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### The thirteenth congress of the Bulgarian communist party

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## **The Thirteenth Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party**

The thirteenth congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP), held in Sofia on 2–5 April 1986, was devoted almost entirely to the subject of the implementation of the scientific-technological revolution which was equated by the party's General Secretary, Todor Zhivkov, with the construction of a developed socialist society. Although Zhivkov's call for 'profound change' was seen by many Western commentators as a belated response to recent Soviet criticism of the way the Bulgarian economy has been run, the scientific-technological revolution in fact has been at the top of the Bulgarian political agenda since a Central Committee (CC) plenum of February 1985, and thus predates Mikhail Gorbachev's accession to power by one month.

Indeed, in comparison with the Soviet Union, Bulgaria has been pursuing innovatory economic policies for many years, notably in the field of agriculture. In 1982 the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) was introduced. While retaining central planning, it aimed to simplify the process by permitting more decisions to be taken by individual enterprises. The overall failure of the NEM by 1985 was aggravated by the severe winter of 1984–85 followed by a summer drought which, combined with a reduction in supplies of Soviet oil and coal, led to frequent power cuts and a consequent serious drop in industrial production. In July 1985 unusually frank criticism of the quality of Bulgarian goods exported to the USSR and of the devotion of the peasants to their private plots was voiced by the Soviet ambassador in an interview with the weekly journal *Pogled*. This message was reinforced by Mikhail Gorbachev during a visit to Sofia in October, which revealed what he described as a few 'sharp edges' in his discussions with Zhivkov, an apparent reference by the Soviet leader to a wide range of issues including the delay in co-ordinating the two countries' plans for the five-year period 1986–90.

The seriousness with which the Bulgarians viewed the Soviet criticism was indicated by the dismissal of the chairman of the State Planning Committee, Stanish Bonev, on the eve of Gorbachev's visit. Bonev was subsequently relieved of his senior party position as a candidate member of the Politburo in January 1986. At the same time Todor Bozhinov, a full Politburo member who as Minister of Energy and Material Resources until May 1985, and thereafter Minister of Supplies, was likewise dropped and thus made the scapegoat for the recent economic failures. Immediately

after the Central Committee plenum which, apart from removing Bozhinov and Bonev from the Politburo, was once again devoted to scientific and technical issues, the National Assembly was convened on 27 January to approve a radical streamlining of the governmental structure. This involved the creation of three supervisory councils within the Council of Ministers, with overall responsibility for the economy, social affairs, and science, culture and education (the latter was subsequently renamed the Council for Intellectual Development). The key appointment, however, was that of Stoyan Markov, elevated two days earlier at the CC plenum to candidate membership of the Politburo, to the post of First Deputy Prime Minister with specific responsibility for scientific research and technology.

A further ministerial shake-up took place towards the end of March, on the very eve of the BCP congress, when the Prime Minister, Grisha Filipov, was replaced by Georgi Atanasov, hitherto a Central Committee secretary with a background in party organization and administration. Primary responsibility for managing the economy was thus entrusted to Politburo member Ognyan Doynov in his capacity as Deputy Premier and Chairman of the recently established Economic Council. Doynov's powers were enhanced considerably by the abolition of the Ministries of Machine-Building, Energy, Metallurgy, Communications and the Chemical Industry, thus placing all sectors of manufacturing industry under the control of the Economic Council. Filipov, by contrast, returned to the Central Committee Secretariat which he had left in 1981 upon his appointment as premier, but his new areas of responsibility have not to date been clearly delineated.

Although some Western observers had speculated earlier in the year that Zhivkov might step down after 32 years as party leader at the BCP congress, given the new mood for change in Moscow and the evident lack of sympathy for him on the part of Gorbachev, such a possibility appeared remote by late March 1986. Not only had the policy of the scientific-technological revolution become identified personally with the BCP General Secretary after the massive publicity accorded by the party newspaper *Rabotnichsko Delo* to Zhivkov's speeches at the January CC plenum, but also the Politburo and Secretariat had been reshaped to produce a balance of technocrats and ideologues. To offset the promotion of Markov and Doynov in January, the party ideologist and *Rabotnichsko Delo* editor, Yordan Yotov, was elevated to full membership of the Politburo, as was the party functionary Georgi Atanasov (from candidate membership) on his appointment as Chairman of the Council of Ministers. On the other hand, Chudomir Aleksandrov, often spoken of as a possible successor to Zhivkov and Markov's predecessor as First Deputy Premier until his transfer to the party Secretariat in January, was implicitly rebuked by Atanasov in mid-March in a severe attack on the Sofia city party leadership which Aleksandrov himself had headed until January 1984.

It was, however, the presence of the Soviet Prime Minister, Nikolai Ryzhkov, as head of the CPSU delegation on the opening day of the BCP congress, that indicated both a close interest on the part of the Soviet Union in Bulgaria's internal affairs and continued support for Todor Zhivkov. As previously announced at the March Central Committee plenum, there was a departure from the normal congress procedure in that the CC report on the previous five-year period was not read by the BCP General Secretary but was circulated in advance to the 2,648 delegates. Zhivkov chose instead to concentrate on some 'basic issues' in his introductory speech which lasted a mere hour and 40 minutes (full text in *Rabotnichsko Delo* of 3 April 1986). With the exception of a brief and uninteresting section on international affairs, the Bulgarian leader's speech was devoted entirely to domestic matters and in particular to the scientific-technological revolution. There was, however, little in Zhivkov's

speech that had not been stated earlier at the January Central Committee plenum and in the draft theses for the congress published in February.

Zhivkov began by emphasizing the importance of the CPSU's twenty-seventh congress, which he had recently attended. However, he did not mention Mikhail Gorbachev by name until the very end of his speech. He then drew the delegates' attention to the fact that the congress was taking place on the thirtieth anniversary of the BCP's Central Committee plenum of April 1956 which, according to party doctrine, introduced the so-called April Line and ended the period of the personality cult and its attendant phenomena of 'dogmatism, secretarianism and subjectivism'. Zhivkov proceeded to cite statistics to indicate Bulgaria's economic progress since 1956, but said the country was now facing 'new realities' in the form of the scientific-technical revolution.

In order to attain the goal of an advanced technological society by the year 2000, Zhivkov called for greater financial incentives for scientists and technologists as well as for even greater co-operation with the Soviet Union on the technical front. Turning to economic matters, the Bulgarian leader urged an end to the departmental approach in planning that would allow greater scope for initiative to the 'socialist self-managing organizations'. The Economic Council and the State Planning Commission would nevertheless maintain a 'dialogue' with the self-managing enterprises, which would be encouraged to compete both at home and abroad. Zhivkov denied that what he had outlined were merely cosmetic measures, and claimed that they amounted to qualitative changes.

In the manner of Mikhail Gorbachev at the twenty-seventh CPSU congress, the BCP leader severely criticized the system of economic information and called for a 'pitiless war' against those who invented or embellished reports. The principle of competition would also be applied in the political sphere where, he said, ability and political qualities should be the deciding factors rather than 'corrupt competitions'. Zhivkov concluded his remarks on internal affairs with a call for 'responsibility, order and discipline' and for much greater criticism and self-criticism.

On the final day of the congress the delegates unanimously approved Zhivkov's opening speech, the draft theses, and the Central Committee's report. After his re-election as general secretary, the BCP leader delivered a brief closing speech in which he reiterated many of the points that he had made earlier, notably concerning the importance of the newly-established self-managing organizations and the need to maintain wage differentials. The magnitude of the task facing Bulgaria in seeking to achieve a scientific-technical revolution by the end of the century was indicated by Zhivkov's frank admission that this could not be achieved overnight, since much of the country's industrial plant was obsolete and even in a 'state of utter ruin'. It was therefore not surprising that, as Zhivkov intimated, some people were questioning the 'fashionable trends' of a 'technocratic deviation'. They would be replaced by 'trained, honest and devoted cadres' who would implement the congress's decisions. Nevertheless, the general secretary conceded in conclusion that there was a frequent Bulgarian contradiction between words and deeds that had to be overcome before progress could be made.

Todor Zhivkov was the only full member of the BCP Politburo and Secretariat to address the congress, although short contributions were made by Politburo candidate members Stoyan Markov and Petur Dyulgerov. The latter, in his capacity as Chairman of the Central Council of the Trade Unions, sombrely pointed out that, at the dawn of the new technological era, 58 per cent of production workers are still undertaking difficult physical labour and that 22 per cent are working under positively dangerous conditions. Of the remaining 37 speeches delivered at plenary

sessions of the congress (a further 92 were heard in the five sub-sections), few were of interest. The proceedings were enlivened only by a spirited attack on 'Turkish bourgeois nationalistic propaganda' by a delegate who resolutely defended the controversial policy of 'Bulgarization' of the country's ethnic Turkish population (highlighted by the publication of an Amnesty International report on the eve of the congress) as a complex process of national revival amongst Bulgarian citizens of the Islamic faith.

The congress re-elected an unchanged Politburo and Secretariat. In view of the extensive party and government reshuffles of the previous three months, this was not surprising.<sup>1</sup> Despite the 12.8 per cent increase in party membership since 1981 from 825,876 to 932,055,<sup>2</sup> the number of Central Committee members was reduced from 197 to 195, although the number of candidate members was slightly increased from 139 to 145. Amongst the 21 CC members who were not re-elected (a further 11 had died in the intervening five-year period) was the former Politburo member and Secretary for ideology, Alexander Lilov, who was dropped in September 1983 for reasons that still remain obscure. Todor Bozhinov and Stanish Bonev, relieved respectively of their full and candidate membership of the Politburo in January 1986, were, however, retained as members of the Central Committee. Of the 34 new CC members one name worthy of mention was that of the son of the BCP General Secretary, Vladimir Zhivkov, who like his late sister, Lyudmila, has begun his political career as Deputy Chairman of the Committee on Culture.

It remains to be seen whether the as yet somewhat nebulous proposals for a scientific-technological revolution can be implemented, or whether the congress speeches were largely rhetorical, intended to appease the Soviet Union's criticisms of Bulgaria's economic shortcomings in 1985. Certainly the blunt acknowledgement by Zhivkov in his closing speech of inertia and even tacit opposition to his plans does not augur well for the long-term future. In the short term, however, Zhivkov's position has been strengthened by the continued support of the Soviet Union, as expressed by Nikolai Ryzhkov and by the extensive pre-congress reshuffle in the party and government, with the identity of his successor more obscure than ever.

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#### NOTES

1. The members of the Politburo elected on 5 April 1986 are:

Chudomir Aleksandrov  
Georgi Atanasov  
Milko Balev  
Ognyan Doynov  
Dobri Dzhurov  
Grisha Filipov  
Pencho Kubadinski  
Petur Mladenov  
Stanko Todorov  
Yordan Yotov  
Todor Zhivkov

Candidate members are:

Petur Dyulgerov

Andrei Lukanov  
 Stoyan Markov  
 Grigor Stoichkov  
 Dimitur Stoyanov  
 Georgi Yordanov

The Central Committee Secretariat is composed of:

Todor Zhivkov (General Secretary)  
 Chudomir Aleksandrov  
 Milko Balev  
 Grisha Filipov  
 Emil Khristov  
 Stoyan Mikhailov  
 Dimitur Stanishev  
 Vasil Tsanov  
 Yordan Yotov  
 Kiril Zarev

2. According to the CC report published in *Rabotnicheskio Delo* of 6 April 1986, agricultural workers constitute 16.31 per cent and industrial workers 44.36 per cent (that is, 413,420) of the total party membership.

### GDR: The Eleventh Congress of the SED

The eleventh congress took place in East Berlin from 17 to 21 April 1986. The report of the Central Committee to the congress was delivered by Erich Honecker and the directives for the next five year plan by Willi Stoph. As is traditional at SED congresses, there were no debates or discussions about policy – all these had taken place long beforehand in the leadership of the party. All the main areas of policy were covered, with particular attention being paid to foreign and economic policies. There were no great surprises.

Much of what Erich Honecker had to say about foreign policy was not new: continuing close relations with the Soviet Union and total support for Soviet foreign policy; close collaboration with other CMEA countries (Cuba was given a particular mention as ‘the first socialist country in the Americas’); support for Third World countries such as Nicaragua, Vietnam and Laos; peaceful co-existence and a new period of detente with NATO and the West. He made an interesting comment that relations with the People’s Republic of China, ‘that great socialist country’, showed a ‘welcome improvement’ in the political, economic and cultural spheres. The attack by United States planes on Libya took place only two days before the congress and was roundly condemned by Honecker. He expressed sympathy and support for Libya. He reiterated support for the PLO and for a UN conference on the Middle East as a means of attaining a just settlement of the Palestinian question and a reduction of tension in the area. With respect to relations with West Germany, Honecker stressed the responsibility of both German states in maintaining peace, the acceptance of the existing frontiers in Europe and of the existence of two sovereign German states, with all that this implies internationally. He warned that no attempt should be made to change the status of West Berlin (‘it is not part of the Federal Republic and may not be governed by it’).

Honecker paid particular attention to the peace question. He called for the termination of all nuclear tests, the halting of the deployment of nuclear systems in Europe and the stage-by-stage dismantling of existing ones, the elimination of all medium-range missiles, the creation of zones free of nuclear and chemical weapons