

2. A Buddhist "Group" on Trial

A strange trial, with many ramifications, took place on 18-25 December, 1972 in Ulan-Ude. B. D. Dandaron, a well-known scholar and member of the Buryat Institute of Social Sciences, was arrested in August 1972 and sentenced in December to five years in a labour camp under Art. 227/1 and 147/3 of the RSFSR Penal Code. He was said to be the organizer of a Buddhist sect between 1971-72, involving hooliganism, speculation in religious objects, sexual mysticism and violence. Before Dandaron's trial, four others, said to be linked with this "sect", were arrested in Ulan-Ude during September 1972 and tried on 21-23 November. These four, A. E. Zheleznov (scholar at Ulan-Ude), Yu. Lavrov (student), V. Mantilevich (from the Leningrad Museum of Religion and Atheism) and D. Butkus (from the Vilnius Museum of Ethnography) were pronounced mentally unbalanced by Ulan-Ude psychiatrists and committed to hospital for treatment. In Moscow, the flat of O. F. Volkova (an expert on Sanscrit and Buddhist philosophy) was searched; A. M. Pyatigorsky (Buddhist specialist) and I. M. Parfianovich (Tibetan specialist) were questioned. In Tartu (Estonia) L. E. Myall, a teacher at the university, was questioned as were some of his students. In Leningrad, B. I. Kuznetsov (Tibetan specialist) and V. I. Rudoi (Buddhist specialist) were questioned. Eight people in Buryatia (some Dandaron's relations) were dismissed from their jobs, because they were associated with Dandaron's group. In addition a press campaign was organized to vilify Dandaron and his friends. The anonymous samizdat letter printed below claims that this so-called "sect" was merely a group of friends deeply interested in Buddhist philosophy, ethics, art and religion, which had met for ritual meals (sogshods) and discussed subjects of mutual interest.

TO COMRADE KUROYEDOV, THE PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL
FOR RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS, ATTACHED TO THE USSR COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

We have decided to appeal to you, since what is happening in the Buryat Republic seems to us to be a crude violation of the Soviet legislation on cults.

In the journal *Man and Law* No. 12, 1971, we read your article "Religion and the law", and that seemed to us a ray of light in the darkness of the fanatical treatment to which we have been subjected by the Buryat bodies of criminal investigation.

This letter comes from both believers and unbelievers – from a few of those who have suffered from the actions of a group of men who have power and use it wrongly.

The matter in question is that of the so-called "Dandaron group". This is a group of people living in Ulan-Ude and linked by friendship and common interests – but the organs of criminal investigation began to describe it as an "illegal Buddhist religious group (sect)". The common interests of this group lay mainly in the realm of Buddhist philosophy, ethics, art and religion. This "sect" also included some academics – Orientalists and others studying Buddhism in Moscow, Leningrad, Tartu and Vilnius. B. D. Dandaron was described by the investigating bodies as the "organizer and leader of the sect": Dandaron is an academic and expert on Buddhism and on Tibetan culture; he is well-known throughout the academic world for his wide knowledge in the realm of Tibetan language and history and of the philosophy and religion of Buddhism, both in this country and abroad. As a result of his tragic fate (he was unjustly sentenced in 1937) Dandaron was unable to complete his education as an Orientalist and it was not till 1956 that he was able to begin work in this field. Despite this, he

is the author of more than 30 works, some of which have received high specialist acclaim. Works by Dandaron have been published in Poland, Hungary and India. On the invitation of the former ambassador of Ceylon in the USSR, an important expert on Buddhism, Dr. Malalasekara, Dandaron participated in the compilation of the comprehensive international work: "Buddhist Encyclopedia". Dandaron's authority on questions of the Buddhist religion is acknowledged not only by the Council of Buddhists in the USSR, but also by Buddhists abroad. . . .

The "members of the group" did consider Dandaron as their teacher, since he gave them consultations, offering profound and detailed answers to the questions that concerned them.

Dandaron is a believing Buddhist, as are some of the "members of the group". Neither Dandaron nor any other believers ever propagated their views and did not consider it necessary to shout about them. But neither did they conceal their adherence to Buddhism.

The "members of the group" are charged with not registering the group. But this was not their fault. None of the "members of the group" knew the rules on registration (these rules do not appear to have been published). There can be no doubt that the authorities, who are also responsible for information, knew that there was such a group of believers. The duty of asking that the group be registered probably belonged to these authorities.

They definitely knew that in the "group members'" flats they held *sogshods* – Buddhist ritual meals.

There is nothing reprehensible about these *sogshods*: a ritual text in Tibetan is read for about 10-15 minutes, then people begin to eat. At each of these meals there is alcohol: about 50 to 500 grammes for 10-15 people (i.e. a purely symbolical quantity). Analogies to this ritual may be found in Indian Buddhism and Japanese (the tea-drinking ceremony) and in Christianity (communion). This ritual is also observed in the Buryat Buddhist temple at Ivolga.

Probably the only "transgression" committed by "members of the group" was that they sometimes collected a small sum of money – to buy a tape recorder, to help a friend who did not have enough money to attend his father's funeral in the Ukraine, or to buy food for the common meals.

Thus although the life of the believers was lived in public view, neither the Soviet authorities nor any other organizations lifted a finger to prevent it, to explain the legislation on cults, to warn the believers about possible violations of the law. No, they chose another way. They chose to wait until the "measure was full", so as to disperse the group and deal with the believers.

The occasion for this came last summer. A personal quarrel arose between Zheleznov (whom the investigation described as Dandaron's first disciple) and Dambadarzhayev. Zheleznov was arrested and charged with grievous bodily harm and attempted murder (although the forensic medical examination on Dambadarzhayev established only slight bodily harm without damage to health) – and this for religious motives.

The investigation tried its best, on the basis of this episode, to represent the group of Buddhist believers as a "fanatical sect". The single fact of a beating was not enough to charge Dandaron as the "leader of a fanatical sect". After crude pressure and threats, the investigation officials forced the "member of the group" Dugarov to testify that Dandaron had forced him to leave the Communist Party, although in his first testimony Dugarov had stated that he had decided to leave the Party long before he met Dandaron, and Dandaron did not even

know he was a member. Dugarov upheld his first testimony in court and stated that he had changed it under pressure and threats from the investigation officials.

The authorities tried to blacken Dandaron's character by every possible means. A prejudiced scientific-atheist report was prepared, giving the completely unfounded and unproven conclusion that Dandaron preached "a cult of violence and sexual mysticism". During the criminal investigation, the utter ridiculousness of this report was demonstrated and the charge dropped.

Despite the unproven nature of other equally shaky charges, the court still declared Dandaron guilty and he was sentenced to five years loss of freedom.

The struggle of "militant atheists" with the other believers went like this. Four "members of the group" were arrested together with Dandaron. Their investigation went on for three months and at the end no better solution was found than to declare all four not responsible for their actions. This appears to be a case without precedent: after a 10-15 minute conversation in an out-patient (not in-patient) department, a complicated diagnosis was given on people who were outwardly absolutely normal.

A criminal case was also instigated against eight other "members of the group". However in this instance the charges were so obviously ridiculous that almost as soon as the charges had been raised, the defendants were handed decisions on the cessation of the case against them.

All the "members of the group" had their flats searched. The aim of these searches was clearly indicated in the protocols: "to confiscate Buddhist cult objects and Buddhist literature". They confiscated from the believers icons, statuettes of Buddha and other divinities, cult objects, books in Tibetan and Mongolian (treatises on Buddhist philosophy, mythology etc.). They also took beads, which for a Buddhist believer are an object as intimate as a cross for a Christian. Even an icon of the Virgin and Child, belonging to the wife of one of the "members of the group" did not escape. We consider these actions a disgraceful violation of the rights of believers.

According to the court sentence, the ritual objects belonging to Dandaron and the four "insane" persons were to be confiscated on the grounds that they had been "taken from the people". In fact these objects were their personal property. (The confusion arose from the fact that two of the "insane" worked for museums – the Leningrad Museum of Religion and Atheism and the Vilnius Museum of Ethnography – and they did in fact collect icons and books of artistic and academic value – not for themselves, but for the museums, to which they transmitted the valuables they had collected.)

In the sentence it is made clear that such confiscation only applies to persons who have appeared in court as defendants, and these persons are listed. Thus it is quite incomprehensible on what grounds the Procurator's Office of Buryatia, despite continued requests and complaints, categorically refused to return all the cult objects belonging to persons who had appeared only as witnesses. All the icons and ritual objects confiscated from believers were handed over to the local folklore museum, although for the most part they have value only for their owners.

Just as serious and perhaps a worse violation of Soviet law is to discriminate against believers in Buryatia by depriving them of their constitutional right to work.

The fact is that "members of the Dandaron group" have been dismissed from work and excluded from institutes of higher education on religious grounds.

The Procurator's Office of Buryatia sent reports round the places where the "members of the group" worked, saying that such and such a person was an "active member of the group" and should be dismissed.

At the same time we cannot understand what criteria were used by the Procurator's Office for defining "active members of the group". At any rate these included relatives of Dandaron and the wives of those declared insane. . . .

The dismissals were carried out in violation of the labour laws, since the local committee either did not convene at all, or did not summon the person to be dismissed to attend its meeting. . . . The Procurator's Office "advised" the administration that the dismissals were to be carried out in accordance with Article 254, para. 3, of the Codex of Labour Laws, i.e. for the "commission of an immoral act incompatible with the continuation of the said work". How are we immoral? They tell us: "because you are believers, or if not, you are linked with believers, you spent time in their company". The People's Judge, comrade Strauss, considering N. Munkina's appeal to be reinstated at work, stated: "all believers are immoral". All appeals for permission to return to work were rejected by the people's courts. This is explained by the position taken by the Buryat Procurator's Office.

Procurator A. F. Baiborodin, head of the department on criminal court procedure within the Procurator's Office of the Buryat Republic, about whose illegal actions we have complained several times, declared to V. N. Pupyshev, a "member of the group", and former collaborator of the Buryat Institute of Social Sciences: "A believer cannot work in a state institution". When Pupyshev replied that in the Soviet Union all institutions belong to the state, there are no private ones, and that Article 142 of the RSFSR Penal Code designates dismissal from work on religious grounds as a crime, Baiborodin answered furiously: "Article 142 of the Penal Code doesn't apply to workers in academic institutions and I'll see you don't stay in your job".

The same Baiborodin in a crude and cynical manner offended the religious feelings and human dignity of believers. Obviously when he declared: "If I had my way, I'd send all you believers to Kolyma. I'd see what kind of believers you are", this is how he envisages atheist work.

The struggle against religious views in Buryatia has taken the form of slander against believers. The local press has taken part in this. In the newspaper *Truth of Buryatia* of 21 January 1973 there was an article "His conscience for a drink", and in the Buryat-language paper *Buryaad unen* of 18 January 1973 another article "Bidiya Dandaron and his *sogshod*". The authors of these articles have shown no restraint in smearing Dandaron and his followers, representing them as a bunch of crooks, drunkards, base people without convictions or conscience. They are not concerned about deliberately and crudely distorting the facts and at the same time present the case as if what they describe, which bears no relation to the truth, had come out in the court hearing. Thus in the newspaper *Buryaad unen* a fantastic picture is painted of a *sogshod* in Zheleznov's flat. This author probably saw the picture in one of his own nightmares. In court, at any rate, it was established that a *sogshod* is in no way reprehensible from a moral point of view. Alcohol was only used in small, symbolic quantities. After the reading of a ritual text there was a peaceful conversation during communal meals about philosophy, the international situation and anything that would interest a cultured person. The author of this article calls all this a "filthy orgy".

Both authors used the word "Dandarism" as the name of a particular teaching

allegedly created by Dandaron. This word was either invented by them or taken from some unknown source. B. D. Dandaron "had the misfortune" to be born with a name that comes from the name Dandar. This name is in fact a corruption in Mongolian pronunciation of the Sanscrit word *tantra*. In court there was talk of the "statute of the *Dandriisky* (not *Dandariisky!*) *iogin*". One of the members of the group, from whom a copy of the "Statute of the *tantriisky iogin*" was confiscated, had made a spelling error and written the word *tantriisky* according to Mongolian pronunciation (i.e. *dandriisky*). Now this spelling mistake has led to a serious charge against Dandaron, that he created and propagated his own teaching. *Tantra* is an essential part of Buddhist teaching. Dandaron did not create any teaching of his own – neither "Dandarism" nor "Dandrism".

It is not surprising that after such "information" in the press, the most fantastic rumours have been circulating in Ulan-Ude and the region about the "band of scholars", vice, a fanatical sect committing human sacrifice and so on.

We are Soviet people. We respect our Soviet laws and consider them the most just and humane in the world. Our fatherland is the only country in the world where freedom of conscience is not only proclaimed but guaranteed by a whole series of legal acts.

The artificially blown-up "affair of the Dandaron group", violations of the legislation on cults, the use of administrative, not ideological means in the struggle against religion – all this can only play into the hands of bourgeois propaganda, spreading slanderous falsifications on the position of religious organizations in the USSR.

It is only by the decision of the investigating and court bodies that we have been united into the so-called "Dandaron group", or rather, have begun to be called the "Dandaron group".

We never wanted to form any group or to oppose society in any way. We want to live in society and be useful. Why do they want to put us outside society, why have they organized base slander not only against believers, but also against people only indirectly associated with them?

We ask you to help us restore justice; to explain to the relevant bodies the violations of the legislation on cults which they have committed. And if we are in error, please help us to understand where our error and guilt lie.

15 February 1973

3. *The Voice of Lithuanian Catholics*

Recent events in the Soviet Republic of Lithuania have focussed the attention of the world on this small country. Street riots on the one hand, and massive documentary evidence of unrest in the Church on the other, have demonstrated both the problems and the determination of Lithuanian people to defend their rights: rights of national identity and of religious freedom.

As a sequel to the article "Recent Events in the Lithuanian Catholic Church" (RCL No. 1) a selection of recent documents written by Lithuanian Catholics, both priests and lay people, is presented. The selection falls into three parts: administrative problems; theological education; the religious education of children.

I

Lithuania is divided into six dioceses of which four are vacant. Two bishops, Vincentas Sladkevicius and Julijonas Steponavicius, arrested in 1957 and 1961