

BULGARIAN COMMUNISM

**EAST CENTRAL EUROPEAN STUDIES OF COLUMBIA
UNIVERSITY AND RESEARCH INSTITUTE ON
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Bulgarian Communism

THE ROAD TO POWER

1934-1944

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To My Parents

PREFACE

THIS STUDY is devoted to the politics of Bulgarian Communism during the decade preceding the establishment of Communist rule in Bulgaria. As such, the volume completes the history of the Bulgarian Communist Party in its pre-ruling days. The roots of Bulgarian Communism and the evolution of the Party through the mid-thirties have been described and analyzed in Joseph Rothschild's masterful *The Communist Party of Bulgaria: Origins and Development, 1883-1936*, published by Columbia University Press in 1959. That work has proved indispensable in carrying on the present research.

The peculiarities of Bulgarian politics and the specific conditions of the Communist Party during a period of illegal existence required that special attention be given to the numerous factions and groupings making up the Bulgarian body politic. Chapter 1, therefore, is devoted to the non-Communist formations, their origins, and their place on the political spectrum. The treatment here is essentially functional. The following two chapters deal with the physical and ideological schisms within the Communist Party, involving, in the first instance, the cadres at home and those in Soviet exile, and in the second, the rivalries between the old leadership and the left oppositionists. Organizational problems, the popular front effort, participation in the Spanish Civil War, and relations with the Rumanian Communists over the issue of Dobruja make up the bulk of chapter 4. Chapters 5 and 6 are devoted

to Communist involvements in the Soviet-German diplomatic rivalries over Bulgaria in the fall of 1940, the beginnings of wartime resistance, and the conflict with the Yugoslav Communists over Macedonia. Armed resistance and Communist inter-Party maneuvers aimed at the creation of a united opposition front vis-à-vis Bulgaria's wartime regime are given parallel treatment in the concluding two chapters.

Research for this study was carried out in various places in the course of the last few years. The richest sources of materials have been found in the following libraries: the Library of Congress in Washington, the New York Public Library, the Butler Library at Columbia University, the Bulgarian National Library and the Library of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in Sofia, the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, and its School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, the University of Skoplje, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem. I owe a debt of gratitude to the staff of all of the above institutions for their resourceful help.

I wish to acknowledge the assistance given to me by a large number of persons in and out of Bulgaria whom I have interviewed in the course of my work. The evidence of some is documented in the references. My thanks go to the Institute on East Central Europe and the Research Institute on Communist Affairs at Columbia University for their grants to Columbia University Press, without which the publication of this volume would have proved impossible.

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NISSAN OREN

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CONTENTS

Introduction	1
I. Background: The Non-Communist Scene	5
Rise and Decline of the Democratic Alliance, 6; the Elections of June, 1931, 7; the Tsankov Movement, 10; Zveno, 11; Democrats, 16; Agrarians of the Twenties, 16; Gichev's Rise, 19; the Exiles, 20; Pladne Agrarians, 22; Radicals, 26; Social Democrats, 27; the 1934 <i>Putsch</i> , 29	
II. Dimitrov and His Detractors	35
Bulgarian Men in Soviet Politics, 35; the Political Emigration in Russia, 40; the Purge of Lukanov, 49; Iskrov and the Left Opposition, 54; Dimitrov's "Exile" in Berlin, 60	
III. The Purge of the Left Opposition	65
Communism on the Home Front, 66; Dimitrov's Rise to World Fame, 69; the Moscow Emissaries, 72; the Purge of the Emigration, 83; Dimitrov, the Comintern, and the Purge, 94	

IV. Communism and the Popular Front	101
Anti-Communist Repressions, 101;	
Organizational Duplication and Party Membership, 103;	
Trade Unionism, 110; United Front Appeals, 115;	
the <i>Petorka</i> , 121; the People's Constitutional Bloc, 122;	
the 1938 Elections, 125; the Spanish Civil War, 133;	
Rumanian Communism and Dobruja, 138	
V. Soviet Diplomacy and Bulgarian Communism	144
From Munich to the Russo-German Pact, 145;	
General Elections, 147; the Sobolev Mission, 153;	
Last Effort, 160	
VI. The Party during the Initial Stages of the War	166
The Spring Interlude, 167; Reactions to the German Attack on the USSR, 169;	
Soviet Contributions: The Arrival of the Parachutists, 174;	
the Great Collapse of 1942, 180; Communists and the Problem of Macedonia, 187	
VII. Armed Resistance	200
The Allies and Bulgarian Resistance, 205;	
Resistance during 1944, 211; Resistance: Myth and Reality, 214	
VIII. Politics of the Fatherland Front	221
The "Tolerated Opposition," 221; the Program of the Fatherland Front, 223;	
Negotiating with the Opposition, 227; the Bagrianov Government, 235;	
the Muraviev Government, 247; the Coup, 251	
Conclusion	259
Bibliography	263
Index	275

ABBREVIATIONS

BCP	Bulgarian Communist Party
BKP	Bulgarska komunisticheska partiia (Bulgarian Communist Party)
BRS	Bulgarski rabotniceski suiuz (Bulgarian Workers' Union)
BZNS	Bulgarski zemedelski naroden suiuz (Bulgarian Agrarian National Union)
CC	Central Committee
CP	Communist Party
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CPY	Communist Party of Yugoslavia
<i>DGFP</i>	<i>Documents on German Foreign Policy</i>
DRO	Dobrudzhanska revoliutsionna organizatsiia (Dobruja Revolutionary Organization)
ECCI	Executive Committee of the Communist International
<i>IIBKP</i>	<i>Izvestiia na Instituta po Istorii na BKP (Announcements of the Institute for the History of the Bulgarian Communist Party)</i>
IMRO	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization
<i>Inprecorr</i>	<i>International Press Correspondence</i>
KUNMZ	Communist University for the National Minorities of the West
NOVA	Narodnoosvoboditelna vustanicheska armiia (People's Revolutionary Army of Liberation)

NRPS	Nezavisim rabotnicheski profesionalen suiuz (Independent Labor Trade Union)
RMS	Rabotnicheski mladezhki suiuz (Union of Working Youth)
SOE	Special Operations Executive
WEB	West European Buro

BULGARIAN COMMUNISM

INTRODUCTION

ON SEPTEMBER 9, 1944, Bulgaria's old order was overthrown. A government of the Fatherland Front, a wartime coalition under Communist sponsorship, assumed control of the country. Emerging from the underground after years of illegal existence, the Communist Party of Bulgaria, aided by the presence of the Red Army in the country, became the dominant force in Bulgarian affairs. The present study deals with the development of the Bulgarian Communist Party during the decade immediately preceding the 1944 seizure of power.

Two events shaped Bulgaria's politics in the years between the wars, the anti-Stamboliiski coup of 1923 and the Zveno *putsch* of a decade later. The first was an assault on the Agrarian Union. The second, the military *putsch* of May 19, 1934, struck at Bulgaria's political institutions. In both cases, the effect on the political life of the country was profound.

The contrast between the two coups, both in terms of their immediate impact and in terms of their long-range effects, was marked. The blow delivered in June, 1923, by a coalition headed by Professor Aleksandur Tsankov was the end result of a well-prepared political conspiracy. The *putsch* of 1934, on the other hand, had little or no political preparation. The first aimed at a specific objective: the destruction of the rule of peasant populism. The second sought to "regenerate" Bulgaria's political life by means of abolishing the political parties. In both

cases, the long-range consequences went far beyond the limits originally envisaged.

In January, 1926, less than three years after his coming to power, Tsankov gave way to the more moderate Andrei Liapchev, who undertook to bring an end to the turmoil and place the country on the road to normalcy. His rule opened the way for free elections in 1931 and the assumption of power of the People's Bloc coalition, giving Bulgaria the semblance of political freedom for the first time in many years.

The instigators of the May 19 coup avoided bloodshed. At the same time, the blow they delivered to the Bulgarian body politic proved deadly, for political parties never recovered. After 1934, Bulgaria was denied the free, if undisciplined, press of the days of the People's Bloc. A newly instituted state-controlled syndicate assumed the place of the free trade unions. Local self-government, which had survived many a past regime, was brought to an end. The centrally appointed bureaucrat took the place of the locally elected politician. The Turnovo Constitution was suspended. The Subranie, Bulgaria's legislature, was dissolved. Organized political meetings were banned. State administration became further centralized. The May conspirators proposed to place a small military clique as the sole counterweight to the growing influence of the monarchy. However, the new regime fell to pieces soon after it took power. Since all political parties were denied organized legal existence, the ambitions of King Boris could not be seriously challenged. Combining a keen sense of intrigue with well-developed political skills, Boris was able to emerge victorious simply by playing off his enemies one against the other. Until his death in 1943, it was in his hands that real political power resided.

Under Boris, Bulgaria did not become a full-fledged totalitarian state. Although crypto-Nazi elements grew in strength and in influence, there remained enough leniency in the Bulgarian political system to allow for a certain political intercourse below the official level. Denied legal existence, most political groupings continued as ghost parties. Some were able to reach the public at large by means of independent newspapers. Nevertheless, throughout the decade following the 1934 coup, Bulgarian political life continued progressively to atrophy. This factor, among others, contributed to Bulgaria's new disaster in World War II. At the time, when open discussion could have stirred Bulgaria to leave

the losing Axis camp, the Bulgarian masses remained too disorganized and politically too powerless to bring their weight to bear. This course of events led to still another coup which, executed as it was at a time when the Red Army was already on Bulgarian soil, propelled the Bulgarian Communist Party to power.

The Bulgarian Communist Party sprang from the doctrinaire Bulgarian Social Democratic Party founded in the early 1890s. The division between reformism and Marxist orthodoxy dominated Bulgarian socialist thinking from the beginning. By 1903 a decade of intense ideological rivalry resulted in the formation of two independent factions, the "narrow" Socialists led by Dimitur Blagoev, a Russian-educated Bulgarian intellectual, and a "broad" faction which followed the usual Second International model.

Politically intransigent, Blagoev's "narrows" had at first a smaller popular following than the "broad" Socialists. This power relationship was reversed at the end of World War I when, having renamed themselves the Bulgarian Communist Party, the "narrows" became the second strongest political force in the country after the Agrarian Union.

At the time of the anti-Stamboliiski coup of June, 1923, the Communists stood aloof on the ground that the conflict between the "rural and urban bourgeoisie" did not concern them. In September, 1923, after the establishment of the Tsankov regime, the Communists belatedly joined the radical Agrarians and staged an insurrection which was soon bloodily suppressed. Their leaders, including Georgi Dimitrov and Vasil Kolarov, fled the country and established a Buro-in-Exile, through which they endeavored to maintain control over the Communist Party at home. In 1924 the Communist Party was officially banned. In the following year Communist-instigated terroristic outbursts gave rise to widespread anti-Communist retaliations by the government.

With the coming of Andrei Liapchev to the premiership the Bulgarian Communists resumed their organized activities. In 1926 Communist-backed trade unions began to reappear. In the following year the government agreed to the establishment of the Bulgarian Workers' Party, a front organization directed by the illegal Communist Party. The Young Workers' Union, a front for the illegal Komsomol, was also created.

The early days of the People's Bloc regime saw Bulgarian Communists attain a new height in popular support and organizational strength. Working through the Bulgarian Workers' Party, the Communists elected thirty-one deputies in the general elections of 1931. In the Sofia municipal elections held the following year, the Party received the largest number of votes and the majority of mandates. Provoked by the semi-insurrectionary Communist tactics of the period, the government of the People's Bloc ousted the Communist-elected deputies from the Subranie (April 12, 1933), following which the government initiated a series of legal and extralegal anti-Communist repressive measures. Internal Party strife, conflicts generated within the cadres at home and in exile, and the hardships of underground existence could not but leave their mark. The decade ahead, therefore, found the Communists ill-prepared and ill-equipped, both organizationally and psychologically, in the pursuit of their designs.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND: THE NON-COMMUNIST SCENE

THE RESULTS OF THE Bulgarian general elections of June, 1931, came as a surprise. In Bulgaria, as in most of the Balkan countries, it was a rarity for a governing party or coalition to be defeated in an election. After eight long and stormy years in power, however, the Democratic Alliance gave way to a newly formed political constellation generally known as the People's Bloc. The changeover was of significance, not only because it was peaceful, but also because it signaled the re-emergence of the Agrarian Union as a governing party. As the outcome of the election became known, a wave of rejoicing swept the nation, particularly the countryside. The peasants, having been the ones most responsible for the victory, hoped for a better deal for themselves and their families. There was an air of expectation forecasting a new era and a better future. However, the new era lasted less than three years. Possibly the change had come too late, or else the times were against an evolution toward liberal democracy. Before long, elements from among the very alliance which had helped engineer the 1923 anti-Stamboliiski coup struck again, thus making almost a profession out of what had eight years earlier appeared to be a mere adventure (nor was their second strike the last one). Therefore, for an understanding of things to come, it is necessary to examine the events leading to the crises of the mid-1930s and to describe the political factions at work at the time.

RISE AND DECLINE OF THE DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE

The Democratic Alliance dated back to the immediate post-Stamboliiski era and represented in effect an enlargement of a smaller coalition—the People's Alliance—which had carried out the coup against the Agrarian Union regime of Aleksandur Stamboliiski. The core of the People's Alliance consisted of the Military League, headed by General Ivan Rusev and including General Ivan Vulkov and Lieutenant-Colonels Damian Velchev, Kimon Georgiev, and Nikola Rachev. On the civilian side, the coalition was headed by Aleksandur Tsankov, who had succeeded in attracting to himself people like Boian Smilov from the National Liberal Party, Tsvetko Boboshevski from the People's Progressive Party, Yanko Stoianchev from the Democratic Party, Petur Todorov from the Radicals, and Dimo Kazasov from the Social Democrats. Tsankov assumed the premiership in June, 1923, and promptly began to transform a small clique of the People's Alliance into a large political party to include all middle-class political groups in the country. To this end negotiations were started as early as August, 1923, and it was from these exchanges that the Democratic Alliance evolved. The final result was not all that Tsankov had desired. A section of the Democrats under the leadership of Aleksandur Malinov and a section of the Radicals under Stoian Kosturkov refused to enter the new formation. Nevertheless, the coalition as finally constituted was a substantial cluster, quite impressive in its size if not in its cohesion. Only a small minority of Democrats followed Malinov, while most accompanied Andrei Liapchev into the Democratic Alliance; furthermore, Atanas Burov had brought in his conservative Narodniatsi Party (Populists) and they, together with some other minor splinters, helped to strengthen the governing coalition. Thus the Democratic Alliance as it existed around 1925 rested on a tripod of which Tsankov, Liapchev, and Burov constituted the legs. Although Tsankov's wing was considered at the time as the more radical, while the Liapchev-Burov group was thought of as the right wing of the coalition, except for individual inclinations and impulses the Democratic Alliance was devoid of all ideological content. Outside of a fear of Bolshevism, there was little that united the various groupings within the coalition. In a way, the heterogeneity of the Alliance was also its strength, since it was at all times possible to reshuffle the composition of the government without changing the coalition on which it was based.

Tsankov surrendered the premiership in January, 1926. The cabinet was now reorganized under his successor, Andrei Liapchev. Liapchev's emergence at the top was largely due to the support of the Military League under General Vulkov. (The League had its own inner factions. The stronger one, which enjoyed the confidence of King Boris, was led by Vulkov, the minister of war, and supported Liapchev. The other had as its leader Kimon Georgiev, a Tsankovite.) Tsankov did not enter the cabinet but was instead relegated to the presidency of the Subranie (legislature). Thus opened the second stage of the Democratic Alliance regime with Liapchev at its head and with Professor Tsankov heading the internal opposition. Nominally within the coalition, Tsankov proceeded to organize a substantial group of politicians around himself who were antagonistic both to Liapchev's economic policies and to his close association with the pro-Italian General Vulkov.

The history of Liapchev's premiership, which was the longest in Bulgaria's interwar period, was marked by a gradual recovery of Bulgarian party politics. Factionalism from within the government and the growing powers of the opposition forces from without, however, posed an ever growing challenge which not even the durable Liapchev could withstand. Ultimately he fell prey to his own limitless optimism. When after more than five years in office the constituent parts of his coalition proved too unruly, Liapchev strove to bring about general elections which he believed would strengthen him and solidify his grip on his followers. He submitted his resignation on April 20, 1931. After a number of unsuccessful attempts by the King to find a replacement who would command a majority in the Subranie, Liapchev was recalled on May 3, and soon after it was announced that the government would hold general elections on June 21, 1931.

THE ELECTIONS OF JUNE, 1931

In the pre-electoral campaign, Aleksandur Malinov, a Democrat, emerged as the strongest figure of the antigovernment configuration. In the 1927 general elections Malinov had tried his hand at forming a coalition with the extreme right wing of the Agrarian Union led by Kosta Tomov. The results, however, had convinced Malinov that conservative Tomov commanded little support among the peasants. In 1931 he was determined not to repeat his earlier mistake. Furthermore, the Agrarian Union had undergone great changes since 1927. The group led

by Dimitur Gichev now commanded the loyalty of the majority of the local organizations as well as the heart of the central leadership. After prolonged negotiations, Malinov's efforts brought success. When later in May the composition of the People's Bloc was announced, its base proved wider than expected. Included were the Malinov Democrats, the Kosturkov wing of the Radical Party, the wing of the Liberal Party led by G. Petrov, and the Agrarian Union under Gichev (known as Vrabcha I). The Social Democrats and the Bulgarian Workers' Party (Communists) remained unaffiliated with either of the two coalitions—the Democratic Alliance or the People's Bloc. The Workers' Party came out with an alliance of its own which it called the Labor Bloc (*Trudov blok*) and which included some Agrarian Union elements from the extreme left. The complexion of the Workers' Party was not changed by these additions. Finally, the group of Kosta Tomov's Agrarians remained isolated.

That the June, 1931, elections were on the whole free was attested to by the results. The government in power interfered, but on a minor scale. When all the results were in, the People's Bloc had won a great victory. It elected 152 deputies as compared to 78 for the Democratic Alliance. The Workers' Party elected 31; the Macedonians (the Mikhailov wing of IMRO), 8; and the Social Democrats, 5. The distribution of deputies among the parties entering the People's Bloc was as follows: Agrarians, 72; Democrats, 43; Liberals, 30; Radicals, 7. Of the seventy-eight deputies elected on the government list, eleven were Liberals.¹

Malinov proceeded to organize his cabinet. Despite the much greater contribution made by the Agrarians in terms of popular support, the Democrats took the principal portfolios. The distribution of cabinet posts was as follows: the Democrats held, in addition to the premiership and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Malinov), the ministries of the Interior (Nikola Mushanov) and Finance (Aleksandur Girginov), leaving to the Agrarians the less important ministries of Agriculture (Dimitur Gichev), Education (Konstantin Muraviev), and Public Works (Georgi Yordanov). The Liberals were given two posts (Trade and Justice), while Kosturkov for the Radicals took over the Ministry of Railroads. The

¹ *Istoriia na Bulgariia*, p. 611; Kazasov, *Burni godini*, p. 423; Swire, p. 242.

Agrarians were dissatisfied and remained so until the very end. Although the Agrarian ministries lacked the glamour of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the authority of the Interior, from the point of view of patronage they were far from unimportant, and this, for a time at least, took away some of the bitterness. However, the struggle over ministerial posts dominated the entire period of the People's Bloc and contributed to its downfall. Yet the Malinov and, later, the Mushanov governments had their own logic. In terms of votes, there was no denying that the Agrarians had provided "the muscle" without which the People's Bloc could not have won. At the same time, on their own the Agrarians would not have been permitted to become a governing party so short a time after their 1923 debacle and while prominent Agrarian leaders were still exiles. What the Agrarians needed most in 1931 was a measure of respectability and acceptance which the Democrats had and which they were ready to share. The fact that the Democrats claimed and got the key posts was only proof that a good name was worth as much as power.

The immediate effect the People's Bloc regime had on Bulgarian politics was to intensify the already acute partisan political struggles. Long out of power, the parties of the Bloc undertook to capitalize on their success. Once a ministry changed hands, the entire establishment from the secretary-general down to the last clerk did so too. Abuses were often carried to the very limit of absurdity, with simple policemen, forest guards, teachers, and even unskilled workmen employed by the government awaiting the return to power of the "right minister" who might reemploy them. The government domain was subdivided into party "spheres of influence" which were allocated among the governing groups for patronage exploitation. In a poor economy such as the Bulgarian, already beginning to feel the effects of the worldwide depression of the 1930s, this acute politicization generated resentment. As for the Democratic Alliance, the ordeals were even greater. A heterogeneous grouping of this type could not stay out of power for long and survive. The process of disintegration started immediately after the electoral defeat, and continued until the Alliance all but disappeared from the scene. The first split came right after the elections. The splinter groups were composed of elements that were still in a position to make peace with the victors and thus escape the consequences of defeat. This was particularly true

of a great many Liapchev Democrats, who hastened to rejoin Malinov and his party. Then came the splitting off of the Tsankov group. The remaining elements stayed together for a time. They tried the best they could to play the role of an orderly opposition and to gain public support by calling for such measures as a moratorium on debts and a trade monopoly on foodstuffs. Their rank-and-file support continued to shrink.

THE TSANKOV MOVEMENT

Professor Tsankov broke away from the Democratic Alliance in 1932 and launched his own National Social movement. Impressed by the Italian Fascists and the German National Socialists, but insisting on the originality of his social and political ideas, Tsankov began efforts that constituted in effect an endeavor at transplanting Fascism onto Bulgarian soil. The influence which Tsankov exerted on many prominent Bulgarians, not excepting his fellow professors, was substantial during the early and middle 1930s. His was a group which changed with the times and meant different things to different people. When first launched, Tsankov's movement was aided by the spirit of the times. With anti-Bolshevik slogans high on the lists of almost all political parties, and with mounting Fascist successes in Europe, Tsankov was quick to capitalize on the disillusionment which had overcome many elements in the country. There were, however, two fundamental factors which worked against him. First, his appeal was almost entirely restricted to the urban population. In overwhelmingly agrarian Bulgaria this posed an obstacle of the first magnitude. To the majority of peasants he remained "bloody Tsankov" who had murdered Stamboliiski. For this reason, his inroads in the villages remained weak and his few successes localized. Second, Tsankov lacked the ability and the skills of the successful mass demagogue. He was never able to rid himself of the "professor image." While mounting a political platform and facing the crowds he remained the urban intellectual.

His ideas were complex and his formulations vague. He was against political parties because they were based on a class maxim. Tsankov maintained that capitalism, Socialism, Hitlerism, and Bolshevism would in the end converge into what he called "social nationalism." He was opposed to the corporate state even though he favored "the bringing of the factors of production into government." He was for "economic democracy." Tsankov was preoccupied with the

drift of youth toward the left, a process he feared. This process, he maintained, could only be arrested by the force of new ideals, which, however, he failed to provide.²

At first as he spoke of the "new order" he pointed out that the orders established in Italy and Germany were unsuitable to the Slav temperament. The foreign experience could be dangerous if applied mechanically, since the Bulgarian nation was too young and as yet untrained to respect authority. It did not take long, however, for Tsankov to follow in the direction in which much of Europe was moving. At the height of Nazi military successes, he was to turn to his fellow deputies in the Subranie with the revealing questions: "Are you with the capitalists? No, you are not because they are withering away. Are you with the Bolsheviks? Even less so. With whom are you? I am with the national socialists."³ This position, however, belonged to a later period. During the early thirties there was a certain freshness in Tsankov's neo-Fascist demagoguery. Much energy was expended by him and by his followers to attract the laboring masses. He spoke of the concessions the employers must make to the workers in order that the era of "peace among the classes" be brought about. To this end he established the National Workers' Syndicate, the main function of which was to divert the workers from the socialist trade unions. He even tried his hand at operating free kitchens for the unemployed. Above all, there were the endless noisy campaigns which Tsankov and his followers kept up and which moved many to believe that a Tsankov regime was around the corner. Part of the Liberals went over to Tsankov, as did the right-wing Agrarian group of Kosta Tomov, together with many other individuals from various groups.

ZVENO

Closely related to Tsankov at first, and in a way constituting an integral part of the Tsankov movement, an influential group of people emerged whose role during the years of the People's Bloc became par-

² Tsankov, *Trite stopanski sistemi*. This collection of his lectures on political economy is the single most important source on Tsankov's ideology. His politics, however, had to be judged by his actions. On Tsankov's ideas, see also Kazasov, *Burni godini*, pp. 619-20.

³ From Tsankov's speech delivered in the Subranie on November 18, 1941; Narodno subranie, *Stenografski dnevnik*, pp. 179-86.

ticularly important. This was the Zveno group, which admirers called by its longer and more respectable name of "The Political Circle Zveno" and which detractors simply called the Zveno clique. Having borrowed its name from a publication by the same name, Zveno had one distinction: its size bore no relation to its importance. In fact, in the light of events to come, one could say that Zveno was most influential in the periods when it was smallest in size. Zveno was sometimes jokingly referred to as the *kamion partiia* (truck party) since, so the joke went, its entire membership could be loaded on a single military truck. Another distinction of Zveno was its close association with the army.

The early days of *Zveno* the publication, and thus, also, of the group itself, were associated with a journalist by the name of Dimo Kazasov. A teacher, a trade unionist, and an active member of the Social Democratic Party, Kazasov had made a name for himself in the years immediately following World War I with his journalistic writings. He became a national figure on the day after the 1923 coup when, to the surprise of most, Kazasov was named the minister of communications in the Tsankov cabinet. He was in fact one of the first to be approached by Tsankov while the conspiracy was being hatched. In the coup he participated as an individual without asking or receiving the authorization of the Social Democratic Party. As communications minister, he made his greatest contribution during the September Communist uprising, which he helped to put down with great efficiency. Kazasov continued his association with the Social Democrats and was in fact elected a member of the Party's Central Committee (February, 1924). On February 15, 1924, he left the cabinet in compliance with the decision of the leadership of the Party. By that time he had antagonized many among his fellow Socialists. In 1925 Kazasov published a detailed account of his participation in the 1923 conspiracy as well as of the coup itself.⁴ In 1926 he was finally expelled from the Social Democratic Party. This clinched Kazasov's drift to the right. In the middle of 1927, on his initiative, a small group of influential people came together and formed an "ideological circle." A number of meetings were held out of

⁴ Kazasov, *V tumninite na zagovora* (Sofia, 1925); when first published, this account of the 1923 conspiracy created a sensation, making Kazasov one of the most controversial political figures of the time. His activities up to that time are related in his memoirs, *Burni godini*, pp. 186-89, 227-29, 293-96.

which emerged the decision to launch a weekly publication to be edited by Kazasov. This marked the beginning of *Zveno*, the first issue of which appeared on January 1, 1928. At the time of the paper's appearance, the "circle" around *Zveno* consisted of some eighty individuals belonging to different parties. The overwhelming majority were associated with the 1923 coup and were followers of Tsankov.⁵

What made the *Zveno* group important in the long run was the fact that not long after its emergence a number of Tsankovites, who had close connections with the army, joined in. Thus, in a small way, *Zveno* became the vehicle for the political aspirations of certain elements from the Military League, which was then being reorganized. The case in point involved Kimon Georgiev. When in the middle of 1930 Tsankov reentered the government of the Democratic Alliance, Georgiev formally joined the *Zveno* group, with which he had maintained close connections from the beginning. This association marked the "marriage" between the intellectuals and the military within the *Zveno* group, a combination which lasted until the eve of the May, 1934, coup. The presence of Georgiev in the leadership of *Zveno* was particularly significant because of his friendship with Damian Velchev, who was helping to revive the Military League. Velchev had been instrumental in carrying out the 1923 coup. It was he who took control of the army in Sofia in June of that year. During the next five years (1923–28) Velchev served as the commandant of the Military College, a position he used in building a personal following from among the young officer cadres. In 1928 he was again a civilian, having broken with the minister of war (General Vulkov). This development did not prevent Velchev from maintaining his connections in the army and from exercising a great personal influence on many a young officer.⁶

In the meantime, *Zveno* made progress. From the first, its spokesmen insisted on the non-party, or rather the extra-party, nature of the group. This stand was in part dictated by considerations of logical consistency, since *Zveno* attacked all parties as decadent and harmful to the Bulgarian body politic. Here is how Kazasov characterized the nature of *Zveno* in a speech delivered on May 5, 1932:

⁵ Kazasov, *Burni godini*, pp. 322–24.

⁶ Swire, pp. 159–67, contains a detailed (and on the whole favorable) description of Velchev's activities during this period.

The political circle Zveno is not a political party. Zveno is an organization which stands above all parties, an organization free from dogmatism and narrow-mindedness. Zveno strives to solve Bulgaria's problems on a level higher than the party level, where ideological differences and class antagonisms have conformed to the national interest.⁷

The similarity between this statement and Tsankov's pronouncements was unmistakable. It was therefore natural that most Zveno people continued to belong to the Tsankov movement even after their formal affiliation with Zveno. Differences between the two remained methodological rather than ideological. Zveno was never interested in creating a mass movement. Its leaders relied on what they called the "competent minority" made up of select individuals.⁸

In matters of economic policy, Zveno was in favor of government intervention and, above all, of rapid economic growth. "Our problem is not one of distribution of wealth but one of elevation of the national well-being," wrote Kazasov not long after the launching of Zveno.⁹ Economic activism was intended to arrest rather than foster a revolutionary development. Ivan Kharizanov, one of the ideologists of Zveno, insisted that "by means of a radical intervention in the economic sphere on behalf of the middle and lower classes the revolutionary solution could be prevented."¹⁰

Bold stands were also taken in matters of foreign policy, particularly those affecting Macedonia. At a time when rival factions from among the various wings of IMRO were carrying on their fights in the streets of Sofia, Zveno made history by coming out openly against terrorism, and by calling for the reestablishment of Bulgarian governmental authority in the Petrich Department, where the Macedonians had created a state within a state. This action placed the Zveno group on the side of those who were in favor of a rapprochement with Yugoslavia as the only way out of the intolerable situation created by the Macedonian elements

⁷ Kazasov, *Zveno bez grim*, pp. 161-82; this is a collection of his pronouncements, in most cases reproductions of his articles in *Zveno*, published in the aftermath of the 1934 coup.

⁸ *Istoriia na Bulgariia*, p. 647.

⁹ Kazasov, *Zveno*, December 2, 1928, reproduced in *Zveno bez grim*, pp. 67-69.

¹⁰ *Zveno*, October 9, 1932. Ivan Kharizanov remained one of the principal figures in *Zveno* until his death on July 7, 1947.

in Bulgaria. In the public mind, therefore, from the very beginning the Zveno people were identified as "pro-Yugoslav." To their enemies, and particularly to the Mikhailov wing of IMRO, they were nothing more than "foreign agents in the pay of Alexander, king of the Serbs."¹¹ As far as Bulgarian relations with the Soviet Union were concerned, there was nothing "soft" in Zveno's attitude. Partly because the Zveno government was to reestablish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union (after its coming to power), and partly because of vague prorepublican pronouncements of some of its leaders, there were those who thought Zveno unduly leftist. If Zveno spokesmen did advocate a normalization of relations with the Soviets, it was on grounds of what they considered the national interest. At no time during the early 1930s was pro-Communism an issue within Zveno circles. In 1932, writing in *Izgrev* (a daily newspaper which Zveno had started publishing in addition to its weekly), Kimon Georgiev openly denounced the Bulgarian Communist Party, which, "under the ideological leadership and material support of Moscow, is organizing revolution and spreading anarchy in our country."¹² Nor was Kazasov's stand any different when he stated that "Bulgarian Communism is an instrument of a mighty *gospodar* [master] used against a defenseless beggar."¹³ As to the prorepublican sentiments prevalent among some of the leaders (mainly among the military), they were based mostly on grounds of opposition to the dynasty that had brought two defeats to the nation, rather than on ideology.

During the first years of its existence, Zveno restricted its activities to the publication of its weekly and daily organs, remaining organizationally inactive. The first step in the direction of establishing organizations on the local level was made on the eve of the 1931 elections, and was signaled by the publication of a manifesto (June 14, 1931) in which it was said that in the future Zveno would undertake to create local cells of supporters, the function of which would be to popularize its ideas. Similar declarations were made on a number of occasions in the following years. Local units were in fact set up but they remained few and were restricted to the larger towns. Those who affiliated themselves with Zveno were in the main lawyers and other professionals.

¹¹ Kazasov, *Burni godini*, pp. 490-96.

¹² *Izgrev*, No. 93-94, 1932, cited in Kazasov, *Burni godini*, p. 459.

¹³ Kazasov, *Zveno*, November 22, 1931, reproduced in *Zveno bez grim*, p. 72.

DEMOCRATS

The center of the political spectrum was occupied by the Democratic Party of Malinov. Not very powerful in terms of popular support, the Democrats received their strength from the middle and lower-middle classes, which in themselves were comparatively weak. The Democrats derived their influence from their central position as the only group capable of combining with either the left or the right. In addition, they enjoyed the confidence of the court, having always been close to the monarchy.¹⁴ They formed the so-called *tsarska partiia* (king's party). In the person of Malinov the Democratic Party had a leader of great distinction. Malinov's premiership was of short duration. Claiming poor health, he resigned on October 13, 1931, and became the president of the Subranie. His place was taken by Nikola Mushanov, who vacated the Ministry of the Interior. Malinov continued to play an active role in both the Subranie and the Democratic Party, attempting to remain above the day-by-day political struggles.

AGRARIANS OF THE TWENTIES

Because of its size, its structure, and its many inner factions, the Agrarian Union occupied a place on the political spectrum of Bulgaria that cannot be defined with any precision. Nominally the party of the small peasant, the Agrarian Union with its numerous "wings, winglets, and feathers" (as the saying went) spread from the extreme left to far into the right, with its center located somewhere to the left of the Democratic Party.

Factionalism among the Agrarians was the rule rather than the exception, owing to the desire of the Union to represent the entire peasant population. The Agrarians saw themselves as a *suslovna organizatsiya* ("estatist" organization) rather than as a conventional political party. In practice, despite the largely egalitarian character of Bulgarian rural society, there remained sufficient differences between the poor peasant, who throughout his life remained a buyer of agricultural goods,

¹⁴ The Democrats were accused of having been instrumental in passing the constitutional amendment (July–August, 1911) that gave the King the right to conclude treaties without informing the Subranie, as the constitution had originally provided. Although the Democrats approved of the amendment, the actual passage of it was done after Malinov had resigned from the premiership (March 16, 1911) and had been succeeded by a government composed of Narodniatsi and Progressive Liberals.

and the richer peasant who produced for the market. There was, of course, more to the factions than mere divergences in economic interest. In the Agrarian Union personalities were very important. As Malinov wrote in his memoirs, "One is compelled to observe, even if with sorrow, that with them passions and appetites were of greater importance than competition between different ideas and platforms."¹⁵

The Agrarian Union had its left and right wings even at the height of its power. Around 1922 there were two *petorki* (groups of five) within the Stamboliiski regime, the left led by Daskalov and Obbov, and the right by Turlakov, Tomov, and Omarchevski. In the spring of 1923, on the very eve of his regime's collapse, Stamboliiski broke with both Daskalov (who was his first lieutenant) and the Turlakov-Tomov group and reorganized his cabinet to include more easily dominated people. Then came the June coup, which removed the kingpin of the Bulgarian Agrarian Union; with the disappearance of Stamboliiski and under the impact of the White Terror, the Union was split two ways. First, there were those who fled the country. Second, there were the various groups which emerged from among the Agrarians at home.

Daskalov had been abroad at the time of the coup and it was he who became the first exile leader. However, he was soon assassinated in Prague by a Macedonian terrorist. The leadership of the exile Agrarians then passed into the hands of Obbov, who had been Stamboliiski's minister of agriculture. He had been one of the few Agrarian leaders actively to resist the Tsankov forces in June, 1923, by leading an abortive march of several thousand armed peasants into the town of Pleven. In the summer of 1924 the exiled leaders were joined by two more of Stamboliiski's ministers, Atanasov and Stoianov, who succeeded in crossing the Yugoslav frontier. A few months earlier, in January, 1924, Kosta Todorov had been invited to Moscow to negotiate with Georgi Dimitrov and Vasil Kolarov, acting in behalf of the Bulgarian Communist Party and the Comintern, on the terms of a united front to be established between the Communists and the Agrarians with the purpose of overthrowing the Tsankov government.

Dimitrov's proposals [made in Vienna shortly before Todorov left for Moscow] were interesting. He wanted us [the Agrarians] to acknowledge that the goal of our struggle against Tsankov was the establishment of a "workers'

¹⁵ Malinov, *Pod znaka na ostrasteni i opasni politicheski borbi*, p. 185.