TWO of this year’s crop of books on Parliament* were sponsored by Political and Economic Planning and the Study of Parliament Group, thus following in the distinguished footsteps of The Members of Parliament and his Information, by Anthony Barker and Michael Rush, which came out in 1970.

The first is a notable study, edited by Michael Rush and Malcolm Shaw, of the services and facilities of the House of Commons. For the serious student of Parliament this will prove a valuable work of reference: it traces the history of the various departments of the House and describes with clarity and thoroughness their present functions; it documents the debates about Members’ salaries, allowances and pensions, the research facilities available to M.P.s, and the provisions for their travel abroad. No longer will there be any excuse for confusing the functions of the Table Office with those of the Vote Office. The authors cannot be blamed for having produced their book in advance of the Compton Report on the running of the House of Commons. The fact that the House of Lords is omitted altogether underlines the obsessive organisational separation between the two Houses—in itself a major obstacle to administrative rationalisation.

This book is for specialists, though the more general student of politics will find the odd item of interest. The on-going debate about Members’ salaries and the new parliamentary building must surely be case-studies that illustrate if nothing else, something about the psychology of politicians. There is considerable fascination in the way Hansard is produced (Members can correct their grammar, but cannot alter the record to include what they wish they had really said). The wealth of detail which is the book’s main strength is also its principal weakness. Did you know that “copies of Vacher’s Parliamentary Companion can be purchased from the Superintendent of the Members’ Cloakroom”; or that the House of Commons hairdresser “is permitted to make what profit he can from his hairdressing, and from the sale of toothpaste, razor blades and certain other wares includ-

ing . . .”, wait for it, “pencils”? But to how many people has ignorance of such things been a handicap in life?

The book confesses to being a factual account: the authors indicate some of the underlying controversies (such as whether M.P.s should be regarded as full-timers or part-timers) without themselves taking sides. This neutrality is perfectly defensible in itself but it does nothing to leaven the rather technical and estoteric subject-matter. And here and there one cannot help feeling that a poker-face is inappropriate, as at p. 224 where the authors cite without comment a recommendation by the Services Committee that second class envelopes should no longer be issued free to Members since “only about 7,000 of these have been issued compared with nearly 1,400,000 of those stamped for first class post—clearly Members regard the greater part of their correspondence as urgent and important”. Don't we all?

All in all, however, this is a thoroughly worthwhile and scholarly enterprise; though it is one whose appeal will be confined to a very small and specialised audience.

On the face of it, Professor Griffith's book on the legislative process might be expected to have a wider market; but this too turns out to be a work for cognoscenti of the inner workings of Parliament. The author's sample comprises the 190 or so government Bills introduced into the House of Commons during the three sessions 1967/68, 1968/69 and 1970/71 (i.e. excluding the prematurely terminated session 1969/70). He analyses in great detail (with numerous statistical tables) the successive stages of parliamentary debate, with particular emphasis upon the committee and report stages in the Commons and the impact of different species of amendment (differentiated by source and intent). He discovers that “on only sixteen occasions during the three sessions was the Government of the day forced in committee, either by defeat in a division or by pressure there exerted, to modify a part of a principle”. Nor does the government take kindly to defeat in committee: of 26 such defeats “the Government on report reversed fourteen of them, modified their position on three and accepted the change in nine only”.

In general, one’s hunches about Parliament’s lack of impact upon legislation are confirmed. Some of the author’s ideas will not be wholly unfamiliar to readers of his evidence to the Select Committee on Procedure (see H.C. 538, 1970-71, appendix 9). The book contains some interesting and ingenious proposals for reform, notably a two-part select committee stage during the first part of which the minister would be interrogated as a witness and during the second would become a member of the committee itself. The great strength of this work is in revealing the subtle nuances of the parliamentary stages of the legislative process: this is a book which needs repeated squeezing in order to extract all the nourishment. Moreover, many of the Bills discussed—Parliament (No. 2), Immigration, Industrial Relations—are of great interest in their own right. The weakness of this exercise lies in the fact that while Parliament is a useful observation platform for the student of policy and administration it is not the place where the decisions that matter are taken. This kind of book suffers from doing such a thorough job, since in so-doing it inevitably devalues its own subject-matter.
The two books just mentioned are both highly specialised and very expensive. It is something of a relief, therefore, to turn to a work which students (and even teachers) may be able to afford. Professor Richard's *The Backbenchers* first appeared in 1972 and is now re-issued in paperback at modest cost. An excellent introduction to the subject, we now look forward to a new edition to incorporate the spate of recent electoral and parliamentary events.

Books by politicians about their trade are often a disappointment. They tend to be light in weight, one-sided and sometimes downright conceited. Two new efforts, both by active Labour M.P.s, John Grant and Fred Willey, are better than many of their kind. Grant's book takes the form of a diary of his day-to-day activities in the period October 1972 to July 1973. One is impressed by the vast range of things that this (surely atypically?) active M.P. gets drawn into. The book is well written and partisanship is kept within acceptable limits, though the author cannot resist the occasional party point or the odd sneer at the Liberals. Willey's book is also explicitly personal, though written in the more usual form of continuous narrative: he proceeds via campaigning, the electoral process and constituency affairs to life in the House of Commons itself. This is mostly familiar stuff though with occasional items of interest, such as the local Conservative agent offering the author advice about election procedure during his first campaign, and some observations about the Commons committee system from Willey's vantage point as chairman of the Select Committee on Science and Technology. Both these books are easy and pleasant to read, though it is difficult to imagine who will actually buy them—they fall between the two stools of political autobiography on the one hand and scholarly commentary upon the political process on the other.

Rather better value is Nesta Wyn Ellis's racy little paperback, costing only fifty pence. The author has stood unsuccessfully as a Liberal in several recent elections. She has a very personal style: "the Tory M.P.s", she tells us, "are substantially better looking and certainly taller on the whole"; and the influence of Conservative ladies serving on selection committees seems to diminish the chances of attractive women being chosen as candidates. "Duty is the dominating factor in Parliamentary wifeliness", she opines, in a chapter which makes some telling points about the "very unpleasant life" (plenty of late nights and a high divorce rate) of the Member of Parliament. Accuracy and rationality are sometimes neglected: could one agree that, even in theory, "a democratic system enables anyone who wants changes to do so"? It is misleading to say, baldly, that "the recognition of the Opposition as Her Majesty's Opposition dates back to 1937". Nevertheless this is good rousing stuff, and some chapters, such as those on Members' salaries and Members' outside interests, would be useful for students. Either one likes this kind of book or one hates it: this reviewer likes it.

*The Times Guide to the House of Commons* is a handsome book to adorn anyone's shelf. Alas, the volume for February 1974 sent to this reviewer has had the shortest working life of any in the series. This book contains the usual photographs of Members and potted biographies of all candidates, though the latter are so blandly neutral as to be of little use (perhaps the
Guide needs to be used in combination with Andrew Roth's unashamedly subjective M.P.'s Chart?); there are also the usual commentary and statistics, plus the texts of the party manifestos. By far the worst thing about this book is its price. There must surely be a large potential market for a paperback edition printed in less glossy paper; the October edition is on offer for £7.00. I shall make do with the pull-out guide to the House of Commons issued with The Times itself after the election—free of charge.

PRESSURE GROUPS IN BRITAIN

by Wyn Grant

Here are four books on pressure groups in Britain*. Pressure groups offer a promising field for the academic who feels the need to dash off a quick article. Modest success can be attained with a simple recipe. Select a current controversy, look through the index of Hansard and The Times, do a few interviews and sprinkle references from Eckstein and Beer. One should hasten to add that some of the case studies which have been written are very good, and some of the better ones appear in Kimber and Richardson's reader.

Unfortunately, relatively little progress has been made in the development of pressure group theory, although Kimber and Richardson do point to Olson's The Logic of Collective Action. Even if there is no theoretical breakthrough in Pressure Groups in Britain the authors do provide a useful introductory chapter which acknowledges the complexity of pressure group activity and attempts to bring some order to its explanation. The first section of the book consists of five studies of sectional groups, including Lieber's penetrating analysis of British policy towards European integration from 1956 to 1967; Self and Storing on the National Farmers' Union; Roy on membership participation in the National Union of Teachers; and a new essay analysing the relationship between the Labour Party and the trade unions in which Martin Harrison reformulates and brings up to date the conclusions he reached in his study, Trade Unions and the Labour Party since 1945. The section concludes with a disappointingly short analysis of the TUC and CBI by the authors. The studies of promotional groups include Steck on the CND; Christoph on capital punishment; Hindell and Simms on the abortion lobby; and a thorough analysis by the editors (with