

GEORGI DIMITROV: BIOGRAFIIA. By *Veselin Khadzhinikolov* et al. Sofia: Partizdat, 1972. 644 pp. 2.60 lv.

This official scholarly biography of Georgi Dimitrov (1882–1949), Bulgaria's foremost Communist and former general secretary of the Comintern (1935–43), follows a fourteen-volume set of his selected writings (1951–55) and numerous specialized collections. The book endeavors to enlarge and improve on two earlier biographies, one by Stela Blagoeva (first published in Moscow in 1934, with many later editions) and the other by P. S. Sokhan (published in Kiev in 1962 and re-published in 1969). The present book is a composite picture turned out by a collegium at the Institute for Party History at the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party. The authors have had unlimited access to party archives.

There are three distinct layers in Dimitrov's life: the earlier period of his activities in Bulgaria proper as a syndicalist leader, who, together with Vasil Kolarov, led the September 1923 abortive Communist uprising; the period of his activities as a functionary of the Comintern; and the last and the shortest stretch (1945–49) during which Dimitrov led the Sovietization of Bulgaria following his return from Soviet exile.

In relative terms, the biography is at its best for the first phase of Dimitrov's career as a revolutionary. Even though he had little formal education, his organizational talents, personal charm, and political flair come through. His activities as an organizer of the radical syndicalist movement in a land with a meager working class and his fiery oratory in the Bulgarian Subramie, to which he was elected in 1913, are treated in some detail. The biographers do not conceal the well-known fact that during the anti-Agrarian coup of June 1923 Dimitrov supported the neutrality line laid down by the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, a stand which the Comintern was soon to condemn. At the same time, the authors contend that during the soldiers' Radomir rebellion of 1918, while in prison, Dimitrov advocated the active participation of the Communists (then known as "narrow" socialists) in the rising (p. 114), an idea rejected by the senior leadership of the party. Similarly, while in Moscow during the founding of the Profintern in 1921, Dimitrov was said to have told Lenin that the Bulgarian Communists were prepared to take power (p. 146). It is, of course, not easy to square the inconsistencies between his militant stands of 1918 and 1921 and his commitment to neutrality in 1923, which he was to regret throughout his life.

For obvious reasons the Comintern period of Dimitrov's life is of greatest significance to the student of communism. Yet this official biography becomes less serviceable as time passes. The accounts of the protracted infightings within the ranks of the Bulgarian Communist émigrés in Soviet Russia in the 1920s and the 1930s are altogether unsatisfactory. Dimitrov's activities as the head of the West European Bureau of the Comintern (1929–33), his relations with the German Communists and those of Western Europe, are stiffly chronicled but add little to what we already know. The fact that during that same period Dimitrov had become an outcast in the eyes of the majority of Bulgarian Communist leaders in Soviet exile as well as in Bulgaria proper, because of his past revolutionary blunders, is glossed over.

The biography provides us with little that is new on the Reichstag fire and the famous trial. The fact that Dimitrov's two Bulgarian codefenders were later purged by Stalin's purge machine is not mentioned. At the same time, the biography gives Dimitrov deserved credit for having helped tilt the Comintern line away

from its dogmatic leftism and in the direction of the united front and an anti-fascist orientation (pp. 309–10).

The biographers rightfully point out that Dimitrov became *de facto* head of the Comintern soon after his return to Moscow in early 1934, and well before his crowning as the general secretary during the Seventh Congress of 1935. As early as May 1934 Dimitrov sent Stalin a detailed scheme of the reorganization which the Comintern was to undergo (p. 320). In October of the same year, Stalin responded: "I have no doubt that the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union will support you" (pp. 332–33). The reader is bound to find some new information on the reorganization of the Comintern apparatus and the new style of work following the Seventh Congress (pp. 373–77).

Nothing typifies the neo-Stalinist character of the biography better than the accounts (or rather their absence) of the latter part of the 1930s and early 1940s. The Great Purge is not even mentioned. Nothing is said of the sudden disappearance of hundreds of Comintern functionaries, including many of Dimitrov's own Bulgarian compatriots, employed as they were, nominally at least, by the General Secretariatship. Since the purge remains an official taboo, the biographers cannot claim even that minimum of deserved credit for Dimitrov, who on occasion succeeded in extracting individual Comintern functionaries from the hands of Stalin's secret police and saving them. What does the counterpositioning of enormous nominal authority and utter actual impotence do to the psyche of a man of genuine revolutionary past and undoubted courage? All these questions are left to the reader's imagination.

There is little of interest on Dimitrov's activities after his return to Bulgaria in 1945. He did, as long as he lived, keep the Bulgarian party leadership together. Tito, for whom Dimitrov had a genuine personal liking, is given a single passing mention. The Bled Agreement between the two, which was to institute the beginning of a Balkan federation, is disposed of in a single paragraph. Stalin's public displeasure with Dimitrov's federation schemes in 1948 is not mentioned. The cruelty with which Dimitrov disposed of the non-Communist opposition in his home country is not concealed.

Dimitrov was and remains an important object for scholarly scrutiny. Above and beyond his career, he is significant as a prototype for those numerous genuine revolutionaries caught in the Stalinist grip and forced into a perpetual impotence-omnipotence syndrome of existence. Unluckily, those who possess the archives remain unable, and possibly incapable, of turning out anything better than this glorified but emasculated caricature of an interesting and significant figure.

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REVOLUTION ADMINISTERED: AGRARIANISM AND COMMUNISM IN BULGARIA. By *Nissan Oren*. Integration and Community Building in Eastern Europe, no. 8. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973. xv, 204 pp. \$8.50, cloth. \$4.00, paper.

Bulgaria is drawing increasing scholarly attention. Understandably, although unfortunately, the emphasis remains on general developments during the Communist period and on the history of the Communist Party, while many special aspects of current Bulgarian society, let alone its history, lie unexplored.