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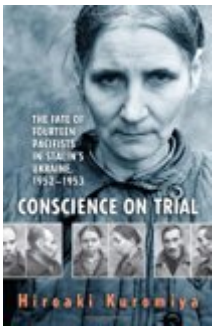
Hiroaki Kuromiya. *Conscience on Trial: The Fate of Fourteen Pacifists in Stalin's Ukraine, 1952-1953.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. x + 212 pp. $60.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4426-4461-8.



Reviewed by Kayla Hester

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On a November night in 1952, Soviet police descended upon the homes of more than a dozen individuals in the city of Bila Tserkva in central Ukraine. Soviet officials suspected that these poor, barely educated people belonged to an outlawed religious sect called the Reformed Adventists, which subscribed to pacifism and the Saturday Sabbath. Through his book ***Conscience on Trial: The Fate of Fourteen Pacifists in Stalin's Ukraine, 1952-1953***, historian Hiroaki Kuromiya seeks to illuminate this single example of Joseph Stalin's oppressive reign over the Soviet Union through the study of these individuals. Specifically, Kuromiya utilizes the case file of the arrests, interrogations, and trails of these Ukrainians to construct "the mechanism of political repression … in Stalin's last days" and decipher how exactly Soviet citizens became entrapped in this system (p. 6).

Kuromiya's sources are remarkable, as he found the entire set of trail records, covering every stage of the investigation, almost completely intact. Housed in the archive of the Security Service of Ukraine, the entire case file is nearly nine hundred pages in length, mostly front and back, tightly bound, and written almost completely in longhand. The arduous undertaking of deciphering these records took the author three summers, but the detailed snapshot it provides of the workings of the Soviet judicial system is extraordinary. As Kuromiya notes in his introduction, he borrows from the microhistorial methodology of Carol Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms* (1992). In the same way that Ginzburg analyzed the court records of an Italian miller during the Inquisition in order to elucidate the world in which he lived, Kuromiya used the trial reports of these fourteen Ukrainians to provide "insights into the minds of those swept up in Stalin's terror machine" (p. 6).

Kuromiya begins by chronicling the arrest of the accused, all but one being simultaneously apprehended by Soviet police. Drawing from the police records, the author provides detailed descriptions of each individual, including year and place of birth, occupation, family information, and any objects taken from the suspect's home. Accompanying this information are striking photographs,

"mug shots" taken of each suspect, that add an incredible personal dimension to Kuromiya's narrative. The quiet lives behind these images were mostly characterized by intense poverty, unemployment, and marginality. Still, the Soviet government perceived this group as a national security threat because of their suspected religious ties to Reformed Adventism. This was a splinter group of the Seventh-Day Adventists, whose doctrine had originally promoted pacifism and rejection of military service, and observing the Saturday Sabbath by not laboring that day. However, the Seventh-Day Adventists in the USSR had discarded these two tenets in the decades before because they conflicted with Soviet laws. Those who opposed this change and left the church to form their own new organization became known as the Reformed Adventists. Government officials believed that these individuals arrested in Bila Tserkva were not only affiliated with this sect and thus rejecting Soviet authority, but that they were also attempting to spread their beliefs and anti-Soviet sentiment, which constituted a major crime.

The book then moves into an examination of the interrogations, where the author calls into question the credibly of the records and uses this case as an example of how Soviet authorities routinely forged confessions in order to "prove" the guilt of a suspect. For instance, one of those arrested, Fedora Il'chenko, characterized the Reformed Adventists, to which she claimed to belong, as an "anti-Soviet" and "underground" group. As the author deduces, it is very improbable that she would have used such provocative terminology; more likely, the police took advantage of the fact that she was illiterate and forged her confession of guilt. In another interrogation of Liubov' Fedorchuk, the investigators reported the suspect as stating: "I indeed raised my son … in an anti-Soviet spirit and tried to induce him into the Adventist community, but I failed. Now he lives … [a] normal way of life" (p. 93). Again, it seems curious that a devout Reform Adventist would have characterized her son's secular life as "normal"; thus it appears that the police embellished her confession as well. Furthermore, in the case of Gavriil Belik's interrogation, police claimed that he admitted his absolute refusal to serve in the military if required, or even to work in military factories. However, when police collected Belik's belongings from his home, they recorded that they seized his military service card, proving that Belik had actually served in the military at a point in his life. This also points to the fact that his "confession" was a police fabrication. Between the lines of these records, Kuromiya also finds probable evidence of aggressive interrogation tactics. In many cases, the Soviet police officials only took down a few meager pages of notes for an questioning session that spanned six or seven hours. Kuromiya deduces that this means the suspects attempted to resist questioning for a long time and that "intimidation and threat were applied to extract necessary confessions" (p. 69). To the author, the interrogation records of these individuals were almost entirely an invention by Soviet investigators.

Kuromiya then examines the trials of the accused Reformed Adventists, which further uncovers the falsehoods within the interrogation records. Despite their supposed confessions of guilt during the interrogation period, all of the suspects but one pleaded not guilty during the trial. Many of the inconsistencies within the police reports and accusations came to light throughout the trial, but the defense council did nothing to highlight them. Clearly, as Kuromiya argues, "the guilt of the accused and the sentences against them were predetermined … the court was merely pro forma" (p. 159). Ultimately, the judge ruled that ten of the accused would serve twenty-five years of correctional labor, and the other four would serve ten years. Fortunately for the accused, however, Stalin died just a few months after their imprisonment, and in the process of de-

Stalinization that followed, Kuromiya found records that Soviet officials released all but two.

After examining the whole trail process of these fourteen accused, Kuromiya reaches a series of fascinating conclusions about some of the accused. He concludes that one of the suspects, Vasilii Fedorovich Belokon', was most likely working for the Soviet police to implicate this group. Belokon' was the only suspect who did not get a mug shot, he was the only one to refuse to speak for the entire trial, and, as Kuromiya uncovered, his son had refused to serve in the army during World War II and yet this information did not surface during the trial. In the author's mind, it is likely that Belokon' agreed to collaborate with Soviet police in return for the release of his son from the gulag. It is likely, since Kuromiya was unable to locate information on him after he was imprisoned, that Soviet officials quietly exonerated Belokon' for his help in the case. In addition, the author deduced that two other defendants, the youngest and oldest of the group, were likely broken by the police and worked with them throughout the entire process.

Ultimately, Kuromiya contends that the whole criminal case was a complete police fabrication. Apart from the fact that members of this group refused to work on Saturdays because of their faith, which was not a criminal offense, none of the other charges against them were proven by Soviet officials during this trial. It was not likely that they were involved in an illegal, anti-Soviet group; indeed, from what Kuromiya can deduce, the vast majority of the group were not even familiar with the term "Reformed Adventist" and therefore had no official organization ties to the sect. There was also no proof of these individuals' outright refusal of military service, and many of them had even agreed to serve in the military at some point in their life. The allegation that they were involved in anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda also had no founding in evidence, as these were very private people, living on the margins of Soviet society, with no history of spreading anti-Soviet sentiments. The only "proof" that Soviet officials recorded were their confessions of guilt during the interrogation period, which were almost certainly gained through coercion, threat, and even torture.

Though going to such elaborate lengths to imprison a group of individuals who were not an obvious national security threat may seem bizarre, the author notes that this was a very common practice of the Soviet government. Repeatedly, the Soviet government essentially fabricated entire trails such as this one. This was because the regime feared ideas and faiths that did not exactly conform to the Soviet system. As Kuromiya argues, "whether any of them collaborated with the police at the trial does not negate the possibility that among the defendants there were devout and principled believers" (pp. 183-184). And those believers represented "a moral universe deeply private and separate from the official, atheist and revolutionary regime" (pp. 6-7). In this way, the author believes that these Adventists represent a microcosm of the Soviet people as a whole and the ways that the regime attempted to infiltrate the private and personal spheres of its citizens.

Conscience on Trial is an outstanding glimpse into this fascinating aspect of Soviet history. Kuromiya has utilized a wide variety of secondary sources on Soviet and religious history, many of them in the Ukrainian and Russian languages. Furthermore, his ability to decipher the Ukrainian police reports to create this analysis is outstanding. Many of his conclusions involved a lot of conjecture and reading between the lines because the source material did not always appear credible. This can be problematic for a less astute historian, but Kuromiya has reached thoughtful and logical conclusions that are convincing for the reader. Overall, Kuromiya has provided a valuable and interesting look into the inner workings of the Soviet judicial system in the Stalin era.

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