

THE SIBERIANS. By *Farley Mowat*. Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown (An Atlantic Monthly Press Book), 1970. x, 360 pp. \$7.95.

This is a very mixed book, perhaps because the author's knowledge of Siberia is uneven or he is afflicted with a form of that love-hate relationship which so often bedevils students of Russian-Soviet affairs. On the one hand, he writes with warmth and sincere admiration about the many genuine accomplishments of Siberians in the face of formidable difficulties, always rightfully warning the reader of the querulous cavils of professional anti-Communists and Russophobes and justifiably castigating development policies in the Canadian North. Drinking heartily, eating well, traveling remotely, asking widely, he obviously had a good time and learned a good deal.

On the other hand, the book is too uninformative for the specialist and too misinformative for the layman. Although at home the Canadian author is known as a hard-hitting writer and hard-drinking skeptic given to championing maligned wolves and uprooted Eskimos and Newfoundlanders, in this mistitled travelogue—the result of two trips (first class) to parts of Siberia, mainly Yakutia (one in the fall of 1966 with his wife, and one in 1969 with a photographer)—the hard drinking is evident but the skeptical outlook has been dimmed and the incisive prose blunted. Mowat has proved very vulnerable to Soviet manipulation, Novosti's *blat*, Russian earthiness and unpretentiousness, and Siberian hospitality. So he marvels at those selected accomplishments of Soviet power that he was permitted to see, especially the planned, rounded, permanent development of resources and the humane treatment of natives. Some of these accomplishments are real (if exaggerated), but he does them a disservice by frequently quoting the pious and invidious utterances of sundry loyal officials and specialists without any critical comment. In addition, he tries to side-step the considerable role of forced labor in Northern and Siberian development in the USSR (especially in his beloved Kolyma region) by asserting that it really contributed very little and no longer functions; he ignores the severe problem of labor turnover and the higher cost and lower standard of living in Siberia compared with European Russia; and he overlooks the many physical advantages, historical headstarts, and political-economic expedients that favor the Russian over the Canadian North.

But perhaps all this is not surprising in view of Mowat's VIP treatment, show-case itinerary, blithe acceptance of Soviet statistics (with the usual stress on quantity, not quality), and ignorance of Russian (which he even considers an advantage [pp. viii–ix]). Little wonder, then, that he makes rather silly statements such as the following ones: “Even professional northern experts in Canada and the United States seem to have surprisingly little interest in, or knowledge of, the Russian North except insofar as they profess to be concerned about it as a possible springboard for a Red invasion of North America” (p. vii); “Aeroflot's safety record is unmatched” (p. 17); “cultural, medical, teaching and technical services outside the big cities of Russia are of such high standard” (p. 38); “The prime problem during the initial stages of collectivization . . . was in persuading the independent-minded Yakut farmers of the value of working cooperatively” (p. 136); “The truth seems to be that the people of Russia in general, and of Siberia in particular, simply aren't privy to the conclusions of some Western journalists that after a brief liberalization under Khrushchev, the lid is being forced back down again” (p. 341).

These misrepresentations are only slightly compounded by a minimum number of outright factual errors, such as calling Great Russians and Ukrainians “races”

(p. 13), referring to the sable as a member of the weasel family (p. 42), equating 100 verstas with 100 miles (p. 74), dating the founding of Yakutsk to 1640 (p. 95), and calling Yakutia a "country" (*passim*). The legendless map on pages 116–17 is apoplectic; it locates Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky in Kazakhstan, lists Buriatia as an SSR, confuses the Viliui and Tunguska rivers, mislocates the Urals, and misspells Tobolsk, Yeniseisk, and Kirensk.

Thus, although Mowat at times writes evocatively and arrestingly (as in his descriptions of Lake Baikal [pp. 41–42] and permafrost [pp. 150–52]) and occasionally offers some interesting glimpses into Siberian life (such as the "nature kids," the taiga culture, *valuta* resources, northern transport, and reindeer herding), his generally uncritical and shallow treatment will likely multiply rather than "dispel some of our misconceptions about Siberia," which is his stated purpose (p. viii). Another purpose, as he himself admitted on CBC Radio, was to enjoy the ruble royalties from Russian translations of his books, royalties that can only be spent in the USSR. For a more sober account the reader is advised to consult George St. George's *Siberia* (New York, 1969).

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A HISTORY OF JEWISH EDUCATION IN THE SOVIET UNION. By *Elias Schulman*. Institute for East European Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, 3. New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1971. viii, 184 pp. \$10.00.

THE BLACK YEARS OF SOVIET JEWRY, 1939–1953. By *Yehoshua A. Gilboa*. Translated by *Yosef Shachter* and *Dov Ben-Abba*. Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and the Graduate Center for Contemporary Jewish Studies, Brandeis University, 1971. xiv, 418 pp. \$15.00.

POLAND'S GHETTOS AT WAR. By *Alfred Katz*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970. xiii, 175 pp. \$6.00.

RED STAR OVER BETHLEHEM: RUSSIA DRIVES TO CAPTURE THE MIDDLE EAST. By *Ira Hirschmann*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971. 192 pp. \$5.95.

Isaac Babel wrote a story in which one of the characters asks, "Can I not have the Sabbath as well as the Revolution?" The unreality of this hope is soon made clear. Indeed, the common background for these four works is the tragic fate of East European Jewry in the twentieth century—the century that saw the promise of emancipation and also witnessed the reality of extermination.

This process is clearly revealed in Schulman's exposé of the fluctuating fortunes of the Jewish school system in Soviet Russia. He begins with an account of the intellectual and cultural ferment in the Pale of Settlement and its concomitant educational problems, which centered on the dual issues of secularism and language of instruction. The language struggle waged by the minority nationalities in Russia and Austria-Hungary impelled the Jews along a similar path. Thus in conjunction with the development of secularizing influences, the idea of a Jewish secular school system emerged, with Yiddish as the language of instruction. In 1908 the first conference for the Yiddish language, held in Czernowitz, proclaimed Yiddish as a "national language of the Jewish people" and demanded "its political, social, and cultural equality." This stand was opposed by Hebraists and Zionists.