

FOREWORD

Within months of writing the poem you shall read, the young poet Geo Milev was strangled by fascist police thugs and his body thrown to rot in a ditch near Sofia.

The grounds for his guilt then are today his claim to immortality.

This poem is sprinkled with the poet's pure blood, warmed by his last breath.

These verses are not just a declaration of the poet's faith, passionate feeling and devotion to his people and their struggles. They are much more. Because few are the poets in the world who have given their lives for their words to become prophecy.

Geo Milev perished because he wrote this poem. It laid bare the bloodthirsty face of fascism, branded its brutality. In verse of fire it sang of the people's revolt and of the awesome tragic end of their uprising. At the same time this poem sounded the alarm, lashed the conscience of Europe.

What was happening in that distant Balkan country, so small it is lost in the broad pages of the atlas?

Bulgaria, June 1923. With the connivance of all the bourgeois parties a fascist group under notorious "butcher" Tsankov seized a favourable moment to take power. The Agrarian Party's government was overthrown and Alexander Stamboliiski, its leader, assassinated.

Faced with mounting police persecution, Communists and Agrarians united their forces and called a mass armed uprising against the government on September 23.

And the people rose! In some districts the hard-pressed working people had already taken to arms — such as they could get.