

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH. By *Joseph Berger*. New York: The John Day Co., 1971. 286 pp. \$8.95.

The author is a Communist of a particular sort. Born in Poland, he first emigrated as a very young man to Palestine as a Zionist, and in 1922 he helped to found there a Communist party of which he became the secretary. After a stay in Moscow in 1924–25, followed by several missions to the Near East on behalf of the Communist International, he became a militant and permanent official of the Comintern from 1932 to 1934, having adopted Soviet citizenship. Like so many others and without any known reason, he was arrested in January 1935, after which he spent twenty-one years in a dozen prisons and concentration camps. “Rehabilitated” after Stalin’s death, he was able to leave Russia, thanks to his Polish origin, and settled in Israel, where he wrote this remarkable eyewitness report.

How he could reconcile Zionism and Marxism—ideologies that are mutually exclusive (if the words and ideas have any meaning)—he does not explain. Nor does he explain his persisting loyalty to communism after the experiences he lived through, when so many denials had been given by practice to theory. He himself tells how it was when, after fifteen years of separation from his family, his son and wife (cruelly persecuted on his account) were able to visit him in Siberia: “Unlike me, he and his mother had broken with Marxist ideology and it was difficult for the three of us to find a common language on many subjects” (p. 213). It is true that his is not the communism of the founders of the Third International, since he owed his offices to Stalin’s regime.

Berger endured the worst kind of treatment and privation in the course of his interminable sufferings. Condemned to death without rhyme or reason, he conducted two long hunger strikes in order to affirm the rights of the human being. One wonders how he could have survived. And he testifies for the sake of history with remarkable serenity, without weeping and gnashing of teeth. He knew almost all the categories of victims to the Stalinist terror regime—sons of illustrious families (a Loris-Melikov, an Obolensky), writers, Communist officials, Trotskyists, Mensheviks, religious persons—and he conveys their words to an indifferent free world. His poignant account will take its place in the series of authentic eyewitness accounts, written in the blood of martyrs, which will remain to characterize a world and an era.

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MAGADAN. By *Michael Solomon*. Foreword by *Irving Layton*. Princeton, New York, Philadelphia, London: Auerbach Publishers, 1971. Published in Canada by Chateau Books. x, 243 pp. \$7.95.

THE SILVER MADONNA. By *Eugenia Wasilewska*. Foreword by *Arthur Cook*. New York: John Day, 1971. 216 pp. \$5.95.

Neither of these books appears to be intended for scholars, and their value to scholars is questionable. They seem intended rather for the general reader, invited in the case of the Solomon book to read a story comparable to *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* and in the case of the Wasilewska book to read about “a brave young woman’s remarkable flight to freedom.” In both the setting is basically Stalin’s Russia.