ties and tensions, extending to its relations with its closest
observers, many of them seekers after sensationalism
absurd assumption that Poland’s political allies might be
These individuals—and they are a significant
not view Poland as a minor element of a “major world
If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then Soviet
If we take a breather from our balance of payments
EXCURSUS 2
Elisabeth L. Rosenthal on
THE VIEW FROM SOFIA
If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then Soviet
officials must glow with pride when they look south toward
Bulgaria. The Bulgarian Communist party is modeled
directly on its Soviet counterpart, and Bulgaria’s five-year
plans are coordinated with the Kremlin’s. At the July,
1973, Plenary Session of the BCP Central Committee,
Bulgarian President Todor Zhivkov pronounced that the
two countries should be “as one organism with the same
lungs and fed by one circulatory system.” Today Bulgaria
courages all its citizens to develop similarly deep
commitments to communism and to “mother Russia.”
Indoctrination begins early. Three Party organizations,
the Chavdarche, the Septemvriiche, and the Komsomol
provide extracurricular education for schoolchildren that
begins at age seven. On Sundays huge groups of
youngsters file by the embalmed body of Georgi Dimitrov,
first president of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria (Dimitrov
had spent twenty-five years of exile in Moscow). Polit-
cical tutelage continues at the university, where entrance
procedures favor the offspring of Party members, and all
students—biologists and linguists alike—must complete
courses on scientific socialism, the history of the Bulgar-
ian Communist party, and dialectic materialism. “Which is
the most important: the material or the ideal?” one politi-
cal exam question asks. Apparently there is only one cor-
rect response: “I answered ‘the material,’” one student
remarked; “otherwise I wouldn’t still be here.” When
political education is not specifically pro-socialist or pro-
Soviet, it is generally anti-Western. The USA is a particu-
lar bête noir. Display cases on Ruskı Boulevard, Sofia’s
main thoroughfare, bear the inscription “dollars and
blood” and feature photographs of American soldiers.
Radio Sofia reports assiduously on strikes in New York.
But recently any political interests among the masses
are eclipsed by more immediate economic difficulties. A
year ago November, Bulgaria instituted huge “price
adjustments.” Some prices have jumped 200 per cent
during the past two years, and the cost of basic staples—
products that Communist governments subsidize heav-
ily—has also increased markedly. Bottles of fruit juice with
labels printed “29 stotinki” are restamped “40 stots.”
And of course there are always shortages. Shortages of
housing—which make extended families a necessity in
the capital city; shortages of food—which Bulgarians
claim are worse now than in past years. Sugar, for exam-
ple, was virtually unavailable at the summer’s end. Some
Informed residents of Sofia suspect that the sugar from a
docile Bulgaria went to appease an angry Poland. But
most Bulgarians know virtually nothing of the events to
the north; they simply accept the scarcity and supplement
their normal purchases with supplies from the well-
stocked foreign currency stores. At these establishments

unless we take a breather from our balance of payments
for a few years. Deferring payment of at least some of the
credits and loans accorded the Glerek government seems
the bare minimum. We have no desire, however, to
become bogeyman to the world.

Jacek Wejroch is chief of the socio-political section
of Wiez, a leading Warsaw periodical.
sugar is almost always available, though it may cost $5 per kilo. Here Bulgarians buy their Marlboros with crisp $50 bills—money earned through government contract work abroad (mostly in Iraq or Libya) or, more commonly, through black marketeering. This year, however, Bulgarians with dollars will find themselves in a quandary: As of January 1, the so-called “Corecon” shops are officially off limits to Bulgarian nationals.

In the midst of widespread economic difficulties there are simply sit out the delay. In a country where unemployment is theoretical anathema, such idleness is costly. Bulgarians seem particularly irritated by the fact that in the midst of widespread economic difficulties there are those with an excess of goods and opportunities. Some people can easily pay the 2 leva cover charge at a swank café (about a third of a day’s salary for the average Bulgarian worker). With gasoline hovering around $4.50 per gallon, most Bulgarians can’t afford to own even a Lada. Yet every weekend Party officials drive luggage-laden black Mercedes along cobbled “pedestrian only” streets. The significance of these cars, readily identified by their lack of license plates, is not missed by the people.

Bulgarians observe also that the roads to privilege are often opened by kinship as much as by talent. At thirty-eight, President Zhivkov’s Oxford-educated daughter, Lyudmila, heads a Party committee on science, culture, and education, and is a Politburo member as well. Speculation is rife that Lyudmila will eventually assume her father’s post. The Bulgarian people seem to view as undeserved her lightning promotions within the Party. She is certainly both intelligent and experienced in partying in paying tributes to “Marxist-Leninist methodology.” But Ms. Zhivkova is also twenty years younger than the average Politburo member, and a bit more eccentric than the typical Party woman. A reported believer in astrology and practitioner of yoga, Ms. Zhivkova peppers “Marxist” speeches with talk of the “Eternal” and the “seven-stage harmony of the universe”—not the normal Marxist fodder.

But Bulgarian orthodoxy does not preclude a few isolated contradictions of dogma. After all, despite the Bulgarian Government’s professed belief in the “leading role of the Party,” Bulgaria—for complex historical reasons—is nominally a two-party state. And despite Marxism’s antipathy to religion, Bulgaria traditionally has been fairly lenient with its Orthodox Church. Bulgarian leaders are simply too self-confident to worry much about minor doctrinal contradictions, and the country’s political structure is too well entrenched to be moved by popular grumblings. It seems that no matter how scarce sugar becomes, there will always be plenty of young cadres who will report that “Bulgaria and the Soviet Union are sincere socialist friends.”

Elisabeth L. Rosenthal, a freelance writer, has just returned from a trip to Eastern Europe, traveling on a Marshall Scholarship.

EXCURSUS 3

Arthur Dobrin on KENYA: THE SORCERERS’ CONNECTION

Japheth is the father of seven and his wife is pregnant again. “All my children won’t live until adulthood,” he explains. But it is not childhood diseases he dreads. By and large, these have been controlled by modern medicine. “There are people who are jealous of my success. I know that one of my neighbors is a witch. She will cast a spell and some of my children will die.”

Japheth is a Kenyan university professor who holds a doctoral degree from an Ivy League college. His fear of witchcraft is not personal, idiosyncratic, or an isolated belief. A recent story in a Kenyan newspaper reported a court case in which one politician accused another of employing witches during his campaign. Claims of bewitchment have become so numerous that it is now a criminal offense to accuse another of being a witch.

Recognition of this belief in sorcery is fundamental to understanding the deadly problem that now confronts Kenya. United Nations estimates indicate that within the next year there may be more than two million starving people in this country of less than sixteen million.

At first glance Kenya seems an unlikely country to experience widespread hunger. Fertile and productive farmland dominates the center of the nation; and under nearly twenty years of stable, democratic rule the standard of living has risen considerably for the majority of the people. But food production cannot keep pace with Kenya’s 3.5 per cent annual population growth; and the problem is compounded by cash cropping—where, for example, good land is devoted to growing pineapples for export rather than peanuts for domestic consumption. Since Kenya needs investment capital, it cannot switch dramatically to food production without disrupting foreign trade. Furthermore, the country is burdened by mounting debt repayments from foreign assistance loans.

A belief in witchcraft helps in part to explain why couples continue to have large families in the face of such poverty. A witch is believed to be someone motivated primarily by revenge and jealousy, often a neighbor who casts fatal spells upon those who have become successful. There is no protection against witchcraft, since it is surreptitious and preternatural. It is viewed as a weapon of the weak and the poor. The most one can do to protect against this evil is to have many children, thereby ensuring support in one’s old age.

Anthropologists say that the belief in witchcraft appears to be related to stress and anxiety. In a stable social situation accusations of witchcraft are only occasional. But when traditions and customs begin to erode, as today in Kenya, when the world seems a hostile and uncontrollable place, and when individual striving and achieved status replace social cohesion and ascribed position, the belief in witchcraft is intensified. The modern, competitive society that characterizes Kenya has weakened families. People feel more alone than ever before and more fearful of the future.

Clearly, Kenya’s future is not bright, but it is a mistake to think that ineptitude, corruption, and drought are the only causes of the impending crisis.

Arthur Dobrin, who has lived in Kenya, is author of “The Role of Cooperatives in the Development of Kenya,” and the forthcoming Convictions (Orbis).