

**BEYOND THE
WELFARE STATE**
edited by Irving Howe
Schocken, 1982
288 pp. \$17.95 cloth,
\$8.95 paper

The "welfare state"—not only its mild U.S. version but also its systemic Western European forms—arouses public expectations that cannot be fulfilled, reduces political participation, and, in its extravagance, fuels inflation. Are these the grumblings of the resurgent American Right? Hardly. Howe, co-editor of the liberal journal, *Dissent*, cites these failings in this surprising collection of leftist critiques of social welfare programs (including everything from progressive taxation to public education to subsidies for failing corporations). The welfare state does provide for the barest needs of the underprivileged, most contributors concede. But economist Robert Heilbroner calls the concept a buttress of capitalism, a means of defusing discontent at the bottom of society and salving consciences at the top. Others, including political scientist Philip Green and Swedish sociologist Ulf Himmelstrand, argue that in practice, too, welfare states are flawed: In Britain, corporate executives earn up to 20 times the incomes of their low-level employees; in Sweden, 94 percent of the means of production remains privately owned. The central concern of the authors is how economies—and society in general—should be *controlled*. Heilbroner opts for an authoritarian order to ensure central economic planning and "a collective moral goal." Vigorously disagreeing, sociologist Lewis Coser and the late historian Henry Patcher favor decentralized economies governed by local workers' councils. Will the ideal socialist state be democratic or authoritarian?—that remains the unresolved question.

**SHIFTING
INVOLVEMENTS**
by Albert O. Hirschman
Princeton, 1982, 138 pp.
\$14.50 cloth, \$5.95 paper

Why do individuals—and whole societies—lurch from a preoccupation with private pursuits into immersion in public issues and then withdraw again? This puzzling cycle has been seen in the United States and other Western nations during the past three centuries. After instituting a "Republic of Virtue" in France, Robespierre voiced dismay at how quickly his fellow revolutionaries developed an appetite

for *chétives marchandises*—shoddy consumer goods. Hirschman, an economist at Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study, offers some fresh explanations. Beginning in the 18th century, Western societies challenged the Renaissance ideal of power-seeking as *the* public virtue and instead identified the public interest with the private pursuit of wealth. But the Western "consumer-citizen" has been repeatedly disappointed by the goods and services his recent affluence has enabled him to buy; while providing comfort, they fail to provide enough psychic "pleasure." He may then seek the very different satisfactions of the public arena. There, as Hirschman writes, he may escape, at least temporarily, our "imperious bottom-line mentality." When large numbers of people undergo parallel experiences (a rising middle class, for example), their disappointment with private consumption—their sheer boredom—may lead to political activism. Alas, says Hirschman, politics also entails disappointments. Progress may be too slow and results unexpected. Among its virtues, Hirschman's essay helps to explain why America's children of affluence for a time embraced wide-ranging social change and then beat such a hasty retreat toward the world promised by Ronald Reagan.

Arts & Letters

**THE BARBARIANS
ARE COMING**

by J. M. Coetzee
Penguin, 1982
156 pp. \$3.95

This is a fable of moral awakening, a story set in a nameless Empire at a time that could be any time. Its protagonist, the aging Magistrate of a frontier town, has unquestioningly served his state for decades. But when interrogation experts of the Empire's Third Bureau arrive to root out information about a rumored barbarian uprising and senselessly torture innocent natives, the scales begin to fall from the Magistrate's eyes: "I know somewhat too much; and from this knowledge, once one has been infected, there seems to be no recovering." Coetzee, a South African novelist, sets this Kafkian theme of one in-