

CLERICS IN SOFIA END CONFESSIONS

Pentecostal Clergyman Breaks String of Statements With Denial of Espionage

By M. S. HANDLER

Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES

SOFIA, Bulgaria, March 1—The last of the fifteen Protestant ministers on trial in Sofia completed their oral confessions today.

Of the seven ministers who remained to be heard at the close of yesterday's session, six ministers confessed today to treason, espionage and illegal currency transactions. The seventh, the Rev. Ladin Popov, 36, minister of the Pentecost Church at Ruschuk, pleaded not guilty of the charge of espionage but confessed to illegal currency transactions.

Mr. Popov's brother, the Rev. Haralan Popov, another Pentecostal minister, made his confession yesterday. Ladin Popov denounced his elder brother as a "liar" at one point where their confessions were not in agreement. This evidence of strife between the two brothers came during Ladin's questioning by the Court president.

The most pathetic scene, which broke the monotony of legal routine, occurred today when the last defendant, a 74-year-old Methodist minister, took the stand. He was the Rev. Alexander Zahariev, a tall, feeble countryman with a ruddy complexion.

To the surprise of everyone in the courtroom, Mr. Zahariev turned out to be the father-in-law of the Rev. Yanko Ivanov, head of Methodist churches in Bulgaria and one of the four principal defendants.

Calls Himself Dupe

He spoke in a cracked voice, which finally broke down completely at the end. Mr. Zahariev alleged he had been duped by his son-in-law and had become his unwitting tool. He said Mr. Ivanov had requested military, political and economic information for reasons that would benefit the Church.

The elderly pastor said it had never occurred to him that Mr. Ivanov was passing on this information to foreign powers. He indignantly denied he had ever received any payment. He said he had kept record of Mr. Ivanov's requests and information supplied in a small red notebook, which the security police discovered when they searched his home.

Mr. Zahariev said he had reported Soviet troop movements and economic and political affairs. The conflict between the Popov brothers and the Zahariev-Ivanov relationship were the first indications of some personal tragedies in the background of the trial of the fifteen ministers.

The other ministers who confessed today and pleaded for mercy were Ivan Spankulov, 44, a Baptist minister; Zdravko Bezlov, 28, a Methodist minister; Zaharij Raichev, 50, a Baptist minister; Mitko Dimitrov, 39, Church of Christ minister, and Angel Dinev, 40, a Pentecostal pastor.

Security Police Praised

They pleaded guilty to particulars as well as the general charges and concluded their confessions with tributes to the security police for humane treatment, political re-education.

Mateyev Dimitrov is under a particularly serious accusation in addition to the three broad charges. He is accused of having worked in a German slave labor camp in upper Silesia and of having betrayed there a large number of Bulgarian workers to the Gestapo.

One of the first state witnesses called to the stand this afternoon was the widow of a man who died in the German concentration camp. She accused Mr. Dimitrov of having been responsible for her husband's betrayal and death.

Twenty-one of the state witnesses were heard today, after the last defendants had made their confessions. They attempted to corroborate the charges against the prisoners.

Today's witnesses included a dockworker from Burgas, who testified that one of the defendants had sought information on the loading and unloading of Soviet ships. Another witness was a man who alleged he had bought \$18,000 from the churchmen at the illegal rate.

Some sixty more witnesses for the state and the defense will be heard tomorrow. The trial will be recessed on Thursday, which is one of Bulgaria's liberation days, and will be resumed by the prosecution Friday morning when the case will be summed up for the state.

Defense counsel will speak Friday afternoon and Saturday. The defendants will make their last brief pleas Saturday or Sunday, and the verdicts will be rendered Monday.

The main target of the confessions of most of the ministers were Nikola Mihailov and Yanko Ivanov, although the state's main case was made out against Vasil Ziapkov. According to the ministers who confessed yesterday and today, they received requests for information primarily from Messrs. Mihailov and Ivanov.

The prominence of the reports of Soviet troop movements and installations in the confessions and in the indictment is another important aspect of the case. The court appears to have accepted reports on the Soviet Army, which was the army of occupation, as the basis for charges of espionage, although the alleged acts were committed by Bulgarian citizens on Bulgarian soil against a foreign army.

The prisoners have had no communication with each other or their counsel during the trial. Each man is brought into the courtroom under guard and is removed from the courtroom individually. The seating arrangement provides for the prisoners and guards alternating on the benches.