

The cover features a central image of a person standing on a dark rock, looking up at a vibrant green aurora borealis in a starry night sky. The background is a dark blue-green gradient with diagonal stripes in shades of teal and brown. The title 'REVISTA INCLUSIONES' is prominently displayed in white, bold, sans-serif font.

# REVISTA INCLUSIONES

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## **LAUNCHING STALISM IN BULGARIA**

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### **Abstract**

After the Second World War the communist doctrine and the experience of the USSR offered eastern European countries a detailed matrix for imposing political and social-and-economic changes. With the beginning of the Cold War the processes of Sovietization and imposition of Stalinism in the satellite countries were sharply accelerated. In 1949 a decisive battle for supremacy took place in the Bulgarian communist party. It was won by those communists who had come back from Moscow after the WWII. Under the directions of Stalin and with the presence of his advisers and troops was established a regime that was not simply obedient but was built up by strict adherence to the soviet model and was meant to ensure the direct control of Moscow.

### **Keywords**

Cold War – Stalinism – Government – Communist party – Regime

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## Introduction

By 1948 the Soviet Union controlled most of eastern Europe. The establishment of Cominform in September 1947 marked the first steps to unification and the Soviet-Yugoslavian conflict that followed in the spring of 1948 definitively ended the so-called „national paths” to building socialism for the east European satellites of the Soviet Union. The Soviet pressure to conquer and subdue not only the communist parties but also the national security services, the armies and administration in the satellite countries turned into one of the major reasons that led to the break with Yugoslavia. This conflict in its turn led to speeding up the Stalinization of the communist parties in Eastern Europe and to turning them into a flawless conductor for cloning the model, Sovietization and total subordination.

## Developing

The plenary session of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Workers' Party /BWP/communists/ in October 1947 formulated the basic task of the Bulgarian Workers' Party /communists/ and of the National Front - the carrying out of significant restructuring of the state governance apparatus, by “eliminating the bourgeois throwbacks of the past”, with the purpose of establishing „a genuinely new type of state organization” as an effective instrument of the transition to socialism.<sup>1</sup> Towards the end of the year BWP /c/ had already conquered all key positions in the government.<sup>2</sup> From the summer of 1948, after the 16<sup>th</sup> plenary session of the Central Committee /CC/ of BWP/c/ (12<sup>th</sup> -13<sup>th</sup> July), asserting the adoption of the major stipulations of the Soviet political and ideological system, a new phase of open imposition of Stalinism began and its intensification was demonstrated after the June plenary session of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party in 1949.<sup>3</sup> When Valko Chervenkov headed the 68-th Bulgarian government in February 1950, his administration throughout the next four years led a course towards open and unreserved Sovietization and application of the Stalin model in all realms of social, political, economic and cultural life of the country.<sup>4</sup>

In 1949, a decisive battle took place for supremacy in the management of the communist parties in the Eastern European countries among “the insiders” and those communists who had come back from Moscow after passing Soviet schooling. Most authors assumed that this contraposition characterized the process of establishment of government by the communist regimes in all Eastern European countries. In the Bulgarian case, however, the opposition of „national” communists against political immigrants was not so strongly expressed and as Iliyana Marcheva put it, „it did not have any meaningful characteristic of the attitude towards the USSR and Stalin.”<sup>5</sup> According to her, „they were all Stalinists to the bone” and most of them resided in the Soviet Union during one or another period of their political careers. The confrontation and displacements at the top of the party

<sup>1</sup> I. Baeva, Smyana na elita i kadrite v Balgariya i Iztochna Evropa (1944 – 1948). – In: Litsa na vremeto. vol. I. (Sofiya: 1996): 79.

<sup>2</sup> G. Nikova, The Blow against the State Leadership of Bulgaria (1949-1953). In: Bulgarian Historical Review, 1-2 (1997): 112.

<sup>3</sup> VI. Migevev, Po vaprosa za ustanovyavaneto na Stalinskiya model na sotsializma v Balgariya. – Istoricheski pregled, 5 (1996): 37.

<sup>4</sup> M. Marinova, Nachalo na kurs kam otkrita savetizatsiya na Balgariya i nalagane na stalinoviya model na upravlenie – kadrovi rokadi i dinamika na partiyniya elit. – In: EPOCHS, Volume XXIV, 2 (2016): 275-288.

<sup>5</sup> II. Marcheva, Todor Zhivkov – patyat kum vlastta. Politika i ikonomika v Balgariya 1953–1964. (Sofiya: 2000): 21.



and government administration in Bulgaria were due more to personal rivalry and the weighing of past merits among Bulgarian communist, as well as to Stalin's attitude as he was in favor of longtime political immigrants and of the "youngsters" in governance.<sup>6</sup>

The returnees from Moscow, Georgi Dimitrov and Vasil Kolarov, were figures of international significance in the communist movement. They had quite an authority and prestige in the Bulgarian Communist Party /BWP(c)/, but their long absence distanced them from the realities in Bulgaria, which they did not know in detail. The latter was also valid about the other political immigrants in the party /Valko Chervenkov, Georgi Damyanov, Vladimir Poptomov and others/, who returned to the country after 9 September 1944. Traycho Kostov stood out as the most active among the „insiders”. He was responsible for the economic restoration and development of the country after the war and for the establishment of the new socialist structure of the economy. He would also be the most natural choice for the heritage of Dimitrov if only the prospective of communists – insiders dominating in the communist party was so radically unacceptable to Stalin, especially after the problems with Tito. The instruction of Traycho Kostov in the winter of 1948 to limit the direct access of Soviet representatives to information about the export prices of certain Bulgarian goods proved fatal for his political career and life. The withdrawal of Stalin's trust predetermined the fate of Traycho Kostov. In March 1949 at a plenary session of the CC of BWP/c/ he was accused of nationalism and anti-Sovietism and was dismissed from the Politburo of CC of BWP/c/ and from the position of Deputy Prime Minister and Chairman of the Committee on Economic and Financial Affairs. In June 1949, he was arrested and placed under the custody of the multitude of the Soviet State Security representatives who arrived in the country with multiple entourage headed by General Chernov. Accused of „treason”, „nationalism”, „anti-Sovietism” and „Titoism”, and later on of being an „agent of the English and American secret services”, Traycho Kostov was sentenced to death and executed in December 1949.<sup>7</sup> His elimination as a contender for power and the accusations raised against him also paved the way for the follow-up purges, aimed at strengthening an authoritarian regime that had to ensure the smooth and undisturbed Sovietization of the country.

The communists „insiders” of authority – Anton Yugov, Georgi Chankov and Dobri Terpeshev were not in a position implying the favor and choice of Stalin. The determined manner in which Anton Yugov and Georgi Chankov distanced from Traycho Kostov and blamed him at the March plenary session of CC of BWP/c/ saved them from a subsequent political and physical annihilation.<sup>8</sup> Dobri Terpeshev was also threatened by such retribution – he was a member of the Politburo of CC of BRP/c/ before 9 September 1944 and he was one of the leaders of the resistance movement during the war.<sup>9</sup>

After the death of Georgi Dimitrov /2 July 1949/ Vasil Kolarov was elected Prime Minister of Bulgaria. The governing of the country, however, actually passed into the hands of Valko Chervenkov, who was the First Secretary of CC of BWP/c/ and deputy-chairman of the Council of Ministers. In Bulgarian historiography the role of Vasil Kolarov in the governing of the country during the period when he was Prime Minister was limited to brief information

<sup>6</sup> Tsentralen Darzhaven Arhiv, fond 1-B, opis.5, arhivna edinitsa 42, list 45.

<sup>7</sup> M. Isusov, Poslednata godina na Traycho Kostov. (Sofiya:1990): 21-97.

<sup>8</sup> I. Baeva, Ot profesionalen revolyutsioner do darzhavnik. Anton Yugov. – V: Balgarski darzhavnitsi (1944–1989). Sofia, 2005):149.

<sup>9</sup> T. Tashev, Ministrite na Balgariya 1879 – 1999. Entsiklopedichen spravochnik. (Sofiya:1999): 459-461.

of „his grave health condition”. Regardless of his poor health, however, according to the research of Evgeniya Kalinova, he was the man at the highest levels in the government and in the party who officially sanctioned the purges in the government, the arrests of the people close to Traycho Kostov, and „he personally formulated the questions to Traycho Kostov, which the investigation had to find an answer for; he was also the man who instructed the jury in the eve of the trial.”<sup>10</sup>

In spite of Kolarov’s stalinist training and his proved loyalty to the Soviet line both in the international communist movement and in Bulgarian politics, after the death of Dimitrov, the undisputed favourite of Stalin was Valko Chervenkov. Kolarov belonged to the older generation of communists, highly educated, with international reputation. He envied Traycho Kostov for occupying the second after Georgi Dimitrov place in the party and government hierarchy. At the same time, there was a long-lasting and mutual dislike between him and Valko Chervenkov.<sup>11</sup>

The soaring promotion of Valko Chervenkov in the party and government apparatus even before the death of Georgi Dimitrov was obvious as well as the fact that Stalin trusted Valko Chervenkov far more than he trusted the „hero from Leipzig”. Under the dictate of Moscow and with the assistance of Stalin’s advisers in State Security, using the camouflage of the existence of an anti-government, anti-state and anti-Soviet conspiracy, Chervenkov used his time until the formal legitimating of his complete and unseparated power for getting rid of the most dangerous opponents of the total Sovietization of the country. His position was clearly stated before the October plenary session of the Central Committee in 1949: “Nothing will stop us from fulfilling Stalin’s instructions. This is a guarantee that we will clear the party and the country of all enemies of the Soviet Union.”<sup>12</sup> – a position of an orthodox communist who had passed the schooling of Moscow.

In the autumn of 1925, Valko Chervenkov emigrated to the Soviet Union. There he became a member of the Communist Party /Bolsheviks/. He completed the one-year Higher School of government and political administration and the two-year International Lenin School /ILS/ in Moscow. He defended his PhD dissertation and became an associate professor in Basics of Marxism-Leninism. He taught in ILS and the Communist University of National Minorities from the West /CUNMW/. He knew in detail and confidently accepted the communist ideology. This promoted him to the position of director of the International Lenin School /1937-1938/ and to prestigious positions in the Comintern related to the party education and propaganda in the period up to 1943. Although he was not so popular among his colleagues in emigration, Valko Chervenkov undoubtedly had the reputation of a highly educated and complete theoretician. In the period 1941-1944 he was a member of the Foreign Bureau of CC of BWP/c/ and editor in chief of the Hristo Botev radio station, but he remained less popular in Bulgaria as he broadcast his emissions under an alias.<sup>13</sup>

His stay in the USSR was also related to an event of personal nature, which undoubtedly turned into an important factor in his development and growth in the structure

<sup>10</sup> E. Kalinova, *V usluga na Moskva. Vasil Kolarov. – V: Bulgarski durzhavnitsi (1944 – 1989) (Sofiya: 2005): 88.*

<sup>11</sup> Il. Marcheva, *Todor Zhivkov – patyat kum vlastta. Politika i ikonomika v Balgariya 1953–1964 (Sofiya: 2000): 26.*

<sup>12</sup> G. Nikova, *“Golemiyat zagovor” v Bulgaria (1949 – 1953). – V: Litsa na vremeto (Sofiya: 1997): 82.*

<sup>13</sup> M. Marinova, *“Malkiyat Stalin na Balkanite”- V: Traditsii, posoki, predizvikatelstva (Smolyan: 2013): 477.*

of BWP/c/ and the Comintern, as well as in the party and government hierarchy in Bulgaria after 9 September 1944. In March 1926, he married Georgi Dimitrov's sister – Elena Dimitrova who he had met as early as 1919 in Bulgaria.<sup>14</sup> Valko Chervenkov returned to Bulgaria immediately after 9 September 1944. Since October 1944, he had been continuously a member of Politburo and secretary of CC of BCP. He managed the entire propaganda work of the party. His area of responsibility encompassed the ideological life of BWP/c/ and the cultural policy of the country. His active participation in the two sessions of the Comintern /in October 1947 and in June 1948/ presented him as a conductor of the new course of the Comintern. At the end of 1947, he entered the government of Georgi Dimitrov as a Chairman of the Committee for science, art and culture and in 1948 he took the position of General Secretary of the National Council of the People's Front. The persistence that tolerated no controversies with which he worked in the lines of cultural and scientific workers had a decisive importance for the ideologization of Bulgarian science, culture and art and their placement in favor of the communist party. After the arrest of Traycho Kostov and in view of the deteriorating health of G. Dimitrov, Valko Chervenkov almost took over all contacts with Moscow, where undoubtedly Stalin completely put his trust in him.<sup>15</sup>

Immediately after G. Dimitrov's death /on 6 July 1949/ Valko Chervenkov sent a radiogram to inform Stalin and consult him concerning urgent staff-related issues of the supreme party leadership. After the consultations with Stalin, the Politburo of CC of BCP decided that the Grand National Assembly /GNA/ should elect Vasil Kolarov as prime minister but no reorganization of the Council of Ministers should be carried out.<sup>16</sup>

The isolation of Vasil Kolarov in that period was complete. In relation to his health status, it was ordered that he should be guaranteed „absolute rest” for two months and during that period he was to be visited and informed by Valko Chervenkov only for no longer than half an hour every day.<sup>17</sup> Using a cunning maneuver, Chervenkov did not let Kolarov be given the post of General Secretary of the Central Committee /CC/ explaining before Stalin that as of that moment it was not expedient to do so, in view of the necessity to maintain closer relations with CC of BWP/c/ that could be maintained by a „harder-core collective management of the Politburo of CC of BCP”.<sup>18</sup> The contact with Stalin was maintained by Valko Chervenkov exclusively and the Soviet ruler in person directly declared at his meeting with the Bulgarian government delegation /including V. Chervenkov, A. Yugov and R. Damyanov / on 29 July 1949 his attitude of dislike and suspicion concerning Vasil Kolarov, defining him as a right opportunist who „did a lot of harm to Lenin” in the past and also noting that such „recidivisms could repeat themselves”.<sup>19</sup> Contrary to the opinion of Vasil Kolarov, expressed by Valko Chervenkov before Stalin, the instructions of the „leader of the peoples” were for immediate implementation of changes in government without waiting for the forthcoming elections.

After the June plenary session of CC of BCP of 1949 according to Vladimir Migevev a turning point was evident in the building of Soviet structure in the government and political

<sup>14</sup> Vulko Chervenkov za sebe si i svoeto vreme (Sofiya: 2000): 34.

<sup>15</sup> M. Marinova, „Malkiyat Stalin na Balkanite” - V: Traditsii, posoki, predizvikelstva (Smolyan: 2013): 477.

<sup>16</sup> L. Ognyanov, Ministerskiyat suvet v politicheskata sistema na Balgariya 1944 – 1956 – V: 120 godini izpalnitelna vlast v Balgariya (Sofiya: 1999): 278.

<sup>17</sup> L. Ognyanov, Ministerskiyat suvet v politicheskata sistema na Balgariya 1944 – 1956 – V: 120 godini izpalnitelna vlast v Balgariya (Sofiya: 1999): 278.

<sup>18</sup> Balgariya v sekretniya arhiv na Stalin (Sofiya: 2005): 269.

<sup>19</sup> Balgariya v sekretniya arhiv na Stalin (Sofiya: 2005): 276.

system of Bulgaria.<sup>20</sup> In the summer and autumn of 1949 almost the entire economic elite of the country was under the blow of repressions related to the trial against Traycho Kostov. The major economic ministries were deprived of their initial leaders and BCP did not have qualified staff. It is an indicative fact that at the end of 1949 from a total of 187 soviet specialists in the economic area working as advisers in Eastern Europe, more than half – 99, were located in Bulgaria.<sup>21</sup> On 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1949 Valko Chervenkov turned to Stalin in a formal letter in which he requested the sending of 4 Soviet specialists to work with the Council of Ministers in relation to the issues of planning agriculture, domestic trade and price policy, concerning the financial policy and for the Ministry of Industry.<sup>22</sup> The persons sent to the country as advisers to the Council of Ministers were Kucherenko, Kuznetsov, Stupov and Madonov. The four advisers of the government were people of quite high a ranking, authority and competences. Adviser Stupov, for example, was a former Minister of agriculture in the Ukraine.<sup>23</sup> Those persons together with the Soviet ambassador influenced and determined the governmental decisions of Valko Chervenkov.

By proposal of Rusi Hristozov, Minister of Interior, in September 1949 Valko Chervenkov approved of the arresting of 17 people as „accomplices” of Traycho Kostov.<sup>24</sup> Later on the list of persons arrested in relation to the forthcoming trial increased. Among them were former ministers, assistant-ministers and the managers of the Bulgarian National Bank and the Bulgarian Investment Bank. From the 16 communists who held minister positions, only six preserved them. In October 1949 the Grand National Assembly was summoned and on 21 October 1949 the Law on bringing government members to court trial was voted.

The trial against Traycho Kostov, the elections for National Assembly and the coming of the new government led to a radical turning point. There was no doubt that Stalin and Chervenkov expected counteraction. It is not clear to what extent a potential for organized or spontaneous reaction but it is a fact that in the period from the end of October 1949 up to the middle of January 1950 within a strictly secret mission of State Security in Sofia and other districts of the country 3 regiments of the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs of the USSR were positioned in Sofia and along the Southern and Western border territories.<sup>25</sup> The first deputy-minister of the State Security of the USSR, S. I. Ogaltsov also resided in the country for a while, in relation to the trial against Traycho Kostov.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, at the January plenary session of CC of BCP in 1950 Valko Chervenkov emphasized his determination to „energetically educate” and „to prepare the Party so that it is loyal and faithful to proletarian internationalism, to the USSR, to All-union Communist Party /Bolsheviks/, to the great and favorite leader and teacher Comrade Stalin to the end and under all circumstances.”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>20</sup> VI. Migev, Savetskiyat opit, savetskiyat primer v Balgariya (1948 – 1968). – V: Balgariya i Rusiya prez XX vek. Balgaro-ruski nauchni diskusii (Sofiya: 2000): 266.

<sup>21</sup> T. Volokitina, i dr. Moskva i Vostochnaya Evropa. Stanovlenie politicheskikh rezhimov sovetzkova tipa 1949 – 1953 (Moskva: 2002): 616.

<sup>22</sup> Al. Noskova, Vozniknovenie sistemuy sovetских sovetnikov v stranah Vostochnoy Evropay (1949 – 1953). – V: Balgariya v sferata na suvetskite interesi (Balgaro-ruski nauchni diskusii) (Sofiya: 1998): 42.

<sup>23</sup> VI. Migev, Savetskiyat opit, savetskiyat primer v Balgariya (1948 – 1968). – V: Balgariya i Rusiya prez XX vek. Balgaro-ruski nauchni diskusii (Sofiya: 2000): 267.

<sup>24</sup> Borbi i chistki v BKP (1948 – 1953). Dokumenti i materialii. Sastavitel: L. Ognyanov, S., 2001, 145.

<sup>25</sup> M. Isusov, Stalin i Balgariya (Sofiya:1991): 218.

<sup>26</sup> T. Volokitina, i dr. Bolgaria v XX veke. Ocherki politicheskoy istorii (Moskva: 2003): 387.

<sup>27</sup> TsDA, f. 117, op.13, a. e. 602, l. 22.

At a session of CC of BCP on 6 January 1950, in the context of the next reproaching tirades in relation to the „treason of Traycho Kostov”, Valko Chervenkov sharply criticized Dobri Terpeshev and Anton Yugov. In relation to Dobri Terpeshev the suspicion was expressed that maybe as a Chairman of the State Planning Commission he was not in terms with the anti-Soviet positions and activity of Traycho Kostov.<sup>28</sup> The accusations against Anton Yugov were in the same direction as his responsibility was sought in relation to the fact that in his capacity of Minister of interior he failed to reveal „the traitorous activity of Traycho Kostov.”<sup>29</sup> Such an attack in Stalin’s practice could mean a prior notice of a subsequent removal from the governing posts held or of even graver sanctions. In his „Stalinization of Bulgarian society 1949-1953” Hristo Devedjiev makes a parallel between the tactic Stalin used upon validating his power in the USSR in the period between 1924 and 1928, and the manner in which Valko Chervenkov affirmed his power in Bulgaria.<sup>30</sup> According to this author, Valko Chervenkov obviously followed the methods of his idol in Moscow in this field as well. After Georgi Dimitrov / “the Bulgarian Lenin”/ died, and Traycho Kostov / “the Bulgarian Trotsky”/ was eliminated the time came to eliminate Dobri Terpeshev and Anton Yugov, defined as “Bukharins” and “Rykovs” in the Bulgarian case. The comparison is interesting and in spite of the simplification, it does not lack grounds. The processes were directed by Stalin and assisted by the advisers and the troops that he had sent in the country. Bulgaria was a strategic partner, bordering three countries behind the “iron curtain” and its leader, the Stalinist - Valko Chervenkov, was expected to rigidly assure its Sovietization and the application of the Stalinist model in all realms of life.

On 17 January 1950, the first extraordinary session of the National Assembly elected on 18 December 1949 was summoned. Pursuant to Art. 17, cl. 2 and Art. 40 of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria, the National Assembly elected the government of the country. On 18 January 1950 Vasil Kolarov, in his absence, was again affirmed as Chairman of the Council of Ministers.<sup>31</sup> At the opening of its first meeting on 20 January 1950 Valko Chervenkov pronounced a brief but programming in its contents introductory speech. He declared that this Council of Ministers was “an entirely new type of government, which could not have anything in common with the governments from the bourgeois past either in the nature of tasks it was facing and needed to solve or in its methods of work”, therefore he urged his colleagues “to learn to govern by learning from the experience of the Soviet Union and the All-union Communist Party /Bolsheviks”.<sup>32</sup>

On 23 January 1950 the Prime Minister Vasil Kolarov died. After the unreserved support for the candidature of Valko Chervenkov expressed by the Vice-Chairman of the Council of Minister of the USSR K. E. Voroshilov who arrived for the funeral of Kolarov and the total unanimity of all members of CC of BCP in this respect, just the formal procedures were left. At the first meeting of the first regular session of the National Assembly on 1 February 1950, after an announcement of the death of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers and honouring his memory, the member of the Politburo and the first secretary of

<sup>28</sup> V. Chervenkov, Za osnovnite pouki ot razkrivaneto na Traychokostovskata banda i borbata za neynia razgrom. Za nedostatutsite v partiynayta rabota I nashite zadachi. Doklad pred plenuma na TsK na BKP (16 yanuari 1950) (Sofiya:1950): 32-34, 44-45.

<sup>29</sup> V. Chervenkov, Za osnovnite pouki ot razkrivaneto na Traychokostovskata banda i borbata za neynia razgrom. Za nedostatutsite v partiynayta rabota I nashite zadachi. Doklad pred plenuma na TsK na BKP (16 yanuari 1950) (Sofiya:1950): 43-44.

<sup>30</sup> H. Devedjiev, Stalinization of the Bulgarian Society 1949-1953” (Philadelphia, Dorance: 1975): 54.

<sup>31</sup> Stenografski dnevnitzi na I ONS, I izvanredna sesiya, stranitsa 9.

<sup>32</sup> L. Ognyanov, Ministerskiyat suvet v politicheskata sistema na Balgariya 1944 – 1956 – V: 120 godini izpalnitelna vlast v Balgariya (Sofiya: 1999): 279.

CC of BCP, the Vice-Chairman of the council of Ministers at that time - Valko Chervenkov – was elected Prime Minister. The approved government composition was the same that was elected on 19 January 1950 and only the number of Vice-Chairmen of the Council of Ministers was reduced from 4 to 3 persons. The government was entirely under the full control and unquestioned influence of the Prime Minister Valko Chervenkov. His domestic policy would ensure the imposition, throughout the following 4 years, of Stalin's methods and forms of government and would be the conductor of Sovietization of the Bulgarian state and society.

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