



*The American University is a frequent site for journal-
ism education seminars in Bulgaria*

Chapter 5: Reversal of Fortunes: Rehabilitations and Counter-Purges in Bulgaria

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Introduction

After a previous three-month stay, I returned to Bulgaria in February, 1993, to find that the Director General of Bulgarian National Television, Asen Agov, had been forced to "resign." This is part of an anti-democratic purge now (since January, 1993) taking place. The Union of Democratic Forces had, after a three-month period of political chaos, finally been replaced by another governing coalition in the last hours of 1992, and so it was predictable that such a sensitive position would be affected. One consequence was that every night until the end of March, 1993, when Agov was finally replaced, television workers protested by running a three-minute videotext message with the unofficial anthem of political crisis, the Beatles' "Let it Be," as the sound track, just prior to the eight o'clock evening news. Their message was both a complaint and a warning about low wages, poor working conditions (the subtext being unwanted government interference), and an impending strike.

On March 1, 1993, I attended the first television awards program to ever be held in Bulgaria. The actual award, a foot-long glass obelisk designed by a prominent Bulgarian sculptor, does not yet have a name such as "Emmy." The ceremony brought together the biggest

names in Bulgarian broadcasting. An emotional moment came when the just recently fired Agov hopped out of his ground level box seat to receive a consolation prize of sorts and a passionate ovation. The purpose of the evening was more than innocent celebration. The program was conceived in large measure as a way to very publicly acknowledge the efforts of the new cadre of investigative reporters working in the "post" Communist Bulgaria. The awards show was in large part motivated by the publication of a list of 70 journalists who, in the last year, had been threatened and harassed by powerful forces in the country. The program also commemorated the politically motivated removal of Agov. The list, compiled by the Union of Bulgarian Journalists, had been released one month earlier, and given this motivation behind the event, the night's attention naturally focused on television journalists. As each winner came forward to receive his or her prize, they took the opportunity to remind the nation-wide audience that although it is fragile, freedom of speech is a necessity for future political progress in the nation. It was a show of solidarity.

Journalistic Landscape

The current (as of August 1993) journalistic landscape in Bulgaria cannot be understood without appreciating three important facts. First, journalism is an integral part of Bulgarian society, therefore it is senseless to attempt to explain its role without context. After the bloodless Communist coup that removed the hardliner Todor Zhivkov on November 10, 1989, pent up energy, creativity, and political competition exploded into print. For instance, since November, 1989, 873 different Bulgarian newspapers have been catalogued in a book published in late 1992, by the Faculty of

Journalism and Mass Communications at Sofia University.¹

Greed for Power and Money

Second, all levels of Bulgarian life, including media institutions and the practice of journalism, manifest causes and consequences of democratization, privatization, and most recently, potential recommunization. It must be noted, however, that recommunization is a misnomer because the struggle now underway is not so much ideological but premised on an extremely cynical and selfish greed for power and money. Throughout the former East Bloc and Russia, the privileged elite who happened to call themselves "Communists," a genuine ideological interest that probably died with Trotsky, are working furiously to maintain their advantages in the new "free" market society.

And third, everything is changing. For instance, on March 2, 1993, I found myself sitting on the top floor of the former Bulgarian military headquarters in Sofia, being interviewed by a young discjockey about journalism in the United States on "FM Express," the second private radio station to open in Bulgaria (November 1, 1992).

Progress During the Interregnum

The European Media Foundation in Manchester, England, has suggested that television in Europe is following a three-stage evolution. The first stage (1935-1985) was characterized by public service television operated as a state monopoly. The second stage (1985-1995) witnesses the disappearance of state monopolies as parallel private systems come into existence with the state retaining regulatory powers. The second stage is very similar to the structural relationship between gov-

ernment regulation and private ownership currently existing in the United States. The third stage (1995-) stage is supposed to be dominated by the widespread dissemination of satellite television so that states lose their power to regulate. According to this scheme, Bulgaria is in transition from stage one to stage two. However, the boredom with interminable political debate on domestic television and a powerful desire to see the "outside" world, have also caused satellite dishes to sprout on many apartment balconies. The formerly closed East Bloc differs from the Western European experience so that the desire to get information from the outside world is accelerating the search for transborder broadcasts. In the East it seems to be less a search for additional entertainment but more a desire to "see" what the "outside" looks like and what those lifestyles are like.

The Broadcasting Environment

The broadcasting environment has been rapidly changing. The end of state monopoly occurred in 1991 when Voice of America began FM transmission in Sofia. This was followed by the World Service of the BBC, Deutsche Welle, and Radio France International, all on local FM. Since my visit began in September, 1992, private broadcasting has begun. In December, 1992, the Telecommunications Committee (appointed by Parliament and made up of 20 MP's) granted six licenses to private radio stations in Sofia and 21 outside of the capital. Three of nine applicants, Multimax Ltd., Bogat-Beden, and Open Market, were also granted licenses for private television channels in Sofia. Privatization continues.

In Plovdiv, Bulgaria's second largest city, a pirate station called "Kom Channel" was closed by the au-

thorities in 1990. It reopened legally and with excellent facilities in December, 1992. The first private station however, called "FM+" began broadcasting in the capital on October 18, 1992. As might be expected, rock'n'roll music has proven to be a powerful programming strategy. "The Voice of the Rabbit," a daily rock program that emphasizes information about rock personalities on FM+, has found great appeal among Sofia's estimated 50,000 student population. According to Peter Pouchev, owner of FM+, the station began with only two CD players which belonged to Peter "Petsi" Gyuzelev, lead guitarist of Bulgaria's most successful rock band "Shtourtsite" ("Crickets").²

On September 30, 1992, the second private radio station, "Radio Express," began broadcasting. Like FM+, Radio Express is staunchly dedicated to an apolitical sound. In December, 1992, another member of "Shtourtsite," Kiril Marichkov, started the first all-music radio station "Tangra." This is probably the least political of all the new private radio stations. It has reduced news to just two minutes per hour.

Local Interest Broadcasting

All of this indigenous competition, as well as local dissatisfaction with having five foreign language radio stations broadcasting from Sofia on the FM dial, has forced VOA-Europe to launch an hourly four-minute local news program in Bulgarian and two minutes of local news in English. The new emphasis on Bulgarian language and local interest broadcasting by VOA was marked by a name change. As of January 8, 1993, the local VOA operation became "Radio Vitosha" (named after the mountain that forms the Southern boundary of the capital).

Despite economic and political problems, free flows

of information are accelerating. In December, 1992, Agence France-Presse greatly increased the number of wire services it offers to Bulgaria. The Telecommunications Committee of Bulgaria is moving ahead with its plans to bring Bulgaria into compliance with the Pan-European mobile system frequency standards in order to be able to introduce cellular telephone service.

Video Film Distributors

Because modern copyright law does not yet exist in Bulgaria, Bulgaria's leading "video film" distributors have formed an association to protect their interests and combat piracy. They are seeking admission into an international association (MPEAA) that combats the theft of intellectual and artistic property. Bulgaria has also joined Euroimage, the European fund aiding film makers and distributors. This will help with film distribution and cinema repairs. Bulgarian film production ground to a halt with the cancellation of state sponsorship more than two years ago. Bulgarian film makers who have been idle since then are working hard to cultivate joint ventures with various Western film makers.

In April 1991, Egmont of Denmark, Europe's leading comics publisher with subsidiaries in 21 countries, opened a joint venture Egmont Bulgaria, Ltd. Georgi Alexandrov heads the Bulgarian company, and like so many new media enterprises his nine-person staff is young (averaging 27 years of age). With this new venture, Bulgaria is witnessing a rebirth of such classic and popular characters as Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Batman, Flintstones, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, and others. He too argues that during this interregnum Parliament's failure to pass a new Copyright Act is the major problem for new media enterprises.³

Bulgaria's first-ever private music agency was started September 29, 1991, by Yulia Hristova with a loan of 5,000 leva (\$200 at 1991 exchange rate).⁴

Context: The Fall of the Democrats

I arrived in Sofia on September 18, 1992, to begin my year-long Fulbright assignment as the first Western member of the Journalism and Mass Communications Faculty at Sofia University. On the same day as my arrival, the political coalition between the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (for ethnic Turks in Bulgaria —MRF) that had governed over a shaky period of transitory reform, collapsed. Also the long-awaited verdict in the first trial of the former Communist *apparatchiks* had been handed down only a few days earlier. The former "ruler of Bulgaria," Todor Zhivkov was sentenced to seven years imprisonment by the Bulgarian Supreme Court. He was not found guilty of failing to warn the Bulgarian people of the radioactive fallout from Chernobyl, or for overseeing the infamous name change campaign against Bulgarians of Turkish descent, or for having ordered the torture and assassinations of hundreds of people including the dissident writer Georgi Markov (author of *The Truth That Killed* and victim of the notorious umbrella assassination in London). He was found guilty for "exceeding his authority and rights in regard to the pricing of 67 motor cars, disbursements for food allowance and entertainment expenses, and distribution of dwellings to 72 persons..."⁵

Case Number One

Everyone I talked to was very disappointed and frustrated that the first case ("Case No. 1") in the series to be heard against the former Communists, set a prece-

dent of reducing internal and external terrorist to the status of "pilferers."⁶ Because of his age and weak heart, it was decided that Zhivkov could spend his sentence in his daughter's *dacha* on the slopes of Mt. Vitosha. It is important to note that virtually all jurists in the country attained their privileged educations and statuses by being staunch Communist supporters. This has consequences for shaping broadcast and print media laws concerning copyright, licensing, and ownership issues as well.

Communists Regain Control

Meanwhile, the collapse of the government occurred less than one year after the second parliamentary election (October 13, 1991) which ushered in the first democratic government. In that election the Democratic Forces (UDF) won a slim victory over the former Communists (BSP) taking 110 (34.36%) to 106 (33.14%) of the 240 seat Parliament. Consequently, the UDF was totally dependent on the support of the MRF (the Turkish controlled Movement for Rights and Freedoms Party) led by Ahmed Dogan. The remaining 24 (7.55%) seats were won by the MRF, barely giving them the seven-percent minimum of the popular vote required by constitutional law to allow them to participate in the Parliament.

When the coalition collapsed, constitutional law dictated that the second most popular faction in the Parliament, the former Communist, now self-proclaimed Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), choose a Prime Minister and attempt to install a cabinet. The recent collapse of the Democratic coalition created the opportunity for the former Communists to regain control.

The Democratic coalition failed for basically six reasons. Probably the most important one was the

continued decline in the economic performance of the nation. Nevertheless, this problem is inseparable from the other five. The second reason for their failure was their attempt to slow the process of privatization. The irony here is that the former Communist opposition have been demanding that privatization be accelerated. However, as privatization commenced it became clear that only a few wealthy had the capital to purchase former state owned factories and co-operative agricultural operations. The Democrats, suspecting that the money was laundered "red money," began to ask purchasers where it came from. When adequate answers were not forthcoming, the Democratic government, in the interest of justice, began to slow the process in an effort to assure that the "average" Bulgarian would have an opportunity to acquire private property, to participate in the new market economy, and to prevent the previous Communist elite state embezzlers from becoming the new capitalist elite owners. Thus the former Communists in Parliament railed in the press against the "regressive" Democrats who were stopping the progress of democratic privatization. Instead, the Democrats stressed the restitution of property confiscated by the former Communist government.

Burning the Trail of Repression

The third factor in the collapse of the Democratic coalition was that the ethnic Turks (the MRF) felt that the Democratic Prime Minister Filip Dimitrov's agenda had neglected their interests. The fourth problem involved personal conflicts within the UDF, especially between Dimitrov, and President Zhelyu Zhelev (a founder of the UDF) over the issue of making public the contents of the former Bulgarian secret police files. This issue remains politically explosive. When the Commu-

nist regime fell, party members set afire their own headquarters in an attempt to hide the fact that most of the files had already been destroyed. It has been reported in the press that for several days just prior to Zhivkov's surrender of 37 years of dictatorial power, cars, trucks, and vans filled with documents continuously shuttled from party/state offices in downtown Sofia to the *dachas* of the Communist *nomenklatura* in the elite Boyana suburb of the capital. Day and night, for over a week, the chimneys of the *dachas* signaled the frantic destruction of the paper trail of totalitarian repression.⁷ However, while some files were missed, others were purposefully saved by Communists for blackmail purposes in a future world. It is these remaining files that Dimitrov insisted be disclosed while Zhelev, and still powerful former Communists, argued that other issues were more important, and that the publication of the contents of these files could tear asunder the social contract of the society.⁸ Consequently, on October 29, 1992, one day after the Democratic cabinet lost a vote of confidence and resigned, the UDF National Coordinating Council announced that President Zhelev no longer represented the same principles and interests as the UDF.⁹

Lack of Capital

The fifth problem involved a general sense of conflict between the cabinet leadership and the UDF rank and file who tended to side with the President. It must be remembered that most of the newspapers that have been launched since the fall of the Communists, have failed due to a lack of capital.

An excellent example is the failure of *Vesti*, a newspaper started by the pooled efforts of thirteen national papers and magazines, and the Union of Bulgarian

Journalists. It was the first "serious attempt at professional solidarity and defense," wrote the *Vesti* in an "extra emergency final edition."¹⁰ Its proceeds were to support the Unemployed Journalists Fund. The Bulgarian Constitutional Forum (staffed mostly by former Communists) took control of the paper from the Sofia Press Agency but refused to finance it. The editor of the weekly *Kultura* wrote of its failure that "It seems that journalists on cloud nine after the newly acquired freedom of speech, will overlook the simple rule that whoever pays the piper calls the tune. The truth is though that party press is partisan and it is free only within the limits set by the publishers."¹¹

Serious News/Fantastic Tales

The media outlets that are surviving are almost exclusively of two categories. They are either entertainment oriented, catering to fantasy and escapism such as papers filled with stories about psychic healers, UFO's, martial arts masters, and pornography, or they have access to the deep pockets of the major political parties and trade union confederations. Part of the confusion caused by widespread mis- and disinformation is that the two categories often overlap so that "serious" news is interspersed with fantastic tales. Often they mix as in the cases of several stories that continue to appear (many without bylines), charging the former Democratic Prime Minister Dimitrov with being insane, homosexual, a puppet of U.S. interests, et. cetera. Most papers are owned and operated by former Communists. Thus, the rank and file of the UDF seems to have been swayed by the print media that has been almost uniformly critical of every UDF action, especially their attempt to increase oversight of the privatization process and illuminate the attendant shadow of money

laundering. The "former" Communists-owned-and-operated press has proven to be very adept at turning the rhetoric of privatization, democratization, and economic progress against the Democrats. By contrast, and as one might expect, the Democrats appear to be very naive and clumsy.

Decommunization and Recommunization

In accordance with their new constitutional law, on November 12, 1992, President Zhelev instructed the outgoing Democratic Prime Minister Dimitrov to try once again to form a new government. According to law, Dimitrov had two chances to reformulate his cabinet so that it would be acceptable to a majority of the MP's. During my first three-month stay in Bulgaria, Dimitrov's efforts failed. Consequently, Bulgaria had no government. After December 8, Zhelev, in accordance with constitutional law, mandated the second most numerically popular bloc in Parliament, the Socialist Party to choose a prime minister who could form a cabinet. The irony in this is that the constitution mandated that the former Communists take control of the government just as the official (by Parliamentary Ordinance) process of "decommunization" had begun.

Dubious Qualifications

At the beginning of 1993, decommunization laws came into effect so that former high-ranking Communists should be removed from government administrative positions. These laws also apply to academic administration. The rationale is that such individuals have hindered the development of science and critical inquiry. Furthermore, their academic qualifications are dubious since they were awarded on the basis of service to the Communist Party rather than academic merit.

Hence, two months after I arrived the Dean of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communications lost his job on charges of theft of television equipment, plagiarism (including his dissertation and a text book), diverting university funds to his personal use, and for being a former Communist.

He and his opponents have waged their battle through various channels including former journalism students working in the press. He has since sent members of his gang, the "Wrestlers" (many of whom are former secret police and members of the Karate school he attends—he was Bulgarian heavy-weight Karate champion in 1991) to occupy the Dean's office and a restaurant in the journalism building from which he was extorting one-third of the profits. On March 11, by threat of physical violence, his gang forced the new dean and the president of the university to pay some university monies in order to be (ostensibly) left alone. As tends to be the rule with extortion, however, this may not be the end but the beginning of harassment. When I inquired about police protection, the current dean laughed and informed me that the university does not need yet another hand to feed. The old ways persist, and ideology has far less to do with anything that has happened in the last 40 years than power and money. Meanwhile journalism instruction is limping along in some confusion. Budget problems remain central. The two academic units that were most loyal to, and controlled by, the former regime were law and journalism.

Anti-Communist Purge

During the less-than-one-year period that the Democrats had power, they attempted to purge the country of the vast network of *apparatchiks* that ran (and continue to run) the machine of government. The obvious problem

is that only the former Communists had such privileges as good educational opportunities and it is they who set up the system. They are, therefore, essential to the day-to-day running of the overall system. One must remember that everything was government controlled so that their expertise extends well beyond what Westerners may typically think of as being the domain of government experts. When one thinks of the government in Bulgaria, one is also thinking of the entire national life. As a consequence of the anti-Communist purge, 1,000 television workers were fired by Agov. The criteria for firing were former Communist Party membership/appointment and multiple redundancies in the bloated organization. The state broadcasting and publishing organizations were populated by people who "spied on the spies." Paranoia and the desire for total control inflated all the information agencies.

Political Chaos Continues

The political chaos that started with the downfall of the UDF-led government continues. In December, 1992, the BSP had been charged with forming a new government. It is widely believed that in an effort to avoid responsibility for the current and multifarious problems that are plaguing the nation and to thereby maintain the accusation that the national economic and social crises are the fault of the fleeting yet inept Democratic leadership, the BSP nominated Peter Boyadzhiev to form a new cabinet. Boyadzhiev's nomination was predestined to fail because he is not legally eligible to form a government. This is because he holds dual French and Bulgarian citizenship and returned to Bulgaria only in 1992, thus being resident for less than the 12-month minimum required by the constitution. It is clear that he was never meant to be a serious nominee.

In short, the BSP declined to take power directly.

Counter-Democratic Purge

Finally, in literally the last hours of 1992, the mantle of responsibility to form a government passed to the third and last Parliamentary force, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF). The MRF occupies less than eight percent of the Parliamentary seats. Despite its small minority, the MRF nominee Lyuben Berov succeeded in winning the necessary votes for his cabinet. Most of his support came from the BSP. A deal was made so that in exchange for political support Berov would release the Communist ex-Prime Minister Andrei Loukanov who was under detention awaiting trial on multiple corruption charges, and that privatization would be greatly accelerated. Now that the Democrats have lost power, Agov, and many other Democratic appointments are being removed. All of Bulgaria, including the major communication organizations, is oscillating between purges and reappointments which manifest the direction of the political gales. On March 10, 1993, after we had concluded a live radio interview on the state-operated Radio Sofia, a well informed and highly placed broadcast journalist told me that "now" (during the 1993 counter-democratic purge), not November, 1989, is the most crucial period in the Bulgarian struggle for justice. It is also at this moment that President Yeltsin is having his greatest Parliamentary crisis to date in Moscow. There are many in Bulgaria who still look to Moscow for political cues.

Significant Reversals

Other reversals from the previous Democratic government include immediate changes in the penal code criminalizing any act of destruction or damage to monu-

ments by public authorities, disclosure of information about the activities of the security services, and a moratorium on dismissals at the Foreign Ministry and diplomatic services. The latter two reversals are significant because the criminalization of disclosure, especially by the mass media (which carries the most harsh penalty of six years imprisonment) effectively closes the book on the secret files debate, and the moratorium protects the remaining "former" Communists that still dominate Foreign Ministry posts (the Democratic government had fired 300 employees during its short tenure in power).

Avoiding Responsibility

Even though Berov is not a member of the BSP, which supports him, many Bulgarians consider him a Communist "hack." The consequence of this intense three-month long politicizing is that the BSP appears to have a prime minister and cabinet that will do their bidding without having to take direct responsibility for the necessary austerity measures being enacted. By March, 1993, the "red money" owned and operated press has begun to stonewall the Berov government. Apparently, the former Communists are attempting to run the Bulgarian economy into the ground so that they can return, like they did in the wake of Nazism, as the saviors of Bulgaria.

What nearly everyone in the country dreads, except the Democrats, is to hold early elections. This is now very likely to happen in the summer of 1993, because Berov is weathering the partisan press storm no better than his predecessors. What must be understood is that politics in Bulgaria is pervasive. As Antonio Gramsci (1971), Raymond Williams (1977; 1980) and Eric Kramer (1992) have argued, the Marxian theory of a hierarchy of

base and superstructure fails to explain the "depth" to which hegemonic forces pervade society, even at the interpersonal level. Likewise attempts to fragment the continuum between "mass" and "private" realms of reality along two, or even multistep relays of communication, do not adequately describe the integral nature of hegemony. After years of living with networks of informants and political/personal opportunism, this attitude and orientation yet prevails at all "levels" of Bulgarian society.

Political battles are waged through the partisan press so that personal attacks become public discourse and vice versa. The theoretical separation of the public from the private domain can obscure the pervasive nature of hegemonic discourses that not only maintain a political system but also constitute individuals' very identities and interpersonal relationships (Noelle-Neumann, 1984). It is a common and convenient excuse now exploited by the former Communists, to claim that a sort of noumenal public system "out there," separate from personal experience, determined history, including their behavior. This allows them to avoid personal responsibility by deferring to external determinism. Determinism is a great excuse for avoiding responsibility.

Consolidating the New Power Base

Nearly all the specifics of governmental reform proposed by the former Democratic government were sabotaged in Parliament and in the struggle over popular opinion in the press. Reform in administrative law that could facilitate the regulation of privatization, itself strongly resisted by former Communist lawyers, could not and cannot move forward. Many people I interviewed informed me that Parliamentary gridlock will

continue until the former Communist elite can consolidate its new capitalistic power base through the reintroduction of its stolen wealth. In order to do this, the former Communists are working hard to manipulate the formation and implementation of privatization legislation and regulatory oversight law. Some ex-Communist money is buying newly privatized media outlets which are being used to launch campaigns of confusion in order to perpetuate a climate where these new capitalists can flourish without scrutiny.¹² The goal is to foster legal chaos until the money can be totally laundered. While this struggle continues, severe economic, political, and social obstacles to progress continue to mount.

Such political and social chaos confounds causal distinctions in economic and social life. In other words, concern about causal priority (i.e., does political confusion cause economic weakness or vice versa) fails to appreciate that this is a process of continual disintegration, not a single cause-effect event. What appears to be occurring is an ongoing symbiotic relationship between the two kinds of confusion. The largely partisan press is an important channel for fostering this chaos.

Purposeful Confusion

Several tactics of disinformation are currently being used to confound the public such as writers using two or more bylines and writing contradictory stories. A decidedly positive slant, in the style of "development journalism" also appears in many English language publications generated for an audience of foreign business persons and hoped-for investors. What follows are four examples of confusion in the press.

1) The press has been the battle ground for the confused and confusing soap opera that is the story of

petroleum. On August 1, 1992, the government granted Neftochim, Inc., exclusive rights to trade in petroleum. By September, 1992, Neftochim owed the Russian-Siberian Trade Association and Chimimport 460,000 million leva (\$17 million). Meanwhile, the World Bank provided 150 million dollars to Neftochim for the purchase of crude oil. Neftochim has not repaid any of this amount to the State Reconstruction and Development Fund, thus bringing its debt to 4,000 million leva. The problem is, where is the petrol? Has it gone to Serbia? By mid-November Petrol Company Executive Director Bedo Doganian reported that liquid fuel stocks had shrunk to the point where it was impossible to supply filling stations.¹³ By late November, 1992, only 11 of Sofia's 50 gas stations had any fuel and most only "token amounts" (five tons for the month). This is despite the fact that the Neftochim refinery had been operating at capacity since early September. Evtim Tsintsarki, a member of Neftochim's Board of Directors, claimed that just half of the refinery's output could supply national demand.¹⁴

Contradictory Stories

In the red press, the reason given for the shortage was that an insufficient number of railway tanker cars had been sent to Neftochim. Meanwhile, in the blue (democratic) press, the Bulgarian State Railways (BDZ) admitted to losing 1,409 tanker cars to the ex-Yugoslavia but they claimed that this was not the cause of the gas shortage. Contradictory stories about breaches in the international embargo to the ex-Yugoslavia saturated the press while prices rose along with the price inflation of available gasoline. It is impossible to determine the truth of these stories and therefore to determine which political camp is lying. Thus, the Bulgarian audience is

flooded with mis- and disinformation that is of little value to it when it comes time to vote. Even if an accurate series of investigative reports were to appear, it would be practically impossible to distinguish them from all of the partisan flak.

2) Another example of contradictory claims made by various institutions and fought in a polarized and politicized press concern whether Bulgaria had a trade surplus in 1992. The National Statistics Institute reported in the blue press that imports exceeded exports by 5,400 million leva. By contrast, the Bulgarian National Bank claimed in the red press that there was a trade surplus amounting to 464.8 million dollars. No newspapers compared and evaluated the accuracy of the conflicting stories.

Instant Billionaires

3) Another partisan row is being played out between Ivan Kostov, who like Asen Agov, was purged by the Berov government as soon as they took control, and Mileti Mladenov, the current National Bank Deputy Governor. Kostov attacked the BNB's policies and performance on prime-time television and argued that it should be placed under greater regulatory oversight. The Governing Board of the BNB responded by calling an emergency meeting on February 8, followed by a news conference insisting that it remain absolutely autonomous. Again, the Democrats were made to look like the proponents of Communist style centralized control. Perhaps the greatest and most poorly reported scandal of 1992, was the money laundering going on in the BNB and the sleight of hand antics of bankers in the massive consolidation process that occurred. Ninety percent of Bulgaria's banks disappeared or merged with larger ones in 1992, according to Ventsislav Antonov,

the former President of the Agency for Economic Coordination and Development.¹⁵ Neither the Democratic government nor the press seemed capable (or for the red press desirous) of keeping abreast of the shell game.¹⁶ One consequence has been what are called "instant billionaires." The conflict between Kostov and the BNB Governing Board is being played out between the two major newspapers in the country; the blue *Demokratsiya*, which is the newspaper of the Union of Democratic Forces and *24 Hours*, which in many ways resembles an American grocery store checkout paper and which is widely believed to be financially supported by the deep and shadowy pockets of red money. *24 Hours* is far and away the most popular newspaper in Bulgaria. It is regarded as a credible source of print news by most Bulgarians. *Duma*, the Bulgarian Socialist Party's official (admitted) paper and *Troud*, the voice of the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions, have added to the bewilderment with exaggerated, often inflammatory, charges flying in all directions at once. Such partisan reportage either reinforces previously held prejudices and alliances or confuses the reader who really wants to know whether or not Bulgaria has a sound fiscal policy. In any event, a war between the BNB and the government does facilitate destabilization which seems to be cloaking the ongoing consolidation of red money and power.

Food Shortages

4) Another contradiction surrounds whether or not Bulgaria is facing a food shortage in the coming months and year(s). During the various votes of confidence (September - November, 1992) which finally led to the downfall of the Democratic government, the red press reported a massive failure to harvest nearly half of

Bulgaria's cereal crops in fall 1992, and a sharp drop in planting. According to several months of reporting in *Duma* and *24 Hours*, many problems have plagued grain production. It was reported that in an attempt to postpone a crisis, in November, 1992, the Parliament allocated 320 million leva (\$12,300,000) to subsidize the purchase of seed. Planting has not been adequate to meet projected needs for 1993. According to the red press, only one-third of the wheat crop and just 24 percent of the barley crop were planted in areas that had been fertilized. Another problem, according to reporting in *Troud*, was the low quality of seed used. By October 25, 1992, Bulgarians were told that only half the area needed to meet domestic needs had been planted. Local Liquidation Councils charged with taking over co-operative farms were faced with assuming a burden of 323 million leva (\$12,300,000) in state enterprise debt. Most banks refused to grant Liquidation Councils new loans to facilitate planting. Meanwhile, despite conflicts among editors, other publications such as *The Insider*, have begun to write in a developmental journalistic style running headlines that read, "Good Outlook for 1993 Harvest." And the blue press, that represented the embattled government, downplayed the crisis. Thus far, no food shortages have materialized. Nevertheless, the Democrats are no longer in power.

Television in the Storm

It would seem that the highly politicized office of the General Director of Bulgarian National Television should be fitted with a revolving door. This position oversees the operation of the two state-operated television channels. Since the collapse of Communism in late 1989, there have been ten general directors. This is even more astounding when one factors in the six-month

period from November, 1991, to April, 1992, when the position was vacant. This parade of directors includes Agov's immediate successor Milligza Traikova, and the current (as of August 1993) General Director Hacho Boyadjiev. Traikova, who had been the chief financial executive at Bulgarian National Television and the director of "Air 2" (channel 2) before being promoted to General Director, lasted only two days in March 1993, before resigning in the face of uncontrollable political wrangling among the staff. She returned to her position as the chief financial officer. Soon afterward the former program director Boyadjiev was appointed by the General Assembly. Subsequently, in August 1993, Boyadjiev exercised a new and controversial law which allows chief executive officers in government posts to fire anyone without expressed reason. He fired Traikova who had worked for Bulgarian National Television for many years. The only excuse given was that she "hampered" him.

Bedlam

Since the fall of the Communists, staff had been polarized into hostile camps with many of the older staff members owing their careers to cynical opportunism and a ready willingness to eagerly do the bidding of the Communist elite. In the first months following Zhivkov's ouster, nearly all public rallies climaxed by marching to the offices of Bulgarian Television. The "bedlam" existed inside the offices as well, and it was also manifested on screen. For example the 30-minute eight o'clock news started "dragging on for hours. . . people simply could not edit the news into pithy and balanced composition."¹⁷ The news was taken over by long declarations made by various alliances that appeared on the show. "Even *Panorama*, the Saturday night prime-time news,

and-views show, looked like it had lost its way: for some time interviewers and interviewees seemed to reverse their roles."¹⁸ On other shows, anchors allowed guests to talk almost as long as they wished, ignoring the high price of air time. Domestic news, which was vitally important, was preempted on Air 2, as it aired live unscheduled broadcasts from Romania in December, 1989, covering the fall of Ceausescu.

Relentless Political Debate

With democracy came genuine political coverage and interviews of opposing politicians. "For the first time ever, the box [TV] broadcast political disputes."¹⁹ There was even a live debate by the presidential candidates. "Live broadcasts of dramatic clashes in Parliament lasted hours."²⁰ This practice persisted during the cabinet crisis that ran from September, 1992, until the last hours of that year. Lengthy parliamentary discussion was also carried on state radio. The result was finally boredom. The relentless political debating has driven radio and television audiences to crave apolitical rock'n'roll on foreign-language broadcasts such as VOA, to buy satellite dishes, to purchase video cassette players, and to seek out political satires such as the award winning and hugely popular television show *Cuckoo*.

The struggle to implement pluralism in Bulgaria's press cannot be fully appreciated unless one understands the current economic and political difficulties that constitute the daily life of the nation. Furthermore, it must be recognized that for virtually all of the university teachers of journalism and their former students (now working journalists) the Millian, Western European conceptualization of pluralism as a catalyst for democratic decision-making is foreign. That is not to say that the journalists are theoretically unfamiliar with

the tandem canons of the freedom to express and the freedom to access expression (to hear, read, or view). But in practice, pluralism is confused with partisanism without much faith in the principle of objectivity so familiar to those of us who are products of a milieu shaped by the doctrines of the Enlightenment philosophers.

Summary

Bulgarian journalists have embraced what they believe to be Western freedom of expression without appreciating the dimension of responsibility that is inherent to this condition. There is a confusion of pluralism with a notion that "anything (should) goes," including extremely partisan political distortion, no less egregious than previous communist propaganda. Likewise, there exists a belief that the more outrageous, for example, the pornography or slander, the more free and enlightened the message. This confusion is made worse by the recent importation of the scholastic fashion for "postmodern" ideology, especially neo-Derridian variety that promotes a self-contradictory (absurd) doctrine of *absolute* relativism. Nihilism is a real threat. I found this impulse at metaphysical speculation that denies the existence of truth or objectivity easy to combat by simply pointing out the moral implications to my colleagues and students. For instance, if one assumes the premise that there is no truth, then it logically follows that there can be no liars. This line of argument, without exception, allowed me to proceed with a discussion of the distinction between responsible and irresponsible reporting. This also tended to convince my audience that American pragmatism is neither a totally bankrupt *modus operandi* nor evil.

But more problematic is the cynicism of some "ex-

red" editors who see the audience as little more than a mob of children who need to be politically educated, which means lied to, or at least manipulated.

Absolutism, whether applied to either objectivity or relativity, although perhaps interesting for theoretical discussion, is not very practical for the daily responsibility of attempting to keep a citizenry informed so that participatory government can flourish. But this is precisely the vital question. Are journalists in Bulgaria more predisposed to make partisan proclamations and attacks than to attempt to articulate what is the case as best as they can? From my observations, the effort to democratize has been stalled and to some extent reversed by a growing tendency to recommunize. This change in the political course of the country has been facilitated to a significant degree by a paralyzing confusion of the public by a cacophony of partisan news messages that appear to do one of two things. Either the news bias reinforces previously held prejudices or the competing and contradicting news biases cancel each other out. Simply put, the more Bulgarian news one consumes, the less one can determine what is really going on. The population knows that things are bad, and in some ways getting worse, but they are uncertain as to the causes of their plight. This uncertainty has generated a widespread sense of anxiety and distrust of democracy, communism, and practically all solutions.

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