



The Anarchist-Communist Mass Line

Bulgarian Anarchism Armed

Michael Schmidt



Post: Postnet Suite 47, Private Bag X1, Fordsburg, South Africa, 2033

E-Mail: zababooks@zabalaza.net

Website: www.zabalaza.net

- ★ Suppression of the death penalty and of all special laws.
- ★ The disappearance of all concentration and labour camps or workhouses with the aim of punishing; dissolution of the forced labour system, applied as a police method.
- ★ Struggle against the remnants of fascism and vigilance against all activity against the people, under the aegis of the various labour, production and ideological organisations of the workers and peasants.
- ★ The grouping of all worker and democratic elements into egalitarian military unions in order to resist strongly and effectively the growing reaction.
- ★ War reparations to be made by war criminals.
- ★ The dissolving of the army, the suppression of obligatory military service and the militaristic education of young people both inside and outside schools.
- ★ The creation of a voluntary popular militia (not controlled by any party), recruitment to which will be solely effected from among the workers and peasants, and controlled by the worker-peasant organisations.
- ★ Full scientific teaching and education, free of all political party and class influence, widely available to the new generations.
- ★ Free, widely available healthcare for everyone.
- ★ The total exclusion of all religious interference from teaching and the family.
- ★ Aid to the population under the control of the labour, production and ideological organisations of the workers and peasants.
- ★ Bread, freedom, peace and jobs for all workers and the progressive layers of the Bulgarian people.

***Long live the International Solidarity
of the Workers!***

Long live Anarchist Communism!

Platform of the FAKB taken from the
website of the Fondation Pierre Besnard
www.fondation-besnard.org

Translation from French by Nestor McNab.

Downloaded from Anarkismo.net

Front cover picture: Mikhail Gerdzhikov (1877-1947)

The Anarchist- Communist Mass Line

Bulgarian Anarchism Armed

**By Michael Schmidt (ZACF, South Africa)
with the assistance of veteran Bulgarian
anarchist Jack Grancharoff¹**

Kindly proof-read by Will Firth.



In the early 20th Century, anarchism entrenched itself as a mass organisational movement in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland - anarchists having already been active in the 1873 uprisings in Bosnia and Herzegovina against Austro-Hungarian control. But it was primarily in Bulgaria and its neighbour Macedonia that a remarkable case of anarchist organising arose, in the midst of the power-play between the great powers. This poorly-studied movement not only blooded itself in national liberation struggles and armed opposition to both fascism and Stalinism, but developed a notably diverse and resilient mass movement, the first to adopt the controversial 1926 *Platform* of the Ukrainian Makhnovist exiles in Paris ² as its lodestone. For these reasons it is vital that the revived anarchist-communist movement in the new millennium re-examine the legacy of the Balkans. This article, which begins mid-stream in 1919, is a version of an extract from the two-volume work on anarchism & syndicalism, *Counter-Power*, co-written by Lucien van der Walt, a global history and theory of the movement, which is due to be published in book form by AK Press in the USA in 2008.

The Federation of Anarchist Communists of Bulgaria (FAKB)

In the hot year of 1919, at the height of the global worker's revolt against capitalism, Bulgarian anarcho-syndicalists (the first groups having been established in 1910) and the core of the old Macedonian-Bulgarian Anarchist Federation (a nucleus of which had been founded in 1909) called for the movement to reorganise. The Federation of Anarchist Communists of Bulgaria (FAKB) was founded at a congress opened by the anarchist guerrilla Mikhail Gerdzhikov (1877-1947), a founder of the Macedonian Clandestine Revolutionary Committee (MTRK) in 1898 and commander of its Leading Combat Body during the 1903 Macedonian Revolt. His forces, only about 2,000 strong and armed with antique rifles, managed to defeat a Turkish garrison of 10,000 well-armed troops, setting up a liberated zone in the Strandzha Mountains of Thrace, centred on the Commune of Tsarevo (Vassiliko) – an action that was a key factor in the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The FAKB founding congress was attended by 150 delegates – not counting those representing underground organs. The FAKB was organised as a clandestine federation of four regional anarchist-communist “unions” sub-divided into study groups, syndicalist groups and combat groups. Its membership was restricted to militants only, but its public

- ★ The creation of free worker and peasant local councils and committees elected directly and not as representative of political parties, organised and controlled by the people. These councils and committees must take completely in hand, or control, the political direction of the country.
- ★ The role of these councils and committees is to express the wishes of the working masses and of co-ordinating the efforts of all in order to construct a complete social system and ensure it's functioning. They are united on local, regional and national levels and represent the whole people's political force, thought and will.
- ★ The adoption by Bulgarian workers and peasants of the International Workers' Association, to defend the worldwide interests of all working people and impede any forthcoming war.
- ★ The clear and categorical rejection of all forms of class collaboration.
- ★ Recognition of the right of workers to struggle freely to defend their material interests, to improve their conditions and to strike.
- ★ Workers' control of production and a share of the benefits.
- ★ The reduction of wage differences between the various categories of civil servants, State workers and private sector workers, tending towards the introduction of a family wage.
- ★ Exemption from all taxes for workers, low-level employees, small peasants and all low-paid levels of society.
- ★ Free and voluntary agricultural co-operative associations.
- ★ Free and voluntary co-operation between small artisan enterprises.
- ★ Progression towards a complete co-operative system of exchange, food supply and consumption, and towards co-operative development to include domestic and foreign trade and social security.
- ★ Increases in the prices of agricultural production up to an average level and a reduction to the same level of the prices of industrial products, based on real retail prices and a just and egalitarian remuneration for labour in the towns and countryside.
- ★ Organisation of the struggle against speculation and the black market by the labour associations, producers' associations, exchange and consumption associations and by the public naming of all speculators and traffickers.
- ★ The creation and development of regular, high-quality commercial relations throughout the country, with the rapid satisfaction of needs with regard to basic essentials, such as clothing and footwear, through foreign imports.
- ★ The financial stabilisation of the country with a streamlining of the bureaucratic apparatus, with a real (not provisional) State budget and economy, with the complete elimination of all unnecessary spending (such as the costs of war), and with a real increase (not just a demagogic one) in the national production.
- ★ Complete freedom of speech, of the press and of organisation and assembly for all non-fascists. The suppression of all State and police control - left over from the fascist period - of co-operatives, trade unions and other organisations. The government must fulfil its promises in this regard.
- ★ Opposition to all dictatorships of whatever name or colour.

in them their vision of direct action and struggle against political parties and the tactic of peasant direct action. The OZPS² could be considered such an organisation.

A fourth type of organisation is the co-operative. Anarchist communists participate in all types of co-operatives, bringing to them the spirit of solidarity and of mutual aid against the spirit of the party and bureaucracy. Agricultural production co-operatives today merit special attention, as they will become more important and will play a decisive educational role in the future construction of an anarchist communist social system.

Another type of organisation are those of young people, women, temperance groups, Esperantists and other cultural organisations whose members support the ideas and the struggles of the anarchist communist ideological and economic organisations of the working people.

Relations between the aforementioned organisations are on a functional basis, that recognizes the full freedom and independence of the members and the organisations, and excludes all external interference and all subordination of one organisation to another. The reciprocal dependence between the various types of organisation can only be based on their ideological commonality and unity, the common goal to which they all aspire.

Organisational decisions within anarchist communists organisations are made unanimously, and not by majority. The decision of the majority is not binding on the minority; persuasion should always be sought. In practice, the minority generally rallies to the decision of the majority, which reserves the right to express the correctness of its position, once it has been demonstrated in fact. Thanks to this principle, which is widely applied within the anarchist movement, splits, enmities and arguments are rare.

However, within the mass economic organisations and the other organisations, decisions are taken by majority vote and are binding, as only in this way can unity be achieved, unity that is absolutely indispensable in mass organisations. But in certain cases where there is profound disagreement, the minority may be freed from the obligation to apply a general decision, on condition that it does not prevent the execution of such a decision.

All the aforementioned organisations share the common task of preparing the radical social reconstruction throughout the country. During the social revolution, they will each carry out (within their own domain) the expropriation and socialisation of the means of production and of all goods.

Immediate Tasks

At present, the Federation of Anarchist Communists of Bulgaria has adopted the following slogans:

¹ & ². We have been unable to trace these organisations, respectively an industrial union and an agricultural union.

activity included propaganda tours of all cities and villages. The FAKB suspended the revived post-war *Rabotnicheska Misl* (*Worker's Thought*) and assigned the honour of its mouthpiece to Gerdzhikov's *Probuda* (*Awakening*), but also decided that each affiliate could run its own press. According to Grancharoff:

Anarchism succeeded in becoming a popular movement and it penetrated many layers of society from workers, youth and students to teachers and public servants. The underground illegal activities of the movement continued.

Thus the FAKB helped found, and worked alongside, organisations like the Bulgarian Federation of Anarchist Students (BONSF), as well as a federation of anarchist artists, writers, intellectuals, doctors and engineers, and the Federation of Anarchist Youth (FAM) which had branches in towns and villages and all the bigger schools. So it can be seen that the FAKB consisted of syndicalist, guerrilla, professional and youth sections which diversified themselves throughout Bulgarian society. During the 1919/1920 transport strike, the anarchists planned to arm the workers, but the strike was betrayed by the leftist political parties and savagely crushed, with *Probuda* banned. A key FAKB militant was Georgi Sheytanov (1896-1925),³ called Sheitanoff by Grancharoff, who hailed from the eastern city of Yambol, became an anarchist as a teenager and was forced to flee into exile in France at the age of 17 after having escaped from the prison where he had been placed for burning the records of the local courthouse. Sheytanov returned to Bulgaria to carry on clandestine anarchist agitation in 1914, but was arrested and tortured, but escaped again, travelling to Moscow where he witnessed the 1917 revolution first-hand, and returning to Bulgaria in 1918 after having escaped a White firing squad in the Ukraine. In Bulgaria, Sheytanov became involved with the anarchist movement again and issued a famous *Appeal to the Anarchists*, and a *Manifesto to Revolutionaries*, an anarchist critique of Bolshevism.

In 1920, the social-democratic Bulgarian Agrarian Union (BZS) under Aleksandar Stamboliyski became Bulgaria's first socialist government, within the framework of the constitutional monarchy of Tsar Boris III, creating conditions for widespread popular self-activity. But as with the Social Democratic Party's "Noske Guards" in Germany, the BZS also established an "Orange Guard" as a strikebreaking force. The pro-Bulgarian right wing of the nationalist Internal Revolutionary Organisation of Macedonia (VMRO) rebuilt itself in 1920, and started agitating for the return of Macedonia to Bulgaria. The Bulgarian Communist Party (BKP), which had developed out of the *Tesni* social-democrat faction which approximated the Bolsheviks, rose swiftly to become one of the largest in Europe, but still adhered to reformist tactics and had seats in the Bulgarian parliament. After *Produda* was banned in 1920, it was replaced as the FAKB's mouthpiece by *The Anarchist*, of Kyustendil, a large town to the south-west of Sofia. Meanwhile, Sheytanov published *The Revolt* clandestinely and *Rabotnicheska Misl* reappeared first as a magazine, but then took the name of Gerdzhikov's old paper *Svobodno Obshtestvo* (*Free Society*). In 1921 at the age of 15, another key militant, Georgi Grigoriev (1906-1996)⁴ joined the FAKB.

He would later write the definitive anarchist history of what he called “the Macedonian Revolution”⁵ under the pseudonym Georges Balkanski while in exile in Paris.

The 1923 Fascist Coup & its Aftermath

In January 1923, the FAKB held its fifth annual congress – its first public, though still illegal, congress – in the city square at Yambol, attended by 104 delegates and 350 observers from 89 organisations, according to Grancharoff at page 5. The agenda included the internal and external situation, and the questions of organisation, the peasantry, internationalism, the transition period, the dictatorship of the proletariat, propaganda, co-operatives and syndicalism. Delegates reported that the working class of Yambol itself, of Kyustendil and Radomir to the west of Sofia, of the central village of Nova Zagora and the southern city of Khaskovo, and of Kilifarevo and Delebets were almost wholly affiliated to the anarchist movement and that great progress was being made in Sofia, the southern city of Plovdiv, the Black Sea port of Burgas, Russe and other centres. The Yambol public congress was so impressive that the circulation of anarchist journals surged upwards. But this popularity had not escaped the eyes of the reaction who were plotting a coup and persuaded the BZS to pass an “anti-bandit” law that targeted the anarchists. In March 1923, Stamboliyski signed a pact with Yugoslavia recognising the new border and agreeing to suppress the VMRO. On March 26, an anarchist protest in Yambol against the disarming of the people under the anti-bandit law provided the right-wing with the excuse for a massacre.

According to Grancharoff, the military governor of the city forbade the anarchist meeting and stationed troops in the public square, but an anarchist orator stood on a bench and began speaking. The troops opened fire, injuring him and several other anarchists. A fierce battle lasting two hours between the anarchist forces and the two regiments stationed in the city was only ended when the military commander brought in an artillery regiment from a nearby town. Soldiers captured 26 anarchists who were machine-gunned at the barracks that night. Some 30 to 40 anarchists, including the key organiser and activist Todor Darzev, were killed that day, but one of the 26, the student Obretenov, had only been wounded, and creeping away, managed to raise the alarm. The following morning, troops raided the anarchist centre in Sofia and arrested all present. On June 9, in a nationalist backlash to the Bulgarian-Yugoslav pact, fascist army officers belonging to the Military League, and backed by the tsar and the VMRO, staged a coup against the BZS government and killed Stamboliyski. At Kilifarevo, the anarchists united the communists and agrarians behind them and withstood assaults by the army for several days, and also briefly occupied the city of Drenovo and several towns at the foothills of the mountains.

The new government was a coalition of right-wing forces supported by the *Narodrisak*, the party of big capital and led by the notorious fascist Professor Aleksandr Tsankov, which gave the VMRO right wing de facto control of the

A second type of organisation is the workers’ syndicate, also based on the federative principle, organised by workplace or by trade, and united into production or trade unions in a general federation of workers’ syndicates.

These organisations, created with the participation of anarchist communists, adopt the tactic of direct action and reject the struggles of political parties and all interference by political parties in the workers’ organisations.

Their tasks are:

- ★ the defence of the immediate interests of the working class;
- ★ the struggle to improve the work conditions of the workers;
- ★ the study of the problems of production;
- ★ the control of production, and the ideological, technical and organisational preparation of a radical social reconstruction, in which they will have to ensure the continuation of industrial output.

All workers who accept their structure, tactics and tasks may be members of these organisations.

When conditions do not permit the existence of such organisations, anarchist communist workers join other independent syndicalist workers’ organisations, while defending their concept of direct action and their anti-party position. The ORPS¹ would appear to be such an organisation today.

A third type of organisation must group the peasantry. This is the locally-created agricultural labour organisation, united on a regional, provincial and national level in a general federation which, together with the federation of workers’ syndicates, make up the national confederation of labour.

The tasks of these agricultural labour organisations are:

- ★ to defend the interests of the landless peasants, those with little land and those with small parcels of land;
- ★ to organise agricultural production groups, to study the problems of agricultural production;
- ★ to prepare for the future social reconstruction, in which they will be the pioneers of the re-organisation and the agricultural production, with the aim of ensuring the subsistence of the entire population.

The agricultural labour organisations are built on the basis of sector and reject all struggles by political parties and their interference in the organisations. They apply the tactic of direct action, whenever possible, in their specific conditions, including refusing to pay taxes, boycotting the State, production strikes, etc.

The members of these organisations can be landless peasants, those with little land and those with small parcels of land, who work the land themselves without the use of wage labour.

When the conditions to create such organisations do not exist, anarchist communist peasants join other similar labour organisations, with the aim of promoting with-

general strikes, insurrections and the social revolution. In consequence, anarchism rejects all forms of organisation and struggle by political parties, considering them sterile and ineffective, unable to respond to the goals and the immediate tasks and to the interests of the workers in the towns and villages. The true strength of the workers is in the economy and their economic organisations. Only there lies the terrain where capitalism can be undermined. Only there lies the true class struggle.

Organisation

The radical social re-organisation demanded by anarchist communism requires the organisational action of all the forces on whom this historical task is incumbent.

It is above all necessary for the partisans of anarchist communism to be organised in an anarchist communist ideological organisation.

The tasks of these organisations are:

- ★ to develop, realize and spread anarchist communist ideas;
- ★ to study all the vital present-day questions affecting the daily lives of the working masses and the problems of the social reconstruction;
- ★ the multifaceted struggle for the defence of our social ideal and the cause of working people;
- ★ to participate in the creation of groups of workers on the level of production, profession, exchange and consumption, culture and education, and all other organisations that can be useful in the preparation for the social reconstruction;
- ★ armed participation in every revolutionary insurrection;
- ★ the preparation for and organisation of these events;
- ★ the use of every means which can bring on the social revolution.

Anarchist communist ideological organisations are absolutely indispensable in the full realization of anarchist communism both before the revolution and after.

These organisations are formed on a local level. Every local organisation chooses a secretary, whose task is to keep in contact with other similar organisations. The secretaries of all the organisations of one locality with a certain number of inhabitants constitute the general organisation of the locality. All the local organisations unite, by region and province, in regional and provincial unions. Contact between the unions is assured by the respective secretaries. All the provincial unions of the country are united in the federation of anarchist communists of Bulgaria. Activities are co-ordinated by the federal secretariat. The members of each secretariat form part of the local organisation in their area of residence, and it is obligatory for every initiative of theirs to pass through the local organisation, and therefore be considered an initiative of the latter. The secretariats are merely liaison and executive bodies with now power.

Only anarchist communists can be members of the anarchist communist ideological organisations.

Bulgarian portion of Macedonia (the left wing of the party, dissolved during World War I, was re-established in 1926 in Vienna as the VMRO United, but no longer had any anarchist content, being oriented towards the Bulgarian and Greek communist parties). Grancharoff writes that “the country turned into a slaughter-house,” with perhaps 30,000 to 35,000 workers and peasants killed by right-wing forces between 1923 and 1931 – on a par with the Argentine dictatorship under Galtieri. The anarchist, communist and agrarian movements were forced underground and key anarchist militants like Nicola Dragnev were arrested and summarily executed. Some anarchists went into exile, producing *Rabotnicheska Misl* in Chicago. Others formed combat detachments known as *cheti* and were involved in an important attempt at a co-ordinated rising with the BKP in 1923 and in subsequent guerrilla activities. Grancharoff says that the BKP had initially not taken part in the struggle against fascism, taking the line that it was a struggle “between two bourgeoisies” – the people and the state! Scolded by Moscow, the party initiated the insurrection, but because the party tried to substitute itself for mass action, it was an adventurist failure. In 1923, Sheytanov published the underground newspaper *Protest*, and was later, in 1924, able to publish the legal weekly *Zov (The Call)*, which became popular in academic circles, while also clandestinely publishing the paper *Acratia (Anti-Authority)*.

The United Front & Guerrilla Warfare

Believing it was time to unite rank-and-file workers against fascism, Sheytanov established contacts with communists, left agrarians and Macedonian federalists such as Todor Panitsa, founding the “literary” journal *Plamlak (The Flame)* to push this idea. But when the United Front was founded, it was a Comintern initiative and the FAKB-led anarchist movement rejected it as authoritarian. Grancharoff cites a Stalinist work, *The Rise, Development and the Setting of Opportunism in the Bulgarian Workers’ Movement* (1986) as his source for the quote in his comment that:

With a few exceptions, anarchists had not accepted the Soviet Union as being a socialist country. And their argument was cogent: “In Russia as everywhere else, there is capitalism. It is stupid to think that the latter can exist without being defended by a government [even if in] Russia, this government is referred to as proletarian.”

The existence of a large, organised anarchist-communist ideological and anarcho-syndicalist workers’ movement with deep penetration into both the working class and intelligentsia must also explain why, unlike in Hungary and Czechoslovakia where many anarchists helped found communist parties in this period, few Bulgarian anarchists were attracted to the Bolshevik concept of revolution. The 1925 bombing of the St. Nedelya Cathedral in Sofia by a joint team of a radical BKP faction and BZS members – in response to the jailing and execution of many BKP leaders – killed 11

generals, the chief of police and the mayor of the city, and 140 other people. However, it brought down a reign of terror against the left, with 3,000 communists arrested and three executed. The FAKB, BKP and BZS united their guerrilla forces into a single detachment, but it was soon forced to disperse into smaller combat groups. Special police units were sent after Sheytanov and he and his comrade-in-arms, the young anarchist actress Mariola Sirakova,⁶ were caught and executed along with 12 other prisoners at the Belovo railway station on June 2, 1925. The repression saw a large number of Bulgarian anarchists such as Grigoriev flee into exile in Yugoslavia, then France, where groups were established in the anarchist strongholds of Toulouse and Paris as well as Beziers. These groups set up an aid committee to support anarchist prisoners in Bulgaria and drafted a revolutionary programme for the FAKB. Influenced by the debate in France over the Makhnovist *Platform* from 1926 onwards – where a Bulgarian delegate known only as “Pavel” (perhaps Grigoriev) was among those who established the short-lived platformist International Anarchist Communist Federation (IACF) in 1927 – the FAKB adopted the *Platform* as its constitution.

“Vlassovden Syndicalism” & Anarchist Expansion

Meanwhile, the anarcho-syndicalist Manol Vassev Nicolov and a group of anarchist-communists from Khaskovo had been organising among the peasant tobacco farmers in the district, making use of traditional old rural mutual aid co-operatives called *Vlassovden* (after the feast-day of Vlas, an old pagan god). In 1930, they achieved success, with 600 delegates from across the country founding the *Vlassovden* Confederation – sometimes called the *Vlassovden* Union – at Khaskovo. The demands of the *Vlassovden* Confederation were radical, not revolutionary: the reduction of direct and indirect taxation, the breaking-up of agrarian cartels, free medical care for peasants, insurance and pensions for agricultural workers, and community autonomy. But “*Vlassovden* syndicalism” spread like wildfire and by 1931, the *Vlassovden* Confederation boasted 130 sections. Meanwhile the political situation was changing: in 1930, Grigoriev returned to Bulgaria to take advantage of an amnesty, and organised an underground FAKB cell in Sofia; in the same year, a fascist military organisation called *Link* (*Zveno*) was founded by army officers who were inspired by Mussolini and closely associated with the Military League.

In 1931, faced with rising anarchist-led demands for free speech and an amnesty for political “crimes”, the right-wing regime was ousted by a “People’s Bloc” coalition of BZS agrarians, liberals and radicals. Before the election, in Bulgaria’s first May Day celebration, the police attacked an anarchist student BOSF meeting and arrested eleven students. The BOSF demanded an end to clerical control of education and military recruitment on campus, demanding that “the priests and sergeants major be expelled from schools and universities and taxes abolished.” The end of

individual freedom.

We are for anarchist communism or free communism, which will replace private property with the complete socialisation of lands, factories and mines, and of all goods and instruments of production. The State will be replaced by a federation of free communes regionally, provincially, nationally and internationally united. The church and religion will be replaced by a free individual moral and a scientific vision.

Unlike all other socio-economic and political concepts and organisations, Anarchist Communism is federalist.

The new social organisation that will replace the State will be built and run from the bottom upwards. All the inhabitants of any given village will form the local free commune, and all the local free communes will unite regionally, provincially, nationally and internationally in unions and federations and in a universal general social confederation.

The new organisation of society’s production will be formed by a tight network of countless local agricultural enterprises, artisans, mines, industry, transport, etc., united on a regional, provincial, national and international level in production unions and federations as part of a general confederation of production.

Society’s new organisation of exchange, consumption and supply will likewise be represented by a dense and complex network of regional, provincial and national organisations, unions and federations, grouped in a general confederation of exchange and consumption for satisfying the needs of all inhabitants.

All human social activity and all transport, communications, education, healthcare, and so on, will be organised in a similar fashion.

With this organisational system of all the functions of the various aspects of social life, there will be no place in society for the power of one individual over another or for the exploitation of one by another.

The basic principle of production and distribution for the building of the new social system will be: everyone will produce according to their possibilities and everyone will receive according to their needs.

Tactics

The realisation of this social ideal of equality, solidarity and freedom can only be brought about by the united workers and peasant masses, inspired by anarchist communism and organised into ideological, professional, exchange and consumption, cultural and educational groups.

Anarchist communism, while repudiating the State, rejects the involvement of the workers in the administration bodies and institutions of the State, in the parliament and in any vote for the official management of the State.

As the sole means of efficient struggle, as a defence of the immediate interests of the working masses, and for the realization of the full ideal of humanity’s freedom, anarchism recognizes only the direct action of the workers themselves, initiated by their economic organisations and expressed through strikes, sabotage, boycotts,

Appendix:

Platform of the Federation of Anarchist Communists of Bulgaria, 1945

Federatsia na Anarkho Komunistite
ot Balgaria - FAKB

Basic Positions

We reject the present social system of State and capitalist centralisation, as it is founded on the principle of the State, which is contrary to the initiative and freedom of the people. Every form of power involves economic, political or spiritual privilege. Its application on an economic level is represented by private property, on a political level by the State and on a spiritual level by religion. These three forms of power are linked. If you touch one, the others are changed and, inversely, if you keep one form of power, it will inevitably lead to the re-establishment of the other two. This is why we repudiate the very principle of power.

We are supporters of the abolition of private property, of the State and of religion, and of the total suppression of every form and institution of constraint and violence. We reject every teaching and every social, political and economic-political movement aimed at maintaining the State, private property, the church, and constraint and violence in social relations.

We repudiate fascism, which is a historic attempt to restore absolutism, autocracy and the strength of the political form of power with the aim of defending the economic and spiritual dominance of the privileged classes.

We reject political democracy, as it does not foresee the disappearance of the principle of power, and drives the masses to bewilderment by leading them, through lies and illusions, into fights which are against their interests, and corrupts them through the exercise of power and the maintaining of the appetite for domination. Political democracy, furthermore, shows that it is totally incapable of solving the great social problems and that it fosters chaos, contradictions and crime as a result of its social foundations based on the centralised State and capitalism.

We repudiate State socialism as it leads to State capitalism - the most monstrous form of economic exploitation and oppression, and of total domination of social and

the regime saw a huge upsurge of anarchist organising and publishing so that the anarchist movement could be counted as the third largest force on the left, after the BZS then the BKP. In that year, according to one study, there were some 40 anarcho-syndicalist groups under the Anarcho-Syndicalist National Confederation of Labour (ASNCL), while the Bulgarian Federation of Autonomous Unions (BFAU) became the Bulgarian IWA section.⁷ In 1932, the FAKB held a clandestine national congress in the forest near Lovech which was chaired by Grigoriev which aimed at re-uniting the movement: *Rabotnicheska Misl* was re-established as the mouthpiece of the federation. Despite the leftist nature of the “People’s Bloc”, the anarchist movement was still persecuted: shootings, arrests and imprisonment were common.

The 1934 Fascist Coup & its Aftermath

In 1934, fascist *Zveno* leaders Colonel Kimon Georgiev and Colonel Damyan Velchev staged a coup and established an authoritarian regime with Georgiev as prime minister, outlawing all political parties, corporatising the trade unions like the ANSCL, BFAU and *Vlassovden* Confederation – from which the latter never recovered – and waging war on the FAKB and BKP. Also in 1934, the rightist VMRO assassinated King Alexander of Yugoslavia and French Foreign Minister Louis Bartou in Marseilles in collaboration with the Croatian fascist *Ustaše*. The international outrage the assassination provoked forced the *Zveno* regime to suppress the VMRO. The regime also banned anarchist papers such as *Svobodno Obshtestvo* – but it reappeared as a monthly entitled *New World* edited by Petar Lozanov, while the paper *Compass* managed to remain in circulation. A counter-coup in 1935 backed by the tsar saw Georgiev ousted and monarchist *Zveno* leader General Zlato Panchev installed, soon to be replaced by a civilian monarchist dictatorship. But the anarchist, communist and agrarian movements still had to operate underground – with the remnants of its press banned – while the pro-communist VMRO United collapsed in 1936.

An example of a typical Bulgarian anarchist of this period is found in the police file (compiled later under Soviet occupation) of the miner, farmhand and locomotive fitter Alexander Metodiev Nakov (1919-1962),⁸ who came from a poor family in the village of Kosatcha in the department of Pernik. Becoming an anarchist in 1937, Nakov launched an anarcho-syndicalist group in the Machinostroitel factory in Pernik and was later to serve time in both a fascist prison and a Soviet concentration camp. The Stalinist police described him despairingly as “a fanatical anarchist” – but also a “fine worker”, with “a good overall political grounding” who was well-read and an Esperantist. At the outbreak of the Spanish Revolution in 1936, some 30 Bulgarian anarchists including Grigoriev went to fight in the militia. Grigoriev represented the FAKB at the CNT-FAI congress in free Spain in November that year. The revolutionary challenge to fascism finally forced the dispersed anarchist movement to rally again at the FAKB’s final pre-war congress, held at Vitoshka in August 1936. Despite their many jailings in concentration camps, the anarchists also managed to circulate

the mimeographed *Khleb i Svoboda (Bread and Freedom)* during 1936-1939. In 1938, the BKP attempted to appeal to a broader audience, renaming itself the Bulgarian Workers' Party (BRP), until reverting to its Stalinist colours in 1948. Returning to Bulgaria in 1939, Grigoriev was arrested and spent the war years in prison then a concentration camp.

War & Red-Orange-Brown Collaboration

In 1940, a manifesto by the FAKB railed against the intrigues of the Comintern in first allying with the Nazis, then opposing them, accusing the communist BRP, by supporting the Allied war effort, according to Grancharoff, of having:

...committed a historical crime by restoring the credit of the bankrupt bourgeois slogans, gonfalons [medieval military and ecclesiastical flags] and institutions for constitution, democracy, love of peace... patriotism and nationalism...

Bulgaria aligned with the Nazis in 1941 and the anarchist movement fought a guerrilla war against Nazi forces stationed in Bulgaria as well as the Bulgarian fascists: as Grancharoff puts it, "situated between hammer and anvil, they courageously fought against fascism and paid dearly for it." Popular resistance, in fact, saved all of Bulgaria's Jews from deportation to the Nazi extermination camps. In Macedonia itself, a Communist Party of Macedonia (MCP) was only founded in 1943. The anarchist movement operated a powerful guerrilla force by the closing phases of the war in what was still mostly an agrarian society. The anarchist movement, which had fought a long guerrilla campaign against the fascists, grew rapidly and helped the Fatherland Front stage the successful insurrection of the 9th of September 1944 against the Nazi forces stationed in Bulgaria. Indeed, they were arguably strong enough to pose a serious alternative, but the strength of the Fatherland Front – consisting of the communist BRP, a faction of the socialist BZS and the military fascist *Zveno* movement – which had also fought as partisans against the Nazis, proved formidable. In late 1944, the BRP had only 15,000 members, but when the Red Army replaced the Germans as an occupying force, the Bulgarian communists took advantage of the situation, forming a Fatherland Front government headed by *Zveno* leader Kimon Georgiev, the army colonel who had staged the fascist coup a mere decade earlier in 1934. This Red/Orange/Brown alliance – what Grancharoff calls "the unity between National Socialism and communism" – immediately went to work to repress the anarchists, other political tendencies and the working class. Workers were forced to join a single state "trade union" – as before under Georgiev's rule, which was modelled on Mussolini's Italy – and piecemeal was introduced. Nevertheless, organisations such as the Southwest Bulgarian Anarchist Union and the Élisée Reclus Group in Pernik were formed by militants such as Nakov.

Notes:

1. *The Bulgarian Anarchist Movement*, Jack Grancharoff, unpublished manuscript kindly written especially for the ZACF, Quamaa, Australia, 2006. This document provides the connecting tissue for what was otherwise an intriguing, yet obscure movement.
2. The *Organisational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists (Draft)*, Nestor Makhno, Ida Mett and others of the Workers' Cause exile group in Paris, France, 1926. This key anarchist-communist text reaffirms the historical majority tendency – of the mass-organisational line, which includes "political" (ideological), "social" (community) and syndicalist (union) organising – against both the adventurism of the minority insurgent line, and anti-anarchist individualist posturing. It can be found among the documents in the extensive Nestor Makhno Archive online at: www.nestormakhno.info/. It is also downloadable from the Zabalaza Books website as a fully laid out pamphlet.
3. *Gueorgui Cheitanov, 1896-1925*, Nick Heath, Anarchist Federation, UK, undated, online at: www.libcom.org/articles/history/1896-1925-gueorgui-Sheytanov/index.php
4. *Georgi Grigoriev, 1906-1996*, (aka Georges Balkanski), Nick Heath, Anarchist Federation, UK, undated, online at www.libcom.org/history/articles/1906-1996-georgi-grigoriev/index.php
5. *Liberation Nationale et Liberation Sociale: l'Exemple de la Revolution Macedonienne*, Georges Balkanski (Georgi Grigoriev), Collection Anarchiste, Federation Anarchiste, Paris, France, undated. This book is the primary French-language anarchist analysis of the Macedonian national question.
6. *Mariola Sirakova, 1904-1925*, Nick Heath, Anarchist Federation, UK, undated, online at: www.libcom.org/history/articles/1904-1925-mariola-sirakova/index.php
7. *Bulgaria: The New Spain* (available for download from the ZB site)
8. *Alexander Metodiev Nakov, 1919-1962+*, anonymous, Bulgarian Libertarian Union in exile, Paris, France, undated, online at: www.libcom.org/history/articles/1919-1962-alexander-metodiev-nakov/index.php
9. *Bulgaria: The New Spain*
10. References to these organisations can be found under their relevant country entry at the reasonably accurate Broadleft web-portal: www.broadleft.org/
11. *Platform of the Federation of Anarchist Communists of Bulgaria*, Federatsia na Anarkho Komunistite ot Bgaria, 1945, English translation by Nestor McNab, FdCA, Italy, 2006. This excellent mass-organisational position statement deserves, in the author's view, to take pride of place in the platformist theoretical pantheon.

the left, using worker disenchantment with agrarian and communist reformism to build a plethora of urban syndicalist unions, then penetrating all layers of society with a phalanx of interlinked professional, worker, student and even guerrilla organs. It even managed to bridge the urban-rural divide by organising the peasantry along syndicalist lines that were uniquely their own. This was above all a social movement – but one that had significant ideological clarity to fend off the lure of Bolshevism, and one that was organised, and able to defend itself by force of arms.

That clarity came, I suggest, by the FAKB's adherence to the platformist concept of the specific organisation working – as the Makhnovist's had – within a broad front of revolutionary libertarian socialist social forces. By doing so, the FAKB was not merely orienting itself geographically eastwards towards neighbouring insurgent Ukraine with its flexible, plural approach towards the revolution, rather than westwards towards the Bolshevik-compromised anarchist movements of Czechoslovakia and Hungary, but politically towards the task of grabbing the bull by the horns and taking up the necessary tools to build tomorrow's society today. It seems the *Platform* served the FAKB specifically, but the movement in general, very well given the challenges of fascist corporatism, guerrilla war, fascist-Stalinist rule, and some 40 years of productive exile. And despite the slander of sectarianism often thrown at platformist organisations by synthesists, the FAKB, as shown by its 1945 *Platform* was a staunch supporter of the anarcho-syndicalist *International Workers' Association* (IWA) – founded in Berlin in 1922 representing some 2 million workers – and so was its descendant, the FAB, so the anarchist-communists clearly never relinquished the mass line, regardless of either repression or their own adoption of defensive guerrilla war.

Other than the Makhnovist Revolutionary Insurgent Army of the Ukraine (RIAU) itself, which peaked at 500,000 members, the closest corresponding mass anarchist-communist organisation to my mind that combined such a range of worker, peasant, student, intellectual and social formations including guerrilla forces were those of the pre-war/wartime Korean Anarchist Communist Federation (KACF) of 1929-1945 and the post-war Uruguayan Anarchist Federation (FAU) of 1956-1976. But key KACF militants joined the Korean provisional government in 1940, and the FAU fell into insurgency, flirting with Guevarist adventurism in the early 1970s, before finally clearing its head of the Marxist fog and embracing *especificismo* (the Latin American form of specific organisation which is often close to platformism) in 1985. So it seems fair to say that the FAKB takes the honours as one of the best-organised and enduring of all anarchist-communist organisations, even if its current incarnation as the FAB is (of necessity, perhaps, for a rebuilding movement) synthesist. What role did the FAKB and its sister organisations play in laying the social groundwork for the remarkable historical feat of the refusal of Bulgaria's people to allow the deportation of their Jewish neighbours, resulting in the rescue of every single one of Bulgaria's 48,000 Jews during the war? These facets have yet to be explored: the Bulgarian movement clearly needs further intensive study, but it would appear that few movements have had such a tough history. And that few have met the challenge so brilliantly.

The Stalinist Regime ⁹

The FAKB called a congress at Knegevo, in the capital Sofia, in 1945 to discuss the repression, but communist militia arrested all 90 delegates and put them into forced labour camps. This did not stop the organisation from producing an important anarchist-communist Platform. Anarchist locals were forcibly shut down and the revived FAKB organ *Rabotnicheska Misal* (*Workers' Thought*) was forced to suspend publication after only eight issues. It reappeared briefly during communist-rigged elections held in 1945 under American and British pressure, surging from a circulation of 7,000 to 60,000 before being banned again. The next annual congress of the FAKB in 1946 had to take place clandestinely. In 1946, the *Zveno* leader Georgiev was replaced by the communist Georgi Dimitrov, the *Zveno* and BZS factions within the Fatherland Front were dissolved, the monarchy was abolished and Bulgaria became a supposed "People's Republic". The agrarians of the BZS refused to cooperate and in 1947 (the year of the anarchist veteran Gerdzhikov's death), the BZS leader Nikola Petkov was executed by the communists. In 1948, the last mass round-up of anarchists netted 600 militants who were sent to concentration camps such as Cuciyan (near Pernik, called by its inmates the "Caresses of Death"), Bogdanovol (called the "Camp of Shadows"), Nojarevo, Tadorovo and Bosna – and the BRP was merged with the Fatherland Front to transform it into an ersatz mass "communist" party claiming 460,000 members.

By that date, hundreds had been executed and about 1,000 FAKB members sent to concentration camps where the torture, ill treatment and starvation of veteran (but non-communist) anti-fascists – some of whom had fought fascism for almost 30 years – was almost routine. Anarchist prisoners were singled out and worked to death, being forced to work 36-hour shifts compared to the 12-16-hour shifts of other inmates. A partial list of 33 detained anarchists released that year by those working underground in Bulgaria is revealing in terms of its class composition: eleven school and university students; four urban anarcho-syndicalist workers including a technician; four teachers including a schools inspector; four rural workers (remnants of the *Vlassovden* syndicalist movement); three print-workers; two journalists including Georgi Dimitroff Kurtov (Karamikaylov), the often-detained editor of *Rabotnicheska Misal*; a librarian; and several others whose occupations are not given. The youngest whose age was given was 21, presumably politicised under fascism, and the oldest 49, the tobacco worker Manol Vassev Nicolov, who had initiated *Vlassovden* syndicalism in 1930. Most had been imprisoned or even sentenced to death by the fascists, three were former guerrilla fighters, and one had been involved in a military conspiracy against the fascists. As Grancharoff says:

The dark veil of communism used to entomb anarchism was also the same that buried ... genuine communism and all revolutionary hopes for the emancipation and liberation of the downtrodden.

While a dedicated anarchist underground run by militants like Nakov kept operat-

ing well into the 1980s, many Bulgarian anarchists such as the key militant Georgi Grigoriev fled into exile in France – where exile formations of the FAKB were established, as well as an umbrella Bulgarian Libertarian Union (BLU) which embraced all anarchist tendencies from that country. Grigoriev, who wrote a history of the Bulgarian anarchist movement and a study of the interplay between national liberation and social revolution in the Balkans, would play a key role in re-establishing the BLU as the synthesist Federation of Bulgarian Anarchists (FAB) after the collapse of communist rule in 1989 and in ensuring its adherence to the International of Anarchist Federations. In 2008, the FAB still publishes its newspaper *Svobodna Misl* (*Free Thought*) as a monthly. Today, other anarchist organisations in Bulgaria include the *Anarchist Front* (AF), the Autonomous Anarchist Group “Anarchoresistance” (ABDA) with its paper *Anarkhosprotiva* (*Anarchoresistance*), the anarcho-syndicalist Bulgarian Confederation of Labour (BKT) which is an IWA section, founded in 1991 by militants such as Nikola Mladenov Totorov, and the revived Federation of Anarchist Youth (FAM).¹⁰

The Legacy of Bulgarian Platformism

On the plane of theory, I would argue that a long-neglected Bulgarian document should be regarded as another cornerstone of the platformist tradition after the Platform itself: the 1945 *Platform of the Federation of Anarchist Communists of Bulgaria*.¹¹ Only recently translated into English, this *Platform* repudiated fascism, democracy, the state and capital, and reaffirmed an anarchist communist mass line of the total eradication of private property and the full socialisation of the means of production under working class control. The FAKB *Platform* went on to deal with the crucial issues of tactics and organisation, rejecting the form of the political party as “sterile and ineffective, unable to respond to the goals and the immediate tasks and to the interests of the workers,” but speaking in favour of “the true strength of the workers”, “the economy and their economic organisations. Only there lies the terrain where capitalism can be undermined. Only there lies the true class struggle.” On organisation, the FAKB stated that several types of working class organisation were indispensable and intertwined without subordination: anarchist communist ideological organisations; worker syndicates; agricultural worker syndicates; co-operatives; and cultural and special-interest organisations, for instance for youth and women. Of these, the FAKB *Platform* noted that:

It is above all necessary for the partisans of anarchist communism to be organised in an anarchist communist ideological organisation. The tasks of these organisations are: to develop, realise and spread anarchist communist ideas; to study the vital present-day questions affecting the daily lives of the working masses and the problems of the social reconstruction; the multifaceted struggle for the defence of our social ideal and the cause of working people; to participate in the creation of groups of workers on the level of produc-

tion, profession, exchange and consumption, culture and education, and all other organisations that can be useful in the preparation for the social reconstruction; armed participation in every revolutionary insurrection; the preparation for and organisation of these events; the use of every means which can bring on the social revolution. Anarchist communist ideological organisations are absolutely indispensable in the full realisation of anarchist communism both before the revolution and after.

Such anarchist communist organisations were to be federated across a given territory, “co-ordinated by the federal secretariat” – but the “local organisation” remained the basic policy-making unit and both local and federal secretariats were “merely liaison and executive bodies with no power” beyond executing the decisions of the locals or federation of locals. The FAKB *Platform* emphasised the ideological unity of such organisations, stating that only convinced anarchist communists could be members, and that decision-making must be by consensus achieved by both persuasion and practical demonstration – not by majority vote (the latter being the method applicable to syndicalist and other forms of organisation, with allowances made for dissenting minorities). Anarchist communist militants, so organised, participated directly in both syndicalist unions and mainstream unions, arguing their positions, defending the immediate interests of the class and learning how to control production in preparation for the social revolution. Militants also participated directly in co-operatives, “bringing to them the spirit of solidarity and of mutual aid against the spirit of the party and bureaucracy” – and in cultural and special-interest organisations which support the anarchist communist idea and the syndicalist organisations. All such organisations related to each other on the basis of “reciprocal dependence” and “ideological communality”.

Lessons from the Bulgarian Experience

I would argue that here we have a movement that started out looking quite similar to many of its contemporaries, particularly in colonised territories: small propaganda cells of anarchist militants establishing underground presses and raising the temperature of the class struggle. The parallels with the early movements of Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary are of course there, but the Bulgarians in particular parted ways quite early on from those trajectories by throwing themselves directly into the Macedonian liberation war of 1903. For all the criticisms levelled at these anarchist guerrillas – and the strategy of launching a largely rural war without a peasant organisational base, relying instead on the vagaries of peasant sympathies, is one of the strongest – this baptism of fire not only hardened the Bulgarians for the struggles to come, but in real terms precipitated the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. In less than ideal conditions of almost continual war from 1911-1918, followed by the hammer-blows of two successful fascist coups in 1923 and 1934, the Bulgarian anarchist movement built itself into a formidable force, the third-largest on