

THE BULGARIAN PRESS DURING AND AFTER FIVE HUNDRED YEARS OF SERVITUDE

BY

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The five centuries of servitude under which the Bulgarian people had languished retarded the beginning of modern civilized life for them at a time when the States of Western Europe were showing marked progress. This is particularly true of Bulgarian journalism, and explains the late appearance and slow development of the Bulgarian Press.

The founder of the first Bulgarian periodical and with it of the Bulgarian journalistic Press was Constantin *Fotinov*, who edited "*Luboslovie*" (*Philology*) in Smyrna in the years 1844—1846. Shortly afterwards the first political newspaper made its appearance. It was published in Leipzig, a town with which the Bulgarians were constantly in contact in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and even earlier. The title of that newspaper was "*Bulgarski Orel*" (Bulgarian Eagle). It was published first on 26th April 1848 by Breitkopf und Härtel, a Leipzig publishing firm, and was edited by Dr. Ivan Bogorov, one of the most eminent champions of the Bulgarian renaissance. The avowed aim of this newspaper was to achieve the spiritual emancipation of the Bulgarian people, and the realization of this ideal was stated to be its *raison d'être*. But only two issues were printed, the second bearing the sub-title "*Bulgarische Volkszeitung*". After the failure of this paper its editor turned to Constantinople, where he published one entitled "*Constantinople News*" (1848—1862).

Corresponding to the two trends of opinion actuating the Bulgarian intelligentsia in the middle of the nineteenth century, the Press, before the liberation, was also divided into two camps — one at home (*in Turkey*) and one abroad. The one camp, led by the revolutionaries *Rakovsky*, *Botev*

and *Karavelov*, criticized the severity of the Turkish régime and preached revolution as a means of breaking the fetters of servitude; the leaders of the other, P. R. *Slaveikov*, *Filaretov* and *Burmov*, all of whom resided in *Constantinople*, were of the opinion that the people must first be raised to a higher level of civilization before they could engage in a struggle for political liberty. To attain this end they spread culture and knowledge among the people. In this respect their work resembled that done in Germany and England in the eighteenth century by the so-called "Moral Weeklies". They also waged a bitter war against the Greek Church, thus paving the way towards the religious emancipation achieved in 1870. Before the liberation the Press was purely idealistic in its aims; it laboured for the renascence of the Bulgarian nation, brought culture and knowledge to the people and prepared them for the coming struggle for liberty. This idealism, excluding, as it did, business speculation as a factor in the launching of a newspaper, was one of the main reasons why no Press organ enjoyed a long span of life.

After the liberation, conditions, so far as the development of the Bulgarian Press was concerned, were more favourable and progress began to make more rapid strides. The Press no longer adhered to the traditions of the pre-liberation era. It began to place itself wholly at the service of the new methods of political life, and set itself the task of co-operating in the building up of a modern State and organizing the economic resources of the country. This epoch was characterized by the appearance of a Party Press. In 1879 there were two Parties in Bulgaria, the Conservatives and the Liberals. The "*Vitoscha*", "*Bulgarian Voice*", and "*Fatherland*" were Conservative, while "*Integral Bulgaria*" and the "*Independent*" (1879—1882) were the organs of the Liberal Party. The object of those papers was to popularize the views of the Parties, thus serving the interests of the people and the State. Their struggles were fought with fair weapons and on questions of principle; on the major national question of the union of North and South Bulgaria they were unanimous. The correct tone of these newspapers soon changed, however, when the Conservative Party began to weaken owing to the

formation of a number of fractions, each with a personal bias. It was then that the daily Press came into existence. The author of its being was Hariton Genadiev, who on 1st March 1890 in Phillipopolis published the first issue of a daily called "*Balkan Dawn*". This newspaper ran for three years. Independent to begin with, it came under the influence of Stambulov when Dr. N. Genadiev joined its editorial staff. The "*Balkan Dawn*" is regarded as the first Bulgarian daily; but we meet with the idea of a daily paper earlier, for already in 1887 P. R. Slaveikov started to publish the "*Sofia Daily News*", three consecutive numbers of which appeared. The close of the nineteenth century was characterized by the appearance of periodicals dealing with politics, art and technical (scientific) subjects. The first political magazine was the "*Day*" (1891—1896), edited by John Sakerov, who had set himself the task of spreading socialist ideas among the masses. Others were the "*Idea*" (1892—1907), edited by Dr. Krstev, a magazine devoted to art criticism, the "*Chronicle*" (1899—1905), and "*Political Economy*" (1899—1925), a periodical dealing, as its name implies, with economic questions. Most of these papers were constructive; they were not the products of overweening ambition or injured vanity, such as many are today, but were created with the conviction that universal ideas would crystallize in them and that they would give a clear survey of things and events, as well as help in the development of the language, national feeling, literature, art and public life.

Up to the beginning of the twentieth century almost all the Bulgarian newspapers, dailies as well as weeklies, seemed more or less to take part in the Party struggles. It was only then that completely independent papers began to appear: the "*Evening Post*" (1900—1914), edited by Schangov, which appeared first three or four times a week and then daily, and the "*Daily News*" (1903—1928), edited by Nikolov. They were speculative enterprises pure and simple and built up their circulation after the manner of newspapers in the West by devoting more space to advertisements in order to balance profit and loss. The majority were published by joint stock companies, and the influence of the various Party leaders was weakened by the circumstance that excellent

collaborators were always recruited. In the year 1911 the type of newspaper that has more than one edition daily made its appearance. To the "*Daily News*" was added the "*Morning*", which appeared as an early morning edition. The "*Balkan Tribune*" (an evening paper) and the "*Dawn*" (a morning one) were a similiar combination. Contrary to the custom prevailing in Germany, morning and evening editions in Bulgaria bear different names. The best-known daily papers appearing in 1928 were the "*Demokratitscheski Sgovor*", "*Peace*", "*The Flag*", "*Dawn*", "*The Radical*", "*Independence*", "*The People*", "*The Banner*", "*La Bulgarie*", "*Macedonia*" — all papers with two editions daily — "*Speech*", "*Free Speech*", "*Daily News*", "*Morning*", etc.

Periodicals worth mentioning were "*Bulgarian Thought*", "*Archives*", "*The Golden Horn*", "*Falling Leaves*", "*The Democratic Review*", "*The Macedonian Review*", "*Zveno*", "*Transition*", "*Political Economy*", etc.

A characteristic feature of the Bulgarian daily Press was its strongly marked political character. The dailies entered whole-heartedly into politics and Party strife, and comparatively neglected questions of economy, culture and science. This on-sidedness was the reason why a great section of the reading public — the female world, which is little or not at all interested in politics and still less in Party struggles — remained indifferent to them. In the past two years, however, this character of the Bulgarian newspapers has undergone a partial change. Publishers and editors have awakened to a realization of the fact that they cannot feed their readers on politics alone, and are consequently beginning to devote pages to literature, humour, illustrations, etc. In spite of the unfavourable conditions under which the existence and development of the Bulgarian Press began, it nevertheless, from the very outset, proved to be the mouthpiece of public opinion, and has become an important factor in political and public life. Journalism has developed along precisely defined lines, as the spiritual support of the people during the Turkish era, as an aid in naturalizing political institutions after the liberation, and as a pillar of the State in recent times.

During the past few years the Sofia newspapers have

represented the Bulgarian Press in the same way as those of Paris may be regarded as the representatives of French journalism. But the Bulgarian papers are far from having so powerful an organization resting upon such stable economic foundations as the French Press has. On the contrary, up to 1935 they were completely dependent on the caprice of the ruling Party. When in 1935 an unexpected change of régime took place, the financial foundations of about fifteen or twenty newspapers were shaken, and they were obliged to discontinue; others that despite the change of Government managed to keep afloat were compelled to change their policy and adopt new aims. Since *Kusseivanov's* Government took office in that year — 1935 — the number of papers has been limited, without, however, their existence being ensured in any respect.

The following figures will serve as an illustration of the progressive development of the Bulgarian Press. Before the liberation there were 119 periodicals published annually; now there are 1070 newspapers and magazines. In 1879 the biggest of the newspapers had a circulation of 1500 copies, today there are papers with a circulation of 180.000.

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