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Bulgaria Reawakens

1990, May

Bulgaria had a strong anarchist tradition prior to the movement being smashed and driven underground or into exile after Bulgaria was consigned to the Stalinist sphere of influence in the post-1945 carve-up of Europe.

The national revolutionary movement that developed around 1870 was to free the Bulgarians from five centuries of Turkish domination (1393 through 1877) was heavily influenced by the Russian revolutionaries of the time, including the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin. Cristo Botev, the Bulgarian national hero who died fighting for Bulgarian independence in the mountains, was a disciple of Proudhon and Bakunin.

After national independence anarchism remained a force in Bulgarian society. The movement's historic paper *Rabotnicheska Missal* was founded before the First World War. Bulgaria entered WWI allied to Germany and Austro-Hungary. Popular discontent with the war and the news of the Russian Revolution led the masses to revolt. Frontline troops deserted en masse and marched to Sofia, forcing the king to abdicate. The Agrarian Party came to power, under Stambuliyski.

In 1919 the influential but disorganised anarchist movement took a step forward by founding the Bulgarian Anarchist-Communist Federation (BCF). From being a movement of

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small groups and closed circles, the anarchist-inspired revolutionary movement developed into a mass movement second only to the Communists (who had the support of the Bolshevik Government in Russia) in terms of influence amongst peasants and workers. The ruling class was frightened by the revolutionary atmosphere.

The Stambulyiski government began to persecute the leftists, workers halls were attacked and militants assassinated. Behind the scenes a right wing military coup was being prepared. The anarchists could see what was coming and called for the people to be armed. But the Communist Party had been won over to electoral opportunism and did nothing, while the Agrarian Party didn't take the idea of a military coup seriously and continued to attack the anarchists and Communist Party.

The anarchists formed combat groups which resisted the fascist coup d'etat in 1923. Later, the Communist Party also realised a stand must be made, but by now it was too late. The fascist coup was successful and the country plunged into a long night of repression, torture and assassination. Some partisan units continued to operate in the mountains, formed by anarchists.

In 1931 elections were held and a bourgeois democracy ushered in. Things became slightly easier for anarchist propaganda, though still difficult. The movement grew again. As well as the BACF there was a burgeoning syndicalist movement. But in 1934 the military staged another coup, and the clampdown returned.

During the Second World War the country was occupied by the Germans. Partisan resistance groups formed once again, with the anarchists to the fore. Acting independently or in cooperation with the Communists, they came immediately after the Communists in number of combatants. Bulgaria was liberated from the Nazis in 1944.

Following the liberation, local and factory committees took over administration. In the streets the victorious people openly

displayed its revolutionary will. The union movement reorganised. But as the Russian Army occupied the country, the Communist Party began to take over, in alliance with some very dubious friends who had been involved in the 1934 military coup (the 'Fatherland Front').

At first the anarchist halls had been reopened, free unions were allowed, and Rabotnischekska Missal reappeared. But as the Communists strengthened their position in the government, the anarchist locals were closed down and militants arrested. Many anarchists perished in the labour camps or endured many years of imprisonment. The Bulgarian syndicalist union (CNT) for many years continued a precarious existence as a small exile group.

In November 1989, as neo-stalinist regimes crumbled across central Europe, a plenum of the Communist Party ditched its leader, Zhivkov, in a desperate effort to stay ahead. But strikes and demonstrations continued. A free union was set up, and in December an opposition demonstration of 100,000 took place in Sofia. The bureaucrats have attempted to stir up anti-Turkish sentiment to deflect the popular discontent.

And the anarchists have re-emerged in Bulgaria from over forty years of repression, clandestinity and exile. BACF militants have spoken at many meetings, and the paper has recommenced publication.

— Translated by DM

Additional historical footnote: A part of the exiled Bulgarian movement took ship to Australia, and its militants have helped in the building of the movement there, also preserving the records of the movement for the younger generation now arising back home. Also, of several militants who had fought in Spain, two Macedonians—threatened in France with deportation to their native country where they were wanted on charges of guerrilla activity—made their way to Mexico on

British passports (who says only the monarch has the right to grant nationality?) and carrying on with the struggle there, finally got deported to the UK! We know they returned to Bulgaria. If still alive and reading this, we would love to hear from them again.