

Industrial accidents and the “fight against the class enemy” during the years of classical Stalinism in Bulgaria

Daniel Vatchkov

Abstract. In the late 1940s, the Communist regime in Bulgaria undertook a policy of accelerated industrial development. In following the Soviet model, the construction of many heavy industry enterprises began. The harsh working conditions and the effort to meet the production plan deadlines resulted in a drastic rise in the number of industrial breakdowns and fatal workplace accidents. Contributing to this was the sharp increase in the number of workers and engineers lacking the necessary professional qualification and experience. But in the context of widespread persecution and purges taking place in Bulgarian society during in the time of Stalinism, the authorities looked upon industrial accidents as entirely due to sabotage on the part of the “class enemy”. Following the Soviet model again, trials were held, in which the accused “confessed” their hostile activity. Hundreds of people were repressed in connection with industrial accidents. The fight against wrecking activities would largely contribute to the establishment of full Party control over the economy.

Keywords: industrial accidents, sabotage, wrecking, class enemy

Starting from 1947, the accelerated construction of a totalitarian state was commenced in Bulgaria. Full control over society was established in several major stages.

First, all public opposition that might question the power of the Communist Party and the political and economic course it had undertaken for the country’s development was abolished. In general, this stage was completed by the autumn of 1947, with the destruction of the Parliamentary opposition parties - the Agrarian Union headed by Nikola Petkov and the Social-democratic Party headed by Kosta Lulchev. After sham trials based on fictitious charges, oppositionaries were thrown in jail or sent to camps; their political leaders were executed (Isusov 1991, 190-191). Thus was eliminated even the slightest possibility of an alternative course to the country’s Communist orientation and subjection in foreign policy to the Soviet Union.

The next stage consisted in putting an end to the remnants of independence of the Communists' allied parties, which were completely emptied of meaning. The Fatherland Front was deprived of any power and left with insignificant social functions, mostly of an official, representative kind (Vezenkov 2008, 295-296). The Bulgarian Agrarian National Union was allowed to continue its formal existence only in order to complete the fake picture presented by Communist propaganda regarding a pretended union between workers and peasants.

The last stage of construction of the totalitarian regime was the elimination of the opposition within the ruling Communist Party itself, which had now become the only factor of power and began to merge with the state. With the subjection of the Party structures to the centre, the totalitarian model was complete: the leader of the Party became the brilliant and infallible leader of the people. In Bulgaria, as in the other East European countries controlled by Moscow, it was necessary to assert the cult of the local "little Stalins" who would loyally and rigorously implement in their respective countries the policy of the "father of the world proletariat" (Service 2008, 363-367, 432-448).

In the 1920s and 1930s, these stages of transition from a pluralistic to a totalitarian society had been conducted in quite similar ways under the various totalitarian regimes of that time - Communist, Fascist, and National Socialist. In implementing the separate stages in Bulgaria, the local authorities applied the Soviet experience, including the typical Soviet-style show trials, like those conducted in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, which handed down unsparing sentences to the accused (Dobriyanov (ed.) 2001, 133-144).

In Bulgaria, the totalitarian system's last stage of completion began with the 16th Plenum of the Central Committee (CC) of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP), held on 12 and 13 July 1948, and presided over by Georgi Dimitrov. The Plenum was convened primarily in connection with the condemnation of Josip Broz Tito, the Communist leader of Yugoslavia, by the Soviet Communist leadership, to which all the East European communist parties followed suit. The theses adopted at the Plenum entirely repeated the idea formulated twenty years earlier at forums of the Soviet Communist Party, the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks). The plenum defined that "in the transition period from capitalism to socialism, it is inevitable for the class struggle to grow more intense, since the enemies of the people's democracy and socialism, internal and external, will stop at nothing to hamper the development and to attempt to restore in our country the rule of capitalism and the reactionaries". In this connection, the Party structures were called upon to display "implacability and the sharpest vigilance with regard to the class enemies - the saboteurs, wreckers, spies, traitors, speculators and disorganizers of the national economy, and [to wage] a decisive struggle for their complete disarmament" (Ognyanov (ed.) 2001, 6).

The Party forum clearly identified the enemies and their basic activities. Soon after (with the aid of the Soviet Union and especially its brilliant leader Yosif Stalin), the chief organizer of anti-socialist and anti-Soviet activity in Bulgaria was unmasked. This was Traycho Kostov, the second in rank figure in BCP and Deputy Prime Minister of Bulgaria. In the course of the investigation and trial that followed, many economic and financial officials were charged, including ministers, heads of the Bulgarian National Bank, and heads of various

economic organizations (Isusov 1990, 35). In fact, the accused were the people who had been conducting the economic policy of the Party in the first five years after the Communist takeover. We need only mention the main figures who were tried and convicted: Ivan Stefanov - Minister of Finance; Manol Sekelarov - Minister of Construction; Nikola Pavlov - Deputy Minister of Construction and member of CC; Dimitar Kochemidov - Deputy Minister of Internal Trade; Nikola Govedarski - Deputy Minister of Internal Trade; Boris Simov - Deputy Minister of Industry; Tsonyo Tsonchev - Governor of the Bulgarian National Bank, etc. (Ognyanov 2001, 145).

Here we will not linger on the history of the trial of Traycho Kostov and the high-ranking economic experts. The focus will be on court trials involving direct accusations of intentionally causing large-scale breakdowns, fires and frequent workplace accidents. We will trace how the problems arising in industry were used to build the totalitarian political system in Bulgaria and establish full control over society.

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In this period, noticeable changes took place in the condition of workers and generally of all people engaged in material production. While carrying out full nationalization, steps were taken to establish stronger control over the industrial working class, in whose name the Communist Party claimed to be governing the country (Marcheva 2016, 99-100). A task of prime importance was to raise the productivity of labour, which was accounted too low for the economic goals set by the authorities. To begin with, it was necessary to sharply improve work discipline. The “revolutionary days” of 1944 were long past and the workers had to buckle down to building socialism in Bulgaria. Moreover, the enterprises were no longer the property of the old exploiters but belonged to the people’s state, and any insubordination, deviation from labour duties, or violation of the rules, were seen as directly aimed against the people’s power and the state’s policy of accelerated economic development.

Certain measures were adopted to check the high turnover of workers, who frequently moved from one industrial site to another. Service books for workers were introduced, in which the worker’s place of employment was to be registered. A change of job from one enterprise to another was noted in the book; but this change could be made only with the permission of the head of the first enterprise where the worker had been employed. The aim was, in a manner of speaking, to bind the workers like serfs to the respective factory. In order to raise labour productivity, higher work output norms were set, that were not connected with any perceptible increase of pay (Ludzhev 2005, 383-386). To increase productivity, the Party organizations and the fully controlled trade unions launched different labour initiatives similar to the Stakhanovite movement; these measures were likewise not tied to any wide increase of income but involved a very small group of people, the so-called shock workers. And even in their case, the incentives used were primarily moral.

In fact, the conditions under which people were living and working had not changed significantly since the years of the war and immediately after it. The

basic food products were still provided through the quite restrictive ration coupon system. The system was officially repealed in 1952, but this did not lead to a sharp increase of consumption, as there was a continuing scarcity of goods in the stores. This was one reason why the workers, and not only they, continued to maintain close contacts with their home villages, from where they could partly supply themselves with some of the products that were constantly lacking. All the problems typical for the previous period, related to bad living conditions, lack of adequate work clothes, long and difficult travel to work, continued to exist up to the mid 1950s. Of course, the launched construction of more and more industrial sites in socialist Bulgaria was constantly being announced, but the main thing the accelerated industrialization actually offered the citizens was a good dose of labour heroism.

While the Communist propaganda loudly declared the enormous care given by the Party to workers, and the improved living and working conditions, the real picture proved quite different. The poor working conditions were the main reason why workers were constantly leaving the mines and factories where they were employed. The problem of labour force supply in mining was especially severe in Dimitrovo (actual Pernik). Politburo of CC of BCP devoted a special session to the matter on 14 June 1951. They discussed the report prepared by Radi Radev, a former instructor and organizer at Georgi Dimitrov Mine. The report focused on the problem that newly appointed workers were quitting their jobs in large numbers. The presentation made it clear that at the Dimitrovo mine alone, 600 workers had quit their jobs in 1949. In the following two years, the situation had gotten simply out of control. In 1950, out of approximately 7,500 workers brought over to the mine, 5,000 had quit before the end of their term of contract. Based on unspecified data, it was mentioned that the situation continued to be critical in 1951 as well - the number of those who had quit was likewise approximately 5,000 (CSA, f. 1B, inv. 6, file 1330, p. 9).

The report formulated twelve causes of large-scale quitting of jobs on the part of the workers at the mine. Foremost were the bad living conditions. Not only did most of the barracks where workers were lodged lack any comforts, but the living conditions there were simply repulsive. There were no decent, clean blankets or sheets, the straw mattresses were torn and full of moldy straw, there were no chairs, tables, coat hangers in the rooms, and the lack of stoves and coal in winter finally made the workers quit. Another category of causes was related to the widespread poor treatment of the newly hired workers. The heads of the mine showed no interest in them and their problems. The engineers or technical leaders would hardly ever go and talk calmly with the new miners about the difficulties they were experiencing in their work and living conditions. The report pointed out that many of the workers were members of the Party, but the Party organization at the mine was doing hardly anything to integrate them. Many administrative and labour-related difficulties were being made for them; the pay they were entitled to for their work was often not recorded correctly. Sickness benefits were paid out with long delay. Working clothes and rubber shoes were not handed out on time. The attitude of the old miners (who were local people) was also very bad; they would curse the newly arrived workers and would even chase them away from the mine. The newly arrived were constantly

victims of theft, mostly of their food coupons and money, and no measures had been taken to deal with this problem (CSA, f. 1B, inv. 6, file 1330, p. 7-8).

Without entering into details and citing specific numbers, the report identified the basic reason why workers quit their jobs at the mine: information was being spread about daily collapses of rocks in the mineshafts and deaths of workers. Here it was noted that the organs of Committee for State Security (CSS) in the mine were not working adequately and not waging stubborn class struggle against the hostile elements disseminating these rumours (CSA, f. 1B, inv. 6, file 1330, p. 7). In fact, the report did not require that this information should be refuted but that a stop should be put to all comments on the topic.

Sharp criticism was leveled at the presidents of the village councils who failed to bring the quitting workers back to the mine (CSA, f. 1B, inv. 6, file 1330, p. 8).

After investigating the conditions in Georgi Dimitrov Mine, a new report was presented to Politburo by Georgi Chankov on 7 February 1952. He practically confirmed the facts presented in the previous report. The session concluded that the structures of the Ministry of Heavy Industry, the Party and trade union organizations, the management of the mine, etc., had not undertaken the necessary measures for the fulfillment of the economic plan, for stimulating socialist competition, for ensuring safety at work, and for improving the living conditions of workers (CSA, f. 1B, inv. 6, file 1540, p. 17). Along the line of the Party organizations, it was decided to change the leadership of the Municipal and Regional Committees of BCP in Dimitrovo, and to replace the trade union leadership there. Minister Georgi Tsankov was entrusted with the task "to review the operative staff of the Ministry of the Interior in Dimitrovo, to strengthen it and organize high vigilance with regard to the protection of the mines" (CSA, f. 1B, inv. 6, file 1540, p. 19).

A severe shortage of labour force resources was felt not only in mines, where the working conditions were exceptionally harsh, but in construction as well, a branch characterized by frequent industrial breakdowns and workplace accidents. It was reported early in 1952 that many sites failed to recruit the needed numbers of workers. For instance, 3,500 workers were needed at the dam Rositsa, but only 1,200 were working there. The situation at Georgi Dimitrov dam was even worse: instead of 3,700 workers, only 1,300 were working there (CSA, f. 1B, inv. 6, file 1540, p. 20). That is why Politburo decided at its session to create a special organ, subordinated to the Council of Ministers, called Chief Directorate of the Labour Reserves. This new structure was expected to set the start of organized recruitment, from villages and cities, of the labour force badly needed in mining and construction (CSA, f. 1B, inv. 6, file 1540, p. 21).

One of the unfavourable consequences of the accelerated rates of industrialization was the recruitment in these heavy branches of the economy of large numbers of young people lacking both professional and life experience. Some of the chief causes of frequent accidents were largely related to the employee's lack of professional training and working habits.

Despite these obvious professional shortcomings of both ordinary manual workers and the technical and administrative staff, any breakdown or accident was viewed mainly as an act of sabotage or intentional wrecking on the part of

the enemy. The archives of CSS are full of cases of workplace accidents, failures, fires in enterprises, which were investigated only as cases of intentional wrecking. A nut or bolt found in the motor of a machine, a broken electrical switch, a torn conductor, would turn out to be the result of sabotage on the part of Bulgarian agents of Western imperialism and Titoism.

Very indicative of the prevailing spy mania and the absurdity of accusations made when investigating accidents, was the case of the frequent workplace accidents occurring at the Bulgarian-Soviet geological expedition in the village of Gurkovo, Kazanlak district. The expedition started work there in February 1949. The group was headed by a Soviet engineer, whose assistant was Bulgarian, a member of BCP. Two drilling rigs were mounted and drilling began. Very soon, in July, frequent breakdowns of the drills started to occur, which led to interruption of work lasting from several hours to several days. By November, a total of ten breakdowns had taken place, amounting to an average of two or three a month. It was emphasized that the drilling workers had undergone a training course as early as 1945, but it was known to CSS that these courses had been infiltrated by fascist elements, which was a sufficient proof that the breakdowns leading to frequent interruption of work were brought about intentionally (ACDDAABCSSISBNAF, f. 1, inv. 1, file 1687, p. 1-2). In the course of repair work, it was found that the drills broke down so frequently because particles of sand and grist were falling into the machinery, and also because of faulty handling of the machines. In September, after being interrogated by agents of CSS, one of the workers admitted he had intentionally caused the breakdowns. His motive was connected with the fact that workers were not given leave from work at the site, so he could not go to Kazanlak and to the village of Drenta, Elena district, to see his girlfriend. The senior worker Svetoslav Kostov was sentenced to 7 years of solitary confinement (ACDDAABCSSISBNAF, f. 1, inv. 1, file 1687, p. 1).

Despite this major success of the CSS organs in unmasking hostile elements, the breakdowns in Gurkovo continued to occur and grew even more frequent in the months of September and October. The investigating agents found that, since at no time did a single person work at the drills, a whole shift of workers consisting of four people had to be involved in the wrecking. Evidently, an organized enemy group was active here. The investigation focused mainly on workers who either had something dark about their past or had made critical comments about life under Communism. Suspicion fell on the shift foreman Georgi Geshev. Commenting on the dismissal of a drill worker from another site for having caused a breakdown, Geshev had said to a CSS informer that he too was prepared to cause a breakdown in order to be dismissed from the job (ACDDAABCSSISBNAF, f. 1, inv. 1, file 1687, p. 3). This statement indicates that some drill workers were employed at the site against their will.

The other suspect was Andrey Kostov, who worked as a guard at the site. He was a member of BCP and claimed he had been a political prisoner under the former regime, but after checking, the agents found he had been a criminal offender before 9 September 1944. Kostov often protested to his superiors that guards should enjoy the same benefits as the drill workers. Moreover, he did not fulfill his duties at all well, always sleeping during his shifts. Also, he had complained about

his wife receiving a daily wage of 100 leva¹ at her job in the cooperative farm. In his report, the chief investigator stated that additional suspects would be charged for the breakdowns; for this purpose, two more operative agents were sent to assist in unmasking the saboteur group (ACDDAABCSSISBNAF, f. 1, inv. 1, file 1687, p. 3-4). The report does not make any mention of the possibility the breakdowns may have been caused by the fact that the drills were perhaps outdated and of poor quality.

An incident that was qualified as a severe case of enemy diversion was the big breakdown at the Geo Milev Factory near Iskar train station. On 2 August 1950, around 14.45 h, an explosion took place at the factory, killing 12 workers. The investigation definitely concluded the disaster was caused intentionally by resident Yugoslav spies. According to the CSS report, the explosion was organized by Asen Milanov, a spy working for Yugoslavia, who acted under the instructions of Kosta Ugrița, the Yugoslav military attaché in Sofia. Milanov was a Bulgarian from the region of Tsaribrod, who had served as an officer in the Yugoslav royal army before the war. He admitted having been recruited by the Yugoslav intelligence services at the end of 1944, and having been sent on a mission to Bulgaria in 1946. He had maintained regular contact with the consul at the Yugoslav legation in Sofia, Svetozar Savich, to whom he delivered secret information. After Savich was expelled from Bulgaria in 1950, Milanov continued working with Ugrița, the military attaché at the embassy. The latter set him the task of carrying out a diversion at the Geo Milev Factory, where Milanov at the time was head of the staff department (CSA, f. 1B, inv. 6, file 1305, p. 81-82). To carry out the plan, Milanov recruited Nikola Velinov, a worker in the factory's extracting workshop, who was an inveterate enemy of the BCP and the Fatherland Front government. Velinov was said to be a person of low morals and greedy for money. Milanov had promised Velinov he would be richly rewarded after the diversion was carried out and would be taken to Yugoslavia. He had given Velinov two clockwork lighters and had set the time for the explosion. Meanwhile, in order to cover up their tracks, Milanov and Ugrița timed the clockwork mechanism so the explosion would kill Velinov. Indeed, Velinov was killed along with 11 other workers (CSA, f. 1B, inv. 6, file 1305, p. 82-83).

This was the version of events for which Milanov was indicted. It is remarkable that the whole accusation was based on the confessions of the accused and on testimonies of witnesses. No mention is made of material evidence that might confirm the prosecutor's accusation. As we know, confession by the accused was the main, if not the only, basis for conviction at the Soviet trials conducted under Stalin. This advanced Soviet legal practice was widely used in Bulgaria from 1945 to the middle of the 1950s. Another circumstance throwing serious doubt on the prosecutor's claim was the death of Velinov. He had to be an exceptionally illiterate person not to understand that the timing of the clock would kill

¹ At that time, 100 leva was indeed a very small sum. After two monetary reforms, carried out in 1952 and 1961, this amount was approximately equal to 40 cents, which would make a monthly salary of about 10 leva.

him. In any case, none of the proofs presented in the report would lead a reader today to conclude the incident in Geo Milev Factory was the result of an intentional diversion.

Another such accident, which gave rise to a wave of sabotage mania, was the fire at Parvi May Factory in Pleven, an enterprise producing clay pipes. On 23 February 1951, at 21.00 h, a fire broke out in the newly built part of the factory containing a drying facility for pipes and the room of the furnaces. The material damage caused by the fire was calculated to be approximately 10 million leva. The investigators suggested sabotage as the cause of the fire. Accusations were aimed chiefly at the former owner of the factory, who had been appointed technical director there after its nationalization. Though he had signed a declaration he would devote all his efforts and knowledge for the development of production, he had immediately begun his wrecking activity. He succeeded in engaging the support of the trade-union organization, and with its help, began dismissing honest workers, who were not members of the Party, by unjustifiably raising their work norms to make them unfulfillable, so that the workers were forced to quit the enterprise. At the same time, he started hiring enemy elements. Thus, by the end of 1949, a group of seven people was formed - former policemen and fascists, intent on wrecking. They often purposely broke gypsum molds; the frequent breakdown of conveyor belts was also their doing. The group caused the production of defective items by not fulfilling the technical requirements for pipe baking. One of the senior workers, Petar Mirchev, taking advantage of the naivety of the recently hired worker Petar Atanasov, a former poor farmhand, left him alone at the baking furnace one day, and went home. The young worker fell asleep, the temperature in the furnace fell, and the whole batch of pipes cracked. Mirchev warned Atanasov to tell others he was somewhere in the factory, because otherwise both of them would go to jail. Finally, in order to cover up the fact that they were responsible for a large amount of faulty produce, they decided to take a drastic measure - to set fire to the factory. Mirchev made Atanasov and Todorov go up and open the shutters of the furnaces so they would cool faster and be ready for production the following day. In fact, the plan was to set fire to the workshop. The worker Todorov was forced to open the shutters, even though he had expressed his fears this might cause a fire. And indeed, half an hour later, a fire broke out, destroying the drying room and the furnace section (ACDDAABCSSISBNAF, f. 1, inv. 1, file 2040, p. 10-14).

The topic of wreckage in the Parvi May Factory in Pleven is touched upon in a long report addressed to Vasil Kolarov by Engineer Minka Hadzhitrifonova a year before the fire occurred. In her report, she offers a different explanation of such an incident: sabotage was being committed by concealed enemies of the Party appointed to work there by Petko Kunin, Minister of Industry and a member of the "Traycho Kostov gang". The report begins with a detailed autobiographical introduction, in which the author emphasizes the fact that she was a member of BCP since 1921 and a member of the Soviet Communist Party since 1926. While living in the Soviet Union, she had worked as an engineer and had received Stalin awards for her research activity and rationalization of production. Her second husband had been killed in 1942 as a volunteer partisan,

and her son, a graduate of the Soviet Artillery Faculty, was currently working in the Soviet Union. These details from her biography were meant to serve as the surest possible guarantee of the truthfulness of the theses and facts presented further on in the report.

Her presentation was devoted mainly to the wrecking activity in Bulgarian industry perpetrated by Minister Petko Kunin and his close associates. Engineer Hadzhitrifonova pointed out she had returned to Bulgaria in 1945 with the great desire to work for the industrialization and building of socialism in Bulgaria, but from the very start had been the object of all kinds of abuse on the part of enemies, bandits, and scoundrels. But after Traycho Kostov's band of spies and wreckers was exposed, the causes of this attitude towards her became clear (ACDDAABCSSISBNAF, f. 1, inv. 3, file 18, p. 61). In fact, she points out she had been acquainted with Petko Kunin since the 1920s and accuses him of having failed at the time to warn her first husband about a betrayal in the Party organization, as a result of which the husband had been arrested and killed in 1925, while she had to emigrate to the Soviet Union with her infant child. After returning to Bulgaria, she lived several months as a tenant in Kunin's home. Later, when he was already Minister of Industry, she presented to him the structure of the respective Soviet ministry. Even then, she had noticed he was surrounding himself with dishonest people, careerists and wreckers. Further on in the report, she points out many instances when she found wrecking activity going on at enterprises she was inspecting; she had always informed Minister Kunin about this, but he had taken no measures. What is more, at one point he had forbidden her to inspect the cement factories (ACDDAABCSSISBNAF, f. 1, inv. 3, file 18, p. 71).

The author of the report qualifies as wrecking the complete incompetence with which the nationalized enterprises were managed after 1947. She points out that in many places she had witnessed entirely incorrect exploitation of the equipment, which was the main cause of the frequent breakdowns and interruption of work in the factories. She also detected enemy activity aimed at compromising socialism in the fact that absolutely uneducated people were being appointed to positions in industrial production. She seems to have been unaware that, after the elimination or dismissal of the old "fascist" specialists, these new cadres were simply the only people the Communist Party had available. Of course, the presentation is notable for the author's constant indignation that specialists like herself, who had come from the land where socialism was already being built, were not achieving the proper professional realization and, especially, were not holding sufficiently high positions in management. She heaps merciless insults and criticism upon all the deputy ministers appointed by Kunin; here, we may suspect her of personal resentment at being overlooked for such a position. She was even refused a position of professor in engineering chemistry at the Polytechnic, where a person with a "fascist past" was appointed instead (ACDDAABCSSISBNAF, f. 1, inv. 3, file 18, p. 65-67).

After discussing many other cases in her report to Vasil Kolarov, she devotes a considerable space to the situation in Parvi May Factory. The latter was one of the factories she had inspected. Here again, she points out the large amount of defective produce the factory is turning out. But her explanation is quite

different from that of the CSS agents regarding the fire, who would impute it to the activity of the former owner and the wrecker gang of former policemen and gendarmes. The bad production results, she says, were due to the policy of the Party leader in Pleven, V. Topalski, who was a friend of Kunin and who had been appointing his personal relatives and friends as directors of enterprises. These people knew nothing about the work they were entrusted to do; according to her, some of them were criminals and had never taken part in any way in the struggle of the Communists. She calls Topalski a bandit and scoundrel, adding that all Pleven knew how he had organized his wedding - he had sent his friends, armed with machine guns, to visit the rich people of the city, and in this way quickly collected 900,000 leva, with which he paid for his own big wedding. Of course, she warned Kunin about Topalski's activity in Pleven, but the minister not only did not dismiss him, but even told her he was relying on Topalski to expand Kunin's influence in this region of the country (ACDDAABCSSISBNAF, f. 1, inv. 3, file 18, p. 77-78).

The report was entirely in keeping with the "Bolshevik vigilance" typical for the times: everywhere and in everything, the author detects nothing but wrecking and sabotage. Most of the qualifications and comments are highly subjective, aiming to unmask the class enemy concealed in the ranks of the Party. It should be noted, however, that the text reflects an indisputable fact - the total incompetence, or more precisely, illiteracy, that prevailed in the management of the Bulgarian economy in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The fight against wrecking was given publicity at that time in order, on the one hand, to unmask the foreign agents before the people and, on the other hand, to provide an explanation for the visible failures occurring in the economic sphere despite the loud propaganda glorifying the historic victories of the Communist regime. Hence, the authorities often organized public trials, at which saboteurs and wreckers were "exposed" and strictly punished.

Such was the case of the "gang of saboteurs" active in the food processing factory Kooperator in Pazardzhik. According to a report prepared by a CSS agent, the gang had formed in September 1950, setting itself the task of wrecking production meant for export. The group consisted of four persons, all of whom were from wealthy families. They had been putting nails in the marmalade pulp and thus ruined a large part of the produce. In doing so, they wanted to compromise Bulgaria before the Soviet Union and the other fraternal socialist countries. The group had managed to engage in their service some of the truck drivers of the enterprise, who intentionally drove the trucks slowly so the transported vegetables would spoil. With the same intention, they were slow in making repairs to the trucks. Thus, the enterprise worked with low-quality materials and gave poor produce. At that, the gang acted furtively, showing itself hard working and disciplined, which made it difficult to unmask it in time and enabled it to carry out its wrecking activities for 7 or 8 months. Despite its cunningness, it was eventually exposed when the family background of its members came to the attention of the investigators. All the members of the group came from wealthy urban or rural families (ACDDAABCSSISBNAF, f. 1, inv. 1, file 2040, p. 1-2). We can only imagine the terrible torture these people must have undergone to confess the unbelievable activities of which they were accused.

The trial against the “wreckers” in Kooperator Factory took place on 26 June 1951. The report submitted by a CSS agent describes the situation in the city and the heightened attention with which the workers followed the trial. In all, five people were charged: an additional worker, of common origin, was accused together with the first four, who came from wealthy families. Before the start of the court proceedings, loudspeakers were placed in all sections of the factory, so the workers could be informed about the course of the trial. Workers from other enterprises in the city were also present. From the start of the day, the workers expected the trial with great interest, “commenting on the wreckers excitedly and with class hatred”. The courtroom proved too small for all the workers who wanted to attend. When the prosecutor demanded the death sentence for the organizers of the group, all the workers started applauding loudly. At 19.00 h, the court read the sentences: the organizer of the group was sentenced to death and the other members were sentenced to 15, 10, 8 and 2 years of solitary confinement respectively (ACDDAABCSSISBNAF, f. 1, inv. 1, file 2040, p. 4).

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The accelerated industrialization undertaken in Bulgaria was attended by many great problems: the growing amount of industrial produce led to a sharp rise in the share of discarded and poor-quality goods. While the population was in great need of food products, clothes, shoes and all sorts of basic essentials, the warehouses were full of useless, obsolete stocks for which there was no demand. Thus, despite the large amount of produced goods, the financial situation of most enterprises was very difficult, as considerable resources were blocked due to the large amount of unrealized produce (Ivanov, Todorova, Vatchkov 2009, 89-90). These problems, typical for centralized administratively planned economy, were ascribed by the regime to intentional wrecking on the part of enemy elements. Bad planning, waste of capital investment, low-quality produce - all this was ascribed to the wrecking activities of fascists, some of whom had successfully concealed themselves by becoming members of the Party after 1944 (ACDDAABCSSISBNAF, f. 1, inv. 3, file 3, p. 1-50).

It was only after the death of Stalin in 1953 that many economic reports started to admit some of the real causes for the frequent industrial breakdowns and accidents. A report addressed to Valko Chervenkov in 1954 drew attention to the harmful practice of hastily putting into exploitation new industrial facilities, after which, when the facility was reported completed, its servicing was neglected, and the installations were exploited incorrectly, leading to numerous severe accidents (CSA, f. 1B, inv. 6, file 2187, p. 37-38). This report reflects another very typical problem with accelerated industrialization: the tendency to officially report the launching of new industrial sites that were not fully fit for work. As a result, enterprises were cranking out low-quality produce.

Typical for the trials related to industrial breakdowns were the invariable accusations of sabotage, wrecking, and disorganization of the economy, for which no material evidence was presented to the court. Thus, based on confessions extorted under pressure, many people were given severe sentences for

fictitious crimes. Nevertheless, the trials achieved their basic social objective: to keep the mass of workers mobilized and vigilant with regard to enemy activities; and to provide an excuse for the enormous distortions that appeared in the economy, finances, and living conditions of Bulgarian society. The unleashed struggle against sabotage and wrecking in the economy instilled pervasive fear among the technical staff, created a system of mutual spying and snitching, and helped establish full Party control over the economy. In this way, the construction of a totalitarian political system in Bulgaria was completed.

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Assoc. Prof. Daniel Vatchkov, PhD

Institute for Historical Studies
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
52 Shipchenski prohod blvd., bl. 17
1113 Sofia, Bulgaria
Email: daniel.vatchkov@gmail.com