

PART FOUR

STATEHOOD AND INDEPENDENCE (DURING AND AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR)

In the Balkans, the Second World War began with Italy's failed invasion of Greece in October 1940, but it engulfed the region only with the German blitz against and speedy occupation of Yugoslavia and Greece in April 1941. Its outbreak caught the Macedonians angry and restless, but divided and wholly unready for common action. While they had no reason for loyalty to the oppressive Greek and Serbian/Yugoslav regimes or to regret their collapse, they soon discovered that their new rulers, Italian or Albanian, German, and Bulgarian, were no better and in many respects worse. Like all other occupied peoples in Europe, they faced some stark choices. They had to decide their attitude toward the occupiers: accommodation, collaboration, or resistance. And they had to think about their postwar future.

However, answering these dilemmas was much more difficult and confusing for them than for all other occupied peoples. For almost three

decades, three Balkan states had separately oppressed them. Now they were under four foreign occupiers: Italian, Albanian, German, and Bulgarian. They had no government-in-exile to represent their interests among the Allies. They did not have even a quisling administration to represent or pretend to speak for them among the Axis occupiers. Even more devastating, they had no single, all-Macedonian organization, legal or illegal, active in all parts of Macedonia, that could legitimately claim to lead or represent them in all parts of their homeland. Bulgaria's dissolution of Mihailov's VMRO in 1934 and the Comintern's dismantling of the VMRO (ob.) in 1937 left Macedonians leaderless and lacking national representation.

The right, especially Mihailov's VMRO, had been losing ground to the left throughout the 1930s. Mihailov himself was in exile and would spend the war years in Zagreb, waiting and hoping that the Axis powers, or rather Hitler, would treat Macedonia like Croatia and establish a satellite state under his stewardship. Extreme Bulgarophiles had taken over direction of Macedonian organizations in the Pirin region and throughout Bulgaria, and they favored annexation of Macedonia by Bulgaria and creation of a Great Bulgaria. The Mihailovist organizational network in Greek (Aegean) Macedonia had been rather weak all along and was virtually nonexistent on the eve of the war. The VMRO appeared stronger in Yugoslav (Vardar) Macedonia; many of its principal activists were still there, and they had a following but no active and functioning organization ready and willing to lead.

Although the VMRO (ob.) no longer existed, the left seemed stronger, at least potentially. Many Macedonian leftists, its former members, also belonged to the Communist parties of Bulgaria (BKP), Greece (KKE), and Yugoslavia (KPJ). All three parties recognized the existence of a Macedonian nation and had to accept the Comintern's policy calling for a Macedonian state in a future Balkan Communist federation and Macedonians' right to their own state.

Whatever the three parties thought of the Comintern's long-range and hypothetical policies, the outbreak of war in 1939 forced them and their national liberation movements to tackle the Macedonian question. It immediately became obvious that that issue would divide them more than any other cause. At the same time, their vicious struggle for that territory and its people forced Macedonian party members to choose between their party and their national cause—for most, the primary con-

sideration. All these factors influenced developments in Macedonia during the war and its revolutionary aftermath in the Balkans. They affected collaboration, resistance, and the fight for national liberation in the three parts of divided Macedonia.