

CURRENT BOOKS

FELLOWS' CHOICE

Recent titles selected and reviewed by Fellows of the Wilson Center

SAMUEL BECKETT

by Dierdre Bair
Harcourt, 1978
736 pp. \$19.95
L of C 77-92527
ISBN 0-15-179256-9

Samuel Beckett is arguably the most important English writer of this century after his great friend James Joyce. He has also been the most passionately private of men. But now Beckett has broken his long silence, responding to the questions of a hitherto unknown English professor from the University of Pennsylvania. Dierdre Bair's biography is thus something of a literary event as well as a treasure-trove of information. With assiduity and patience, she has constructed from interviews and previously unavailable letters the story—or *a* story—of Beckett's life, including many new details about his only recently disclosed service with the French Resistance in World War II, for which De Gaulle awarded him the Legion of Honor. Bair portrays Beckett's struggles with self-doubt as well as his heroic dedication to writing, even to writing about the pointlessness of writing. Both as an interpreter of Beckett's work and as a prose stylist, she leaves much to be desired. Such complaints are gratuitous, however, since her book presents a wealth of new material both for students of 20th-century fiction and readers with a special interest in one of the darkest and richest authors of our age.

—Frank D. McConnell

TWO CHEERS FOR CAPITALISM

by Irving Kristol
Basic Books, 1978
288 pp. \$10
L of C 77-20408
ISBN 0-465-08803-1

This powerful, provocative statement on the modern liberal state is, says Kristol, editor of *The Public Interest*, "a kind of intellectual autobiography." Written over the past seven years, it clarifies the author's political evolution from "someone who was once simply content to regard himself as a 'liberal'" to one who "has come to be a 'neo-conservative.'" Although he withholds the third cheer for capitalism, Kristol denounces all forms of socialism, communism, and fascism as either

"utopian illusions or sordid frauds." Our society continues to come under attack, he suggests, in part because of its very success and also because its ability to generate wealth has created a new class of professional academics who seek political influence while rejecting traditional bourgeois values. His lucid examination of the American corporation seems sure to raise hackles in many an executive suite: Kristol urges business leaders to blend private morality with an increased sense of public responsibility—sometimes even to the point of forgoing profits. But everyone needs to rethink current assumptions. "The idea of progress in the modern era has always signified that the quality of life would inevitably be improved by material enrichment," he writes. "To doubt this is to . . . start the long trek back to pre-modern political philosophy—Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Hooker, Calvin, etc. It seems to me that this trip is quite necessary."

—Robert Hawkins ('76)

**THE TRANSFORMATION
OF SOUTHERN POLITICS:
Social Change and Political
Consequence Since 1945**

by Jack Bass and
Walter De Vries
Basic Books, 1976, 538 pp.
\$17; New American Library,
1977, 543 pp. \$5.95

L of C 75-36375
ISBN 0-465-08695-0
ISBN 0-452-00470-5 pbk.

Following the violent resistance to the 1960s civil-rights movement, the South has emerged as the nation's politically most dynamic region. The old courthouse politics of the Deep South, where black-belt county voters were disfranchised, relied on white support. Malapportioned legislatures blocked potential Republican strength in the region's growing cities and suburbs—a consequence of postwar industrialization. But the Supreme Court's 1964 "one-man, one-vote" ruling, which required smaller districts based on population, drastically altered the character of Southern politics. And with the Voting Rights Act of 1965, black voter registration soared. In Mississippi, where blacks make up 37 percent of the population, the percentage of registered black voters rose from 6 percent in 1965 to 60 percent by 1969. Throughout the South, the black vote has become a significant and often decisive factor, as in the 1976 presidential election. The shifting profile of the Southern electorate—its racial composition, changing ideology, party affiliation, and increasingly urban character—has produced