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# The Anarchist-Communist Mass Line

**Bulgarian Anarchism Armed**

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August 24, 2008

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Michael Schmidt is from ZACF (South Africa). Written with the assistance of veteran Bulgarian anarchist Jack Grancharoff and kindly proof-read by Will Firth.

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ation (KACF) of 1929–1945 and the post-war Uruguayan Anarchist Federation (FAU) of 1956–1976. But key KACF militants joined the Korean provisional government in 1940, and the FAU fell into insurgency, flirting with Guevarist adventurism in the early 1970s, before finally clearing its head of the Marxist fog and embracing especifismo (the Latin American form of specific organisation which is often close to platformism) in 1985. So it seems fair to say that the FAKB takes the honours as one of the best-organised and enduring of all anarchist-communist organisations, even if its current incarnation as the FAB is (of necessity, perhaps, for a rebuilding movement) synthesist. What role did the FAKB and its sister organisations play in laying the social groundwork for the remarkable historical feat of the refusal of Bulgaria's people to allow the deportation of their Jewish neighbours, resulting in the rescue of every single one of Bulgaria's 48,000 Jews during the war? These facets have yet to be explored: the Bulgarian movement clearly needs further intensive study, but it would appear that few movements have had such a tough history. And that few have met the challenge so brilliantly.

## Source

*The Bulgarian Anarchist Movement*, Jack Grancharoff, unpublished manuscript kindly written especially for the ZACF, Quamaa, Australia, 2006. This document provides the connecting tissue for what was otherwise an intriguing, yet obscure movement.

society with a phalanx of interlinked professional, worker, student and even guerrilla organs. It even managed to bridge the urban-rural divide by organising the peasantry along syndicalist lines that were uniquely their own. This was above all a social movement – but one that had significant ideological clarity to fend off the lure of Bolshevism, and one that was organised, and able to defend itself by force of arms.

That clarity came, I suggest, by the FAKB’s adherence to the platformist concept of the specific organisation working – as the Makhnovist’s had – within a broad front of revolutionary libertarian socialist social forces. By doing so, the FAKB was not merely orienting itself geographically eastwards towards neighbouring insurgent Ukraine with its flexible, plural approach towards the revolution, rather than westwards towards the Bolshevik-compromised anarchist movements of Czechoslovakia and Hungary, but politically towards the task of grabbing the bull by the horns and taking up the necessary tools to build tomorrow’s society today. It seems the Platform served the FAKB specifically, but the movement in general, very well given the challenges of fascist corporatism, guerrilla war, fascist-Stalinist rule, and some 40 years of productive exile. And despite the slander of sectarianism often thrown at platformist organisations by synthesists, the FAKB, as shown by its 1945 Platform was a staunch supporter of the anarcho-syndicalist International Workers’ Association (IWA) – founded in Berlin in 1922 representing some 2 million workers – and so was its descendant, the FAB, so the anarchist-communists clearly never relinquished the mass line, regardless of either repression or their own adoption of defensive guerrilla war.

Other than the Makhnovist Revolutionary Insurgent Army of the Ukraine (RIAU) itself, which peaked at 500,000 members, the closest corresponding mass anarchist-communist organisation to my mind that combined such a range of worker, peasant, student, intellectual and social formations including guerrilla forces were those of the pre-war/wartime Korean Anarchist Communist Feder-

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both syndicalist unions and mainstream unions, arguing their positions, defending the immediate interests of the class and learning how to control production in preparation for the social revolution. Militants also participated directly in co-operatives, “bringing to them the spirit of solidarity and of mutual aid against the spirit of the party and bureaucracy” – and in cultural and special-interest organisations which support the anarchist communist idea and the syndicalist organisations. All such organisations related to each other on the basis of “reciprocal dependence” and “ideological communality”.

## **Lessons from the Bulgarian Experience**

I would argue that here we have a movement that started out looking quite similar to many of its contemporaries, particularly in colonised territories: small propaganda cells of anarchist militants establishing underground presses and raising the temperature of the class struggle. The parallels with the early movements of Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary are of course there, but the Bulgarians in particular parted ways quite early on from those trajectories by throwing themselves directly into the Macedonian liberation war of 1903. For all the criticisms levelled at these anarchist guerrillas – and the strategy of launching a largely rural war without a peasant organisational base, relying instead on the vagaries of peasant sympathies, is one of the strongest – this baptism of fire not only hardened the Bulgarians for the struggles to come, but in real terms precipitated the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. In less than ideal conditions of almost continual war from 1911–1918, followed by the hammer-blows of two successful fascist coups in 1923 and 1934, the Bulgarian anarchist movement built itself into a formidable force, the third-largest on the left, using worker disenchantment with agrarian and communist reformism to build a plethora of urban syndicalist unions, then penetrating all layers of

It is above all necessary for the partisans of anarchist communism to be organised in an anarchist communist ideological organisation. The tasks of these organisations are: to develop, realise and spread anarchist communist ideas; to study the vital present-day questions affecting the daily lives of the working masses and the problems of the social reconstruction; the multifaceted struggle for the defence of our social ideal and the cause of working people; to participate in the creation of groups of workers on the level of production, profession, exchange and consumption, culture and education, and all other organisations that can be useful in the preparation for the social reconstruction; armed participation in every revolutionary insurrection; the preparation for and organisation of these events; the use of every means which can bring on the social revolution. Anarchist communist ideological organisations are absolutely indispensable in the full realisation of anarchist communism both before the revolution and after.

Such anarchist communist organisations were to be federated across a given territory, “co-ordinated by the federal secretariat” – but the “local organisation” remained the basic policy-making unit and both local and federal secretariats were “merely liaison and executive bodies with no power” beyond executing the decisions of the locals or federation of locals. The FAKB Platform emphasised the ideological unity of such organisations, stating that only convinced anarchist communists could be members, and that decision-making must be by consensus achieved by both persuasion and practical demonstration – not by majority vote (the latter being the method applicable to syndicalist and other forms of organisation, with allowances made for dissenting minorities). Anarchist communist militants, so organised, participated directly in

## Preface

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, anarchism entrenched itself as a mass organisational movement in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland – anarchists having already been active in the 1873 uprisings in Bosnia and Herzegovina against Austro-Hungarian control. But it was primarily in Bulgaria and its neighbour Macedonia that a remarkable case of anarchist organising arose, in the midst of the power-play between the great powers. This poorly-studied movement not only blooded itself in national liberation struggles and armed opposition to both fascism and Stalinism, but developed a notably diverse and resilient mass movement, the first to adopt the controversial 1926 Platform of the Ukrainian Makhnovist exiles in Paris<sup>1</sup> as its lodestone. For these reasons it is vital that the revived anarchist-communist movement in the new millennium re-examine the legacy of the Balkans. This article, which begins mid-stream in 1919, is a version of an extract from the two-volume work on anarchism & syndicalism, *Counter-Power*, co-written by Lucien van der Walt, a global history and theory of the movement, which is due to be published in book form by AK Press in the USA in 2008.

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<sup>1</sup> The Organisational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists (Draft), Nestor Makhno, Ida Mett and others of the Workers’ Cause exile group in Paris, France, 1926. This key anarchist-communist text reaffirms the historical majority tendency – of the mass-organisational line, which includes “political” (ideological), “social” (community) and syndicalist (union) organising – against both the adventurism of the minority insurgent line, and anti-anarchist individualist posturing. It can be found among the documents in the extensive Nestor Makhno Archive online at: [www.nestormakhno.info/](http://www.nestormakhno.info/). It is also downloadable from the Zabalaza Books website as a fully laid out pamphlet.

## The Federation of Anarchist Communists of Bulgaria (FAKB)

In the hot year of 1919, at the height of the global worker's revolt against capitalism, Bulgarian anarcho-syndicalists (the first groups having been established in 1910) and the core of the old Macedonian-Bulgarian Anarchist Federation (a nucleus of which had been founded in 1909) called for the movement to reorganise. The Federation of Anarchist Communists of Bulgaria (FAKB) was founded at a congress opened by the anarchist guerrilla Mikhail Gerdzhikov (1877–1947), a founder of the Macedonian Clandestine Revolutionary Committee (MTRK) in 1898 and commander of its Leading Combat Body during the 1903 Macedonian Revolt. His forces, only about 2,000 strong and armed with antique rifles, managed to defeat a Turkish garrison of 10,000 well-armed troops, setting up a liberated zone in the Strandzha Mountains of Thrace, centred on the Commune of Tsarevo (Vassiliko) – an action that was a key factor in the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The FAKB founding congress was attended by 150 delegates – not counting those representing underground organs. The FAKB was organised as a clandestine federation of four regional anarchist-communist “unions” sub-divided into study groups, syndicalist groups and combat groups. Its membership was restricted to militants only, but its public activity included propaganda tours of all cities and villages. The FAKB suspended the revived post-war *Rabotnicheska Misl* (Worker's Thought) and assigned the honour of its mouth-piece to Gerdzhikov's *Probuda* (Awakening), but also decided that each affiliate could run its own press. According to Grancharoff:

Anarchism succeeded in becoming a popular movement and it penetrated many layers of society from workers, youth and students to teachers and public servants. The underground illegal activities of the movement continued.

tants such as Nikola Mladenov Totorov, and the revived Federation of Anarchist Youth (FAM).<sup>9</sup>

## The Legacy of Bulgarian Platformism

On the plane of theory, I would argue that a long-neglected Bulgarian document should be regarded as another cornerstone of the platformist tradition after the Platform itself: the 1945 Platform of the Federation of Anarchist Communists of Bulgaria.<sup>10</sup> Only recently translated into English, this Platform repudiated fascism, democracy, the state and capital, and reaffirmed an anarchist communist mass line of the total eradication of private property and the full socialisation of the means of production under working class control. The FAKB Platform went on to deal with the crucial issues of tactics and organisation, rejecting the form of the political party as “sterile and ineffective, unable to respond to the goals and the immediate tasks and to the interests of the workers,” but speaking in favour of “the true strength of the workers”, “the economy and their economic organisations. Only there lies the terrain where capitalism can be undermined. Only there lies the true class struggle.” On organisation, the FAKB stated that several types of working class organisation were indispensable and intertwined without subordination: anarchist communist ideological organisations; worker syndicates; agricultural worker syndicates; co-operatives; and cultural and special-interest organisations, for instance for youth and women. Of these, the FAKB Platform noted that:

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<sup>9</sup> References to these organisations can be found under their relevant country entry at the reasonably accurate Broadleft web-portal: [www.broadleft.org/](http://www.broadleft.org/)

<sup>10</sup> Platform of the Federation of Anarchist Communists of Bulgaria, *Federatsia na Anarkho Komunistite ot Balgaria*, 1945, English translation by Nestor McNab, FdCA, Italy, 2006. This excellent mass-organisational position statement deserves, in the author's view, to take pride of place in the platformist theoretical pantheon.

print-workers; two journalists including Georgi Dimitroff Kurtov (Karamikaylov), the often-detained editor of *Rabotnicheska Misa*; a librarian; and several others whose occupations are not given. The youngest whose age was given was 21, presumably politicised under fascism, and the oldest 49, the tobacco worker Manol Vassev Nicolov, who had initiated *Vlassovden* syndicalism in 1930. Most had been imprisoned or even sentenced to death by the fascists, three were former guerrilla fighters, and one had been involved in a military conspiracy against the fascists. As Grancharoff says:

The dark veil of communism used to entomb anarchism was also the same that buried ... genuine communism and all revolutionary hopes for the emancipation and liberation of the downtrodden.

While a dedicated anarchist underground run by militants like Nakov kept operating well into the 1980s, many Bulgarian anarchists such as the key militant Georgi Grigoriev fled into exile in France – where exile formations of the FAKB were established, as well as an umbrella Bulgarian Libertarian Union (BLU) which embraced all anarchist tendencies from that country. Grigoriev, who wrote a history of the Bulgarian anarchist movement and a study of the interplay between national liberation and social revolution in the Balkans, would play a key role in re-establishing the BLU as the synthesist Federation of Bulgarian Anarchists (FAB) after the collapse of communist rule in 1989 and in ensuring its adherence to the International of Anarchist Federations. In 2008, the FAB still publishes its newspaper *Svobodna Misl* (Free Thought) as a monthly. Today, other anarchist organisations in Bulgaria include the Anarchist Front (AF), the Autonomous Anarchist Group “Anarchoresistance” (ABDA) with its paper *Anarkhosprotiva* (Anarchoresistance), the anarcho-syndicalist Bulgarian Confederation of Labour (BKT) which is an IWA section, founded in 1991 by mili-

Thus the FAKB helped found, and worked alongside, organisations like the Bulgarian Federation of Anarchist Students (BONSF), as well as a federation of anarchist artists, writers, intellectuals, doctors and engineers, and the Federation of Anarchist Youth (FAM) which had branches in towns and villages and all the bigger schools. So it can be seen that the FAKB consisted of syndicalist, guerrilla, professional and youth sections which diversified themselves throughout Bulgarian society. During the 1919/1920 transport strike, the anarchists planned to arm the workers, but the strike was betrayed by the leftist political parties and savagely crushed, with Probuda banned. A key FAKB militant was Georgi Sheytanov (1896–1925),<sup>2</sup> called Sheitanoff by Grancharoff, who hailed from the eastern city of Yambol, became an anarchist as a teenager and was forced to flee into exile in France at the age of 17 after having escaped from the prison where he had been placed for burning the records of the local courthouse. Sheytanov returned to Bulgaria to carry on clandestine anarchist agitation in 1914, but was arrested and tortured, but escaped again, travelling to Moscow where he witnessed the 1917 revolution first-hand, and returning to Bulgaria in 1918 after having escaped a White firing squad in the Ukraine. In Bulgaria, Sheytanov became involved with the anarchist movement again and issued a famous Appeal to the Anarchists, and a Manifesto to Revolutionaries, an anarchist critique of Bolshevism.

In 1920, the social-democratic Bulgarian Agrarian Union (BZS) under Aleksandar Stamboliyski became Bulgaria’s first socialist government, within the framework of the constitutional monarchy of Tsar Boris III, creating conditions for widespread popular self-activity. But as with the Social Democratic Party’s “Noske Guards” in Germany, the BZS also established an “Orange Guard”

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<sup>2</sup> Gueorgui Cheitanov, 1896–1925, Nick Heath, Anarchist Federation, UK, undated, online at: [www.libcom.org/articles/history/1896-1925-gueorgui-sheytanov/index.php](http://www.libcom.org/articles/history/1896-1925-gueorgui-sheytanov/index.php)

as a strikebreaking force. The pro-Bulgarian right wing of the nationalist Internal Revolutionary Organisation of Macedonia (VMRO) rebuilt itself in 1920, and started agitating for the return of Macedonia to Bulgaria. The Bulgarian Communist Party (BKP), which had developed out of the Tesni social-democrat faction which approximated the Bolsheviks, rose swiftly to become one of the largest in Europe, but still adhered to reformist tactics and had seats in the Bulgarian parliament. After Produda was banned in 1920, it was replaced as the FAKB's mouthpiece by *The Anarchist*, of Kyustendil, a large town to the south-west of Sofia. Meanwhile, Sheytanov published *The Revolt* clandestinely and *Rabotnicheska Misl* reappeared first as a magazine, but then took the name of Gerdzhikov's old paper *Svobodno Obshtestvo* (Free Society). In 1921 at the age of 15, another key militant, Georgi Grigoriev (1906–1996)<sup>3</sup> joined the FAKB. He would later write the definitive anarchist history of what he called “the Macedonian Revolution”<sup>4</sup> under the pseudonym Georges Balkanski while in exile in Paris.

## The 1923 Fascist Coup & its Aftermath

In January 1923, the FAKB held its fifth annual congress – its first public, though still illegal, congress – in the city square at Yambol, attended by 104 delegates and 350 observers from 89 organisations, according to Grancharoff at page 5. The agenda included the internal and external situation, and the questions of organisation, the peasantry, internationalism, the transition period, the dictatorship of the proletariat, propaganda, co-operatives and syndicalism. Del-

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<sup>3</sup> Georgi Grigoriev, 1906–1996, (aka Georges Balkanski), Nick Heath, Anarchist Federation, UK, undated, online at [www.libcom.org/history/articles/1906-1996-georgi-grigoriev/index.php](http://www.libcom.org/history/articles/1906-1996-georgi-grigoriev/index.php)

<sup>4</sup> *Liberation Nationale et Liberation Sociale: l'Exemple de la Revolution Macedonienne*, Georges Balkanski (Georgi Grigoriev), Collection Anarchiste, Federation Anarchiste, Paris, France, undated. This book is the primary French-language anarchist analysis of the Macedonian national question.

all 90 delegates and put them into forced labour camps. This did not stop the organisation from producing an important anarchist-communist Platform. Anarchist locals were forcibly shut down and the revived FAKB organ *Rabotnicheska Misl* (Workers' Thought) was forced to suspend publication after only eight issues. It reappeared briefly during communist-rigged elections held in 1945 under American and British pressure, surging from a circulation of 7,000 to 60,000 before being banned again. The next annual congress of the FAKB in 1946 had to take place clandestinely. In 1946, the Zveno leader Georgiev was replaced by the communist Georgi Dimitrov, the Zveno and BZS factions within the Fatherland Front were dissolved, the monarchy was abolished and Bulgaria became a supposed “People's Republic”. The agrarians of the BZS refused to co-operate and in 1947 (the year of the anarchist veteran Gerdzhikov's death), the BZS leader Nikola Petkov was executed by the communists. In 1948, the last mass round-up of anarchists netted 600 militants who were sent to concentration camps such as Cuciyan (near Pernik, called by its inmates the “Caresses of Death”), Bogdanovol (called the “Camp of Shadows”), Nojarevo, Tadorovo and Bosna – and the BRP was merged with the Fatherland Front to transform it into an ersatz mass “communist” party claiming 460,000 members.

By that date, hundreds had been executed and about 1,000 FAKB members sent to concentration camps where the torture, ill treatment and starvation of veteran (but non-communist) anti-fascists – some of whom had fought fascism for almost 30 years – was almost routine. Anarchist prisoners were singled out and worked to death, being forced to work 36-hour shifts compared to the 12-16-hour shifts of other inmates. A partial list of 33 detained anarchists released that year by those working underground in Bulgaria is revealing in terms of its class composition: eleven school and university students; four urban anarcho-syndicalist workers including a technician; four teachers including a schools inspector; four rural workers (remnants of the Vlassovden syndicalist movement); three



fact, saved all of Bulgaria's Jews from deportation to the Nazi extermination camps. In Macedonia itself, a Communist Party of Macedonia (MCP) was only founded in 1943. The anarchist movement operated a powerful guerrilla force by the closing phases of the war in what was still mostly an agrarian society. The anarchist movement, which had fought a long guerrilla campaign against the fascists, grew rapidly and helped the Fatherland Front stage the successful insurrection of the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 1944 against the Nazi forces stationed in Bulgaria. Indeed, they were arguably strong enough to pose a serious alternative, but the strength of the Fatherland Front – consisting of the communist BRP, a faction of the socialist BZS and the military fascist Zveno movement – which had also fought as partisans against the Nazis, proved formidable. In late 1944, the BRP had only 15,000 members, but when the Red Army replaced the Germans as an occupying force, the Bulgarian communists took advantage of the situation, forming a Fatherland Front government headed by Zveno leader Kimon Georgiev, the army colonel who had staged the fascist coup a mere decade earlier in 1934. This Red/Orange/Brown alliance – what Grancharoff calls “the unity between National Socialism and communism” – immediately went to work to repress the anarchists, other political tendencies and the working class. Workers were forced to join a single state “trade union” – as before under Georgiev's rule, which was modelled on Mussolini's Italy – and piecework was introduced. Nevertheless, organisations such as the Southwest Bulgarian Anarchist Union and the Élisée Reclus Group in Pernik were formed by militants such as Nakov.

## The Stalinist Regime<sup>8</sup>

The FAKB called a congress at Knegevo, in the capital Sofia, in 1945 to discuss the repression, but communist militia arrested

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<sup>8</sup> Bulgaria: The New Spain

egates reported that the working class of Yambol itself, of Kyustendil and Radomir to the west of Sofia, of the central village of Nova Zagora and the southern city of Khaskovo, and of Kilifarevo and Delebets were almost wholly affiliated to the anarchist movement and that great progress was being made in Sofia, the southern city of Plovdiv, the Black Sea port of Burgas, Russe and other centres. The Yambol public congress was so impressive that the circulation of anarchist journals surged upwards. But this popularity had not escaped the eyes of the reaction who were plotting a coup and persuaded the BZS to pass an “anti-bandit” law that targeted the anarchists. In March 1923, Stamboliyski signed a pact with Yugoslavia recognising the new border and agreeing to suppress the VMRO. On March 26, an anarchist protest in Yambol against the disarming of the people under the anti-bandit law provided the right-wing with the excuse for a massacre.

According to Grancharoff, the military governor of the city forbade the anarchist meeting and stationed troops in the public square, but an anarchist orator stood on a bench and began speaking. The troops opened fire, injuring him and several other anarchists. A fierce battle lasting two hours between the anarchist forces and the two regiments stationed in the city was only ended when the military commander brought in an artillery regiment from a nearby town. Soldiers captured 26 anarchists who were machine-gunned at the barracks that night. Some 30 to 40 anarchists, including the key organiser and activist Todor Darzev, were killed that day, but one of the 26, the student Obretenov, had only been wounded, and creeping away, managed to raise the alarm. The following morning, troops raided the anarchist centre in Sofia and arrested all present. On June 9, in a nationalist backlash to the Bulgarian-Yugoslav pact, fascist army officers belonging to the Military League, and backed by the tsar and the VMRO, staged a coup against the BZS government and killed Stamboliyski. At Kilifarevo, the anarchists united the communists and agrarians behind them and withstood assaults by the army for several days,

and also briefly occupied the city of Drenovo and several towns at the foothills of the mountains.

The new government was a coalition of right-wing forces supported by the Narodisak, the party of big capital and lead by the notorious fascist Professor Aleksandr Tsankov, which gave the VMRO right wing de facto control of the Bulgarian portion of Macedonia (the left wing of the party, dissolved during World War I, was re-established in 1926 in Vienna as the VMRO United, but no longer had any anarchist content, being oriented towards the Bulgarian and Greek communist parties). Grancharoff writes that “the country turned into a slaughter-house,” with perhaps 30,000 to 35,000 workers and peasants killed by right-wing forces between 1923 and 1931 – on a par with the Argentine dictatorship under Galtieri. The anarchist, communist and agrarian movements were forced underground and key anarchist militants like Nicola Dragnev were arrested and summarily executed. Some anarchists went into exile, producing *Rabotnicheska Misl* in Chicago. Others formed combat detachments known as *cheti* and were involved in an important attempt at a co-ordinated rising with the BKP in 1923 and in subsequent guerrilla activities. Grancharoff says that the BKP had initially not taken part in the struggle against fascism, taking the line that it was a struggle “between two bourgeoisies” – the people and the state! Scolded by Moscow, the party initiated the insurrection, but because the party tried to substitute itself for mass action, it was an adventurist failure. In 1923, Sheytanov published the underground newspaper *Protest*, and was later, in 1924, able to publish the legal weekly *Zov* (The Call), which became popular in academic circles, while also clandestinely publishing the paper *Acratia* (Anti-Authority).

worker”, with “a good overall political grounding” who was well-read and an Esperantist. At the outbreak of the Spanish Revolution in 1936, some 30 Bulgarian anarchists including Grigoriev went to fight in the militia. Grigoriev represented the FAKB at the CNT-FAI congress in free Spain in November that year. The revolutionary challenge to fascism finally forced the dispersed anarchist movement to rally again at the FAKB’s final pre-war congress, held at Vitosha in August 1936. Despite their many jailings in concentration camps, the anarchists also managed to circulate the mimeographed *Khleb i Svoboda* (Bread and Freedom) during 1936–1939. In 1938, the BKP attempted to appeal to a broader audience, renaming itself the Bulgarian Workers’ Party (BRP), until reverting to its Stalinist colours in 1948. Returning to Bulgaria in 1939, Grigoriev was arrested and spent the war years in prison then a concentration camp.

## War & Red-Orange-Brown Collaboration

In 1940, a manifesto by the FAKB railed against the intrigues of the Comintern in first allying with the Nazis, then opposing them, accusing the communist BRP, by supporting the Allied war effort, according to Grancharoff, of having:

...committed a historical crime by restoring the credit of the bankrupt bourgeois slogans, gonfalons [medieval military and ecclesiastical flags] and institutions for constitution, democracy, love of peace... patriotism and nationalism...

Bulgaria aligned with the Nazis in 1941 and the anarchist movement fought a guerrilla war against Nazi forces stationed in Bulgaria as well as the Bulgarian fascists: as Grancharoff puts it, “situated between hammer and anvil, they courageously fought against fascism and paid dearly for it.” Popular resistance, in

## The 1934 Fascist Coup & its Aftermath

In 1934, fascist Zveno leaders Colonel Kimon Georgiev and Colonel Damyan Velchev staged a coup and established an authoritarian regime with Georgiev as prime minister, outlawing all political parties, corporatising the trade unions like the ANSCL, BFAU and Vlassovden Confederation – from which the latter never recovered – and waging war on the FAKB and BKP. Also in 1934, the rightist VMRO assassinated King Alexander of Yugoslavia and French Foreign Minister Louis Bartou in Marseilles in collaboration with the Croatian fascist Ustaše. The international outrage the assassination provoked forced the Zveno regime to suppress the VMRO. The regime also banned anarchist papers such as Svobodno Obshtestvo – but it reappeared as a monthly entitled New World edited by Petar Lozanov, while the paper Compass managed to remain in circulation. A counter-coup in 1935 backed by the tsar saw Georgiev ousted and monarchist Zveno leader General Zlato Panchev installed, soon to be replaced by a civilian monarchist dictatorship. But the anarchist, communist and agrarian movements still had to operate underground – with the remnants of its press banned – while the pro-communist VMRO United collapsed in 1936.

An example of a typical Bulgarian anarchist of this period is found in the police file (compiled later under Soviet occupation) of the miner, farmhand and locomotive fitter Alexander Metodiev Nakov (1919–1962),<sup>7</sup> who came from a poor family in the village of Kosatcha in the department of Pernik. Becoming an anarchist in 1937, Nakov launched an anarcho-syndicalist group in the Machinostroitel factory in Pernik and was later to serve time in both a fascist prison and a Soviet concentration camp. The Stalinist police described him despairingly as “a fanatical anarchist” – but also a “fine

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<sup>7</sup> Alexander Metodiev Nakov, 1919–1962+, anonymous, Bulgarian Libertarian Union in exile, Paris, France, undated, online at: [www.libcom.org/history/articles/1919-1962-alexander-metodiev-nakov/index.php](http://www.libcom.org/history/articles/1919-1962-alexander-metodiev-nakov/index.php)

## The United Front & Guerrilla Warfare

Believing it was time to unite rank-and-file workers against fascism, Sheytanov established contacts with communists, left agrarians and Macedonian federalists such as Todor Panitsa, founding the “literary” journal Plamlak (The Flame) to push this idea. But when the United Front was founded, it was a Comintern initiative and the FAKB-led anarchist movement rejected it as authoritarian. Grancharoff cites a Stalinist work, *The Rise, Development and the Setting of Opportunism in the Bulgarian Workers’ Movement* (1986) as his source for the quote in his comment that:

With a few exceptions, anarchists had not accepted the Soviet Union as being a socialist country. And their argument was cogent: “In Russia as everywhere else, there is capitalism. It is stupid to think that the latter can exist without being defended by a government [even if in] Russia, this government is referred to as proletarian.”

The existence of a large, organised anarchist-communist ideological and anarcho-syndicalist workers’ movement with deep penetration into both the working class and intelligentsia must also explain why, unlike in Hungary and Czechoslovakia where many anarchists helped found communist parties in this period, few Bulgarian anarchists were attracted to the Bolshevik concept of revolution. The 1925 bombing of the St. Nedelya Cathedral in Sofia by a joint team of a radical BKP faction and BZS members – in response to the jailing and execution of many BKP leaders – killed 11 generals, the chief of police and the mayor of the city, and 140 other people. However, it brought down a reign of terror against the left, with 3,000 communists arrested and three executed. The FAKB, BKP and BZS united their guerrilla forces into a single detachment, but it was soon forced to disperse

into smaller combat groups. Special police units were sent after Sheytanov and he and his comrade-in-arms, the young anarchist actress Mariola Sirakova,<sup>5</sup> were caught and executed along with 12 other prisoners at the Belovo railway station on June 2, 1925. The repression saw a large number of Bulgarian anarchists such as Grigoriev flee into exile in Yugoslavia, then France, where groups were established in the anarchist strongholds of Toulouse and Paris as well as Beziers. These groups set up an aid committee to support anarchist prisoners in Bulgaria and drafted a revolutionary programme for the FAKB. Influenced by the debate in France over the Makhnovist Platform from 1926 onwards – where a Bulgarian delegate known only as “Pavel” (perhaps Grigoriev) was among those who established the short-lived platformist International Anarchist Communist Federation (IACF) in 1927 – the FAKB adopted the Platform as its constitution.

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## “Vlassovden Syndicalism” & Anarchist Expansion

Meanwhile, the anarcho-syndicalist Manol Vassev Nicolov and a group of anarchist-communists from Khaskovo had been organising among the peasant tobacco farmers in the district, making use of traditional old rural mutual aid co-operatives called Vlassovden (after the feast-day of Vlas, an old pagan god). In 1930, they achieved success, with 600 delegates from across the country founding the Vlassovden Confederation – sometimes called the Vlassovden Union – at Khaskovo. The demands of the Vlassovden Confederation were radical, not revolutionary: the reduction of direct and indirect taxation, the breaking-up of

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<sup>5</sup> Mariola Sirakova, 1904–1925, Nick Heath, Anarchist Federation, UK, undated, online at: [www.libcom.org/history/articles/1904-1925-mariola-sirakova/index.php](http://www.libcom.org/history/articles/1904-1925-mariola-sirakova/index.php)

agrarian cartels, free medical care for peasants, insurance and pensions for agricultural workers, and community autonomy. But “Vlassovden syndicalism” spread like wildfire and by 1931, the Vlassovden Confederation boasted 130 sections. Meanwhile the political situation was changing: in 1930, Grigoriev returned to Bulgaria to take advantage of an amnesty, and organised an underground FAKB cell in Sofia; in the same year, a fascist military organisation called Link (Zveno) was founded by army officers who were inspired by Mussolini and closely associated with the Military League.

In 1931, faced with rising anarchist-led demands for free speech and an amnesty for political “crimes”, the right-wing regime was ousted by a “People’s Bloc” coalition of BZS agrarians, liberals and radicals. Before the election, in Bulgaria’s first May Day celebration, the police attacked an anarchist student BOSF meeting and arrested eleven students. The BOSF demanded an end to clerical control of education and military recruitment on campus, demanding that “the priests and sergeants major be expelled from schools and universities and taxes abolished.” The end of the regime saw a huge upsurge of anarchist organising and publishing so that the anarchist movement could be counted as the third largest force on the left, after the BZS then the BKP. In that year, according to one study, there were some 40 anarcho-syndicalist groups under the Anarcho-Syndicalist National Confederation of Labour (ASNCL), while the Bulgarian Federation of Autonomous Unions (BFAU) became the Bulgarian IWA section.<sup>6</sup> In 1932, the FAKB held a clandestine national congress in the forest near Lovech which was chaired by Grigoriev which aimed at re-uniting the movement: *Rabotnicheska Misl* was re-established as the mouthpiece of the federation. Despite the leftist nature of the “People’s Bloc”, the anarchist movement was still persecuted: shootings, arrests and imprisonment were common.

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<sup>6</sup> Bulgaria: The New Spain (available for download from the ZB site)