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## INTELLIGENCE BRIEF

BULGARIA EXPERIMENTS WITH YUGOSLAV FORM  
OF ECONOMIC ADMINISTRATION

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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BULGARIA EXPERIMENTS WITH YUGOSLAV FORM  
OF ECONOMIC ADMINISTRATION

Usually a passive follower of Soviet policy, Bulgaria has emerged in 1964 as the boldest Soviet Bloc country in experimenting with economic administration of the Yugoslav type. Since mid-year, 52 Bulgarian enterprises -- mostly small plants producing consumer goods -- have been operating with little detailed direction by the state, being encouraged instead to seek maximum profits. Profits remaining after payment of the usual operating expenses, a capital-use charge of 6 percent, and income taxes are divided between employees and the enterprise itself. According to reports in the Bulgarian press, the experiment is proving successful. Although the kinship is not acknowledged publicly, Bulgaria's experimental system resembles the Yugoslav system. Both systems emphasize profitability, dispense with centrally determined production plans, allow free formation of some prices, and enlarge the role of workers in management but leave foreign trade and major new investments under central state control.

The new Bulgarian system is being applied more widely than similar experiments in the USSR and Czechoslovakia, and Premier and Party Secretary Todor Zhivkov stated in June that the Party is considering extending it throughout the economy during 1965-66. Unlike Czechoslovakia, however, Bulgaria has not published an explicit program for future reform. Because of the economic and political dependence of the Zhivkov regime on the USSR, Bulgaria's experiment presumably had the approval of Khrushchev. The nature and timing of further steps in this direction probably will be influenced by the signals received from the new leaders in Moscow as well as by the regime's assessment of the experiment.

1. Background

Bulgarian leaders have been concerned for some time about the numbing effect on incentives of detailed central planning and control of the economy. Until 1963 they attacked the problem in an orthodox way, calling for ever greater efforts to perfect the existing system. A fresh approach was revealed at the Party Plenum in May 1963, when Zhivkov stated: "We have instructed the chairman of the State Planning Committee to curtail 50 percent of all office supplies . . . with a view to reducing paper work and red tape. Of course, this is not enough."

The leadership now has undertaken the bolder experiment of largely freeing a group of enterprises from detailed central administration and letting the pursuit of profit be their guide.

The regime set the stage for experimental reform of Bulgaria's economic system during the last 8 months of 1963, when it permitted a wide-ranging, although decorous, debate in the Communist Party's theoretical journal, Novo vreme. 1/ In its May issue the journal presented and asked for readers' comments on an article by Evgeni Mateev, a Minister without Portfolio. This article and some that followed took a conservative position on reform. Other writers, however, suggested changes similar to those proposed in the USSR by Professor Ye. G. Liberman the previous year.

In November and December, Novo vreme broadened the range of discussion considerably by publishing articles of a "revisionist" nature. In spite of its customary orthodoxy in doctrine and its continued cool relations with Belgrade, the Bulgarian regime allowed the authors of these articles to suggest reforms that would go a long way toward adoption of the Yugoslav system. 2/ The article in the December issue was written by Petko Kunin, who was purged and imprisoned in 1949 as a Kostovite (in essence, a Yugoslav sympathizer) but who has since been rehabilitated, becoming a member of the Party's Central Committee in 1962. His proposals concerning economic decentralization and emphasis on profits, profit sharing, and workers' participation in management were echoed in an article in the May 1964 issue of the Bulgarian economic monthly, Ikonomicheska misul. 3/

## 2. Growing Scope of the Experiment

The new system apparently was introduced in the latter part of 1963 in a single enterprise, the Liliana Dimitrova Textile Factory in Sofia. In January 1964 the regime announced its decision to try out a new system of management beginning in a number of enterprises on 1 April -- later reported to comprise 27 manufacturing plants, 10 trade enterprises, and 4 construction enterprises. 4/ One month later, Czechoslovakia began a similar experiment stressing profitability and minimal central control in a knitwear cooperative and possibly in several other plants. 5/ On 1 July, when the USSR introduced into two clothing enterprises an experiment resembling the Bulgarian reform, 6/ additional enterprises were included in the Bulgarian experiment, raising the total to 52. 7/ Several textile plants, a cement

works, a glassworks, a construction firm, and a construction design enterprise have been mentioned specifically as participants.

The scope of the experiment soon may be enlarged. On 30 May 1964, Zhivkov said: "The organization and structure of management in a number of national economic branches are no longer adequate to the new requirements and tasks; they are exerting an unfavorable effect upon our economy and its further development . . . . On these questions the Party Central Committee has already worked out a number of measures which are now being experimentally applied with a view to introducing them next year and in 1966 in all fields of our economy." 8/ In August 1964 the Minister of Construction announced that beginning on 1 January 1965 the new system will be applied to all industrial construction and construction material enterprises and to all district construction organizations. 9/

### 3. Rules of the New Game

#### a. Profits as the Criterion of Success

For enterprises in Bulgaria's experiment the criterion of profitability has largely replaced detailed central planning and control as a guide to economic activity. Subject to certain constraints, the enterprises are encouraged to conduct their business so as to maximize profits, which are shared by the employees, the enterprise itself, and the state. The enterprise draws up its own plan regarding the value and assortment of production, and it contracts freely for purchases of inputs (where it can find them) and for sales of its goods to trade organizations. State planning offices reportedly are informed of the production plans, however, and retain the right to change them.

Under this system, profit is defined as total revenues minus current operating expenses, turnover taxes, and a newly introduced tax of 6 percent on the value of fixed and working capital held by the enterprise. 10/ Aside from purchases of materials and semifinished goods on current account and charges for depreciation, current operating expenses include payments of "guaranteed" wages to employees, which are independent of the amount of profit. For blue-collar workers they approximate the basic wages paid previously for fulfillment of work norms, and for white-collar workers they amount to 70 to 75 percent of the basic salary paid previously. 11/ Wages paid to employees beyond these amounts are called "variable" wages and depend on the amount of profit earned.

b. Distribution of Profits

Profits remaining after payment of an income tax (which is levied at progressive rates) are distributed (1) to a fund for "individual distribution," which is used to pay "variable" wages; (2) to a reserve fund for "individual distribution," which is supposed to insure payment of "guaranteed" wages even if the enterprise temporarily has financial difficulties; (3) to a fund for expansion and technical improvement of the enterprise; and (4) to a fund for social-cultural expenditures to benefit employees. According to a Bulgarian calculation, 50 to 70 percent of total profits remain at the disposal of the enterprise management, and the greater part of this sum is to be used to pay "variable" wages to each worker. Such an arrangement would contrast sharply with the previous system of incentive pay, under which only 3 to 5 percent of profits (as then calculated) were used for bonuses. 12/

Along with greater freedom of action, the experimental enterprises have been given greater financial responsibility, especially in the financing of investment. How much the enterprises have to say about their investment activities is not yet clear. But it has been reported that they no longer will receive grants of investment funds from the state, being required instead to rely on their accumulated funds and on such funds as they can borrow from banks. The state not only requires that part of profits be allocated to investment but also requires the enterprises to deposit 70 percent of their depreciation charges in a special bank account as a reserve for expansion and modernization. The remaining 30 percent of their depreciation charges must be remitted to the state, 13/ which presumably redistributes the funds to investment projects of high priority under the national economic plan.

c. Price Determination

Given an incentive to maximize profits, an enterprise director's thoughts turn sooner or later to price increases if the market permits them. To prevent abuses in this sphere, prices are supposed to be determined by agreement between the enterprise and its customers, with the state intervening as necessary to resolve disputes and protect the buying public. In practice it appears that the enterprises have had some leeway in negotiating the prices of certain goods but that the state continues to fix the prices of the more important articles.

d. Enterprise Management

Bulgarian sources assert that under the new system employees genuinely participate in the management of enterprises through their production committees, which -- on paper, at least -- resemble the Yugoslav workers' councils. Although the production committees allegedly have a say in all questions of management, they seem to have special responsibilities in raising labor productivity and profits and considerable authority in deciding on the distribution of "variable" wages.

Like the Yugoslav workers' council, the Bulgarian production committee is elected by the total work force of the enterprise and can be established in individual departments as well as in the enterprise as a whole. There must be at least as many production workers as white-collar workers on the production committee. The enterprise director, the foremen, the secretary of the Party unit, and the president of the trade union council are members ex officio. 14/ The influence of the Party in the selection of these individuals undoubtedly is strong, assuring the regime that the enterprise will give due attention to national policy and the general welfare in making its decisions. Although the more revisionist proposals in Novo vreme suggested that workers should have some say in the selection of the enterprise director, there is no evidence that this is yet the case in the experimental enterprises.

4. Results of the Experiment

The Party leadership has said little about the progress of the experiment, but the Deputy Minister of Construction reported in August that the new system has yielded good results in construction, 15/ and several individuals in the experimental enterprises have published enthusiastic reports. The most concrete discussion comes from the chief accountant of the Sofia branch of the Proletariy Consolidated Textile Enterprise, who wrote in a provincial Party journal in September that "the initial results of the new system ... are extremely encouraging" and that "the system has essentially proved itself." According to this observer, workers are taking a new interest in the quality and efficiency of work, and "things are getting tough for the misappropriators and sloppy workmen." 16/

One effect of the experiment, the accountant stated, was a shift to production of higher quality goods. This caused a decline in labor

productivity initially as well as above-plan expenditures for fabrics. But significant advances soon were made in expanding the volume of production and profits. To hold down the tax on capital, unneeded equipment was disposed of, and the employees of the enterprise asked that a second shift be started so that facilities could be used more efficiently.

The accountant also revealed that the enterprise is dissatisfied with the system of price formation. The state continues to fix prices for "first-quality" products; the enterprise may negotiate with buyers on the prices of less desirable goods only. "Serious changes in prices have not yet occurred," and the state has been slow to determine prices for new products even though "fashions cannot wait." Some new prices, the accountant claimed, do not allow a reasonable profit margin or -- in some instances -- any profit margin at all, "creating no incentive to produce such articles." 17/

In a recent interview with a Yugoslav journalist, the deputy chairman of the State Planning Committee played down the extent and significance of the reform, as might be expected, and said that either the journalist or the workers in the plant that he had visited "had understood the rights and independence granted to the enterprises . . . in a much too broad way." This official stressed the right and willingness of the state to intervene in the affairs of the experimental plants to protect important interests and gave the impression that some aspects of the new system have not yet been introduced fully into all of the experimental enterprises. 18/

Bulgaria's experiment in any case cannot be considered a blueprint for broad reform, because it involves mostly small enterprises producing consumer goods for an established market. The regime thus has not yet had to face the perplexing issues that would arise if the reform were extended to numerous large enterprises producing industrial materials and capital equipment. Paramount among these issues would be the future roles of central planning, Party direction, and indirect controls in economic management; the permissible limits of freedom for enterprises in price formation and foreign trade; and the balance between and administration of centralized and decentralized expenditures for investment.

##### 5. Bulgaria in the Vanguard of Economic Reform

Although discussion of economic reform is widespread in the Soviet Bloc, Bulgaria has permitted expression of a broader range of opinion



and has revealed more ambitious plans for reform than any other country except Czechoslovakia. 19/ This fact raises the question: Why Bulgaria? Among the European Communist countries, Bulgaria has long been regarded as one of those least likely to take initiatives, and even now its motives for doing so are unclear. On most domestic and foreign policy issues, the Zhivkov regime continues to take a hard line. Economic progress, although not on a par with that in Rumania and Yugoslavia, has been rapid in recent years and provides no pressing reason for Bulgarian innovations. In this respect, Bulgaria differs sharply from Czechoslovakia, where the disappearance of easy ways of achieving economic growth has forced the regime to consider drastic reform of the system.

Furthermore, Bulgaria ordinarily follows the Soviet lead docilely and has good reason to do so. Zhivkov relies strongly on Moscow for political support, and the Bulgarian economy depends on the USSR for much of its trade, economic aid, and technical assistance. These considerations suggest that the Bulgarian experiment has had Soviet blessing and that Bulgaria may even have been regarded in Moscow as a testing ground for a profit-oriented system.

Bulgarian actions that go beyond Soviet policy, however, cannot be ruled out. The rate of economic growth has slowed in recent years, causing some restiveness in the leadership. Zhivkov remarked in May 1964 that "this rate of speed . . . no longer satisfies us and we cannot put up with it. Our country must develop at even higher rates . . . so that we may catch up [with the most advanced Communist countries] within a short time." 20/ Moreover, Bulgaria's record in following Soviet policy has been tarnished since 1959, when the leadership undertook the Chinese-style "leap forward" and showed an unseemly interest in the Chinese communes.

The ideological disarray in the Bloc and the weakening of Soviet authority also may be having an effect in Bulgaria. Zhivkov himself -- while paying tribute to "the rich experience" of the USSR, which "has always been and will remain for our party a precious source of . . . guidance" -- also made the following point at the Party Plenum in May 1963:

You are aware that in the past we had to pay a [price] because of stereotyped . . . application of

this experience. What would happen if we mechanically applied the entire management structure of the Soviet economy? Obviously, this would not be appropriate, since the scales, conditions, and concrete situation in the Soviet Union are different. Therefore, the distinctive mark of the proposed reorganization in our country is ... a creative approach and a search for different forms and means which best correspond to our circumstances ... . 21/

Zhivkov's speeches at this Plenum did not reveal any intention of introducing management reforms of the sort now being tested. Instead they focused on improvement of planning through the use of computers and improvement of central management through adoption of the "branch principle" -- that is, the amalgamation of enterprises into large combines covering entire branches of industry. Nevertheless, Zhivkov's argument concerning the relevance of Soviet experience obviously can be used to justify reforms that go further than changes in the USSR.

In 1964, Zhivkov appears to have defended his experiment not so much against possible Soviet criticism as against predictable condemnation by the Chinese Communist "dogmatists." In May he stressed the "socialist" character of the new system, arguing that until the "mature phase of communist society" is reached, "we would commit a great mistake if we neglected the material incentive to any extent whatsoever ... [and] if we did not fully utilize profits, self-support, prices, and so forth." 22/

Whatever understanding Zhivkov might have had with Khrushchev concerning the Bulgarian experiment, the change of leadership in the USSR adds a new element of uncertainty to Bulgarian plans for further experimentation. A blast of disapproval from Moscow might at least lead to delay, curtailment, or a watering down of plans to extend the experiment. But the Bulgarian regime betrays no such fears. On 7 December, Zhivkov stated that the new method has produced very good results and reaffirmed that it will be applied in entire branches of the economy next year. 23/

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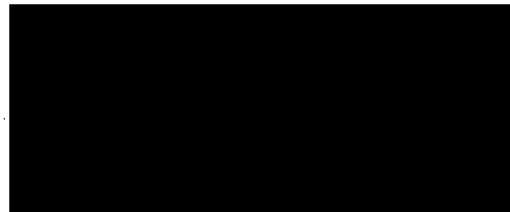
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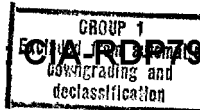
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