

4 Bulgar Pastors Get Life, Nine Others Up to 15 Years

Two Receive Suspended Sentences in Sofia Trial by Red Regime for Espionage and Treason—Prisoner Hails Judges

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SOFIA, Bulgaria, March 8—A Sofia court sentenced today four leading members of the Supreme Council of United Protestant Churches of Bulgaria to life imprisonment, loss of civil rights, confiscation of property and fines of 1,000,000 leva.

Nine other Protestant ministers, members of the council, received sentences ranging from five to fifteen years in prison, loss of civil rights for from eight to twenty years, confiscation of portions of their property and heavy fines.

Two defendants received suspended sentences of one year.

Except in the case of the Rev. Ladin Popov, 35-year-old Pentecostal Minister, all the defendants were sentenced on charges of alleged treason, espionage on behalf of British and American intelligence agencies and illegal transactions in foreign currencies. Mr. Popov was sentenced to five years' imprisonment and fined 4,000,000 leva on the currency charge.

[The United Press reported

that both the defendants and the prosecution announced the acceptance of the sentences so that there would be no appeals.]

Presiding Judge Konstantin Oundjiev, who read the verdicts, said the court had shown the greatest clemency in not applying the death sentence against the principal defendants because they had made "sincere and honest confessions."

A strange scene was enacted after the court had adjourned. The judges and the prosecutors had left their places and had almost reached the exit when Vasil Ziapkov, president of the council and head of Bulgarian Congregationalists, moved forward from his place with the other prisoners and said he wanted to speak. The judges and prosecutors returned.

Speaking in a loud voice, Mr. Ziapkov thanked the court, saying: "I am very satisfied with the verdict. I now have life and hope be-

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fore me, and I declare with all strength in me I shall work for the Bulgarian Socialist Republic because the sun of freedom is rising before me. Again I thank you, comrade judges."

Judge Oundjiev then called on each of the prisoners who in turn echoed Mr. Ziapkov's thanks to the court. In pronouncing the sentences Judge Oundjiev had said that if the prisoners would behave in prison as they behaved in court the day would come when they would be free.

The judge took forty minutes to read the verdicts. The defendants were attentive and appeared to take their sentences stolidly.

The sentences were as follows:

The Revs. Vasil Ziapkov, head of Congregational churches; Yanko Ivanov, head of Methodist churches; Nikola Mihailov, head of Baptist, and Georgi Chernev, head of Pentecostal churches received life imprisonment.

They also received concurrent sentences of fifteen years' imprisonment and 500,000 leva fines for having sought to undermine the security of the state and allegedly having received payments from foreign states for this activity.

They received additional concurrent sentences of five years' imprisonment for having spread rumors against the state, plus three years for having impaired Bulgaria's relations with other states. They also received half a dozen more sentences on various subsidiary charges.

The Revs. Lambri Mishkov, Congregational minister and lecturer at Plovidiv University; Georgi Vasev, Baptist; Haralan Popov, Pentecostal pastor, and Zdravko Bezlov, Methodist, were sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment, fines of 500,000 leva, loss of civil rights for twenty years and confiscation of 125,000 leva's worth of their property. Haralan Popov received a special fine of 4,000,000 leva for illegal currency transactions.

The Revs. Yoncho Driankov, Pentecostal minister, Ivan Spankulov, Baptist, and Zaharij Raichev, Baptist, were sentenced to ten years' imprisonment and the loss of civil rights for fifteen years

plus varying fines and partial confiscation of property.

The Rev. Mitko Dimitrov, Baptist, was sentenced to six years and eight months in prison, loss of civil rights for eight years, a 10,000-leva fine and confiscation of 10,000 levas' worth of property.

The Rev. Ladin Popov was sentenced to five years' imprisonment solely for illegal currency transactions plus a heavy fine.

The Revs. Angel Dinev of the Pentecost Church and the 74-year-old Methodist minister Alexander Zahariev received suspended sentences of one year and small fines on the ground they had been innocent dupes. Mr. Zahariev testified he had been duped by his son-in-law Mr. Ivanov into supplying information for the needs of the church.

Under Bulgarian law the period of detention before being brought to trial is deducted from prison sentences.

The trial marks an end to a long historic connection between Protestant churches in Bulgaria and those in the United States. Under the new law on religious cults adopted before the trial began, any connection between churches in Bulgaria and parent bodies abroad is prohibited except with the consent of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The sentencing of the thirteen pastors, twelve of whom constituted the Supreme Council of United Protestant Churches, ended the connection with the United States in a forcible manner. The remaining Protestant ministers are not likely to preserve their contacts with the West under such circumstances.

In a sense an historic period came to an end with the trial. Protestant missionaries first "discovered Bulgaria" seventy or eighty years ago when Bulgaria was still a province of the Turkish

Empire. Missionaries who penetrated into Bulgaria from Greece were the first to open Bulgaria to the Western world.

It was on the basis of their early "discoveries" that the first ethnographic maps of Bulgaria were made. It was the missionaries who found Bulgarian-speaking communities in Macedonia and even in parts of Greece. It was they who discovered the exact extent of the spoken Slavic language in the Balkans.

In this respect, American Protestant missionaries were to a great extent responsible for the intensification of a strong national consciousness among Bulgarian intellectuals long before Bulgaria became an independent state. It was Bulgarian missionaries who brought out to the world the news of the terrible massacres of the Bulgarian

people by the Turks and who provoked international investigation.

With time, missionaries founded schools in Bulgaria and were, for all practical purposes, responsible for the establishment of many institutions of higher learning in Bulgaria. The present curricula in Bulgarian secondary schools are largely patterns of courses of study that the missionaries introduced. The missionaries also were largely responsible for the introduction of the study of the physical sciences and foreign languages in Bulgaria.

A whole generation of Bulgarian intellectuals between the first and second world wars owe much of their intellectual outlook to training in schools founded by missionary societies.

This epoch has now been put to an end in a dramatic manner.