

## **Grapes Of Wrath Taste Bitter**

The ten days of long expectation have passed. New President Peter Stoyanov took office and it seems that now is the right time to try and take a look into the future.

These ten days between the clashes on January 10-11th and the inauguration of the new President were granted to the opposition by the former President Dr. Zhelev. Having nothing to lose, he refused to give the Socialist Party (BSP) a mandate to form a second government.

It is hard to say whether the opposition used this time properly or not. Yes, some very important preparations for the future strikes and negotiations were made. On the other hand, if despite the law, which sets a one week invoice-time a national strike was started ten days ago, today everything could well be finished.

It is (and was) quite obvious that BSP does not intend to give up the power and agree on elections it is going to be defeated on. It must be forced to do so. An important question is then, why didn't the opposition lead the people straight ahead. Of course, it is much better to resolve a crisis in a lawful way, but it is also well-known that an emergency situation calls for emergency measures. Two possible answers to the above question are: the opposition got scared or there is some kind of a deal between the political parties reached in background.

There are many reasons to expect that a mass protest, spread all over the country, may easily get out of control. Or be taken out of it, since there are politicians which will be happy if somebody else could do the dirty work for them. I'm not afraid to mention here the name of George Ganchev. This explains why the United Democratic Forces (UtdDF) decided to try and handle the events in a peaceful way.

The scenario with the deal seems highly unlikely, because leaders of UtdDF understand now is their last chance to take the power and take the country out of the economic disaster. They failed to do so once in 1992; another question is can they do it now. But if they don't try, there are other forces ready to take their place in the policy.

First of them is the Bulgarian Business Block (BBB), led by the ambitious George Ganchev. The elections last autumn showed there are many people who believe his promises to put order everywhere - and only a few who see in him a new-born dictator. Eventual elections in the near future are BBB's once-in-a-lifetime chance to displace the Socialists and to become the second large political force in the county; there is no doubt they won't waste it. That's why their present position to hold elections in September-October is a mere camouflage, just in attempt to differ from both UtdDF and BSP - a move, widely used earlier by Ganchev to launch his new image as a non-confrontation leader whose main concern is the people's welfare.

The second major figure with big influence on the people is the King Simeon II. In the past seven years he proved to be a wise politician and his opinion has always been taken into account. He is very popular on two reasons: first, there are still a lot of people who remember the ruling of his

father, King Boris III. Then Bulgarian Kingdom has one of the top ten living standards in the world which is in deep contrast with the today's misery brought by the Republic. Second, King Simeon is well-known in the western world, European courts and high-society as an honest man and a first-class businessman. Many believe if he heads the country this will make the economy more attractive for foreign investors - and probably are right.

A couple of days ago the King stated he's not going to return to Bulgaria and to interfere the events. Doing this, he probably loses a great possibility to become a ruling King. His coming to Bulgaria will surely divide the opposition, which consists both of republicans and royalists, thus making his victory even easier. The only problem here seems to be that most of the people support not the monarchy as a form of ruling, but Simeon himself. It depends on him to change this.

Anyway, the situation in Bulgaria is calm; the King is not homecoming yet and UtdDF have chosen negotiations rather than a breakthrough, assuming the worst peace is better than the best war. These negotiations will take place under the patronage of the new President. Although Peter Stoyanov comes directly from the opposition and is much more popular than former President Dr. Zhelev, he seems to be more acceptable for the BSP because he has less knowledge and experience in politics than his ancestor. Holding them will be his first trial, thus of great importance for his future.

Political negotiations in Bulgaria are much like an Oriental marketplace. Both sides try to reach their goals and in the end they compromise in order not to lose all. The stake is quite high - the future of the whole political system (and of all today's politicians in particular). In some way, they will try to save themselves, so it is important to know what which side can offer and what it demands.

BSP needs the power for about an year to conceal as far as it is possible the reasons that led to the present free fall of the economy. Since they will not be allowed such a term - if not by UtdDF than by the people in the streets - they will try at least to preserve the people in response from being prosecuted, because some their decisions deserves this. It is even possible to expect that all the responsibility will be taken by a narrow circle of people like Jean Videnov, that are apparently out of the politics forever, in order to save the largest number of party functioniers untouched. Doing so will help the BSP keep its unity, which is once again threatened by the fraction of Social Democrats claiming to leave if no compromise is reached. If this happens, BSP will lose just a small percent of its members, but will suffer a much greater loss in its public image.

UtdDF will have to accept some of the BSP's demands - the less, the better. As we saw, reaching agreement on soon elections may be vital for them. UtdDF should put any possible attempt to make the compromise more acceptable - even to use pressure from the streets in its supreme form. They should also try to encourage Social Democrats to leave BSP. But they must not forget that BSP is not the only (and soon will be not the main) danger. Drastic measures are needed to fight the hunger knocking on door of some 80% of the families. Just a stable economy can assure stable democracy and the only existing alternative is chaos.

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