

LEGISLATURES. By K. C. Wheare. [London: O.U.P. 1963. 247 pp. (incl. Select Bibliography and Index). 10s. 6d.]

This book is one of the Home University Library series, designed particularly for students. It would be difficult to find a work better suited to its purpose. Dr. Wheare's style is light, almost conversational; yet he does not write down to his readers; and he never bores. He says that his aim is a "discussion, on the comparative method, of certain broad themes or issues which arise from a study of the place and purpose of legislatures in modern politics." He fulfils this aim admirably. The Parliament of Great Britain is, naturally enough, the core of the discussion; and the major comparisons are with the Congress of the United States, the State legislatures of that country, the legislatures of Western Europe, particularly of the Third, Fourth and Fifth French Republics, but also of the Scandinavian countries. He does not concern himself with countries east of France, except for one or two references to Weimar Germany and post-war Western Germany. In his preface he had warned that he was not attempting a guide to the legislatures of all countries. Other nations which figure in the book are the older members of the Commonwealth, but including India; and also Ireland and the Union of South Africa.

The scope of the subject matter and some idea of the lightness of style may be derived from the chapter headings — there are only nine. These include: Making

the Legislature, Influencing the Legislature, Making the Government, Making the Government Behave. The author's most frequent stylistic device is to pose a question to introduce a particular discussion, the type of question a student might well ask at a fairly early stage in his education on the subject. For example, in Chapter Six, Making the Laws, the questions include: What may the legislatures make laws about? Who decides what bills they shall deal with? Whose Bills does the legislature deal with? and so on. Every teacher is aware that to ask a good question, by either a teacher or a student, is fully as difficult as giving a good answer. Dr. Wheare asks good questions as well as gives good answers.

Just in passing, one might note two examples of the difficulty faced by any author who would wish his work to be both topical and not too soon out-dated. In speaking of President de Gaulle, Dr. Wheare made use, on page 134, of the past tense: "With de Gaulle on the scene, it was impossible to know how the provisions of the constitution would work. They were almost irrelevant while he was in office." But for Mr. Gaitskell he chose, on page 68, the present tense: "...Mr. MacDonald, Mr. Attlee and Mr. Morrison, have all asserted that they do not regard the resolutions of the Labour Party conference as instructions to a Labour government in office. And it seems clear that Mr. Gaitskell takes the same view." Even so skilful a writer as Dr. Wheare can be forgiven for guessing wrong. Who could have anticipated that death would have removed Mr. Gaitskell from the political scene while President de Gaulle remained an apparently timeless institution?