

## Reviews

**Dnevniki ("Diaries")** by Eduard Kuznetsov. Les Editeurs Réunis, Paris, 1973. 374 pp.

Often it is a single book which suddenly brings to life a whole area of fact hitherto unknown or unexplored. Such a book is Eduard Kuznetsov's "Diaries", published in the Russian language in Paris last year. Most people will remember the Leningrad "hi-jack" trial. In June 1970 a group of young Soviet Jews was arrested for attempting to hi-jack a plane and fly to Sweden. In the beginning the affair was shrouded in mystery, but in December the world was shocked by the news : the group had been put on trial and two young men had been sentenced to death. After a world wide outcry, the death sentences were commuted to fifteen years. Other defendants received sentences of varying lengths. In the months that followed, the trials spread to other Soviet cities as more were implicated in the plot.

One of the two young men reprieved from execution was Eduard Kuznetsov, known to his friends as "Edik". Another of the defendants was his wife Silva Zalmanson. Some of those sentenced in 1970-71 have now been released and some have even emigrated to Israel. One of these is Ruth Alexandrovich. When Ruth was married in Tel Aviv in November 1971, she counted Mrs. Golda Meir among her wedding guests. But many are still in the labour camps – that vast network of "corrective" establishments whose features are becoming so familiar in the West. Through the many documents and even books now available about them, especially the Mordovian camp complex, these places are becoming a living reality throughout the world. Some of these writings have been imaginatively filmed in the West, and actors have testified to the traumatic experience this represented for them.

It is in places like these that Edik Kuznetsov and Silva Zalmanson, as well as thousands of others, continue their punishment. But the "hi-jackers'" story remains unique. Kuznetsov's book tells how it happened : the frustration of young Soviet Jews becoming aware of their national identity but unable to express it in freedom and peace. The cherished dream : Israel. The setbacks, and the plot born of desperation. The forging of links, the initiation of group members, the suspicions, and finally,

the arrest. The story moves towards its climax with an inexorable momentum. It becomes more and more clear that the plan is doomed to failure, but the participants continue with a grim determination. It is too late to go back.

So to the prison cells, the investigation, the attempts to divide and confuse friends with conflicting testimonies. 'The trial – and the sentence. Days of shocked unreality. "Outside" there are protests, but can they do any good? Reprieve – and the grey future of imprisonment looms ahead. The diaries for the first few months of 1971 are missing, discovered during a camp search. They continue from May and break off again in November 1971. This section adds much valuable material to the wealth of "camp literature" referred to above.

The story seems to be one of despair, and yet the book is warm and personal. It is the cry of a real man – the kind of cry that strikes sparks in the hearts of those not yet frozen into passive uniformity. (The image comes from the Ukrainian historian Moroz, sentenced in 1970 to a total of fourteen years in prison, labour camp and exile.) The "Diaries" are full of memorable lines, and of humour. One treasures the comment: "At the dawn of the revolution they sang gaily 'We'll destroy the churches and the prisons.' They managed the first quite well, but there's been something of a hitch with the second." (p. 21) Kuznetsov himself is not a believer, but comments on some of the believers he meets in prison and labour camp. He characterises the Soviet system thus: "I consider the present regime in our country a type of tyrannical, worldly religion, whose god is the State. It is impossible at the moment to speak of the possibility of secularization in Russia. We can only speak of a change of heathen cults in this basically religious atmosphere." (p. 93)

In *RCL* Vol. 2, No. 1 we printed a press statement by the young Russian Orthodox believer, Yevgeni Barabanov, who admitted that he had sent (among other things) Kuznetsov's "Diaries" to the West. Yelena Bonner, wife of Academician Sakharov, has made a similar statement. Published so far in Russian only, this book urgently demands translation into other languages.

Kuznetsov is still serving his harsh sentence, and is in poor health (also his wife). His story seems a tragic one, but there is another side to it. At the time of the hi-jack attempt, emigration to Israel was a forlorn possibility. Now, almost four years later, the emigration of Soviet Jews, although still far from meeting the demand, has increased. One suspects that this change of policy towards the Jews was due to a process similar to that which took place in the Baptist Church: the trouble incurred by the Soviet reform Baptists probably helped to lessen the pressure on

the State-recognized Baptist Church. Edik Kuznetsov, like Jan Palach in Czechoslovakia, deliberately sacrificed himself in order that his friends might be free. In this case free "Next year in Jerusalem".

KATHLEEN MATCHETT

*Sergei* by Sergei Kourdakov. Oliphants, London, 1973. 205 pp. £2.50.

This dramatized autobiography is written by a youth who led numerous attacks on Russian believers as a member of the Soviet auxiliary police. It does not cover his short sensational career in the West under the sponsorship of *Underground Evangelism*. The book, based on tapes, is expertly written by a ghostwriter and made even more attractive through sixteen pages of photographs, most of which Sergei brought with him when he jumped ship off the western Canadian coast.

Written as a story of human interest, it was not intended to be a factual document. The informative materials must therefore be treated with care. Sergei gives specific information about the religious situation around Petropavlovsk in Kamchatka. Although this information agrees essentially with what is already known, no other documents have appeared which confirm the existence of believers in this region. The book itself acknowledges that there are no churches in Kamchatka, just believers meeting illegally. Since the book concerns persecution during 1969 and 1970 when the reform Baptists' Council of Prisoners' Relatives was already well organized, it is surprising not to find references to this region in the *samizdat* which has reached the West.

It should be kept in mind that this is the story of a young man, barely 22 when he died. His life was full of traumatic events which he was not yet experienced enough to understand from any but the personal perspective. The most useful parts of the book are his description of life in a State orphanage, his education as a future leader in the Party, and his own growing disillusionment with communist practice.

Sergei's career as a Christian was brief and hectic. He shot himself on 1 January, 1973 in somewhat sordid circumstances. The book, however, does not mention his death except for a publisher's note, which still gives the misleading impression that the Soviet authorities were behind it, although it was made to appear as an accident.

WALTER SAWATSKY