

FINAL PLEAS MADE BY SOFIA PASTORS

Defense Winds Up Argument
in Trial of 15 Protestants
—Verdict Due Tuesday

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SOBIA, Bulgaria, March 5—A Sofia District Court heard today the final pleas of fifteen Protestant ministers and the twelve remaining defense counsel who had not been heard yesterday and then adjourned until Tuesday when it will render its verdict.

Today's final session, which began 8:30 A. M. and ended 2:10 P. M. was grim. Defense counsel resumed their tactics of yesterday in joining with the state in flogging the United States and American culture as the evil geni in the drama that has been played out in Sofia during the last ten days. Several of the defense counsel offered new adaptations of this technique.

The defendants' final pleas, which ended the session, introduced a high dramatic note in the trial.

Several of them, including the Revs. Ziapkov, head of Congregational churches; Nikola Mihailov, head of Baptist churches; Ladin Popo Pentecostal minister; and 74-year-old Alexander Zahariev, Methodist minister, broke down completely, unashamedly and begged for forgiveness and a new start in life.

Others Are Dignified

Others, such as the Revs. Yanko Ivanov, head of Pentecostal churches and Yoncho Driankov, Pentecostal minister, confessed everything, begged for another chance but remained dignified throughout their self-abasement.

Some of the final pleas submitted by defense counsels were unusual.

Georgi Meshkov, for example, defending the Rev. Georgi Vasev, Baptist minister, said:

"If my client does not like the way I am defending him he should be frank and tell the Court. My client has confessed and repented. He is a weak-willed person.

"Instead of fighting bourgeoisie he sold out to the Anglo-Americans. The drunkard who speaks over the voice of America alleged we Bulgarians are interfering with the freedom of religion. This drunkard should have sent someone to hear what is going on and describe things as they are.

One Year in Jail Asked

"Our Bulgaria has borne some great sons. Now, when I am before these spies, I appeal to you to give them the possibility of changing. Warmongers can no longer find any agents in Bulgaria. I ask for one year of education in prison."

Kosta Armenov, counsel for the Rev. Georgi Chernev, head of Pentecostal churches, as well as for Mr. Mihailov, said: "An acknowledged crime is a semi-crime. These crimes are political. The confessions have an educational significance because they give society the possibility of seeing what the defendants have done and why.

"I plead extenuating circum-

stances because of the sincere confessions. Chernev and Mihailov have a foreign mentality. Chernev helped Jews and some partisans during the war. Give them a just punishment. Those who speak truth are entitled to clemency."

Aresenye Georgiev, another counsel for Mr. Chernev, pleaded his client had acted under foreign pressure and was therefore entitled to clemency. He said Mr. Chernev was a product of mission schools.

Reports Called Customary

"The missionaries were the handmaidens of capitalism," he said. "They were followed by tradesmen and finally by generals."

Mr. Georgiev argued that Protestant ministers had been sending reports to their church boards ever since the founding of the Protestant churches in Bulgaria. These reports become routine habits, and the prisoners did not realize they must cease after Sept. 9, 1944, when "the new Bulgaria" was born, he added.

The trouble, Mr. Georgiev argued, was that the Protestant ministers did not realize after September that the building of socialism was a state secret. He said his client never had contact with foreigners in Bulgaria and could, therefore, be considered only an accessory.

Counsel for other defendants said their clients all pleaded guilty to charges but should be given another chance.

The defendants were in a demoralized state when Judge Konstantin Oundjiev called upon them to say their last words. The first to speak was Mr. Mihailov. He wept as he said he had received a fair trial and praised the court.

"I have made a mistake, I sinned,

I repent, I am sorry," he said. "Give me a chance to resurrect after this Golgotha. Give me a light sentence so that I can devote my life to building up the republic."

Mr. Ivanov then took the stand and, speaking calmly, said that "man's most precious possession is his life, and life is given to man only once.

"A human being tries not to pity himself at the end that his life has been in vain. He wants to create something that will add to the lives of others. You will draw the balance sheet of my life and my crimes. You must take into consideration I have discovered germs of good in my heart."

Mr. Ziapkov went to pieces the moment he began to address the court.

"These ten days," he said, "have passed like a sinister film of our criminal activities and when I think of the verdict I address to you from the bottom of my heart a plea for leniency.

Don't only punish me. If you were a Fascist court you would only punish me without worrying what would become of me. But you are a people's court of the Republic of Bulgaria and therefore you will do more than punish me and that is to help a fallen citizen."