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THE END OF COMMUNIST RULE IN BULGARIA: THE CRISIS OF LEGITIMACY AND POLITICAL CHANGE

On 15 February 1988, Tatiana Popova (name changed), a dentist in Sofia, sent a letter of complaint to the Fatherland Front (*Otechestven front*), the largest mass organization in communist Bulgaria.[1] Mrs. Popova wrote that although she was a trained dentist, for almost a year she had been unemployed. She had two children—one under the age of six—and as she was divorced, she received only 75 levs monthly child support from her former husband. She further explained that she had approached many medical centers for a job, but all of her requests had been turned down, even though the Labor Code stipulated that mothers of two children had an explicit right to a job. Requests sent to various authorities had not had any effect either. Her parents were in no state to help her because, as retirees, they received only very small old-age pensions. Mrs. Popova continued:

> To be honest, I sometimes ask myself how I could slide into such a situation in our socialist society. We show the whole world how proud we are of our constitution, which guarantees every citizen of the People's Republic of Bulgaria the right to a job. We are proud of our Labor Code, of the decisions of the thirteenth party congress, of the July and November plenary sessions of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party […]. These most handsome documents and decisions by the party are, unfortunately, circumvented by some and therefore not executed.[2]

A day later, Mrs. Popova also wrote to the general secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP), Todor Zhivkov, informing him about her fruitless efforts to find a job in her profession. She informed him about her recently rejected application for a position at a clinic in Sofia, which had announced an open dentist post in the newspaper *Zdraven front*.[3] When she spoke with a doctor at the clinic, she was told that the position had already been filled six months before the job was advertised. Mrs. Popova used this example to make some general comments:

> All of the vacant jobs announced in the newspaper *Zdraven front* have actually been reserved for people whose appointment has been prearranged. These jobs are advertised in the papers only for formal reasons, with demagogic means, in order to invent and lie, to pretend that the jobs have been formally announced.

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[1] Petitioner to Fatherland Front, 15 February 1988, in Tsentralen Dărzhaven Arkhiv (TsDA), f. 28 (*Otechestven front*), op. 24, a.e. 377, l. 214.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., 216.

> They feel bored by us; they hate us—stop with all these lies, demagoguery and deception!!!!! You should know that you are facing a developed socialist society, not mummies, stones or chopped trees!!!!!
> I am not a horse with blinkers so that I go and look only straight ahead, without seeing what happens in the country—I see the truth!!!! I have carried a heavy burden my whole life and I understood that what is reigning are lies, demagoguery and deception, but not truth!!!![4]

This vignette, despite its personal nature, is illustrative of the process of the de-legitimization of communist rule in Bulgaria. On one hand, Mrs. Popova's letters show that the citizens of the People's Republic of Bulgaria had learnt the ideological language of the regime and knew the relevant official structures. Mrs. Popova judges her immediate situation by referring to existing laws and uses official propaganda to substantiate her demands. Whether or not she truly believed the state's promises, whether she had internalized its ideology or not, is irrelevant here; important is rather her tactic of instrumentalizing official state and party proclamations for her individual claims and criticism. The party-state had been successful in making its intentions and ideology generally accepted frames of reference. Thereby it put a "weapon" into the hands of the weak, who then used state ideology as a means for subaltern protest. A statement of John Scott comes into mind: "The ideology formulated by the ruling class to justify its own rule provided much of the symbolic raw material from which the most damning critique could be derived and sustained."[5]

Mrs. Popova's plight, on the other hand, shows that the state had problems fulfilling its own promises. It could not live up to the constitutional guarantee of providing everyone a job, and it failed in many other important areas as well. The many thousand letters of complaint kept in the archives of the government and the Fatherland Front provide ample evidence of widespread dissatisfaction with the concrete shortcomings that affected everyday life—perennial lack of housing, experiences of injustice in court, low wages, irregular public transport, dirty neighborhoods, etc. "Real" life in communism emerges as significantly different than its ideological promises. Nonetheless, citizens took the assurances of the state literally and called on the authorities to come forward with solutions. At the same time, they realized through their experiences that the party and state would not do so.

A third feature is noteworthy in the dentist's letters. She clearly articulates a deep dissatisfaction with what was going on in the country at that time (the late 1980s). She links her individual fate of not finding a job to wider problems, especially clientelism. Hence, she finds three of the most important positions of the official ideology violated: the principles of equality, justice and meritocracy. In her eyes, the existing system could no longer claim moral superiority: it had lost its legitimacy. This chapter will argue that this loss of legitimacy was a central factor in the political revolutions of late 1989, when communist power also end-

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[4] Ibid.

[5] John Scott, *Weapons of the Weak. Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 339.

ed in Bulgaria. This implies that we must not only seek explanations for the end of communist rule in the realms of "high" politics, but also in the "lows" of mundane, everyday activities. The interrelation between state and society is especially important here, because communist rule had also been based on its legitimization within the social realm. Therefore, this chapter will argue that while structural forces, such as growing economic problems, provided the basis for revolutionary change, it was the loss of legitimacy that pushed the actors to perceive the economic and other problems as systemic. This instilled in them a belief in the need, and also the viability, of regime change.

The political developments of late communist and early postcommunist Bulgaria are well documented. The comprehensive overviews of modern Bulgarian history by Evgeniia Kalinova and Iskra Baeva[6] and by Richard Crampton[7] provide a quick navigation also through the important events and personalities of Bulgarian political life in the 1980s and 1990s. While the history of the socialist period did not attract much interest by Bulgarian historians for some time after 1989, recently a number of important works have appeared. The foremost institution to edit such books is the non-governmental Institute for Studies of the Recent Past (*Institut za izsledvane blizkoto minalo*) in Sofia.[8] It has published, for example, a study on the forced assimilation of the Muslims under communism[9] and a voluminous handbook on the People's Republic of Bulgaria "From the Beginning to the End."[10] The main social trends since 1960 have been documented by Nikolai Genov and Ana Krasteva using a great deal of quantitative data.[11]

The study of state communism in Bulgaria is facilitated by the relatively liberal access to archival documents. The archives of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party and its many bodies, of the Fatherland Front (the largest mass-organization of communist Bulgaria), of the central government authorities (including the Council of Ministries) and of other important institutions are stored in the Central State Archives (*Tsentralen dărzhaven arhiv*) in Sofia. Documents in these collections dated until the end of the 1980s are generally accessible.[12] Since a law change in 2006, the Archives of the Ministry of

[6] Evgeniia Kalinova and Iskra Baeva, *Bălgarskite prehodi 1939–2002* (Sofia: Paradigma, 2002); in an abbreviated German version: *Bulgarien von Ost nach West: Zeitgeschichte ab 1939* (Vienna: Braumüller, 2009).

[7] Richard Crampton, *Bulgaria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[8] See their webpage at www.minaloto.org (accessed 18 September 2012).

[9] Mihail Gruev and Aleksei Kalionski, *Văzroditelniiat protses. Mjusjulmanskite obshtnosti i komunisticheskijat rezhim: politiki, reaktsii i poslednici* (Sofia: IIBM, 2008).

[10] Ivan Znepolski, ed., *NRB. Ot nachaloto do kraia* (Sofia: IIBM, 2011).

[11] Nikolai Genov and Ana Krasteva, eds., *Bulgaria 1960–1995. Trends of Social Development* (Sofia: National and Global Development, 1999).

[12] For a helpful guide through Bulgarian archives and libraries see Iskra Baeva and Stefan Troebst, eds., *Vademecum. Contemporary History Bulgaria* (Berlin and Sofia: Stiftung Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur, 2007). Free download at www.stiftung-aufarbeitung.de/download.php?file= uploads/pdf_publikationen/vade_bul.pdf (accessed 18 September 2012).

the Interior are also available to researchers, although the procedure for gaining access to its documents is time consuming.

The events and developments of 1989 and 1990 have been well explained by journals such as *Südosteuropa* and the *Berichte des Bundesinstituts für Ostwissenschaftliche und Internationale Studien*, as well as through the broadcasts and newssheets of *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. Of course, one can also examine the extensive newspaper reporting of that time. In the early 1990s, a number of studies were published providing the first in-depth analyses of the changes in Bulgaria; the collection of essays *Parteienlandschaften in Osteuropa* is a case in point, in which the dynamics of party formation after the end of one-party rule are highlighted.[13] A number of memoirs by communist and postcommunist politicians, such as Zheliu Zhelev, have also appeared.[14]

Many features of the postcommunist developments are well researched. A good introduction into the first decade of transformation is provided by Emil Giatzidis, who documents the political, social and economic changes.[15] A volume edited by Hans Leo Krämer and Hristo Stojanov bringing together eminent Bulgarian social scientists has a comparable scope.[16] An original perspective on the transformations is provided by the ethnologist Milena Benovska-Săbkova, who analyses the manifold consequences that the political and economic changes had on everyday life.[17] The important problem of minority policies—in a country in which about 15 percent of the population belongs to an ethnic minority—has been comprehensively analyzed by Bernd Rechel.[18]

The end of communist rule in Bulgaria: events

Before outlining the explanatory framework, this chapter will briefly recall the political events that mark the "change" in Bulgaria.[19] The most important single date is 10 November 1989, when the Central Committee of the Bulgarian

[13] Magarditsch A. Hatschikjan and Peter Weilemann, eds., *Parteienlandschaften in Osteuropa. Politik, Parteien und Transformation in Ungarn, Polen, der Tschecho-Slowakei und Bulgarien, 1989–1992* (Paderborn and Munich: Schöningh, 1994).

[14] Želju Želev, *V goliamata politika* (Sofia: Trud, 1998). Cf. Iliyana Marcheva, "Recollections as Alternative History," in Maria Todorova, ed., *Remembering Communism. Genres of Representation* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 2010), 253–74.

[15] Emil Giatzidis, *An introduction to post-communist Bulgaria: political, economic and social transformations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).

[16] Hans Leo Krämer and Christo Stojanov, eds., *Bulgarien im Übergang. Sozialwissenschaftliche Studien zur Transformation* (Bergisch Gladbach: Ferger, 1999).

[17] Milena Benovska-Săbkova, *Politicheski prehod i vsekidnevna kultura* (Sofia: Prof. M. Drinov, 2001).

[18] Bernd Rechel, *The long way back to Europe: minority protection in Bulgaria* (Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2008).

[19] The following section is mainly based on: Evgeniia Kalinova and Iskra Baeva, *Bălgarskite prehodi 1939–2002* (Sofia: Paradigma, 2002), 242–79; Richard Crampton, *Bulgaria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 381–94.

Communist Party accepted the resignation of Todor Zhivkov, who had dominated Bulgarian politics for more than thirty years, first as the general secretary of the party (from 1954) and then as the head of state (from 1971). Zhivkov was followed, as state and party leader, by the reformer Petăr Mladenov, who in October had denounced Zhivkov's methods of rule in an open letter to the Politburo and Central Committee and then had resigned as foreign minister.

After Zhivkov's replacement, which had the approval of the Kremlin, the political dynamics increased dramatically, pushing the BCP towards rapid liberalization. On 18 November 1989, the first big oppositional rally took place in the centre of Sofia in front of the Aleksandăr-Nevski cathedral. It was attended by approximately 100,000 people, who demanded an end to communist rule. Dissidents became more vocal, and "ordinary" citizens took to the streets to protest against the government. On 14 December, another mass rally near the parliament building demanded the immediate renunciation of the infamous first article in the constitution, which awarded the "leading role in society and politics," i.e. political monopoly, to the BCP.

Under pressure from within and without, the BCP made a number of decisions in order to shed some of its dictatorial past. The leadership called an extraordinary party congress for January 1990, suggested abolishing the first article of the constitution, and condemned the so-called rebirth process, the campaign in the 1980s of forced assimilation of the Turkish minority. The revocation of the forceful name changes of the Turkish minority at the end of 1989 had provoked nationalist demonstrations in January 1990 in Sofia and other towns, mainly in regions with a minority population. However, the nationalist tension soon evaporated and gave way to the re-establishment of basic minority rights. The fourteenth party congress from 30 January to 2 February 1990 accepted a manifesto for democratic socialism which denounced the Soviet model and voiced social-democratic ideas. The party congress also re-allocated the top positions in state and party: Andrei Lukanov became prime minister, Aleksandăr Lilov head of the party, while Mladenov remained head of the state. In April, the BCP changed its name to the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP). The Politburo and Central Committee were abolished and replaced by more inclusive bodies.

In the meantime, opposition parties emerged that demanded free elections. The most important of these was the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), founded on 7 December 1989, which was headed by the best-known Bulgarian dissident, the philosopher Zheliu Zhelev. The UDF was a coalition of thirteen opposition groups, ranging from conservatives to social-democrats. Their union was primarily based on their opposition to the communists. The historical Bulgarian Agrarian National Union (BANU), which had legally existed also during communism, broke with the communists and again became an independent party. Other "historical" parties, such as the Bulgarian Social-Democratic Party, the Radical-Democratic Party, and the Democratic Party, were re-established. Another new party that was

to play a significant political role was established on 4 January 1990: the Movement for Rights and Freedoms, which was created effectively as the political representation of the Turkish minority under the leadership of Ahmed Dogan (who still presides over the party). In addition to these new political parties, the independent trade union *Podkrepa* (Support), which had been established in 1988 in the town of Plovdiv, became a driving force of democratic change. On 26 December 1989, *Podkrepa* called for a strike demanding free elections. Mass rallies in Sofia and other towns continued to put pressure on the government and provided momentum for rapid democratization.

An important next step to promote and, at the same time, channel political change was the establishment of round table negotiations on 3 January 1990. It was to meet until May 1990. At the round table, the BCP sat together with the main opposition parties and social organizations in order to work out a road map for Bulgaria's first free elections after World War II. The proceedings of the debates were broadcast live on radio and television, which had a huge impact on political consciousness in the country. The broadcasts made the UDF widely known in the country as the main challenger of communist (socialist) rule, also due to their reluctance to join the communists in a national unity government. The most important decisions of the round table concerned the de-ideologicalization of the constitution, the dissolution of BCP party cells in enterprises, the "de-partization" of state institutions, an agreement on democratic transformation, the abolition of the political police, the observance of the rule of law and human rights, and the holding of free elections, which were scheduled for mid-1990. The parties agreed, in a compromise, on a mixed election system of direct and representative vote, and on a 4 percent threshold for entering parliament. Elections were to be hold for a so-called Grand National Assembly, which would pass a new constitution.

The elections took place on 10 and 17 June 1990. In the election campaign, the BSP focused on the civic achievements of socialism, while the UDF denounced all aspects of communist rule and highlighted communist crimes. The UDF enjoyed the support of the West (especially the United States), but it was disadvantaged by its lack of a functioning party apparatus outside big towns. In contrast, the BSP was able to make use of its broad base. In the end, the socialists were more successful, gaining 47.25 percent of the vote and 211 (of 400) seats in the constituent assembly. The UDF won 36 percent of the vote and 144 seats. As the third largest faction in parliament, the "Turkish" party, Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), emerged with 23 deputies. The socialist victory was not only due to the better organization of their party, but also due to strong support in small towns and rural areas, where the populace was fearful of the privatization of land and had also been less exposed to political mobilization in the winter of 1989–90.[20] The UDF strongholds were Sofia and other large towns. The

[20] See Gerald Creed, "The politics of agriculture: identity and socialist sentiment in Bulgaria," *Slavic Review* 54, no. 4 (1995): 843–68.

victorious BSP, under Prime Minister Andrei Lukanov, attempted to create a coalition government with the UDF, but this proved impossible and thus, they formed their own government in September 1990. The UDF resorted to radical rhetoric in parliament to fuel public protests, which took place in Sofia and other large towns after the elections. Nevertheless, the BSP and UDF eventually agreed to select the opposition leader Zheliu Zhelev for the office of president (1 August 1990), after Mladenov had been forced to step down. Public protests, however, continued on the streets, escalating in the night from 26 to 27 August 1990, when protesters set the Socialist Party headquarters in the center of Sofia on fire and looted the building. After these events, the public mood became more sober and political contestation continued mainly within parliament.

The debates in the parliament were especially intense with regard to two problems: the new constitution and economic policy. Regarding the latter, the land issue was probably most fiercely contested, that is, what to do with the collective farms. The main disagreement was the question to whom the collectivized land should be restituted: its former owners or those who were currently farming it. The UDF was able to push through the first option; the socialists only managed to include a passage that the restituted land should not be parceled out. The "Law on the Land" of 22 February 1991 was the start of a protracted and economically disastrous agricultural transformation, which resulted in the dissolution of collective farms and the reestablishment of the pre-communist pattern of small-scale farming. In general, economic policies were much contested until the big economic crash of 1996–97, when the neo-liberal consensus finally prevailed.

Lukanov's government failed to stop a rapid economic decline through the year 1990, and it was eventually forced to resign by a wave of strikes in November 1990, when the population was plagued by food shortages. In September 1990, food coupons even had to be introduced. Prices were finally liberalized in February 1991, which eased the shortages but led to sky-rocketing inflation, further impoverishing the population. In 1991 annual inflation reached almost 480 percent while the gross domestic product declined by more than 22 percent. Bulgaria's joining the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in September 1990 had yet to bring dividends.

After Lukanov's downfall, in December 1990 the leading parties agreed on a care-taker government headed by the non-party expert Dimităr Popov. The UDF joined the government and controlled the economic ministries. However, the UDF soon split into warring factions, when a group of its deputies left parliament in protest of the draft constitution and went on hunger-strike. The larger part of the UDF remained in parliament, but was split between a moderate and a more radical camp. The former took part in the elaboration of the constitution, which was passed on 12 July 1991 by 309 of the 400 members of parliament. The new constitution proclaimed Bulgaria a "democratic, constitutional and social state"

with a parliamentary democracy. It guaranteed democratic rights and freedoms, the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary, and the separation of powers. The economy was declared to be based on "free market initiative," and by law every citizen and juristic person was guaranteed the right to entrepreneurship. The constitution also prohibited the establishment of "autonomous territorial units" and declared "the defense of the national and state unity" to be a principle of state policy.[21]

After the constitution was passed, the way was cleared for new elections to be held for an ordinary parliament. These took place on 13 October 1991. The elections were distinguished by fierce controversy about the legality of the MRF. The new Bulgarian constitution prohibited the establishment of parties on "ethnic" or "religious" grounds. The MRF charter actually did not describe the party as representing a minority population, but rather emphasized human rights and liberal values; to most Bulgarians, however, the MRF was the "Turkish" party. The constitutional court eventually declared the MRF to be in accordance with the constitution by the narrowest of margins. Its parliamentary presence safeguarded, the MRF was to tip the scales after the elections resulted in a hung parliament: the UDF won the most votes (34.36 percent) but not an absolute majority (110 of 240 seats in parliament). The socialists (BSP) came a close second, with 33.14 percent of the vote and 106 deputies. The MRF achieved 7.55 percent and 24 seats, and thus its support was crucial for the forming of an UDF government under the new prime minister, Filip Dimitrov, who since December 1990 had been the leader of the UDF. However, the MRF did not join the government and a year later withdrew its support, because Dimitrov's economic policies negatively affected the MRF's constituency, the Turkish minority. Dimitrov's confrontational style and his zealous anti-communism also became a burden for the UDF, which consequently lost the next elections to the BSP, who won an absolute majority in 1994. Nevertheless, the first UDF government can be said to have represented the successful democratization of Bulgaria. Bulgaria's joining the Council of Europe in Mai 1992 and its application for association with the European Community were foreign policies that demonstrated the direction of the new democracy. And if the functioning of a democracy is judged by the ability to vote a government out of office, Bulgaria is unmatched, because no government was to be reelected in any election following 1990.

The economic record of transformation was less convincing, however.[22] After Dimitrov's government was overturned by a vote of non-confidence in October 1992 and especially after the socialists returned to power in 1994, the speed of economic reforms slowed down. Successive governments shied away from radical steps, such as the privatization or liquidation of loss-making state companies,

[21] *Konstitutsija na Republika Bălgarija* (Sofia: Sofija Press, 1991), preamble and article 2(1).

[22] See Ulf Brunnbauer, "Surviving Post-Socialism. The First Decade of Transformation in Bulgaria," *Sociologija* 43, no. 1 (2001): 1–26.

and rather pursued a policy of "soft budgetary constraints," which increased the state's burden of debt. The population paid the price, with the economy coming to the brink of catastrophe in the winter of 1996–97. Hyperinflation and severe shortages of basic consumer goods pushed the majority of the population into poverty. Only radical policy changes, together with international support, rescued Bulgaria from the abyss and led the country onto a path of sustained economic growth. Due to the influx of billions of US dollars in foreign investments, liberal economic policies and fiscal discipline, living standards have slowly risen (whether the new economic foundations are sound enough to weather the outfall of the 2009 global economic crisis remains to be seen). Bulgaria's membership in the European Union in 2007 can be considered its reward for transforming the country into a market economy and a functioning democracy.

Legitimacy and revolution

The above-described chain of political events was the outcome of the loss of the regime's legitimacy, on one hand, and the path to creating legitimacy for a new political order on the other. It was the loss of legitimacy experienced by the communists that made the political change in 1989 not merely possible, but inevitable. Legitimacy, thus, provides the missing link between structural crisis and system-changing political mobilization.

Since Max Weber, legitimacy has been considered the salient aspect of political rule, because without it, citizens (or subjects) do not accept the political order. Weber's main point is that a legitimate political system is founded, at least in part, on its moral validity in the eyes of the citizens (subjects), and not only on their egoistic calculations, customs or traditions. Legitimacy should not be confounded with democracy, as also in the modern era, non-democratic regimes can become legitimate, although it tends to be more likely for democratic regimes to be legitimate than authoritarian ones.[23] Authoritarian systems can also successfully appeal to culturally embedded values and moralities. But their legitimacy is predicated mainly on their capacity to meet certain expectations of vital segments of the population and to fulfill their own promises. In exchange, the population is ready to forfeit democratic rights. The fact that authoritarian regimes are aware of the need to show their legitimacy is evinced by their great efforts to stage popular approval (as for example, by mass rallies or "elections"). However, the legitimacy of authoritarian regimes is less solid than that of a participatory system: if such a regime does not meet expectations, the population may no longer be ready to forgo its democratic rights.

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[23] See Bruce Gilley, *The Right to Rule: How States Win and Lose Legitimacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

It is, of course, difficult to establish the level of legitimacy enjoyed by the communist rule in Bulgaria. However, there are some indicators that the Bulgarian communists were considered legitimate—at least among vital social groups—until the late 1970s or early 1980s. One indicator is the absence of a dissident movement. From oral history interviews, we know that many people accepted central aspects of the official ideology and credited the communists with welfare achievements. The repeated victories of the Socialist Party after 1989 might also be taken as an indicator for the popular support of certain core values of socialism. It should also be noted that communism in Bulgaria was not only a Soviet imposition, but had strong native roots: after World War I the "narrow" socialists—the predecessors of the communist party—were the second most successful party in the first elections.[24] When the communists took power in 1944, the political mood in the country was decidedly left-wing following the moral and political bankruptcy of the authoritarian war-time regime. Important ideological claims of the communists were also well connected with culturally embedded values, such as egalitarianism, the urge for education, and morality.

A further source of consent was the significant increase in living standards experienced in Bulgaria, especially in the 1960s and 1970s. Under communist guidance, Bulgaria became an industrial society with relatively decent levels of public welfare, and hundred of thousands of former smallholders experienced upward social mobility. The communist regime, furthermore, showed a certain amount of flexibility in dealing with social practices that did not conform to its political intentions. Collectivized peasants were granted small private plots and the regime often turned a blind eye to "ordinary" citizens' strategy of appropriating state property. These informal arrangements not only gave citizens a sense of autonomy and agency, but also led to what anthropologist Gerald Creed calls the "domestication of revolution."[25] People accommodated the system and modified it in their everyday actions to make it more tolerable. The downside, from the regime's point of view, of its accepting informal—and often illicit—arrangements was the emergence of citizens holding a rather cynical attitude toward the state. People feared the state to some extent, but also tried to trick it to their own benefit.

These ambiguous results of far-reaching informality qualify also Bulgaria for the paradox formulated by Alexei Yurchak regarding the end of communism in the Soviet Union: "Everything was forever, until it was no more."[26] Yurchak's telling phrase alludes to the fact that even a few years before communist rule came to an end, most citizens of the Soviet Union considered the communist

[24] On the emergence of the Bulgarian Communist Party, see Joseph Rothschild, *The Communist Party of Bulgaria. Origins and Development 1883–1936* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

[25] Gerald W. Creed, *Domesticating Revolution. From Socialist Reform to Ambivalent Transition in a Bulgarian Village* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania University Press, 1998).

[26] Alexei Yurchak, "Soviet Hegemony of Form: Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 3 (2003): 480–510.

Soviet system as ever lasting and without alternative. Not only a few believed seriously in the core values of communism and its superiority. However, after the communist system and even the Soviet Union had been rapidly dismantled, almost no one was surprised. Hence, according to Yurchak, while there had been legitimacy, to some extent it was illusory and not real political capital that could be spent by the regime. A similar model can be applied to Bulgaria as well: until the 1980s, most people seem to have taken communist rule for granted and even subscribed to some of its ideological underpinnings. One-party rule, nevertheless, imploded rapidly: "real socialism" as a configuration of power left the stage almost noiselessly. The reason for this was the multi-dimensional loss of legitimacy, which culminated in the 1980s. This loss made the potential of revolution a real possibility upon which people could act.

Bruce Gilley has shown that legitimacy is the central variable to explain revolutions.[27] For a revolutionary movement to gain ground, the old regime must first experience "legitimation failure," wherein the state loses its *raison d'être* in the eyes of its population. If the political system is no longer considered legitimate, crisis phenomena—such as economic problems—can tip the public mood towards changing the regime. In such a situation, crisis is increasingly seen as the typical outcome of the existing system and thus, the elite loses faith in this system. Relevant social actors, based on such perceptions of reality, then look for political solutions outside the existing structures of power, because they believe incremental reforms will not be enough to salvage their own interests. In a revolutionary situation, oppositional groups provide alternative interpretations of the current situation and connect with the disaffected population. If legitimacy is lost and a certain revolutionary threshold is reached, change can come very quickly—if it is not stopped by violence (as what happened on Tiananmen Square in Beijing in 1989). The initial protesters participating in anti-regime activities are swiftly joined by an increasing number of fellow citizens. This creates, as has been noted by Stathis N. Kalyvas, the "dynamics of increasingly large and frequent mass demonstrations and the simultaneous process of fragmentation, defection, and loss of confidence within the regime."[28] The speed of revolutionary changes, therefore, is the result of a twofold negative feedback mechanism caused by the loss of legitimacy. On the one hand, the citizens demand change, criticize the government and support the opposition, which makes even more people doubt the morality of the current regime. On the other hand, the erosion of legitimacy undermines the state's capacities, which in turn increases popular dissatisfaction because of growing economic and social problems. It can be argued that the economic problems experienced by Bulgaria in the 1980s were, to some extent, not only the cause but also the consequence of a loss of legitimacy.

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[27] Gilley, *The right to rule*, 164–68.

[28] Stathis N. Kalyvas, "The Decay and Breakdown of Communist One-Party Systems," *Annual Review of Political Science*, no. 2 (1999): 323–43, 336.

Culminating legitimacy crises in the 1980s

In his book on the history of modern Bulgaria, Richard Crampton observes that "by the middle of the 1980s, few people regarded Zhivkov's regime as legitimate."[29] The dynamics of this loss of legitimacy can be illustrated by Sabrina Ramet's threefold model of increasing regime opposition that she developed to describe the case of the GDR: "dissatisfaction," "disaffection," and "dissent."[30] *Dissatisfaction* means the "discontent with certain ways in which certain parts of the system operate or with certain policies of the regime, without necessarily calling into question the legitimacy or optimality of the system."[31] *Disaffection* is defined "as discontent with the system itself without necessarily entailing a belief in one's ability to change the system, but possibly being expressed in social nonconformism or deviance."[32] *Dissent* goes a step further, being "discontent with the system, charged by belief in one's ability to effect change […] and implying an external standard by which the system's performance is evaluated."[33] Hence, there is not only a growth in political consciousness, but also a shift in the frame of reference, from within the system to without.

The Communist Party in Bulgaria considered all three forms of regime discontent as potentially dangerous. In the 1980s, party leaders seem to have been aware that one of their most important sources of power, legitimacy, was waning. At this time external changes were also negatively affecting their rule: Gorbachev's reform policies put pressure on the Bulgarian comrades from at least two angles. First, the Soviet Union began to charge higher prices for oil and other natural resources that were vital for the Bulgarian industry. The Soviets also became less tolerant of the poor quality of imports from Bulgaria. Second, perestroika and glasnost made Bulgarian old-style communism look increasingly awkward. It was quite obvious that the new Soviet leadership considered the Bulgarian party leader an "unwelcome survival of the brezhnevite 'years of stagnation'."[34] Zhivkov's differences with Gorbachev became a major embarrassment for the Bulgarian leader, who in the past had stressed his success in establishing cordial relations with the earlier Soviet leaders Khrushchev and Brezhnev. The changes in the Soviet Union thus are also part of the regime's loss of legitimacy. The unwillingness of Gorbachev to intervene militarily in order to keep the communists in the Warsaw Pact countries in power created the political space for change in the first place. And yet, the most important processes leading to the loss of legitimacy, which opened the gates for revolutionary change, must be seen

[29] Crampton, *Bulgaria*, 384.

[30] Sabrina Ramet, *Social Currents in Eastern Europe. The Sources and Consequences of the Great Transformation,* 2nd ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 55–83.

[31] Ibid., 55–56.

[32] Ibid., 56.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Crampton, *Bulgaria*, 382.

in domestic developments. These were, however, also linked to external conditions. Four main areas in which legitimacy evaporated can be defined: 1) everyday life, whose over-politicization led to alienation; 2) economic problems; 3) alienated youth; 4) dissent and political opposition.

1. Over-politicization and alienation

The over-politicization of everyday life and the omnipresence of ideology was a structural reason for the crisis of legitimacy. The Bulgarian Communist Party fell victim to its own agenda of gaining total control: the party pretended to be in charge of everything (as can be seen by the notorious article 1 of the constitution) and developed ideological instructions for even the most mundane actions. Hence, for everything there was a clear template of the correct, "communist" way to act, which led to the political and ideological over-determination of everyday life. The Bulgarian communists, largely un-thwarted by any political opposition in the country, devoted particular effort to make life "socialist."[35] The envisioned "socialist way of life" would result in the internalization of the values of communism, so that people would act correctly in any situation without even thinking; individual aspirations and needs should conform appropriately to the system. The extensive propaganda about the "socialist way of life" thus made clear to everyone what the party-state considered the correct norm of legitimate behavior.[36]

The result of this policy was twofold: On one hand, the citizens held the party-state responsible for all difficulties and offensive behavior, such as shortages of housing and consumer goods, noisy taverns and smoke-filled hospitals, drunken drivers and humdrum cultural programs—to mention just some of the tribulations of daily life. These were some of the problems to which the party and public organizations (above all the Fatherland Front) paid significant attention.[37] But ironically, the party-state, through its propaganda and actions to address such problems, in the first place made them widely known and then showed the public that it was unable to solve them. On the other hand, the party-state's self-declared responsibility for everything and its concern for ideological purity created an exaggerated aversion to "deviant" behavior. Even if absolutely non-political and insignificant acts did not conform to the ideological instructions, they were seen by the party-state as a potential threat. There was no officially recognized space for social behavior outside socialism. An example of this is the nearly

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[35] See Ulf Brunnbauer, *Die sozialistische Lebensweise*. *Ideologie, Politik und Alltag in Bulgarien, 1944–1989* (Vienna, Cologne, and Weimar: Böhlau, 2007).

[36] Cf. Gilley, *The Right to Rule*, 80.

[37] Ulf Brunnbauer, "Making Bulgarians Socialist. The Fatherland Front in Communist Bulgaria, 1944–89," *East European Politics and Societies* 22, no. 1 (2008): 44–79.

paranoid concern about the "bad" influence of Western pop music, which at times led to attempts to repress its consumption, which in turn only alienated the youth. The interventionist disposition of the party and its obsession with ideological deviations ensured that, in the long run, social discontent became focused and politicized, turning against the party. Anthropologist Katherine Verdery, in an analysis of labor relations in communist Romania, observed,

> The very form of Party rule in the workplace, then, tended to focus, politicize, and turn against it the popular discontent that capitalist societies more successfully disperse, depoliticize, and deflect. In this way, socialism produced a split between 'us' and 'them,' workers and Party leaders, founded on a lively consciousness that 'they' are exploiting 'us.' This consciousness was yet another thing that undermined socialist regimes. To phrase it in Gramscian terms, the lived experience of people in socialism precluded its utopian discourse from becoming hegemonic—precluded, that is, the softening of coercion with consent.[38]

"Socialism" as it actually existed thus produced a consciousness of a divide between "us" (the people) and "them" (the party-state); "they" were exploiting us, so "we" have the right to trick "them." Dissidents could build their counter-ideology on this sentiment, which became deeply rooted in the popular consciousness.

In Bulgaria, there is interesting empirical evidence for the growing alienation of the workers in the one-party state. This was particularly significant, first because the BCP ruled in their name, and secondly, the party's welfare policies addressed the working class in particular. In the 1980s, the Scientific Research Institute for Trade Union Problems (*Nauchno-izsledovatelski institut po profsăjuzni problemi*), which was part of the trade unions, organized annual polls of approximately two thousand workers across the country. These polls asked about the workers' general mood, their attitudes towards the trade unions, and their opinions about current affairs. These reports were confidential and only for internal use. The results were disheartening for the trade unions and the party. Workers did not have a particularly high opinion of the trade unions: "There are no trade unions, they are parasites." "The trade unions in Bulgaria should be called 'Independence' because nothing at all depends on them."[39] In the 1987 poll 28 percent of the workers said they were a member of a trade union only because it was effectively obligatory, 14 percent were members because "everyone else" was, and 6 percent because of the vouchers that the trade unions distributed for vacation homes. The report stated that many trade union members took part in union activities "without enthusiasm" and "only to have their presence counted." Workers did not expect much help from their trade union: two thirds had never

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[38] Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 23.

[39] Quoted in Petăr Petrov, "Lebenszufriedenheit bulgarischer Arbeitnehmer: Aussagen aus den 1980er Jahren und heutiges Erinnern," in Klaus Roth, ed., *Arbeitswelt—Lebenswelt. Facetten einer spannungsreichen Beziehung im östlichen Europa* (Berlin: LIT, 2006), 51–62, 52–53.

approached the union organization of their place of work.[40] The 1989 report produced even more sober results:

> There is massive distrust, sharp criticism and a negative evaluation of the trade unions: 'The trade unions exist external to and independent from the needs and interests of the people'; 'they are part of the bureaucratic elite.'[41]

2. Economic problems

An important reason for the growth of discontent in the 1980s was increasing economic problems. Reliable data about economic growth in this period are hard to come by because of the irregularity of communist statistics and the use of the Net Material Product (NMP) to measure economic activity. According to calculations by John Bristow, the average annual growth rate of the NMP was about 3.7 percent in the first half of the decade and 3.0 percent in the period from 1985 to 1989 (which is close to the official figures).[42] But other Western estimates, which are based on GDP calculations, are significantly lower. Industry, which until the 1970s had expanded quickly, grew in the 1981–88 period by an average annual rate of only 4.4 percent. A US study on Bulgaria notes that, "By the late 1980s, Bulgarian industry had completely exhausted the advantages it had used in earlier decades to post impressive growth statistics."[43] The various reform attempts of the previous decades, notably the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) initiated by the Central Committee in 1979 and set in place in 1982, had obviously not achieved the intended goals of raising efficiency and quality. The Bulgarian economy did not succeed in shifting from extensive to intensive growth, while input factors (labor, natural resources, and capital) became increasingly scarce. Agriculture, which had always been neglected by the planners, fared even worse. Its output declined during the Eighth Five Year Plan (1981–85), mainly because of a severe drought in 1984 and 1985. The drought years also affected electricity production, and thus electricity had to be rationed. These "dark nights" had a strong effect on the public's state of mind and played an important role in the demoralization of society and the fading faith in communism.[44]

Not only was the party leadership aware of the ensuing economic crisis, but also the population, which suffered from increasing shortages. In the above-mentioned trade union reports, the share of workers who were dissatisfied with the

[40] Lilia Dimova, "Obshtestvenoto mnenie za profsăjuzite v usloviiata na preustroistvoto" (unpublished report, Nauchno-izsledovatelski institut po profsăjuzni problemi, Sofia, 1987), 10.

[41] Nauchno-izsledovatelski institut po profsăjuzni problemi, "Profsăjuzite prez pogleda na trudeštite se" (unpublished report, Sofia, 1989), 3.

[42] John A. Bristow, *The Bulgarian Economy in Transition* (Cheltenhem: Elgar, 1996), 19.

[43] Glenn E. Curtis, ed., *Bulgaria: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1992), http://countrystudies.us/bulgaria/38.htm (accessed 2 June 2010).

[44] Kalinova and Baeva, *Bălgarskite prehodi*, 221–22.

development of the economy grew constantly. In 1984, 15.7 percent of the polled workers said that the economy was developing "well." In 1986, this had fallen to 9.2 percent. The opposite opinion was shared by 9.9 percent of the workers in 1984, and 29.2 percent in 1986.[45] The economic problems reduced the state's capacity to provide ample welfare benefits. This was also aggravated by the foreign debt (more than $ 4 billion at the beginning of the 1980s). In 1986, two-thirds of the workers expressed dissatisfaction with the slow solutions for vital social problems.[46] The overwhelming majority of workers considered their wages insufficient, and complained about rising prices and increasing wage inequality, because of the party's policy to provide material incentives to raise productivity. Hence, two central tenets of the social contract that were in exchange for the acceptance of communist rule were put into question: the provision of comprehensive welfare by the state and the official commitment to equality—traditionally a highly cherished value in Bulgaria. It is not surprising that trade union reports and the many letters of complaint sent to the authorities reveal a growing frustration of the citizens due to various difficulties encountered in daily life that were a result of the economic crisis.

The ailing economy undermined widely practiced accommodation strategies, such as the appropriation of social benefits and public property or the exploitation of informal economic resources, which had guaranteed a decent standard of living into the 1980s. The regime was also increasingly unable to furnish material privileges to important social groups on whose loyalty it depended. The party-state had to realize the long-term consequences of its promise to increase the material standard of living. The Pandora box of consumerism, which had been opened in the 1960s, could not be closed again.[47] On the contrary, consumer needs were also rising because of the ideological rehabilitation of consumption. The dysfunctional economy, whose light industry regularly received less investment than its capital goods industry, was in no shape to produce enough consumer goods to meet expectations. Party propaganda extolling the virtues of "harmonic, socialist" consumption in contrast to consumption that was "egoistic and capitalist" proved ineffective in limiting the needs. The population's horizon of expectations had widened and they were no longer satisfied with the existing system. People also began to judge their living standards by contemporaneous Western life styles—or what they believed life to be like in the West—rather than by the poverty of past generations. The increase in contacts with the West, on different levels and in different areas, as well as Western radio and TV broadcasts being jammed after the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, proved to be a system-subverting force.

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[45] Nauchno-izsledovatelski institut po profsăjuzni problemi, "Rabotnicheskoto obshtestveno mnenie v nachaloto na 1987g." (unpublished report, Sofia, 1987), 10.

[46] Ibid., 3.

[47] See Liliana Deianova, *Ochertaniia na mălchanieto. Istoricheska sotsiologiia na kolektivnata pamet* (Sofia: KKh., 2009), 354–55.

3. Alienated youth

Another factor of the de-legitimation of party rule can be found in one of the salient results of the socio-cultural transformation which the party had helped to trigger. Especially in the cities, a new cohort of well-educated young people had emerged. The various life styles they had developed were often at odds with party ideology. This youth was rarely oppositional and often even communist, but their behavior and tastes (for instance, for Western rock music) frightened the party gerontocracy, who sensed "ideological deviations" in anyone listening to the Rolling Stones.[48] For these young people, the founding myths of communist rule were largely irrelevant; they had not experienced the terror of the 1940s. They compared their lives to their peers in the West, not to the generation of their grandparents or parents, who had experienced the poverty of the past. Sociological studies on Bulgarian youth in the 1980s did not reveal an overt orientation towards the West, but highlighted the fact that young people defined communism mainly by their consumer possibilities.[49] Young people generated new visions of individuality and autonomy that were at odds with the collectivist, ascetic morality preached—though often not practiced—by the party leadership. Attempts of the state to rein in the youth culture, such as the closing of discotheques in the 1980s, could not but increase the young people's estranged sentiments. The leading Bulgarian sociologist on youth at that time, Petăr-Emil Mitev, found a distinct alienation of the youth from politics.[50]

Alienation had grown not only out of new value systems, but also problems in the social stratification: young people often saw their chances of advancement limited by old communists who would not step down, or by people who had acquired good positions not due to qualifications but to their family or party networks. Sociological studies already in the 1970s revealed a decrease in social mobility; the social classes increasingly reproduced themselves. Especially the middle class, upon which the functioning of the system largely depended, developed strategies to barricade itself against worker and peasant upward movement. In the 1950s and 1960s, however, upward social mobility had been an important source of legitimacy, when hundreds of thousands of peasants moved to the towns and many workers were promoted to white collar jobs or rose in the party hierarchy. Internal reports and individual complaints in the 1980s reveal the widespread discontent of young people who could not find a job commensurate to their education. Citizens often criticized the allocation of jobs on the basis of nepotism and clientelism. Particularly worrying for the regime was the increasing frustration of the technical intelligentsia, as they were essential for managing the economy. Young technocrats were often faced by incompetent party-bureaucrats,

[48] Cf. Karin Taylor, *Let's Twist Again. Youth and Leisure in Socialist Bulgaria* (Vienna: LIT, 2006).
[49] Andrei Raichev, *Mladata lichnost i malkata pravda* (Sofia: Narodna mladezh, 1985), 81.
[50] Quoted in Taylor, *Let's Twist Again*, 58.

which made them lose faith in the ability of the party to solve the problems of the country. In a confidential report of the trade unions in 1987, company directors were frank:

> We must admit that what we have created is not socialism. We have created a bureaucratic state. How should we fight the daily grind, the good connections [*vrăzki*], nepotism [*rodninstvoto*], the ruined economy? […] I have no idea how the leaders in the most important echelons of power struggle against each other and against others, and whether they will ever admit that they have erred.[51]

A growing number of people, especially younger ones—those who were supposed to "build communism"—were not only dissatisfied with the system, they also did not believe in the possibility of reform. This disaffected group rather looked towards system changes to fulfill their ambitions. Quite a number of young communists in the middle levels of the power hierarchy hoped that a radical transformation would allow them to translate political and symbolic capital into economic capital. It is therefore not surprising that a high percentage of the post-1989 Bulgarian elite stem from the former communist youth organization Komsomol or other party bodies. But while these disaffected young people provided the social base for anti-regime mass mobilization, they were not the first to demand an end to communist rule. This was carried out by the dissidents.

4. Political opposition and dissent

Political dissent in communist Bulgaria was long insignificant, especially if compared to countries such as Poland or Czechoslovakia.[52] Nevertheless, active opposition played an important role in the end of communist rule in Bulgaria. The first to put up real resistance were members of the Turkish minority, who opposed—also by violent means—the forceful assimilation campaign that had started in 1984.[53] It appears that this campaign, in which Turks were required to take Bulgarian names and all symbols of Turkish (Muslim) culture were outlawed, did not even appeal to the majority of the population, despite the fact that the communists had quite successfully played the nationalist card to create consent in the previous two decades. The forced assimilation of the Turkish population and their increasing resistance also led to protests among Bulgarian intellectuals in 1988, who demanded that human rights be observed. The mass emigration of Turks from May to August 1989, when some 350,000 people left to Turkey,

[51] Dimova, *Obshtestvenoto mnenie za profsăjuzite*, 7.

[52] Nataliia Hristova, "Spetsifika na bălgarskoto 'disidenstvo'," *Istoricheski pregled* 60, no. 3–4 (2004): 115–40.

[53] For more on the so-called rebirth process, see Mihail Gruev and Aleksei Kaľonski, *"Văzroditelniiat protses": Miusiulmanskite obshtnosti i komunisticheskiiat rezhim: politiki, reaktsii i posleditsi* (Sofia: Institut za izsledvane na blizkoto minalo, 2008).

showed the entire Bulgarian population that something had seriously gone wrong. It also caused severe labor shortages in the affected areas.

In 1988–89 the regime faced increasingly vocal opposition in parts of the intelligentsia. It began to lose the support of this crucial group, which for decades the party had incorporated into the system relatively successfully. It is very likely that the developments in the Soviet Union played an important role here, since Bulgarian intellectuals traditionally followed Russian media. In November 1988, the dissident organization Club for the Support of Glasnost and Perestroika in Bulgaria was founded by prominent intellectuals at the University of Sofia. Among its founding members were dissidents like the philosopher Zheliu Zhelev, but even more numerous were party members, who as a result were expelled from the party. Also in 1988, the first independent trade union, *Podkrepa*, was founded. As well, a number of other informal organizations for the protection of human rights were established in 1988, all of them very small and without much direct impact. Nevertheless, they demonstrate the disappearing fear and the emerging civil society.

Even more forceful were ecology protests, which started in the town of Ruse on the Danube River. For years Ruse had suffered from suffocating pollution emitted by a Romanian chemical plant on the other side of the river. The pollution had caused a dramatic increase in various diseases among the population of Ruse, especially its children. From the autumn of 1987 regular demonstrations were held, organized mainly by mothers, and petitions were sent by the citizens of Ruse calling on the authorities to act. Even a documentary film (*Dishai!* "Breath!") was made about the ecological disaster in Ruse. On the occasion of its premiere on 8 March 1988, the first Bulgarian dissident organization, the Social Committee for the Environmental Protection of Ruse, was founded. The events in Ruse inspired environmentalists in Sofia to establish the organization *Ekoglasnost* on 4 April 1989, which aimed at informing the public about environmental pollution in Bulgaria, much of it caused by industrial plants. *Ekoglasnost* became famous for its protests during the CSCE Meeting on the Protection of the Environment in Sofia from 16 October to 3 November 1989. The brutal suppression of this demonstration by the militia in the city center was a major embarrassment for Bulgaria, not only in front of the world media, but also domestically: it showed that the regime was ready to use violence against people who demonstrated for a goal that the party also propagated, that is, the protection of the environment. This made environmental protests even more dangerous in the eyes of the party, since these people could hardly be labeled "counterrevolutionaries," "anti-social elements," or "foreign agents." Their protest illustrated the collapse of faith in the ability of the regime to solve immediate problems, as well as the rise of a civil society. The demonstrations in Sofia in October marked the beginning of an opposition mobilization that would play an important role in pushing the regime for real change after Todor Zhivkov's exit on 10 November 1989. The "revolutionary threshold" in terms of the willingness to engage in anti-regime protests had been reached.

Conclusion

The Bulgarian Communist Party was, of course, aware of the creeping loss of its legitimacy and what this meant for its claim to sole responsibility. The sociologist Evgenii Dainov expressed this succinctly:

> It is something completely different to have total control in the moment when your opponents get more vocal; conditions no longer allow the application of mass terror, and society no longer accepts your legitimacy because of your failure in all areas.[54]

As a consequence, the party tried to decrease its visibility in order to extract itself from the criticism frontline. The "July conception" of 1987, adopted by the Central Committee, reduced the responsibility of basic party committees and gave more flexibility to state authorities and enterprises, on paper at least. Reforms in the labor code and the economic organization also sought to increase the autonomy of companies. The self-management of workers was also to be expanded. For a few years, decentralization was in vogue. The party hoped that these reforms would reduce the alienation of workers and increase their willingness to put an effort into raising productivity. But the reforms went nowhere. First of all, the party was not ready to really relinquish power, so many reform measures were not even implemented, and others, especially those concerning decentralization, were revoked only a few years later. A last-minute attempt at economic liberalization in January 1989 (*ukaz* no. 56) was also not really implemented (although it did prepare the ground for managers and influential party members to appropriate state capital).[55] The only result of Bulgarian pseudo-perestroika was an increase in administrative chaos. The regime proved incapable of adapting to rapidly changing conditions.[56]

The reforms also failed because they met widespread skepticism among the people. Apathy and disillusionment had reached such proportions that only very few people were interested in getting actively involved in the party's program for change. The 1987 trade unions report on workers opinions portrays a deeply alienated society:

> Instances of the violation of labor discipline can be observed ever more frequently; there is a decrease in the labor effort by workers and an increase in labor turnover. Several information sources mention apathy and skepticism, the withdrawal into personal life and 'doubts that the ideas would become reality.' Among the working people—managers as well as workers—the standpoint of 'listening and waiting,' of 'the curious occasional observer' prevails. 'Those above have brought us into this mess, they should get it right again'—one hears such opinions often, if the conversation turns to the execution of the reconstruction [*preustrojstvo*].[57]

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[54] Evgenii Dainov, "Reformirane na nereformiruemoto—Bălgarskata komunisticheska partiia i predizvikatelstva na 1980-te godini," in: Evgenii Dainov and Deian Kiuranov, eds., *Za promenite… Sbornik* (Sofia: Tsentur za liberalni strategii, 1997) 11–40, 25.

[55] Kalinova and Baeva, *Bălgarskite prehodi*, 232.

[56] Cf. Kalyvas, "The Decay and Breakdown of Communist One-Party Systems," 331–32.

[57] Dimova, *Obshtestvenoto mnenie za profsăjuzite,* 5.

Workers were not enthusiastic about self-management either, as they sensed that this was mere rhetoric. In a representative survey in 1988, only 20 percent of the workers showed a "strong willingness" to become involved in workers' self-management; 90 percent believed that they had no or only little influence on their company's management.[58] Even Todor Zhivkov complained in the Politburo about the party's loss of trust among the population and that almost no one was willing to get involved in the proclaimed changes.

The party's half-baked reform attempts made the inherent contradictions of the system only more obvious. Zhivkov's slogans—"individual initiative, self-management, rule of law, democracy, human rights"—revealed the shortcomings of "real socialism," which for more than four decades had propagated, but obviously not achieved, these goals. His slogans even pointed to a different order. The more the party imitated democracy and a market economy, the more citizens' expectations increased, but the party could not meet these expectations if they did not surrender their power, so frustration grew. In a way, the reforms—as limited as they were—undermined the party's dominant role. The party had lost both its monopoly on the interpretation of reality and the population's belief in its problem-solving capacity. The gulf between ideology and lived realities had become too wide to be bridged by policy adaptations, informal arrangements and concessions to the population. It had become clear to everyone that much of what happened did so not according to the party's plan, but rather despite it, or even against it.

At the end of the 1980s, the question was no longer whether communist rule would end, but when and how. Had the Bulgarian communists really read Marx, they would have seen the writing on the wall: the relations of production had clearly obstructed the development of the productive forces, and from the fold of "real socialism," its own negation had come into existence.

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[58] Derek C. Jones and Mieke Meurs, "Worker Participation and Worker Self Management in Bulgaria," *Comparative Economic Studies* 33, no. 4 (1991): 47–82.