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THE FATHERLAND FRONT GOVERNMENT OF BULGARIA

The present Bulgarian Government, installed by the bloodless *coup* of 9 September 1944, just prior to Bulgarian surrender, consists of a four-party coalition known as the Fatherland Front. It includes the powerful, well-organized (Communist) Bulgarian Workers' Party; the Agrarian Party, with a broad following among the Bulgarian peasants; the numerically weak Socialist Party; and the People's Union *Zveno*, whose strength lies chiefly in its long-standing close relations with the Bulgarian Army. For almost four years before the Bulgarian surrender the Fatherland Front, with the Communists as its most active element, functioned as an underground anti-fascist organization. Since September 1944 the Bulgarian Communists, profiting from apparent Soviet support and from their own superior party organization and tactics, have dominated the Fatherland Front. They have succeeded in weakening the other parties of the coalition by a series of aggressive attacks on non-Communist leaders attempting to preserve a measure of party independence. Simultaneously they have conducted a strong drive for control of key positions in the central and local governments, in the Bulgarian Army, labor organizations, and the press. This rapid expansion of Communist influence has caused considerable friction with the other parties of the Fatherland Front and frequently threatened the solidarity of the coalition itself. However, the non-Communist members of the Bulgarian Government, despite their fear of growing Communist control, have thus far been unwilling to precipitate a cabinet crisis. Such a move, they feel, would accomplish little in their favor as long as the Red Army remains in the country and the USSR continues to be the dominant power in the Bulgarian ACC.

At the time of the September Revolution the two strongest elements of the Fatherland Front were the Communists and *Zveno*. The Communists owed their strength to their efficient organization and their twenty years' experience in underground work. The latter included the organization of the partisan operations of the Fatherland Front. Communist activities were directed throughout by members of the former Comintern still in Moscow, notably George Dimitrov. Although they have never commanded the support of a majority of the people, the Communists were in a sufficiently strong position to demand four posts in the Fatherland Front Government, including the key ministries of Interior and Justice.

The strength of the small *Zveno* group derived from the ability of its leaders to command the loyalty of a large part of the Bulgarian Army.

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This military support accounts for the absence of any major internal clash on 9 September when the Fatherland Front seized power. It also accounts for the fact that *Zveno*, like the Communists, was allotted four ministries in the new Government, including the key posts of Prime Minister (Kimon Georgiev) and the Ministry of War. The *Zveno* group has generally stood for centralized authoritarian government at home and close relations with Russia and Yugoslavia abroad.

The Agrarian Party, generally believed to have numerically the greatest potential following of any Bulgarian political organization, was also awarded four ministries. Its position in the Government, however, is only secondary because it controls none of the key posts. The Agrarians, who had played a relatively passive role in the underground resistance, were divided, disorganized, and without effective leadership at the time of the September Revolution.

Finally, the Bulgarian Socialist Party, while it is the oldest in the Fatherland Front, is also the weakest. Its two representatives in the Cabinet have been given relatively unimportant positions.

The official foreign policy of the new Government, announced soon after the seizure of power, is directed toward cordial and everlasting friendship with the Soviet Union and the Russian people, friendly relations with the western democracies, and close ties with Yugoslavia and the other Balkan countries. The new domestic program includes thoroughgoing reform of all Government departments along leftist democratic lines with particular emphasis on economic and social welfare.

Despite general agreement on this policy, conflicts have since arisen over the interpretation of its various points. Implementation of the program has been overshadowed by the jockeying for position which quickly developed among the four parties. In this internal struggle, which has been sharpest between the Communists and Agrarians, the *Zveno* has tended to side with the Agrarians. The Socialists either supported the Communists or failed to take a definite stand until recently, when they too have come under Communist attack.

Although the lack of harmony within the coalition has occasionally been attributed to Soviet influence, the current struggle between the Communist and Agrarian Parties has its roots in the period of the early 1920's, when the Agrarians excluded the Communists from power. The conflict would have been revived after the German withdrawal from Bulgaria even had there been no Soviet troops in the country. While the presence of Soviet forces and the dominant position of the USSR representatives on the Allied Control Commission are advantageous to the Bulgarian Communists, there is some doubt whether the Soviets have felt it necessary to lay down the details of the local Communist program and tactics. On the other hand, Anglo-American authorities have not encouraged non-Communist Bulgarian leaders to hope for British and American support in their struggle to keep Bulgaria from falling entirely under Communist domination.

One of the first and most important steps of the Communists to extend their influence was to secure the Ministry of Interior. With this key post in its hands, the party immediately proceeded to reorganize the police force, now called the militia and composed almost exclusively of Communists. The Communists, despite the fact that the Ministry of War is held by *Zveno*, have also had considerable success in infiltrating the army, the chief source of *Zveno* strength. The new Assistant Minister of War, Chief of Staff, Assistant Commander in Chief, and Chief of Intelligence are all Communists. Approximately a third of the regular Bulgarian Army commissions are estimated to have been given to Communists or to men with strong pro-Russian leanings. Political commissars, virtually all of them Communists, have been attached to all army units.

As a further means of consolidating their influence the Communists have created or provided leadership for large mass organizations within which political subdivisions are not tolerated. None of the individual parties are allowed to be politically active in these organizations. However, political commissars carry on intensive political education and propaganda for a "Fatherland Front outlook," largely determined by the Communists. The Communist contention is that the Bulgarian people need unified political education and that every Bulgarian should belong to one or more of such mass organizations. Among the organizations thus created or exploited by the Communists are the General Workers' Trade Union, the Sports Federation, the Women's Union, and the Anti-Fascist Youth Organization.

The Communists have also taken numerous measures through their party and Fatherland Front organizations to control Bulgarian economic activities. The serious deterioration of economic conditions since the Bulgarian surrender, stemming primarily from the after-effects of the war, has been a constantly aggravating factor in the political clashes of recent months. Prices of consumers' goods, temporarily lowered last fall, have risen to inflationary levels; there is a flourishing black market; and certain categories of industrial wages are reported to have been fixed so high as to make production impossible. Many Bulgarians believe that economic recovery has been retarded by what they regard as excessive Communist zeal in promoting basic reforms and by complicated bureaucratic supervision. The Communists, who regard any possible failure of the Fatherland Front economic program as a grave threat to themselves, appear little disposed to relax present controls.

As in other countries, the Communists in Bulgaria have played the leading role in instituting trials of collaborationists and other persons charged with responsibility for Bulgaria's entrance into the war on the side of Germany. The presence in the country of the Red Army, the strength of the Bulgarian Communist Party, and the bitterness of long-standing personal political grudges have all contributed to a more thorough purge in Bulgaria than has taken place in any other country. The latitude taken by the courts in defining war guilt has led to heavy

sentences and to the punishment of certain right-wing Agrarian politicians. These men refused to join the Fatherland Front in the months preceding the September Revolution and are regarded by some Agrarians as victims of Communist political vengeance.

In addition to these methods of extending their influence, the Communists have attempted to weaken the other parties of the Fatherland Front either by direct attack on the parties themselves for harboring alleged fascist sympathizers, or by forcing out of positions of power those of their leaders who oppose complete subservience to Communist policy. For example, the Communists have made a series of attacks on the Agrarian leader, George M. Dimitrov (not to be confused with the Communist, George Dimitrov). G. M. Dimitrov was made Chief Secretary of the newly united Agrarian Party in September 1944, and is believed to have one of the largest followings of any Bulgarian politician. He has consistently opposed the extension of Communist influence in Bulgaria beyond the letter and spirit of the agreement which provides for equal Agrarian and Communist representation in the Fatherland Front and in the Government. He is also a strong proponent of close relations with Great Britain and the United States as well as with the Soviet Union.

The Communists accuse Dimitrov of fomenting disunity within the Fatherland Front and of predicting an eventual clash between the Western Allies and Soviet Russia. Despite the difficulty of proving that he had ever been a traitor to his country, the fact that Dimitrov has worked for British Intelligence has made the Soviets mistrust him and has provided ammunition for his enemies in Bulgaria. On the other hand, some of Dimitrov's many followers felt that his inability to win Soviet confidence was a serious disadvantage to the party. Also, Dimitrov had many personal enemies within the Agrarian Party who assisted the Communists in pressing for his removal. Dimitrov resigned as leader of the party in January 1945. However, his resignation was preceded by an executive committee vote of confidence in his policies along with the appointment of a Dimitrov supporter, Nikola Petkov, as his successor.

Despite Dimitrov's complete withdrawal from political activity, he and his policies continued to be the object of violent Communist attacks. These culminated last April in a demand that Petkov and his associates should issue a public denunciation of Dimitrov. The demand was refused and the Agrarian cabinet ministers offered to resign rather than make further concessions to Communist pressure. However, Premier Georgiev, the leading *Zveno* representative in the Cabinet, fearing that if the Agrarians should be seriously weakened the turn of *Zveno* would come next, urged the Communists to show restraint and the Agrarians to be more conciliatory. The Bulgarian Regents and the Soviet members of the ACC also urged the Agrarians to compromise, and a cabinet crisis was averted.

Having failed to win Petkov over to the anti-Dimitrov camp, the Communists tried new tactics. Exploiting the genuine differences which existed within the Agrarian Party, they increased their demands that the "reactionary" followers of Dimitrov be expelled. They promised that the party, when purged, would be granted fuller participation in local Fatherland Front Committees and in the central and local government administration. At the same time they encouraged a group of dissident Agrarians headed by Alexander Obbov to seize the party leadership. This time the Communists were more successful. A convention held by the Obbov faction on 8 and 9 May decided to expel all Dimitrov followers, elected a new party administrative council consisting almost entirely of Agrarians willing to adapt party policy to the wishes of the Communists, and reaffirmed Nikola Petkov as head of the party. The retention of Petkov appears to have been motivated by the fact that, while he has not been a close personal associate of Dimitrov, he commands the loyalty of Dimitrov's large following among the rank and file of the Agrarian Party.

Petkov himself, who had not been consulted, immediately declared that the use of his name had been unauthorized, that the convention had been called without the consent or knowledge of the authorized leaders of the Agrarian Party, and that the new party administrative council was spurious. His prepared public statement to this effect, however, was barred from the Bulgarian press and radio. When Petkov and his associates complained to Soviet ACC authorities the latter are said to have advised Petkov not to break openly with the Obbov group. Petkov has as yet taken no decisive action, but the purge of the Agrarian Party has continued.

The expulsion of Dimitrov, formally announced on 26 May, was followed closely by that of Minister of Public Works Bumbarov, who shares Dimitrov's opposition to Communist domination. Despite his expulsion from the party, Bumbarov has not yet resigned from the Cabinet. Finally, the pro-Communist Agrarian authorities are said to have requested the Agrarian Minister of Agriculture to resign from the Cabinet, though he has not yet been expelled from the party. On 12 June the same group "elected" their own leader, Obbov, to be Chief Secretary of the party, thus replacing Petkov. If Petkov continues to oppose the Obbov Agrarians, this step may be followed by his expulsion from the party and by a demand for his resignation from the Government. However, a major Cabinet reshuffle will probably be deferred until after the imminent Big Three Conference.

Meanwhile, Agrarian and *Zveno* leaders, who had hoped to avoid Communist domination and who had expected that the end of the war in Europe would be followed by more active Anglo-American participation in the affairs of the Bulgarian ACC, pressed the American representatives for some indication of United States policy in regard to Bulgaria. With increasing frequency the American members were asked whether non-Communist Bulgarians should give up their struggle for

political independence, in which many lives are claimed to have been lost, and join the Communist Party in order to obtain as favorable treatment as possible from the Soviets.

The only encouragement which Petkov and his followers have received in their opposition to the Obbov Agrarians has been the United States action in granting asylum to G. M. Dimitrov. On the night of 23 May, Dimitrov, many of whose followers had been arrested and whose own removal to prison appeared imminent, escaped from his closely-guarded apartment. He took refuge first with a British member of the ACC, who was unable to grant him the protection of diplomatic immunity, and subsequently at the home of the American representative, where he has remained. The United States Government has taken the position that Dimitrov will not be relinquished unless the Bulgarian Government offers satisfactory guarantees for his personal safety.

Similar to the pattern of Communist attacks on Agrarians who have attempted to preserve party independence are the more recent attacks on Socialist leaders. The initial Communist pressure on the Socialist Party to purge itself of leaders who opposed Communist domination of the Fatherland Front met with relatively weak resistance. Independent-minded leaders were quietly dropped from the party until by May few "unreconstructed" Socialist leaders remained. In recent weeks the Communists and their allies within the Socialist Party have encountered stiffer but still largely ineffective resistance. On 29 May the chief secretary of the Socialist party was replaced by a pro-Communist leader. At present the one remaining independent Socialist leader, Minister of Social Welfare Cheshmedzieff, is in a position similar to that of Petkov and his Agrarian associates. Though he has actively opposed the Communist-backed faction headed by Minister of Commerce Neikov, he must either tolerate the subservience of his party to Communist policy or resign his posts in the party and in the Government, thus further strengthening the trend toward Communist domination.

Zveno leaders have not yet shown the same determination as other non-Communists to maintain independent party action. Reports from Sofia indicate that should they do so, there are other men within the party who, like Obbov and Neikov, would be willing to coordinate *Zveno* policies with those of the Communists rather than see the party destroyed. This is particularly true among the military adherents of *Zveno* who do not wish to jeopardize their army careers.

In recent months all Bulgarian parties have been increasingly concerned with the elections for a regular National Assembly, now scheduled for 26 August. This body will be asked to approve all legislative decrees issued by the Fatherland Front Government since September 1944. Bulgaria's future form of government will be an important topic of discussion, though constitutional procedure would demand the calling of a Grand National Assembly for a final decision in this matter.

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Until the time of G. M. Dimitrov's expulsion from the Agrarian Party, the electoral procedures to be followed were the subject of sharp controversy between the Agrarian and Communist Parties. Dimitrov and his followers contended that the parties should present separate lists of candidates in order that the elections should accurately reflect the numerical strength of each party. The Communists, on the other hand, appeared determined to force the use of a common Fatherland Front list, which would include a predetermined number of candidates from each party and would thus enable the Communists to preserve their dominant position. Since the purge of the Agrarian Party and the seizure of party control by Agrarians who are unwilling to oppose Communist demands, the electoral controversy has become largely academic. The electoral law, as determined on 5 June 1945, appears on the surface to be entirely democratic. The ballot is to be free, secret, and universal, and each party has the option of submitting its own list of candidates or of participating in the ticket of the Fatherland Front. Under its new leadership, however, the Agrarian Party has already agreed not to offer a separate list. In addition the courts will pass on the anti-fascist record of every potential nominee. Since the Ministry of Justice is in the hands of the Communists, this process may tend to eliminate a number of the stronger non-Communist candidates. The fact that the police system is Communist-controlled may also tend to influence the balloting. Under such conditions the coming elections cannot be expected to gauge accurately the following of the individual parties or to affect seriously the present balance of power in Bulgaria.

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