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SAVING BULGARIA'S JEWS:

A TRIUMPH OF NON-VIOLENT RESISTANCE

PAPER SUBMITTED TO PROFESSOR ELLEN OTT MARSHALL

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Plan of This Paper

In this paper, I shall begin by presenting a necessarily brief account of the historical background, the events preceding the war years. I shall then recount – again, briefly – the Shoah-related events of the war years in Bulgaria and, in a separate section, the story of how the proposed deportation of the Bulgarian Jews was stopped. Finally, I shall offer my assessment of the significance of the various contributors to the rescue of the Bulgarian Jews and the significance of their rescue in the peace process. "G*d[1] was very weak at that time, because he [*sic*] had no friends in Germany.[2] According to the tradition, G*d has no other hands than ours, and during the *Shoah*, G*d was very alone."[3] As we shall see, G*d did have friends in Bulgaria.

"There is no good modern history of Bulgaria."[4] I have found, in particular, no objective studies in English of the saving of the Jews of Bulgaria; all the sources seem to have as their purpose (or as one of their major motivations) the validation of the claim of one or another group to having been instrumental in the rescue. I have attempted in this study to draw from those self-serving accounts in order to glean a relatively accurate and objective understanding of this era in the history of Bulgaria.

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[1] Because, in keeping with the Jewish tradition, I refrain from spelling out the Divine Names, I take the liberty, even in citations from sources, of substituting an asterisk for the primary vowel in such Names. I consider my doing so to be akin to translating, to quoting in English from a source written in some other language. In this case, it is a translation, so to speak, from non-Jewish (or non-religious Jewish) writing to religious Jewish writing.

[2] An understandable exaggeration, in view of Sölle's history. Consider, however, the *bekennende Kirche*, which numbered among its shining lights Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Niemöller, Hans Lilje, and Rudolf Bultmann, and consider also Monsignor Bernhard Lichtenberg, who, as early as 31 March 1933, strove valiantly albeit unsuccessfully to persuade Adolf Cardinal Bertram, Archbishop of Breslau and President of the German Episcopal Conference, to intervene on behalf of the Jews, and who, from *Kristallnacht* (9/10 November 1938) until his arrest on 23 October 1941, never failed to include within his Masses a prayer for the end of the anti-Semitism.

[3] Dorothee Sölle, foreword to *The Holocaust and the Christian World: Reflections on the Past, Challenges for the Future*, ed. Carol Rittner, Stephen D. Smith, and Irena Steinfeldt (New York: Continuum, 2000), i.

[4] Frederick B. Chary, *The Bulgarian Jews and the Final Solution, 1940-1944* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972), 227. Chary is no exception to this characterization. He consistently minimizes the ideological motivation of King Boris III in pursuing his pro-Nazi policies and portrays the king as being virtually compelled by circumstances to cooperate with Hitler's demands for fear that worse would otherwise transpire. He is also surprisingly gentle in his treatment of the Nazis, as witness his description of the "Madagascar Plan," which I discuss briefly below (page 4). Nevertheless, his is the most extensive study of the history of Bulgaria in general and the Bulgarian Jews in particular in the Holocaust years. It is not his facts so much as his interpretations of the facts which seem to me to be unreliable. An example of his interpretation (and similar passages occur throughout his book) is found on page 139: "At this time [March and April 1943] the government leaders solidified their anti-Semitic views. At no other period during the war years were official government pronouncements so similar to the anti-Jewish propaganda of the Reich. This was undoubtedly part of the process of rationalizing the deportations and should not be regarded as the normal attitude of the government leaders and the monarch (Gabrovski perhaps excepted)." In view of Gabrovski's history as a *ratnik* (see pages 3-4 herein), Chary's "perhaps" is problematic. Further, Belev, another *ratnik*, was a high, albeit sub-cabinet level, official of the government, and it was the king who had chosen these individuals as well as Filov (whose germanophilia we shall see) to lead the government.

Generally, I have discussed the subjectivity of each of my major sources, as I have deemed it necessary, usually when I first cite it.

Historical Background

King Boris III ascended the throne upon the abdication of his father, King Ferdinand, in October 1918. He thus bore no stigma of Bulgaria's defeat in World War I. Through a series of political machinations, beginning with a semi-coup that ousted Agrarian Union leader Aleksandur Stamboliiski[5] from power in 1923[6] and culminating with another coup carried out by "a clique of left-wing army colonels [in] May 1934,"[7] Boris consolidated his power to the degree that he "governed his state through ministers selected from his coterie of advisors and chamberlains with a disregard for the constitutional limitations upon his rule. This sort of royal dictatorship was not unique to Bulgaria in the thirties. Boris's fellow Balkan monarchs Alexander of Yugoslavia and Carol of Rumania followed the same form, but the former was assassinated by Croatian and Macedonian terrorists and the latter fled his country, pursued by Rumanian fascists. Boris's version of the royal dictatorship was more successful."[8]

After "the paramilitary *coup d'état* of 19 May 1934, . . . a strong executive power was concentrated in the hands of the government, which the king, Boris III (1894-1943), appointed and controlled. A parliamentary opposition, . . . after the elections of December 1939, . . . comprised 19 deputies (out of 160)."[9]

In the late 1930s, two fascist organizations rose to prominence in Bulgaria – *Suiuz Na bulgariskite natsionalnui legioni* (Union of Bulgarian National Legions) and *Ratnitsi napreduke na bulgarshtinata* (Guardians of the Advancement of the Bulgarian National Spirit). Several *ratnitsi* (singular is *ratnik*) became members of the government in the later 1930s and 1940s.[10] In particular, Petur Gabrovski became Minister of Internal Affairs in October 1939 and brought his fellow-*ratnik* Aleksandur Belev with him as a leader of the judicial section with special responsibility for the Jews. Belev, in turn, named several "other Ratnitsi as assistants and retained his own close relations with

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[5] While I have attempted to be consistent in my transliteration of Bulgarian names, this has not always been possible. Various sources use differing transliteration systems, and, while I strive for a consistency in this matter when speaking outside direct quotations, I cannot claim not to have missed a time or two.

[6] A coup in which Boris is thought to have been involved, although I have found no clear evidence thereof. Still, all sources who speak of those times report that Stamboliiski was the only person in Bulgaria with power to rival that of the king. As Henry David Thoreau writes (*Journal*, November 1850), "Some circumstantial evidence is very strong, as when you find a trout in the milk."

[7] Ibid., 4.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fragility of Goodness: Why Bulgaria's Jews Survived the Holo-caust: A Collection of Texts with Commentary*, trans. Arthur Denner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 3-4.

[10] Chary, 8, 36.

Berlin. Thus in this department, which vitally affected the Jews, the very people from whom they had most to fear [became] leaders."[11]

King Boris, from the early 1930s, tried to maintain a pro-German neutrality, a stance which grew more and more difficult as World War II intensified in the Balkans, and by 1940 Bulgaria had become a Nazi ally in all but name.[12] Bogdan Filov, the prime minister, an art historian by profession, had been educated in Germany and belonged to several German learned academies.[13] In January 1941, he met with Hitler and Ribbentrop in Vienna. His diary entry for January 7, 1941, declares, "War is unavoidable. If, however, we realize this, it is best that we follow it under conditions that are least complicated for us. If we allow the Germans simply to pass through our country,[14] they will treat us as an occupied land, like Rumania, and this will be much worse than if we ally with them. We cannot gain anything from an English victory, for a failure of German arms inevitably means we shall be 'Bolshevized.'"[15]

Bulgaria, although allied *de facto* with Germany virtually from the date of the coup, did not formally join the Axis until March 1941. Still, Bulgaria reaped the benefits of being a German ally, as, for example, in regaining the southern province of Dobrudja under the provisions of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939.[16]

The War Years: The Shoah *Comes to Bulgaria*

The first *official* act of anti-Semitism in this era of Bulgarian history came in September 1939. There had been anti-Semitic instances earlier, "but the government was not involved and arrested those responsible."[17]

Chary describes the "Bulgarian Jewish policy" as having been directed from Berlin, not from Sofia. "The Reich had considered at one time deporting all Jews from Europe to Palestine, perhaps, or Africa.[18] The impossibility of accomplishing this during the war convinced the Nazis to try a different tactic in ridding Europe of the Jews."[19] Yet even Chary acknowledges implicitly that the

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[11] Ibid., 36. See also Israel Borouchoff, Presentation to Federal Interagency Program on Holocaust Remembrance, 1 May 2003.

[12] Chary, 19. "In the spring of 1940 the ministers of the new government made it quite clear that although they were officially neutral, they were in fact pro-German."

[13] Ibid., 17.

[14] As Ribbentrop had requested.

[15] Bogdan Filov, "Diary," entry for January 7, 1941, *Naroden Sud* (Sofia) no. 1, p. 14., quoted in Chary, 21.

[16] Todorov, 5. The actual transfer of Dobrudja to Bulgaria did not take place until September 1940.

[17] Chary, 35, citing especially Haim Keshales' unpublished manuscript "Tova se sluchio v onezi dni: Belekhki za zhivota na evreite v Bulgariia prez 1939-1950 godoni" ("It happened in those days: notes on the life of the Jews in Bulgaria during the period 1939-1950") deposited at Yad vaShem, Jerusalem.

[18] This would have been the "Madagascar Plan," recognized by most historians of the era as a stalking horse never taken seriously by the Nazis and designed to lend a semblance of credibility to the "final solution." See my next paragraph.

[19] Leading to the "final solution." Ibid., 49.

deportations were the policy of the king, when he says that "the protest by prominent Bulgarians, particularly that by Metropolitan Stefan, against the government's proposed Jewish[20] measures had *forced* Boris and Filov to reconsider their policy of deportation."[21]

In fact, there is no evidence of any plan by the Third Reich to deport Europe's Jews to Palestine or to the mainland of Africa. There was a "Madagascar Plan," which was at its heart a plan for the extermination of the Jews without the need to establish concentration camps or death camps. "As part of the so-called 'Madagascar Plan,' all Jews under German rule were to be deported to the French colony of Madagascar. However, this plan was rendered unworkable as long as Great Britain's Royal Navy retained control of the seas. In the winter of 1940 to 1941, Hitler commissioned a third variation of the 'territorial solution,' in which the Jews would be deported to the Soviet Union after it had been conquered. Whether in Poland, Madagascar or the Soviet Union, these plans show unambiguously that the deported Jews would have succumbed to a combination of malnutrition, disease, forced labour and general abuse. Thus even the 'territorial solutions' were effectively conceived to bring about the physical end of the Jews in Europe."[22]

In 1940, the Bulgarian parliament enacted the "Protection of the Nation Act" (*Zakon na zashtitata na natsiiata*, ZZN), patterned after Germany's Nuremberg Laws. Liubomir Hristov Lulchev, one of King Boris' closest advisors, described the king as having told him that, "since an anti-Jewish law had to come, the Bulgarians should initiate it themselves rather than let the Germans dictate a harsher one."[23] It is not clear just what the king meant by this.[24] Was the king concerned that a German-written law would be harsher against the Bulgarians, coupling them with the Jews? Was he therefore concerned with limiting the effects of the racial laws to the Jews alone? Bulgarians, after all, were Slavs, and, according to the Nazis' racial scheme, were not Aryans. A lengthier examination gives us at least a partial text of Lulchev's diary entry:

> I spoke to him about the law. He told me he had not read it and that, if I wanted anything, I should tell him what to pay attention to. I read him some of the articles and told him that much was already being extorted from the Jews and that the law, as it had been worded, created opportunities for many arbitrary acts and unprincipled personal and partial decisions. . . . As matters now stand, everyone could be attacked for purely personal reasons. Now I understand, he told me, it means we have to set limits and norms so that there will be no arbitrary acts. I put it off for a long time and did not want us

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[20] I find his frequent, albeit not invariable, references to the anti-Semitic policies of the Bulgarian government as "Jewish policies" and "Jewish measures" to be rather disingenuous.

[21] Ibid., 152. (Emphasis added.) Absent the outpouring of protest, the king and government would willingly – I hesitate to say "eagerly" – have implemented the "final solution" throughout Bulgaria.

[22] Peter Longerich, *The Nazi Racial State* (London: BBC, 2005); database on line at http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/war/genocide/racial_state_01.shtml,

[23] Lulchev's diary, entry of November 11, 1940, cited by Chary, 37.

[24] Perhaps, if I knew Bulgarian, I would be able to read the actual diary entry and draw my own conclusions.

to do it, too, but now that they have done it in Romania, Hungary and even France, I DECIDED IT WAS BETTER WE DO IT OURSELVES THAN HAVE IT IMPOSED UPON US.[25]

The king, at least in Lulchev's depiction,[26] chose to display, "on the one hand, ostensible concern for the fate of the Jews, expressed in high-flown words designed not to conflict with the image of a humane King, drawn by himself and his propaganda, [even while,] on the other hand, [expressing] approval and encouragement of the specific measures against the Jews . . . concealed behind the pretext of it being impossible to act otherwise."[27] A Bulgarian cabinet decree of August 26, 1942, based on Belev's recommendation, revised the ZZN to define Jews by ancestry rather than by religion.[28]

As the Parliament of Bulgaria was in the process of enacting the ZZN, the Jewish population of Bulgaria was about 50,000,[29] less than 1% of the total population of Bulgaria.[30] The Communist Party of Bulgaria, taking its cue from the Soviet Union, was unanimous in opposing the ZZN in the strongest possible terms; every branch of the Bulgarian Communist Party stood firmly, publicly, and openly against the ZZN.[31] Indeed, throughout the war years, "the Communists did oppose the persecution of the Jews in all its forms. . . . There is ample evidence of the party's efforts to fight anti-Semitism in its deputies' speeches in the National Assembly, dating, that is, from the days when they could still speak their hearts and minds (after the Soviet invasion, these legislators would be suspended and imprisoned)."[32] Nevertheless, the Communists' protests against the enactment of the ZZN were

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[25] Haim Oliver, *We Were Saved: How the Jews in Bulgaria Were Kept from the Death Camps* (Sofia: Sofia Press, 1978), 73. Block capitals inserted by Oliver.

[26] I have found no reason to question Lulchev's description of the king's self-image.

[27] Ibid., 74. Chary and Oliver, reading the same diary entry, come – not atypically – to opposing conclusions about its significance.

[28] Ibid., 54.

[29] Some sources give the figure as 48,000. The difference is not significant.

[30] Ibid., 38. Oliver brings the perspective of the Bulgarian Communist Party (he was published in Sofia during the Communist years) and tries to credit the Communists with stopping the deportations, giving lesser notice to the work of other organizations. He even includes self-serving quotations from Georgi Dimitrov (who was the only individual acquitted in the Reichstag Fire trial and who went on, in 1945, to become the first Prime Minister of Communist Bulgaria) and Todor Zhivkov (First Secretaryof the Bulgarian Communist Party from 1954 to 1989). He fails to mention that not a single Communist member of the parliament signed the Peshev letter (discussed below). Indeed, his description of Peshev's attempted intervention is so brief and truncated that, absent other testimony, one would almost believe it to have been solely a personal matter of Peshev's; the forty and more other members of parliament who signed Peshev's letter are hardly even mentioned by Oliver. He also asserts that Peshev, alone among the members of the monarchist government, was not punished by the Communist courts for having been a member of the old regime; in fact, as we shall note, Peshev, as the other members of the government, was sentenced to prison.

[31] Ibid., passim. Oliver neglects to point out that the Soviet Union and the European Communist parties dependent upon it spoke not a word against any aspect of Nazi policy until Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in violation of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

[32] Todorov, 17.

ineffective, as were their protests against the deportations; "had the Jews been perceived as being close to the Communists, they would have suffered even greater persecutions."[33]

"The first blow [against the ZZN] was the 'Statement by the Synod of the Bulgarian Church to the Prime Minister and the President of the National Assembly.' It was signed by the Vice-President of the Synod, Neophit of Vidin, and we can read the resolution of National Assembly President Logofetov in the margin: '*File. I have read and studied and will bear in mind the contents of this document.*'"[34] The statement declared, *inter alia*, "No measures against the Jews as a national minority should be envisaged."[35] Despite his predilection for giving credit to the Communist Party, Oliver acknowledges "the popular traditions of the Bulgarian Church dating back to the times of the Greek and Turkish yokes. In hard times for Bulgaria, the Church has often taken the side of those persecuted, against slavery and tyranny. There is no doubt that this first intervention [the Statement by the Synod], as well as subsequent steps taken by the Church on behalf of the Jews, played a substantial role in finally saving them."[36] This protest, as all those preceding the deportation of the Thracian and Macedonian Jews in March 1943, had little if any observable effect. It seems, however, that the church's early position against the racialism of the ZZN significantly contributed to developing an atmosphere in which the objection to the deportations of the Bulgarian Jews could be effective.

On 8 October 1940, the Bulgarian Writers' Union, over the signatures of "the greatest living Bulgarian writers of the day, who are now classics of our literature,"[37] issued an open letter to Prime Minister Bogdan Filov, declaring, "In the past the Bulgarian people have been persecuted and humiliated. . . . Must we, too, in imitation embark on a dangerous path and renounce our status of a free and cultured people? . . . We are not defending this or that minority; our aim is rather to defend the good name our people have won in the civilized world and to warn those, upon whom it depends, not to allow the country's prestige and the traditions of tolerance and humaneness it has acquired to be harmed by the elaboration of [the ZZN]."[38] Again, President Logofetov put a note in the margin of the statement, "File. I have taken note. 22.X.1940 – Logofetov."[39]

That the king and the government were in substantial agreement with the Nazis' "final solution" is made clear by Adolf Beckerle's[40] report to the Reich's Ministry of Foreign Affairs dated 7 June

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[33] Ibid., 18.

[34] Oliver, 59. Italics in Oliver; he typically uses italics as well as quotation marks to dis-tinguish quotations.

[35] Ibid., 60.

[36] Ibid., 61.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., 64.

[39] Ibid., 65.

[40] German ambassador to Bulgaria.

1943:[41] "Ich bin fest davon überzeugt, dass der Minister-präsident und die Regierung eine endgültige und restlose Lösung der Judenfrage wünschen und anstreben."[42]

The ZZN was protested by the Bulgarian Writers' Union, the Bulgarian Union of Lawyers, the Bulgarian Union of Doctors, and the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. The government joined with a variety of right-wing non-governmental organizations in a propaganda war against the Jews, accusing them of economic exploitation of the Bulgarians, of leading the nation in crime statistics, and of simple disloyalty. The ZZN was passed by the parliament after only three days of debate at the first reading and virtually none at the second reading. "The most heated argument during the entire debate [concerned] not the Jewish [*sic*] but the anti-Masonic sections of the proposed legislation."[43] Article 57 of the Bulgarian constitution provided, "All Bulgarian subjects are equal before the law. There exists no privileged class in Bulgaria." The constitution itself, however, was little more than a symbol, honored far more in the breach than in the observance, and there was no Bulgarian equivalent of the United States Supreme Court to conduct a judicial review of legislation in order to determine a law's constitutionality. "If the [parliament] passed a bill and the king signed it, it was law."[44]

For all the opposition to it, the ZZN passed Parliament and was signed into law by the king. Under its provisions, the Jews of Bulgaria were stripped of virtually every right they had enjoyed for centuries, including the right to vote and the right to practice their professions. A curfew from 9:00 P.M. to 6:00 A.M. was imposed on Jews throughout Bulgaria, and "many Jewish businesses and shops were closed. We were forced to wear the yellow Star of David, were prohibited from owning any means of transportation, telephone, radio, and were banned from all recreational or theater events, concerts, sporting events, or stay at hotels."[45]

In a memo to Ribbentrop dated 6 July 1942, Beckerle declared that the Bulgarian government was "ready to sign an agreement on the Jewish problem as proposed."[46] Bogdan Filov, the prime minister, shepherded through the parliament a "Law empowering the Council of Ministers to take all the necessary measures for the solution of the Jewish problem."[47] On 26 August, the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs was established, with Belev as its head.[48] On 20 November 1942, the king signed a

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[41] This was three years after the enactment of the ZZN and even after the "temporary" suspension of the deportations. If Beckerle was so sure of the king's and the government's wishes at so late a date, how much more so must they have been in the Nazis' racialist pocket when the Reich was in its ascendency!

[42] "I am certain of this: That the Prime Minister and the Government desire and intend a final and complete [the German word will also support a rendering of "dead"] solution to the Jewish question." (My English rendering.) A photograph of this paragraph of Beckerle's report is reproduced in Oliver, 86.

[43] Chary, 39.

[44] Ibid., 40.

[45] Israel Borouchoff, Presentation to Federal Interagency Program on Holocaust Remem-brance, 1 May 2003.

[46] Oliver, 102.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid., 103.

decree approving the entire panoply of anti-Jewish regulations which had been promulgated – locally as well as nationally – under the laws.[49]

In February 1943, the deportation of Bulgarian Jews was authorized, and the roundups began in March. The Jews of the newly acquired territories – Thrace and Macedonia – were deported in March. The Thracians were taken by boat up the Danube from Lom to Vienna and then by train to the death camps of Katowice and Auschwitz. The Macedonians were taken by train all the way to Auschwitz and Treblinka. "In all, 11,343 people were deported. Twelve of them would survive."[50]

Protests were raised, but to no avail. Dimitâr Ikonomov alerted his colleague Dimitâr Peshev, who was thus spurred to action.[51] Peshev himself relates that he was surprised by Ikonomov's visit. "I received a visit from Dimitâr Ikonomov, the deputy to the National Assembly from the town of Dupnitsa. He and I had had our differences on certain issues that had come up in the Assembly, and our relations were so strained that we were no longer on speaking terms. . . . I believed him to be a decent man and an upstanding public servant who was deeply committed to the interests of his home town and the electoral college of Dupnitsa."[52] Metropolitan Stefan of Sofia and Petko Stainov, an opposition member of parliament, joined the protesting chorus, but to no avail. "Stefan, in particular, wasted no time in alerting the king, pleading with him by telegram to spare the Thracian Jews, whose transport train he had encountered as it crossed Bulgaria. But as Stefan himself said even at the time, his entreaties fell on deaf ears."[53]

Then, on 9 March, the order was issued to begin deportations of Bulgarian Jews.[54] Several smaller cities were to be made completely *judenrein*, and numbers of Jews from Sofia and from some villages were also to be rounded up. One of the cities was Kyustendil, a town with 940 Jewish residents, located in an area of heavy Partisan and Communist resistance. The Communist Party called for physical resistance – a call which appears to have been virtually entirely ignored. A delegation of forty citizens of Kyustendil, Jews and gentiles both, determined to go to Sofia to plead with the king; by the time the group actually went to Sofia a few days later, they numbered only four, none of them Jewish.[55]

The delegation met with Dimitâr Peshev, member of parliament from Kyustendil and Vice-President of the National Assembly, who soon became their *de facto* leader. He asked for a meeting

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[49] Ibid., 112.

[50] Todorov, 8-9.

[51] Ibid., 9.

[52] Dimitâr Peshev, "Memoirs," in *The Fragility of Goodness: Why Bulgaria's Jews Survived the Holocaust: A Collection of Texts with Commentary*, by Tzvetan Todorov, trans. Arthur Denner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 158.

[53] Todorov, 9.

[54] "Bulgarian," as distinguished from those living in the "administered territories" of Thrace and Macedonia, which had not yet been formally incorporated into Bulgaria.

[55] Oliver, 154-159, passim; Todorov, 9.

with Prime Minister Filov, but was rebuffed. He then went directly to the office of Minister of the Interior Gabrovski, who professed surprise at the news of the pending roundup. He dismissed them, saying "he would see what could be done."[56]

Stopping the Deportations

"The fate of Bulgarian Jews during World War II is a remarkable exception to the tragedy that befell Jewish communities in Europe."[57] Indeed it was, and the questions we must ask is why – even more than how – the philo-Semitic forces were able to prevail in Bulgaria when they failed so badly almost everywhere else in Nazi-controlled Europe.

"Just as the Jews of the collaborating countries had a better chance than those of the conquered, inside Bulgaria those who were close to the government were usually more effective champions of the Jews than those who were in opposition. It was not primarily through an enraged public or defiant anti-Nazis that the Jews escaped deportation, but first through the action of the government and its supporters. Anti-Nazis, such as Metropolitan Stefan, were instrumental in convincing the government to change its plans, but Peshev took the initial step in reversing deportations, and the government itself had to make the final decision."[58] Once again, Chary portrays the government as, in effect, waiting for a reason, seeking as "peg" on which to hang the saving of the Jews. Yet, at every step along the way, the government pushed forward with its plans for the deportations, ignoring or dismissing the protests, until the pressure, in the form of the protests of the entire Bulgarian Orthodox Church, proved too great for the king to resist.[59] Even Peshev's letter had no direct influence upon the government's determination to deport the Jews; it led directly only to Peshev's losing his position as Vice-President of the National Assembly. It did, however, contribute to the atmosphere which enabled the Church's pressure to be effective.

The survival of the Jews of any particular nation under Nazi occupation seems to have little if any relationship to the history of anti-Semitism in the country. A prime example is Czechoslovakia. "Czechoslovakia, with virtually no anti-Semitism to soil its long proud record,[60] had a lower percentage

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[56] Oliver, 160-161.

[57] Emmy Barouh, "Ancestral Memory and Historical Destiny: The Sense of Belonging," in *Jews in the Bulgarian Lands: Ancestral Memory and Historical Destiny*, ed. Emmy Barouh (Sofia: International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations, 2001), 19. Barouh's book is not an examination of the history of Bulgaria and her Jews under Nazism, but rather a sociological study of the Bulgarian Jews in Israel at the turn of the millennium. Part of that study, of course, touches upon the Holocaust years.

[58] Chary, 197.

[59] I cannot but think of the actions of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church as a response (several years prior to the question) to Stalin's "How many division does the Pope have?"

[60] This is far more true of the Czechs (the territory of Bohemia and Moravia) than of the Slovaks. Even in what is now the Czech Republic, however, anti-Semitism was not entirely absent. The legend of the *golem*, an android of clay made by Rabbi Yehuda Loewe (1525-1609) and animated by certain mystical incantations, was a response to anti-Jewish depredations by the citizens of Prague. (The legend inspired Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*.)

of Jewish survivors than any other Nazi-occupied country."[61] Despite the Czechs' philo-Semitism – the Czech people, in response to the Nazis' decree that Jewish shops post the Star of David, increased their patronage of those very shops – only 13,000 of Czechoslovakia's 120,000 Jews survived, 3,000 within Czechoslovakia. 7,000 who survived Tereseienstadt, and 3,000 survivors of camps in the East.[62]

Throughout Nazi-occupied Europe, there were individuals of great courage who sheltered Jews or who helped them escape. In no country but Bulgaria, however, was the rescue effort so completely effective and on so large a scale.

We cannot but honor the Danes, of course, who, led by King Christian X,[63] mobilized a fleet of virtually every vessel in Denmark to transport the Danish Jews to Sweden. The Danish story can be told with pride. "The obdurate Danes were bluntly ordered [in February 1943] to . . . establish a ghetto, and enforce the wearing of the Jewish badge. King Christian balked, declaring that he would be pleased to move from his palace to such a ghetto and would regard wearing the so-called 'Jewish badge' as an honor."[64] Even so, about 10% of Denmark's Jews were lost to the Nazis, and the toll would likely have been far greater had not Count Helmuth von Moltke, later executed by the Nazis, warned Danish intelligence and had not Captain Georg Ferdinand von Duckwitz, who governed German shipping in and from Denmark, received and passed on to two high-ranking members of the Danish government and to the Swedish ambassador to Denmark "a strictly confidential letter from his superiors ordering him to prepare four cargo ships, [which] would be adequate to transport all Danish Jews in one mass deportation."[65] Both the government and the Danish Lutheran Church were virtually unanimous in their support of the efforts to save the Jews of Denmark. Gerda Bertelsen, wife of the principal of the Aarhus Cathedral College, "in reply to the bludgeoning Gestapo official who pressed her to confess that she had participated in the smuggling of Jews to Sweden, . . . asserted: '*All* decent people do!'"[66]

In Finland, only four Jews of a total Jewish population of about 2,000 were sent to the crematoria, thanks to the adamant stand of the Finnish government. Finnish Prime Minister Wolf Juhan Witting, at a luncheon meeting in the late summer of 1942, told Heinrich Himmler's personal physician Felix Kersten (who was meeting with him as Himmler's representative), "Finland is a decent nation. We would rather perish together with the Jews. . . . We will not surrender the Jews!"[67] By use of dilatory tactics based upon Finland's being a parliamentary democracy and the slowness of moving so major a proposal through the parliamentary process, and despite Finland's being "almost wholly

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[61] Philip Friedman, *Their Brothers' Keepers* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1957), 101-102.

[62] Ibid., 102.

[63] An interesting note to the history of Denmark is that King Christian X was born on Rosh Hashanah in 1870.

[64] Ibid., 150-151.

[65] Ibid., 151-152.

[66] Ibid., 154. Italics in Friedman.

[67] Ibid., 146.

[economically] dependent on" Germany,[68] Finland managed to avoid participating in the Nazis' effort to make Europe *judenrein*.[69]

In both Denmark and Finland, the rescue was made possible by a combination of (a) the government's learning of the plans for deportation[70] and (b) the government's active resistance. In Bulgaria, another solution had to be found, for the government, led by King Boris III, was firmly in the Nazi camp.

At a meeting of the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church on 2 April 1943, Metropolitan Stefan of Sofia declared, "The Jews know well that there is no one to speak for them with authority except for the Bulgarian Church, and that if she acts forcefully, her voice will be heard. . . . If our Church does not intervene, we should expect even worse outrages and acts of cruelty, which our people, who are good and kind, will one day recall in shame."[71]

In 1998, the Open Society Foundation conducted a survey on "Ancestral Memory and Historical Destiny of Bulgarian Jews."[72] As part of the study, interviews were conducted with Jews still living in Bulgaria. "To guarantee maximum credibility of the answers . . . the team decided to select interviewers from the young members of the Jewish organization [*sic*; probably means the Jewish community], who were subsequently trained for the purpose."[73] The interviewers are not identified in the study, and the interviewees are identified only by initials. In answer to the question, "What sort of people did you entertain at home?" one respondent said, "All sorts, mostly Bulgarian. There was this priest from Moursalovo [Kocheinovo] who was like a son to my father. Even though they were prohibited [from visiting Jews] during the fascist period, he would still come and visit us."[74] The respondent continues, "Until '41 there was no division between us and the Bulgarians. We were on excellent terms with the neighbours. We lived in a Bulgarian neighbourhood. I remember when they transported the Aegeans [the deported Jews from Aegean Thrace]. . . . Even the wife of a policeman, she was Bulgarian, she was making the sign of the cross and repeating, 'The L*rd will punish us.' Her husband was the most evil

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[68] Ibid., 144.

[69] Ibid., 146-147.

[70] In Denmark, by warnings from the German officials who would have been involved in the deportation; in Finland, by Dr. Kersten's attempt to persuade and browbeat Prime Minister Witting.

[71] Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Minutes of a Special Session, 2 April 1943, in *The Fragility of Goodness: Why Bulgaria's Jews Survived the Holocaust: A Collection of Texts with Commentary*, by Tzvetan Todorov, trans. Arthur Denner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 101.

[72] The results of the survey are published in *Jews in the Bulgarian Lands: Ancestral Memory and Historical Destiny*, ed. Emmy Barouh (Sofia: International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations, 2001). The individual essays which constitute the study are listed separately in the bibliography and cited separately herein.

[73] Emmy Barouh, foreword to *Jews in the Bulgarian Lands: Ancestral Memory and Historical Destiny*, ed. Emmy Barouh (Sofia: International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations, 2001), 7.

[74] Interview with L.N.Ch., Varna, 9 August 1998, in *Jews in the Bulgarian Lands: Ancestral Memory and Historical Destiny*, ed, Emmy Barouh (Sofia: International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations, 2001), 111. (Brackets in the original.)

policeman. . . . When we were locked up, we used to find bread and other food on our doorstep every morning, from Bulgarian friends of my father's."[75]

Some would credit King Boris III with blocking the deportations. "This thesis was first put forward in the Bulgarian émigré press . . . in 1952 by Benjamin Arditti, a Bulgarian Jew who had emigrated to Israel. . . , but also, after 1990, in Bulgaria itself."[76] An examination of the king's statements reveals that he manipulated what he said to have the effect he wished upon his hearers. "When Boris spoke . . . , it was not to reveal his inner thoughts nor to put into words the world he saw around him; he spoke in order to act on those he addressed, so that they would do what he wanted them to do."[77] Looking at the king's actions for a clue to his attitude, we find that he may have had a hand in stopping the deportation of the Bulgarian Jews – "Peshev and his fellow deputies' action could not have stopped the deportation, had Boris, who held supreme power in Bulgaria, wanted it carried out."[78] – but equally, he certainly bore responsibility for the deportation of the Thracian and Macedonian Jews; "It was his government that, in its decree of 5 June 1942, had taken away their citizenship.[79] Boris did not initiate the deportation . . . but he did nothing to stop it, even though he had the means to do so."[80] The king seems to have been genuinely motivated by what he believed (or convinced himself) was good for his nation. "His actions were guided by self-interest, or rather, by what he saw as Bulgaria's interests; for someone like Boris, who identified completely with his country, the two were indistinguishable. What motivated him was national interest as he understood it, not humanitarian principles."[81]

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[75] Ibid, 111-112. Again, brackets in the original.

[76] Todorov, 18.

[77] Ibid., 19.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Technically, the decree did not take away their citizenship; it singled out the Jews of the newly acquired provinces, unlike all the other ethnic minorities, as being unable to attain it. But Todorov's point here is still sound.

[80] Ibid., 20.

[81] Ibid., 23. Todorov, in my opinion, as I have found with Chary, treats the king far too gently. I find him to have been manipulative in the extreme and more than willing to institute the final deportations. Had not the Bulgarian Orthodox Church presented a solid phalanx against the deportations, the Jews of Bulgaria would have been decimated, despite the Peshev letter. (If the king really wanted to stop the deportations, he could have compelled Filov to respond favorably to the Peshev letter and could have prevented Filov from stripping Peshev of his position. In short, I find his primary motivation not only to have been less than humanitarian but even less than patriotic; his interest was personal, the maintenance of his own power. It is not that he "identified completely with his country," but that he identified his country with himself.

Accepting Gabriele Nissim's depiction of Peshev[82] as a major player in the opposition to the deportations – although we cannot help but note that Peshev, with all other members of the government, supported the enactment of the ZZN and that he offered no demurral when the deportees were the Thracian and Macedonian Jews – Todorov tells us that, "had Peshev and his like-minded colleagues not acted as they did, the king would probably have decided differently."[83]

We cannot forget that, along with every member of the government party, Peshev supported the adoption of the ZZN in 1940. "His argument was one of national interest: concessions had to be made towards the Germans, since Bulgaria depended on them and isolating the Jews seemed to keep the Germans happy; besides, the law would not be enforced and no one would really be bothered."[84] But Peshev revealed himself in 1943 as being eminently teachable, as he responded to Ikonomov's entreaties. It seems that "where once he had seen abstractions – rules, laws, regulations, Jews – he now saw individual faces, and they were faces of people who were suffering."[85]

In March 1943, Peshev visited his home constituency of Kyustendil, where the assistant chief of police told him in great detail of the plans for the round-up of the Jews. "There could be no more doubt about what was going to happen to the Jews," he affirms, and he then continues, "I could not remain passive – my conscience and understanding of the grave consequences both for the people involved and for my country did not allow it. It was then that I made the decision to do everything in my power to prevent the execution of a plan that was going to compromise Bulgaria in the eyes of the world and brand it with a mark of shame that it did not deserve."[86] As he realized that the Commissar for Jewish Questions (Belev) was, in fact, determined to carry out the deportations, Peshev found that he could not "fold my arms and sit back quietly. . . . To remain silent would have been a breach of conscience, it would have been contrary to my sense of responsibility both as a deputy and as a human being. I would be responsible for the outcome if I did not take steps to halt actions that had already

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[82] Gabriele Nissim, *L'uomo che fermò Hitler* (Milan: Mondadori, 1998), passim. I have seen Nissim's book; my Italian is not sufficient for me to have made significant direct use of it (it has not been published in English, although a manuscript of an English translation exists at the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington, inaccessible to me), but I have been able, skimming, to get an idea of its thrust. Todorov, in acknowledging his dependence upon Nissim, fairly reflects Nissim's work. Nissim's characterization of Peshev as "the man who stopped Hitler" (translation of his title) is, in my opinion, over the top. Peshev risked – and lost – his political career in trying to stop the deportation of the Jews from "old Bulgaria," and for this he is deserving of great honor, even a chapter in a European version of John F. Kennedy's *Profiles in Courage*; he is one of only seventeen "righteous gentiles" from Bulgaria officially honored by Yad Vashem. Still, in view of his having quickly been deposed as Vice-President of the National Assembly, he cannot have been the one whose objection was the effective blow.

[83] Todorov, 24.

[84] Ibid., 29.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Peshev, 159.

begun but were now temporarily suspended and that I knew to be a grave crime from a constitutional as well as a human and moral viewpoint."[87]

Six days later, Prime Minister Filov made an entry in his diary recounting an afternoon audience with the king, declaring, "We spoke mainly about the Jewish problem in which the King is insisting on a firm hand."[88] Peshev drafted and on 17 March obtained the signatures of forty-two of his fellow-members of parliament on a memorandum to Filov demanding, in the name of the honor of Bulgaria and the Bulgarian people, that there be no deportations of Jews. Under pressure from the government, a dozen of the signatories withdrew their names, but Peshev persevered.

Although some opposition deputies had let Peshev know of their willingness to sign his letter, he declined their offers,[89] feeling that "the action . . . had to be led by members of the majority who repudiated neither the regime nor the general principles of its domestic and foreign policy nor its own overall support for the government, but rather disagreed with it on a single issue: the deportation of Bulgarian Jews and their delivery to a foreign power whose intentions in this regard no one could claim not to know."[90]

With the acquiescence of the king,[91] Filov then took steps to remove Peshev as Vice-President, and it was done, without his having a chance to speak in his own behalf.[92] "Nevertheless, the plans for deporting the Bulgarian Jews had been abandoned for the time being."[93]

But the stay of execution was only temporary. By mid-May of 1943, the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs had developed a plan to deport the Jews of Bulgaria. Their plan included rounding up all the Jews of the nation prior to the actual deportations and placing them in camps. With a (perhaps conscious, perhaps unconscious) evocation of the requirement of the ZZN that Jews be expelled from the city of Sofia, the Commissariat's plan declared, "The rounding up of all Sofia Jews is technically difficult in a single stage. In order to accomplish it, the Sofia Jews must previously be deported to the countryside. . . . The deportation of Sofia Jews to the provinces will divert suspicions of deportation to Germany."[94] On 22 May, the Jews of Sofia were ordered to leave the city not later than Sunday, 24 May, the feast day of Saints Cyril and Methodius. There followed an outpouring of protest telegrams and memoranda from individuals and organizations, including the Communist Party (which urged the

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[87] Ibid., 163.

[88] Oliver, 166.

[89] With the exception of "two deputies who did not belong to the majority – Alexander Tsankov and Todor Kojukharov[, members of the right-wing pro-German opposition]. Since they were strong supporters of the government's policies towards Germany, their signatures would make it difficult for our parliamentary action to be constructed as anti-German." (Peshev, 167)

[90] Peshev, 165.

[91] As witnessed by an entry in Filov's diary.

[92] Oliver, 166-173, passim; Todorov, 10-11.

[93] Todorov, 11.

[94] Oliver, 182.

Jews to "choose heroic struggle and death rather than death at the hands of the butcher Hitler"), the Bulgarian Lawyers' Union, numerous members of the parliament, and the United Evangelical Churches.[95] The Swiss and Spanish ambassadors and the Catholic bishop at Skoplje were also among the prominent voices raised in protest.[96]

The most consistent and the strongest voice opposing the government's anti-Semitic policies was that of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. While the leaders of the Church were virtually unanimous in their opposition to the government's anti-Semitism, "no other man with comparable influence so opposed the government's anti-Semitic policy as did Metropolitan Stefan. Stefan was openly pro-British[97] and because of this an embarrassment to the government. It was under his direction as chairman that the Holy Synod sent letters of protest to the government against the ZZN and the deportation of Jews in March 1943."[98]

> Among these various appeals, those of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church were particularly important, and as the situation worsened, the Church's stance grew firmer and firmer. At the time of the first Assembly debates on the Law for the Defence of the Nation, the metropolitans were stressing the difference between converted or baptized Jews who had adopted the Christian faith, and the rest, demanding, above all, full protection for the former. At the same time, the clerics asked that the latter, the non-converted, be judged by what they did, not for who they were. . . . During one meeting of the Synod, on 2 April 1943, even those who had defended the law [when it was first enacted] now attacked its implementation. Yosif, metropolitan of Varna, for example, said, 'Toward the non-Christian Jews, our relations must be those of universal morality, of one man to another.' . . . Another metropolitan, Kliment of Stara Zagora, added that, in acting as they did, the government bodies were behaving like Communists, not like Christians. Cyril of Plovdiv and, above all, Stefan [of Sofia] were particularly outspoken. Stefan fired off one report after another; the king was unmoved, while the prime minister threatened to haul Stefan into court for actions hostile to the state. . . . Stefan responded by announcing that the doors of every Bulgarian church and monastery would be opened to the Jews.[99]

The Church's work in the rescue included many tactics. There was a "veritable epidemic of 'mercy baptisms' during the German occupation, . . . [and] in the years 1938-1941, approximately 10,000 mixed marriages[100] were conducted between Christian Bulgarians and Jews. . . . After 1941,

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[95] Ibid., 183-190.

[96] Ibid., 162-164.

[97] Very likely true, but neither Chary nor any other source which I have encountered brings evidence to prove it.

[98] Chary, 188. As we shall see below, Stefan was not alone in leading the Bulgarian Orthodox Church to this position. Metropolitan Cyril of Plovdiv wrote in opposition to anti-Semitism as nearly as 1938. I have seen only secondary references to his pamphlet and no citations of the pamphlet itself, so I cannot judge its details.

[99] Todorov, 25. See also Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Statement to the Prime Minister, 15 November 1940, in *The Fragility of Goodness: Why Bulgaria's Jews Survived the Holocaust: A Collection of Texts with Commentary*, by Tzvetan Todorov, trans. Arthur Denner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 54-57, passim.

[100] In view of the fact that the total Jewish population of Bulgaria (men, women, and children) was only about 50,000, it is simply not credible that over 20% of all the Jews in Bulgaria (not even of all the adult unmarried Jews) contracted "real" interfaith marriages in the course of only three years. While there may well have been some genuine interfaith

conversions were administered on a mass scale, with both parties tacitly agreeing that the convert could renounce his vow after the war. . . . A government order placed a deadline on conversions, ruling that only Jews who had been baptized prior to the publication of the racist laws were exempt. However, in many instances priests readily stated that a Jewish applicant for formal baptism had in fact been converted to Christianity some time earlier."[101]

Metropolitan Cyril of Plovdiv, who was later to become Patriarch of Bulgaria, "sent his own telegram to the king, interceded with the administrative authorities, and allowed Jews to take refuge in his house; it is said of Cyril that he vowed to lie across the rails in the path of the first train transport of Jews from his diocese."[102] The story of Cyril's dramatic vow may be apocryphal – it is mentioned in several sources, but always as a statement, without evidence – but it is believable. In 1938, Cyril had written a pamphlet entitled "Faith and Resolution," which roundly condemned anti-Semitism.[103]

Metropolitan Stefan of Sofia personally saw to the hiding of Chief Rabbi Asher Hannanel and even "declared publicly that 'G*d had determined the Jewish fate, and men had no right to torture Jews, and to persecute them.'"[104] He also "sent Boris a telegram that read as follows: 'Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get.[105] Know, Boris, that G*d watches your actions from Heaven.' . . . The traditional Cyril and Methodius Day parade on 24 May (Cyril and Methodius Day is a Bulgarian national holiday in honour of culture and education) turned into a mass demonstration against the government's anti-Jewish policies; 400 people were arrested. Nonetheless, the evacuation of Sofia's Jews to the provinces went ahead and continued through the month of June; nearly 20,000 Jews were forced to leave the capital. Yet deportation to the concentration camps of Poland still had not occurred."[106]

As Germany began to go into retreat militarily, the incentive to deport the Jews of Bulgaria also faded. Beckerle, in a memo dated 18 August 1943, acknowledged that only the resumption of Germany's military success would enable the deportations to resume. King Boris returned from a visit to Berlin on 25 August. Three days later, under what almost every source describes as mysterious

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marriages, the overwhelming majority of these 10,000 must have been purely *pro forma*, with some provision (I have not encountered a telling of the details) that would have justified a later annulment.

[101] Friedman, 105. Friedman deals with Bulgaria only briefly – just over one page – but he seems mildly to echo Chary in viewing King Boris III as having tried unsuccessfully to sidestep the Nazis' demands.

[102] Todorov, 10.

[103] Chary, 188.

[104] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, revised and enlarged edition (New York: Penguin, 1977), 186.

[105] Matthew 7:1-2.

[106] Todorov, 12.

circumstances,[107] he died. Filov and two other regents were named, as Crown Prince Simeon was only six years old. "A new government was formed, and . . . Belev was replaced by another commissar, someone not known for his anti-Semitism. By the end of [October], Sofia's Jews had been granted permission to return to their homes . . . ; on 31 August 1944, . . . the cabinet rescinded the Law for the Defence of the Nation. On 9 September, the old regime collapsed."[108]

"Not a single Bulgarian Jew had been deported or had died an unnatural death, when, in August 1944, with the approach of the Red Army, the anti-Jewish laws were revoked. I know of no attempt to explain the conduct of the Bulgarian people, which is unique in the belt of mixed populations."[109]

Conclusion

Who, finally, gets the credit? Certainly, all those who protested, all who objected, are entitled to share in the accomplishment. Well, almost all. I am disinclined to give much credit to the Communists as a group (although there were undoubtedly individuals within the Communist camp who did contribute substantially). The Communists' position was that the Jews should fight; it would have been a hopeless battle and one that would likely have accelerated the deportations. Further, the Communists – again, as a group; there may well have been more idealistic individuals within that camp – seem to have been motivated far more by an anti-monarchialism than by any humanitarian considerations.

Writing well after the demise of the Communist regime, Tzvetan Todorov points out that the Communist government, even while claiming credit for the rescue, seems by its actions to have regarded it as virtually inconsequential. The People's Tribunal, established by the newly formed Communist government after 9 September 1944, put all the monarchist members of parliament on trial. Of the forty-three signatories to Peshev's letter (forty-two plus Peshev himself), "twenty were sentenced to death, six to life imprisonment, eight (including Peshev himself) to fifteen-year prison terms,[110] four others to five-year terms, and one to a prison term of a year; three were acquitted and another died while awaiting sentencing. . . . Among the most notable of those executed were Ikonomov, who had been the first to sound the alarm, and Ivan Petrov, who had fought hard in the National Assembly against the [ZZN]."[111]

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[107] Oliver explicitly blames Hitler as having given up on Boris' ever implementing the "final solution." Other sources suggest the same, but there seems to be no conclusive proof.

[108] Ibid., 13.

[109] Arendt, 188. Arendt, writing perhaps too soon after the events to attain objectivity (1963), seems to me to whitewash the king and the government of Bulgaria. Typical is her statement (p. 185), "The Bulgarian monarchy had no reason to be worried about the native Fascist movement, the Ratnizi, because it was numerically small and politically without influence, and the Parliament remained a highly respected body, which worked smoothly with the King." In fact, as I have noted, the king named several *ratnitsi* to high or sensitive positions in the government.

[110] As Todorov acknowledges (p. 25), Peshev was actually released from prison after serving less than a year. I have not found information concerning the release of his fellow-signers.

[111] Todorov, 14-15.

The members of parliament who stood up against the deportations (even if they did come late to their realization) certainly contributed to the atmosphere in which pressure could be brought upon the king and the government.

> Memory is not merely a place where wills collide, each seeking advantage over the others. Memory is also open to the establishment of truth. It is either true or false that the Communists were responsible for the rescue of the Jews; it is either true or false that Boris did his best to spare all of Bulgaria's Jews from deportation.[112] If memory is to become history, the battle of opposing wills to power needs to recede into the background and leave room for the search for truth: an endless search perhaps, but necessary nonetheless.[113]

Hannah Arendt, speaking of the well-known rescue of the Jews of Denmark, declared, in words which can be applied even more clearly to Bulgaria, "One is tempted to recommend the story as required reading in political science for all students who wish to learn something about the enormous power potential inherent in non-violent action and in resistance to an opponent possessing vastly superior means of violence."[114] She characterizes Bulgaria, along with Denmark, Sweden, and Italy, as "nearly immune to anti-Semitism."[115] "Italy and Bulgaria," she observes, "sabotaged German orders and indulged in a complicated game of double-dealing and double-crossing, saving their Jews by a tour de force of sheer ingenuity, but they never contested the policy as such."[116]

It has often been suggested that non-violent resistance can be effective only when the oppressor is relative "civilized," as in India under the British Raj, or where there are institutions able to force the oppressors to refrain, as in the United States in the 1960s. (Knowledge of the history of those struggles might call into question the characterizations of those oppressors as even relatively civilized, but their barbarism was certainly orders of magnitude less than that of the Nazis.) Bulgaria, even more than Denmark and Finland, provides proof that a powerful moral agency (the Bulgarian Orthodox Church) can exercise non-violent resistance that can prevent the very worst oppression of even a strong central government. The moral force is more powerful than the weapons of war.

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[112] And it is either true or false that the actions of Peshev, Ikonomov, and the others made the church's intervention possible. Actually, I would suggest that it may be somewhere between true and false. Rather than declare any one of the options "true," we may find, ultimately, that each contributed to the eventual rescue, that credit needs to be shared.

[113] Ibid., 26.

[114] Arendt, 171.

[115] Ibid. Pavel Stefanov, "Bulgarians and Jews Throughout History," *Religion in Eastern Europe* 22 (December 2002), 1-11, calls this characterization somewhat into question so far as Bulgaria is concerned, but it seems the case that Bulgaria's anti-Semitism, although assuredly not historically absent, was orders of magnitude less than that of most central European nations, especially Germany and the north Slavic countries.

[116] Arendt, 171. Arendt is speaking in general terms and seems not to have examined the Bulgarian situation in any detail. She acknowledges that not a single witness in the Eichmann trial spoke of Bulgaria. Those sources which explicitly examined Bulgaria draw quite a different picture, portraying Bulgarian organizations ranging from the Communist Party through the writers' and artists' union to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church as openly opposing the pro-Nazi and anti-Jewish policies of King Boris III.

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