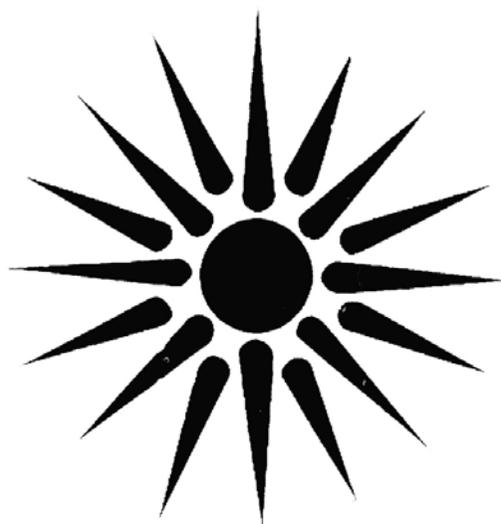


*Metodia Andonov-
Chento*



By
Fidanka Tanaskova

(Translated from Macedonian to English and edited by Risto
Stefov)

Metodia Andonov-Chento

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rstefov@hotmail.com

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About the book “Metodia Andonov-Chento” by Fidanka Tanaskova

This is an effort that brings out unknown or less known facts and adds to the knowledge, not only about the bright name “Metodia Andonov-Chento” as our legacy but also to a period and to a system that relied on one party and unanimity.

The offered argumentation and truth in this book is valuable testimony for us and undoubtedly directs the reader’s attention to the country and to the middle of life in exile.

It is well written, exciting, convincing and richly illustrated. This is the first monograph about Macedonia’s first president. Fidanka Tanaskova has many readers and devoted supporters.

Dr. Blaze Ristovski

Metodia Andonov-Chento was a man who always demanded rights, freedom and happiness for the Macedonian people. He was truly a man who fought for Macedonia and the Macedonian people. This book is an attempt to get to the truth about the great Chento which will add to the benefit of our collective history, will enter the annals as a valuable lasting historical document and will bring national-political awareness to the Macedonian people.

In a few words, the author corrects the “scholars” who respected the principle “I prefer to lie when I cannot tell the truth”, and once again confirms that “the word should always be true, and the truth should always be expressed through an unharmed word”.

Dr. Stojan Kiselinovski

JUDGMENT - On behalf of the people

Metodia Andonov-Chento (44) was deprived of his freedom for 11 years. He was sentenced to hard labour and, except for his parental rights, lost all his political and individual civil rights, and that was five years after serving his sentence... He was tried at the People's District Court in Skopje by President Panta Marina, members Lazar Mojsov and Kole Chashule, and by assistant public prosecutor Blagoia Popovski. The verdict was pronounced in accordance with the Law on Crimes Against the People and the State, and was read after the main and public hearing took place on November 19, 20 and 21, 1946.

Skopje, November 23, 1946

This was the ruling of the People's Court against Metodia Andonov-Chento, the first president of the Republic of Macedonia. This is how he was judged and this is how everything ended for him. His appeal, addressed to the Supreme Court of Macedonia and to the Skopje District Court, was rejected, and his new arguments never appeared in the courtroom to face justice or in public. He never got a chance to defend himself and possibly affect his 11 year harsh sentence of hard labour, which became his fateful destiny and, a little later, his end.

Was this a fair sentence for the mistakes and for the acts committed? Perhaps this was a tax for the unrepentant repentance of a never-ending plea for forgiveness?

Was this a tax that had to be paid?

And what were Chento's "big sins" which earned him the wretched and infamous titles "traitor", "spy", "sinner", "collaborator" working with the enemy and with foreign forces...? What earned him this series of orderly, difficult, dangerous, accusatory qualifications that at that time, or at any other time, cut a man down, wiped him out and removed him from the public and from history forever?

Is history (not) written while heroes are still alive? And how will it be written when the heroes leave forever? It will surely be written, as it has in the past and as it will in the future, to reveal the truth. In this year, 1990, not only will an attempt be made but it will have to be followed by much persistence in order to get to the truth (even partially) and to remove the often mentioned black spots - white spots, experienced during those mysterious and unexplained periods of our past...

Because, from time to time in recent years, Metodija Andonov-Chento's case has been amplifying spirits, waving and imposing dilemmas, causing questions to surface, opening new spaces and offering unknown facts, it has given us more reason to search for new answers!

But how can one touch, describe and write the truth about him? Who was Chento? What was his life path like? What were his ideals? What did he advocate for? Was he an innocent victim or did he get what he deserved?

Our quest to find more information on him proved to be very difficult. For many months we were uncertain if our requests for source documents, contacts and meetings would be answered. We found those who we contacted hesitant, belligerent and restrained. Then came the dilemma - how to approach some of the important witnesses. How to respond to the threats and "benevolent distractions" of such "hot topics"? But we did not give up. Our desire to get to the truth pushed us to get closer to our goal, as much as possible given the circumstances and to the extent that conditions would allow. That challenge was truly great.

When we began our research we ran into a wall of silence. The moment we mentioned the name "Chento" people began to turn their heads, look at us with suspicion, hang up the telephone and avoid further contact. And even when we had an agreement to see these people in some future time, this agreement would not apply the next day. Many changed their minds overnight and thought that it was best for them to stay away from this topic. They realized that their words would become public knowledge and they could not risk

that, not while they were still alive or while the top figures of that period were still alive.

And when we did manage to see some of them, even for a consultative meeting, we were rarely welcomed and we were looked at with much suspicion. Most did not even want to talk at all.

And that was not all:

Our persistence and the desire to open the archives, look at files, check out certain facts, did not wane but it was only a desire because no one knew how far it would take us. In the letter of request we sent to the Communist Party of Macedonia Central Committee, we asked for the documents from the party politburo, or more precisely the meeting documents written during the early days in 1946 when Chento was severely criticized. This was the crucial time before Chento resigned and left the post of President of the Presidium.

We were surprised to receive a quick reply but disappointed with the answers. We were told that the archives contained no transcripts or any other “usable” documentation that we could have from that period. So, the question was: “Where did these documents go? Who had access and permission to take them away? Who did not want these documents to remain in the archives for future generations? Did they end up (in large part) in private hands or were they intentionally destroyed for known or unknown reasons? And because they told us that these documents were not in the Macedonian archives, we naively believed that they were telling us the truth that the documents had “somehow” disappeared.

In addition to the letter we sent to the CPM CC we also sent a letter to RSVR with a request to inspect part of Metodija Andonov-Chento’s files. However, here too, we failed in our quest.

After our requests for archival information were shot down, we re-focused our efforts in finding witnesses who would be willing to cooperate and speak to us. We looked for both direct and indirect participants who had information and expressed a willingness to speak to us and to help us in our effort to unveil the truth about Chento’s case. This was a case which, for many people, had been

taboo for the last 44 years. It was a case under whose veil hidden were a lot of things; unsaid, unspoken, obscure, mysterious things... which were cause to throw suspicion that there was something not right about how Chento was treated... that the entire process seemed manipulated with actors and by some kind of animated machine...

There were also voices, many voices, calling for justice for Chento in messages and posters that appeared on the walls in Skopje, Ohrid, Prilep... with slogans like “Chento lives!”, “Who killed Chento?!”, “The truth about Chento” and “Let’s talk about Chento”. There were also the posters that were carried at rallies organized by young people and environmentalists. There were calls from Macedonian organizations from Toronto, Perth and Sydney, from tribunes of the newly established MAAK and from the League for Democracy, demanding that Chento be reinstated to his true historical place. And the strongest and most massive of all were the thousands of chants yelling “Chento! Chento! Chento!” during the Skopje Solidarity Meeting with the Macedonians in Bulgaria, when several pictures of Chento, from when he was the first President of the Republic of Macedonia, were displayed among the other, highly elevated Macedonian revolutionaries.

Opening Metodija Andonov-Chento’s file, even this late in time, has offered us a look at his life which we followed through the years of his youth and maturity, as a shopkeeper, a civilian activist and a prominent person in the Prilep bazaar. We continue with his story when he was a partisan, a member in the NOVМ Headquarters, his arrival on the throne – being the first president of the ASNOM Presidential Assembly, the first president of the Macedonian Republic - to the disagreements and differences in view points, to his different views of approach to problems, to his decisions of how to govern at that time, and to his fall and departure from political life, arrest, trial, imprisonment and death.

This rather wide approach, but in many ways unknown mosaic, whose tackle (as mentioned) required a lot of time, research and patience, we hope will give a full picture and speak authentically of the taboo topic called “Chento”. The pages are still open for those who would like to offer new, unexplored and meaningful information about this person.

DIFFICULT LIFE AS A LABOURER - Young Metodias spent years struggling for his bread and survival

He got his nickname “Chento” from mispronouncing “napred cheto”! (He said “chento” instead of “cheto” which earned him his nickname “Chento” from his peers).

Metodias Andonov-Chento’s name appears in the list of the big games and wits played in the electoral races by the then government with great support from the young people and from his fellow citizens

Who was Metodias Andonov-Chento?

Let us start from the beginning:

Metodias Andonov-Chento was born on August 17th, 1902 in Prilep. He was born to a poor family right when his mother, Zacharia from Prilep, and father, Andon from the village Lenishte, moved to Prilep and settled under Marko’s Fortress. A few months later Metodias, their first male child, was born. Three girls were born before him but because of poverty, disease and generally poor living conditions they did not survive.

The Andonov family had no land, no roof and no money to speak of so they had to work for low wages in the opium poppy and tobacco fields in Prilep, earning very little money; barely enough to live on. Metodias also suffered the same fate. From his young days as a child he experienced hunger and the struggle for survival. He became well acquainted with the feeling of being very poor, having no food to eat and living on the edge between life and death.

Metodias became a wage earner at a very young age and did whatever he could to contribute to the family’s income, mainly through apprenticeships and manual labour, exploiting all possible

means of employment available to him at that time. But despite all the cruelty life threw at him, Metodija still had a strong desire to learn as much as possible and attended school as conditions would allow him. By the outbreak of World War I he was in grade four. Then with Serbia's clamp-down on Macedonia after WW I, he was forced to continue his education in Serbian, a foreign language for the Prilep born youth. This was yet another blow to Metodija but that did not deter him, in fact it did quite the opposite. After some interruptions in his education he continued to learn and work in the gardens and shops, on the railroad and in road and tunnel construction.

By age fifteen he worked from very early in the morning until the late hours of night. The long hours and hard work, however, were too much for the malnourished youth to bear; yet he still persisted. As luck would have it, trouble followed him everywhere he went, like a curse. After his father experienced a long and hard illness, Metodija became the head of the Andonov household. At age seventeen he was forced to knock on the door of the dark halls of the Prilep Monopoly. But with a single look and a shake of their heads, the employers there rejected him outright. They did not want to employ a youth of skin and bones, who, with all his troubles, insisted that he was a grown up man with experience in hard labour. But somehow he did manage to squeeze through the Monopoly gates and got a job.

Times were difficult, life was uncertain, wages in the halls of the Prilep Monopoly and in the tobacco fields were very low; life was an everyday disappointment for young Metodija, whose struggle for survival became his destiny. But he was optimistic and stoically patient, waiting for better times to come and making plans for a different and better future.

The opening of the vocational trade school in the city was a welcome turn in Metodija's life as he registered in it with great enthusiasm and high expectations. Around 1921 the first gymnastics organization in Prilep was also founded, in which Metodija quickly became an active and valuable member. Because he was very good at giving instructions he was privileged to often lead the ranks of a Cheta (squad) in exercise.

One day while calling out the exercises, instead of calling out “napred cheto!” (squad forward!), he called out “napred chento!” (chento forward). His friends and members of the squad broke into laughter and because of that they began to call him “Chento”. In the beginning he resented being called “Chento” and was angry with the boys but when they took the nickname outside the gymnasium, to the streets and to the marketplace, the name stuck and became his permanent nickname. In time he forgave his friends.

Being good at what he was doing opened up new opportunities for Metodija at the gymnasium. Because he was an excellent student, his teacher recommended he receive a government grant and an opportunity to be sent to Belgrade or Zagreb to further his education. But how could he leave Prilep? Who would look after his family? His family at the time was in a difficult financial situation so he decided to stay in Prilep.

When the Monopoly closed down, Metodija again found himself out of work and had to turn to the local shops and taverns to seek employment. What was going to happen tomorrow? This was Metodija’s constant dilemma as he tried hard, working long days and nights, to eke out a living as an apprentice, assisting craftsmen in the Prilep shops. But in spite of trying to work hard, he could not endure the tempo of this difficult life, so he became a bit more ambitious and jumped ahead in life. In 1926 he was awarded his first personal certificate from the authorities to open his own store, which over the years and decades turned into a successful business.

In the fall of the same year he opened his first truly modest, grocery store but that was in the beginning before his business became one of the most prominent businesses in the Prilep market. His store was one of the most important places in Prilep for conversation and meeting people. Naturally this attracted many prominent, progressive and intelligent intellectuals who often got together for talks in Chento’s store, located just under King Marko’s castle. This was most certainly a very important place, because it was in the heart of a truly rich, interesting and unique city, where both memorable moments and unpleasant events were taking place.

Ever since Metodija's trade school days he was interested in reading socialist literature, especially about workers rights. One time he was quoted as saying, "As athletes and as members of the mandolin orchestra it is not appropriate for us to want the king and to accept that we are South-Serbians. Unfortunately the government had different expectations and was looking for results that were the opposite. The more they thought we were not persuaded, the harder they tried to oppose our self recognition and revolt. We were not what others wanted us to be and we would not let them impose it on us. We accepted membership in the Sokolsko Organization so that we could get together more often and discuss ideas and come to agreements without fear of falling under the watchful eyes of the police which forbade gatherings, especially in the evenings..."

In Metodija's interesting and eventful life it is worth mentioning his attempt at marriage to a young woman named Vasilka Pop Atanasoa after his engagement to her in 1929. Vasilka was a priest's niece from a religious family which had certain expectations of the groom to be. One of these expectations was that, as a member of the family, Metodija could not be involved in politics, especially in Marxist politics, because as far as the church was concerned they were plain wrong and bad for the church. In addition there was a certain very vocal priest named Grdanovikj who warned people during his sermons to avoid people like Metodija who associated with opponents of the king and country. But the most serious blow to Metodija came when he, after six years of trying to get married, was told that the Church would not give him its consent to have a wedding.

Being unhappy with Pop Grdanovikj's hypocrisy and with some other personalities in the Church, who, according to him, preached equality but, in a kind of submissive way, did very little to help him marry his fiancée. His reply to them was very simple; a marriage can also take place without the help of the church. So he defiantly decided to have it his way. Metodija left for Novi Sad where he applied for permanent residence and in 1930 had a civil wedding. He married Vasilka Pop Atanasoa outside of the Church, which for many was unprecedented and full of never before seen "impudence", a shock, not so much to her family, as it was to some others in the city.

Unfortunately the novice groom had no idea how many legal barriers, canonical hurdles and other obstacles he would have to face before he would be able to acquire a valid and legal marital status. This gloomy chapter of the start of his new life was ended in 1936, by the Cessation Court in Belgrade. By then the Andonov family had increased by two with the birth of their two sons and Metodia had built a solid reputation in the marketplace.

Metodia became friends with many progressive people in the city and his store was the place where students gathered and shared progressive ideas. About this, Metodia was quoted as saying, “I enjoyed the most, our discussions about the past and about a new and more successful future, our Macedonian future, which we must struggle for and achieve. I enjoyed our discussions about our great leaders from this region such as Gjorche Petrov, Pere Toshev and other prominent names from the Macedonian revolutionary past. Such discussions gave me will and satisfaction and made me feel wonderful and enthusiastic...”

Sometime before 1934, Prilep students brought back pamphlets from Belgrade with a message from the Communist Party calling on people to begin fighting against the government and work through the more reputable legal opposition parties. There was a drive to form a new Macedonian movement called the “Macedonian National Movement” or MANOPO, whose platform called for an autonomous Macedonia in a Federal Yugoslavia.

Young people started to become more active in politics and took the role of being the bearers of the new and progressive front. They became the orators of the Macedonian truth and the writers of the new pages of life in Prilep. They carried and dispersed leaflets which students brought from Belgrade bearing Dragoljub Jovanovich’s signature, who Metodia sincerely believed supported the struggle for an autonomous Macedonia, unlike Ljuba Davidovikj who did not even want to hear about Macedonia or the Macedonians. As punishment for his participation in carrying and distributing leaflets, Metodia was denounced and later imprisoned.

The warnings and threats from the authorities made it difficult for Metodija to continue to be active in politics in the city. So with help from his like minded friends and civil officials, in 1935, Metodija was nominated for candidacy in Vlatko Machek's United Opposition which supported a Federal Yugoslavia. However, due to falsifications and unfair practices on the part of his opposition, he never made it as a candidate.

A year later, according to information provided by the district chief of police, Metodija was sentenced to imprisonment and was fined 4,000 dinars for allegedly organizing a political rally without a permit and without permission from the police. Metodija naturally appealed the charges but his appeals fell on deaf ears. At the time no one helped him, not even the Governor in Skopje who did not denounce the charges, so in August Metodija had to pay the fine and serve his sentence.

Eventually however, the truth was revealed and the Government Court in Skopje reversed the Governor's decision but that was of little comfort to Metodija because by then it was December 31st, 1938 and too late. There was little satisfaction when justice arrived two years too late after being endlessly dragged through the legal process.

On the positive side however, during the same year Metodija became more involved in politics and his reputation as a good businessman grew in the marketplace. However, his next big challenge was to be elected to the National Assembly where he would have to wage uncertain battles. But before he could do that he had to gain support from the people of his own town, where he was born. Then as a candidate to the United Opposition, a party which he supported some time ago, he would have to run a strong race in the party challenge.

Metodija received much encouragement from the students with whom he had cooperated in the past, from the members of the Communist Party, whose names then and in the coming years would become even more known and respected, as activists and fighters in Macedonia and beyond, people like Kuzman Josifovski, Mirche

Atsev, Borka Taleski, Joska Jordanoski, Ljuben Lape, Dimche Mire...

Next he entered the electoral race by signing up for candidacy in the Agrarian Party, a member of the United Opposition. There he fought a number of battles with Jotsa Jovanovikj, leader of the Serbian Agrarian Party. The fights were mostly about Jovanovikj's attitude towards the national rights of the Macedonian people. It was a persistent and enormous struggle for Metodija right from the start but he managed to persuade many people to see things his way.

While this was going on, the people from Prilep did not stand by idly, wasting time, or expecting others to do things for them out the goodness of their hearts, they took matters into their own hands and made contact directly with Vlatko Machek, leader of the United Opposition who did support the national rights of the Macedonian people in a federally regulated Yugoslav State.

Under pressure, Jovanovikj and the Agrarian party finally backed down and accepted the task of representing the national rights of the Macedonian people as requested but placed some conditions of their own, including the right not to emphasize the national rights of the Macedonian people before the elections. Such matters were to be dealt with after the Party's victory.

Over the course of the electoral race everyone worked hard drafting agreements, campaigning, organizing and traveling all over. Metodija too was doubly engaged. As a storekeeper he kept busy meeting people at his store and using his facilities as a meeting place for the members of the party. As an activist and supporter of the party he also worked directly on the ground. It was by no accident that the slogan "Chento-Machek" was coined during the final stages of the electoral race.

On the day of the elections many people from everywhere arrived at the City Centre around Metodija's store, too many to be accommodated inside or outside. Among the people present in the crowd were his friends from the Sokolsko and Belosidelsko Organizations, the mountain climbers, the Hajduk football players and others.

There were people marching through the centre of Prilep heading for the polling stations. They were carrying banners on long poles with slogans praising democracy, peoples' rights and freedoms. But as they marched on the Bitolsko Road towards Gjordere, they found themselves blocked by police and military barricades. The march turned into demonstrations as the participants began to shout "democracy now" and "down with the government". Unfortunately the demonstrators found themselves powerless before the bayonets of the charging gendarmes and had to disperse.

After that episode doubt began to creep into Metodija and his friends as they waited for the election results. But when the final count was taken there was much excitement as Metodija found that out of the 3,815 votes he had received 2,113, convincing him and his friends that there was a sure victory ahead. Unfortunately the JR3 party, which at this point had won a majority, used a legal rule to take 40 percent of the lost seats from the opposition. One of those seats belonged to Metodija. It was estimated that they did this because, most likely, the JR3 party was afraid of Metodija's controversial politics and did not want an enemy such as him in the Parliamentary Assembly.

After facing the JR3's dirty electoral games and after finding out that he was being unfairly set up by Machek and later by Gabrilovikj, it became very clear to Metodija that "no one was going to give the 'Macedonian' a hand". About this Metodija later wrote: "It is important [for Macedonians] to lead and win their own battles for 'rights and the truth' without any help from outsiders, regardless of whether it is done by elections or by any other means. Because for whatever support is given there is always a high price to pay. Also, the usefulness of such support will, most likely, amount to almost nothing".

Almost every leader of the regime made promises and as a result made advances in the electoral races and generally received as many votes as possible. But when the elections were over the leaders disappeared and with them disappeared all the promises made that would have "benefited" the people.

That is why it was important for Metodija and his supporters to divorce themselves from the Machekovtzi, Gavrilovikji, Tsvetkovikji and some of the others. It became necessary to fight and strengthen the ranks and to avoid divisions in the well politicized Prilep masses of progressive and patriotic people.

As a store owner and a person belonging to the guilds, the people of Prilep elected Metodija to represent the Prilep retailers and caterers in the Industrial-Commercial Chamber in Skopje, where, during Assembly sessions Metodija posed many "awkward" questions and boldly and openly stood against the politics led by the Chamber, which were in favour of the industrialists and the state but worked against the traders who were burdened with fines and fees which they had to pay at the expense of their poor customers.

Metodija could not stand for but did not want to keep quiet about the constant trumpeting, whining and complaining about the King doing "so much" for the people of South Serbia (meaning the Macedonian's) and that the Macedonian's had done nothing in return for the state. "And how many of those complainers asked how these poor, tormented, overtaxed and beaten down people felt?" asked Metodija in response to the bitter insults hurled by people from the regime. Then one day when he could no longer stand any more insults, he stood up in the Chamber and, among other things, said:

"We have had enough of these allegations, of being accused that we are loafers and that the state has given us more than it has taken from us. I say this is not correct! I say that the state has taken a lot more from us and has given us nothing. If you feel that way, then why not leave us alone and let us manage our Macedonia as a free people. If you know so much about how Macedonia is today then why not leave and come back in five to ten years and see what Macedonia will be like then..."

"Such impudence, how dare he stand up and speak like this..." was recorded in the Session minutes by the sober supporters of the regime who reported the incident directly to the President of the Council of Ministers via a stern confidential letter dated June 8th, 1940. In the letter they expressed worries that Macedonia might separate: "The idea of creating a free Macedonia has penetrated to

such an extent that all it requires now is a spark, (especially) from the youth, for the situation to explode into flames...”

After that Metodija, a known autonomist and separatist from Prilep and a bitter rival of the regime, became a target of all sorts of accusations. However, unable to silence him, the regime pinned all sorts of things on him until they had him imprisoned...

At the Chamber of Commerce Plenum in Skopje, in front of 60 representatives from every corner of Vardarska Banovina, Metodija again voiced his concerns: “Why do we submit resolutions and petitions. Why talk when those responsible in Belgrade are proving to be incapable of leading the state and the economic policies towards us, in Yugoslavia... Let us have a free Macedonia...”

But no matter what he said or did, the current administration continued with business as usual, so Metodija wrote a letter to the Viceroy in Skopje asking him to suspend the current administration, which consisted of Serbs only, until the next election and in the meantime appoint a commissar. Of course all these open attempts at removing the administration aggravated his opponents, who, among his other provocative qualities, viewed this one as arrogant and harmful to Serbian governance. About this, in 1940 the regime protectors of the peace, on duty in Macedonia, wrote to the Minister complaining that “the people of Prilep feel strongly that there are no Serbs living in Prilep. Also there are activities of concern conducted in the southern parts of the country by communist and separatist forces.”

The regime estimated that 98 out of 100 people in Prilep were against the Serbs. This was proof that there was cause for alarm and that there was need for harsh and concrete measures to be taken. A special place on the chart of “biggest troublemakers” and dangerous offenders was reserved for Metodija, a man who openly defied authority and caused unrest in the more nationally conscious population. The regime did whatever it could to “safeguard” the youth from having their minds muddled and infected with national and patriotic feelings.

One of many such examples is the FK Hajduk Prilep affair. FK Hajduk Prilep was an organization that Metodija formed and financed. Before the end of 1940 the regime, with a number of like-minded supporters, joined the organization and in Metodija's absence, called for a hasty assembly, elected a new leadership and called for a complete break with Metodija.

In the memories of the people of Prilep lived the August 2nd Ilinden picnic held at Shatorov Kamen, which, even though it was under surveillance, the organizers always managed to fully accomplish their aims. On that day, by the old tradition, all people named "Ilija" went there to celebrate their name day. Metodija was there to celebrate his son's name and of course there were many others there who found other reasons to attend. When enough people arrived, Kole Chasule called on Metodija to give a speech, during which, among other things, he said:

"No, we do not need to believe anyone from the other side because their promises are empty and they use them only for their personal interest. We need to fight for our rights and for our freedom alone, by ourselves. Look what Machek did. He promised federal regulation of Yugoslavia and national rights for the Macedonian people that never materialized. Where is Machek now (Vice-President in the Tsvekovikj Government)? Why will he not allow the same volunteers that he supported in sending to the Spanish revolution, return from France? When they left to fight on the fronts he supported them. That's because he was in opposition then, now that he is in power he does not support them. Our way is the Ilinden way. Long live Ilinden, long live a free Macedonia..."

As soon as Metodija returned to Prilep from Shatorov Kamen the people who attended the picnic descended upon the city and formed an organized column of demonstrators, later joined by more demonstrators. When they arrived at the promenade they listened to a speech given by Borka Taleski. Then continuing on through the city they passed by the Monopoly and shouted out slogans like "Down with the King and the dynasty" and "Long live free Macedonia..." The final speech was given in Trizla by Kuzman Josifovski before the gendarmes and the army arrived and attacked the unarmed demonstrators.

Metodia managed to slip through the crowd and reach his home but the police were not too far behind. When they knocked on the door, Metodia's sick, old mother told them that she was too sick to come to the door and was unable to open it for them. But the police knew they had Metodia in their hands, so they watched his house all night.

The next morning when Metodia stepped outside he was captured and, together with Borka Taleski, Trajko Tartsan, Kole Chashule and Kotse Kjurhija, was jailed and remained behind bars for weeks. Metodia was only allowed to leave jail the day his mother died. Accompanied by gendarmes he was allowed to visit his mother for the last time before she passed on.

The agitated police spy ring kept a night vigil, meticulously compiling reports about the day's "unpleasant events". The next day, on August 3rd, 1940, the Prilep Region authorities recorded the previous day's activities in a confidential document, describing in detail everything that took place during the Ilinden gathering, including the criticisms leveled against the government by the organizers. Among other things they also warned the government that there were calls for the people to oppose the regime and to avoid enlisting in the army.

The shortest straws were drawn by Talevski, Kurchija, Tartsan and Metodia, who were accused of having broken various laws including violating the law of public safety and order. So for being a danger to society they were imprisoned at the Ada Tsiganlija Prison and at the beginning of September they were surrendered to the local investigative judge. Four weeks later they were transferred to the Velika Kikinda Prison where they remained until the end of November 1940.

After that they left for home but it was a bitter experience for Metodia, being paraded by the gendarmes, tied in chains, bayonets pointed at him in front of the people and in front of his family, being brought to the railway station to be sent to prison in Serbia...

But in spite of removing the so-called "troublemakers" from the streets, the headaches the authorities suffered in the region not only

continued but in time escalated. Headaches provoked by disobedient “nationalists” who “misled” the people to not even want to speak the Serbian language, an act which a police report called “one of the greatest evils”.

The Macedonian intelligentsia, young working shop owners, students, etc., at every opportunity instead of speaking Serbian in public places, spoke the Macedonian language. This was particularly characteristic where the anti-regime movement was strong and had greater influence.

Metodia at that time, even though he had a family with four children from 18 months to 8 years old, was active with his friends in initiating and directing open attacks and violence against the regime and exhibiting intolerance towards the ruling elite.

On December 8th, 1940 the National High School in Prilep was full of people. At that time about 200 parents were invited for a very serious discussion, a discussion which turned out to be orders and threats, ordering parents of the children attending that school to forbid their children to speak the Macedonian language anywhere, not even at home. On top of that, no one in the audience, not even the parents, was allowed to speak in their defence.

But even with the hard days at Ada Tsigalija and Velika Kikinda prisons fresh in his mind, Metodia could not just sit there and let this injustice pass without a challenge. So he jumped into the fire with both feet and was ready to be engaged in new battles. He accepted a nomination from Joska Jordanovski of the Local Committee to participate in the affairs of the Gymnasium.

The scandal in the Prilep high school was, without precedence at the time, a typical example of the tough and relentless stand people took to uphold their ideals and beliefs and without much care for the revenge, cruelty and torture the authorities would inflict on them.

SCANDAL AT THE PRILEP GYMNASIUM

Chento: Our children must speak their native Macedonian language

Fierce police controls and torture, prisons and camps, but Metodija Andonov-Chento courageously tolerates everything - he bravely fights for his ideals and for his people

When the director opened the meeting he was very worried, angry and, with threatening reproach, he said to the parents, “these are strange times because the students, not only at home, but also at school, during their breaks, speak to each other in a strange language, not in the mother Serbian, literary language. And what is even more worrying is that they influence the Serbian children, who sadly already speak the local language here, dividing themselves into Serbians and Macedonians.” Since this was a widespread phenomenon, the director once again appealed to their parents not to speak to them in any other language except Serbian at home...

The strict gymnasium director said what he had to say and when he finished, Metodija Andonov-Chento stood up and in front of all the parents, students, teachers and other participants, said: “Mr. Director, you can’t ask this from us. Neither you nor anyone else can prohibit the children from speaking in their native, Macedonian language at home and here in the gymnasium. Our children have the right to speak their native Macedonian language. Just as no one has the right to forbid the Serbian children from speaking their language. If we don’t have our independent political and national rights in a federal state like this, rights that have been taken away by this political order, then the day will come when this country will no longer be called South Serbia, and Macedonia will become an independent state. Yugoslavia has several provinces with different nations and they can live together within the federation...”

Metodija Andonov-Chento’s bold performance in the Prilep gymnasium in front of the gathered teachers, parents, professors, students, scribe and others was a shock, a real scandal.

“While I was talking,” said Chento later, “the police scribe, a man named Milivoje Matich, lost his nerve and began to yell at me very loudly: ‘Stop with the political and anti-state propaganda...’ Not being able to endure and hear what I had to say, he jumped at me and physically attacked me. Some of the professors and some

Serbomani joined him, so it was very difficult for me to defend myself against all of them.”

Immediately after this incident, Chento was taken to the police station where he faced severe torture. He was continuously beaten for 12 long hours. During the torture he lost consciousness several times. In the process they broke a rib, pulled most of his hair out, tore open his skin on his head, and inflicted many injuries and wounds on his entire body. His feet were beaten black and blue and he was unable to stand up on his own from severe pain. He also sustained kidney damage and was unable to sit or stand.

The beatings and all the harassment did not force repentance out of him. He did not regret what he had said at the gymnasium. On the contrary, he was determined to endure everything. During all this he continued to make requests for national rights for the Macedonian people, the same requests he made at the gymnasium. This further angered his oppressors and the savage police.

This unprecedented scandal gained wide dimensions and Chento was seen as a great disgrace by the regime, which handed him over to the state prosecutor to be charged with offenses punishable under the Security and Protection Act. However, in order not to expose the brutal treatment and harassment he had received from the police and not to use it in his defense in court, on January 4, 1941 he was sent to jail in Serbia, in Baina Basta. Here the authorities collected piles of evidence which they could use against him. This included accusations made against him of prior disobediences and sins he had supposedly committed. One of those sins was the speech he gave at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry where he asked for Macedonia to be allowed to be a federal unit in Yugoslavia and to cover its own expenditures from its own revenues.

The plan then was to take Metodija Andonov-Chento from Baina Basha to Belgrade to be tried at the state court. However the plan, to some extent, was ruined by a German attack, because on the morning of April 15, 1941 when Uzhitse was captured, he and three Germans were to be sent to face a firing squad. But somehow he managed escape the claws of the gendarmerie, but only until the afternoon when he approached a group of people to ask what was

happening. Unfortunately, the police had its informants looking for him and immediately reported him. After being denounced and accused of being a member of a fifth column, the military police returned him to the barracks where he was sentenced to death.

Since there was already a verdict, the court president, who otherwise was signatory to this most severe punishment, took a carriage and left for the city. On the way he met a group of prominent citizens, acquaintances of Chento, who wanted to know what had happened to him. The court president told them that Chento was sentenced to death and maybe by now he was already dead. After hearing that, the citizens surrounded the court president and made every effort to convince him that Chento was an honest citizen and not a member of some fifth column, and begged him to release him.

Convinced that Chento was already dead, the court president nevertheless showed good will and gave the citizens a brief note with orders to release Chento. By the time the citizens arrived Chento was already tied to a tree with a firing squad ready to shoot him. The only thing left was to tie the ribbon around his eyes. The citizens arrived just in time and saved him. They came running and calling for the captain who, after reading the note, ordered his squad to release the prisoner. Chento, who only moments ago was on the verge of death, was saved. He was amazed by the kindness of his friends, and promised himself that he would find ways to pay them back.

But this was not the end of Chento's torment. The next evening Chetniks, dressed in financial controller uniforms, attacked the house in which he had some property. His head was again saved, for a third time, thanks to the honest Baina Basta citizens who took him away that night to a safe place with friends, to the nearby village Vishiesava. A few days later, on April 22, 1941, he was allowed to leave and go to Macedonia.

For now this was the last of the many episodes Chento experienced with the Serbians, unfortunately it was not the end but the beginning of another set of episodes. The moment it arrived in Macedonia, the Bulgarian fascist regime quickly and very aggressively began to knit

its network, attacking activists and citizens who stood in the way of fulfilling its dark goals and plans.

The moment Chento returned home he was invited to attend a meeting with the Macedonian National Committee. The meeting was requested by lawyer Atanasov from Kavadarci. Not knowing who this lawyer was Chento had a conversation with him but the proposal the lawyer offered was a great disappointment to him. It immediately became very clear to Chento what the Committee's intentions were and what those "important" activists were up to. They offered him a commercial function in Prilep and cooperation with the Bulgarian authorities because, as they put it, "Macedonia was finally united with Bulgaria" and they needed people like him.

Chento was visibly disappointed and responded appropriately by saying that, as a Macedonian it was never his intention to unite Macedonia with Bulgaria. He never fought for or mentioned anything like that in his entire life. His desire was to fight for a united Macedonia and for the national rights of the Macedonian people. Chento stunned Atanasov with his answer and it was the first and last conversation he had with the so-called Macedonian National Committee, which in fact was nothing more than a kind of exponent of the Bulgarian political wing attempting to define a Bulgarian nationality in Macedonia.

Chento was not in favour of this or any other similar committee, regardless of what incentives they offered him or threats they made against him. He said: "I refused to cooperate with the Bulgarian government because I am Macedonian. I am fighting against the occupiers, and the most important thing for me is to unify all of Macedonia, but not with Bulgaria. My struggle is for a united Macedonia, and for obtaining national rights for the Macedonian people." (April 26, 1941).

The Bulgarian Gestapo agents and chief Tsvetan Mogilanski in Prilep assumed that Chento would be eager to retaliate against those who mistreated him and severely beat him, especially the police officers who locked him up so many times, so they offered him a free hand to return the favour and settle "old accounts". Chento, in acknowledgement of the generous offers, shrugged his shoulders

and said that he was not interested in exacting any kind of revenge because these people were just doing their job, which greatly disappointed Mogilanski. In other words the Bulgarians failed to recruit Chento, who was a representative of the Prilep guild and the advanced revolutionary wing, to their side.

Chento's everyday life in the Prilep bazaar was always interesting. There were numerous incidents and events that took place, some were unusual, some sad and some pleasant. One morning Kuzman Iosifovski came to Chento's store, and as usual immediately went close to the radio to listen to the morning news from London. Chento, who at that moment was standing beside him, turned off the radio and loudly scolded Kuzman for coming to his store, not to buy something, but only to listen to the radio. Kuzman Iosifovski looked at him surprised and left the store.

As Kuzman later found out, Chento scolded him to save him and himself from the Bulgarian agents who at the time were lurking in his shop. He also warned Kuzman to be vigilant of prying eyes when he entered not only his store but other establishments too. He told him to keep his eyes open not only for agents but also for informants. Kuzman was both happy and relieved for the clarification and for the advice he had received.

In July 1941, Chento, along with brothers Nikola and Blagoia Poposki, Vera Atseva and Borka Modernoto were arrested and jailed on the same day the first flyers against fascism, against Hitler and against the Bulgarian occupying authorities were distributed in Prilep. But thanks to Chento's apprentices Ioshka and Borka Iordanovski, Kuzman Iosifovski and Mirche Atsev avoided being arrested. When Ioshka and Borka realized that the police was looking for them everywhere, they warned them and thus avoided capture. After that Kuzman, Mirche, Borka and Tartsan disappeared.

When Vasilka Andonova went looking for answers as to why Metodija (Chento) had been arrested, the authorities told her because he was a communist leader. The Bulgarians were doing the same thing now, like the Serbians were doing before, because Metodija was connected with some bad people with bad ideas, and that's why he was behind bars... Several days later, after being imprisoned,

tormented and mistreated, Chento and his friends were released, except for Asparuh Iosifovski, who they tortured in order to tell them where his brother Kuzman was hiding.

During the occupation people who were against the occupiers, including young people, citizens, illegal immigrants and communists, began to increasingly organize. Day by day their actions began to spread city wide and concentrate under king Marko's castle. As Ilinden approached, there was news that the Bulgarians were preparing for the Ilinden celebrations claiming that Ilinden and the Ilinden merits, personalities and events were Bulgarian. At Chento's hostel, people were rushing to create banners of freedom, democracy, and signs that Ilinden was a Macedonian uprising and not a Bulgarian one. Unfortunately Bulgarian informants and agents on duty discovered their preparations. Someone betrayed Ioshka Iordanovski and he was forced to flee and hide. Ioshka discovered that he had been betrayed through his channels. After going into hiding, he and several of his comrades started a secret cell which consistently grew and spread, attracting new and significant names and fighters.

In time Prilep became a core of resistance against the occupying regime. Actions related to the preparation for an armed uprising become massive and grew stronger with each passing day until they exploded on October 11, 1941.

October 11, 1941 became a historic day signaling the firing of the first liberation rifle shots in Macedonia. That October day Prilep was in flames, signaling the beginning of armed actions against the occupiers.

Initially Chento did not participate directly in the early partisan actions against the occupiers but later in the autumn and during the winter months he helped the partisans by sending them money to purchase food and munitions. He did this in various ways and through a series of secret channels and links.

Suspected of being involved in the actions that led to the uprising in Prilep, Chento along with his assistant Borka Iordanovski, in 1942, were arrested and imprisoned. His partner Krumen Volnaroski

somehow managed to escape and then he too disappeared. While looking for Krumen the authorities searched Chento's house and found a Soviet Union Constitution, and this was yet more and new irrefutable evidence proving that Chento was a "dangerous element" for whom there was no place in Prilep, so they took him and jailed him in the Bitola dungeons.

After serving his sentence, Metodija Andonov-Chento was allowed to go home, but only for a short time. Even before he was sent to jail in Bitola, the Bulgarian regime began to investigate him and continued to do so throughout the first months of autumn. In their investigation the Bulgarians sought evidence to connect him to the partisans, which landed him on their list of dangerous opponents against the Bulgarian regime. However, even though the charges were the same as before, being accused of helping the partisans, this time his sentence was more severe. He was put on a list of people who were to be executed at Dabnitsa. The only thing that saved him this time was that he was not in the city during the arrests. Given that he was suspected of being involved and arrested every time the Communists acted, not to be implicated, he often left Prilep and went on the road purchasing products for his company.

News of the charges and sentences spread quickly and far and wide, so to avoid being captured Chento spent almost a month and a half traveling through various places in Tikvesh Region. From there he went to Skopje where he met with Kuzman Iosifovski who recommended that he immediately join the partisans. It was a dangerous proposal about which Chento cared less for himself and more for his family. He was well-aware of the retaliation his family would face from the gendarmes once they found out he had joined the partisans. He did not know what to do. How was he going to protect his wife and their four children? A thought that was constantly present in his mind.

He decided to go home, but the moment he arrived in Prilep he was in chains again. This time he was immediately taken to Skopje where the investigators tortured him in order to force a confession out of him to admit his involvement with the partisans and to reveal his connections. But despite the torture he was put through, Chento denied having any contact with or helping the partisans. Not the

beatings, not the bribes and not even being confronted by witnesses could change the situation. Without any evidence the police were empty-handed and unable to charge him with anything. He was again sent to the Prilep dungeons and a little later returned to Skopje.

And that's not all: first they sent him to the notorious Sofia and Plovdiv prisons, where he served for a short time. After that they interned him in various other prisons ranging from the Rhodope Mountains all the way to the Turkish border.

On January 2, 1943 he found himself in the town Zlatograd. His main thoughts were with his family and how they were going to survive without him. A month later he received orders to be moved to a new prison located in Gorski Izvor, a Turkish village about two hours walk from Zlatograd. Here he faced difficult living conditions including hunger, lice and mice, but most damaging of all was the torment exacted by the police.

Chento was released from prison in late April, 1943 and allowed to return to Prilep but again only for a short time. Unfortunately, the joy of being with his family lasted only thirty days, after which the authorities chained him again and this time sent him with a group of prisoners from Prilep to a camp in Chuchuviliovo Rupel, where they encountered unbearable conditions including hard labour and hunger. The group from Prilep remained there until the beginning of August 1943. After he was released from this hellish camp, Chento again returned home.

Upon his return Chento continued to meet and work with his co-conspirators just as he had before when he worked in the bazaar. His shop continued to be the centre for gatherings, particularly by the leftists, and a thorn in the eyes of the authorities. But, given what Chento had already experienced, this time he was very cautious. He was a very determined person and never surrendered to the enemy regardless of the frequent arrests and brutal torture. Neither the local authorities nor the occupiers could break him or silence him.

More and more fighters and sympathizers were joining the partisans and fueling the military operations in many parts of Macedonia.

Their struggle for freedom angered the occupying fascist regimes who did everything in their power to preserve their positions and hold onto Macedonia.

As the resistance movement continued to intensify, Kuzman Iosifovski sent his long-time friend and co-activist Metodija Andonov-Chento a couple of messages in which he asked Chento to meet with him. Kuzman wanted Chento to join the partisans. Kuzman sent a letter from Skopje to Veles through Draga Vrazhalska to let him know that he wanted to meet with him. He then sent a telegram with the place and date of the meeting. The telegram was delivered to Chento in Prilep by Krume Volnaroski.

The two men met in a house in Skopje on September 24, 1943. Two old friends, Kuzman Iosifovski-Pitu and Metodija Andonov-Chento sat down face to face, warmly greeting each other with their eyes, and made plans on how to move forward with the struggle.

“I had great confidence in Kuzman because he was an honest man. He told me that in order for us to realize our aims for a free Macedonia, for which we struggled all this time, we needed to join the battle lines because, as Kuzman said, the revolution needs patriots with authority among the people, proven to be fighters for freedom and justice. It reminded me of my own words: ‘only alone and united can we fight for ourselves and that moment is now.’ He spoke to me and I trusted him very much. I agreed with him without hesitation and was ready to leave immediately...” said Chento later, recalling this very important meeting with Kuzman Iosifovski Pitu.

The people expected to assist Chento in Skopje, unfortunately did not arrive, so he was forced to return to Prilep, and through Ohrid, to wait for new news for further developments in Debarca. By now Chento was 41 years old. He had four children and, of course, his thoughts were with them and who was going to take care of them. But he decided to pursue the revolution and left.

Here is what Kuzman Iosifovski had to say, in part, about the conversation he had with Chento in a letter to the CPM Central Committee on October 4, 1943: “...He was much more progressive than I have known him to be. He was informed that he was accepted

as a member of General Headquarters. He immediately gave his consent to leave... He is steady, independent and active. He is well known, respected and valued in the bazaar and in the community...”

Here is what, among other things, was said about Chento in a letter signed by Kire Gavriloski Iane, a prominent party activist and revolutionary: “The opinion of the Party here is that Chento is an honest Macedonian who, during the Great German hegemony, was a fearless fighter, in good relations with the Party with which he freely cooperated. After Yugoslavia capitulated, he firmly believed and had said that it was unnecessary to cooperate with the occupier. He was very popular in the city and in the district...”

Chento’s departure to join the partisans did not go easy. The links were very hard to penetrate especially on the western territory, given the great concentration and surge of enemy forces from different sides and from multiple directions. His second attempt to follow along the road leading through Lake Ohrid was unsuccessful because of bad weather. As a result Chento and his companion student Boris Shainov were forced to return. His third attempt, in spite of some unforeseen problems, was more successful and on October 1, 1943 he left for western Macedonia and arrived at the Main Headquarters in Debartsa where he joined his comrades.

In November 1943, an Initiative Board was formed for the convening of ASNOM during which time Metodia Andonov-Chento was elected Board President representing the revolutionary government. Here Chento used his initiative to organize the event, point out some problems that needed solving and identified a number of issues of wider importance that needed to be looked at. During this time Chento worked tirelessly on the preparations, the tasks and the decisions that needed to be made during the First ASNOM Meeting.

Chento’s joining the Partisans had a visible impact not only in the city but all around Prilep Region. More and more new fighters began to arrive and join the ranks of the national liberation units and strengthen the resistance forces.

The situation, be it in the battlefield, on the ground or behind the scenes began to change almost hour by hour, not to mention day by day. Attacks against enemy strongholds and against larger units became more and more massive. Wisdom, tactical skills and decision making at the command level were needed to flame the revolution and guide the fierce battles in these extraordinary conditions. The situation demanded quick responses and there was no time for broader consultations and agreements. There were only a few individuals who had that kind of capability. The top Macedonian military leadership had competent command staff capable of making such decisions and coming up with quick resolutions to all conditions facing them.

Chento, and let's not forget the others, was one of those people with great decision making capabilities. He always believed and professed that decision making was not a right and privilege of only certain individuals, (be they instructors of Supreme Headquarters or members of the CPY Central Committee), but above all it was an obligation of the collective and the responsibility of General Headquarters, not excluding situations where certain individuals had better knowledge of the situation.

Here is what Strahil Gigov wrote in his book "Memoirs": "Venko (Markovski) and Metodia Chento wanted to participate in all sectors of the work carried out by General Headquarters, even where they were not authorized. They requested this from Headquarters and after it was discussed a decision was made to allow them to act..."

Insistence certainly was not without foundation. But time was passing very quickly.

NOV was intensely involved in all spheres of the struggle and Macedonia was standing on its own feet. And as the struggle intensified, the Macedonian forces were growing more numerous. The Germans, cooperating with the Balists in Tetovo, Gostivar, Debar and Albania, once again took the offensive and began new hostile attacks in western Macedonia during the first days of December 1943. As a result General Headquarters, where Chento and members of the CPM Central Committee were serving, was forced to leave Debar and relocate.

Even though the fighting in the western regions of Macedonia was fierce during the fall and winter of 1943, when the Germans, in cooperation with the Albanian Balists, were launching new hostile actions, the Macedonian partisan units kept growing both in strength and numbers acting as a bulwark against enemy raids. It seems that after General Headquarters left Debarska a decision had to be made as to where to relocate. At this time there were two options considered, one supported by members of the CPM Central Committee and the other by the instructors of the CPM Central Committee. Tempo was of the opinion that General Headquarters and its units should be transferred to Serbia, however, the Macedonian comrades in General Headquarters, which included Tsvetko Uzunovski and Metodia Andonov-Chento, oppose Tempo's proposal, advocating that the proper direction to travel was south, towards the Aegean (Greek occupied) part of Macedonia.

According to Tsvetko Uzunovski, Chento, among other things, told Tempo that these Macedonian units are fighting to free Macedonia, and if they are transferred to Serbia, what will the Macedonian people say? What will the fighters themselves say? To that Tempo said: "We can't survive here" to which Chento replied: "If we can't survive here, then we can survive in the Aegean and Pirin parts of Macedonia, and that is the Macedonia that we must liberate..."

On December 5, 1943, NOV and POM General Headquarters, consisting of Commander Mihailo Apostolski, Political Commissar Tsvetko Uzunovski and Members Metodia Andonov-Chento, Hamdi Dema, Strahil Gigov, Venko Markovski, Petar Piruze, Ivan Tanev, Nikola Minchev, Ielisie Popovski and Kuzman Iosifovski, together with their comrades started to march through Prespa towards the Aegean (Greek occupied) part of Macedonia. Fighting strenuous battles under terrible conditions that included enemy ambushes and road blocks, 13 days later they arrived at their destination located in a region called Fushtani.

On December 21 and 22, 1943, the group that arrived in Fushtani held a meeting, later dubbed the First Congress of the Anti-Fascist Youth of Macedonia, in order to assess the overall situation, analyze the actions it had carried out and determine what to do next. After

that the partisan units began to approach Tushin where on this territory at this time they faced fierce action from enemy forces. But the Macedonian units fought bravely, tactfully and wisely for the liberation of the Macedonian people in the Aegean (Greek occupied) part of Macedonia.

The road they took led them to Zborsko, Golemi Livage, Zhensko, Shugovo... They followed this route and in 8 hard days, extending from 6 pm January 31, 1943 to midnight February 9, 1944, they traveled about 180 kilometres (climbing up to 1,750 metres), or an average of 22 kilometres per day.

They crossed the Vardar River near Solun and, because of the great secrecy during the march, they crossed the river without fighting, leaving behind only an unbreakable scaffold in a secluded place near the Gevgelia-Solun crossing. The crossing took a lot of time because the Vardar River at the time was deep and about 500 metres wide. The Macedonian units, it appears, were not spotted at the crossing or while traveling through Aegean (Greek occupied) Macedonia. Especially memorable about this march were the meetings, rallies and other events held with the Orizars of Vardar and Amaranta in the area near Lake Doiran. Here is what Vera Atseva had to say in a report published on February 9, 1944: "Much wonderment was displayed about our heroism in the struggle... Chento was very popular there."

The third group of battalions continued their campaign towards eastern Macedonia and found the march long and very difficult. The march required the third group of battalions to cross through Strumitsa, Petrich, Shtip, Kochani, Kumanovo, Kriva Palanka, Strumichka, Bregalnitsa and Kriva Reka and all their obstacles. The trek though eastern Macedonia began an hour before midnight on February 10, 1944. The group was faced with severe weather conditions, snow, rain and hostile encounters. The group faced great obstacles on the road through Belasitsa, Orazhden, Plachkovitsa, Osogovski Planini... but, despite everything, the group managed to travel 260 kilometres in the time span from February 10 to February 22, 1944, delivering great blows to the Bulgarian occupying forces.

After the hard marches, heroic struggles and difficult obstacles... after the many breakthroughs, the partisans were ready for a break so they began to assemble at the "Prohor Pchinski" Monastery, where on February 27, 1944 they organized a meeting to analyze their political and military combat actions particularly those of the military units which participated in the Kumanovo-Kriva Reka, Vranie, and Luzhnitsa campaigns and widened the free territory in Macedonia.

While the Macedonian military units were engaged in difficult and strenuous actions in the heat of the fiercest battles, political and high military representatives were preparing to hold the First ASNOM Meeting by convening a conference. This was a very significant event, a historical act for the Macedonian people, so the Macedonian representatives needed to not only be prepared for this extraordinary engagement but to work together as a team. Activists, fighters, members of the Initiative Board... all had to work hard and together.

The first session of the Expanded Initiative Board for convening of ASNOM was held on April 30, 1944 in the free territory of Kumanovo. The meeting, consisting of delegates from all over Macedonia, was opened by General Mihailo Apostolski. Included in the Expanded Initiative Board were: President Metodija Andonov-Chento (Prilep), Vice Presidents Mane Chuchkov (Shtip) and Bane Andreev (Veles), Secretaries Kiril Miliovski (Bitola) and Kiril Gligorov (Shtip), Members Mihailo Apostolski (Shtip), Tsvetko Uzunovski (Resen), Kiril Petrushev (Bogdantsi), Epaminonda Pop Atanasov (Strumitsa), Strahil Gigov (Veles), Nikola Minchev (Kavadartsi), Petre Piruze (Ohrid), Mara Natseva (Kumanovo), Blagoi Hadzhipanov (Veles), Vlado Polezhina (Kichevo), Risto Boialtsaliev (Gevgelija), Borko Temelkov (Prilep), Todor Petsov Tsipovski (Tetovo), Panko Brashnarov (Veles), Todor Zvezdin (Skopje), Genadia Lesko (Brodsko) and Milan Stefanov (Prilep). The delegates debated quite openly about a variety of issues and problems that had risen, thus setting the stage for ASNOM.

It was decided and unanimously approved that Metodija Andonov-Chento, as President of the Initiative Board, was to lead a delegation to travel to Vis, meet with Marshal Tito and inform him of the overall war situation and the situation in Macedonia.

The Macedonian delegation traveled for many days in cold weather and over hostile territory to the Adriatic island. They traveled over snow in Morava and through the Iablanitsa pass. They trekked for many long kilometres over Iastrebat and from there, via plane, flew over the Adriatic Sea to the Italian city Bari and from there they took an English military ship to Vis. After many disruptions, they finally arrive on the island expecting to meet with Marshal Tito.

Their troubles experienced over the long and arduous trek were forgotten on June 24, 1944, when members of the National Committee for the Liberation of Yugoslavia and the Macedonian Initiative Board delegation jointly agreed to convene ASNOM. The meeting was chaired by Tito and opinions on both sides were freely expressed...

OPEN CLASHES BETWEEN CHENTO AND TEMPO

Their disagreement was about which way to send the Macedonian combat units - towards Aegean (Greek occupied) Macedonia or towards Serbia

What warmed up and heated the atmosphere?

Collision around Vidoe Smilevski's membership in the Board of the People's government

Chento: "If Vidoe is Macedonian, let us choose him, let him commit himself..."

The long, difficult and uncertain breakthroughs through the many storms and enemy lines; the long road from Macedonia to the Adriatic Sea; the long days and nights from the beginning of May, until June 24, 1944, were now seen as an episode that should be forgotten as soon as possible.

In Vis members of the Initiative Board delegation and members of the National Committee for the Liberation of Yugoslavia sat together to decide the convening of ASNOM. Included among them were President Josip Broz Tito, Marshal of Yugoslavia, Vice-

Presidents Edward Kardeli and Vladislav Ribnikar, Trustees Vlada Zechevich, Ivan Milutinovich, Edward Kotsbek, Dr. Vladimir Bakarich, as well as Aleksandar Rankovich and Milovan Gilas, members of the AVNOJ Presidium.

Included on the Macedonian side were Metodija Andonov-Chento, Mane Chuchkov and Kiril Petrushev. Included among them was also Svetozar Vukmanovich-Tempo who at the time was an instructor at the National Liberation Army Supreme Headquarters as well as at NOB and POJ in Macedonia. The session was chaired by Josip Broz Tito, and minutes were taken by Vladimir Bakarich.

According to the adopted agenda, the first point of discussion was convening ASNOM as was requested by the Macedonian Initiative Board delegation. The second point of discussion was the Macedonian Question. Mane Chuchkov began by expressing hope that the Macedonian people would exercise their national rights during this struggle. Immediately afterwards, Tito spoke about some of the current issues experienced in Macedonia.

Metodija Andonov-Chento and Kiril Petrushev supplemented Chuchkov's report by acquainting the attendees with the Initiative Board's minutes from the two previous meetings. (April 30, 1944 and May 6, 1944.) After the reports and minutes were read and after some discussion as to when ASNOM was to be constituted, the following points were made:

1. The Macedonian people express their historical aspirations to unite all parts of Macedonia. This is their national right and therefore, this aspiration will remain as their constant demand.
2. Given the current international situation, the internal position of the Macedonian people in the neighbouring countries as well as the development of the Macedonian people's armed struggle, it would be too early to set national aspirations in the form of an action request, be it by the supreme representatives of Federal Yugoslavia, or by the Macedonian people's governing bodies. If the Macedonian national aspirations are set at this time, they would hinder the unity of the anti-Hitler front and the unity of the various nations involved,

which would lead to an unfavourable international situation for Yugoslavia in general and for the Macedonian people in particular.

3. The path to liberation and self-determination of all parts of Macedonia and of the Macedonian people today can be attained through a broad liberation movement against the fascist occupiers headed by Hitler and through an organized decisive armed struggle against this chief enemy. A request for national self-determination and democratic rights can be made within this movement and through the struggle of the Macedonian people outside of old Yugoslavia.

4. The Macedonian people in Yugoslavia want to develop the People's Liberation Struggle against the fascist occupiers in all parts of Macedonia, aware that it is precisely with such a struggle that they acquire the right to liberation and self-determination of their entire country. In accordance with this desire, the Macedonian people will assist in all liberation movements regardless of where they appear.

In addition to the above, it was also concluded that the founding Anti-Fascist Assembly for the Macedonian People's Liberation should take place as soon as possible and organize a Macedonian People's Liberation Front.

After the ASNOM session, Metodija Andonov-Chento was to return to the National Committee.

Vis June 24, 1944,
President and Marshal of Yugoslavia
Tito

(This record, from the joint meeting at Vis, was made available to science and journalism.)

The delegation that traveled to Vis found it just as difficult to return home to Skopje and to Kumanovo Region.

However, August and the day for holding the Anti-Fascist Assembly for the liberation of Macedonia were fast approaching. There was a

need to quickly prepare all sectors, identify issues, make decisions and propose solutions. At the same time there was a need to look ahead and prepare extensive, comprehensive and timely tasks for the second half of 1944, which was already under way.

For example, discussions that had taken place regarding the first draft of the General Headquarters Manifesto were filled with polemic tones and divergent views. Changes need to be introduced, but in the opinion of some members the Macedonian Question was a step backwards for them. They demanded that this part of the document take a different dimension and have more intense and clear views. These divergent views in fact, all together, were evident when comparing the manifesto put together by General Headquarters, on the one hand, and the text of the Manifesto adopted by ASNOM during the First Sitting, on the other.

Disagreements arose, mainly between Tempo and Chento, regarding some staffing issues which in time gained wider dimensions and led to an open clash. Tsvetko Uzunovski-Abas, in a letter addressed to Tempo, mentioned that he did not agree with Tempo's personnel policy that he had recently undertaken in Macedonia. Namely, the instructors of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, at their own discretion, were imposing personnel decisions by rejecting eligible candidates and choosing only those who they trusted.

These and other similar actions, undertaken in the constellation of the then relations, did not remain without broad echoes, without opposing views and without clashes of opinions. This is what Strahil Gigov in his "Memoirs" had to say: "The first and biggest misunderstandings took place when Lazar Kolishevski and Mara Natseva were appointed members of the AVNOJ Presidium. One day while I, together with Tempo and Bobi, was visiting General Headquarters, we were told that the thinking was that Kolishevski and Natseva should be made members of the Presidium and become responsible comrades in our Party, even though they were not here, and their destiny was uncertain. The most vocal opponents of these appointments were Metodia Andonov-Chento and Venko Markovski. Apostolski joined them but the others started to hesitate..."

The ASNOM meeting was also held back by other disputes such as the proposal to appoint Vidoe Smilevski member of the Initiative Board of the People's Government. Smilevski had just arrived in Macedonia from Serbia and he was not well known so Metodia Andonov-Chento and some other comrades asked Smilevski to express himself by declaring who he is and what he is. "If he says he is Macedonian we will choose him but if he says he is Serbian he cannot be in the government," said Chento among other things.

The dispute that arose over whether or not Vidoe Smilevski should be a member of the Initiative Board of the People's Government received wider dimensions. Tempo, who was notified of this, came to the Board meeting to resolve the dispute. His advice was: "Give up your request. It is insulting to ask a Macedonian to declare his nationality only because he lived and fought against a common enemy in the ranks of another nation. It's pure nationalism..."

Metodi Andonov-Chento immediately reacted and, replying to Svetozar Vukmanovich-Tempo, said: "You, Comrade Tempo, should not interfere in our affairs. You should not be present at this meeting..."

"I was surprised," wrote Tempo in his book. "I also looked at the other members of the Board. I wanted to know if they agreed. They were all silent. This meant that they approved of what Chento had said. It deeply offended me. With my head bent down I immediately left." About this Tempo also wrote: "When we suggested (not indicating who) that Vidoe Smilevski also enter the Board, in the meantime, otherwise co-opted in the CPM Central Committee, there were disagreements. Many members of the board asked Smilevski to declare beforehand whether he felt Macedonian or not, because before the war he lived and worked in Serbia."

This is what Strahil Gigov wrote in his "Memoirs" about this incident: "When Tempo began to speak, Metodia Andonov-Chento, chairing the Initiative Board, did not allow him to finish what he was saying. Chento turned sharply towards him and said: 'You Comrade Tempo should leave the meeting. After all, you do not have the right to be here. This is an Initiative Board sitting and, as

far as I am concerned, you are not a member.’ The majority of us immediately condemned it...”

This clash over Vidoe Smilevski’s membership in the Board, between Chento and Tempo on the eve of this August 2nd historic First ASNOM meeting, delivered a dose of restlessness, visible anxiety and anticipation in the membership. Tempo left the session, however, a CPM Central Committee Commission was formed, in accordance with Tempo’s wishes and charged with the responsibility of evaluating and assessing Metodija Andonov-Chento’s actions. Vidoe Smilevski, over whom the dispute had arisen, was appointed chairman of the Tempo formed Commission and charged with delivering Tempo’s views and comments which would lead to an open conflict.

According to what some people had said, after the formation of the Commission (headed by Smilevski), Chento was truly hurt to a point that he wanted to quit and leave everything... leave Prohor Pchinski altogether. But...

The long-awaited day, August 2nd, 1944, a new Ilinden day for the Macedonian people, had arrived. Guests and representatives from all over Macedonia began to arrive at the “Prohor Pchinski” Monastery. And, according to what the chroniclers wrote, a crackling voice began to speak in the silence at five o’clock in the afternoon. It was Panko Brashnarov, oldest member of the Initiative Board, who opened the meeting with his quiet and shaky voice. The spacious hall and the historic monastery were decorated with Macedonian and Yugoslav flags, posters and pictures. The anthem “Izgrei zora na slobodata” (the dawn of liberty is rising) echoed through the halls.

After these solemn moments, Panko Brashnarov, a witness to the two Ilindens, addressed the audience with the following words: “At this moment, in this historic place, Sveti Otets Prohor Pchinski and on this historic day, Ilinden, I am happy to declare the First Anti-Fascist Assembly for the liberation of Macedonia, open. My soul is filled with joy and, before my weak eyes, I see that all the rivers from Pchinia and Vardar Regions to Bistritsa Region, all across Macedonia, are ready and willing to wash away the ten-century-old Macedonian slavery from the Macedonian people starting with the

collapse of Samoil's state to this day, when a new, bright and free Macedonia is reborn..."

After Panko Brashnarov delivered his emotionally charged message, and after reading all the telegrams, delivering the speeches and greetings, the working part of the Initiative Board meeting, chaired by President Metodija Andonov-Chento, was opened. Immediately afterwards, the Initiative Board's report and the two other reports, submitted by Bane Andreev and Mane Chuchkov, were read.

The First ASNOM meeting took place in a somber and proud atmosphere. It was a historical moment for the Macedonian people. Many important decisions were made and resolutions adopted with the most important decision being the proclamation of ASNOM as the supreme, legislative and executive national representative body and the highest authority of the state of democratic Macedonia. An ASNOM Presidium was elected with Metodija Andonov-Chento as its first president. Elected as vice-presidents were Panko Brashnarov and Mane Chuchkov, elected as secretaries were Liubomir Arsov and Vladimir Polezhinoski, elected as members of the ASNOM Presidium were Venko Markovski, Tsvetko Uzunovski, Bogoa Fotev, Mihail Apostolski, Strahil Gigov, Petre Piruze, Kiril Petrushev, Iovan Giorgov, Epaminonda Pop Andonov, Genady Leskov, Kemal Agoli, Lazar Sokolovski, Vera Atseva, Kamber Hasan, Atso Petrovski, Mladen Chelopezki and Liliana Chalovska.

ASNOM, at this historic gathering in Prohor Pchinski, also adopted the First Session Manifesto which, among other things, read as follows: "Following the Macedonian people's century-old ideals, the First Macedonian People's Assembly, in front of the entire world, is proud to proclaim its, up to now, unavailable wish, to unite the whole of the Macedonian people. This will put an end to the slavery in all parts of Macedonia and create the right conditions for sincere solidarity and peace among the Balkan peoples..."

Following the days, weeks and months after the gathering at "Prohor Pchinski", the ASNOM Presidium continued to function, tackling problems and urgent issues, making decisions and generally preparing for the future of the Macedonian state. The First ASNOM Presidium sitting took place on August 6, 1944, in the village

Ramno. Following that another sitting took place on August 14, 1944, this time in the Petrova Gora forest. Then, from September 2 to September 5, 1944, the Presidium met in “Prohor Pchinski” for its Third Session where a number of resolutions proposed earlier were verified and adopted.

The ASNOM Presidium, among other things, also sent a telegram to the National Committee requesting that the Macedonian Question be brought up during the negotiations for a ceasefire with Bulgaria. In terms of the economic rebuilding of Macedonia, a plan was put together to collect data on the devastation from 1941 to 1944, and which of the belligerents caused it, and to apply for military damages. The Presidium set its goals to collect data not only on the devastation caused by the most recent war, but also the damages caused by the colonial management of Macedonia from 1912 to 1941. This data was to be provided to the allied forces as supporting documentation to show how the Macedonian people were treated in Greece and Bulgaria. In other words, the National Committee was supplied with this data to illustrate the reasons for the economic backwardness of Macedonia and in support of the necessity to allocate much military compensation in order to develop Macedonia economically and fast.

Regarding the colonists deposited in Macedonia over the years, on November 17, 1944, Mane Chuchkov, at a NKOJ sitting, proposed that “the city’s command stop issuing passes into Macedonia, because... this was about people who had illegally received land in Macedonia during the old Yugoslav era.” This proposal was adopted.

With the passing of time the new Macedonian state organs continued to accelerate their effort, tackling numerous issues, making decisions and preparing to run the people’s government, its economy, its culture, its education, health and so on.

On April 15, 1945, the Macedonian National Assembly confirmed Metodija Andonov-Chento as its president. The Presidium continued to function as a political-executive body, temporarily carrying out tasks of the people’s government, until a proper government was formed at which time some of the Presidium’s functions were

dissolved. After that the Presidium became part of the political-executive, and the government took over its administrative power.

Finally, the centuries-old anticipated freedom overpaid with blood was felt on the entire territory of Macedonia. Meetings and rallies were held everywhere. The people joined the partisans to celebrate their victories and their successful campaigns to free Macedonia. Metodija Andonov-Chento took part in many of these celebrations and numerous times gave speeches. The people often chanted his name.

Around the fall, preparations were being made for the first October 11th commemoration of the historic day when the first rifle shots were fired in Prilep and Kumanovo, signaling the start of the liberation. Even Josip Broz Tito, Marshal of Yugoslavia, was invited and was expected to arrive in Skopje to attend this great event.

The entire city of Skopje came out that day anxious to hail Tito's arrival. Then, while waiting at the Skopje Railway Station, President Metodija Andonov-Chento approached Tito and, on behalf of the National Assembly Presidium, welcomed his highly valued guest and his entourage with the words: "Comrade Marshal and dear guests, I am happy to greet you, and in the name of the Macedonian people, to welcome you here in Skopje, the capital of Macedonia. In their entire history, the Macedonian people have never been as happy as they are today in your presence for your first visit in Macedonia."

"...You are here as our guest for the October 11th celebration. This was the day when the Macedonian people raised their weapons against the bloody fascists. We think that our gratitude will best be expressed on November 11th when the first free elections are held in Yugoslavia. Also great is our gratitude to our allies who have helped us gain our freedom. Thanks to the Soviet Union, Great Britain and America.

At the end, I wish you happiness and to have a great time here in our capital, and to remember the Macedonian people at their best..." concluded Chento.

(October 11, 1945, speech published in “Nova Makedonija”.)

After Macedonia was freed from the occupiers, a number of projects were undertaken to cure the wounds from the devastation and from the atrocities committed by the occupying fascist regimes. The people’s government, the Presidium, the National Assembly, and the entire governing board, were in almost constant sessions, investing an enormous effort to establish efficient functions in all corners of life, enacting laws, making decisions and taking measures.

Another important date to mention is December 28, 1944, at which time the Second ASNOM (First Extraordinary) session took place, during which Presidium President Metodija Andonov-Chento, among other things, said: “We Macedonians who have suffered the worst slavery in the Balkans, today, together with all the other nations in Yugoslavia, are building a state... There are three districts formed in Macedonia consisting of 30 regions, 2880 villages and towns in which there are more than 37,000 people engaged...”

The Second ASNOM Session ended at the very end of 1944 and, as Dimitar Vlahov wrote: “It was held in an atmosphere of enormous enthusiasm, during which representatives of the Macedonian people showed themselves to be worthy sons of the immortal fighters of the famous Ilinden epic.”

There was also an election held during the Second Session of the ASNOM Presidium during which 35 members were elected. Metodija Andonov-Chento was elected president, Lazar Kolishevski was elected vice president, Nedzhat Agoli was elected vice president, Boris Spirov was elected secretary, and Epaminonda Pop Andonov was elected second secretary. Elected as trustees were Kiro Petrushev, Strahil Gigov, Petar Piruze, Nikola Minchev, Mire Anastasov, Bogojia Fotev, Atso Petrovski, Sterio Bozov, Georgi Vaskov, Kiro Gligorov and Dimitar Mitrev. Elected members were Aleksandar Petrovich, Dimitar Vlahov, Panko Brashnarov, Pavel Shatev, Aleksandar Martulkov, Krste Germov Shakir, Mara Natseva, Tsvetko Uzunovski, Hasan Shukri, the priest Iovan Gelev, Vukashin Popadich, Milosh Iakovlievich, Dimitar Nestrov, Mladen Chelopechki, Kemal Seifula and Veselinka Malinska.

Given that the Macedonian leadership was involved in dozens of activities and making hundreds of necessary, urgent, and important decisions, we will only look at some of them. With the ASNOM Presidium's approval, a program to immediately begin collecting a one-time tax was approved. As was said, this tax was to "arrange the finances", and the base for the tax rate that was to be charged on personal incomes earned in the last three and a half years. This program was signed by Metodija Andonov-Chento.

Unfortunately, even though he approved the program by signing it, it counted as a big minus for Chento because some people were saying that he was against such a tax. This is what Chento himself said about that: "I was not against it. I signed the program but I suggested that some mistakes be corrected..." He was citing the examples at Prilep and Strumitsa where a lot of tax was imposed on some firms and very little on others. At the same time, Chento also advocated that those who pay with gold, since there was still no fixed value on the gold at the time, be given the chance to have it back and settle their debts with money (this proposal was not approved).

Among the many Acts proposed and adopted there was the Law on Agricultural Reform which Chento proposed (not accepted until it was amended), requiring wholesalers who possessed more than 25 hectares of land give some of it back to the original owners. If this land originally belonged to people who had no other livelihoods, and according to their age they could not work elsewhere, they were each entitled to receive five hectares in order to secure their existence.

Chento also insisted that the foreign exchange earned by the sale of six million kilograms of tobacco remain in Macedonia. This money could be used to solve very difficult and immediate problems, but in the end it did not turn out to be this way. He also advocated that the money from sales of poppy, cotton, rice and other agricultural products sold in this region be deposited in the federal treasury and to keep track of exactly where it was spent and what it was spent for. Chento openly talked about economic independence for the republics and, as someone put it, to have their own "separate

wallets”.

Another thing that counted as a minus for Chento was his personal intervention in executions. He believed in and advocated for a fair trial for everyone, even for those who made mistakes during the war. He was totally against people being executed without a fair trial. At the time there were mass shootings without trials and because he was in a high position in the Presidium, he was exposed to many complaints and shocking testimonies of abuse of power. He strongly believed that no one should stand before a firing squad without a fair trial where all the facts and evidence are examined... Chento spoke about this publicly at the National Assembly on April 15, 1945, after which he was elected President of the Presidium.

Before that, on March 4, 1945, the first Macedonian church gathering was held. This meeting was of great importance to the Macedonian people and had a special place in the post liberation days and months. While addressing the church dignitaries, Presidium President Metodija Andonov-Chento, among other things, also said: “The Macedonian people have a historical right to have their own autocephalous church. It is well-known that the Macedonian people, among them the Macedonian priests, have suffered throughout history and throughout the recent past. A considerable part of the priests were at the forefront of our struggle for freedom...”

A resolution was adopted at this meeting calling for the autocephaly of the Macedonian Church. Later, however, representatives of the government took a different political position. The resolution adopted on March 4, 1945, was deemed to be wrong because it implied that: “Autocephaly meant separation, cutting all connection with the Serbian patriarchate, closing the circle on itself, which meant disruption of the brotherhood and unity of the Yugoslav people...”

On June 10, 1945, as president of the Macedonian assembly, Chento spoke at the ratification of the treaty of friendship between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, during the Federal Assembly held in Belgrade. Among other things, he said: “As a result of the heroic struggle of the freedom-loving nations, as a result of the Atlantic

Charter and of the Crimean Conference, all great and small nations have the right to be recognized and the right to a free national, political and cultural life. The Macedonian people are included in this and have the right to be free and equal, together with the other peoples in the SFRY...”

“I also consider it my duty to come before you to inform you that our people have experienced difficult times. Our brothers in Aegean (Greek occupied) Macedonia have suffered cruel injustices and have been forced to fight for their survival, fleeing to the mountains with their unhappy families, to avoid death and the terror perpetrated by the various sides... The only thing that our brothers are guilty of is that they want to live free to develop their nation and culture and to freely to learn and speak their mother tongue...”

I SUBMIT MY RESIGNATION

What were the reasons that led Chento, the first president of the Republic of Macedonia, to resign?

Very active in the participation on the adoption of laws in Belgrade

Chento’s proposal to add a clause in the country’s first constitution enabling the republics to have the right to self-determination and to secession, was like an exploding bomb

While looking through a pile of notes labeled “Legislative Boards of the AVNOJ Presidency and the SFRY Provisional National Assembly”, we found out that Metodija Andonov-Chento had actively participated in various debates during the summer and fall of 1945, which showed thoroughness and farsightedness on his part. One of these debates took place during the first constitutive session, held on August 10, 1945. Included among the Macedonian leaders who participated in this session were Metodija Andonov-Chento, Epaminonda Pop Andonov, Petar Piruze, Kemal Agoli and Todor Dzevdin. Chento also participated in the second session to discuss the proposal for agrarian reform and colonization. Here he advocated for the landless and for those who had poor properties to be given a piece of land. Also, in replying to Milosh Zhanko who wanted to harshly punish those who had wronged the revolution,

Chento said yes they must bear the legal consequences and get everything that is coming to them; however, measures must also be taken not to leave their families to face a harsh destiny without any means for survival.

When the Constituent Assembly met on August 13, 1945, Chento proposed that everyone be allowed to freely express their opinions on what kind of state the people should have when the new constitution is drafted. He said: “As a Macedonian, I fully support this proposal because for the first time our people have a real opportunity to publicly express their opinions about their own being and their future...”

Then, on August 22, 1945, when the law on crimes against the people and against the state was being drafted, Chento compared it to the law of old Yugoslavia and, among other things, said: “These injustices were committed against us (Macedonians), because no man was allowed to declare his identity and reveal that he was Macedonian. The whole Macedonian nation suffered from this law. Therefore, let the new law with its new ideas and visions be examined by the public. Let the people have their say... I believe they will welcome it and it will pass because it will be a fair and just law.”

Chento actively participated in the preparations for the adoption of the first Yugoslav Constitution in 1946. Here he used arguments from the talks he had had in Vis and the ASNOM and AVNOJ documents to support his position for an amendment to the Yugoslav Constitution in which he advocated the principle of “self-determination to secession of republics”. This was an amendment which at that time resembled an exploding bomb.

From their notes and speeches, Chento’s contemporaries painted Chento as a very open person, who as a president, communicated with the people openly and directly. The door to his office was always open and anyone who needed to see him and speak with him was welcomed without problems. He did not feel he needed bodyguards or personal security. He used to say: “We fought against gendarmes and against soldiers. And, as long as the people trust me, I have no need to protect myself. Who should I be afraid of?” (Let

us also mention at this point that as President, Metodija Andonov-Chento and his family lived in a three-room apartment in the centre of Skopje, opposite the former hotel “Macedonia”.)

According to some of his contemporaries, who participated in the discussions with him, Chento was a “hard” negotiator especially when defending his views and suggestions in the discussions. He firmly stood his ground. They could only convince him with many arguments and counter-arguments.

In the tens and even hundreds of projects Chento worked on with various committee members, where decision making was required, he always had his own unique and clearly and loudly stated views and opinions. Naturally, this created disagreements between Chento and some of the committee members which, in the long run, were counted as a big minus for Chento. Also, the watchful eye of the Party was not too far away. These so-called judgments against Chento materialized during the Popular Front National Board Conference, held on March 7, 1946. Here Chento faced an avalanche of criticism and accusations. Even the most basic arguments he had made counted against him. He was tormented, seen as the culprit and accused of being hard, disobedient, opinionated, and of having a bad attitude. Some of the ideas he presented and argued for were characterized and viewed as an attack against the new measures proposed by the new state. This fierce and mounting criticism from his opponents, in time, would contribute to Chento’s resignation.

Among other things, here is what was said in the report summarizing the National Assembly Presidium’s work for the period from April 15, 1945 to April 15, 1946: “The work of the Presidium was characterized by frequent misunderstandings and disagreements between former President Metodija Andonov-Chento and members of the Presidium. Chento’s disagreements and misunderstandings were beyond the Presidium’s scope, which provoked sharp criticism against him at the Popular Front Conference.”

On March 14, 1946, seven days after the Conference was held, Metodija Andonov-Chento resigned. The following day the

Presidium accepted his resignation. The National Assembly accepted his resignation a month later on April 15, 1946.

Here is what was written in the resignation letter:

“This is a request for the Presidium of the National Assembly of Macedonia to release me from my current duty as president and a member of the Presidium. I find it necessary to submit my resignation due to my personal situation and the knowledge that I can no longer fulfill my entrusted duty.” Signed Metodija Andonov-Chento.

After submitting his resignation Metodija Andonov-Chento left Skopje and returned to his native Prilep with intentions of continuing his work at his store. But, after returning home he began to run into problems. He found it difficult to purchase the products he needed to sell in his store. His suppliers were unwilling to sell him goods and there were rumours, generated by “well-informed sources” threatening him with bankruptcy and persecution. All these difficulties went on for four months, from March 14 to July 14, 1946.

Sometime after midnight on July 14, 1946, Chento was arrested but it was a kind of arrest that was covered with a veil of great secrecy and conspiracy, which later would cause a lot of controversy, curiosity and dilemmas and would leave many open issues, some of which are still open to this day. During our research for this book we were unable to find out who knew what and what was written in the testimonials. This is because some of the material on Chento is still deemed confidential and beyond our reach. But, we did not give up. We continued to search persistently for the truth to find out everything we could about why Chento was arrested. First we looked at the speeches he made and after that we looked for witnesses who attended these events. Included among the witnesses we found was Stevan Petreski Tute, a close neighbour of the Andonov family. Stevan remembered that mysterious night very well, almost photographically, which for us began to untangle and unravel Chento’s case.

Here is what Stevan Petreski Tute, a social welfare adviser in Prilep, had to say: “That evening when I came home, I was surprised by the unannounced presence of three unknown persons in my house. Two of them were positioned near a window that had a direct view of the yard of the Chento family home. The third individual went behind the house. They stayed with me a long time. They banned me from going in or out and forced me to stay in the room opposite to Chento’s home. I had never seen those people before, I did not know who they were, but it was obvious to me that they were expecting something to happen with Metodija Andonov-Chento, who only a few months ago had returned home after his resignation in Skopje.”

“What else did you see that night?” asked the researcher.

“It was sometime after midnight, I don’t know exactly when, I only remember that it was a July night when I heard a noise coming from Chento’s front gate. I also heard the dull noise of heavy footsteps. The people in the room called me to come to the window. It was so close; it was almost in front of my eyes. ‘Do you recognize the people entering the gate?’ asked one of the strangers who was in my house. ‘Yes, I do recognize them. I don’t need to look twice,’ I replied. ‘The first one is from Mariovo, he goes to markets. I recognize the second one too, he is Zagoranliev from Zagorani. Yes, I know him too,’ I added,” replied Stevan Petreski Tute and continued:

“The first one to enter was the man from Mariovo. Boshko Zagoranliev, the second man, followed him. Boshko was wearing a dark coat. He walked up and sat on the stairs on the upper terrace. Soon afterwards Chento came out in his pajamas and talked with Zagoranliev. The man from Mariovo approached. Shortly afterwards, Chento put on his clothes, came down to the yard, spoke with the two men and the three left together. I could hear their footsteps on the cobblestone road.”

“What happened next?” asked the researcher.

“Well, while their steps were still echoing in the night, the three strangers in my house, who by the way were not from Prilep, and who were obviously expecting something to happen, ran after them.

I could still see Chento and the others walking away and were not too far from my house. When I went outside to close my front gate I saw Chento's wife standing at the door. She saw me too. Then, after everyone found out that Chento had been arrested and later tried, I became and remained to be a traitor in the eyes of the Chento family and in the eyes of every person in Prilep. I was and remained to be a traitor and the person who betrayed Metodija Andonov-Cheno. That anathema has followed me for the last 44 years. I am now an old man who will soon leave this world and I don't want my children to have to live labeled as the children of a traitor. Especially since it is not true..." said Stevan Petreski Tute, pausing for a moment and continued:

"I never again saw the people who came to my home that night. I never saw them before and never again. After that, neither they nor anyone else ever came to my doorstep to spy on my neighbours..."

"Was that it?" asked the researcher.

"No, not at all. A while later they summoned me to the UDBA office in Prilep. I entered a room and was met by a stranger (I think it was Zlate Biljanoski) who immediately warned me that what was to be done to Chento was to be of utmost secrecy and that it was never to be revealed to anyone! His tone of voice was clear and frightening. After he said that to me he left the room and closed the door, leaving me there all alone. I thought it was all over for me. I stayed there for about two hours and then, when I came out, they gave me a sheet of paper to sign, making sure that I remained silent forever..." he replied.

"But?" asked the researcher.

"But, as you can see, I can no longer remain silent. I can't and I shouldn't remain silent. That's why it was good of you to open Chento's case and give me the opportunity to speak up... I am all for re-opening Chento's case and for letting the truth come out.

And also let me say that Chento was a great authority in the bazaar. Unfortunately, the same Party which sought to find honest people did him injustice. But he was very brave... people always rallied

around his name. He worked with many revolutionaries from Prilep including Pitu and Rampo Lefkata, Krume Volnaroski, and so on. But, in spite of all that, look what happened to him!” relied Stevan Petreski Tute.

INTERNMENT, TORTURE, PRISON AND MORE

How, where and when was Metodija Andonov-Chento arrested?

Why was it done under such secrecy?

A verdict of 11 years imprisonment in hard labour was rendered on November 22, 1946 at the Skopje District Court. President of the Judicial Council was Panta Marina, members were Lazar Moisoj and Kole Chashule and Deputy Prosecutor was General Blagoja Popovski.

We will resume building the mosaic of Metodija Andonov-Chento’s mysterious arrest, his ordeal in Skopje and his destiny in general through the words and memories of his close and distant contemporaries and through direct and indirect witnesses and participants.

Here is what Kiro Orovchanets, Assistant to the UDBA Plenipotentiary in Prilep, had to say:

“The morning after the investigation was carried out by officials from the Skopje Ministry of Internal Affairs, led by Dimitar Aleksievski Pekar, when we came to work with Plenipotentiary Kiro Dzaikoski, Pekar was already there. He informed us that Chento was caught at the border attempting to escape to Greece. He also told us that it was necessary to inform the president of the municipality and the secretary of the Party about this...”

This was a short statement made by Orovchanets which we wrote in our notebook, word for word.

Here is what Risto Buneski, Party member working for the Bureau of the Environmental Committee (in absence of the organizational and political secretary), had to say:

“Kiro Dzhaiki, Plenipotentiary of UDBA for Prilep Region, and Kiro Orovchanets came to the Committee office around 8 o’clock in the morning and personally informed me that the Party organizations needed to be advised that during the night Chento was captured at the border and imprisoned while fleeing for Greece. I was told that in his hands he held a written Resolution that was to be taken to Solun, to a certain assembly of 25 people, with aims at sending it to the United Nations in order to place Macedonia under the auspices of the Western Powers...” Buneski was a long time researcher of Chento’s work and life. Buneski also said:

“After we had the indictment and verdict, we began to wonder: ‘How was it even possible, according to the indictment, that Chento committed this crime on July 14, 1946 around 2 am, having to travel from Prilep so many kilometres to the border, which would otherwise have taken 10 to 12 hours. How did they catch him and bring him back to Prilep in such a short time, which we know would have taken much longer. We also know that the city was notified at eight o’clock in the morning. In some places including Bitola, in the beginning some people were saying that Chento had died while fleeing for Greece.’...” said Buneski with a visible dilemma in his eyes.

Later, the indictment did not say that Chento was captured at the Greek border, but that he had plans to commit such a crime. Also, there was no mention in the indictment of any “Resolution” or “Assembly” in Solun. The indictment did, however, mention that there was an armed band of ten people with aims at creating a United Macedonian Federation with Greece under the protectorate of a foreign country.

This is what Commander Ionche Tagoski from Pretor, commander of the KNOJ anti-tank unit in 1946, stationed at the Greek border near Belushina, Bitola Region, had to say: “That day when I received the newspaper ‘Nova Makedonija’ and I read the story about Chento being captured and detained at the Greek border,

according to a statement made by the Minister of the Interior, I immediately reacted in front of my comrades standing with me. I said:

‘This can’t be true. We are in charge of guarding the border and we have a tight belt around it. And if anyone had to know about this it would have been us!’...” Later, Ionche’s statement proved to be very costly to him. In the end this is what he summed up: “I have a clear conscience. It is true that I was shocked when I read the news about Chento’s arrest and I could not hide my surprise. I could not react spontaneously because this was not done in the border region, but around us. It was very sad to see something like this done against such a Macedonian person like Chento. People like him were needed in Macedonia...”

And so, Chento’s case, investigation and life in prison continue... He was delivered to the prison in Skopje. And how did all that take place? Who participated in it? Who ordered it? And who conducted it? Questions that remain to be answered...

Metodia Ivanovski-Svatot, the then manager of the Investigative Prison in Skopje, was old and bedridden from his illness, but it was interesting to hear what he had to say. He spoke with great difficulty but was glad to speak about the days and months he had spent with Chento, one of his most enthusiastic prisoner “clients”. This is what he said:

“He was blindfolded with a scarf the night they brought him in a jeep to the prison in Skopje. I saw him sitting in the car alone, and everything became clear to me. ‘Take him out of the jeep and immediately inform Elisie Popovski’ said one of the UDBA agents, who, together with Krste Pangovski, brought Chento here directly from Prilep. When I contacted Elisie Popovski, he briefly told me that this was Chento and to keep an eye on him because he was arrested under a strict conspiracy, for which I later signed a statement.

Chento was housed in the most guarded area in the prison, in the secret cells, with double doors, where no prying eyes could penetrate. First he was interrogated by Marko, then, I think, he was

taken over by Dimitar Aleksievski and then I think by Blagoia Popovski, I don't remember exactly..." concluded Metodia Ivanovski-Svatot.

We asked Metodia Ivanovski-Svatot more questions. We wanted him to tell us more about the truth behind Chento's arrest. This is what he said: "When they brought Chento here we inspected the personal belongings he had taken with him and on him we found a comb, an empty bottle and a belt. I took them all and threw them into the warehouse because I was not required to keep a list of items belonging to prisoners like him (under conspiratorial arrest). In fact I did not even open a file for what was taken from him. I don't remember that well, but I think it was either Pekar or Marko who called me and asked me to bring everything we had on Chento. I told them there was nothing to bring. I said to them, 'Chento was brought here with eyes bound, with an empty bottle and with a military belt, which I threw in the warehouse. I did not keep a file and that was that...' I said. To this Marko said: 'You must find these things!' 'But how?' I asked. 'You will have to find them! And that's an order!' he replied. Now I was in trouble and under the gun.

Where was I going to find Chento's belongings? So many prisoners had passed through there. I looked through all the stacks... I did everything I could... but the belt was gone. I was in real trouble. I had to find it because my neck was on the line. Finally, there it was... the infamous belt was found. One of the locksmiths had taken it home. When I brought it back, I handed it over to Elisie Popovski, just like I had the gold before that. Everything was above board, on trust," concluded Metodia Ivanovski-Svatot.

"Did you know Chento for a long time?" asked the researcher.

"Chento and I were good friends from the time he was in the Chuchuligovo camp in Bulgaria, where he was a distinguished prisoner. He stood shoulder to shoulder with many of the intellectuals there... about everything. I was the only one from the Skopje prison who had the right to enter his cell. I used to bring him his food and sometimes I sat with him and we talked for a while. He was quite open with me. He knew me from before so that is why I think he spoke to me frankly. He did not care that I was an

administrator. I believe I was here, in the vicinity, during his most difficult time in prison,” replied Metodija Ivanovski-Svatot.

“Did he say anything about his arrest?” asked the researcher.

“After seeing him for a while I asked him: ‘Why did you have to flee and what would you have done at the United Nations?’ Chento looked at me and said: ‘If they set you up, they will arrest you too.’ After that he said: ‘I never thought it would be this way, nor did I deserve to be arrested and brought here like this. I knew I would be expelled and I knew by whom, but not in this way. I gave it all for Macedonia...’

You know how it was then, we really could not arrest people like him without the knowledge of the Party, without the knowledge of top officials, and without the knowledge of Belgrade.

He told me many times that he had done nothing to deserve the treatment he was getting. He knew that he was going to be arrested and sent to jail because there were many whispers about that and some people even openly told him so. They advised him to run away...” explained Metodija Ivanovski-Svatot. “Chento was arrested near the village Staravina. He was pressured to leave his home. Everything was set up so that he would leave and not disturb anyone. And who can convince me that he was a traitor? No one!” explained Metodija Ivanovski-Svatot. “I tell you, he had no weapons, at least not when they brought him to the prison. Before that I don’t know. He was an honest man, many times he said to me: ‘If they don’t believe that I am worthy then let them ask the people of Prilep...’

“Chento was a great patriot who did not tolerate injustice. He was an honest and sincere person. He did not deserve to be arrested, tried and sentenced with such a severe and lengthy sentence. It was sad, very sad. A historic injustice!” concluded Metodija Ivanovski-Svatot.

Chento was tried and put behind bars in the same mysterious and conspiratorial way as he was arrested and brought from Prilep directly to Skopje. He was placed behind bars in a secret cell for 3,000 days and guarded by people who would not reveal his identity.

Only the top officials knew who he was and where he was held, no one else... For many long days Chento's family in Prilep was left with much uncertainty and all efforts to find him ended in vain. Her search for him brought his wife to Belgrade.

On July 29, 1946, the People's Republic of Macedonia's Public Prosecutor's Office was informed by the Macedonian branch of UDBA that Metodia Andonov-Chento from Prilep and several others were detained on July 14, 1946, for attempting to illegally cross the border into Greece and for being involved in anti-people's activities. On the basis of this, a decision was made to detain Chento and the others and to initiate criminal proceedings against them. They were to be detained and kept in prison until the end of the investigation...

Two days later, on July 31, 1946, the People's Republic of Macedonia's Ministry of Internal Affairs made an official announcement, signed by Minister Tsvetko Uzunovski-Abas. The announcement was published on page one of the newspaper "Nova Makedonija", which read as follows:

"Metodia Andonov-Chento was arrested by the state security authorities while attempting to cross the border from our country to Greece..."

Chento was repeatedly questioned by the UDBA authorities in the coming months towards the start of his trial, which lasted until November 8, 1946, when the Public Prosecutor's Office filed an indictment against him and Boris Zagoranliev, Miter Mitreski and Nedelko Makreski at the Skopje District Court where they were charged under Article 13 of the Criminal Code of having committed crimes against the people and against the state. The charges were signed by Nikola Vrazhalski, whose name appeared for the last time as a public prosecutor in connection with Chento's case.

Chento's trial began on November 19, 1946 and was held at the People's District Court in Skopje. The trial was conducted by a Judicial Council consisting of President Panta Maria, Members Lazar Moisov and Kole Chashule and Deputy Prosecutor General Blagoia Popovski.

Chento's trial was one of the most interesting and enigmatic processes of its time which, in the past decades, and in recent times has been the object of widespread attention and interest. Intentionally or not, an audience was also provided during the trial. The actual trial was not conducted by Prosecutor Nikola Vrazhalski, but by his deputy Blagoia Popovski from Prilep, Chento's hometown. Judicial Council member Kole Chashule was also from Prilep.

During the trial Popovski read the indictment as follows:

“Defendant Metodia Andonov-Chento, disagreeing with the FPRY's internal and foreign policy, which in his opinion works against the interests of the Macedonian people, because he believes its unification could not be achieved within the FPRY, but only under the protection of a foreign state, decided to take action deemed anti-national and anti-state. To this end, immediately after Easter in 1946, the accused Chento made connections with the next defendant, Boris Zagoranliev, and revealed his plan to him telling him that he intended to cross the Greek border, outside of Yugoslavia, and his intentions outside of our country would be to take part in the Paris Peace Conference. But if that failed he planned to take action in Greece itself, with intentions of violently separating the People's Republic of Macedonia from the FPRY, and uniting it with Aegean Macedonia in a federation with Greece.

Defendant Boris Zagoranliev approved of Chento's plan and, as an old member of the Vancho Mihailov terrorist organization, agreed to organize an armed unit, cross the border into Greece and begin criminal activities. In order to facilitate his own escape and the transfer of the armed unit across the border, the accused Chento funded the operation and promised to make more funds available later. After putting his plan in place, Chento then acquired the services of Mitre Mitreski and Nedelko Makreski and decided to run away. Chento, the first defendant, and Makreski left but, on July 14, 1946, they were caught on the road by organs of the people's government.

Defendant Metodija Andonov-Chento, a citizen of the FPRY, organized an armed unit and started on his way across the border in order to encourage foreign countries to interfere in FPRY's internal affairs, with aims at damaging FPRY's territorial independence and inviolability and, as such, has committed criminal offenses punishable under Article 3, items 2, 7 and 9 of the Criminal Code and under Article 4 in conjunction with Article 12 of the same law.

Defendant Boris Zagoranliev, in agreement with the criminal action of Metodija Andonov-Chento, cooperated with him and together they organized an armed unit of ten people. Their aim was to realize Chento's political ambitions of crossing the border into Greece and working with foreign states to interfere in FPRY's internal affairs and, by employing armed actions, to secede Macedonia from Yugoslavia. By being involved in this, the defendant Boris Zagoranliev attempted to commit criminal offenses under Article 3, items 2, 7 and 9 of the Criminal Code. Defendants Mitre Mitreski and Nedelko Makreski, acquainted with the above-quoted criminal actions of the first two defendants, became involved by making themselves available to transfer them across the border, by which they attempted to commit crimes under the already cited law."

Interrogations of defendants Metodija Andonov-Chento, Boris Zagoranliev, Mitre Mitreski and Nedelko Makreski continued in Skopje. According to an unpublished report, published in part in "Nova Makedonija", the alleged statements made by the defendants in front of the judicial council were generally very similar to the main charges leveled against Chento.

According to Zagoranliev, Metodija Andonov-Chento acknowledged that he would go across the border to reach the Peace Conference in Paris, where he would ask Great Power representatives to unite Macedonia under their protection. And if he did not succeed there, he would go to Greece to work for the unification of Vardar and Aegean Macedonia in a federation with Greece.

According to information gathered from the interrogation, it was concluded that Mitre Mitreski served as a link between Metodija Andonov-Chento and the people who were supposed to be engaged in crossing the border and in the transfer of the armed (about ten)

persons to Greece. It was also concluded that he was expected to find a person who would be willing to help Chento cross the border. Among other things, Nedelko Makreski lied to the court when he said that Chento revealed to him that he was preparing to organize armed actions against the old Yugoslav regime, which still ruled Macedonia to this day...

During the trial, when witness Traiko Beshoski from Mariovo Region was cross-examined, he said: “Chento told me that Macedonia should be separated from Yugoslavia and that the wallets should also be separated.” Traiko also claimed that Chento told him that he wanted to go to Paris to seek the unification of Macedonia under the protection of another state, etc. Witness Kiro Platnik (an old acquaintance of Chento from Prilep) told the court that after his resignation, Chento made a lot of money in his store, a lot more than ever before. (In the verdict, however, it was stated that the defendant was poor.) The next day after the defendants were tried, deputy prosecutor Blagoia Popovski made his summation speech spelling out the crimes committed.

Immediately afterwards, Blagoi Popankov, Chento’s lawyer, spoke and, among other things, asked the court to take into consideration some mitigating circumstances, and in particular that there was only an attempt and not an actual crime committed. After that Nedanov and Makreski’s lawyers spoke and, among other things, said that the actions of Chento’s protégés should also be viewed, like Boris Arsov said, as preparatory actions and not as attempts to commit actual crimes. Ianakievich, Mitreski’s lawyer spoke last.

After all the defense lawyers spoke, around 5 pm on November 22, 1946, the final verdict was read.

CHENTO: I AM NOT A SPY, I AM NOT A TRAITOR OF MY OWN PEOPLE

The appeal that Metodija Andonov-Chento made remained just that

Why was his file closed so quickly, closed yet his dilemma remained open until today?

Chento died on July 24, 1957 and was buried in his family plot in the Prilep cemetery

In the name of the people

The Skopje District People's Court, consisting of President Panta Marina, Members Lazar Moisov and Kole Chashule, and Deputy Prosecutor General Blagoia Popovski, read the verdict:

Metodia Andonov-Chento was sentenced to 11 years of imprisonment in hard labour, five years without civil and political rights and confiscation of all objects found on him.

Boris Zagoranliev was sentenced to five years of imprisonment, Mitre Mitreski was sentenced to one year of imprisonment and Nedelko Makreski was sentenced three years of imprisonment.

EXPLANATION

After examining all the evidence presented during the trial, the Court found elements of criminal activities committed by the accused Metodia Andonov-Chento, namely:

Endangering the independence and inviolability of FPRY territory, as defined in Article 3 item 2; organizing an armed unit and transferring its members outside of FPRY territory with aims at endangering the existence of FPRY, as defined by Article 3 item 7; and encouraging foreign states to interfere in FPRY internal affairs, as defined by Article 3 item 9 of the Law on Crimes against the People and against the State.

The Court's assurance that the accused Metodia was responsible for the crimes committed, as referred to in Article 3 item 2 of the aforementioned law, is based on the statements made by defendants Boris, Mitre and Nedelko, witness Traiko Beshoski and by the partial confessions made by the accused Metodia himself.

Both in front of the investigative authorities and during a search, Boris Zagoranliev stated in a clear and categorical manner that after Easter in 1946, defendant Metodia met with him and revealed his

plan, which called for fleeing to Greece and attending the Paris Peace Conference with aims at uniting Macedonia as a protectorate of one of the Great Powers. Failing that, his aim was then to return to Greece and work with the Greek authorities to break the People's Republic of Macedonia away from the FPRY, and to merge it with Aegean Macedonia in a federation with the Monarcho-Fascist regime in Greece.

During the hearing, accused Metodija admitted that he had a special debt to Macedonia and that was to unify it by uniting the Yugoslav part together with the Bulgarian part or by uniting the Yugoslav part together with the Greek part. He wanted an independent Macedonia, from which the court gathered that in order to achieve that, the accused Metodija had a prerequisite and that was to separate the People's Republic of Macedonia from FPR Yugoslavia, which meant violating its territory. The Court concluded that, included in accused Metodija's activities were all the necessary elements for the existence of the crimes referred to in Article 3 item 2 of the Criminal Code against the People and against the State.

The Court was satisfied that the accused Metodija was also responsible for the crimes committed, as referred to by Article 2 item 7 of the Law. The Court based its findings on the indictment given by accused Nedelko who, at the hearing, declared that on July 13, 1946, the accused Metodija, at his home in Prilep, was preparing an escape over the Greek border. According to Nedelko, Metodija told him: "Because the old regimes have fallen I will go to Greece where I will organize an armed unit which will fight for a free Macedonia."

The Court was satisfied with Nedelko Makreski's story, which coincides with statements made by Mitre Mitreski, namely that Boshko Zagoranliev is one of the main defendants to whom Metodija first introduced his plan and offered him 100,000 dinars to transfer ten armed persons over to Greece. The Court has concluded that one of Metodija Andonov-Chento's goals was to escape to Greece and organize armed units which would then fight against the FPRY.

The Court's assurances that Metodija Andonov-Chento was responsible for the offense, covered by Article 3 item 9, were based

on Chento's own confession which was obtained from the testimony of witness Traiko and from statements made by Boris Zagoranliev. Chento's confession coincided with testimony provided by witness Traiko Beshoski. The Court has full confidence in Traiko's testimony who told the Court that the accused Metodija had told him that "if the People's Republic of Macedonia was not part of the FPRY community, then England and America would allow the People's Republic of Macedonia to join with other parts of Macedonia, namely Aegean and Pirin Macedonia", which in fact means that foreign forces would interfere in FPRY internal affairs.

Similarly, Boshko Zagoranliev categorically stated at the hearing that the accused Chento had told him his plan to flee to Greece so that he could attend the Peace Conference in Paris, where he planned to make a request to the Great Powers to unite the three parts of Macedonia and, as a whole, put them under the auspices of one of the Great Powers, and that the Great Power would then place him as an official of the government given that he had already been a former representative of the People's Republic of Macedonia. From that the Court has concluded that preparations were made for foreign forces to interfere in the FPRY's internal affairs. By acting on this, Chento has fulfilled all the elements necessary for a criminal offense defined by Article 3 item 9, and by Article 12 of the same Law.

In his defense, the accused Metodija has stated that he wanted to flee to Greece because, after his resignation and return to Prilep, he had been subjected to political and economic persecution by the people's government and that this persecution was his main motive for wanting to leave. The fulfillment of his debt to unite Macedonia in the manner described above was only a secondary motive. The Court has found no evidence to support his defense and therefore is rejecting it. But rather from his own statements and from statements made by witnesses Kiro Platnik, Risto Baialski and Petre Talev, which the Court has no reason not to trust, the correct verdict has been reached.

Witness Kiro told the court that the accused Metodija had personally told him that, in the short time he worked in his store, Metodija had made a lot more money than ever before. Witness Baialski again

said that he criticized Metodija's activities in the People's Assembly because, as a People's Representative, he could have jeopardized the basic benefits gained from the National Liberation War, specifically during the discussion of Article 1 of the FPRY Constitution.

Witness Talev testified that, as president of the GNO in Prilep, Chento issued an order to prohibit certain notorious drunkards from attending all the venues in the city, and not just his own tavern. On the other hand, Metodija had mentioned to the Court that during the time after submitting his resignation he was never summoned or punished by the authorities, nor was he banned from working in his store. On the basis of this, the Court rejected Chento's defense, calling it an attempt to divert attention from the real motive. According to the Court's assessment defendant Metodija's desire was not to escape to America in order to settle there and work, but to carry out his treacherous and defamatory work, as it was stated earlier. The Court could not accept the explanation given by the defendant's lawyer that Metodija had not committed any of the aforementioned acts and that they were only looking at attempts that never took place. The Court, however, disagreed with the lawyer for the following reasons: in its jurisdiction the Court had adopted an undisputed legal principle where an attempt to commit a criminal act was the same as committing that act because it carried consequences even if those consequences did not materialize. Therefore, the Court concluded that because the accused Metodija was prepared to execute the aforementioned act, flee to Greece, according to the law it was the same as actually committing that act. Regarding defendant Boris's criminal responsibility, the Court was satisfied with the full and clear confession that he gave about himself at the hearing and about the statements he made about the accused Metodija and Mitre.

In determining Metodija's sentence, the Court also took into consideration aggravating circumstances: i.e. he manifested insincerity in an attempt to cover up facts which were clearly determined at the hearing. He was absent of remorse and in view of the character of the crime, in the Court's opinion, the 11-year hard labour jail sentence was deemed appropriate...

Minutes taken by A. Ianashkov

Signed by Panta Marina President of the Judicial Council

After the verdict was read, Metodija Andonov-Chento was taken away to serve his sentence and placed in total isolation. On May 9, 1947, on Victory Day, the National Assembly issued a decree pardoning all persons convicted of similar acts for which Chento was convicted. His family demanded that the decree be applied to Chento as well, but that did not happen. The Skopje District Court Council, chaired by Panta Marina, rejected the request, stating that Chento was convicted of espionage, an act that was otherwise not covered by the decree.

After that Metodija Andonov-Chento himself wrote an appeal addressed to the Skopje District Court and to the Supreme Court of Macedonia... Here is what he wrote:

To the District Court in Skopje and to the Supreme Court of the People's Republic of Macedonia

This is an appeal from Metodija Andonov-Chento a prisoner in the Idrizovo Penitentiary

On November 21, 1947, the Skopje District Court adopted a decision to reject the application (submitted by Vasilka Andonova, Chento's wife) requesting my pardon on the basis of the May 9, 1947 Decree put forth by the FPRY National Assembly Presidium. The reason for the rejection was because my offense was viewed as espionage.

To prove that this decision was unfair please have a look at the verdict (11 years in prison) which was based on quite untrue testimonies and accusations, all of them used as material against me. But, on the other hand, any solid evidence brought up in support of my case was deemed incomplete and dismissed. Further, I can't think of any reason why my wife would not have appealed my verdict within the specified time limit. I believe the time limit complaint was issued because of fears that the truth may come to light and that is that I never committed a criminal offense deemed espionage. That is why I am providing you the following:

EXPLANATION

Included in the material available to the Court at the hearing for the crime I was convicted of were the indictment, statements made by the other defendants, statements made by the witnesses, and the public prosecutor's speech. In addition to having a lot of untruths presented about my crimes, my political past was also presented to the Court, but in the darkest of colour, to prejudice my case and to contribute to a tougher sentence. Because of that, I consider it necessary to separately answer to each charge. At the hearing I was restricted from speaking and my defense was limited, especially during the final summation, and thus my side of the story, the truth, was not presented. Now I would like to begin in a chronological order with my political past first, because it was made part of the process, even though I think it was not that important.

I was involved in politics in old Yugoslavia, for which I was persecuted from 1929 to 1941. I was punished and imprisoned many times... In the period from 1935 to 1939, I was a "Machek" supporter because Machek was a federalist. He was in support of a Yugoslav federation, and I too was a federalist, struggling for the Macedonian people's political and national rights and their economic protection. In 1939, Machek gave up on the Yugoslav federation, and for that reason I gave up on him. I remained a federalist. One year later, after he was elected vice-president in the government, I was sent to jail twice and spent nine months behind bars. Twice I was charged under the State Protection Act and, the second time, I would have been convicted and sent to jail for many years, but due to old Yugoslavia's capitulation, I was saved. At that time I was in jail in Baina Bashta. On April 15, 1941, the Intercity Military Court had twice sentenced me to face the firing squad, once by the gendarmerie and the second time by the military police, but thanks to the intervention of a number of loyal citizens, I was saved at the last moment.

When I returned from Baina Bashta to Skopje in 1941, I was summoned by the Macedonian National Committee, which supported the existence of a Macedonian territory but with a Bulgarian nationality. Stefan Stefanov was its president. The Committee appointed Anastasov, a lawyer from Kavadarci, to

explain to me the situation and to convince me to cooperate with the Bulgarian authorities because Macedonia, according to him, had now united with Bulgaria. My answer, in the presence of Matov and Engineer Tsvetko, was that I would not cooperate with the Bulgarian authorities because I do not feel like a Bulgarian. I am a Macedonian, and because of that it was important for me to unite the whole of Macedonia and gain national rights for the Macedonian people. This conversation took place on April 26, 1941, and that was my first and last contact with Stefan Stefanov and the Macedonian National Committee. Kiro Platnik knows this well.

Because of this, and for other reasons, I fell out of favour with the Bulgarian authorities. When the war between Germany and the Soviet Union began, Bulgarian agents forbade me from listening to news broadcast from Radio London. At the same time, they were looking for evidence to connect me with communist students who cooperated politically with me and, among others, Kuzman Iosifovski. One day Kuzman came to my store and not recognizing that there were enemy agents there, turned on the radio and began to listen to the London broadcast. In order to save his life, because he did not know the agents were there, I suddenly turned off the radio and, without an explanation, told him to go away. He left surprised. But the next day I explained to him that I had done that to save him. He told me that he was grateful for that.

The first communist flyers were distributed in Prilep on Petrovdan in 1941. Because of that, myself, my brother Nikola and Blagoi Popov, the current public prosecutor, were simultaneously arrested on the same day and sent to prison. Immediately after my arrest enemy agents went to my store looking for Kuzman Iosifovski who was expected to come to the bazaar and look for me in my store. But my assistants saved him and since then Kuzman has fled the city and joined the partisans. As for me, I was imprisoned four times, one time I was interned in a prison camp. I was freed in September 1943. After that I received a hand-written letter, delivered by Comrade Draga (wife of public prosecutor Nikola Vlazhalsky), with a request to meet Kuzman Iosifovski in Skopje. At the meeting, among other things, we decided that I should join the partisans, and with the connections that Kuzman gave me, I went to Debartsa. Then, on Ilinden in 1944, I was elected president of ASNOM.

From Ilinden, August 2, 1944 to April 16, 1945, I was part of the ASNOM Presidium and part of the legislative body in the people's government. As a people's representative and as President of the Presidium, I had the right and it was my duty to propose ideas and to make corrections where necessary. And in my opinion I did that with best intentions. At that time, some of my suggestions were not accepted, but they were neither arbitrary nor unlawful. On the other hand, no decision was made on my part that would be deemed unlawful. However, the suggestions I made at that time were later viewed by the Court as hostile "disagreements" and I was indicted because of them.

The Court characterized these "disagreements" as acts against FPRY internal and external policies, so my indictment and the verdict reached were based on "my disagreement with FPRY internal and foreign policies." From the testimonies given by witness Traiko Beshoski and defendants Nedelko, Boris and Mitre, one can see that there are differences and contradictions, especially in the untrue statements made by the defendants. Clearly these untrue statements were given in order to avoid punishment. For example:

Defendant Nedelko Makreski said that I wanted to go to Greece in order to organize troops and to fight against the FPRY. To prove that this testimony is not true all we have to do is compare it to the testimony given by witness Traiko Beshoski, who was my opponent, and who, among other things, said: "Metodia Andonov-Chento told me that he did not want to shed a single drop of blood for Macedonia and that he was looking to immediately leave for Solun by ship." In fact in my conversation with him I told Nedelko that once I arrive in Solun I would look for ways go to America and he too agreed to come with me. The idea that I was organizing an armed unit can be disproved by the fact that I have never been a terrorist in my entire life and that I do not know what is required to organize such an act. On the other hand, I am well-aware that a person cannot conquer a country with just an armed unit of ten men, even if they wanted to. I explained the reasons to Nedelko why I wanted to leave but those reasons were completely twisted.

Boris Zagoranliev testified that I told him why I intended to emigrate, that I gave him a draft copy of the project on the constitution so that he could see for himself why I had resigned and why I had decided to emigrate. But the allegations made that I wanted to go to Paris to the Peace Conference with aims at uniting Macedonia as a protectorate of some Great Power, was just a story. And so were the allegations made that if I did not succeed at the Paris Peace Conference, then I would return to Greece and violently unite the People's Republic of Macedonia with Aegean Macedonia in a federation with Greece. The idea that, after all that, I also suggested to him that he leave with me, was another story.

It is true, I did tell Boris that I wanted to leave. We talked about it and he wanted us both to leave together, but later, in a second conversation, I told him I had decided against it. It is true that I gave him a draft copy of the project on the constitution, and in connection with that we touched on the idea of unifying Macedonia. Namely, apart from Trieste, the unification of Macedonia could have been brought before the Paris Peace Conference, but not just by me. It is also true that I told him that if I was out of the country (Yugoslavia) during the Conference, I would support Macedonia's unification and self-determination, but never did I ever say that Macedonia should be a protectorate of a Great Power, or if I did not succeed at the Conference then I would struggle to unite the People's Republic of Macedonia with Aegean Macedonia in a federation with Greece by means of violence.

One can also look at these problems using logic and common sense. If a problem is not solved at a Peace Conference, then it will never be solved, neither with violence nor with Greek help. Greece had no authority or the military might to take the People's Republic of Macedonia away from Yugoslavia. I believe every conscious person can see that. I can't believe or tolerate the stupidity that is put before me.

Mitre Mitrevski testified that, on the day before I left, I had told him that I would cross the Greek border. That I would put my head in a bag and that it did not turn out as I thought... I don't remember exactly what I told him but even if I said that, I don't think that this can be considered espionage. "I will put my head in a bag," of

course, was the risk I was going to take in crossing the Greek border, and “it did not turn out as I thought,” is true, because I never thought that my life would be in danger in my Macedonia.

Witness Traiko Beshoski testified that I told him that I wanted to flee to Solun, find a man who would be willing to transport me across the Greek border, and from Solun I would leave with an American ship before the start of the Paris Peace Conference so that I could commit to the unification of Macedonia. And that, there I would be able to unite Macedonia with help from England and America, without a drop of blood. He also testified that, in addition, the profits from the tobacco should be put in our wallet.

Beshoski’s testimonies are almost true, because he has covered the gist of what was said but not completely to exact the truth out of them. There were certain changes to certain words which I don’t think were intentionally made but, on the other hand, these changes were to my detriment. There are also very important words which were said in our conversation that he neglected to mention in his testaments. These words point to the truth. These words referred to the unification in connection to Russia, England and America.

Namely, there was no longer a need for a war. Macedonia can be united under peaceful means which will be best for everyone. I personally don’t want to shed a drop of blood for Macedonia. But in order to unite Macedonia, first of all, there is need for consent from the Great Powers. Russia recognizes our problems but it is not enough, because our problems need to also be recognized by both England and America. But in order to achieve this we need to and are obliged to stand, especially now, before the Peace Conference and demand our right to self-determination.

Because I had no right to directly cross-examine the witness during the trial, I tried to ask my questions indirectly, through the Court president. I asked him to ask the witness what we discussed in relation to the Great Powers. Regarding this the Court president said: “The old man does not remember anything about that.” Beshoski did not answer and an important part of our conversation remained unclear. As for the wallet and the tobacco, it is not a secret, because I made a written proposal for this to be included in

the project for the constitution. Now, looking back at the entire conversation I had with Beshoski, I don't think there is anything there that can be deemed espionage...

This is also what Metodija Andonov-Chento wrote in his appeal, after his family's request for pardon was rejected by the Presidium (1947):

A gang of ten people was mentioned in the indictment, but not to the investigative authorities or to the public prosecutor's office. What is true and what are lies? What kind of gang were they talking about? Only those who said this know about it. Personally I know nothing about this nor have I heard anything from anyone about such a gang. Look through the Court records, examine my conversations with the defendants and with the witness and you will find that no such subject was ever discussed. I did want to go to Solun and then leave Greece. It would be illogical for me to leave Greece if I had any connection to any gang I was supposed to lead inside Greece. And why would it be necessary for me to cross the Greek border with a gang and declare war on Yugoslavia from the outside? Why couldn't I do the same thing from inside?

Given that the existence of a gang was mentioned, isn't it strange that not a single gang member's name was mentioned? Even though this information was very important to the Court, isn't it strange that no place was ever mentioned where this gang congregated or resided and from where were its members? And finally, a year and a half after I was sent to jail, there is still no trace of such a gang, and no evidence that I had some kind of relationship with it.

Witness Petre Talev testified that when I was president of the GNO in Prilep, I refused to allow some of my customers to come to my store. He also testified that I was against the one time tax. However, when I was president I did sign and approve that tax. The only suggestion I made was to correct existing mistakes, specifically the way Strumitsa was taxed to pay 3 million while Prilep was taxed with 149 million, and the thinking was that it should have been taxed 170 million leva. The tax levied on some companies was very heavy and on the one in which I was the levy was very light. So, I proposed that the tax on this company (even though it was to my

detriment) be raised from 300 thousand to 1 million. My proposal was happily accepted and approved, especially by Secretary Kole Chashule. One company, having no money to pay the tax, paid it with gold but at that time there was no fixed value for the gold. A week later the company came up with the money and went to the tax office to pay its taxes and retrieve its gold. Petre asked me what to do. I told him that, in my opinion, if the company paid its taxes in full with money then its gold should be returned. However, my advice was not accepted. But even if it had been accepted it would have caused no harm.

The honest thing to do for Kiro Platnik would have been to tell the Court that, for two years my store was sending food and other needs to the partisans in Prilep, for which I was sent to jail four times. And another thing, if I was his enemy why then did Kuzman Iosifovski have a meeting with me in 1943 in Skopje? A paid informer maliciously betrayed my intervention with deadly consequences. I spoke publicly about this in the National Assembly on April 15, 1945, after which I was elected President of the Presidium. Witness Risto Baialski, a national representative, testified that he attacked me during a meeting and then maliciously rejected a proposal I made for the project on the constitution which was not a secret, and which was not a criminal offense.

In his closing statement the public prosecutor repeated all the points in the indictment and all the statements made by the defendants and witnesses, whether they were true or not. Among other things, he went over my political life in old Yugoslavia and my connections with Machek and Dragoliub, and those with Stefanov and Kuzman Iosifovski Pitu. I have already said enough about my connections with Machek, Stefanov and Kuzman. As for Dragoliub, all I can say is that in old Yugoslavia I had links with certain progressive Macedonian students, among whom was public prosecutor Blagoi Popovski. It would have been the decent thing to do for Popovski if he mentioned that he and I were among the first people to be arrested on Petrovdan and imprisoned during the occupation in 1941.

Generally speaking, the verdict, with a severe punishment for me, was based on this material, whether it was true or not. Analyzed

objectively one can establish a legal offense for attempting to flee by crossing a border illegally. But in no case was there an attempt, an objective, an act of espionage, an aim for armed struggle, a purpose for secession of land from Yugoslavia, an accession with Greece, or for Macedonia to be a protectorate of a foreign power.

From all this, one can conclude that Macedonia's unification is of great interest to me and that, in my opinion, is the best and correct solution. I consider this to be "our right to self-determination" which I support and would have supported if I were abroad, as an immigrant.

I don't hide this because I consider it to be my duty. I proposed that Macedonia's unification be discussed during the project and to be included in the constitution, referring to all three parts of Macedonia, and not just the People's Republic of Macedonia as an exclusive part.

My basic and justifiable reasons, which led me to want to leave this country, in a moment of weakness, are as follows: One can find something specific in every politician. That was the case with me. I had points of view for some things that were different than those of my comrades. One such case was my view on the project for drafting the constitution. I prepared a written proposal, an amendment, requesting to introduce rights to self-determination and to provide the national republics with more freedom to manage their economic sector. Because of this, and because of some other earlier differences, but not necessarily illegitimate or unlawful, a negative campaign was started against me.

I wanted to avoid conflict among ourselves, not so much for me, but for our political interests in general, because I was the President of the Presidium. To do that I took measures to curb this campaign against me and to stop it from spreading. Unfortunately on March 7, 1946 while attending a Main Board Conference of the People's Front in Skopje, 12 people maliciously attacked me, accusing me of many untrue things. Among other things, I was accused of being an opponent of the agrarian law. However, my view on this law was as follows: I proposed that we leave one hectare of land to those landowners who had more than 25 hectares so that they could work

and provide a living for themselves. My view on this was well known to all the members of the Presidium. In practice this proved that I was right. Some time after I resigned, the central law in this regard was changed. After that, among other things, I was attacked and accused of being a friend of the IRZ, of the Germans and of Jemo's gang, while all of Macedonia knew, and those who attacked me also knew very well, that I had fought against the IRZ, against the Germans and against Jemo. Among other things, I was also attacked for proposing constitutional amendments. I was told: "We will expel you from office."

I believe I am an honest and conscientious person but with all these untrue charges leveled against me I could no longer function and the most sensible thing left for me to do was to resign and withdraw from political life altogether.

After I resigned I returned to Prilep thinking that I would have a peaceful life, provide for my family and that should not bother anyone because I was no longer in any authority. Unfortunately my assumptions proved to be wrong. As a result of what took place at the Main Board Conference of the People's Front in Skopje, things in Prilep took a fateful turn for the worse. Most devastating of all were the following: a ban was placed on people shopping at my store; the union would not allow me to purchase beer even though I had the right to sell it; at the People's Assembly, Platnik and Baialski intimidated those people who visited my store; the villages were agitated so that the villagers would not come to shop in my store, this was especially done by President Traiko from the village Beshishte. A street in Bitola that carried my name was changed. The change in itself did not mean anything, but the comments and attacks against me that came with it were very hurtful and demeaning.

Milan Ianevski, a watchmaker from Prilep, told me to my face that the government authorities would destroy me. But I did not pay attention to Milan's warning even though, at that time, he had five sons who were important political officials in the government. Lazo Cheshlar told me that "like we killed the Trotskyists, we will kill you too." But, I never did give any serious importance to Lazo's

warning, even though he had a son who was chief of security in Prilep.

A couple of times my store was branded as “an anti-government gathering place”, the first time was during old Yugoslavia and the second time was during the occupation. During these times my customers were intimidated and punished for gathering there. But I never thought that my shop would be attacked and my customers chastised for a third time, and especially by the Assembly of the People’s Republic of Macedonia.

During the Bulgarian occupation, the Serbians of old Yugoslavia intimidated me with threats of murder, but I never thought that Macedonians too would threaten me with murder.

These are only a few of the factors, viewed from an economic and political point of view, that led me to resign and to want to flee Macedonia, to leave my hometown, my father’s home, to leave my wife and four little children to an uncertain destiny, and to risk my own life.

When Ian Hus was burning in the fire, an old woman, who was unable to bring a bigger piece of wood, brought only a stick and placed it on the fire, to fulfill her holy duty. Her descendants I have felt in myself.

During the hearing, I was questioned by the Court as to why I wanted to flee just before the Paris Peace Conference, why I wanted to go to Greece and from there to America, and why I was going to look for Petre Sokolovski in Solun, whom the prosecutor described as a revolutionary.

I thought I would go to Greece because it was the closest border to here, and because in Karadzova I knew some Macedonians who would secretly take me to Solun, where I also knew people who would help me leave with UNRA for America. There I had Macedonian friends and relatives who were prepared to help me so that I didn’t depend politically on anyone except my own conviction.

I thought I would secretly travel through Greece because I was afraid of the Greek government because here, at public rallies, I publicly condemned the Greek regime for perpetrating terror tactics against the Macedonian people. If I did not find any of the people I knew there, then I thought of looking for Petre Sokolovski because he, from age 15, was a clerk at the Solun port and knew the movement of ships. As a person from Prilep, I thought that he would help me, but all that was up to him. If he did not help me, I thought at least he would not betray me to the Greek government. I knew about his political past. He was disgraced during the January sixth dictatorship and, as a result of that, he went to live in Solun.

The Paris Peace Conference was also mentioned during the trial but its timing was only a coincidence. Whether or not the Peace Conference was taking place, I was forced to leave because of the above-stated reasons, but not as a spy. Being inside Macedonia or out, I always had the same vision for our unification and for our right to self-determination. I was all for unification and for the right of our people in all three parts of Macedonia to freely decide their own destiny of their own free will. But in no case did I have any ambitions for a secession of the People's Republic of Macedonia from Yugoslavia and for unification with Greece.

I consider it necessary to mention at this point that, if someone was a spy, then they would have been prepared to endure all humiliation and would not give up on their mission. They would fight by all means possible to successfully achieve their goal. Another thing, during the one and a half years after I was imprisoned many changes were made in the FНРY, and especially in Macedonia. If there was anything about any espionage on my part that would have given support to the untrue statements made against me, traces of it would have been found. Where is the evidence to support espionage?

At the end of the verdict, it was said: the punishment was made stricter because Chento did not show any remorse.

And how could I have repented about some things that I did not do, or did not mean to do!

I think my verdict may have been different if I was allowed to speak freely and point to a letter published in the American newspaper "People's will", as well as to call on three other witnesses Traiko, President of Beshishte, Milan and Lazo from Prilep to testify on my behalf and show how my life was being threatened. Do you not find it strange that all the witnesses invited to testify at my trial were my opponents and all of them spoke against me with aims at clouding the truth? In any case, of the six witnesses that came before the court, three confirmed my allegations. Hence, it should be appreciated that I was telling the truth without having the ability to cross examine the existing witnesses or to call on new witnesses, that truth was muddled.

From all that I wrote above, I hope that the Supreme Court will see that, in all I have done, I am not guilty of espionage and that I have the right to be pardoned. I hope justice will prevail.

Skopje, December 4, 1947

Courteously, Metodija Andonov-Chento
Convict at the penitentiary in Skopje

Metodija Andonov-Chento's appeal was not accepted. The Supreme Court of Macedonia did nothing for him except confirm the Skopje District Court's decision. The explanation given was that "Chento was convicted of espionage, a criminal offense against the FPRY, and such persons are exempt from being pardoned by the Decree". The explanation also said that, "one should not look for a sharp and narrow interpretation under the word espionage, and demand that the person be tried according to Article 3, item 10 of the Law on Crimes against the People and against the State".

Chento, however, was not satisfied with the explanation he received from the Supreme Court of Macedonia and requested a clarification of Article 3 of this Law. He wanted to know which point in the law deemed him a spy. His request was also sent to the Presidium of the National Assembly of Yugoslavia, but this request never reached its destination, and he never received an answer to the question he asked.

Sometime after his trial, Chento's case file was closed, practically forever. According to statements made by his contemporaries and witnesses, it was suggested to him that if he wanted to be released from his sentence then he should petition for forgiveness. In other words, accept the charges leveled against him, plead guilty, repent and promise to never again engage in politics... Chento, however, did not want to do that and remained true to his position. He did not want to humiliate himself by disrespecting the truth, especially the facts he offered at the trial and the statements he made in his appeals. He was still puzzled and no one offered him an explanation as to why the first appeal was never made on time before the deadline expired. He was also puzzled as to why his wife did not deliver the appeal to the Court herself. The reasons for this remained unknown to him, although there are many versions of the story. There are also many versions of the story regarding his second appeal.

"I was convicted of crimes that I neither thought of, spoke of, nor committed," wrote Chento. Later, after he resigned from the presidency and returned to Prilep, Chento was thrust into isolation, both economic and personal. He faced threats from people all around him, even death threats. Very few people knew and believed that he was not a spy, that he was not arrested at the border, that he did not know anything about any gangs, that he never condoned violence, and that his verdict was based on false testimonies and allegations.

Chento was treated like a common criminal and sent to Idrizovo Prison to serve his over 3,000 day hard labour prison sentence under a strict regime. As a matter of fact his sentence was "fit for" a "villainous" convict. All over the world prison regimes are a story of their own and Chento was going to experience one of them. He was going to pay for the crimes he never committed with his health, both mental and physical, and experience hell behind bars that included isolation, starvation, and deaf years regarding his pleas (even from the Minister of the Interior) when his health was failing him.

Sometime in 1955, he began to feel weaker and exhausted. He complained to the prison guards that his health was failing him. One day, after nine years and four months in prison, he was told that he

would be allowed to go home. He was surprised because he did not expect this and neither did he ask for it. When he asked why and what had changed, he was not given an explanation. He was told the decision was final and that he was due to leave Idrizovo and go to Prilep. On September 4, 1955, he was released and his prison term ended. Chento was freed at age 53.

Chento, however, was not content without having been given an explanation for his release, so he made inquiries at the Idrizovo Police Regiment, asking for clarification as to why he was unconditionally released and why he was not informed beforehand. Unfortunately he never got a reply.

After he was released, Chento returned to Prilep but found things to be different. He found that living with his family and loved ones was no longer the same. He wanted to work and took on jobs in the Prilep fields, as a steel fitter and as a brick layer. When he was working on the city café, people from all over Prilep came to see their former president toil in construction work. But Chento honourably earned his piece of bread and was never ashamed of doing what was necessary to support his family.

In the meantime, security organs in Prilep followed Chento's every step, and meticulously recorded all their observations including descriptions of persons he made contact with. Those who Chento invited to have a conversation with were warned not to talk to him and were threatened with harm if they continued to do so. So Metodija Andonov-Chento was once again isolated, this time as a free man in his own hometown, even after having served a heavy prison sentence.

Chento's health continued to deteriorate. The incurable disease he had continued to take its toll on him. He had serious surgery performed on his stomach but it did not help. He wanted to go to Switzerland for treatment but he was not allowed. During the summer his illness turned from bad to worse.

On July 24, 1957, Metodija Andonov-Chento died of cancer. Many of his friends, acquaintances and sympathizers attended his funeral and participated in the funeral procession in Prilep. Unfortunately

many more did not, fearing eventual consequences. Metodia Andonov-Chento, the first president of Macedonia, was buried among the “ordinary people” in his family plot in the cemetery in the city of Prilep, where his remains are resting to this day.

We knocked on many doors and contacted many people, contemporaries, associates, comrades and acquaintances, to get their impression and search their memories about Metodia Andonov-Chento, a politician, a man, a patriot and a president who voluntarily left his high office and still was tried and convicted. Many of those people did not want to speak to us, some sent us away, some spoke, but only briefly, but did not want to disclose much information, especially the names of those associated with Chento’s ordeals. It was almost impossible to get people to talk... to tell the truth about what had happened to Chento. Even his own family, his daughter and sons, were reluctant to speak to us about him, and when they did, it was with a dose of restraint, perhaps a lesson learned from their experience in life.

When we asked people to tell us what they knew about Chento, they did not want their names connected with him. Some briefly responded as follows.

Lazar MoisoV, then a judge, now a layman, said: “I have nothing to say...”

Panta Marina, then President of the Judicial Council, said: “Nothing, nothing, nothing...”

Even though Tsvetko Uzunovski - Abas, then Minister of the Interior, received us very kindly, the answer he gave us was very short and categorical. Here is what he said: “I promised and swore that I would not publicly engage in politics, that I would not speak about the case, and that I would not break my promise. History is for the historians. And because this was what I decided to do a long time ago, this is how I will remain today...” He then said: “There is no revolution without mistakes and we tend to learn from them as we go along. But when we look at the problem from every aspect... this is precisely the question... it is necessary to look at the bigger

picture and see what has been gained from doing this? If the revolution does not correct its mistakes, then it will fail...”

In answering our questions regarding Metodi Andonov-Chento’s case, including his criticisms, resignation, arrest, trial and prison, in an unofficial capacity and during an unconvincing conversation, Tsvetko Uzunovski said that things needed to be clarified and the truth uncovered. He said: “We can now say unified Macedonia, but in those days it was too dangerous; Chento believed that the Macedonian Question was not resolved and advocated for its internationalization.” During our “unofficial” conversation we touched on the topic of the struggle for power in those days, the enormous power and influence the top Party figures had and that their word was final. We also spoke about the NOB instructors and the overwhelming competency they afforded themselves and the instructors of the CPY Central Committee, etc.

Bogoia Fotev, then Minister of Agriculture in Macedonia and a colleague and friend of Chento, was among the first who had the courage to uncover the taboo about Chento and publicly demand that the truth be revealed.

“What made you take such a step?” we asked the energetic 90-year-old Bogoia Fotev.

“Chento and I were good friends. I knew him very well. It was most unfortunate what happened to him. The trial did not go the way it was supposed to. I learned about Chento’s ordeal from Tode Noshpal, during a moment of sincerity. I heard that Chento was set up. Noshpal found people in Mariovo, where Chento had many friends. They used his friends to set him up in this game that, as you know, ended very badly. I had my suspicions that something was not right when I found out that Chento was not arrested at the border, but at home. If you put all this together then you know that great trickery was involved. It was so well-organized and fine-tuned that they managed to get him. It wasn’t easy because Chento was a smart man.”

“Do you remember anything else about him?” we asked.

“I remember the tobacco fiasco. At the end of the war large quantities of tobacco were found in the monopoly’s warehouses, about 6 million kilograms to be exact. This was a very important Macedonian product, which at that time was worth as much as gold. The Presidium had great hopes that it would use the money from its sale to solve many of the problems Macedonia was experiencing. Then a delegation from Belgrade arrived and wanted to take the tobacco from Macedonian hands. During a joint meeting, most Presidium members voted for the tobacco to stay in Macedonia, also among them was Chento. There was a stormy discussion, but in the end they did what the Party wanted them to do, and that was to take the tobacco to Belgrade. Macedonia was left without money,” replied Bogoa.

“What about the amendment, and the plebiscite?” we asked.

“Chento made Macedonia prominent. When we were leading discussions about our brothers from Aegean and Pirin Macedonia, Chento stood behind the point that a plebiscite should take place in which all Macedonians needed to vote and see whether they wanted a united or a divided Macedonia. An example of this was the amendment that Chento proposed to be added to the first Constitution. In this amendment Chento demanded self-determination to secession of nations. This was a real explosion at that time. A meeting of the Macedonian Parliamentary Club was immediately convened. I also spoke at that meeting. I said that Chento was rushing things because no one else had filed such an amendment, except for us Macedonians,” replied Bogoa.

“But the way we see things today, we don’t believe Chento made a mistake. What happened next?” we asked.

“As we all know, in due course things became complicated. Chento resigned and returned to Prilep. Then, during a session of the Macedonian National Assembly, Tsvetko Uzunovski, then Minister of the Interior, announced that “Chento, our national enemy, is in the hands of the state security”. The announcement was followed by loud applause in the Parliament hall.

In the end, after the staged trial was over and Chento was sentenced to 11 years in prison, I truly felt sad about the whole affair. He was a fair and honorable man, a great patriot, and he did not deserve that,” replied Bogoia.

“Is that everything you have?” we asked.

“Until 1948, we thought that we were building communism and that we were soldiers of the Party. We believed in the Party. Just take a look at Panko Brashnarov’s case, a man who was cruelly put to death on Goli Otok. There were also plenty of ‘courier seekers’ in the war, rotten immoral bastards, as well as idealists and honest people,” concluded Bogoia.

This is what Maria Andonova - Iakimoska (Metodia Andonov-Chento’s daughter), an architect in Prilep, had to say:

“I can never forget how difficult it was to live for decades and decades with severe and unwanted scars. I was a child when my father, who loved Macedonia more than anything in the world, was labeled a traitor to his own country and people. We, his family had to live in misery and go through hell...

How does a person feel about this? What do you expect from us when all doors were slammed in our face? How do you think we felt the countless times we were placed in front of the impenetrable walls of silence? Nothing was normal for us. Every step we took and everything we did was made difficult for us. My mother had to wait 25 years to receive her pension and sadly my father got his just before he died.”

This was the first time Maria spoke about her family’s situation openly but it was brief and with reservations.

“Our lives were constantly filled with fear and uncertainty and we struggled for a crust of bread to survive. This was our life, our destiny... My mother never gave up and remained steadfast and proud even though she had to work dawn to dusk washing clothes, weaving, planting tobacco, and whatever else she could do to feed our family. On top of that she struggled to educate us and bring us

up properly, myself and my brothers Ilia, Andon and Vladimir...” added Maria.

Maria also reminded us of another detail. She said: “After my father was arrested, when we still did not know what would happen to him, our furniture was confiscated. We had bought this furniture while we were in Skopje with our own money and we had receipts to prove it, but they took it anyway. I was very young but still I remember this well. They came with two trucks but we had no idea what they were going to take. They did this to show everyone that Chento was unjustly enriching himself... They took away a couch, a few chairs, a table and that was the extent of Chento’s wealth...” concluded Maria, Chento’s daughter.

This is what Metodija Stoikoski, Chento’s personal driver, from when Chento was President of the Presidium, had to say: “Chento will never be forgotten because he was the kind of person who was able to make many friends whose friendship would last for a long time. I was one of the people very close to him at all times while he was president of the Presidium. I was his personal driver but I also drove others. I traveled with Chento all throughout Macedonia and outside of it. I watched how he approached people when they stopped him. He was always very cordial, listened to them and wanted to help them.

When we were in Skopje I would not start the car because I knew Chento would refuse my offer to drive him home. He lived in the city centre and often said that there was no need to drive him. He would also dismiss his personal guard. He never felt like he was in any danger. He would often say: “We fought to get rid of the gendarmes, of whom should I be afraid now? The people are with me here and there is no one to fear, so why have guards?” His modesty and ability to make immediate relationships made him a characteristically great human being, unlike some of the others who otherwise controlled their lives...”

Photographer Vasile Desoski who was in prison with Chento in the Bulgarian camps, referring to Chento from decades ago, said: “I knew Chento from the bazaar. He was an honest and lively person. As a man in authority he was unselfish and helped the poor. He

often forgave the debts of those who had no money to pay. He was also well-known for helping the partisans.

I remember very well the many days we spent together in the Chuchuligovo camp in Bulgaria. Chento was a healthy man, an athlete, and worked on the railway line and on the rock crushers harder than all of us. I remember when they released us we had a little bit of free time in Sofia so we went inside an antique shop. Chento bought a book about the Miladinov brothers which we read on the way back to Prilep. And I must say that the idea about Macedonia never left Chento. He gave his all for Macedonia and saved none for himself...”

Dimitar Aleksievski-Pekar was in charge of the Second Department of the UDBA Operational Zone. (Many of the people we ran into knew the name “Pekar” in direct relation to Chento’s arrest in Prilep, so it was only logical to solicit his opinion). Here is what Pekar had to say:

“When referring to past events it is always important to carefully examine the situation under which these events took place and the steps taken to remedy them. As far as Chento is concerned, I must say, that even though my name was associated with him, I personally did not participate in his arrest. I didn’t have a need to. At that time I was head of the Second Department of the UDBA Operational Zone in Macedonia. Based on the information our people collected from their contacts, we determined that Chento was preparing to flee to America through Greece, so an arrest warrant was issued. There was special documentation prepared by the competent services for the entire trial. Prior to his arrest and afterwards, special commissions were appointed, including a federal one, to check all the evidence. This means that nothing happened by chance and there were reasons and causes for his arrest.”

“Where was Chento actually arrested?” we asked.

“The people of UDBA arrested Chento in Prilep, at his home. I don’t remember exactly where I was, but I know that I was not in Prilep that day because I did not need to be there for the arrest.

Immediately after UDBA services arrested Chento they transferred him to Skopje. The interrogation was conducted by the investigative authorities with whom our UDBA service had no contact. Everything that was needed to be done by UDBA was done. UDBA held Chento very briefly which lasted from his arrest to his handover to the investigative authorities.

But, as I recall, there were documents for which we were responsible. This is how things were done at the time, we performed our assigned tasks. After that the trial took place and you know how it ended...” concluded Dimitar Aleksievski-Pekar.

This is what Kiro Pop Atanasoski, a craftsman who for many years worked at the Prilep bazaar, had to say: “Many provocations took place after Chento was arrested. There were many of us, and not just me, who were watched. But I didn’t care and did my work as usual. It is a fact that all the time, and throughout all the regimes, Chento deftly emphasized his national being, which was costly and cost him a lot in the end. The unhappy event in the Prilep Gymnasium in 1940 was not forgotten. He was a courageous person. He had the courage to stand up in front of so many people in that auditorium, especially in front of those fanatics who despised us and to say all those things... it was really unheard of at the time. He suffered mistreatment, beatings and imprisonment and never broke down... As far as attempting to flee across the Greek border, if he wanted to he could have without difficulty and without the authorities finding out, because all the people in Mariovo were his friends. They would have taken him anywhere he wanted to go...”

Here is what, among other things, Blagoi Choneski, president of the Municipal Board of fighters in Prilep, had to say: “Chento was a stubborn but brave man who at age 42 was convinced to join the partisans. By doing so he served as an example for many others from Prilep. As a result a large number of men from Prilep took part in the National Liberation War. As a partisan he participated in the brigades and took part in many of the long marches including the one from Debartsa to the Aegean part of Macedonia, to Koziak and Kumanovo...”

Tsvetan Stefanovski, a pensioner, gave us an interesting detail worth mentioning here. He said: “One day in the summer of 1946, I was ordered to go to Kavadarci Region on duty. There I received an order to get ready for action because Chento was preparing to flee across the border... That’s the only thing I was told, nothing more. I saw Chento the day before at the bazaar, he was doing something in front of his store.” This means that the script was written well in advance and everything that was going to happen to Metodija Andonov-Chento was preplanned.

Sava Kantardzhieva from Ohrid was present at Chento’s trial at the District Court in Skopje. She recalled having expressed a desire many times to speak about and around the atmosphere at the Court. She said: “On the first day when we were expecting the accused to arrive, a group of young people, consisting mostly of young women, arrived. We, and some of Chento’s relatives, found ourselves sitting on the benches among these women. They seemed to be well-organized.

At the beginning of the trial, when answering questions, and even when the charges were read, I could see that Chento was overwhelmingly calm. It was very strange, because it was well-known that he was quite temperamental. Here we were looking at a completely different person. What happened to him? What changes took place and why? I’ve been wondering about that for a long time and it’s really still not clear to me. I remember he only occasionally defended himself. He said that he did not flee and that he was not caught at the border... Those present in the court laughed loudly at Chento. In fact the very moment he opened his mouth they laughed... they upset him terribly and distracted him from the interrogation. I can understand how the defendant felt.

In the evening when the trial ended for the day Chento’s wife and I were on our way to a friend’s house to spend the night there. Along the way, as we talked loudly and indignantly about the trial, a person passed us by in the dark and rudely told us to stop talking or he would have to take us in (arrest us). This unknown yet recognizable scolding truly silenced and scared us. We did not say a single word after that,” concluded Kantardzhieva.

This is what Milan Samakoski, a retired lawyer from Prilep, had to say about Chento: “I knew him from the time he was a child until he was an old man. Since 1923 he was in the ranks of those who fought for Macedonia’s liberation and continued to be there until his death. He did not like the Greater Serbians or Greater Bulgarians, or those who pretended to be in support of the Macedonian revolutionaries... who pretended to be remnants of the rebels and freedom fighters, and so on. Also he was always at odds with the regimes and police. During those difficult and dangerous times, Chento was the messenger of freedom for Macedonia and for the Macedonian people. He entered the scene with great enthusiasm and authority, as a tireless fighter and agitator of freedom and progressive ideas...”

“People say he was a stubborn man, what do you know about that?” we asked.

“Yes, I heard that before, I read it somewhere and heard people call him stubborn. They gave the impression that he was a difficult person to deal with. But all that is far from the truth. He was a Macedonian, an honest and principled person, completely committed to the idea of fighting against the occupiers and against Macedonia’s partition. What some consider stubbornness was in fact a firm conviction of principles.

Chento was always with us, with the student groups, which greatly influenced the people to join the revolution. His store was a well-known centre for the gathering of activists and revolutionaries. He never stopped helping the people or the partisans whom he joined at an older age. And, in the end, he was chosen to be the first president of the first free Macedonia after many centuries of occupation. As for me, I would never believe that Chento was a spy or a hostile person in a hundred lifetimes. He was not that kind of person...”

This is what Vera Atseva had to say about Chento: “His struggles and position for the rights and interests of the Macedonian people are well-known. It is also well-known that as a civic politician, although he was not a communist, he cooperated with us, with the members of the Party, in whose ranks he took place during the National Liberation War. He was his own man and was persuaded only by facts and not just by discipline and verbalism...”

I don't know when he was deposed as president and sent to prison, but I know those things did happen because, according to some, he defended the bourgeoisie. Today, as an older person, I appreciate that. He was an experienced man at the time and supported moderate actions. Sadly, most of us, a large number of the Prilep leaders, no matter where we were and whether we were informed directly, indirectly or not at all, and because of our excessive idealism, youth and naivety, we were not able to perceive some of the political games being played. All in all, it seems that even some of the most popular people in Macedonia were not desirable at the time..."

Here is what Borko Temelkovski-Liliak had to say about his experience with Chento: "I had no direct contact with Metodija Andonov-Chento. During the war we were on different sides of the battlefields in Macedonia. As a result we never met, even when we were members of the first Initiative Board for the convening of ASNOM, formed in the fall of 1943, when Chento was president and the Board consisted of only six members.

In the beginning I regarded him as a great Macedonian, a patriot and an honest man who, with his own understanding and in his own world, remained a civil politician with a good reputation. He accepted the Party line and openly, actively and honestly cooperated with it...

But later, after the liberation war was over, a part of the population, including Chento, remained with its own views and, if I could call it that, gazed at its own horizon. And when the revolution, in the period when the new government was being established, was forced to undertake sharper and, at certain times, more rigorous measures for its consolidation, to solve important life problems associated with the population's existence, with supplying the military, etc... under those conditions it was necessary to implement certain unpopular measures including confiscation, taxation of the wealthier and so on. When this was happening Chento began to slowly distance himself... According to him some of these measures were immoral..." concluded Borko Temelkovski-Liliak.

"Which measures did Chento actually resist?" we asked.

“Certainly it was not important which ones, but all measures implemented by the Republic were not without excesses. No. Because at times the behaviour and movements of individual people, who were required and who had to implement those measures, could not be controlled. That is why there were excesses that did not have legal basis, which were not in line with the revolution and fueled a feeling that something was wrong. Among others, I suppose, Chento was one of those people who resisted...

However, it shouldn't have mattered how many mistakes he made and how many times he deviated from the Party line, these disagreements should not have been the reason for breaking away with him, much less the reason that he should be treated as an enemy. Therefore, the basic thing that should have continued to keep Chento in the ranks, where he was elected, was the role he played during NOV, especially as the first president of ASNOM, his honesty, his Macedonian patriotism, and his willingness to cooperate with the people's government.

“What about the many remarks of criticism he had made?” we asked.

“The criticisms that he repeatedly expressed in relation to the government's politics may have been unacceptable, but they had to be taken as an illustration of the feelings expressed by an honest man and as a demonstration of disagreement about certain actions. Unfortunately the government for some reason felt very sensitive and did not appreciate his criticisms so it decided to break with him. To this day, it is not clear to me why this happened. I believe the reason for the break-up may have been Chento's autonomist views, his thesis for Macedonia's secession and merger with other states, as well as his insistence that the Macedonian Question be placed before the UN.

All this information about Chento that was given to the Politburo, as far as I was concerned, came from Party sources and was believed to be true. I, however, could not verify its authenticity because of OZNA's status. What was offered to us was certainly bothering, at least that's what we believed, but it had already been checked out in

competent places. Although perhaps we should have hesitated, but some things in those days were accepted as offered, even painfully, but were accepted. Those who later will tell you differently are insincere.

After Chento collided with the Party, the Party membership accepted the position of the Party. We even had discussions to uphold the Party line and to reject Chento's views. We did this because of the kind of information we received. We accepted this information as accurate and true.

As for the arrest, it is quite clear to me, at least judging by what was published in the press, that Chento did not flee across the border, but was taken from his home. As for the claims that appeared in the press that Chento was wrongly convicted, no one had denied them until now.

Given the time these events took place, one should not forget that the Party system was under Bolshevik and Stalinist influence. Everything that was done and every communist leader in such a constellation of relations, worked for all the communists. And, as long as such a person had a Party book, that person was a communist and a special kind of person who did not make mistakes and everything that that person did was well done. But, the moment that person lost their book they were left behind as an outcast.

This meant that you were either a saint or a devil and there was nothing in between..." concluded Borko Temelkoski-Liliak while thinking about Metodia Andonov-Chento.

Dimche Mire, then education official of Federal Macedonia, in regards to Chento, was asked: "Is it essential for the people to know the truth or not?"

In replying to the question, Dimche Mire said: "The people must know the truth. It is very dangerous for us to be silent. When they are not told they are lied to. No one should run away from their responsibility, no matter what it is..."

"Was Chento truly labeled an enemy?" we asked.

“Yes, Chento was labeled an enemy but only by the circles at the top who made decisions, held power, and whose pronouncements were final. As a person and as an activist in the old Yugoslavia, Chento was the best kind of patriot that Macedonia could wish for. He grew up in poverty and had a huge desire to succeed. And he did succeed. He became a first-class citizen. Everything that he earned in Prilep he did with honesty, with his own labour, and without stealing and plotting. During the revolution, when he left, he left everything behind and went to join the partisans with much conviction, as a great patriot. No one can deny him that!

He did not accept things at face value, and if he was convinced of something, he had the courage to defend his position. He was a devoted Macedonian above all which made some people unhappy. On top of that he was not a communist. No. But he was a progressive person, and not by chance. About 35 of us, all intellectuals from Prilep, convinced Chento to be our candidate in the 1938 elections. We supported him as a deputy of Chichenich in the parliamentary elections. And, no matter how much he was pressured he could not be broken. But you can't accuse him of being an enemy just because of that. He was not an enemy. His stubbornness and persistence in defending his position should not be misinterpreted.

He was a daring fighter. I have always said that he was not afraid of anything; there was no power that could scare him. The occupiers did everything to turn him but he did not give in. He fought fiercely against them. He joined the revolution out of conviction and out of deep and purely Macedonian ideals. He was a hardworking man and could not imagine himself sitting down with his arms crossed. As president of the Presidium, for example, he worked on every job conceivable.”

“But why then did he have problems?” we asked.

“Well, because the top of the Party was usurped. The top would agree on something and deliver an already made solution. That's the way it was in the government in those days. I was a member of it. No one was allowed to take a different stand. What was decided at

the top was final. I remember being in support of this, when the first Macedonian government was to be formed in April 1945. Comrade Kolishevski would call all of us who were members of the Presidium and who led a sector, and would tell us what to do... give us 'the solution', if I can say that. He called Chento and told him that he would be re-elected President of the Presidium. That's what Chento himself told me. To this Chento replied: 'I don't want to be president, I can't do anything without any responsibility. I want to be Minister of Trade because I am familiar with those kinds of problems. I have dealt with them even in the most difficult times. I can contribute much more to better supply our population...' Chento, unfortunately, was not aware that this was viewed as a minus by the Party... Yes, a minus...

Chento saw things differently. For example, when the first tax was introduced in 1945, some businessmen in Prilep thought they were allegedly over-taxed, I thought differently. But when they came to Skopje to complain, Chento supported them, which I thought was wrong, and I told him that.

In any case, Chento is now a historic name and no one can erase it. And there is no need to erase it. Every fighter who actively participated in the struggle has a good and a bad side. What was bad was bad but what was good is a plus for him in his contribution to the Revolution and to the victory. More individuals like him make the nation better.

The war against Chento was clear in those days but what happened to him then cannot be tolerated today, and it shouldn't be. Whatever he did or did not do was because of wicked people and sharp tongues. The work was done by ordinary people but the orders came from above, from the top, and no one can deny that. Unfortunately people did not have the courage to come out, to step up before society and tell the truth."

"Was Chento really accused of trying to flee across the border?" we asked.

"It was a shameful thing that happened to him! He was not like that, he never ran away from his responsibility. There was no reason for

him to run from his fatherland, and certainly not as a traitor. They couldn't find anything else on him so they concocted a disastrous lie. I say that it is a 'disastrous lie', because of it Chento was convicted and sent to prison. One day I went to Prilep and found him mixing lime at a building site. When I saw him I felt sick down to my soul. I thought to myself, 'look how low we have stooped to destroy one of our top and most devoted fighters'. Even if he was guilty he should have been allowed to live his life, but not like this. This was a big negative for our country. The people could not understand this and, in fact, many were cheering for him.

'What's happening here,' I said to him. To which he replied: 'Well, see for yourself, I have become a white washer (painter)...'

After he got very sick and was released from prison, Chento asked for permission to go to Switzerland to be treated, but they would not let him. So I said to him: 'Chento, you are a smart man, keep your chin up. You know they won't let you so don't beg, you are not going get any pity from those who destroyed you.' He then said to me: "I am not going to escape. You know me; I am not that kind of person. I just don't understand what I have done that bothers them so much to want to destroy me..."

History is not going to forgive them. History forgives no one. No one! They will die, and maybe even as self-styled heroes. The real heroes fell on the battlefield. But it is very good for people to be able to gather courage and real human bravery and come out and tell the truth. It is better that people judge them today than history alone tomorrow," concluded Dimche Mire.

This is what Kole Chashule, a judge/juror who participated in Chento's trial in November 1946, present in the courtroom when Metodija Andonov-Chento was sentenced to 11 years in prison, had to say: "Metodija Andonov-Chento was one of the most striking figures in the pre-war opposition movement in Macedonia. There is nothing better that can illuminate his place in this world than the truth about him coming out. The Macedonian people in general, or individually, have no right to add or take away something from the truth.

Chento was a complex and controversial person with an unusual temperament. In the political orbit he was very much guided by his ambition and influence. He was three times more persuasive than was needed for the then opposition and liberation movement in Prilep. He was a powerful figure in the bazaar, which was not immediately identified and with that he was immobilized, as a communist. The Prilep bazaar, however, had always been a crucial factor of influence in the behaviour of the city which made Chento a prominent candidate for the United Opposition and he became synonymous with the election struggles, especially in 1938.

The Communist Party in Prilep not only activated and supported Chento, but made great and perhaps a crucial effort, to build and influence his political consciousness and actions. We, the then students and communists, took great care to show him respect and much public sympathy. He did the same for us.”

“What were your contacts like? And what kind of relationship did you have with Chento in those days?” we asked.

“I only had occasional contact with Chento because in those years I worked mainly in Belgrade, I studied there. Besides, there was a great difference in age between us. I did not have close ties with him until October 11, 1941. After that I left Prilep and I did not return until the end of 1944. After he was arrested and put in jail, I found out from the Headquarters Manifesto that he had joined the partisans. I confess that his name for me, and not just for me, was a kind of surprise, unheard of even, because we never expected him to be in charge of General Headquarters. However, we received his name with sympathy.

I had no direct contact with him immediately after his release from prison because I worked in Poreche. But after I moved to Prilep and took the position as CPM District Secretary for Prilep, I ran into Chento. The CPM District Secretary for Prilep at that time was also District Secretary for the Front and for the government. In that capacity there were actions taken that led to a conflict with Chento.

Namely, having no money to pay the officials and to pursue the normal activities in the city, we, at my suggestion, decided to call a

public meeting, something like a rally and, without repression, given the situation, publicly ask for help to assist those who were seeking work during the occupation. In fact, it was an attempt to kind of engage, without cruel repression, part of the military effort.

The public meeting was convened in the then Sokolana. The people came. The meeting with its very presence in the city certainly did pressure some of the people to voluntarily offer assistance. The tobacco farmers, on the other hand, offered the young Macedonian state their entire crop from that year, for free. The meeting ended without incident. A few days later I was informed that Metodia Andonov-Chento had gathered the so-called ‘businessmen’ of the ‘Balkans’ and criticized what we did, which meant that he was encouraging those who offered assistance to renege on their promises. Young and seasoned as I was at age 25, I understood his gesture. In other words, without informing us he rejected our Committee’s effort. I immediately summoned him to come to our Committee or we could have gone there, and discuss the issue face to face. Chento refused to meet with us. He did not just criticize our action but used insults and vulgar language to do it.

Of course I paid the price for that. I was removed as CPM Regional Secretary for Prilep and, after my punishment, I was transferred to Skopje. The biggest objection was that the people at one of the meetings started chanting my name, asking me to speak. And that perhaps bothered Chento the most. But in the end... Chento was Chento.”

“So, what is the truth?” we asked.

“Well, here and there, I had not much contact with him. That is why today, when an important effort is made to get to the truth, it is necessary that the entire thing be dimensioned correctly. Euphoria and emotions do not help. The facts are all here and no ‘additions’ are needed.

Here are some of the facts:

In those days, in order to imprison someone, especially if he was the president of ASNOM and a giant figure like Metodia Andonov-

Chento, despite all the possible prerogatives the then OZNA had, no political decision or agreement could have been made without involving the highest governing bodies in Macedonia such as the Central Committee and its political leadership, the leadership of the People's Front, the Presidency of ASNOM and the Government of the Republic of Macedonia.

Here is something more. Chento, as president of ASNOM, had supposedly overstepped the frames of the Republic. Such a decision, however, could not have been even thought of, let alone been made without the consent of the Federation's top leadership such as the CPM Central Committee Politburo and personally by Tito himself. Hence, all analyses and closures, including Chento's trial and verdict, should be looked at under those circumstances. The trial would not have been successful if there was no unilateral support from all participants in the leadership. Furthermore, they had their civic, moral and communist obligation to intervene in Chento's arrest, investigation, trial and verdict if, at any stage of this process, they found irregularities, especially if the trial was staged," concluded Chashule.

"And so many decades later the trial is still an enigma?" we asked.

"The Judges of the trial just like the process itself were the last act. Before that, all bases were covered, present in which were irrevocably wide but also individual responsibilities. All of them were responsible, all those who made the decisions and all those who accepted to be silent. And all of this was done without any resistance.

Historical facts will undoubtedly prove that in the general manipulation the judges were just as much victims as the defendant. The greatest victim undoubtedly was the public, together with the defendant," said Chashule.

While interviewing Chashule he gave us the impression that "it would be unfair to now, today, to create a new manipulation, and this time with public opinion..."

Chashule continued: “Before we come to any arbitrary conclusion we need to identify all the figures in the Macedonian political leadership, by name, by function, by influence and whether they were doing this under their own motives or were they only pawns following orders given to them by the highest authorities in the Federation. We also must look, in general, at whether they just gave in to the leadership or if they had any objection, showed resistance or disagreed with Chento’s arrest, trial and verdict.”

“Where is the “green light” of whose decision this was?” we asked.

“All I can tell you is that it was not possible in those days for OZNA alone to take this kind of action against a man like Chento, without a green light, without complete freedom to manipulate the entire game and to develop the entire process. Even the most naïve people will not believe that OZNA acted alone...” said Chashule and continued:

“Meaning that Chento’s arrest, the theory of his escape over the border, the trial, the verdict, and even his imprisonment, were very precisely conceived acts by political decision made at the highest level of the Yugoslav and later of the Macedonian leadership.

There were three categories of architects operating in all of this:

The first were those who devised, planned, gave directions, and controlled the execution of the process, with all the prerogatives to intervene in all phases of the plot.

The second were the immediate perpetrators, the organs of OZNA and the police.

The third were those who were also victims of the conspiracy, of the perpetrated process, who were carefully selected with strictly far-reaching goals. This included the judges, public opinion and the people.

If history doesn’t want to again manipulate the situation, this time with public opinion, then it should open all questions and then look for the truth.

In fact, this is not only about Chento's rehabilitation, but also about something more significant, rehabilitating Macedonia's integrity and the integrity of the Macedonian liberation struggle. It is about the years in which assumptions were made that have lasting effects, especially those of reliance.

No one has the right to excuse himself or herself, to behave today like they were not there, like they were absent during those months and years, to circumvent the truth about his or her participation in the decisions made in the plot against Chento and in all the plots that took place, regardless of whether it was his or her conscious act or that they remained silent, or acted like pawns with ears and eyes shut!" said Chashule categorically and continued:

"Some of the actors in the decision-making process that resulted in Chento's arrest, trial and led to him being imprisoned, are now dead. One of them, for example, was Blagoia Popovski, a man from Prilep, a close friend and neighbour of Chento, who was the prosecutor in his trial. He could neither explain nor prove if the trial was staged and he was one of its main participants.

Some of the then leaders are also dead. That is another reason why people must no longer remain silent. They must not hide behind their 'failure' or think that someone is going to save them from the public or from their responsibility. They must seek the truth.

Some many have deep reasons to remain silent.

As an accomplice in the plot, no one has the right to pretend to be innocent, to wash their hands, or to unjustly lay blame on someone else.

And in the end, besides history, there is another judge - conscience.

It was not by accident that two reputable people and loyal communists were chosen by the Court to conduct Chento's trial and to arrive at the right conclusion. Those two people were Blagoia Popovski and myself. It was also by no accident that a third person, again from Prilep, was chosen to publicly voice the attack on

Chento. The architect of this trial had a clear deceit, which today is even clearer.

As for me, I think, and I am convinced that when all the facts are out they will undoubtedly prove that I was a planned sacrifice in the whole mosaic. He, on the other hand, was a victim manipulated along the line of his brightest human feelings - his most sincere attachment and faith in the Revolution and in Macedonia.

But, in order for this not to be a simple declaration, I will give you some more facts:

First, I would like to say that I had no idea what the Macedonian top leadership was doing regarding Chento's destiny and the politics around it in Macedonia. I knew very little about the struggle for power and prestige in those years. At that time I worked for the Ministry of Public Health, I was in charge of health education, and later I went to work for Radio Skopje, as an editor.

In those days there was a great gap between the top leadership and us, as a result of this 'mythical distance' we were kept in the dark at all times except when the leadership wanted us to know something.

I found out about Chento's arrest, accidentally or maybe not, at Vidoe Smilevski-Bato's office, who at that time was in charge of the CPM's ideology. I was in his office for something else when he told me that Chento was caught at the border attempting to flee across it. He was fleeing because he wanted to make connections with the English, specifically with its Intelligence Service and personally with Captain (or Major) Hill, who at the time was in charge of Macedonia," concluded Chashule.

"Why was Chento burdened with so many accusations and charges?" we asked.

"For me, a popular rapid-minded young man, the news was devastating. I suspected that there were internal clashes in Macedonia, even though I knew nothing about them, and even hostilities of a personal nature, but I could never accept that our issue (the Macedonian Question), especially the fate of our newly

liberated Macedonia, was associated with the English and especially with Captain Hill. The English for me were synonymous with the power that took away Aegean Macedonia from us. It made no sense to me how Chento could have stooped so low. But then I was told that this was an undeniable fact by one of the most responsible persons in the CPM, and I myself did not have enough experience to look at it any differently. Given this, I think, I categorically condemned any attempt to draw foreign forces around our question (the Macedonian Question), especially the English, whom I regarded as our main enemy.

On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that those years coincided with Dimitrov's period in Bulgaria. For some time afterwards I heard nothing more about Chento's attempt to escape, so there was no need for me to question the validity of the fact that Chento was caught at the very border. Then I was summoned to Vidoe Smilevski's office and he told that they (the top party leadership) had chosen me to be a judge/juror at Chento's trial. I was repeatedly reassured that there was no doubt that Chento was attempting to across the border into Greece.

I participated very little during the trial preparations but, being in the same prison room, I had private contacts with Blagoia Popovski who at that time was the prosecutor appointed by the Public Prosecutor's Office, which I never suspected would conduct a rigged trial.

The courtroom during the trial, which was publicly attended by families as well as private citizens, was almost always full. Today people are telling me that many of those who attended the trial were OZNA people parading as private spectators, whom I purposely allowed to enter the courtroom. But that's not entirely true, I saw people who I knew and I know they were not associated with OZNA. They were not! But that does not change the fact that the entire public was manipulated.

The communist tradition of long political trials is well-known. Chento's long trial... Georgi Dimitrov's long trial... Broz and Traicho Kostov's long trial... and so on. It was also well-known that these defendants did not recognize the court and refused to answer

questions. Unfortunately, none of this became part of the process,” concluded Chashule.

“Is it true that temperamental Chento was very calm during the trial?” we asked.

“For reasons only known to Chento, he never once refused to answer a question or contest the Court and call it illegitimate. However, he did not say that he was apprehended at his house or deny that he was attempting to flee and cross the border, especially during the hearing when witnesses were interrogated. The only thing he was deprived of, by Court president Panta Marina, was the length of his closing arguments.

I only asked Chento one question and that was in regards to allegations that Chento’s connection in Solun was going to be Petre Sokolovich from Prilep, well-known for his great Serbian convictions and cooperation with the authorities and with the dictatorship of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. I asked Chento how and from where he knew Sokolovich and all the links he had during his struggle for the Macedonian cause. To that Chento calmly replied: ‘I don’t want to explain this here and now.’ There was nothing said or expressed to the Court Council or during the trial about this, at least not in my presence, nor was there any opportunity given to consider any alternatives.

It was not up to me to interpret, much less to judge, why the trial took place, namely, why Chento chose the path and position that he did, why he did not reject the court and did not state that the process was rigged, why he did not debate as he had many times before... to defend himself against the charges leveled against him... I suppose he had his reasons...

That, however, did not diminish his tragedy, on the contrary. We are people, with obligations, with the power of weakness, with the ability to sacrifice ourselves for our loved ones.”

“Sacrifices, manipulations, games... Why are all these things associated with Chento?” we asked.

“In all of that, there was a little of everything. Chento himself probably knew that we were all victims and manipulated. The strongest proof of that for me was when I met Chento after he was released from prison. We accidentally met on the former Gotse Delchev Street near the Writers’ Association. I was happy to see him free so I approached him and congratulated him. He replied cordially and without delay, without any negative implications in his greeting. We talked about his release and about his health and what course of action he was going to take to get better. The conversation went in the most friendly tone, without any ugly subtext, from which I then concluded that it was clear, even to Chento, that I too was a victim in that rigged trial.

These are the facts.

At this point I need to add something. Namely, that it was reprehensible that the trial was allowed to be conducted in public. It is well-known that there is no police or authority in the world that would allow a public trial to take place if there was any risk that it would take a different course and have a different outcome other than what was planned in advance. From this I conclude that OZNA, and the other authorities, had advance assurances that the trial was going to proceed as planned and anyone capable of taking it off course would not be allowed to participate in it.

I had no idea the trial would be rigged. Many times I was assured that the process was legitimate and I was never given any cause to doubt that because of the reasons I mentioned earlier.

So, in that process, Metodija Andonov-Chento was neither the first nor the only victim. And, given what I know now, I am all in favour of discovering the truth and of exposing all the actors, from the CPY Central Committee, from the CPM Central Committee, from the Macedonian Parliament, from the government and from all the other relevant authorities. I want this done to show that the defendant was not the only victim in this manipulation, the number of victims was quite large and, finally, I wanted it to be known that I was one of those victims.”

“What about your proposals for rehabilitation?” we asked.

“I publicly insisted that Chento be rehabilitated. I also made a public request for my own rehabilitation as a victim of this rigged process. Even the others from Prilep, the ones so carefully selected to testify in Court, were also victims. It is clear to me now that the selection was based on willingness to publicly expose the Macedonian orientation,” concluded Chashule.

Here is what Nikola Vrazhalsky, then public prosecutor in Macedonia, had to say about Chento:

“I met Chento for the first time on Koziak when we were preparing the documents for ASNOM. He gave me the impression that he was a good person, direct and to the point. He was not a yes-man.”

“What do you think about renewing his trial?” we asked.

“Now is a good time to do that. There is a place for it and the climate is right. I don’t believe anyone would veto it anymore,” replied Vrazhalski.

Here is what Krste Tsrvenkovski had to say about Chento’s case: “All the information compiled on Chento points to UDBA having taken him from his home and not capturing him at the Greek-Yugoslav border like it has been alleged for all those years. He did not have a ‘declaration’ in his pocket which he was allegedly planning to take to the UN to initiate a process of creating an independent United Macedonia. This was an invention created by the political process in order to give him a longer sentence. Chento was a strong-willed man and never veered from his convictions. Even before the war he had a great reputation for being a commendable fighter, fighting for national rights, and although he was not a communist, he was a faithful Macedonian patriot.

In the years after the war, when we came up with plans to ‘bolshevizize’ our society, we declared war on the craftsmen, traders and those in the villages who had properties. Chento was not only surprised by this but also felt like he was being deceived and came to their defense. At the time, this kind of attitude was seen as ‘heresy’ by us communists so we came up with a political solution

to stop Chento, which ended with his removal from the post as president of the ASNOM Presidium (as the first president of the Macedonian republic). Chento indeed had clashes with the Macedonian Party leadership, several of them in fact. In the fall of 1943, for example, when the Headquarters in Kichevo had discussions about exchanging captured German officers with partisans, Tempo placed Lazar Kolarovski and Mara Natseva's names on the top of the list. Venko Markovski proposed to put Pavel Shatev on top of the list, which was supported by Chento. This is when the first quarrels began.

Later, when the ASNOM Assembly sitting was being prepared, Chento rejected Tempo's proposal to add Vidoe Smilevski to the Board. Then, after Chento asked Smilevski to declare his national identity, because he came from Serbia, Tempo appointed Smilevski President of a newly formed Commission and asked him to investigate and discredit Chento. Another incident took place when the first FPRY Constitution was being adopted. This time Chento demanded that the 'Lenin principle' be included in the Constitution, which would have given the people the right to self-determination and to secession. This, however, was not acceptable to the CPM Central Committee and, as a result, Kolarovski took Chento to Belgrade to have a chat with Kardeli. In the end a solution was found where Chento could leave the Yugoslav Assembly and not vote on the Constitution. After that happened Chento was labeled a separatist.

In order for all this to be cleared I believe a government plan is required. Chento's name needs to be cleared and returned to our history. He was the first president of Macedonia. We are not so rich with such good personalities that we can afford to write him off so easily," concluded Tsvenkovski.

This is what Kiro Gligorov had to say about Chento: "Metodia Andonov-Chento's fate was tragic. He was a great person, authentic and for the people. He was a great Macedonian, a patriot, a man with his own views and with a strong backbone.

It's about time the truth came out. This will be his true rehabilitation. Nothing will be lost except the black spot in Macedonia's history.”

HISTORY FORGIVES NO ONE

The escape scenario, the trial, the verdict, the denials - all well-conceived

Chento could not have been arrested and convicted without the knowledge of the top Macedonian and Yugoslavian leadership

Who was bothered by Metodija Andonov Chento

After all these pages, allow us to end this book with the following:

Opening Metodija Andonov Chento's file, even this late in time (1990) was particularly challenging especially as we found it difficult to open the archives or not to find them empty. Let us not speak of the wall of silence we ran into, as well as our unwelcome presence being viewed with suspicion and us being sent away with “well-meaning” distractions leading us far from the “serious” themes. We cannot say that our struggle to get to the bottom has not been great; neither can we say that we did not insist, persist and persevere in our quest to seek our information. But in the end, we can honestly say that we managed to get something. We managed, given the circumstances, to reveal what was possible about Chento. Of course, as the expression goes, we had to unlock seven padlocks in order to get people to open up and tell us what they knew in our quest to find the truth about Chento. It was an uphill battle but some people did open up their souls. We interviewed almost everyone who would speak to us; Chento's contemporaries; direct and indirect participants, close and distant friends, as well as people who knew him or of him.

The taboos surrounding Chento are no longer the same today as they were yesterday. The conspiracy, we hope, will remain in the annals of time passed. And finally, we hope that we have uncovered the veil which, for more than four decades, had covered this mystery. We hope that we have broken, deconstructed and dismantled the

silence behind which hid the truth about Chento, the first president of the Republic of Macedonia.

We managed to find enough information to piece Chento's life together from the time of his youth through the decades he worked at his store in the Prilep bazaar. We found out things about his character, his relation and attitude towards the ordinary people, his strongly irreconcilable attitude towards the various regimes and despots. Furthermore, we learned about his appearance in the ranks of the National Liberation War, his membership and role in the General Headquarters, his election as President of the Initiative Board and President of the ASNOM Presidium, his rise to the throne as the first president of Macedonia, his departure from political life, his arrest, his trial and his eleven years of imprisonment. Many of the people we spoke to believed that Chento was set up and his trial was rigged. And many of them have suggested that Chento be rehabilitated and returned to the pages of our history, where he belongs.

After everything that was said and done, the next logical thing to do is to ask the inevitable question: "Was Metodija Andonov-Chento guilty of any of this?"

We leave it to the readers to draw their own conclusion. As for the next step to take, do what the Prilep Fighters' Association has suggested and that is form a special commission to clear Chento's name by first demanding the removal of taboos and then allowing the truth to come out. The Andonov family has also submitted a request to the Skopje District Court, followed by a request to the Macedonian Public Prosecutor's Office, demanding that Chento's 1946 case and trial be reopened so that Chento's name can be cleared.

History is written by historians. The lawyers are responsible for bringing justice. Our intention and desire through these pages was to open Metodija Andonov-Chento's file and bring the reader closer to the truth. We all want to know what really happened to this unusual and significant Macedonian figure. We also want past wrongs to be corrected.

Acronyms

AVNOJ – National Anti-Fascist Liberation Council of Yugoslavia
AFZH - Women’s Anti-Fascist Front
ASNOM – Anti-Fascist Assembly of National Liberation of Macedonia
BRP(k) – Communist Party of Bulgaria
CPG - Communist Party of Greece
CPM - Communist Party of Macedonia
CPY - Communist Party of Yugoslavia
CVG - Greek Civil War
DAG – Democratic Army of Greece
EAM – National Liberation Front
ELAS – National Liberation Army of Greece
EON – National Youth Organization
EPON – All Greek National Youth Organization
KOEM – Communist Organization of Aegean Macedonia
KOS - Counter-intelligence Sector of JAN
NKVD – People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs
NOBG - Peoples Liberation Struggle in Greece
NOBM - Peoples Liberation Struggle in Macedonia
PLM – People’s Liberation Movement
NOF - Peoples’ Liberation Front
NOMS - Peoples’ Liberation Youth Organization
OKNE - Communist Youth Organization of Greece
ONOO – Local People’s Liberation Council
OZNA – People’s Defense Division
PAO - Pan-Hellenic Liberation Organization
PDEG – Pan-Greek Democratic Union of Women
PDOG – International Federation of Democratic Women
POJ - Partisan Units of Yugoslavia
PRM – People’s Republic of Macedonia
SID - Information Services of the Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs
SNOF - Slavo-Macedonian National Liberation Front
SKP(b) – Communist Party of the Soviet Union
UDBA - Directorate of State Security
USSR – United Soviet Socialist Republics