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1. Decree on Local Self-Sufficiency in Certain Staple Foods

On October 19, Radio Sofia and BTA released summaries of a new decree on "self-sufficiency of the population in the systems of inhabited places with fruit, vegetables, meat, milk, eggs, and fish." The full text of the decree was published in the daily press on October 20. It was revealed that the decree is the result of a joint session of the BCP CC, the Council of Ministers, the Standing Committee of the Bulgarian Agrarian Union, and the Presidium of the National Council of the Fatherland Front, held for two days, on October 14 and 15, and not reported previously. This high-level session is the first of its kind for several months, and the decree is also the first document of this kind since last July to be given such wide publicity.

The reasons for this publicity are obvious. First, the decree comes at a time of year when the shortage of many of these goods, especially fruit and vegetables, becomes particularly noticeable and is most heavily felt by the population, used to prepare its own stocks of brine cabbage, mixed vegetables, plums, etc. This year, according to incomplete information, the supply of fruits and vegetables is very unequal, due to climatic conditions: some fruits and vegetables in some parts of the country were completely destroyed by spring frosts, whereas others seem to have given relatively good yields. As for animal products, it is a well-known fact that they have always been far from sufficient.
Secondly, the decree is propagandistic in character -- an expression of concern for the supply of the population. The first commentary on it, broadcast by Radio Sofia on October 20, did not fail to point out that it is a manifestation of the "care for man" -- this care being still valid as the main principle of the party's economic policy since the 10th BCP Congress in 1971.

Thirdly, widespread publicity is necessary, because of the additional effort that will be demanded, not only of everyone engaged in agriculture, but also of "housewives, pensioners, as well as part of the leisure time of workers and employees," as stated in the decree.

In their essence, the provisions of the decree are not completely new. Especially since 1973, the question of self-sufficiency of the districts has been raised over and over again, particularly concerning fruit and vegetables. In 1973, the Sofia Municipal People's Council drew up a program on fulfillment of earlier decisions on creating a "vegetables and milk belt" around Sofia; the aim was to have, by 1975, 70 per cent of all vegetables on sale in the capital coming from its close vicinity (Rabotnichesko Delo, 4 September 1973). In 1974, the chairman of the Central Co-operative Union wrote about the need to achieve "self-sufficiency of the areas and the districts" in vegetables (Rabotnichesko Delo, 16 March 1974).

More recently, however, the question of self-sufficiency and supply with fruits, vegetables, and animal products in general seems to have received new impetus. On 8 March 1977, the Politburo approved theses on development of livestock breeding, on self-sufficiency of the districts and year-round supply with fruit and vegetables, and on freshwater fish-breeding (Ikonomicheski Zhivot No.23, 1 June 1977). The latest decree is obviously a sequel to these theses, which were never published. The fact that the session which approved the decree lasted for two days and apparently dealt with this single subject indicates that, despite the existence of the theses, the issue was controversial and not yet sufficiently clear-cut.

In comparison with earlier policy on the subject, the decree differs in three essential points. The first is its demand for self-sufficiency, not only for each district (the country is administratively divided into 28 districts), but also for each "system of inhabited places" (a relatively new term designating a group of villages, or a town with its surrounding villages, which it is planned should develop economically and socially as one unit -- see Bulgarian Situation Report/10, Radio Free Europe Research, 5 April 1977, Item 3). The second major innovation is the increased reliance on personal plots -- although, formally, the public farms and the "powerful material-technical basis of agro-industrial and industrial-agricultural complexes" are still being given priority (it has recently been revealed that a new decree on personal plots has been issued, but its text has not been published). The third new feature is the inclusion of fish production in the demands for self-sufficiency -- although, as mentioned above, it
was apparently contained in last spring's theses. It was probably as a consequence of the theses that increased attention to freshwater fishing has recently been devoted by the Bulgarian press (see Rabotnichesko Delo, 24 April, 27 July, and 12 August 1977). Otherwise, in the last 12 or 13 years Bulgaria has been putting priority on developing deep-sea fishing -- see Bulgarian SR/27, RFER, 12 October 1977, Item 3).

Exceptions from the demand of the decree for self-sufficiency of systems of inhabited places and districts are to be allowed "only if, in a system of inhabited places or a district, there are no conditions for production of some of these products." In such cases, for such products, supply from other areas of the country will be allowed. The decree does not indicate, however, whether there will be a formal prohibition of outside supply, except for the explicitly allowed cases, or whether this demand is, rather, an expression of a policy line that should be followed as far as practicable. It would be logical if the latter were the case, at least at the beginning, until the necessary more equal distribution and increase of livestock is achieved, new orchards are planted and begin to bear fruit, etc. A strict observance of the self-sufficiency demand, as long as the necessary conditions are not created, would run contrary to the explicit aim of the decree, which is to "improve decisively the satisfaction of the population of the territorial units" with the products in question.

In addition to the general provisions of the decree quoted, its main, specific provisions are divided into five points. The first and most important one says that self-sufficiency in all subject products must be secured through additional production, above the agreed procurement control figures (these are a less strict variety of plan targets, applied in various sectors of the economy according to the present economic mechanism). This additional production is to be obtained "with a minimum of public expenditure, and without additionally burdening the state budget."

At first glance, the decree on self-sufficiency appears to mean a more equal distribution of the output of the products concerned, and the aim could easily be assumed to be to save transport costs and overcome the obstacle consisting in insufficient transport, sell the products quite fresh, and overcome the usual hurdles of poor organization. Although these points of view certainly play a role, the above quoted first point reveals, however, that it is, above all, a question of additional production, to be achieved with a minimum of additional public expenditure -- hence the reliance on the personal plot farmers.

The second point, dealing with self-sufficiency in fruit and vegetables, goes even a step further by saying that better use should be made of the possibilities of public farms and personal plots, as well as of "the traditions of our people in this type of production." These traditions, to be sure, are not in farming on the huge areas of agro-industrial complexes, but in private gardening.
The third point, dealing with self-sufficiency in the supply of meat, milk, and eggs, also speaks of additional production, to be obtained by using all possibilities of public farms, the breeding farms of enterprises, and personal plots. It mentions the need to solve the fodder problem, without going into detail.

The fourth point demands rapid increase of fresh-water fishing by improving the state of internal waters (rivers, dams, etc., which are heavily impaired by pollution).

The last point, as usual, calls for participation of party and other organizations in the fulfillment of the decree.

As can be seen, the decree is very general, containing mainly demands, but few concrete measures for the fulfillment of these demands. Its purpose is, to a large extent, propagandistic -- to display concern for improved supply of the population, but it might not be too popular with the peasants, who are called upon to make additional efforts and to produce more without additional capital investments, and possibly also without additional material incentives (the latter are only mentioned in a provision for the Council of Ministers to set up regulations on "planning, financing, crediting, and material stimulation" of production for self-sufficiency).

From the point of view of agricultural policy, the decree bears witness to a lack of consistency. The self-sufficiency not only of whole districts, but of the smaller units, the systems of inhabited places, and also the reliance on personal plots, contrasts with policy which resulted in the forming of the huge agro-industrial complexes, and which still pursues large-scale concentration and strict specialization of production. It would seem that concentration and specialization are theoretically the best methods, but in practice they have not worked, at least as far as fruits and vegetables are concerned.

In the last few years, there has been a constant conflict between theory and practical needs: at the 1970 plenum on agriculture, Todor Zhivkov said that the existing 1,273 market gardens would be replaced by 53, each of them with a surface area of between 500 and 2,000 hectares (Rabotnichesko Delo, 29 April 1970). Four years later, however, it was decided that the small market gardens, which had been destroyed, should be restored (Ikonomicheski Zhivot, No.20, 15 May 1974). In 1975, an author boasted that 75 per cent of the vegetable crops had been concentrated in gardens of 100 to 200 hectares in size (Ikonomicheski Zhivot No.10, 5 March 1975), but last spring Minister of Agriculture Gancho Krastev sharply criticized "grave errors" that had been made in concentration and specialization of vegetable growing; they had resulted in a reduction of the variety of vegetables grown and in too hasty elimination of small vegetable gardens (Kooperativno Selo, 17 February 1977 -- see Bulgarian SR/6, RFER, 3 March 1977, Item 2). Similar fluctuations between the extremes have also been noticeable in the concentration of fruit growing and the size of orchards -- see Bulgarian SR/35, RFER, 7 November 1974, Item 39.
On October 24, Rabotnichesko Delo devoted its leading article to the decree; it was extensively summarized by Radio Sofia. In addition to the "enormous economic and political significance" of self-sufficiency, declared in the decree itself, the party daily attributed to it also ideological and social significance. It surprisingly stated that "in the ideological aspect, the system of self-sufficiency means overcoming definitely the consumerist approach to the question of raising the standard of living and educating the younger generation to love labor." The implication of this seems to be that, in the long run and carried to its logical conclusion, the aim of the decree is to enforce the principle "he who does not produce will not eat" -- a principle basic to the regime's attacks on consumerism.

2. The Fashionable and Luxury Goods Trade

In the late 1950s the Bulgarian communist regime began to depart from its earlier policy of neglecting and ignoring the existence of fashion trends and the average person's interest in fashion. One reason why, the government made this change in policy was because this interest, especially among the youth, played an important role in making people receptive to Western influence, an influence that would only be the stronger, the less possibilities there were to satisfy a desire for fashionable clothing on the domestic market. The first Bulgarian fashion journal, Lada, began to appear in 1959 as a quarterly (since 1971, it has been a monthly), and in 1960 a Center for New Goods and Fashions was set up, which at present employs some 300 designers. The significance of design and of the aesthetic qualities of wares has been recognized as increasingly important since the program for "aesthetic education" was launched two years ago (see Bulgarian SR/35, RPER, 17 December 1975, Item 1). The ideological aspect contained in this development is the requirement that Bulgarian national, folkloristic elements be utilized, in order to counterbalance foreign, i.e., Western, influence.

In response to the increasing demand, "luxury goods," a rather flexible term, have gradually gained ground in the market. A decision was taken in 1963 "to organize the production of some luxury and fashionable goods" in small quantities, using more expensive materials and better workmanship to produce them (Rabotnichesko Delo, 5 and 24 April 1963). Thanks to this decision, or rather to the policy which had inspired it, the following 10 years saw a certain improvement in the choice of goods available and in their quality, but it also resulted in larger possibilities for hidden price increases through arbitrarily putting various goods in the flexible "luxury" category. At the same time, a split attitude to luxury goods persisted officially. In 1970, the journal Finansi i Kredit (issues Nos. 4 and 5) published two articles arguing against such goods, one attacking them mainly from the ideological point of view (according to Marx, they are "not necessary for the reproduction of labor force") and the other explaining fiscal policy, which is designed to "restrict the consumption of luxury goods." In 1971, a special decree was issued on production of "modern, high quality, popular types of goods" (see Bulgarian SR/11, RPER, 5 April 1971, Item 2). The new decree was made necessary by the extremely poor choice and poor quality of all
goods not classified as "luxury," and the steady growth of the latter, more expensive category, at the expense of cheaper goods (it was reported that, in the central department store in Sofia, the share of "luxury" goods had in the course of a few years increased from 20 per cent to more than 50 per cent of all merchandise offered while the "aesthetic appearance (of the popular types of goods) was beneath contempt" -- see Pogled, 16 August 1971).

Apart from this attempt to improve the image of the popular type of goods, the 1971 decree also paid some attention to luxury goods, stating that their production should also be expanded "to the extent necessary." At the December 1972 plenum on the standard of living, Todor Zhivkov said "the policy of reducing retail prices does not mean that there should be no more expensive, luxury goods" on the market, adding that "such merchandise is necessary, it satisfies the specific needs of individual working people, who are ready to pay a higher price for a better quality of goods and services" (Rabotnichesko Delo, 14 December 1972). At the March 1974 National Party Conference, Zhivkov even spoke of "luxury and superluxury goods," saying that it would be "criminal" to continue using valuable raw materials and the labor of the people to produce "poor and primitive products" (Rabotnichesko Delo, 21 March 1974).

Meanwhile, the Lada and Valentina fashion houses had been founded in Sofia in the 1960s. In 1975, the latter establishment served as the basis of a state economic association of the same name whose specific task it was to organize the production and to supply (including imports) the retail trade with luxury and fashionable goods (Darzhaven Vestnik No.37, 16 May 1975). One year later, the Valentina state economic association had 15 shops in Sofia and 38 branches throughout the rest of the country (Otechestven Front, 26 June 1976). Recently, however, it has been revealed that the Valentina has had very great difficulties in coping with its assignments.

A deputy director of Valentina, Tsvetana Mihova, participated in a discussion organized by the weekly Ikonomicheski Zhivot (published in the 17 August 1977 issue of the paper). She complained about the conditions under which fashionable clothing must be produced -- it is Valentina's main concern, together with the sale of shoes, jewelry, perfumes, etc. Mihova revealed that the association is no longer being given much, if any, foreign currency for the importation of fabrics. If some 20 to 30 per cent of the fabrics we use were imported, she said, we could have a better choice of fashionable models. But as it is, Valentina has to produce its clothes from the same Bulgarian-made fabrics as the rest of the clothing industry. What is worse, it is forced, because of its special status, to buy these fabrics at retail prices. The sewing is also more expensive than in the clothing industry, because
only some 200 to 300 copies of each model are turned out. As a consequence, one must pay 180 to 200 leva for a Valentina suit made of the same fabric as the models found in other clothing shops selling for 110 to 120 leva. Mihova also complained of some other difficulties caused by the specific character of the Valentina enterprise: insufficient capital investment, the above-mentioned problem of prices, etc.

A story published in the daily Zemedelsko Zname (October 2) must be read with these difficulties in mind. It revealed that the director-general of Valentina, Engineer Yordan Gandev, had recently been dismissed for the following reasons: Gandev had tried to improve the dark picture of Valentina's economic situation, but took a few financial short cuts, mainly because he found that about half of the goods in stock simply could not be sold.

The article did not discuss the basic reasons for this situation, concentrating instead on blaming the director-general for the methods he had tried to use to improve matters. A certain amount of incompetence among Valentina's managerial staff, indeed, can be taken for granted. The basic and most serious reason, however, must be sought in the whole approach to the creation and the subsequent existence of a state economic association for fashionable and luxury goods. As revealed by Tavetana Mihova, Valentina had not been offered the necessary conditions to function normally. A thorough reorganization would be necessary, improving the economic mechanism applicable to it, giving it more funds for imports and for capital investments, and possibly also attaching some textile factories to it, if it is to fill the still very important gap on the internal market which it was originally designed to do.

3. Deputy Minister Dismissed

Lieutenant-General Ivan Mitrev, one of the six current deputy ministers of Construction and Construction Materials, was dismissed from his post by a decree of September 19, published in Darzhaven Vestnik No.79 of October 11 (such long delays in publishing this kind of decree are not unusual). Since appointments and dismissals of individual deputy ministers in the various ministries are frequent, Mitrev's dismissal would not have attracted special attention, had it not been for the formulation that the change was being made "for reasons of expediency."

Usually, in routine changes of deputy ministers, "transfer to other work" is given as a reason and, varying from one case to another, this "other work" can either mean a promotion or a demotion. Occasionally, no reason at all is mentioned. The one given for Mitrev, however, is highly unusual for the relatively low level of a deputy minister. "Reasons of expediency" were last given for the ouster of Politburo member and CC secretary Boris Velchev, which was a highly political affair, and meant Velchev's complete downfall (see Bulgarian SR/14, RPER, 16 May 1977, Item 1). The implication of this formula, as a rule, is political. In the context of the dismissal of a deputy minister, it might have been
assumed that it was replacing the now obsolete formula of the
1950s, "for not coping with his work," especially as there are
numerous shortcomings in the construction sector for which a
deputy minister might be made responsible. In the particular
case of Mitrev, however, political reasons seem much more likely
than professional ones, because of his personal background.

Unlike most present deputy ministers in the economic
ministries, who are more often specialists in their respective
sectors than political figures, Ivan Mitrev seems to be of the
old type of government official whose merits lay primarily on the
party level. Mitrev (born in 1924) has had a degree of national
prominence since 1967, when, with the rank of colonel, he headed
the Department of Railway Troops at the Ministry of Transport.
He held this post until 1973, in the meanwhile (1969 and 1972,
respectively) being promoted to the rank of major general and then
to lieutenant general. Between 1973 and 1975, he was a deputy
Minister of Transport. He was released from that post to become a
deputy Minister of Construction and Architecture in February 1975
(this ministry was renamed the Ministry of Construction and
Construction Materials in May 1977). Mitrev was a member of the
group of high Bulgarian military officers who were decorated
with Soviet orders in 1969 for their participation in World War II
and/or for "postwar co-operation between the Bulgarian and
Soviet armed forces."

Mitrev's background makes it probable that, as a deputy
Minister of Construction, he was in charge of railway, and
probably also road, construction. Shortcomings in these sectors
are at least as numerous and of as major a nature as in the lagging
construction of housing and in the constant failures to complete
industrial facilities according to schedule. Nevertheless, the
"reasons of expediency" for his dismissal, as well as his background,
implies that the main reason for his departure was political. Other
military personalities may also have been affected, but this is
not likely to emerge immediately (decrees on dismissals and appoint-
ments of deputy Ministers of National Defense are, as a rule, not
published, nor are changes in posts in all ministries lower than
the deputy minister level).

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