



"SOCIETY OF LABOR CLERGY:" SOVIET TERROR AGAINST CHRISTIANS

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In this important and ground-breaking interview, Maria Igorevna Degtyareva, doctoral candidate, discusses her research into the so-called, "Society of Labor Clergy" (1937), which proves how the [NKVD](#) (the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) falsified interrogation protocols, then condemned and sent to death innocent people, in many cases. At the same time, the fabricated case of the "Society of Labor Clergy" was used by the NKVD investigators as an exemplary one, and on its basis subsequent cases against believers were fashioned. Maria Igorevna here speaks with Inna Yurievna Fedotova, Head of the Research Department, of the [Perm State Archive](#) of Social and Political History.

Researching History

Inna Fedotova (IF): Maria Igorevna, what was it that appealed to you about this topic?

Maria Degtyareva (MD): It was just by coincidence. The area of my research interests was the history of French conservative thought. I did not imagine that I would have to engage in the study of repression. The topic came to me "as an inheritance" from my mother.



Inna Fedotova and Maria Degtyareva.

IF: Of course, we knew your mother Natalya Evgenievna. She was a long-time researcher in the collections of our archive.

MD: One of her church obedience was work in the diocesan Department of History and Canonization, connected with the collection of sources. She was a regular visitor at the [Perm Archive](#). A person of exceptional efficiency, dedicated and reliable, her working day often ended at 10-11 pm. After returning from the archive, she would organize and put the prepared copies of documents into folders.

Mom didn't write anything, but when selecting persons for consideration by the Commission on Canonization, she herself went through the fate of each person, every sentence, and she always regretted that so much would just sit in the repositories. It was she who drew my attention to the fact that repressions against the clergy and believers is a topic that has not been adequately studied, and yet the situation is conducive to that.

IF: What situation are you referring to?

MD: In the 1990s, a whole complex of sources was transferred from the departmental funds of law enforcement agencies for state storage at Perm Archive, including those of value to the Church - the cases of the victim priests.

All conditions for the work of historians were created in the archive, and we are grateful to the previous director of the Archive, Mikhail Gennadievich Nechaev, the current director, Sergei Vasilyevich Neganov - and all the specialists of Perm Archive for the fact that the documents were processed, put in order and placed in the electronic database. Fortunately, the archival collections are open, and restrictive measures function within the framework of Russian legislation.

IF: Was it difficult to change direction?

MD: I understood that addressing a new topic, in addition to studying the historical context of the Church, would also require some real physical effort. I was frightened by the volume of the material. I was sure that it was "not a woman's job," and I certainly could never do it.

IF: What made you change your attitude towards this topic?

MD: I was imperceptibly brought to it; there were no external "instructions" and "special blessings." The well-known confessor, the elder of the [Pskov-Pechersk Monastery](#) - [Archimandrite John \(Krestyankin\)](#) - blessed me in due time to finish work on my doctoral dissertation.

It's just that the course of life began to change significantly in Moscow in the early 2000s. It took time to figure it out, to understand something myself and, finally, to discover the new martyrs. A person close to me - a nun of the [Novodevichy Convent](#) - brought me to [Butovo](#) and introduced me to the history of the shooting range. After a few years, what used to be *terra incognita* for me became really important.

With the accession to the cathedra of [Vladyka Methodius](#), systematic work began in our diocese to compile its history, the biographies of the confessors and new [martyrs of Perm](#), and specialized publications for a wider audience began to appear. And, at some point, I felt that I was ready to take part in this as a historian. One of the cases requiring professional application was the [Perm](#)-Sverdlovsk case of 1937 of the so-called "Society of Labor Clergy."

IF: How did you envision professional engagement in such work?

MD: Hagiography and source studies have somewhat different tasks. The compiler of biographies is focused on reproducing the spiritual image of the saint, the essence of his Christian service and exploit. And this is important. It is necessary to see and convey characterological traits, the "core" of the personality. However, the source text is often left behind the scenes as it were. The task of the historian is to analyze documents, correlate them with known facts and try to distinguish between the "desirable" and the real, genuine and counterfeit in the case materials.

IF: In other words, the methods of historical science allow you to reveal falsifications in the case materials?

MD: Yes, and this direction is promising.

Significance Of The Case Of "The Society Of Labor Clergy"

MD: Unfortunately, in our society, where are so opposite to what really happened, there is still the opinion that "there were no unjust sentences in the just Soviet state," and "if they were arrested, it was not without reason." Even in the context of the Church, I had to hear excuses from supporters of a repressive policy: "They were cutting the forest - chips fly...."

When arguments are not accepted because it is difficult to part with an idealized, familiar image of the past, documents are the only basis for dialogue. When working with them, the methods familiar to professional historians are used: comparative analysis, "cross-examination of sources," philological analysis, paleography. When we were students, much attention was paid to the methodological aspects of work and auxiliary historical disciplines at the university.

Of course, one can confine oneself to a general statement: "The convicts were rehabilitated posthumously; numerous violations were found in the case materials by the commissions of the following years." But places with traces of falsifications are the most impartial "witnesses." I think this is one of the possible ways to change the attitude towards what happened in the 1920s and 1930s in our country. It is important that the rehabilitation of Christians who suffered during the years of repression should not seem to be just a consequence of the "swing of the political pendulum."

IF: Please tell us about the features and significance of this case?

MD: The case of the Society of Labor Clergy is one of the central ones for our region, in the drama of the investigative processes of 1937–1938 - and one of the first planned "mass" cases of the period of the "great terror" in the country. Its "orbit" involved not only believers - representatives of the clergy, clergymen, children of priests - but also those who were completely outside the Church.

The "scenario framework," developed by the [Sverdlovsk](#) and Perm investigators, put in the position of the accused people of various views, tastes and positions: believers and atheists, apolitical and partisan, "White" and "Red."

Order No. 00447, Dated July 30, 1937

IF: How was that made possible?

MD: The case was connected with the bringing into force of the notorious operational order 00447 (of July 30, 1937) of the USSR People's Commissar of Internal Affairs N.I. Yezhov, "On the operation to repress former kulaks, criminals and other anti-Soviet elements," which was approved by the Politburo of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks, that is, it turned out to be "built-into" an operation of concerted effort to combat all those that were "suspicious" in the country (or against the so-called "crusade front against Soviet power"), and implemented on the eve of the elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, scheduled for December of that year. The purpose of the "operation" was to ensure "the smooth running of the elections."

First of all, the fears of the leadership were caused by the results of the January population census, which showed that the authority of the clergy in society was still high, and the efforts of widespread atheistic propaganda were not bringing the expected results.

Despite the fact that in the Soviet Union there was officially an organization that was given the task of destroying the Church in several "five years" spans, like the "five-year plans" in the economy - the "[League of Militant Atheists](#)" led by [Yemelyan Yaroslavsky](#). More than half of the country's population noted in the census forms that they were believers.

The socio-political background was also unstable. The 1930s in the USSR were marked by famine, against the background of forced collectivization and numerous peasant protests against the coercion to join collective farms and the conditions created in them.

The reaction to the ruthlessness of the strategy of economic development, chosen by the Central Committee, and built on "pumping funds" from one sector of the economy to another, from agriculture to industry, through a deliberate disproportion in price policy - was criticism of the unbalanced policy by major economists and representatives of the party elite ([A.V. Chayanov](#), [N.I. Bukharin](#), [A.I. Rykov](#), [M.P. Tomskii](#)).

In addition, the style of Stalin's leadership caused a split in the highest party echelons. This is how several opposition groups replacing one another came about. An immediate consequence of this was the planned trials of the participants in the "opposition."

Thus, the general situation filled the top management with doubts about the victorious outcome of the

planned voting. In any case, in the case under consideration and similar cases in 1937, the justification for extending the investigation period, and, consequently, expanding the circle of those arrested, was the wording: *"In view of the upcoming elections to the Supreme Soviet."*

Already in March 1937, in the Main Directorate of the NKVD of the USSR, a draft order was developed: *"On the tasks of the third departments of state security directorates to combat sabotage in the national economy."* It listed the categories of the population that were suspicious of the Stalinist leadership, as it was said, as... possible *"agents of foreign intelligence."* Among them - those who studied abroad, former prisoners of war, immigrants, former members of the [CPSU](#), members of opposition parties, former "Whites" and [kulaks](#).

And finally, on July 30, 1937, order 00447 was issued. The document indicated the categories to which the application of "special measures" was applied: former kulaks, *"continuing to conduct active anti-Soviet subversive activities," "escaping from camps and labor settlements," "hiding from dispossession,"* as well as *"members of insurgent, fascist, terrorist and bandit formations who have served their sentences,"* or escaped repression and *"active anti-Soviet elements from the former kulaks."* The same list included *"members of anti-Soviet parties",* former "Whites," officials, *"bandits and robbers,"* sectarian activists, *"churchmen,"* and... criminals at large and held in camps.

Representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church found themselves in such company (and with an indication of the place allotted to them in the sequence of "subversives"). This was the formal, "legal basis" for the renewal and toughening of the repressive policy towards the clergy and believers.

The listed groups were previously subdivided into "the most hostile" and "less active." The first were subject to execution, the second - to camp imprisonment for a period of 8 to 10 years. In all regions of the country, special "quotas" or "limits" were introduced for the application of the order. From that moment, the investigation could be carried out in an expedited manner, and the determination of the fate of the accused, including in absentia, became the prerogative of the regional, republican and regional ["troikas"](#) of the NKVD.

Throughout 1937, social "purges" were carried out everywhere, but the chronological "framework" of the Perm process and its course indicate that representatives of the Sverdlovsk Directorate and the Perm department of the NKVD were among the "leaders of the great terror."

"In The Bureau Of Partisans, In Secret"

IF: Please tell us about when and how the investigation began?

MD: Formally, several reasons were used to initiate the "investigation." Firstly, the trial a little earlier, in January 1937, in Sverdlovsk. in the case of the underground "[Trotskyist](#) center," was conducted as if it had a connection with Moscow. According to investigators, the members of the "Trotskyite-[Zinovievist](#)" organization were then people who held high party and administrative posts.

Since they managed to get confessions (how that was done is another matter) from the main accused - the chairman of the Sverdlovsk city executive committee, V.F. Golovin – the investigator Dmitriev was convinced that the new administrative center of the Urals was the place where the "underground anti-government rebel headquarters" was located, allegedly having its "branches" in different cities.

Thus, the old administrative center of the Urals - once the provincial one of Perm - was included in the "list of suspects" of the UNKVD of cities.

The fact is that during the Civil War, the old part of our city, unlike the working-class district - [Motovilikha](#), rather actively supported the "Whites." In Stalin's own interpretation, in 1935, these events were called the "[Perm catastrophe](#)."

And so. until the [Great Patriotic War](#), when Perm became important as the center of the evacuation of the Union, and carried that service with dignity, Stalin could not "forgive" the city, and its status was "downgraded" to the value of a regional center, that is, Perm was in a "special category."

And secondly, after Dmitriev gave a general directive to "*intensify searches in the indicated direction*," at an operational meeting in Sverdlovsk, officers of the Perm NKVD put into circulation two "*signals*" [methods] that perfectly met the "job at hand." Both signals, chronologically, diverged quite a lot from the release of order 0044, and it is obvious that at the beginning of 1937, having taken these signals out of "storage," it was decided to use them "for reporting."

The first method is obvious in the set of documents prepared by the sergeant of the Perm NKVD, Alikin. This was the surveillance case opened at the end of 1936 on a group of young believers, mainly from the clergy and children of priests who served in the Red Army, in the 9th battalion of the "rear guard" (in

modern terms, in the "construction battalion").

This group consisted of ten people and was portrayed as pretty ominous. Desperate "dissidents" in conscript service, as evidenced by the characteristics attached to them, not only *"refused to read Soviet newspapers,"* and *"learned political studies only mediocrely,"* but also *"did not change their opinion on the religious issue:"* they read the Gospel, *"arranged collective readings of prayers,"* observed fasts, *"did not interrupt correspondence with the priest-fathers,"* and during leave, without bothering to hide, visited Perm churches, and confessed and received communion. And all this - not only right in front of the rather apathetic bosses, but also while they were among their *"consciously [politically] aware comrades."*

So, in 1937, after a "request" came from Sverdlovsk to take action on the report of investigator Dmitriev, an episode was recalled which led to the observation of this group. Sergeant Alikin reported that somehow in November 1935 (!), three *"rear soldiers"* entered the office of housing construction, of the plant named after Stalin, and one of them made an inspired speech, denouncing the mistakes of the leadership's policy towards the peasantry and the difficult conditions of service in the Red Army for believers.

IF: And the second "signal" [method]?

MD: The second was the "classic" denunciation from a certain citizen named Borisova, who entered the NKVD also in 1935 (!). This was the denunciation at the workplace, by a neighbor in the apartment - of a watchmaker named Nechayev, who, as would be established by a [KGB](#) check in 1956, at that time was *"listed as a [Stakhanovite](#)."*

The denunciation informed the NKVD that the Nechayevs were active parishioners and benefactors of Perm churches, maintained acquaintance with the clergy and bishops. The denunciation expressed "concern" about the political preferences of the watchmaker, who, according to the denouncer, was a "monarchist," who had fled during the Civil War with the "Whites," and after returning "sat for gold" [practiced [parasitism](#), likely, "currency hoarding"].

The text of the statement was written with multiple errors, had a peculiar address ("In the partisan bureau, in secret"), and ended with an equally colorful stroke: *"What I have signed, Borisova."* Apparently, the curiosity of the "style" of the informant was the reason that at the time of receipt the written

denunciation was not taken seriously. However, in 1937, this absurdity was in demand as a "request from below," to work out the hypothesis of action in Perm, allegedly "well-rooted since the Civil War, an underground anti-government network".

The inability to establish the identity of the "applicant" and to question her on the merits of her charges did not interfere with the case, and on May 14, 58-year-old foreman Nechayev was arrested. Indeed, he had been on "trail" before - in 1924, he was arrested for a short period on suspicion of keeping currency.

NKVD: Alignment With Perm And Sverdlovsk

IF: Did I understand correctly that this case received some special status?

MD: You see, the investigation in Perm was opened in the spring of 1937, that is, it preceded the issuance of the July order 00447 (and it is possible that it was used to justify the "need" for such an issuance).

In any case, from the very beginning, the Nechayev case was really given the status of being "exemplary." Perm and Sverdlovsk were then included in the number of "experimental sites," where methods of building large-scale collective indictments were being worked out.

The falsified protocols of interrogations of those arrested in this case were sent to the Main Directorate of the NKVD, in Moscow, where they were replicated and sent to peripheral organizations as a methodological guide, a kind of "tracing paper." That is, dozens, and perhaps hundreds of NKVD divisions throughout the country checked their work against them.

As documents of internal investigations of the NKVD in 1939 show, at operational meetings of the special department in Perm and Sverdlovsk in 1937, these protocols, already sent back from the central headquarters with the very encouraging responses, were presented to the entire officer corps with instructions to "*follow them,*" and "*the methods practiced in the investigation should be widely applied in practice.*"

IF: Did the Perm investigators develop any special methodological processes for such work in 1937?

MD: Their "method" was distinguished not only by the abundance and variety of violations, but by a wide range of manipulations. Some of the mistakes, apparently, were caused by the usual "slovenliness," unprofessionalism. But for the most part, these are quite deliberate falsifications. Before the algorithm, they worked out the so-called "pyramidal scheme" of building collective indictments, with the possibility of replacing "variables" according to the what was required and needed.

IF: Could you give a few examples of false information in the case materials?

MD: Yes of course. The surviving documents of the observation file of Sergeant Alikin indicate that his "informant" - a certain rationer O-v - did not in fact name the Red Army soldier who in 1935 (if you trust Alikin's report) very carelessly "got into a conversation" in the office of the Stalin plant. On the margins of the sergeant's report there was an inscription made in red pencil by the hand of one of the leaders: "Who? Gulyaev?"

So, the method and time of verification of this "fact" was not reflected in the case materials; that is, no additional testimony appeared regarding this crucial question of Georgy Gulyaev and his comrades, no confrontations were held. But just below, on the same page, was attached a typescript comment: *"The materials available in the Perm NKVD established that in the office of Housing Construction Head, Stalin plant, on November, 1935, there came G.N. GULYAEV. with two of his comrades and carried out agitation in the presence of the rationing manager of the Stalin plant - O. Va. and others."*

Thus, the sanction of the Military Prosecutor Ural region, dated March 17, 1937, for the arrest of Georgy Gulyaev was given without any documented grounds for identifying him with the "author" of the speech which was pretty "cold" by that time.

Soon Sergeant Alikin and his handler - the head of the Perm NKVD civil defense department, captain of state security, Losos - received a very informative answer on the letterhead of the military prosecutor's office, which contained not a "hint," but a direct statement: *"We forward the certificate and the decision with the sanction of the Prosecutor of URALVO for the arrest of GN GULYAEV. In the materials sent, the criminal crime figure was completely insufficiently identified with the activities of LEBEDEV, KOZHEVNIKOV, YUFEROV and CHUKHLOV. Therefore their arrest by the Prosecutor of the Ural region has not yet been authorized. The investigation in the case of GULYAEV needs to uncover the organized activities of both GULYAEV and LEBEDEV, KOZHEVNIKOV, YUFEROV and CHUKHLOV, and then again raise the question of their arrest. Inform about the progress of the investigation."*

In other words, there was no question of any presumption of innocence in the accompanying document. The question was not whether the *"rear militia"* believers were really guilty, but that their conversations and "old habits" (that is, religious views) should receive convincing political "framing." Thus, the newly opened *"case of Georgy Gulyaev"* became the "cornerstone" in the foundation of the future collective indictments.

The Target Was Christians

IF: That is, it was "criminal" in the eyes of the investigators that these young people were believers?

MD: Yes exactly. The anti-Christian motive was the "core" of the Permian part of the process. And this is not new, the reason for delivering Christ into the hands of the Romans was also once the motive for "political security:" "He who calls himself King is not a friend of Caesar" (John 19:12). Christ was handed over to the pagans as a "political criminal." From the point of view of the officers of the Perm NKVD, the group of believers in the Red Army was influenced by the *"class-alien element"* - the clergy, which meant it was *"potentially dangerous."*

An important circumstance was the fact that the arrested "rear soldiers" attended services in Perm churches, and this opened up a new wide field of activity for the operatives - the possibility of a *"total cleanup"* of those who remained at large (after a large "wave" of arrests in the early 1930s under the pretext of a struggle against "opponents of continuous collectivization") - namely, representatives of the Perm and Sverdlovsk clergy.

And one more example of the "groundlessness" of preparing the accusation, this time - in relation to the clergy. A striking argument in favor of the version of the existence of an "underground anti-government organization" in Perm under the leadership of the clergy was that when the priest of the Zaborsk Church, Father Mikhail Korovin, was arrested, an impressive list of [Tikhonov](#)-oriented believers compiled by his hand was seized. The title of the sheet indicated that members of the local parish community were included. The list included several hundred people. So, during the investigation, this document was presented as *"material evidence of recruitment into an underground organization."*

Meanwhile, the investigation stubbornly did not notice either that compiling a list of such appointments in the form of a chart, indicating the personal data and actual addresses of parishioners and their

relatives, would be complete absurdity from the point of view of "political conspiracy," nor that the list included mainly elderly and very elderly people. Most were over 50 years old, the oldest of them were 80–85 years old.

At the same time, the investigation did not have any other "material evidence," such as, leaflets, letters of a political nature, agent instructions prepared for transferring data to "foreign intelligence," ammunition depots. Nothing but this list.

IF: Why did the investigators choose Georgy Gulyaev?

MD: It is impossible to answer this question unequivocally. In those conditions, one careless word, bravado of dissent, someone's personal hostility was enough.

But a more serious circumstance cannot be ruled out. Before being drafted into the Red Army, Georgy Gulyaev served as subdeacon to Archbishop Dositheus (Stepanov), and who at that time was in the [Renovationist](#) schism. During the service, Georgy kept up a correspondence with his bishop. The rupture of Vladyka Dositheus with the "Renovationists" and his return to the bosom of the canonical church structure could be the factor that put him and the people in his circle under attack from the NKVD, which was closely patronizing the Renovationist organizations.

IF: Please explain what the "pyramid scheme" of building a case means?

MD: This is a scheme in which, with the maximum expansion of the "connections" of the accused, the alleged "general leadership" is trying to "reduce to a cone," closing it on "unwanted" figures - as a rule, very significant.

The arrest of Georgy Gulyaev seemed "promising," since he led a group of investigators not only to the "rear militia" and Perm priests, but also to the episcopate ... And in case of "success" - to the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The investigation was extended several times. The first order to extend it was issued on May 17, 1937, the next two on July 19, 1937. But even when the main part of the case was completed, many people

were involved in the process of "additional investigation," like a "funnel" - several bishops of the canonical subordination and dozens of priests and clergy from "schisms." In the course of an internal inspection of the KGB in 1956, it is established that in this case and "in conjunction with it" in 1937-1938. more than 50 clergymen were repressed.

At the same time, in Perm and in the Urals, an "inquiry" was carried out against people not connected with the Church - from the leaders of large enterprises and Soviet organizations to ordinary employees, workers and collective farmers. Many of them were charged with having links with the "Society of Labor Clergy," the "Ural Rebel Headquarters," or the "Religious and Political Center" (by the way, Muslims from the village of Koyanovo were also be taken up in the general "stream," and charged with... "connection with Japanese intelligence").

IF: What, in your opinion, were the motives of the investigators?

MD: First of all, they acted in pursuance of the March and July 1937 orders, that is, they carried out a "purge" according to a social and ideological principle, using denunciations of "political unreliability." In some cases (this concerns the arrests of officers) personal motives are not excluded, for example, settling scores.

The question whether the investigators themselves considered their version to be really plausible remains open to me. Judging by the recollections of the participants in the events about the "installations" at the internal meetings of the NKVD in 1937, the initiators of this case were very much "part of the makeup."

Having at their disposal some fragmentary data, they enthusiastically "completed" the picture, inventing not only "missing links," but also entire "blocks." The main motive was the desire to satisfy the expectation, to "prove oneself," that is, career considerations. So, some investigators, for example, Radygin and Zyryanov, according to an internal inspection of the NKVD in 1939, "freely handed" 10 to 15 "confession" protocols per day!

And yet there was further responsibility - to those who drew up and signed orders for large-scale "cleansing," giving scope to the imagination of local performers.

IF: What were those arrested accused of? What was the version of the investigation, and who developed it?

MD: In the spring of 1937, the "rear soldiers" were suspected of intending to create an organization modeled on the Petrograd Orthodox brotherhoods. Indeed, such a "network" had long operated under the guise of communal apartments. Its participants worked, like all citizens of the USSR, but at the same time lived a liturgical life, that is, they confessed, received communion, and, in addition, read the Gospel and Orthodox literature, provided assistance to those who were subjected to repression or those who had lost loved ones.

It was difficult to identify such communities. In Leningrad, they were only partially disclosed by the [OGPU-NKVD](#). The fact that it was the example of the "Petrograd brotherhoods" that inspired these young people to imitate is indicated by the protocol of the interrogation of the Red Army soldier, Ivan Kozhevnikov.

According to the texts of the first protocols of interrogations of Georgy Gulyaev and his friend Nikolai Lebedev, the young people came up with the name "Society of Labor Clergy" for their future organization. But during internal investigation by the NKVD in 1939, some of the investigators began to falsify the protocols immediately – and so we cannot rely on their texts, from the first protocol onwards.

It is possible that someone in the "center" was worried about the possibility of repeating the "Petrograd" experience in the provinces, and this whole story from beginning to end, and the very name of the "organization" were a figment of the imagination of the "specialists." In any case, the documents of several internal investigations of the NKVD-KGB contain direct indications that the leaders of the Perm NKVD brigade themselves invented the name for the fictional organization.

From the moment of their arrest, this case did not bode well for the accused, since the confession of "religiosity" immediately received an unambiguous interpretation – it was equated with "anti-Soviet activity." This was the substantial part of the "confessions" of Georgy Gulyaev, Nikolai Lebedev, Ivan Kozhevnikov and their comrades.

The situation was aggravated when investigators added to this a "note of relevance" in accordance with the upcoming elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. According to their version, the Perm

priests, Savva Beklemyshev, Mikhail Korovin and others, arrested after the "rear militia," were supposedly giving "instructions" to their parishioners, including those from the 9th battalion, to use completely legal (!) Conditions in accordance the Constitution of 1936 and "promoting believers in government." And this was regarded as a "political action."

At other times, the coming together of young believers (and even their possible discussion of the creation of a Christian community, which cannot be ruled out) could entail administrative measures, but if the case had gone to court, the terms of imprisonment would not have exceeded 5 to 7 years. In 1937, Yezhov's "instructions" were decisive for the process.

This case acquired greater scope thanks to the leadership of the Sverdlovsk investigator, Dmitriev, and the reciprocal "creative impulse" of the representative of the Perm department of the NKVD - investigator Mozzherin. They can equally claim "authorship" in the development of a general "scenario" and are most directly related to falsifications.

Mozzherin and Dmitriev tried to give the case "conceptual completeness;" and thus the investigation simultaneously had two versions about the serious "ideological leadership of the identified organization." The first was associated with the name of the Gomel Archbishop Dositheus (Stepanov), who left the "Renovationists," and the second - with the name of the "Metropolitan of Sverdlovsk," Mikhail Trubin, who remained one of them.

If the investigation presented Archbishop Dositheus in the role of a "resident of Polish intelligence," then Mikhail Trubin - as *"the main ideologist of the anti-Soviet crusade front"* in the Urals, allegedly uniting around himself during his visits to Perm, a whole group of bishops of completely different subordination. In this group, there were two canonical ordinations: Metropolitan Peter of Sverdlovsk (Savelyev) and Archbishop of Perm Gleb (Pokrovsky), as well as Metropolitan Peter Kholmogortsev, who was in the schism.

In addition, the Renovationist "Metropolitan" Mikhail Trubin was "identified" by the officers of the Perm NKVD as being "responsible for communication" between the representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate and the "Renovationists" and "[Grigorievites](#)" who did not recognize it... with the representatives of the [AUCPB](#) - the leaders of the "Trotskyist center." He allegedly provided a "connection" with the former ["White Guards,"](#) the leaders of the [Osoaviakhim](#) and officers in the ranks of the Red Army, who were "charged with the duty" to provide the "terrorist insurgent organization" with

weapons and ammunition.

"Terrorism", "Espionage", "Propaganda Of The Fascist Idea"

IF Even for a person who is not very dedicated to the history of the Church, it all looks strange. What were these assumptions based on?

MD: These are not just assumptions. In 1937, they was brought against many people as an official charge: "anti-Soviet and sabotage activities," "propaganda of the fascist idea," "terrorism," "preparation of an armed uprising," and "espionage" – "transfer of secret information about the products of Perm defense enterprises to the residents of foreign intelligence services" (Polish and Japanese).

I have already noted that the information received by Mozzherin's group (about the periodic visits to Perm of the Renovationist "Metropolitan" Mikhail Trubin and about his meetings with the participants in the schism, as well as about the private correspondence of the "rear militia," Georgy Gulyaev, with the Archbishop of the now Moscow Patriarchate Dositheï (Stepanov) were completely inadequate for this kind of construction.

Investigators from the Mozzherin Brigade were in a rush, and Dmitriev's patronage seemed to ensure their privacy. And they easily attributed to Christians violation of the commandments of the Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount, which forbid murder (Ex. 20, 13), violence (Matt. 7, 12; Rom. 12, 21), as well as - the covenants of Christ and the apostles about obedience to the authorities (Rom. 13, 1). Nor did they look back at the fact that in the history of the Orthodox Russian Church there was no case of "espionage" of canonical hierarchs of national origin in favor of foreign (moreover, Catholic) states.

Specifics Of The "Basis Of Evidence"

As for the "basis of evidence" of the charge, traces of rough work are visible in the case file, literally at every step. For example, as "evidence of the connection between Archbishop Dositheus (Stepanov) and representatives of foreign intelligence services," it was indicated that in [Gomel](#) he allegedly "maintained contact through agents" with the priest of the local church, Konstantin Andrekus, and also "was familiar with a certain archimandrite, who left for Palestine." This, according to the interrogation protocols, was "testified" by Georgy Gulyaev. It was as if the bishop himself had "confirmed" all this information under

pressure from the investigation.

However, the identity of the mysterious archimandrite was not established. As for the Gomel acquaintances of Archbishop Dositheus, who were indicated as "intermediaries" in his relations with [Priest Konstantin Andrekus](#), some of these people, according to internal NKVD and KGB investigations in 1939 and 1956, were not identified and were not interrogated, and some, though indeed arrested in Gomel, did not testify against him.

The part about "active interaction" of the canonical church structure with representatives of the Renovationist and Gregorian schisms looks no more convincing either. If the "renovationists" who were losing their authority in the pre-war period sometimes sought communion with the Moscow Patriarchate, its position remained unchanged: unification according to the principle of political parties is impossible, it is only possible to unite through repentance to the canonical Church by the participants of schismatic movements who voluntarily severed ties with it.

It should be noted that the materials of the 1956 KGB inspection in this case contain testimonies of several witnesses that in Perm "...the renovationists had no relation to the Old Churchmen, they had no service separately;" and "all church issues were resolved separately by the Renovationists and Old Churchmen."

And the accusation against the priest of the Zaborsk Church, Mikhail Korovin, who not only allegedly "organized a terrorist and sabotage group in his parish," but also "became a member of the resident network," digging up and transmitting information about defense products of Perm factories to Poland. In the "testimony" against Father Mikhail, one can find both the numbers of important sectors and the production rates at one of the closed Perm enterprises. But only an internal investigation of the NKVD in 1939 made it possible to establish that all this information was entered into the protocols of interrogation of "witnesses" personally by one of Mozzherin's subordinates - the operative Ponosov.

Little by little, Mozzherin and Dmitriev got so into the "game" that they themselves could not bring everything to make sense. The "identified organization" turned out to be "about nine heads" (that is, 9 people were officially held in this case the status of "leader"), and this is not counting the priest Konstantin Andrekus, the "nameless" archimandrite who left for Palestine, and a group of convict Sverdlovsk party members.

At the same time, the two main versions about the "general management of the organization" were never brought to any logical agreement. That is why in 1956, during the next internal check of the case materials, KGB investigators literally knocked themselves off their feet in vain attempts to understand the system of "subordination" and establish which of the arrested, when and by whom was "recruited?"

Philological "Test"

IF: At the beginning of the conversation, you mentioned that it is possible to reveal falsifications in case materials using the methods of philological analysis...

MD: Indeed, lexemes - typical stylistic turns, peculiar speech "markers" - allow us to see in the interrogation protocols traces of the active participation of the "clerks" of the NKVD, unfamiliar with church vocabulary. These include ideological expressions, cliché phrases from the official press and propaganda, samples of the clerical style of those years. Obviously, a priest and a layman in the Church (and the "rear soldiers" were mostly children of priests and clergymen) could not speak such a language. If the protocols were not drawn up on record, but in the absence of the accused, the "creative gymnastics" of the sergeants and lieutenants of the NKVD, who pored over the documents, are especially noticeable. I will give a few examples as an illustration.

So, Georgy Gulyaev in one case allegedly showed that his comrade - Nikolai Lebedev (a pupil of the Makaryevsky monastery) - was going to *"develop religious activities after being fired from the battalion."* In another - that *"Stepanov (his bishop), on holidays often, visited the former Tsar Romanov, Nicholas,"* and often conducted *"political conversations with his subdeacon,"* and the priest Savva Beklemyshev *"gave them instructions"* to promote their delegates to the authorities in order to *"pursue their counter-revolutionary agenda through these delegates."* At the same time, the "rear militia" themselves allegedly planned to contact "the leaders of the religious world in Moscow."

Ivan Kozhevnikov, according to the text of the interrogation protocol, simply called the Perm priests, whom he knew well, *"ministers of a religious cult."*

Then, there is "the praise of Trotsky, Zinoviev, [Kamenev](#) and other Trotskyists and Zinovievites, as real representatives of the people, fearless people and revolutionaries," in the minutes drawn up on behalf of Christians, which were given the meaning of an independent streak in the activities of the "Society of

Labor Clergy." The work of "praising the revolutionaries" was to be carried out by the Red Army and "local priests among the civilian population."

And there are a lot of such "markers" in the materials of this case. For greater effect, imagine someone from the current official speakers of the Patriarchate using such an expressive speech "palette."

Results Of The "Investigation:" 37 Sentenced To Death

IF: Nevertheless, those convicted in this case received sentences of "capital punishment." How would you comment on the discrepancy between the number of sentences and the extracts from the acts of execution [records of executions carried out]?

MD: Indeed, on August 25, 1937, by the decision of the Troika at the NKVD of the Sverdlovsk Region, orders were issued to shoot 37 people.

At the end of the 5th volume of this case, extracts from the acts on the enforcement of sentences are kept in a separate envelope. They indicate the date of the execution - August 31, 1937 - and the time - 24.00. Extracts 35. Among them there is no extract from the act of execution of Archbishop Dositheus (Stepanov). There is also no extract from execution of Deacon Mikhail Bannov, who belonged to the canonical Church structure.

If documents clearly testify about Father Mikhail - he was tortured and admitted to the Perm psychiatric hospital with traces of numerous traumas, from which he died on September 5, 1937, then in the same documents the situation is somewhat more complicated for Archbishop Dositheus (in the case file he goes under his own worldly name, as Stepanov Gabriel Grigorievich).

The official response to the request of his relatives indicates that he, while serving his sentence, "died of angina on December 15, 1941." In fact, on March 31, 1956, according to the investigation of the Military Prosecutor's Office of the Ural region, the fact of the absence of an extract from the act of execution was entered into the "register" of 12 issues requiring clarification in the 1937 investigation.

Unfortunately, checking did not resolve the issues. In the 6th volume of the case, among the

documents on the investigation of abuses during the 1937 trial, there is a document under the heading:

*"Heard: Stepanov Gavriil Grigorievich, born in 1883, from Khodyasheva former Laishevsky district.
Resolved: to shoot. The verdict was executed on 27. VIII. 1937-"*

And the signature:

"Correct - "23. VI. 1956, Sverdlovsk."

According to this document, Archbishop Dosifei (Stepanov), for some reason, "was shot" 4 days before the rest of the participants in the case. The date indicated at the end of the document - June 23, 1956 - indicates that this is, indeed, not the original extract from the act. This text combines the content of two documents - the verdict of the "Troika" of the NKVD in 1937 and the missing extract from the act of execution. Thus, the question of why the original extract from the act of execution is missing in the case remains unresolved.

When the KGB of the Sverdlovsk region received a request to verify the data on Stepanov Gavriil Grigorievich for the operational accounting of the First Special Department of the Police Commission of Leningrad (dated June 21, 1957) at the request of his relatives, a tiny form of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Sverdlovsk region appeared in the documents, in the Volume, "Correspondence," handwritten:

"25 / VIII - 37 convicted tr. UNKVD of the Sverdlovsk region. <...> VMN. There is no information about the execution. Def. VTR Ural VO from 30 / X - 56 solution tr. from 25 / VIII - 37 canceled for lack of corpus delicti. Arch s / d no. c / d in Moscow. sod. in the Perm prison. 12 / VII 57."

And in the "Conclusion of this issue of August 6, 1957," it says:

"... was arrested on August 25, 1937 under Art. --- of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR by the Troika of the NKVD of the Sverdlovsk region, sentenced to a military service. 'On August 26, 1937, the sentence was executed October 30, 1956 by ruling No. 1475 of the Military Tribunal Ural region.'"

Taking into account the discrepancy in the dates indicated and the general inconsistency of the information, it is premature to give any comments in this case.

The [*featured image*](#) shows, *"Russian priests conveyed to judgment"* by Ivan Alekseevich Vladimirov, painted in 1922.

