

afflicted commoners at first appealed to the "old law"—customary rights and principles of fair treatment. Unsuccessful, they turned to religious reformers such as Martin Luther and Thomas Müntzer and found in their preaching a new justification for social justice: "godly law." The "Twelve Articles," penned in 1525 by a German furrier, marshaled Biblical support for its radical demand: "the abolition," writes Blickle, "of all rights and privileges specific to particular social groups." This, of course, was unacceptable to the ruling elite (and even to Luther). The resulting war crushed the commoners' dreams but did prompt modest reforms (e.g., restoration of rights) that for a time preserved the old order.

Contemporary Affairs

**THE TRUANTS:
Adventures among the
Intellectuals**
by William Barrett
Doubleday, 1982
292 pp. \$15.95

From 1945 to 1952, when *Partisan Review* was publishing some of the outstanding writers and critics in America, Barrett, a philosopher-critic in his own right, served as one of its associate editors. Under the direction of Philip Rahv and William Phillips, the review broke with its original sponsor, the U.S. Communist Party, and championed containment of the Soviets even before Harry Truman did. Avant-garde in its aesthetics, the journal also became a major forum for the latest European ideas. Hannah Arendt introduced American readers to existentialism on *PR*'s pages. And Clement Greenberg's critical essays on the new native movement, abstract expressionism, explained that bewildering visual explosion. Barrett demonstrates how pervasive the journal's influence was, but he wonders now if it was altogether salutary. Among other effects, the fuzzy leftism of Rahv and the other "truants," with its strains of fashionable nihilism, may have contributed to the more infantile aspects of 1960s' radicalism. "Follow the zigs and the zags of any given intellectual," as Barrett puts it, "and you may turn out to be reading the fever chart of the next generation."