

# The Good Book Guide

**EUROPEAN DICTATORSHIPS 1918-1945** by Stephen Lee. Routledge, second edition 2000. xi + 340 pp. Index. £14.99 pbk.

The first edition of this much-praised book appeared in 1987. This new edition takes advantage of recent research to reconsider historical interpretations of developments particularly in the Soviet Union, Germany and Italy.

One of Stephen Lee's qualities is his ability to combine a clear narrative of complex events with a concise analysis of their significance. The rise of the inter-war dictatorships is placed in context by considering the impact of the First World War and the 'attractions' of dictatorship as an alternative to democracies struggling to cope with poor leadership and economic crises. The author then examines the rise and fall of the major dictatorships, although there is also coverage of smaller states, for example, in Central and Eastern Europe.

As a principal examiner I welcome the author's approach. The clarity of the sections on individual countries is helpful for AS Level; whilst the analysis of dictatorship as a concept and the comparison of different regimes makes this book suitable for A2 Level or even as an introduction to university study. Particularly valuable for higher level study are the summaries of recent research on interpretations, for example, of Stalin's impact on the Soviet Union. This book can be strongly recommended to students and teachers alike.

John Laver

**NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN** by David Dutton. Arnold - Reputations series, 2001, xii + 224 pp. Index. £12.99 pbk.

Neville Chamberlain was a profoundly unlucky man. Unlucky, because his early death after leaving office denied him the chance to write his memoirs, most politicians' means of defending their reputations. Unlucky, because nature made him reticent and shy, leaving him few close friends to defend him when attacks came. Unlucky, because his fall from power happened when the fate of the British nation and empire hung in the balance, with a scapegoat needed to take the blame. Unlucky, that his successor, someone of very different temperament was, unquestionably, the right person for the crisis and, possessing an unequalled command of the English language, could draft his version of events (largely unfavourable to Chamberlain) as,



seemingly, the unqualified truth. It was not until the 1960s that Churchill's view came seriously to be challenged.

As befits a book in the Reputations series, Dutton's is a history of the history of Chamberlain. A brief biographical sketch is followed by an examination of how he was viewed by contemporaries; his vilification as a 'guilty man' during the war; Churchill's assessment; how later historians modified this view; and the impact made by the release of government documents. Finally, Dutton attempts his own rounded and very fair summing up.

This is a truly excellent study, probably too detailed for the average sixth former, but invaluable for ambitious students and undergraduates. It will hold the field for many years to come.

John Garland

**INSIDE HITLER'S HIGH COMMAND** by Geoffrey Megargee. University Press of Kansas, 2000. xxi + 327 pp, Index. £14.95 pbk.

This is an interesting but specialised book that extends our knowledge of how the Nazi State actually worked. It concentrates on the arcane world of the German military High Command during the period 1939-45. Geoffrey Megargee explodes the myth that a German victory was only prevented by the clumsy meddling of Hitler. In a methodical but readable analysis of all the staff work for the main campaigns of the Second World War he analyses in considerable detail the

errors, rivalries and overconfidence of the generals at headquarters.

Obviously, this is not a textbook for class use as it is a scholarly analysis of German military planning and the General Staff. Yet it is a well-written study packed with many fascinating details, including, for instance, the layout of the *Wolfschanze* and the reasons for the halt of the German armour before Dunkirk. It could be of considerable interest to students who enjoy reading around their subject and provides teachers with a detailed analysis of how the military leadership functioned under Hitler. It deserves a place in the German history section of the school library.

David Williamson

**FRANCE AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR. OCCUPATION, COLLABORATION AND RESISTANCE** by Peter Davies. Routledge - Introductions to History series, 2001, xii + 145 pp. Index. £9.99 pbk.

This Routledge series is committed to producing 'short, clear, self-contained and incisive guides'. Peter Davies has certainly done that. The reference sections, which account for one-fifth of a short book, are a testimony to the extensive and careful research. The comprehensive Bibliography has many national studies concentrating on Paris and Vichy, which means there is little space, understandably, for the many newer regional works now appearing in France. The well-ordered chapters are divided into sensible and clearly subtitled shorter sections. The reader is carefully directed through them as key ideas and issues are elaborated. The 'Legacy' chapter relates all this to modern-day France. Extensive references to the works of other historians provide good indications as to where to find further reading.

Davies has one problem though in the sheer scale of his undertaking. There is the inevitable feeling that the sixth-form reader, as perhaps opposed to the undergraduate, for whom this book and series are designed, would need some help. None the less, he embraces his work with impressive energy and discipline accomplishing an extremely difficult task. The pity is most sixth-formers, with very limited opportunities to study any French history in the new AS/A2 world, will have to wait until they get to university to make the most of this book.

Malcolm Pearce