

OVERSEAS



A group of defendants at a mass military trial in Athens yesterday.

Professors stand accused in mass Athens trial

From Our Correspondent

Athens, March 27

One of the biggest political trials since the military takeover in Greece opened in Athens today, when 34 Greeks were brought before a special military tribunal to answer charges of sedition.

The defendants, who include university professors, lawyers, students and a retired general, are described as the leaders and members of the underground organization "Democratic Defence". They are accused of

having caused several bomb explosions and of disturbing subversive propaganda in an attempt to overthrow the military regime.

Three Scandinavian parliamentarians who arrived in Athens last night to attend the trial were refused permission to enter the country and were put aboard a Rome-bound plane at 4 a.m. today "on Government orders".

The deputies, Mr. Lemborn (Denmark), Mrs. Nancy Eriksson (Sweden) and Mr. Jens Haugland, a Norwegian ex-

Minister of Justice, were accompanied by a Danish lung physician who, they had hoped, would have been allowed to examine Mr. Mikis Theodorakis, the imprisoned composer, whose tubercular condition is said to have deteriorated.

Many other foreign observers, however, including two representatives of the International Commission of Jurists, were present in the overcrowded courtroom when the trial opened today.

The 34 defendants sat in a guarded enclosure, while about 50 lawyers for the defence and several of the 120 witnesses fought for a seat in the new sixth-floor court which has only a capacity of 200.

A joint plea by the defence for a postponement of the trial on grounds that the lawyers had not had time either to study the case, or to consult with their clients, was rejected. Another plea which called for the quashing of the indictment because it contained several contradictions, was also overruled.

Although the 71-page indictment listed only three of the defendants as alleged communists and 11 others as leftists, the charge of sedition was brought on the basis of emergency legislation passed at the time of the communist uprising. The maximum penalty provided is death.

Seventeen of the defendants are also accused in connexion with 16 bomb explosions in the Athens area between April and August last year. The accidental explosion of a time-bomb in the hands of Professor Dionyssios Karayorgas, betrayed them, according to the police. He appeared in court today with a bandaged hand. About 20 persons were injured by the bomb explosions.

Twenty people named in the indictment as residing abroad are not to be tried unless arrested.

Long sentences for attack on El Al

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Athens, March 27

An Athens criminal court handed down severe prison sentences yesterday on two Palestinian Arabs who launched an armed attack on an El Al aircraft carrying 53 persons as it was about to take off from Athens for New York on December 26, 1968.

Mahmoud Muhammad, a 27-year-old teacher, was sentenced to 17 years and five months imprisonment and Maher Suleiman, a 20-year-old student, to 14 years and three months. The attack cost the life of one Israeli passenger.

The decision of the criminal court composed of three judges and five jurors, appeared to satisfy the evident demands for adequate punishment to deter further terrorist raids on civil aviation targets on Greek soil without jeopardizing Greece's relations with the Arab world.

The court's verdict, delivered before the deliberations on sentences, obviously delighted the

Palestinians, their lawyers and Arab observers: the charge of wilful murder against Mr. Muhammad was reduced to manslaughter by negligence. Both were acquitted of the charge of attempted mass murder.

The two Arabs had based their defence on the grounds that as members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine they were under military orders to destroy Israel aircraft.

The court's verdict accepted their patriotism as a mitigating factor.

The defendants seemed stunned when, after two hours deliberation on the sentences, the court returned to give them prison terms some five years longer than those requested by the prosecution.

The main charges on which they were sentenced were that of endangering the security of air communications, of arson, and of use of explosives.