

Electoral deadlock continues in Bulgaria

Andrei Tudora
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A general election was held on April 2 in Bulgaria, the fifth since the fall of the Borisov Government in 2021. Only about 41 percent of Bulgarians showed up to vote.

Despite the harsh rhetoric and mudslinging between the representatives of the main bourgeois parties, in the last two years the Bulgarian oligarchy has in fact presented a solid front against the working class: from the catastrophic COVID reopening and health care collapse, to joining the war drive against Russia.

Boyko Borisov's GERB (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria) consolidated the number one slot from the previous elections, winning 26 percent of the votes, while the PP-DB coalition (We Continue the Change-Democratic Bulgaria) led by Kiril Petkov and Asen Vasilev gained 24 percent and will lose 9 seats.

Petkov was prime minister during the crucial early months of 2022 and began steering the country towards an aggressive confrontation with Russia, until his government collapsed in June, and a caretaker government was appointed by President Rumen Radev. The PP has been praised in the international media for its ruthlessly pro-market stance and its staunch support of Bulgaria's "Western allies." It managed to take advantage of a protracted electoral crisis to emerge at the end of 2021 as the main "anti-corruption" party.

The PP has largely cosmetic differences with Borisov, whom large sections of the ruling class now regard as too compromised and a liability in the government. Petkov had hoped that a first place finish in this round of elections would have offered enough leverage to force a minority government, with GERB support in Parliament. Now Borisov is pressing the PP to join a Grand Coalition. The GERB relies on a network of mayors and regional political operatives that it inherited from the old SDS (Union of Democratic Forces); a right-wing party founded after the restoration of capitalism in 1989.

Petkov and Vasilev have so far refused the scheme, fearing that, as they lack the GERB's electoral network, their party would disappear electorally, similar to other "anti-corruption" parties that sprang up in recent years.

The two parties have been in a de facto coalition

throughout 2022, working together to ensure parliamentary consensus for the imperialist war against Russia, as well as continued provocations towards neighboring North Macedonia.

The international press that has covered the election, such as the *Financial Times*, *Politico*, and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, have expressed great anxiety to see a Grand Coalition officially take form in Bulgaria, to counter what is usually termed "pro-Russian forces," in fact popular opposition to war.

Anti-war sentiment is widespread in Bulgaria. A poll by the EU Commission in December showed only 24 percent fully approve of the sanctions against Russia, while another by the ESTAT polling agency, quoted in Bulgarian News Agency, showed that a total of 23.1 percent of respondents expressed support for Ukraine. Bulgaria has been a member of NATO since 2004, but only 29.8 percent said they would support joining the military alliance, if a referendum were held on membership now.

One political figure that the press describes as "pro-Russian" is President Rumen Radev, accused of at times not showing enough enthusiasm towards the war in Ukraine. Despite some of his public utterances, made to maintain face, Radev's office has in fact been a central node of pro-NATO Bulgaria's machinations in recent years.

Radev, working both with Petkov and his own appointed caretaker government, has accelerated Bulgaria's status as one of the main suppliers of Soviet-type ammunition to the Ukrainian regime. Bulgaria and its EU imperialist allies have been pressuring the former Yugoslav republic of North Macedonia to make concessions to historical Bulgarian expansionism. Bulgarian caretaker Foreign Minister Nikolay Milkov provocatively requested in April that the country be given a "consultative role" in North Macedonia's proposed constitutional changes.

It is open secret that Bulgaria has put its substantial weapons industry at the service of the NATO war machine. According to a report in January by the German daily *Die Welt*, Bulgaria has supplied ample quantities of munition and fuel for Ukraine's Soviet-era equipment, despite widespread popular opposition.

The third largest party, and the de facto main opposition force in the country is Revival, a fascist party, that gained 14 percent of the vote and has increased its MPs by 10 since the last elections. Revival is presented in the Western media as a “pro-Russian” party, in an attempt to amalgamate the fascists with genuine opposition to war.

Revival’s rise is part of an international phenomenon, the increasing turn of the bourgeoisie to dictatorial forms of rule and the promotion of fascist forces. The organization was propped up as part of the ruling class’s attempt to intimidate and pollute public discourse regarding its handling of the COVID pandemic.

The party organized an attack on the Bulgarian Parliament on January 12, last year, a copycat of the January 6, 2021, fascist coup attempt in the US. Its leader Kostadin Kostadinov has expressed his admiration for Donald Trump.

The noxious anti-science reaction to COVID became the official discourse of the Bulgarian oligarchy, spearheaded by the post-Stalinist BSP (Bulgarian Socialist Party). Even minimal protective measures such as vaccines were discouraged, leaving the country with only 30 percent of the population vaccinated as of the summer of 2022.

That right wing and openly fascistic forces hold sway over Bulgarian society is primarily the responsibility of Stalinism and the bourgeois parties that emerged out of it after the restoration of capitalism: the BSP and the whole coterie of middle-class organizations that surround it, such as the Bulgarian Left, formed by ex-BSP bureaucrats in 2009.

With the pandemic and the outbreak of war, these layers are completely submerged in the swamp of fascist conspiracies, with all the nationalist filth, moral degradation and backwardness that have always been integral to Stalinism.

At a BSP Congress in February, the party announced a referendum against “gender ideology” in schools, in order “to safeguard Christian and family values for the sake of our children,” and party boss Korneliya Ninova ranted about the “global-liberal” establishment. The Congress, in true Stalinist fashion, also purged some of Ninova’s potential rivals.

Several of the purged MPs united with factions and parties that usually tailed the BSP and ran in the elections as Levitsata! (The Left!). Expressing virtually no difference to the right wing, pro-NATO BSP, they gathered 2 percent of the vote. The BSP itself took almost 9 percent and is now the fourth largest party in parliament.

The Bulgarian Communist Party and the Party of the Bulgarian Communists, participated in the coalition “Neutral Bulgaria,” which includes the far-right Attack party, an outlet notorious for organizing fascist thugs throughout the 2000s.

As the entire bourgeois establishment is shifting further to the right, the working class is increasingly entering into struggle, where it meets the opposition of the trade unions, and their Stalinist and pseudo-left hangers-on.

Health care workers have struggled against an underfinanced and rotting system since 2019, in open rebellion against the official trade union federation. At the start of the pandemic, nurses have been protesting and exposing the disastrous situation in the hospitals and the lack of PPE. Both the Borisov and successive governments made false promises of pay rises, as the situation in the country deteriorated and the workload in the hospitals became unbearable.

At the end of last year, nurses protested in several Bulgarian towns, and on March 28 ambulance drivers protested in Sofia. In November, large demonstrations took place in the capital against poverty wages and galloping inflation.

The greatest barrier that workers confront are the trade unions. These organizations act as industrial police agents of the state, at all junctures seeking to divide workers and suppress their struggles.

In order to advance their interests and confront the dangers of war and fascism workers must break with the corporatist trade unions and establish independent rank-and-file committees linking their struggles with the international resurgence of the working class.

Above all they need their own party that has learned the lessons of history and the betrayal of Stalinism. This means the building of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Bulgaria and across Eastern Europe to provide the developing struggles a genuinely socialist perspective and leadership.



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