

Erica Wallach
 Hopefield, P.O. Box 669
 Warrenton, VA 22186

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Peter Shepherd
 Harold Ober Associates
 1125 Madison Avenue
 New York, N.Y. 10017

Dear Peter,

you asked my opinion of the article in the April edition of "Commentary" about Alger Hiss.

I can, of course, give no definite answer as to the veracity of the accusations by the Hungarian Maria Schmidt against Noel Field and Alger Hiss. The fact that such alleged statements are contained in the files of the interrogations of Field by the Hungarian Secret Police are, in my opinion, not proof enough. God knows what else can be found in those files.

As you know, I was able to see my own Stasi (East German State Security) file of 1950 - 51. Since I remember extremely well my nightly interrogations and sometimes Day and night - from August 1950 to March 1951 (the last entry in that file but by no means my last interrogation which lasted 'til December 1952) I am amazed at what it contains or what it does not contain.

Apart from several pages in my handwriting, there are only 7 interrogations for the entire period of over 6 months. The answers as well as the questions were written by the interrogator in his language and his interpretation. It has nothing to do with what I had said which should not really surprise me: whenever I tried to rectify their insinuations and lies, I was told that they would not write down lies. It is impossible to convey to anyone who has not been in that situation the impossibility of the prisoner to defend himself, and no historian will ever be able to learn the truth from those files.

In this connection I want to explain that this situation changed after Stalin's death and Beria's execution. The transcripts of interrogations and trials held in East Germany, for instance, in the late 50ies and later are available and make sense from the point of view of communist legality. (I have read several of them). Those of the thirties through 1953 did not. After Khrushchev's disclosures, in 1956, of Stalin's crimes, an effort was made to adhere to a certain amount of legality. Before that, the records contain only lies and falsifications. Anna Larina Bucharina, who spent 20 years in prisons, camps and banishment, found that to be the case when she recently studied the stenographic records of the Party Congresses. She writes in the Epilogue of her book "This I cannot forget" that "they could not bear critical scrutiny; the stamp of dogmatism and falsification lay too heavy upon them, and this disturbed me. Presumably, the stenographic records of Party Congresses and Conferences are read by highly qualified people such as historians, but perhaps also by people like me, interested in grasping the reality they convey rather than a falsified history of the Party". Her book explains better than any the travesty of justice in those years and the total absence of rationality and logic of anything that happened which, to this day, is still incomprehensible to normal people leading normal lives.

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I have told you a few episodes which are not in my book "Light at Midnight": Field's testimony that he was a Colonel in OSS (Office of Strategic Services of the US) which I know he was not; my calling myself Jewish which I am not and did not say - they did in my name. There are probably many others.

In addition, it must be understood - though I realize that it will be very difficult for people who have never been in even similar situations - that if you are a prisoner under those circumstances where you have absolutely no recourse to help or advice from outside, when you are, like me, for 3 years in solitary confinement under constant and brutal pressure, you will say anything to please your torturers, anything to prove that you are one of them and are willing to co-operate with them.

For all those reasons, I would be very careful about regarding anything in those files as authentic. I am worried that with the opening of those secret documents, we may be further from the truth than we were before. But, then, who knows? Please read Anna Larina's book.

Yours,

Anna Hill.