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The Communist movement in Bulgaria and its relationship with the Communist International, 1918-1944

The political mainstay of Communism in Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Communist Party (*Balgarskata komunističeska partija*; BKP), since April 1990 the Bulgarian Socialist Party (*Balgarska socialističeska partija*; BSP), has been in existence for nearly one hundred years. It proved to be the more influential of the two parties which developed from the 1903 schism in the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party (*Balgarska socialdemokratičeska partija*; BSDP), founded in 1891. As a result two autonomous social democratic parties coexisted in Bulgaria: the "Unified" Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers' Party (*Balgarskata rabotničeska socialdemokratičeska partija "Obedinena"*; BRSDP(o)) and the Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers' Party "Narrows" (... "*tesni socialisti*"; BRSDP(ts)), the future Bulgarian Communist Party.

There have been four crucial periods in the history of the Party.¹ During the first, social democratic period, 1903-1918, the Party established itself in Bulgarian society. It developed as a Marxist party, like the social democratic parties in other European countries, but with certain particular features which ensured it a place on the left wing of the Second International.

During the second period, 1918-1944, which coincides almost exactly with the existence of the Communist International (CI), the Party posed as a political force of some weight, as much because of its composition as its influence. In adopting Bolshevism, it transformed itself into a Marxist-Leninist party and its activities were oriented towards the seizure of political power, an aim achieved with the Rising of 9 September 1944, when it was aided to victory by the Red Army.

During the third period, 1944-1989, the Party imposed itself as the dominant force in society. It directed totally Bulgarian interior and foreign policies and carries the responsibility for everything that has been done, or not done, in the country's development. Strictly centralised and closely connected with the administrative apparatus, it grew into a huge organisation, with nearly one million activists (932,000 in 1986).

During the fourth period, from 10 November 1989, the Party has changed radically. Operating in a pluralist society which is in the process of democratization, and under attack from all the other parties, it is reshaping itself along social democratic lines. It has abandoned Marxism-Leninism, proletarian internationalism, democratic centralism, and the label 'communist'. Its membership has dropped in line with its declining influence.

All four periods can be subdivided. During the Comintern period six such distinct periods can be distinguished: 1918-1923, 1923-1925, 1925-1934, 1934-1939, 1939-1941, 1941-1944.

1. Sources and Secondary Literature

Bulgaria has a rich stock of sources for the study of the history of the communist movement during the Comintern period. The most important material is kept in the Central Party Archive under the Supreme Council of the BSP (until 1990 the Central Party Archive under the Central Committee of the BKP) - in the archives of the Central Committee (CC) and the Foreign Bureau,² of the mass organisations led by the Party (the trade unions, the Communist youth Organisation, the Osvobodenie co-operative movement), and in the personal archives of Party leaders. There is also a rich collection of memoirs and diaries.

The materials on the relationship between the Party and the Comintern are held primarily in the archives

¹ The term 'Party' will be used henceforth in place of the various names by which it has been known over the period, i.e. Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers' Party (Narrows), Bulgarian Communist Party (Narrow socialists), Bulgarian Communist Party, Bulgarian Workers' Party, Bulgarian Workers' Party (Communists), Bulgarian Communist Party, Bulgarian Socialist Party.

² During the period of clandestine activity, 1923-1944, a Foreign Committee, or Foreign Bureau, was organised abroad which became the leading organ of the Party.

of the Central Committee, the Foreign Bureau, the Balkan Communist Federation (BCF),³ and in the personal archives of Georgi Dimitrov and Vassil Kolarov. The wealth of material in Dimitrov's personal archive is impressive - as well as materials on the Bulgarian communist movement, there are documents on the history of the CI, on various other communist parties and on leading activists. In Dimitrov's archive is also his personal diary covering the period 1933-1945. This is a source of extraordinary importance which throws light on the climate at the centre of the Comintern, on the Soviet Communist Party, and the process of decision-making in the Comintern.

There are also materials on the Bulgarian communist movement, including its relations with the CI, in other archives: for example, in the archives of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the military historical and central historical archives.

A substantial part of the most important documents on the history of the communist movement has already been published. The series which includes the main documents of the Party's congresses and conferences has seen two editions.⁴ There have been editions of collections of documents on various important events such as the impact of the October Revolution, the work of the Party in the army, the insurrection of September 1923, and the anti-fascist struggle of 1939-1944, and of materials from both the official and clandestine press.⁵ Many valuable documents have been published in the series *Izvestija na Instituta po istorija na BKP* (Information of the Institute for the History of the BKP).⁶

There are also numerous bibliographies.⁷ The above-mentioned *Izvestija* always gives a complete up-to-date bibliography of all books, articles, memoirs etc. on the history of the Party, the workers' movement and the youth movement published either in Bulgaria or abroad. Collections of famous Party activists' reminiscences of important events have also been edited.⁸

The history of the communist movement in Bulgaria during 1918-1944 is a well furrowed subject, and

³ The BCF was a regional organisation of Balkan communist parties in which the Bulgarian, Greek, Romanian and Yugoslav parties participated. It was a continuation of the Balkan Social Democratic Workers' Federation, founded in 1915. In January 1920 the Federation was reestablished under the name communist and joined Comintern. The BCF was very active from 1920 to 1924, after which its activity slowed and it went out of existence in the 1930s. It played a role in the development of the communist movement in the Balkan region and was one of the channels through which Comintern influence penetrated. Bulgarian communists held key positions in the BCF.

⁴ *Balgarskata komunističeska partija v rezolucii i rešenija*, Vol. 2: 1919-1923 (Sofia, 1953), and Vol. 3: 1924-1944 (Sofia, 1954); *Balgarskata komunističeska partija v rezolucii i rešenija*, Vol. 2: 1917-1923 (Sofia, 1987), Vol. 3: 1924-1928, and Vol. 4: 1928-1929 (Sofia, 1990).

⁵ *Velikata oktomvrijska revolucija i revoljucionnitate borbii v Balgarija 1917-19. Sbornik dokumenti* (Sofia, 1957); *Rabotata na BKP v armijata. Dokumenti i materialii*, Vol. 1: 1919-1941 (Sofia, 1957), and Vol. 2: 1941-1944 (Sofia, 1959); *Septemvrijskoto vastanie 1923. Dokumenti i materialii*, 2 vols. (Sofia, 1973 and 1983); *Antifashistkata borba v Balgarija*, 2 vols. (Sofia, 1984); *Revoljucionna Sofija 1891-1944. Dokumenti i materialii* (Sofia, 1969); *Rabotničeski vestnik. Izbrani statii i materialii*, Vol. 3: 1923-1939 (Sofia, 1954); *Internatsionalizmat na BKP. Dokumenti i materialii 1891-1944* (Sofia, 1974).

⁶ A specialised series on the history of the communist and workers' movement in Bulgaria produced by the Institute for the History of the BCP (since 1990 the Institute for Social History). Sixty-seven volumes have been published to date.

⁷ *Revoljucionnoto profsajuzno dviženie v Balgarija 1878-1944. Bibliografija* (Sofia, 1968); *Septemvrijskoto vastanie 1923. Bibliografija* (Sofia, 1973); *Septemvrijskoto vastanie 1923. Enciklopedija* (Sofia, 1973); *Geroi na antifashistkata borba 1923-1944*, 2 vols. (Sofia, 1966 and 1969).

⁸ *17-ta godina. Spomeni na balgarskite revoljucioneri* (Sofia, 1957); *Transportna stačka 1919-20. Sbornik spomeni* (Sofia, 1964); *Septemvrijci za Septemvri 1923. Sbornik spomeni*, 3 vols. (Sofia, 1963); *Geroično minalo. Spomeni* (Sofia, 1965); *Vasil Kolarov. Spomeni* (Sofia, 1968); *Revoljucionna Sofija 1891-1944* (Sofia, 1969).

few events or processes have escaped the examination of historians. There is available a huge literature, including monographs on the impact of the October Revolution and the attitude of the Party to the revolution, the Bolsheviks and Soviet Russia; the revolutionary crisis of 1918-1919; the first Congress of the Party in 1919; the interaction between the BKP and the Bulgarian Agrarian Party (*Bălgarski zemedelski naroden sājuz*; BZNS); the policies of the Party's patriotic front; the armed struggle against fascism, 1941-1944; various problems in the history of the trade union movement, co-operative movement and youth movement, etc.⁹ At the same time there have also been some attempts at writing complete histories of the Party.¹⁰

The life and works of eminent Communist activists have been successfully researched, in particular the lives of Dimităr Blagoev and Georgi Dimitrov. Several editions of their complete works have been published, as well as annals, bibliographies, reminiscences, memoirs and biographies.¹¹ The life and activity of Dimitrov have always been of central interest. By 1982 (the centenary of Dimitrov's birth) this subject had attracted more than 10,000 titles, albeit only in Bulgarian. The majority of these titles are historical studies.¹²

In the specialist literature particular attention has been paid to the relations between the CI and the communist movement in Bulgaria. Generally this subject has come under examination in relation to other problems and has rarely been the object of a specifically focused study. The picture is fairly complete as far as the early years of 1919-1923, and the late thirties are concerned. There is a lack of works however covering the whole period. A tentative start towards a complete study has been made with the organisation of four Bulgarian-Soviet colloquia on the theme "Comintern and the BKP".¹³

For a number of reasons the in-depth study of the history of the communist movement in Bulgaria has not been conducted in a consistent, scientific manner. This general weakness is apparent to different degrees in the work of various authors, the evidence for which can be seen in the fact that there are many disputed questions which demand discussion (the impact of the October Revolution, the origins and nature of the bolshevization of the movement, the nature of the insurrection of September 1923, the nature and genesis of Bulgarian fascism, etc.). Methodological problems have scarcely been touched upon, and there have been few attempts to develop a historiographical evaluation of the huge literature on the subject.

2. The Party's Development from 1918 to 1944

During the Comintern period, 1918-1944, the Party developed in extreme conditions resulting from the national catastrophe which Bulgaria experienced after its defeat in the First World War. Great human and material losses,

⁹ Chr. Christov, *Revoljucionnata kriza v Bălgarija 1918-1919* (Sofia, 1957); *Oktomvri i leninizacijata na BKP* (Sofia, 1981); T. Koleva, *BKP i meždunarodnoto komunističesko dviženie 1919-1923* (Sofia, 1972); P. Boev, *Kongres istoričeski* (Sofia, 1980); D. Kosev, *Septemvrijsko vastanie 1923* (Sofia, 1973); D. Sirkov, *V zaštita na isponskata republika 1936-1939* (Sofia, 1967); *Istorija na antifašistkata borba v Bălgarija 1936-1939* (Sofia, 1967); *Istorija na antifašistkata borba v Bălgarija 1939-1944*, 2 vols. (Sofia, 1976); *Istorija na mladežkoto revoljucionno dviženie v Bălgarija* (Sofia, 1971); *Obščinskata politika na BKP 1891-1944* (Sofia, 1974); *Stachnite borbi na rabotničeskata klasa v Bălgarija* (Sofia, 1960); Sl. Petrova, *Devetoseptemvrijskata revoljucija 1944* (Sofia, 1981); *Istorija na Sofijskata gradska organizacija na BKP* (Sofia, 1982); G. Naumov, *Rabotničeskata partija v Bălgarija 1927-1939* (Sofia, 1980).

¹⁰ *Materiali po istorija na BKP* (Sofia, 1956); *Istorija na BKP. Kratak očerk* (Sofia, 1969); Joseph Rothschild, *The Communist Party of Bulgaria. Origins and Development 1883-1936* (New York, 1959); N. Oren, *Bulgarian Communism. The road to power 1934-1944* (New York, 1971).

¹¹ *Dimităr Blagoev. Biografija* (Sofia, 1979); *Dimităr Blagoev. Letopis na života i revoljucionnata mu dejnost*, Vol. 2: 1904-1924 (Sofia, 1982); *Georgi Dimitrov. Biografija* (Sofia, 1972); El. Savova, *Georgi Dimitrov. Letopis na života i revoljucionnata mu dejnost* (Sofia, 1982).

¹² Cf. *Georgi Dimitrov viden teoretik i revoljucioner* (Sofia, 1982).

¹³ *Izvestija na Instituta po istorija na BKP*, Vol. 35, pp. 265-438; Vol. 38, pp. 305-470; Vol. 44, pp. 121-261; *Kominternat, BKP/b, BKP* (Sofia, 1990).

the economy ruined, international isolation, the painful peace treaty, the arrival of half a million refugees from the seized territories, the suspended national problem - all these factors only made the climate more oppressive in the inter-war period. Despite the fact that in certain sectors the economic collapse caused by the war was overcome fairly quickly, and in others there were encouraging developments, Bulgaria remained a weak country in economic terms. In the mid-1930s 80% of those engaged in manual work were in agriculture, whilst only 8% were in industry or workshops. The majority of the GNP continued to be created by a backward agricultural base.

The period was characterised by deep disorder in the political strata of Bulgarian society, permanent political instability and violent political and social confrontation. The situation was at crisis point in 1918-1920, 1923-1925 and 1943-1944. In a quarter of a century, from 1918 to 1944, there were 20 governments, two reactionary coups d'état (on 9 June 1923 and 19 May 1934), and four armed insurrections (in September 1918, in June and September 1923 and on 9 September 1944). These exceptional conditions opened up the prospects for communist influence and activity.

a) 1919-1923:

The development of the Party during the early post-war years of 1918-1923 is characterised by its remarkable growth, by its increasing role in political life and by the process of bolshevisation. After Bulgaria came out of the war in September 1918 Party organisations and membership rapidly multiplied, this process reaching its zenith at the end of 1918 and the beginning of 1919. Growth slowed later, and there was a drop towards 1922. In 1922 the number of Party organisations was more than 1,600 and the membership was 35,000. Comparing this with the pre-war period the membership had risen ten-fold and the number of organisations had experienced a twelve-fold increase (from 3,435 members and 134 organisations in 1915). This energetic expansion in the size of the Party was unprecedented in its history and was not repeated until the Party came to power in 1944. Taking into consideration the small size of Bulgaria, these figures show the nature of its political strength by the standards of the time.

Under the leadership of the Party a dozen other organisations developed and were active: the co-operative movement "Liberation" (*Osvoboždenie*) with 70,000 members, the General Workers' Union with 30,000 members, and several other organisations such as those for youth, women, and school teachers and other less important ones. In the first Parliamentary elections after the war, in 1919, the Party was very successful. In comparison with 1914 it tripled its vote (from 43,000 to 118,000) and the number of deputies elected rose four-fold from 11 to 47. In the municipal elections in December 1919, and in subsequent Parliamentary elections in 1920 and 1923 the Party held on to its gains. The results show that the communists were the second strongest political force after the BZNS.

After the war the Party initiated and organised highly effective working class action: a massive strike movement, 1st May celebrations, political activity in defence of rights and freedoms which had been violated during the war, action against the onerous Versailles Treaty, actions of solidarity with Soviet power in Soviet Russia and Hungary etc. In conjunction with the Social Democratic Party it led action which spread right through the working class, the transport workers' strike from December 1919 to February 1920.

The period 1918-1923 was the only time in which the Party developed in normal political conditions. During the period of clandestine action which followed, from 1923-1944, there was a marked levelling off in its development, strength and influence. However, despite the ups and downs the Party proved very resistant and for the time being held on to what it had achieved.

Simultaneously with its growth and spread of influence the Party undertook a revision of its programme. The beginning of the process which later would be seen as the process of bolshevisation occurred in November 1918. At that time under the influence of the consolidation of the October revolution, and the revolution which broke out in Germany, which was expected to follow the Soviet route, the Party believed that the world had finally entered the stage of worldwide social revolution. In the light of this conclusion the Party changed its strategy. Until then it had adhered to the strategic concept formulated in the slogan "Socialism in the West, Democracy in the East", but from November 1918 it declared that Bulgaria would also experience socialist revolution. The Party abandoned the idea of the democratic stage of the Bulgarian and Balkan revolutions. The traditional calls for a democratic republic in Bulgaria and for a federal democracy in the Balkans were replaced with slogans calling for a soviet socialist republic in Bulgaria and a federal soviet socialist republic in the Balkans. In a short space of time, from the end of 1918 to early 1919, the views of the Party and its programme, which had been adhered to for three decades (since the founding congress of the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party in 1891) underwent considerable change, to the extent of the formulation of radically new positions: on

the imperialist stage of capitalism, on the world social revolution, on the destruction of the bourgeois political system and its replacement by a dictatorship of the proletariat along Soviet lines, on the mass political strike, and armed insurrection, on the general struggle of the working class and other strata of workers in the towns and villages, etc. The new ideas were given overall justification in two programme documents: the brochure "*Slogans and programme of the BSDRP (Narrows)*", edited by the CC in January 1919, and the "Programmatic declaration" adopted by the first congress of the BKP.¹⁴ The congress was held 25-27 May 1919 in Sofia and made several other decisions: it changed the Party's name to Communist Party, passed amendments to its statutes, rejected the sectarian theories of the left communists (for a boycott of Parliament and the immediate organisation of Soviets), elected new leaders and Party organs, etc. The congress also confirmed the decision made by the Party leadership on 1 May 1919 to join the Communist International.

Since the war the Party had already come to the conclusion that the Second International had collapsed and that it was necessary to build a new, Third International. But its pledge to the constitution of the CI was quite specific. In the name of the Balkan Social Democratic Workers' Federation Kristian Rakovski signed the appeal from eight parties and groups in January 1919 calling for the organisation of a founding congress of the Third International, and he also participated in the work of the congress. Rakovski took these steps without contacting the Party, which was not informed about the immediate preparations for the founding congress (Bulgaria was occupied and isolated from the rest of the world). However, Rakovski's steps were justified by the decisions taken at the founding conference of the Balkan Federation in 1915, and they were consistent with the position of the Party which not only joined the CI but also declared itself categorically to have been one of the founder members.

It should be noted that the Party joined the CI in a united manner, without any disagreement amongst its members. In most other countries this action was closely linked to schisms in social democratic parties, but in Bulgaria the opposite was the case. Firstly, the Bulgarian Communist Workers' Party (*Balgarska rabotničeska komunističeska partija*; BRKP),¹⁵ which declared its allegiance to the International in April 1919, joined the Party in 1920. Secondly, the BRSDP(o) which regarded membership of the International as one of its five main demands (dictatorship, soviets, Third International, left CC and unions) also joined the Party in November 1920. Thirdly, a considerable section of the unions under the influence of the social democratic party united with the revolutionary trade unions. The Party was one of the few in the CI which took with it the strongest wing of the workers' movement.

In 1920 the first Party representative was sent to the CI's Executive Committee (ECCI). Party delegations participated in the work of the CI's Congresses and the enlarged Plenums of the ECCI. The Bulgarian question was put on the agenda, and emissaries and instructions were sent to Bulgaria. Secret channels were set up across the Black Sea, Romania, Constantinople and Central Europe in order to maintain relations. These were used by functionaries and for the transfer of literature, arms and other materials. From the beginning the Party received financial aid from the Comintern and its activists were tied to the Soviet secret service.

A comparison between the basic tenets of the Party programme, formulated independently before the CI was formed, and the programme of the CI show close unity of thought in matters of principle. This unity also expressed itself, as far as the organisational structure of the CI was concerned. The Bulgarian communists supported the idea of a centralised international party, with a belief in imminent world revolution. Common ideas on both organisational and political questions contributed to the consolidation of the Party's new orientation.

Amongst the early congresses of the CI, the Third and Fourth Congresses were particularly influential as far as the Bulgarian Party was concerned, with their attempts to take into consideration changes in objective conditions, and to draw realistic conclusions regarding the policies of the communist movement. The politics of the united front and the slogan "government of workers and peasants" left lasting effects. It offered the Bulgarian communists the chance to overcome one of the fundamental weaknesses of the social democratic period, the gradual rise of autonomous action. Attempts were made to escape from the realm of vague slogans, and to find approaches suited to Bulgarian conditions.

An overall examination of relations between the CI and the Party during the period 1919-1923 shows that they followed a tranquil course without the tensions that were to come a little later.

¹⁴ *BKP v rezoljucii i rešenija 1917-23*, 2 (Sofia, 1987), pp. 39-76, 80-90.

¹⁵ A social democratic group with little influence, founded during the First World War, which was critical of both the social democratic parties. After the war it became pro-Bolshevik.

b) 1923-1925:

During 1923-1925 events occurred in Bulgaria which were to leave indelible traces on the whole of the subsequent history of the country and the Party. A military coup d'état was executed on 9 June 1923. The legitimate government of the BZNS was overthrown and the Prime Minister and leader of the BZNS, A. Stamboliiski, was cruelly murdered. The power of the old parties¹⁶ was restored. A spontaneous insurrection broke out against the coup but it was rapidly put down.

The coup d'état provoked serious disagreements in the Party. Whilst party organisations and cells organised the insurrection in some regions, the CC declared itself neutral in the struggle between the two wings of the bourgeoisie - the urban and rural bourgeoisie. Various factors pushing in the same direction (the interference of the ECCI, pressure from the internal opposition, and the government's anti-communist policies) forced change in the Party. Adopting Comintern's line, according to which the coup d'état was a reactionary turn in Bulgaria's political life, the CC declared that the only solution to the crisis was armed insurrection to overthrow the illegitimate regime, which it labelled fascist, and the installation of a government of workers and peasants. This government was not envisaged as a dictatorship of the proletariat but as a democratic authority in terms of its support and its social programme. The Party changed its attitude to the political situation radically. From confrontation across the political spectrum, it moved towards alliance - a united front with the principal democratic parties: the BZNS and the BRSDP(o), in their common struggle against the new regime. In fact the Party executed a strategic volte-face - socialist goals were relegated to the back-burner, and a democratic stage appeared in the concept of the revolution in Bulgaria.

Suffering from insufficient preparation and becoming the object of government provocation which included widespread arrest of Party functionaries, the insurrection broke out sporadically in different regions of the country between 14 and 23 September 1923. Power was seized in a few small urban centres and in a number of villages, particularly in northern Bulgaria where the insurrection attracted quite widespread support. By the end of September the insurrection had been bloodily put down.

After this setback the Party continued to believe that the political crisis was not over. It undertook preparations for a new insurrection. In clandestine conditions it rebuilt its organisations, formed a military wing, armed itself and began resistance operations. A united front was constructed with the left wing of the BZNS. In the Party, and particularly in the military organisation there was a growth in terrorism which culminated on 16 April 1925 in the explosion in the St Nedelia church in Sofia in which more than 150 people were killed. This terrorist act offered the regime the ideal opportunity for an attack against the communist movement, the left wing of the BZNS and other democratic forces.

The period 1923-1925 saw a fundamental change in the relationship between the Party and the CI. Serious contradictions emerged between the CC of the Party and the ECCI with regard to the coup of 9 June. At the same time the ECCI's interest in the Bulgarian communist movement clearly rose: in only one year (June 1923 to May 1924) the leadership of the CI examined different aspects of the Bulgarian question on 38 occasions, and 8 appeals were made with regard to events in Bulgaria. Comintern's messengers continued to enter the country, and the subject of Bulgaria never left the pages of the Comintern press. The CI played a principal and often decisive role in the Party's turn from a position of neutrality to the adoption of armed uprising, the formation of the united front and the clarification of the demand for a government of workers and peasants.

The special interest which the CI showed in the Bulgarian question during these years had deeper roots, dictated as it was by international considerations. Events in Bulgaria were viewed in the context of the awaited new wave of revolution and were attached to the hope of a revolutionary breakthrough in the Balkans.

c) 1925-1934:

The defeats of 1923-1925 were followed by one of the most difficult periods in the history of the Party, the years 1925-1934. The conditions of illegality, the loss of members, violent internal struggles, and the negative influence of the CI - all this aggravated the crisis in the Party. But the Party showed considerable powers of

¹⁶ The political parties which headed the government of Bulgaria until the end of the First World War. After the war their influence declined drastically. After the coup of 9 June 1923 most of these parties entered into political union under the name of the Democratic Alliance, which after certain transformations held power until 1931.

endurance. Skilfully combining legal and conspiratorial forms of activity (in 1925 legal trade unions were formed under communist leadership; in 1927 a legal party and in 1928 a legal youth movement were set up) the Party won back a substantial part of what it had lost. In the early 1930s, in deteriorating economic conditions, it approached again the level of strength and influence, in terms of the membership of the legal party, readership of the communist press, and election results, that it had enjoyed in the years immediately after the war. Its success in the local elections in 1932 was significant: it won in the elections in the capital. The government resorted to declaring the elections void. The popularity which Dimitrov gained during the Leipzig trial and his election to the leadership of Comintern contributed to the successful rebirth of the Party, and above all to the restoration of its international authority.

During 1925-1934 however the ideological and theoretical activity of the Party took a different route. Extreme dogmatism flourished in the Party. The Party abandoned its theoretical positions of 1923 and revised them in a left direction. This revision found its fullest expression in the Party's attitudes to the politics of the united front, and the demand for a government of workers and peasants. The BZNS and the BRSDP(o) which had been regarded in 1923 as allies, were declared at the end of the 1920s to be agrarian fascists and social fascists and the Party's main efforts were conducted against them. The slogan "government of workers and peasants" was reinterpreted as being synonymous with "dictatorship of the proletariat". Ideas on the national question were likewise coloured with nihilism and a sectarian spirit: Bulgaria was labelled an imperialist state, and the substantial population of refugees regarded as an oppressed foreign minority. The new nations of Thracia, Dobrudja and Macedonia were proclaimed. Even the abandonment of certain traditional (if rather utopian and unconvincing) slogans, such as the call for a Balkan federation and Bulgaria's classification as a colony or semi-colony was carried out from a left sectarian standpoint.

The orientation of the Party during 1925-1934 was the reflection of a process occurring in Comintern. The process of bolshevization and the CI's effort to cut off completely from its social democratic roots saw the triumph in theory and practice of an extreme left-wing sectarianism.

The decade 1925-1934 ended in another tragic event in the history of Bulgaria - the coup d'état of 19 May 1934. A fascist type of political regime was installed, the constitution was suspended and political parties outlawed. In the spirit of the ultra-left line which was then in the ascendancy in the CI, the Party decided that the country had entered a period of revolutionary crisis. A general strike was decreed and the struggle for soviet power was placed on the agenda as an urgent political task. Instead of appealing for union and allied resistance of all democratic forces, the left-wing trend became more extreme: the BZNS and the BRSDP(o) continued to be viewed as public enemy number one and the main attack was conducted against the left wing of those parties.

d) 1934-1939:

The events of May 1934 in Bulgaria coincided with a turning point in the policy of the CI. Under the influence of the CI, the communist movement in Bulgaria also undertook to overcome the left sectarian line. The party changed its views with regard to the situation in the country and its tasks, and turned towards uniting democratic forces in an anti-fascist popular front. The slogan calling for soviet power profitably gave way to the demand for a government of workers and peasants, replaced a little later with the demand for a popular front government. Originally, the popular front was envisaged as having a narrow political composition - unified action by the Communists, the BZNS and the BRSDP(o). In other words, this was a return to the position of 1923. Under the influence of the situation in the country, and as a result of the international experience, the Party quickly broadened its views on the range of the popular front to include all the democratic forces in the country. Although towards the end of 1936 the anti-fascist policy of the popular front acquired a relatively complete image, the Party continued to embellish it: anti-monarchical demands were excluded from the platform of the popular front, the nihilist rhetoric on the national question was rejected, and the Party recognized the necessity of national union for the Bulgarian people. Also the Party did not pose its inclusion in the popular front government as an absolute condition of support for it.

Simultaneously with the formulation of the new policy the Party attempted to put it into action. During the second half of 1934 the communists turned to the BZNS and BRSDP(o) to build an anti-fascist popular front. In November they achieved their first partial success - an agreement between the communist and agrarian youth organisations to work together in their common struggle. In 1935 a similar agreement was reached between the Party and representatives of the left wing of the BZNS, and in 1936 with the leadership of the BRSDP(o). Success continued into 1937 when the communists concluded an alliance with the "Five" - a political bloc formed by five parties. On this basis a broad movement was put into gear for the restitution of the constitution. A network of constitutional committees was set up - a form of organisation peculiar to the popular front.

Pressure from the united democratic parties forced the government into making partial concessions - the organisation of parliamentary and municipal elections. During the 1938 parliamentary election campaign a very broad, if rather chaotic, popular front organisation was created with the participation of the Party - the Democratic Union. The co-ordinated involvement of the Democratic Union in the 1938 elections was the most successful demonstration of the popular front movement in the pre-war years.

The Party's popular front policy, despite the absence of strategic success, i.e. the fall of the fascist regime and the creation of a democratic government, exercised a positive influence on the political situation in the country. The position of the democratic forces was strengthened, the fascist regime was forced to give way on certain points, the communist movement began to free itself from its left-sectarian tendency and reorientated itself towards policies based on realism.

This popular front policy of 1934-1949 was connected to important international events on which the Party took an active anti-fascist position: the civil war in Spain, the invasion of Ethiopia by Italy, the "Anschluss" of Austria to Germany and the dismantlement of Czechoslovakia. Bulgarian communists showed their solidarity with the Spanish Republic. More than 450 Bulgarians fought against Franco's soldiers.

The popular front policy is one of the most striking examples of the constructive influence of Comintern. This influence however had the not unimportant aspect that its aim was to liquidate positions which had themselves been introduced by the CI.

In the middle of the 1930s relations between the Comintern and the communist movement in Bulgaria were put on a new plane. Until 1923 relations were characterised by the nearly absolute autonomy of the Party. After 1923 that autonomy disappeared almost entirely. From 1934 there was a kind of fusion between the leadership of the Party and the leadership of Comintern, Dimitrov being at the same time in charge of the Foreign Bureau of the Party, and head of the ECCI. He led the Party by his participation in the debates and decisions on the Bulgarian question in both organs, and by coordinating things with the leadership of Soviet Communist Party and personally with Stalin. The restoration of diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and the Soviet Union in 1934 allowed directives from Moscow to reach Bulgaria quickly.

During the second half of the 1930s the CI was affected by the Stalinist repression, and the Bulgarian Party was amongst the sections most affected. More than 1,000 Bulgarian emigrés (out of a total of 2,500) were victims of repression. Around 600 of those deported were condemned to death or died in prisons and camps. On the other hand, Bulgarian communists working in the CI apparatus, in the foreign leadership of the Party, and in the administrative apparatus of the Soviet Union, had a share in the responsibility for the repression. Famous Bulgarian activists including Dimitrov, Kolarov and Ivanov supported Stalin's dismantling of the Polish Party, and took part in raising charges against communist cadres which were often used for justifying the repression.

e) 1939-1941:

In August-September 1939 following the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the beginning of the Second World War the CI suddenly changed its policy - the anti-fascist line was abandoned and the communist movement was again pushed towards dogmatism. This change had a pernicious impact on the communist movement in Bulgaria. Support for the union of democratic forces was abandoned. The term fascist disappeared from the political vocabulary. Once again a front against the social democrats and the anti-Hitler parties was opened. This change had an immediately destructive influence: the union of democratic forces was severely disturbed, the confidence of the democratic parties in the communists was undermined once again. The manoeuvres of the government and the monarch in pushing the country into a pro-German alliance were thereby facilitated.

This policy was followed for the most part until June 1941 but under pressure of changes in Bulgaria and in the region it was slightly modified. From the spring of 1940 when Germany turned its aggression against the Balkans, anti-Nazi feeling in the Party intensified. The communists condemned the entry of German troops into Bulgaria, the country's joining the Tripartite Pact on 1 March 1941, and Bulgarian support of the German occupation of Yugoslavia and Greece. Finally, when Bulgaria entered the war, the Party took a position of opposition, something that had not been possible since the conclusion of the non-aggression and mutual aid pact with the Soviet Union.

Stalin decided to resolve the complex problems which faced the communist movement at the beginning of the war by the dissolution of the Comintern. The preparations undertaken in April 1941 for this dissolution

were interrupted by Germany's attack on the Soviet Union.¹⁷

f) 1941-1944:

The German aggression confronted the Party with a new task: to use every means to support the Soviet people. This meant that it was necessary not only to prevent the sending of Bulgarian troops to the Eastern front, but also to disorganise Hitler's rear, drawing the maximum number of Hitler's troops to the Balkans, and impeding the provision of supplies. The Party immediately took action. On 22 June it condemned Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union. On 24 June it adopted the policy of armed struggle. At the end of June the first groups for secret combat were formed, and in July the first resistance detachments organised. In 1943 the growing partisan movement was restructured into an army of insurrection for national liberation. The process of union of the anti-fascist forces developed successfully. In 1942 the Party published its programme for the building of a patriotic front. By 1943 it was achieved, and the patriotic front united four parties under a common leadership.

The anti-fascist resistance in Bulgaria from 1941-1944 had certain particular features which resulted primarily from the specific role played by the communists. Firstly, considering Bulgarian conditions, the movement was very powerful - there was nothing to equal it for organisation, activity and scope in any of the countries allied to Germany. Almost 80,000 people took part in the armed struggle, as partisans, helpers, members of combat groups and messengers. Secondly, the communists were incontestably the driving force of the Resistance. In particular the underground resistance was totally communist. Where members of other parties joined it, it was only an occasional occurrence and happened only on personal initiative.

After 22 June the principal directives for Party activity continued to arrive from Moscow. The centres of Bulgarian emigration in the Soviet Union sent military and political advisors. A radio station transmitting in Bulgarian functioned in the USSR which aided the struggle.

The dissolution of Comintern on 8 June 1943 did not introduce any notable changes in the evolution of the communist movement, because it was a formality. As far as political positions, strategy, tactics, communist party organisation and attitudes to the Soviet Union were concerned there was no substantive change. Without Comintern the communist parties continued to develop and work in the same spirit, even to the extent of following in the Stalinist tradition. This was particularly true of the communist movement in Bulgaria for two reasons. Firstly, it was because the Foreign Bureau of the Party remained in Moscow and continued to fulfil the role of the supreme leading organ. Secondly, the newly created "International Information Department" attached to the Central Committee of the CPSU which replaced the liquidated organs of the CI was effectively, though not officially, led by Dimitrov, who remained the uncontested, authoritative leader of the Party.

3. Conclusion

The Bulgarian Communist Party was one of the most active and influential sections of the Comintern, and the latter was the most significant factor in its development during the whole period. The traces of Comintern influence can be seen in every aspect of the Party's activity - beginning with the adoption of the name "communist" in 1919, through its support of armed uprising in 1923, right up to its stand during the Second World War. The Party belonged to the sections which experienced the most systematic and strongest pressure from the International. Various factors and circumstances contributed to this: the proximity between the left wing of the Bulgarian socialists and the Bolsheviks, Dimitrov's authority and leading role in the CI, the existence of the foreign leadership of the Party, the substantial numbers of Bulgarian emigrés in the Soviet Union, and the leading role of Bulgarian communists in the Balkan communist federation.

Drawing continually from the source of the experience of the CI, the Bulgarian communists in proportion to their strength contributed to its enrichment, and to the consolidation of the influence of the CI. The Bulgarian representative Rakovski played an important role in the constitution of the Third International; the Party brought the strength and compass of a mass party, being a crucial political factor in its country as well as the dominant wing of the labour movement - a rare combination for the time. During the early years the

¹⁷ In his journal Dimitrov recorded Stalin's position on the dissolution of the International, which he expounded during an official dinner on 20 April 1941. According to Stalin communist parties should become autonomous and deal with their tasks alone, without looking to Moscow. When they had consolidated themselves the organisation of the Communist International could be reestablished.

leadership of the International made frequent reference to the experience of the Bulgarian communists. The 1919 "Proclamation of the Programme of the BKP" was published in the *Communist International*, with a personal recommendation from Grigori Zinoviev. Following this international recognition it became the basis for the communist programmes of the Balkan Federation, and the communist parties of Greece, Romania and Yugoslavia. At the Fourth Comintern Congress in 1922 the Party provided one of the three projects for a programme of the CI, which were examined. The breadth of the Bulgarian experience was unrivalled in 1923 with regard to the united front and the demand for a government of workers and peasants. This experience was immediately taken up by the other communist parties in the Balkans. Thus in 1923-1924 the whole communist movement in the Balkans approached an interpretation of the policy of the united front, as it would come to light a decade later.

The role of the Bulgarian communists was important in shaping Comintern cadres. Georgi Dimitrov was the head of the ECCI during the last decades of the existence of the Comintern and he played a notable role in the formulation of the policy of the anti-fascist popular front. Vasil Kolarov was active over a very long period, and his role in the leadership of Comintern was significant. He was a permanent member of the ECCI from 1922 until its dissolution, and during 1922-1924 he was its General Secretary. Dozens of Bulgarian communists worked in the International apparatus, in various international communist organisations and training centres, and fulfilled important missions in other communist parties. The scale of activity of Bulgarian communists in the CI thereby also tars them with substantial responsibility for the errors and defeats sustained by the international communist movement.

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