

influenced largely by American politics and his desire to increase Jewish support for his embattled presidency.

One of the strengths of Neff's narrative is that in most of the book he doesn't display gross bias toward either Israel or the Arabs. His account of the triumphant Israeli capture of the Old City of Jerusalem is subtle and moving, giving the reader a sense of the emotional importance for Israelis and Jews everywhere of the recovery of their ancient capital; yet Neff is no less moving in describing the trauma of Palestinian refugees displaced by the war.

Neff undercuts the balanced tone of much of the book, however, with a preachy prologue and an epilogue that summarize what he sees as the political lessons of the 1967 war. He argues that America's "blind support" of Israel, beginning in 1967, "encouraged the most recalcitrant and militant elements of the Jewish nation"—Begin and his successor, Yitzhak Shamir—and transformed Israel into a "dark vision" of its former self.

Neff understates the tragedy of the Middle East by blaming one

side for the torments of the past 17 years. There is enough folly, and blame, to go around.

—David Ignatius

**Taking Sides: America's Secret Relations with a Militant Israel.** Stephen Green. *William Morrow, \$14.95.* Green argues the same polemical thesis as Neff: America's overindulgent support for Israel created a monster, in the form of the Begin government.

But *Taking Sides* fails in precisely the dimension where *Warriors for Jerusalem* succeeds: in its narrative of the details and texture of events in Jerusalem and Washington. Green describes U.S.-Israel relations with no apparent sense of what motivates either side, and he writes badly—so abominably in places that the declassified government cables he quotes are more readable than his prose. Both books may suffer from having been written in the wake of the 1982 Lebanon war, when it seemed to many Americans that Israel had indeed become a kind of monster, or at least the rival of its Arab neighbors in belligerence and cruelty. In that climate, writers such as Neff and Green wanted to explain to readers how this unruly Israel came to be.

My own impression, after three years of covering the Middle East, is that the 1982 picture of Israel as a reckless Sparta will prove transitory. Israel today is a shaken nation, badly traumatized by the war in Lebanon and its own internal problems. Israeli analysts on the right and left agree that it will be a decade, perhaps a generation, before Israelis are again willing to fight what they call a "war of choice." For the foreseeable future, they probably will fight only "wars of no choice," imposed by their neighbors. —D.I.

**All Stalin's Men.** Roy Medvedev; Harold Shukman, trans. *Anchor Press, \$14.95.* The Marxist dissident historian hands down another indictment of the Stalinist era in biographies of the men the book's jacket condemns as "six who carried out the bloody policies": Voroshilov, Mikoyan, Suslov, Molotov, Kaganovich, and

Malenkov. Under Stalin's special process of selection, anyone who was unable to commit a criminal act was not merely removed from power but physically eliminated. As Medvedev states, "They all traveled the road along which revolutionary tenacity degenerates into callousness, even sadism, political flexibility into pragmatism, and enthusiasm into demagoguery."

—Mark Laughlin

**Wired: the Short Life and Fast Times of John Belushi.** Bob Woodward. *Simon & Schuster, \$17.95.* This is a miserable match of writer and subject, and as a result Woodward's account of the life and death of John Belushi has to rank as the worst book he's ever done. Woodward has never been exactly a prose stylist, but he's one of the best (and most celebrated) investigators of his time. Though he and Carl Bernstein stumbled after their Watergate triumph with *The Final Days*, Woodward rallied with *The Brethren*, the behind-the-scenes account of life at the Supreme Court that he wrote with Scott Armstrong. *The Brethren* showed that Woodward was ready to move from scandals to more important work—stories about the systemic failures of government. So why is he writing a gossipy book about the pharmacological excesses of a movie star?

Woodward has been quoted as saying he got interested in Belushi partly because they both grew up in Wheaton, Illinois but mostly because they both had to cope with the pressure that comes from the kind of instantaneous fame and fortune America can bestow. As an informing idea for a book, that has some potential, but Woodward doesn't pull it off. What we are left with is a waste of Woodward's talent. —Joseph Nocera

**The Art of Corporate Success: The Story of Schlumberger.** Ken Auletta. *Putnam, \$15.95.* Out of the unrelenting battering that American business, from microchips to automobiles, has taken in recent years, has emerged the beginning of a fundamental reexamination of the art of managing. I think of Hayes' and Aber-



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nathy's landmark *Harvard Business Review* article, "Managing Our Way to Economic Decline," as the cornerstone of what has become a revolutionary movement in management thinking, the latest contribution to which is Ken Auletta's fine analysis of Jean Ribaud and Schlumberger.

First and foremost, Auletta's book is a good, detailed, well-written commentary on the real world of business organization. Of late, only Tracy Kidder's *Soul of a New Machine* ranks in the same league. Auletta describes the amazing Schlumberger Corporation, a \$6 billion, 75,000-person organization that ranks at the very top of the 1,000 biggest corporations in the world. Its principal business is providing geological analyses to oil-well drillers.

Schlumberger believes in technology and invests in it heavily. But in the same breath the company argues that service is where it's really at. Unlike other companies in its field, Schlumberger only rents—does not sell—equipment in its oil-well logging (measuring) business, which accounts for 45 percent of the company's revenues and 70 percent of its profits. It sends out crews of exceptionally well-trained, young, aggressive field engineers to sell the complete service and is the only company in the industry that insists upon this complete-package approach.

The organization is lean and mean. Auletta observes that it has not followed the fads of MBA technique and lawyer-infested staffs. A corporate staff of just 197 runs a 75,000-person business. Moreover, Ribaud and Schlumberger stick to the things they understand. Although there have been several acquisitions, the technological logic and coherence of the acquisitions are straightforward. The company has not strayed far afield in even minor senses: eschewing more conventional wisdom, the highly sought-after Ribaud refuses to sit on anyone else's board of directors.

Perhaps the most critical element is radical decentralization. Marcel Schlumberger's most significant concern, as he debated to whom to turn the company over, was that it

would "lose its sense of intimacy." Members of the Schlumberger family suggest today that Ribaud's number one contribution has in fact been to fend off the encroachment of almost inevitable bureaucracy. Radical decentralization and a penchant for shifting people in unexpected fashions (Ribaud calls himself a "seeker of change") are a large part of it. The elitist corps of field engineers (and Schlumberger unflinchingly encourages the feeling of elitism) feels total responsibility for what they do, as interviews repeatedly indicate. They, too, reflect the paradox: "They talk in the same breath of incredibly hard work and fun. They, for a substantial salary, put up with exceptional rigors and yet find the rigors offset by the opportunity to almost immediately 'do anything you want' and the knowledge that merit alone will move one ahead. With a small staff and Ribaud's obsessive attention to personnel issues, corporate politics play a remarkably small role in the scheme of things."

Certainly the Ribaud story puts to bed the notion of the one-dimensional businessman. Ribaud is a fanatic, a perfectionist, a grudge-holder, a patient attender to personnel issues, a technologist, a consummate manager; he is a socialist, an astonishingly generous supporter of the arts, a frenetic traveler who finds time to take at least two month-long vacations

every year. In short, he's a complex man.

My problems with Auletta's book are, I think, minor. I wish Auletta had spent a bit more time with the people way down the line, in the field. My Schlumberger soundings highlight a paradox that Auletta describes, but doesn't bring to life as fully as he might have: the balance between an extraordinarily spirited and decentralized place where you can make your own thing happen, and, at times, a frightening "people eater" side—the pressure to perform is nothing short of brutal—that goes with it. Among my other "favorite excellent companies," IBM and Proctor & Gamble in particular suffer from and benefit from the same paradox.

For me, this and my other caveats are just small nits. Mainly I'm delighted that a writer of Auletta's stature and skill has turned his attention to business. Life in organizations—schools, hospitals, baseball teams, symphonies, oil field service companies, computer makers, and toilet paper vendors—occupies most of us most of the time. And yet the rich texture of that life is almost a nonsubject for literate analysis. (A recent *New York Times Book Review* article pointed out that corporate life is equally ignored by fiction writers.) It's no wonder that our management theories have served us so poorly. In general such theory has been written by academics/

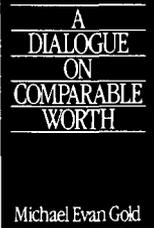
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