

# BULGARIA BETWEEN TWO WARS

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THE nature of the "democracy" established, under Russian influence, in Bulgaria has become, in recent months, an international issue. Press and radio commentary treat the matter as a diplomatic controversy among the Great Powers. Little attention is paid to the Bulgarians: what they think, how they act, or the conditions inside their country. It is difficult to know, much more to appraise, just what is now happening in Bulgaria. But it should be enlightening to examine briefly how she conducted her affairs during her most recent experience of peaceful self-government—the interval between the two World Wars.

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The Trnovo Constitution of 1879, with its provision for a parliament of one chamber and a cabinet appointed by the sovereign, in accordance with parliamentary responsibility, remained operative after the Bulgarian military collapse in 1918. Their activities being confined, theoretically, within the limits set by this document, two types of Bulgarian political parties had appeared during the preceding forty years of national autonomy and independence: those variously designated as the "old", "bourgeois", "law and order", "citizens", or "historical" parties, and the Agrarians, Socialists, and Communists—parties which promoted a basic change in the social order. New parties appear on and disappear from the Bulgarian political scene overnight, while the names of old parties vary with their leadership. With this warning, the "Liberal" or "National Liberal" Party, the "Narodynatsi", "People's" or "Popular" Party, the Democratic Party, and the "Radical" or "Radical Democratic" Party may be said to have been the most important "bourgeois" groups in 1918.

The People's Party was on the extreme right. Many of its members were descendants of the "Chorbidjia", the communal peasant leaders of Turkish times. The party's support came from relatively substantial, satisfied people—bankers, merchants, and the richer villagers, such as the saloon-keepers. The chauvinistic Liberals, the most powerful party in the pre-1914 period, were unpopular owing to their responsibility for

Bulgaria's military defeats both in 1913 and in 1918. The Democrats and Radical Democrats, both of them late nineteenth century offshoots of the original Liberals, had more popular appeal. But, at the end of World War I, all of these "bourgeois" parties were tarred with the same brush of acquiescence in Bulgaria's rule by a small group of city intellectuals and bureaucrats, and of indifference to the wishes and welfare of the peasants. They had subsided from their radical, even nihilistic and revolutionary youth of the liberation epoch, and appeared as the conservative element, preoccupied with the *status quo*.

Advocates of social revolution became really influential in Bulgarian politics only after World War I. The Socialist Party was founded in 1890, and began to be noticeably vocal around the turn of the century. At that time, it was an anomaly—a middle-class intellectual movement existing in anticipation of the appearance of a discontented proletariat.<sup>1</sup> After 1918, the narrow Socialists followed the trend of the times and deserted to the Communist Party, which had come into being by detaching from the Socialists in 1903. The Socialist Party of the post-1918 era was the descendant of the pre-1914 Broad Socialists.

The Agrarian Party evolved from the People's Agrarian League, founded about 1900. Though their efficacy has not been great, the Agrarians have had more apparent social justification in Bulgaria than the Socialists and Communists, owing to the vigour with which they have claimed that they represent the peasants, who constitute the bulk of the population. The early Agrarians had a crusading spirit. They went among the villagers, striving to uplift them through education and discipline. By organizing them in a close association, they hoped to gain control of the *Sobranje* (Parliament), and to mould the national life in a form befitting Bulgaria, "the peasant state". They had both sound and foolish, but, to the ruling class, usually frightening notions. Austere and grim, these social evangelists among the peasantry brought arguments in a vein of uncompromising bias against anything that smacked of bureaucracy or of the city.

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Ten years after the defeat of Imperial Germany, it was said that "The tale of a wicked king and a young shepherd, who flings at the face of the king his song of people's anger, just as in the ballad of the German poet, Uland, is the most popular

1. T. Tchitchovsky, *The Socialist Movement in Bulgaria*, 9.

tale in Bulgaria to-day . . . The shepherd is thrown into prison, and the king triumphs. From the recess of his prison, the shepherd vanquishes the king. The son of the king avenges his father, and the popular hero is killed. A legend was born at his death, and this legend will change the history of the Balkans."<sup>2</sup>

Alexander Stamboliski, the shepherd in the tale, became the leader of the Agrarian Party in the years preceding World War I. A peasant's son, he was fanatic in devotion to things rustic, and detestation of things urban. He was courageous, uncompromising, and tempestuous<sup>3</sup>.

Stamboliski and the Agrarians had their brief hour after Bulgaria's collapse and Tsar Ferdinand's abdication in 1918. By fair means and foul, they secured a grip on the seats of power and, early in 1920, an Agrarian Government gained a Sobranje majority of two by invalidating the elections of thirteen Opposition deputies. "The men with the hoe", at long last, were installed in the halls of state, and great was their wrath against the pampered city folk. Ultimately, whether by chance or by design, Stamboliski rid himself of the advice of the saner Agrarian elements and became surrounded by sycophants. Many of these represented a drastic, even murderous attitude towards the Opposition, and encouraged pointless extremes of deference to the peasantry. It was complained that the best qualifications for office became ignorance and rustic rudeness. A policy which especially annoyed the Opposition was what they conceived to be the Agrarians' exploitation for political purposes of the unpopularity of the Liberal leaders of the World War I era. The Government not only prosecuted many of ex-Tsar Ferdinand's clique, which had allied Bulgaria with the Central Powers, but even held a referendum to determine whether politicians responsible for the anti-Turkish Balkan Alliance of 1912 should be indicted for their mistakes. This procedure was endorsed by the electorate, but not, one may suppose, without more or less illicit government pressure. Despite the excesses and brutalities of their regime, the Agrarians never formally suppressed the Constitution. Their traditional vision, indeed, had been of a social, rather than a constitutional change. Stamboliski, though he had opposed Ferdinand, and was accused of anti-monarchism, does not seem to have threat-

2. Kosta Todoroff, "The King and the Peasant," *Scribner's Magazine*, 83 (May 1928), 632.

3. J. D. Bouchier, "Alexander Stambolisky," *The Contemporary Review*, CXVIII (July-Dec., 1920), 787-788.

ened King Boris's position seriously<sup>4</sup>; and Boris, whatever tales may have gone abroad amongst the peasantry, seemed to adapt himself to the "Peasant" Government. It would not have been, in any event, "the dictatorship of the peasantry" about which the Agrarians sometimes declaimed, but, rather, domination of the State by a left-wing Agrarian clique which had neither the unanimous nor the organized support of the peasantry.

But these successors of the village apostles of the previous decade could be idealistic and even constructive, as well as vindictive and destructive. They instituted a four-point programme of reform and reconstruction: (1) State aid to peasants and expropriation, with compensation, of the few remaining large Crown, Church, and private estates; (2) legislation levying income and profits taxes; (3) legislation for compulsory labour, the main goals of which were mitigation of a manpower shortage and inculcation of the social discipline previously given youth by military conscription<sup>5</sup>; (4) a conciliatory foreign policy.

In 1915, Stamboliski favoured the Serbs, rather than the Austrians, and defined his attitude as "Yugoslav". He dreamed of combining the South Slav lands in a union which would include Bulgaria, and which would be a Peasant State, with Green Peasant International as its model. He urged that defeated Bulgaria conciliate her neighbours—especially Yugoslavia. The *sine qua non* of such a policy was the elimination of comitadji border raiding based on Bulgarian territory. "Imro" (International Macedonian Revolutionary Organization), the implacable group which had championed the cause of Macedonian independence from the Turks, was revived shortly after World War I, and soon resembled an independent government on Bulgarian soil, with the Petritch region as its domain. The Nish agreement with the Yugoslavs, in 1923, bound Stamboliski to attack "Imro". But the revolutionaries proved capable, at that epoch, of shaking the ground beneath any Bulgarian Government which dared challenge them.

The Agrarian "revolution" proved abortive. The purging of all but Agrarian elements from the Government<sup>6</sup>; the attacks, legislative, economic, and social, as well as political, upon the more substantial social strata; the Government's plain intention

4. Hugh Seton-Watson, "The Social Background in Balkan Politics," *Politica* No. 16, 4 (June, 1939), 149.

5. Pitirim A. Sorokin, Carle C. Zimmerman, Charles J. Galpin (Eds.), *A Systematic Source Book in Rural Sociology*, II, 644. (Excerpt from A. Omelianov, "A Bulgarian Experiment," *Peasant Russia*, V-VI (1923), 124-138.

6. Constantin Stephanov, "Bulgaria's Solution of Post-war Problems," *Current History*, 34 (August, 1931), 707.

to rule, not merely in the interests of one class, but to the detriment of other classes; the increasingly ruthless and unconstitutional political methods which betokened a dictatorship responsible, not to the *Sobranje*, but to the Council of the Agrarian Party<sup>7</sup>; and, particularly, the challenge to "Imro":—all this crystallized covert opposition. By the end of 1922, the Democrats, Radicals, Progressives, and, especially, the People's Party (Narodnyatsi) were aligned against the Government. It is probable, however, that the Socialists, provoked by the Agrarian extremists, played a leading part in this confederacy; although, previously, the circumstances of common political foes, if nothing else, had associated them, potentially, at least, with the Government moderates<sup>8</sup>.

The Agrarian regime knew, doubtless, that it sat on a volcano. It had formed, indeed, an "Orange Guard" of peasants. But, when "Imro" bravos occupied Kustendil in western Bulgaria, Stamboliski was helpless. The Bulgarian Army was not yet ready to abandon its traditional cause, the liberation of Macedonia. In March, 1923, the Agrarian-packed *Sobranje*, by altering the system of proportional representation, assured a Government victory in the April elections. The Opposition had no resort but force, and no scruples about using it. The *coup d'état* of June 6th, precipitated by a group of intellectuals and army officers, re-established the pre-war rule of the "bourgeois" parties, now merged in the Democratic Entente, which was not democratic at all, and which stayed in power for eight years, the longest tenure in Bulgarian history<sup>9</sup>. There was no real resistance to the coup, though Stamboliski was killed. The peasants were apathetic. Stamboliski had always neglected his opportunity to coalesce with the Socialists and the Communists, and now the one turned against him, and the other acquiesced in his fate.

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But the Communists were a powerful force in Bulgaria, after 1918, and they proved a serious threat to the Democratic Entente. They were not particularly numerous, but they were the most aggressive and best organized party in the country, and, as is usual with their fraternity, they were filled with a missionary zeal. They were, usually, intelligent and well informed—indeed, they created much of Bulgaria's intellectual life. Sensibly, they provided a "clubby" atmosphere for their

7. Sorokin (Ed.), *op. cit.*, 645-646.

8. T. Tchitchovsky, *Socialism in Bulgaria*, 24.

9. Stephanove, *op. cit.*, 707.

members. There were many peasant converts, some disillusioned by the Agrarians' performance, but all attracted by the Communist organizer's initiative in coming down into the village and by his vaguely eloquent talk of more prosperity and a better life. Had he orated about collectivism, he would have had short shrift with the individualistic peasant, who had so dearly won, and now so tenaciously clung to his tiny holding.

Especially after the June coup, Moscow energetically directed and subsidized Bulgarian Communism. For the Third International conceived Bulgaria as its bridge into the green pastures of anguished, war-torn Europe. Alarmed by the Bulgarian Communists' inertia in the face of the Agrarian defeat, Moscow despatched Kolaroff, a Bulgarian then heading the Secretariat of the Third International, to "retrieve the situation"<sup>10</sup>. Recalcitrant Agrarians and Communists joined forces. But these confederates bungled a rising in the north of Bulgaria which the urban Communists shunned, and it was Communist heads which rolled in surprising quantities. As always, the "Reds" fought stubbornly. Dimitroff, later to endear himself by publicly bearding Goering, replaced Kolaroff, and an ugly, guerrilla sort of civil war flickered for two years. Once again, countless atrocity stories issued from that blood-soaked, patient land. Tsankoff, Stamboliski's successor in the premiership, judged correctly that peasant converts to Communism were more swayed by sentimental attachment to Russia than by Marxian ideology. But his Government misinterpreted both human and Bulgarian nature in supposing that brutality was the only means of eliminating opposition. Communist and Agrarian intrigues continued until the "Reds" overreached themselves by the notorious bombing of the Sofia Cathedral in April, 1925, which was blown up along with some 150 innocent bystanders. Boris and the Government leaders escaped, and the attempted insurrection miscarried. The Tsankoffists immediately intensified their terror, and the Communist Party was dissolved. For the moment the "Reds" were discredited. Many moderate Agrarians, as well as the general public, had had a surfeit of malcontent disturbances. The moderate and left-wing Agrarians now split.<sup>11</sup> It became clear to the Government, on the other hand, that the danger of allowing a few Communists to live might not be so great as to deny a nation, weary unto death of chaos and bloodshed, a period of peace.

10. Tchitchovsky, *op. cit.*, 25.

11. Nadejda Stancioff Muir, "Recent Events in Bulgaria," *The Contemporary Review*, 127 (1925), 724.

By the end of 1925, the public discontent entailed a reorganization of the Entente. The relatively liberal Democrats were the logical choice for fuller representation in the cabinet. In January, 1926, Andrei Liaptcheff, a Macedonian and a Democrat, replaced Tsankoff. The thorniest of Liaptcheff's difficulties were the Macedonian question and relations with Yugoslavia. Abetted by the Entente's laissez-faire attitude, "Imro" vigorously conducted its "operations",—bombings, raids, and killings, with special attention to Serbian Macedonia. The Yugoslavs aggravated the situation by sheltering some 2,000 refugees from the Entente regime, including such friends of Stamboliski as the doughty Kosta Todoroff. The Communist agents, Kolaroff and Dimitroff, intrigued vigorously amidst this material. Communist intervention, furthermore, vitally affected the Macedonian Revolution. Two factions had developed. The Communist Federalists advocated autonomy within a South Slav Federation. The Autonomists wanted Macedonia's independence, or autonomy under Bulgarian protection. The murder of Protogueroff, the Federalist leader, in July, 1928, brought to a climax factional strife so uninhibited that killings in the streets of Sofia had become common place. What started as a movement for liberation from the Turks, had deteriorated to the level of meaningless personal squabbles. The Bulgarian people might have dealt, once and for all, with "Imro". But the Government did not heed the popular mood. Mihailoff, the Autonomist leader, ultimately gained the upper hand, the disturbances died down, and what, from the average Bulgarian's point of view, were the more unprepossessing aspects of the movement were no longer so conspicuous.

Relative political stability permitted the Entente some success in alleviating internal difficulties. Of several hundred thousand refugees, who had fled to Bulgaria, victims of Serbization and Hellenization despite the treaty guarantees of minority rights, some 100,000 were settled in comparative security; and the genuine Bulgarian inclination for social idealism was indulged with social legislation described as "ideal for many more modern and more cultural states than Bulgaria."<sup>12</sup> But the most patent social benefit to develop in the first post-war decade was, typically, educational progress. By 1930, Bulgaria could boast substantially as many men with secondary and university education as some of the countries in western Europe.<sup>13</sup>

12. T. Tchitchovsky, "Political and Social Aspects of Modern Bulgaria," *Slavic Review*, 8 (1929-30), 176-177.

13. *Ibid.*, 182.

The Liaptcheff Government found favour with urban professional, business, and intellectual circles—the complacent, secure sections of society, which constituted about one-fifth of the population. Two factors particularly facilitated this minority's control of the country—the support of "Imro" and of the military who, at the outset, dominated the Entente; and the confusion of the peasants, among whom the gentler spirits had been alienated by the Agrarian excesses. The more dynamic forces, such as the Communists and Agrarians, were exhausted or disorganized, and the Socialists, who had withdrawn from their anomalous participation in the "bourgeois" Entente and had, in the end, opposed Tsankoff, were now weakened by a party split. But the moderate and reactionary "bourgeois" groups gradually united in opposition to Liaptcheff. The Democrats and Radicals were the chief deserters, and Malinoff was the leading personality. By 1931, he was willing to co-operate for election purposes with such Agrarians as Stamboliski's old rival for leadership, Blagoeff, and another factional chief, Tomoff, who, more plodding in spirit than the violent Belgrade expatriates, had adapted themselves to the times and secured followings among moderates willing to work for a sober revival of party fortunes by peaceful means within the law. Though King Boris entrusted the supervision of the 1931 election to Liaptcheff, the political balance had shifted, and his Government could not be prolonged. Even the National Liberals joined the Democrats, Radicals, and moderate Agrarians in the National Bloc, which overthrew the government. The Entente had doubtless been guilty of the characteristic corruption and violence of a Balkan government, and there was the usual popular distrust of those who had held office for a time. But this realignment of parties must be attributed chiefly to the pressure of the "outs" manoeuvring for their share of the political spoils. Professional politicians, out of touch with the peasants and incapable of a serious tussle with their country's problems, were still maintained in power by the successive National Bloc Governments of Malinoff and Mushanoff.

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The Bulgarian is unique, perhaps pathetic, in his passion for book-learning, *per se*, and the relatively large number of educated Bulgarians who find their only prospect of advancement in politics has contributed to the excessive partisanship which has always marred Bulgarian politics. In the early



1930's, some fifteen different factions, with loyalty to personalities rather than principles as their *raison d'être*, had their hats in the political ring. A variety of circumstances combined with this typical condition to produce such futility that the army was once more persuaded to render itself a factor in the political equation. The regeneration of the Agrarians and Communists, "Imro's" increased unity and potency, the emergence of Fascism, represented by ex-Premier Tsankoff's clique, and Bulgaria's share of the world depression, all contributed to the crisis. What vitality the "bourgeois" regime might have had in this situation was vitiated by the discordant character of the coalition which had displaced the Democratic Entente. For the National Bloc included not only the Entente's most repugnant components, but also moderate Agrarians, who must have felt awkward in that "bourgeois" company.

The most dynamic of various more or less militaristic organizations were the League of Reserve Officers and the Zveno Club. Under Colonels Velteheff, Gheorgieff, and Volkoff, the League had been one of the chief cogs in the army's support of the 1923 *coup d'état*. This "Captains' League" (the bulk of its membership had low rank), was dissolved in 1927, and subsequently revived, with more deliberately political aims, by Velteheff. In 1932, it formally remonstrated to Premier Mushanoff, remarking upon the "Red" peril and the chaotic state of Bulgarian politics, with the warning "that the army did not wish to see itself obliged to intervene afresh to save the country from anarchy".<sup>14</sup> Zveno was a more hybrid group, its membership including former cabinet ministers and unemployed politicians, as well as army officers. Velteheff was the guiding spirit of the combine which seized power by a *coup d'état* in May, 1934, although Zveno's leader, Gheorgieff, became Premier.

The group which thus usurped the government had an aura of pious reform about it. This was in harmony with the country's genuine disillusionment with party politics, and the coup seemed not altogether unpopular. The Gheorgieff Cabinet was able to dispense with any constitutional trappings without provoking formidable opposition. The *Sobranje* was dissolved. Political parties were abolished. Article 47 of the Constitution, which sanctioned government by royal decree for one year in emergencies, was invoked. Economic and admin-

14. Joseph S. Roucek, *The Politics of the Balkans*, 128.

istrative measures, such as a moratorium on debts, and reduction in the number of the country's administrative units, gave promise of a "New Deal". Many of the elements which supported the government had "authoritarian" ideas; and there were plans, which did not get beyond the paper stage, for a corporative state. The most dramatic move was the army's occupation of Petritch and suppression of "Imro", accomplished with surprising ease.

Though this "Military Dictatorship" was thought to be a greater danger to the royal power than Stamboliski had been, Boris seems ultimately to have manoeuvred the militarists into disagreement amongst themselves as to just what rôle the Crown should play in Bulgaria. Veltcheff and the army extremists, probably a minority, favoured a "republic" under military control and, doubtless, embellished with some sort of corporative organization. This faction suffered a reverse, early in 1935, when the Gheorgieff Cabinet fell. Its war minister, General Zlateff, formed a more royalist Government. The army, moreover, was soon bored with politics, and the dictatorship grew unpopular when it did not much improve upon Bulgaria's domestic mess. Political corruption and the economic crisis continued,<sup>15</sup> and the League of Nations Financial Committee condemned the Gheorgieff Government's finances. The military could offer the peasantry nothing but "political discipline", which meant, on the one hand, loss of constitutional government and civil liberties; and, on the other, fancy theories about a corporative state in a country where there could scarcely be more than one big corporation of peasants.

Boris is thought to have fashioned his own neat pattern from the tangle. Zlateff's resignation and the army's retirement from active politics into an attitude of "watchful waiting" indicated the failure of the anti-monarchists, now led by Colonel Koleff. The discovery of Veltcheff's plot for another *coup d'état* enabled the King to crush both Zveno and the League, which was dissolved on March 3, 1936. By then, the Bulgarian Army, encouraged by Germany's flouting of the Versailles Treaty, was becoming preoccupied with war preparations.

Boris's influence now became predominant in Bulgarian politics, and in November, 1935, his friend, M. Kiosseivanoff, took office. Just as a long tenure had facilitated Liaptcheff's domestic achievements, the five years of Kiosseivanoff's incumbency were to be the most fruitful, in internal improvements,

15. Jaime Menendez, "The Story of Bulgaria," *The Living Age*, 348 (1935), 501.

of the interval between the two World Wars. If it was a more absolute monarchy than at any time since Ferdinand's abdication, it was also a relatively benevolent one. Much modern agricultural machinery was introduced, and the Government's educational reforms emphasized, significantly, training designed to produce better rather than more dissatisfied peasants. Unfortunately, the economic recovery which increased the Government's popularity was due, largely, to increasingly intimate economic relations with Nazi Germany.<sup>16</sup>

There was no return to "normalcy", if by that is meant the old system of "bourgeois" party politics. But Boris is credited with a desire to turn back towards parliamentary government. The army's bias against political parties engendered caution, and the royal manifesto of April 21, 1935, promised "no going back". But it pledged, too, the drafting, of a new Constitution "which would satisfy the popular desire for some form of representative Government".<sup>17</sup> The course of events indicated a cautious probing for such a *modus vivendi*. In October, 1937, the first Sobranje election since Veltcheff's coup was decreed. The electoral system underwent elaborate refitting for this event. The number of electoral districts was greatly reduced, and the suffrage was extended to all men over twenty-one and all women who had ever been married. Deputyship was meticulously fenced around with varied qualifications: deputies must not be or have been traitors, criminals, or state servants,—and they must not have been "sentenced because of their activities on behalf of the dissolved parties".<sup>18</sup> But the candidacy of old party members was permitted.<sup>19</sup> The ensuing election of March, 1938, was curious. Though parties were still banned, 3,000 candidates, many of them former politicians, entered the lists and clandestine party intrigue was inevitable. It was estimated that of 160 deputies elected, 56 opposed the Government despite terror which was alleged to have been severe—even for a Bulgarian election. Subsequently, a servile Sobranje approved, in exactly four days, the 138 decrees enacted during the four years of emergency rule under Article 47. The new Sobranje, owing to the prohibition of party activity, was, substantially, a collection of local personages of no previous political standing. Parliamentary

16. John C. Wilde, "German Trade Drive in Southeastern Europe," *Foreign Policy Reports*, 12 (November 15, 1936), No. 17, 219.

17. Royal Institute of International Affairs, *South-Eastern Europe*, 104.

18. Roucek, *op. cit.*, 134.

19. N. Pentcheff, "Political Developments in Bulgaria," *The Contemporary Review*, 153 (1938), 709.

debates demonstrated that the National Bloc still existed, through attenuated, and that old party loyalties, which had survived the years of outlawry, had a vitality which the Government could not ignore. Reinstatement of the parties would have risked resumption of the competition which had stultified politics. But the royalist regime did make the gesture of holding conferences with Opposition leaders at strategic moments. As the Sobranje's function was now largely advisory, most of the old party leaders shunned parliament, rather than humiliate themselves by speech-making in a political vacuum. They considered that they could influence affairs only through persuasion in direct conference with the King and his Government. Many veterans of the political wars, such as Kosta Todoroff, remained suspicious and unreconciled.<sup>20</sup>

In the first year of Kiosseivanoff's premiership, two Fascist movements were significant. Tsankoff's development as a Fascist of a sort has been noted. Professor Kantardjiev, also, led an organization, the Ratnizi, emphasizing nationalism, anti-Semitism, and authoritarianism. Fascism, like Communism, might have appeal for all sorts of folk. In Bulgaria, as elsewhere, its clientele came particularly from relatively educated and privileged people. The Bulgarian peasant, though he might, in his simplicity, be inveigled into an enthusiasm based upon misunderstanding, has no taste for either Fascism or Communism—in the doctrinaire sense. He, whose every lesson from Turk or "bourgeois" politician had taught him to wish less, not more government, could scarcely aspire to a Super State. Anti-Semitism, at least prior to 1939, and the rest of the jargon, struck no chord within him. His attitude was succinct. "The Communist will take your cow; the Nazi will leave you the cow and take the milk."<sup>21</sup> The King, moreover, could expect to become a figure-head in a Fascist dictatorship. On October 10, 1936, the royalist semi-dictatorship closed the Tsankoffist headquarters, while Kantardjiev's party was dissolved on two different occasions. But the royalists had the discretion to admit Tsankoffists to most of the Kiosseivanoff Cabinets from 1935 to 1940.

After the outbreak of war, Boris seems to have remained dominant. The Government continued to resist Fascist, Communist, or militarist encroachment upon its domain. While one cannot yet judge the course of events preceding the

20. "Bulgaria's New Fascists," *Great Britain and the East*, XLIX (July 22, 1937), No. 1365, 137.

21. Stoyan Pribichevich, *Spotlight on the Balkans*, 59.

occupation, there is no reason to doubt that Bulgaria's rulers and her people wanted just what they said they did—peace and neutrality. Certainly there was no eager rush into the Nazi fold. The Germans, with all their propaganda, could evoke none of that sentiment with which the "Big Slav Brother" still attracts the Bulgarian peasant. Feelings were mixed. The Bulgarians were stubborn in their wish to avoid errors of the past; the disillusionment of the peasantry, never Germanophile, had been genuine in 1918. But they were stubborn, too, in their wish to set right what they considered the wrongs of the past. It would have been a greater miracle than the miracle of Yugoslavia had the bitterly revisionist Bulgarians fought a "shooting war" against the Nazi onrush.

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In the Balkans, competition for political position is particularly personal and direct, elemental and gladiatorial, as the combatants' interest is, perhaps more than elsewhere, in each other, rather than in the "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" of the audience. Frequently, as when Tsankoff and Gheorgieff seized power, the victors do not bother about the formality of securing the approval of the populace. Habit partially accounts for the Balkan politician's excessive irresponsibility. This has been the Balkan way for a very long time now. That picturesque, comic opera quality of the Balkans, popularized by Rupert of Hentzau, is reminiscent of an unreality which does discredit to these governments. The military interventions, the myriads of vague, bickering parties, that murky atmosphere of mystery, plot, and enigma which leaves one wondering in uncomprehending dismay what it all has to do with some millions of peasants—all these anomalies are the Balkan way. Such ways change slowly.

The change is hindered when the folly is committed of putting any old society into the strait-jacket of any old political design. Bulgaria provides an object-lesson for those high priests of republicanism who happily mouth about the indiscriminate spreading of "democracy" to the four corners of the earth. What is this "democracy"? Is it the American Constitution? Is it British parliamentary responsibility? The Trnovo Constitution! Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha! What a patchwork quilt of a government to saddle upon 5,000,000 Christian peasants whose political instincts were largely derived from the Sublime Porte! We do no service to these alien lands to hold up solemnly our systems, as if they were magic prescriptions which would work themselves. One might almost as well

expect the political philosophy of the Jerusalem Assizes to solve the problems of the American colonists of 1776, as require the Bulgarian peasants to fit themselves into the American formulae of that date. In time, these peasant lands may reflect some new aspect of democracy. It may be a truer, and it may be a more distorted, reflection than our own. But we may be sure that it will not be the same. For the present, we may jolt our smugness with the reflection that if their political erring is crasser than that of the West, it is also more forthright, less camouflaged, and not, perhaps, more immoral than our own.

Many waves of history have left a relatively simple deposit in Bulgaria. For five hundred years, Ottoman military and Greek spiritual rule ground the population—and they ground exceedingly fine. For, of all the Balkan regions, geography peculiarly exposed Bulgaria to the twin evil. What was left in the nineteenth century was the *rayah*—the indestructible peasant, a Slav who called himself “Bulgarian”. The expression of his will is the crucial problem of Bulgarian politics. It is yet unsolved.

But, perhaps, it is not mere rationalization to discern evidence in this little segment of Bulgarian history of a stirring, a questioning among the peasants. Their deepest instincts are associated, not with “alarums and excursions”, atrocities and massacres, but with their homes, their families, and their soil. Such simple, and, in Bulgaria, puritanical folk must, in time, require more decent, conscientious government. Are there not signs of better things to come? In 1918, the simple peasants of the army rank and file made it plain that they had become more interested in their harvests than in bloodshed. It was an event when only a government which fiercely proclaimed the preeminence of the peasants could appropriate power. The Agrarian Party betrayed its cause by immaturity, as it hit out wildly at everything. But Alexander Stamboliski, that tense, strange man, had the magic of leadership. Perhaps his blindness, cruelty, and fanaticism had some kernel of greatness, since he could give the peasants a dream and a memory. They have long memories, those Bulgarian peasants. Do they not dream of Simeon the Great, as though he had lived yesterday, and ardently dispute with the Serbs the nationality of Stefan Dusan? Time is unimportant in the Balkans; it serves merely to demonstrate the mortality of a Turkish or a Nazi Empire. The peasants do not forget Stamboliski. They make their legends, and weave their songs, and his picture stands in the village huts.