

THE GENTLEMEN NEGOTIATORS: A DIPLOMATIC HISTORY OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR. By Z. A. B. Zeman. New York: Macmillan, 1971. xi, 402 pp. \$9.95.

A sustaining interest in World War I has produced a plethora of studies of that holocaust. Most of them establish irrefutable evidence of the absolute idiocy of that conflict. Zeman, an English scholar already noted for his studies of German policy toward the Bolsheviks, Nazi propaganda, the decline of the Habsburg Monarchy, and other studies of twentieth-century history, has turned his acerbic pen to a series of personal portraits. Those historians schooled in England possess a facility—rare among Americans of the same profession—to transform the trite into sparkling prose. Barbara Tuchman is one of those rare Americans who can perform the same miracle, and her remarkable *Guns of August* compares favorably with Zeman's study. Whereas most studies of the war have treated causes and consequences, this delightful work gives us glimpses of the statesmen who lacked statesmanship, politicians who treated the war as a vehicle for re-election (how well Zeman substantiates Arno Mayer's *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking!*), the horse-trading characteristics of efforts to woo the neutrals into belligerency, and the fruitless attempts to arrange separate peace treaties.

A memorable example of Zeman's skill in proving the ineptitude of those entrusted with considerable authority is apparently taken from his excellent study of Alexander Helphand ("Parvus"), *Merchant of Revolution*, who negotiated with the German Foreign Ministry and whose efforts contributed to Lenin's fateful return to Russia in 1917. Helphand was an intimate of Count Brockdorff-Rantzau, the German diplomat whose greater fame rests with the Treaty of Versailles. Zeman tells us more about the count than anything else available. Although he was attracted to Helphand's world of radicalism, he was far from being a part of it. A member of an old Holstein family related to the Danish royal house, Rantzau had served in the Foreign Ministry in St. Petersburg and elsewhere, becoming envoy to Denmark in 1917 when he was forty-two years old: "He was an intelligent, open-minded homosexual; he could be, and frequently was, icily reserved and elaborately polite. He had a liking for Helphand: not because of what he was—flamboyant, *nouveau riche*, in the company of big blondes—but because of what he stood for." This vignette, and a hundred similar ones which punctuate this popularized study, mark Zeman's work as a milestone in what skillful prose can do to arouse and sustain interest in history. Surely Zeman fails to include many essential items in what purports to be a diplomatic history of the war. But he does succeed in making the war behind the war as exciting and useless as most of the battles which have had our attention until recently.

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REVOLUTION IN CENTRAL EUROPE, 1918–1919. By F. L. Carsten. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972. 360 pp. \$11.95.

The author of standard monographs on Prussia, the German army, and fascism has now turned to the revolutions in Imperial Germany and the Habsburg Monarchy with the same conscientiousness and elegant detachment which mark his earlier writings. The result is a fine handbook which can be used with confidence, even