

Upheaval in the land of the eagles

Prologue

In the beginning of 1997, the "criminality of Albanian immigrants was, once again, the prevailing issue in Greek media and reached its climax when some burglaries took place in east Attiki. However, a few months later the image of the "Albanian criminal" gave way to that of the "Albanian rebel". Greek media made a spectacle out of the rebellion and the Greek government supported Fatos Nano and even allowed his pre-election campaign among Albanian immigrants in Greece. How come that the cheapest labour force in Europe armed themselves with Kalashnikovs, how did things come to a rebellion? To answer these questions we had to go back in the past and follow the history of antagonistic social relations in Albania,

From the early post-war years to the fall of the Stalinist regime and the emergence of a new social disorder.

Much attention was paid to the rebellious proletarians' inability to establish a powerful community of struggle of some duration. In this short prologue we will comment on the importance of immigrants for both the development of class struggle in Greece and the Greek capitalist interests in the Balkans.

Nowadays, there are even more Albanian immigrant workers in Greece. In March '98 their "criminality" became again a major issue in Greek media. The same month armed inhabitants of a village in northern Greece imposed an all-night curfew on Albanian immigrants and similar racist and brutal events against Albanian workers took place in many other villages.

Since 1990 tens of thousands of Albanians have entered Greece to find work. Mass deportations of illegal immigrants have taken place quite often in the 90s. In December 1991 100,000 Albanians were deported through "operation sweep". In June '93 Athens responded to the deportation of the Greek Orthodox abbot Chrysostomos, who was preaching division and secession among the Greek-speaking minority of southern Albania, by expelling some 30,000 Albanians in a few days, many of whom had been abused and beaten. By the end of 1993 a rapprochement was made between Berisha and the Greek government and since then deportations have lessened. But the most recent racist campaign against Albanians has revealed more clearly some of the reasons for Greece's immigration policy and periodic deportations. The immigrants are hostages of the Greek state and have been used to blackmail the Albanian government on several issues that range from getting more favourable business opportunities for Greek entrepreneurs and bankers to obtaining contracts to reorganise the army and navy forces of Albania after the rebellion.

Recently the Greek state, with the help of the trade unions, has started organising somehow a rotation immigration policy by providing the green card to a few immigrants and by promising it to the rest. In fact, most of them will not be able to renew the work permit for a further period of 6 or 12 months in 1999, but the state will be able to divide them in (cheap) legal and illegal ones and, at the same time, keep files on them facilitating possible future deportations. In May '98 there was the first immigrants' strike of the 900s in Greece. Some Albanian and Romanian rural workers who worked in a village near Volos (Greek farmers have profited a lot from cheap, illegal work) asked for wage rises, less working hours and social security. 20 of them were arrested while 5 were deported. Whether this strike, which was only partly successful, will be a good example for the rest of the immigrants as well as the Greek temporary workers remains to be seen. Immigrant and native temp workers have been used to lower the wage standards in Greece (as elsewhere). That's why last year's rebellion or strikes like the above-mentioned one could prove to be of great importance for a possible recomposition of the Balkan working class, unless the Albanian proletarians fall prey to the nationalist appeal of the Liberation Army of Kosovo and entangle themselves in another bloody Balkan war.

July 1998

A sisterless gulag

Albanian version of Stalinism was nurtured ideologically by a strong national identity confirmed by a constant propaganda against "the external enemies of a small nation". The sense of internal unity and national cohesion was maintained through the Hoxha personality cult. In the 40's Hoxha had used his popularity as leader of the national liberation army and the initial distribution of land to the families of partisans killed in the war to consolidate his power base.

Hoxha's victory over the pro-Yugoslav faction of the Party of Labour of Albania (PLA) was made possible with the intervention of Stalin and the break between Yugoslavia and the Cominform in June 1948, and that accounts for the PLA's adulation of the Russian leader from that time onwards. This split in the eastern state capitalist camp and the civil war in Greece provoked the Albanian state to wall itself off from its neighbours and thus started a long history of isolation and fortification of this country.

Even before 1948 the PLA leadership had decided on the introduction of a Stalinist development strategy. According to this, there was to be central planning of capital accumulation, with tight control of commodity-money relations in the state sector.

"The 1947 financial budget and the general state plan for 1947 will enable us to build a planned economy. We will be helped by the standardization of prices which allows us to plan state accumulation and does not leave the law of value to spontaneity, but guides the new structure and method of fixing and applying prices, and by the placing of wages and salaries on a correct basis; that is, he who works more and better gets higher pay when

everything is taken into account: ability, work productivity, difficulties of the place of work, etc. All these will enable us to build the economy according to plan" (1)

By early 1947 what little there was of Albanian industry was in the hands of the state. In 1951 the first five-year plan was launched. In terms of material resources, the existence of a substantial mineral base spoke in favour of the development of heavy industry, however, the urban proletariat was dramatically missing since 70% of the population were isolated agrarian petty producers. Thus the transformation of the peasants into rural and factory workers and total state control over the agricultural surplus (basic preconditions of the Stalinist model of transition to real domination of capital) were given priority. These tasks were forcibly pursued in the 50s to the extent that by 1960 over 86 per cent of the agricultural sector had been collectivised in the form of co-operative and state farms. (2) In contrast to "revisionist" Eastern Europe, family plots in Albania had been progressively reduced in size and under article 18 of the 1976 constitution all land was made state property, and even co-operative land was merely granted to agricultural co-operations for their use.

Soviet Union economic assistance was used to obtain the capital equipment needed for a programme of industrialization but with the break in Russian and Albanian relations in 1961 many projects were left incomplete. China replaced Soviet Union in the provision of loans, grants and specialist advice, and although industrial production had performed quite well in the 1961-5 period, "inefficient administration of enterprises" and high absenteeism provoked the government to increase party influence at the shopfloor level and in society in general in late 1965. The party issued an Appeal in which it was explained that Albania was surrounded by "imperialist and revisionist enemies" and that there was an "economic blockade" and therefore would have "to build socialism" relying on its own resources and efforts. Henceforth workers would participate in enterprise decision-making under the guidance of the "correct line" of the vanguard of the working class, i.e. the regional party organs, the Executive Committees of the local People's Councils.

The ideology of "self-reliance" was applied as a means to increase productivity: through mass mobilization workers offered "voluntarily" labour beyond their normal working time. Major construction works were undertaken by brigades of young "volunteers", that, however, could be less and less motivated by the ideology of "socialism".

For years working class subjectivity could be contained in the Albanian state form almost without major threats against the party power; that was not only because of the iron rule of the regime, (3) but also because the party had been able to maintain a continual, albeit modest, increase in the standard of living of workers and peasants (at least until the late 70's). However, the equalization in income by reducing higher salaries and the insufficient incentives offered to workers could not induce but a few to act as watchdogs for "national production". The constant problems of the system were the existence of widespread absenteeism among the labour force (4), the low work norms and the small scale private, "illegal" activities. Every now and then there were articles in the press reporting of theft of materials from state stocks and of people relaxing at their legal work

so that they could slave at night to earn income illegally. Workers had no reason to work harder without a compensating increase in wages and consumer goods. Also, "self-valorisation" was not unknown. It was reported that state-owned trucks and cars were often being stolen and used by workers' families for picnics and excursions.

When in the late 70's the "social revisionist" China was "exposed" and thus relationships between the two countries broke off, the most centralised planned capitalist economy in the eastern bloc was led almost to total isolation. Although trade relations with west and east-European countries were still going on (mostly on a counter-trade basis), the country lacked modern industrial technology and hard currency for imports. Food shortages and lack of consumer goods became more and more often.

Moreover, with the highest birth-rate in Europe (contraceptive methods were prohibited (5) and the need for the creation of 70,000 new jobs annually due to full employment policy, certain reforms were considered by party officials to be absolutely urgent.

The period after Hoxha 1985-1990

Ramiz Alia came to the head of the process of restructuring of the Albanian model, which although belated in regard to similar efforts in other East European countries, proved extremely necessary to the ruling class. In mid-80's what roughly characterized Albania was poverty for almost everyone based on an wage egalitarianism and low productivity: For example a factory director earned 900 leks a month, while an assembly worker 750 and a road-sweeper 600. PLA undertook the recomposition of the working class through reforms that included devolution of decision-making in companies by appointed managers who were former state bureaucrats, austerity measures and lay-offs, slightly wider income differentials and incentive payments for "efficient" workers, but with little result. As for the rural workers, they worked as little as they could on the collectivized farms while working hard on their small private plots (6) and tending animals illegally.

The regime also tried to improve its trade relations with some East European countries and some Balkan ones. Another development which would prove later to be of immense importance was the appearance of TV sets capable of picking up transmissions from Yugoslavia, Italy and Greece: Albanians could then see another world, which not only seemed quite different from what the state propaganda had always presented it but would also undermine this very propaganda and the regime on the whole. It was during the 80's that youth began feeling more and more alienated within "socialist" Albania. Through foreign TV broadcasts the young generation began rejecting the regime and adopted a clearly pro-western liking. Also, the contribution of rock music to slackening discipline among young people should not be ignored.

Things took a turn for the worse after 1989 and the collapse of Comecon in the early 90's. Many trade and barter agreements for industrial commodities between Albania and other East European countries were revoked.

Rural workers continued stealing livestock from state farms and due mainly to absenteeism as well as breakdowns and shortages of fuel and spare parts industrial production declined rapidly.

Relaxations in the penal code were made and Albanians were given the right to own passports and travel abroad which led in 1990 to occupations of western embassy buildings by hundreds of Albanians and attempts to sail to Italy. The hatred of the people against the regime would often take the form of acts of pure vandalism: many factories, transport equipment as well as schools and hospitals were destroyed, and of course PLA and government offices. Quite understandably, people appropriated whatever they could from a regime that had deprived them of almost anything or out of revenge they destroyed whatever could not be of any use.

1990-1991: The coming of the democrats

Spontaneous acts of vandalism mainly by young people increased. It was then, in December of 1990, when PLA and Alia himself decided to send Berisha as a PLA's mediator with the students in Tirana university, that the Democratic Party was founded. Berisha and other intellectuals thus managed to put themselves in the leading position of the student movement, exploiting Alia's initial wish to have a controlled opposition. However, soon other parties appeared. As the first wave of thousands of Albanians fled to Greece, striking miners near Tirana attacked the machinery and the administrative offices and battles between demonstrators and the police increased. Then the PLA made further reforms: the first foreign banks were established, the right to strike was allowed and a delegation of the IMF paid a visit to Albania. Before the elections in March 1991 Hoxha's giant statue in Skenderbeg square in Tirana was pulled down by thousands of angry demonstrators, a symbolic act that marked the end of the one-party rule.

The 1991 elections and after: class revenge puts an end to the old regime

The Democratic Party launched its campaign announcing rapid privatisations and entry to EC which was fantasized by many Albanians as the immediate solution to their misery and the paternalism of the regime. However, rural workers were wary of changes fearing that DP with all its slogans about privatisations would redistribute land in favour of the pre-war landowning class. Thus, the PLA won the elections gaining votes predominantly in the provinces while the urban population voted for DP.

However, even after this victory both the PLA and the state as a whole had lost irrevocably any sense of legitimacy in people's minds. Violent clashes continued showing that the very notion of the public had been destroyed, since the population had always identified it with the one-party rule. "The most dramatic form this alienation takes [of the people from the state] is the wholesale destruction of public property. The country's entire rail system has been closed down, after mobs stripped the trains at the Tirana railway station of their seats and fittings, and smashed all their windows. School classrooms lack even seats, window panes and everything else that can be carried away, prised off, or simply broken. The buses in Tirana have empty sockets where their headlights once were. A student later put the point more simply: *"The state has been stealing from us for 45 years. Now its our turn to steal it all back from the state"*. Others

see more sinister causes at work. Dr Berisha and his party's spokesmen have complained repeatedly about "dark forces in society" (meaning the Sigurimi, the former secret police) pursuing a 'scorched earth' policy to discredit the move to a market economy and make people yearn for the good old days" (7).

It seems that Berisha's recurring theme was "communist conspiracy", interpreting thus spontaneous proletarian violence against exploitation, a habit of his that would rise later, during the 1997 rebellion against his rule, to fever pitch. After the elections, Fatos Nano, an economist and a reformist in the PLA became the head of the government. His programme included fundamental reforms like extensive privatisation and a shift to a free-market economy. However, things turned bad for the ambitions of Nano and his party: a 70% unemployment and increasing poverty left newly-established trade unions with no other choice but strike. With demands like a 100% pay rise, pension increases and a 6 hour working day, around 300,000 industrial workers went on strike in May. There followed the miners with hunger strike and soon the whole country paralysed. It was a successful general strike of urban workers who thus proved how much labour force discipline and work ethic had been irretrievably hit. When the strike reached a month, the PLA proposed a coalition government until new elections next year. So, officially the old regime was put to death sentence by these very proletarians that had been idolised by it and with its demise some industries never opened again as workers fled to Tirana when the strike ended.

The PLA was renamed the Socialist Party of Albania but this little helped improve its image. Thousands of Albanians continued emigrating to Italy seizing ships in Durres but a lot of them were sent forcibly back by the Italian authorities. Lootings occurred again and major changes were taking place even on a settlement level. Towns built under the former regime around a certain factory became ghost-towns as young people deserted them having previously destroyed completely the factories. A lot of rural workers found themselves with no land and were thrown away from the ex-collective farms on the grounds that Hoxha brought them during the period of collectivisation. With no appropriate land legislation thousands of them either left Albania or returned to their mountainous villages or stormed Tirana and other big towns. The coalition government decided to settle the land question granting peasant families the right to cultivate one acre of previously collective land.

However, this only made the chaos prevailing in the countryside even worse, with peasants left with no land at all and others seizing land claiming ownership since before collectivisation. Berisha chose this period, December 1991, to announce that the DP was leaving the government.

Berisha rules OK

It was an easy victory for the DP to win the elections in March 1992 with 62% of the votes while the Socialists polled only 25%. Berisha's image was created in the election campaign with promises of huge foreign investment and immigration possibilities to EC.

The DP's aim (similar to the democrats' aim everywhere in Eastern Europe) was to continue the initially failed process of decomposing the working class in a way that would discipline it according to a neoliberal model. They did it through a shock policy involving huge job losses, and cutting off the unemployment benefits to state workers and thus condemning to abject poverty almost 20% of the workforce. As for the land question, it's true the privatisation the DP had launched (up to 70% of collective land went for private use) gained it support from the peasants, but on the other hand it caused many disputes over ownership of land and seizures of co-operative land by families and, given the lack of machinery, it led to a state of decline in agricultural output. A lot of peasants looted co-operative buildings and took whatever they could. However, most could not survive and, especially the young, were willing to abandon their places fleeing to Tirana or the ports to go abroad. Mass immigration went out of any proportion and, in a way, it was a lot more than expected or wished by the government, which attributed once again the desperate efforts of Albanians to leave Durres in fishing boats to a "communist plot" to destabilise the country. So, in a way, immigration took the form of an individualised resistance to the shock therapy of the DP and it was a kind of insubordination and revenge against the state (besides of course the dreams of a better life). Resistance against Berisha's reform was shown as early as in May 1992 by a two-week strike by train workers, a riot and looting in Tirana in July, and a protest of the workers and the local inhabitants of a munition complex near Berat, that ended in a riot. The usual method Berisha had followed to handle such situations ever since was the use of paramilitary units as well as totalitarian-like propaganda on TV against those who are the "enemies of the country".

The collapse of the former regime and the absence of any state rule between 1991-92 caused many and complex changes. Lifting of the restrictions upon movement within the country soon meant, as we have already mentioned, ejection of peasant families from collective farms on the grounds that they were brought there under agricultural collectivization programmes and were never welcomed. Thousands of people made makeshift houses in the outskirts in Tirana and occupied land that used to be state farms for the nutrition of the city population. After March 1992 cars became legal again and quite soon the country was swept with thousands of cars and became no 1 in Europe's per capita road-death chart.

It seems that Pandora's box opened in Albania after the DP came in rule with all social contradictions and repressions exploding in a period of mass unemployment, uncertainty and despair. This was more evident in the case of women. The equality with men they "cherished" in the former regime primarily as workers and soldiers, meant not so much when thousands of jobs were lost. While religion, especially among Muslims, revived sending women back home, prostitution and pornography started flourishing. Marriages with wealthy Kosovars or Greeks became soon an industry making women invest on their bodies to survive.

In those times of transition, confusion prevailed in Albanians' effort both to survive and to form an identity. The hated past was collapsing dragging with it those parts of Albanian social and cultural collective identity which were seen as a burden in the

process of an anticipated personal and family "success". However, as the bleakness of Hoxha's past gave way to Berisha's nightmarish and fierce present, people were suddenly left with the taste of frustration in their attempts to be westernized or, merely, to survive.

The first two Berisha years passed in a volatile atmosphere caused by strikes and demonstrations against poverty and increasing authoritarianism. Unemployment reached 38% and immigration flows continued (1/3 of the Albanian GDP came from remittances of immigrant workers in Greece) while the Berishian shock therapy of full privatisation of all industries and state-owned assets was put into practice.

Mines or the manufacturing sector, previously protected against (outside) competition were hard hit, while a new class of small farmers was formed following the land privatisation. The farmers were mostly on subsistence level with agricultural machinery almost non-existent except for the huge Hoxha period tractors which were either worn out or unsuitable for small plots. Especially in the north the land issue disputes, which often were "solved" through blood-feuds, made a lot of impoverished people move to Tirana where new disputes between them and Tirana inhabitants broke out. Berisha's urging to northerners to move to the almost deserted coast areas and establish tourist businesses sounded like a bad joke to starving peasants who would prefer immigration instead. Living standards in general got worse and worse and the only welfare still provided came from the Catholic Church. The foreign investments promised by Berisha were actually quite few and a hindrance to such schemes was the land or generally the property question and endless disputes around it between old and new owners. However, besides a small minority involved in Mafia business, mostly in Vlores, a new stratum of small entrepreneurs in retail sector came into shape: pizza restaurants, cafes, expensive fashion clothes shops and jewelry shops appeared in Tirana giving the false impression of general prosperity. Officially statistics showed recovery, like for example hard currency in national treasury. Apart from the remittances, however, the main sources of income were foreign aid -which was quite generous- and money from smuggling petrol and fuel with ex-Yugoslavia.

The rebellion - "Posht Berisha!"

"The Albanian proletarians have hacked their way through history, Kalashnikov in hand"*

**slightly paraphrased here, this slogan was included in the preamble of the 1976 Albanian constitution (the original reads "the Albanian people have hacked their way through history, sword in hand")*

More than 1/3 of the active population had immigrated mainly towards Italy and Greece, not necessarily because they were unemployed but also because they were unwilling to stay and work in Albania under the new conditions. Such a development, that made Albania -and especially the south- a ghetto-reserve of cheap labour (actually the cheapest in Europe), served the interests both of the "reception" countries that exploited as best as they could the Albanian "illegal" labour force and the Albanian state through the remittances. With production devastated to a large extent (the most accurate term to

describe economy both on the countryside as well as in ex-industrial towns is wasteland) the Albanian bourgeoisie orientated itself towards financial capital through the establishment and support of the notorious "pyramid" banks (also called "parabanks" or "pseudo-banks" by world media, insinuating a clear distinction between "illegal-predatory" capitalism and "legal-normal" one). This banking system was the main type of capitalist investment within the 90's (8).

Political developments at that time in the Balkans (embargo on Serbia and Montenegro by the UN, as well as on Macedonia by Greece) helped those banks get established since capital came from smuggling guns and petrol. The lifting of the embargo and the end of the war in former Yugoslavia made it harder and harder for those banks to survive (there were 10 of them only in Tirana and one, VEFA, kept branches in Greece with Greek "investors" as well apart from Albanian ones). So they launched a policy of high interest rates (up to 50%) in their attempt to rapidly accumulate capital attracting mostly the immigrants' savings. Albanian proletarians were tempted into obtaining such flows of money from what they had originally so painfully earned, to the extent that many of them abandoned their badly paid jobs. "Why should they work", said a Greek businessman in Tirana who owned two textile factories. "I pay them 70 dollars a month, while anyone with 1000 dollars can earn twice or three times their wages with the pyramid system". We don't know whether this businessman faced so stoically the fact that in December 1996 half of his 130 workers abandoned their jobs. The banks had accumulated capital well over the country's GDP, they had been advertised by the state as the "Albanian model of capitalism", they were protected by it and they supported in turn the election campaign of the DP in 1996. Obviously any attempt at recomposing labour power that is based entirely on a politics of money and not on a productive process and the exploitation of labour is doomed to fail. In Albania there was the paradox of "working" class families that instead of working they were collecting interest rates and a bourgeoisie that did not invest on a production basis but reproduced itself parasitically on finance capital. And of course the "pyramids" did not collapse; the money was simply stolen and taken out of the country.

However, what other future except for the civil war could have been there in that corner of the Balkans with a model of social reproduction in which living labour was so marginal, with such a big number of immigrant proletarians and with those remaining in the country so unwilling to work for the bosses?

It's understandable that in this ghetto-reserve of Europe what media "analysts" call "Mafia" or "criminal" activities is nothing but some of the few ways of survival left for those within the country's frontiers. Of course there is a grading between organised heroin, car or "illegal" immigrant smugglers and petty-racketeers, like street-vendors selling cigarettes illegally, who are the majority. (During the rebellion another petty-industry flourished with hotel owners and taxi drivers who charged 300 marks for a room or a tour to the "hot areas" taking advantage of reporters' heavy presence). And of course the state mechanism was the most organised racket and Mafia gang, as well as the vast majority of the politicians with the leadership of the Greek minority being no exception as an expert in trading passports and visas to Greece. Indeed, Mafia-type economic

activity of the government was done so openly that in one of his electoral campaigns in Fier Berisha said: "I'm proud that cultivation of potato in your area goes just fine" implying hashish cultivation (from opposition newspaper "Koha Jone").

In any case, the rebellion was a spontaneous outburst of a lumpen proletariat, consisting of immigrants in its vast majority, with clear-cut targets: the state (personified in Berisha) and the rule of money that it imposed. Such a social rebellion cannot be explained with conspiracy theories about "involvement of Italian and Albanian Mafia" or, even worse, with "ethnological" interpretations of a "conflict between the two tribes, Ghegs and Tosks". We claim that we have to do with a modern rebellion. First of all, because its subject, the immigrant-mobile proletariat constitutes the central working class figure today. More than anyone else in the Balkans, it is the Albanian immigrant that represents not only poverty but also availability to capital. Certainly the place of the rebellion was not where Albanians had emigrated to, but where they are natives, that is members of a local community and not foreigners, totally alienated.

It was modern, because it was a rebellion against the power of money, the commodity that rules nowadays and determines the modern capitalist relation. It was modern, because they did not attack an old, outdated bureaucracy but on the contrary a state mechanism that had long ago began the hard job of reform: it was Berisha that undertook the process of shock-transition and it was in his time that the EC and the IMF as well, imposing a price rise in 1996, gave such a big financial aid towards this end. Such rapid transitions oblige those who manage them to appear more authoritarian than their western "colleagues", who have been on an escalated, more "normal" course for over 20 years now. The "undemocratic" nature of such regimes can be explained through this hard "task" therefore and not through their Stalinist past. We are not dealing here with remnants from the old days, but with loyal to IMF regional leaders. Thus, the rebellion is not a belated version of those in 1989, against the Stalinist bureaucracies, but the first one against the neoliberal, reformed governments of the ex-eastern bloc.

Finally, it was modern, for another reason that links it to the rebellion in L.A. in 1992. Unemployed, immigrants or poor peasants did not create the material conditions of a longer standing community of struggle. They just demanded money, the doubly stolen surplus value, but without any perspective of self-determining and producing their lives. Although they were fully-armed and had overthrown the state -which in mid-March 1997 was limited to a few squares in Tirana- they did not advance with a process of re-organising all aspects of their everyday life. The workers did not occupy the few factories or public services. Therefore, their political organisation was in accordance to their demands: the committees, which were mostly composed of ex-members of the local administration or the army, brought forward merely political demands for "free elections", change of the leadership, and they thus supported the socialist party, which in turn supported Berisha until the elections.

Anyway, all profound political changes are only reflections on the surface of deeper social changes, and such did not exist.

But how was this rebellion actually organised? There were public meetings since the beginning (in Vlores they took place twice a day until the end of March, but they were later reduced to 1 per day), and it was through those that the committees were formed. They were composed of people of "common acceptance" like ex-mayors etc, or simply of dynamic people. In Tepelen, for example, the man in charge of the committee, or to be precise, the "polemarch", was an illiterate but tough young guy, who was formerly a security guard in a coffee shop, named Giuleka. (9) This young man threatened gangs from a nearby village to stop stealing and he was quite influential. In general, however, the fact that the members of the committees were not elected or revocable but approved, helped to separate themselves from the rebels. The committees expressed overwhelmingly the "neat" and "homely" side of the rebellion (for example some of them criticised the burning of government buildings), they overemphasized the incidents of theft or the actions of some ex-convicts, presenting them as the most important problem of the rebellion. What they were actually afraid of, however, was the majority of the rebels and that is why they made the "problem" of the "uncontrollability of the revolt" a dominant matter. Information concerning their impact on the local communities was contradictory: some visitors considered it to be big, for others the committees were nothing more than small groups of armed people. If we take into notice the fact that the public meetings, being the place where the committees were coming in contact with the population -either to announce a decision or to discuss something- had become rare by the end of April 1997, then the committees could not have been the centre of the revolt. However, they remained the only collectivities created by the rebellion, relatively autonomous from the central or local power and the official opposition. In the beginning, in Vlores as well as in other towns public meetings were organs of self-organisation with great participation from the people: they decided on the patrols, the road blocks, the position of the militias, as well as the co-ordination of organising some matters of everyday life, e.g. arrangements with the shopkeepers -sometimes under "pressure"- or between cities for the distribution of food and other products). Gradually those elements of self-organisation were reduced or even disappeared and neither the committees nor the rebels promoted any process to continue the struggle or to re-organise everyday life (an exception was the town Kucova which until the beginning of April maintained a people's militia and imposed a price control on the shopkeepers).

No new communal institutions were created, and on the contrary the committees insisted on the reestablishment of the police, the army and the local administration which would now be composed of "the representatives of the people" and not of Berisha's followers. Thus, we had the contradictory situation that we described above: fully armed rebels failing to complete what started as an insurrection and to re-organise social life. The subsequent result was a situation of general inertia, stagnation, boredom and waiting. If in the beginning the images of the rebels playing cards with the Kalashnikovs on their feet brought forward an atmosphere of a festival of the oppressed, all they indicated later was fatigue and helplessness. Equally important was the sense of insecurity for survival which forced many young people to depart once again as immigrants. The absence of self-protection left an open ground for many provocateurs and organised gangs, something which in turn urged many to call for the "restoration of order", legitimizing thus the Fino government and the existence of a multinational military force.

The women remained invisible in the rebellion, although in the beginning they seemed to participate dynamically in the demonstrations and the looting of the army barracks.

Obviously the patriarchal structures of the Albanian society were not affected by the rebellion. Something that really changed dramatically was the relationship of the Albanians with guns, which during the rebellion and for a long time after it became an inseparable part of their body. In the beginning the volleys of the Kalashnikovs - especially at night- were constant, as well as the incidents of injuries from accidents. The gun became a toy, but also a symbol of power. And that is why as long as the basic demand of the rebels "we want our money back" has not been satisfied yet, no disarmament can be guaranteed. And of course the thousands of armed people who remain in a waiting position are a not at all symbolic threat to the Albanian government.

Chronology

19.1.97

Tirana. A big demonstration of protest (organised by the opposition parties) against the "loss" of money in the Albanian banks ended in fierce clashes with the cops.

End of January:

Another big demo (of 25.000 people) in Tirana, siege of the parliament, clashes with the cops. President Berisha assumes extraordinary powers regarding the use of the army in the face of the imminent rebellion. Government announcements about partial compensation for the money "lost". Demos in the north of the country, in Shkodra, and mainly in the south in Vlores, Patos, Korca, Lushnje. Town halls, government buildings, police stations, offices of the Democratic Party and the "pyramids" (those notorious banks) are burned down.

Mid February: 41 students at Vlores university go on a hunger strike. 26.2.97 46 students in Gjirokaster go on a hunger strike in solidarity with those at Vlores. In Tirana high school and university students abstain from classes.

28.2.97

Vlores. Tens of thousands of outraged demonstrators (several of them armed) attack the secret police headquarters and burn it down after hours of clashes (4 people die and a lot get injured). The reason for the demo was the rumour that the cops would break into the university against the hunger strikers. In Saranda, a woman who had lost all her savings in the "pyramids" sets herself on fire.

1.3.97

Vlores. Fierce clashes between many armed people and men of the secret police. This time 14 people get killed. The "uncontrolables" attack police stations and barracks which

they loot, taking away a lot of guns and ammunition, set public buildings on fire, loot and destroy private shops and firms (especially those collaborating with the government). In Vlores they also loot Hoxha's old villa (and Berisha's present country residence) and burn it down. The Socialist Party, which is the main opposition party, launch the slogan "Flowers not stones", but it is obviously ignored by the rebels. Indeed, the rebellion spreads quickly to many towns in the south: Tepelen, Himara, Delvin, Gjirokaster and chiefly to Saranda where the rebels set 200 prisoners free. The leadership of "Omonia", the organization of the Greek minority, prove how close it is to Berisha, describing the rebellion as "settling accounts between the government and gangs". Moreover, it tries in vain to give the false idea that the Greek minority is not involved in the rebellion and that it could become the target of the rebels. Terrible lies that collapsed at once. Alexander Meksi, the Prime Minister, resigns from the government.

2.3.97

Berisha declares a state of emergency. He refers to "armed reds, instigated by foreign secret services". A curfew is imposed and attempts are made at imposing censorship on the foreign press. As for the domestic one, it would hardly be necessary, since it had already, more or less, existed before.

3.3.97

The government of Berisha delivers an ultimatum for turning in arms, which naturally the rebels ignore. Tanks are moving towards Gjirokaster and elsewhere in south Albania. The rebels however do not lose time. They seize the naval port at Vlores and the naval base at Saranda where they occupy a mine sweeper. In this town, hundreds of people surround the Town Hall and the pale and injured mayor (a follower of the Democratic Party) was mobbed and asked to send an ultimatum to Berisha to leave the political scene. The 46 student hunger strikers in Gjirokaster give up the hunger strike, making an inopportune, national democratic announcement: "...seeing the uncontrolled situation created in the country and judging that when the essence of democracy is replaced by the power of arms, then this situation may bring about consequences with national cost... In such conditions, when democracy has no realistic colour, the hunger strike does not reflect the real situation and must be considered as terminated".

In the meantime, Berisha does not seem to be terrified and quite provocatively he is reelected by parliament, which he controls completely, for one more 5-year tenure of office, promising that he will "defend the ideals of freedom, democracy and progress". There is the rumour that Berisha has replaced the chief of the armed forces (whom he obviously could not control anymore) and appointed in his place the chief of the secret police, Gazidede, his right-hand man.

4.3.97

The government continues leaking out the information that tanks are moving to the south and roadblocks have been made, impeding traffic from the south to Tirana. In Saranda the armed rebels wait tensely, ready to withstand a possible attack. They elect an "autonomous town council", which consists virtually of representatives of all political parties. Representatives of this committee "agreed" to some kind of truce with Berisha.

Completely in vain. A bit later, men of the secret police in civvies try to enter the city and start shooting at armed rebels who are on guard duty. Many such cases prove the tactics followed by the government: violent espionage missions by men of the secret police, SHIK, which is completely under the government's control, in the south, or agent provocateur operations: thereby hooded gunmen, who in the end prove to be secret cops, murder peasants or travelers, commit sabotage or attack unarmed people, in order to spread panic and a sense of chaos. Among such actions we may also count some break-ins. However, some burglaries or lootings were more like "individual initiatives", instances of roguery or simply dictated by hunger and not necessarily acts of provocation. In any case, it is hard to make a distinction, although the lootings and destruction of the first days were collective and more "political" in character.

It is now clear that the army is not controlled by the government: the chief of the General Staff has also been replaced. A lot of officers and many more soldiers participate or often play the leading part in lootings of camps. Greek-speaking Albanians -who are deeply involved in the rebellion, at least most of them- said that soldiers and officers let them into the army camps, a fact that reveals how ridiculous the representatives of the Greek minority were to declare that "...the minority does not take part in the riots". On the other side, the government try to impute the rebellion to a conspiracy by the Greek minority while the Greek state protest, praising the minority for its "sense of responsibility". However, at the same time, the media vultures, having a nose for blood and spectacle, kept bombarding us with interviews with Greek-speaking armed rebels who were explaining why they rebelled! After that, a special recommendation was made to the channels "not to expose the minority". Of course, the truth is that, except for its political leadership, the minority rose up in arms as well, since they have lost almost everything in the "pyramids".

5.3.97

In the south, in Stiari, an outskirt of the town of Delvin, 60 fully armed commanders of the Police Academy in Tirana in civvies open fire against the rebels. As a result the latter respond violently and only after the mediation of the "Committee of Salvation" the cops get away. In Vlores, the rebels expropriate 3000 tons of wheat kept in state stores and start to reorganise their everyday lives by themselves, at first on an elementary level. In Saranda the rebels take possession of a tank and stroll through the town in it, and many others entrench themselves on hills around the town, fully armed, declaring that "we'll fight to the end".

Several unsuccessful raids by Berisha's men create an atmosphere of tension in the people who prepare themselves for a possible army invasion. (In the end such an invasion never took place since many soldiers, cops and officers having lost their money in the "pyramids" became rebels themselves. There lies the explanation for the easy access of the rebels to the camps, the use of tanks, ships and heavy weapons as well as their relatively good organisation on a military level).

6-7.3.97

Berisha meets with the opposition parties to discuss the situation, not controllable by any of them, but without result. However, the government is beginning to ebb and declares a new 48-hour ultimatum for turning in arms, granting a general amnesty. The European Council is exercising pressure on Berisha to collaborate with the other parties to form a broad-based caretaker government and to arrange for new elections.

The committees of Vlores and Saranda -at the head of which there are some former army officers- suggest several demands, like the formation of a new government of technocrats(!), calling for new elections, departure of those in charge of the state TV and the media controlled by the government, no persecution of the rebel army officers and withdrawal of the army from the regions.

8.3.97

Gjirokaster falls into the hands of the rebels; just before Berisha's armed commandos had tried to invade it the people had looted military stores and held them back. In Lushnje outraged demonstrators immobilise the bodyguards of the vice-president Tritan Sehu who had rushed to the town to calm the population down. Hit with a stone on his head the minister took shelter in the locker-rooms of a football ground mobbed by thousands of workers and farmers who had previously held him up to public ridicule by placing one leek in his mouth and another one in his arse.

9-10.3.97

Berisha retreats as the rebellion constantly spreads. He starts negotiations with the 9 opposition parties at an urgent meeting in the evening after the news of Lushnje and Fier falling had reached the capital. The rebels also seized the military airport at Kukcovac, 120 kms away from Tirana, taking hold of 40 Migs. Berisha declares to the parties that unless they all find a way to cope with the situation "they are all in for it" and suggests finally that the new premier should be from the Socialist Party while the Home Office (to which the media and the police belong and which is also responsible for the elections) remain with the Democratic Party. They also agree on a general amnesty for the rebels after they have turned in their arms, on a caretaker government of "National Reconciliation" with representatives from all political parties, on new elections to be held in June and to no longer have a state of emergency. That's how the opposition gave help to the government when it was desperately needed; however the rebels refuse to accept the agreement. Until the 10th of March they control 13 towns and 25% of Albanian territory. The committee in Vlores issues its own demands: elections before June, return of the money "lost", their own participation in the negotiations between Berisha and the opposition, freedom of press, the breaking up of the secret police, the lifting of the state of emergency. However, even in the north the government starts losing ground and people there are overtly reluctant and indeed indignant at Berisha's request to attack the insurgents in the south. A cop that guards the Town Hall in Shkodra says to a reporter: "He behaves like a dictator. It's infuriating to ask from us to use arms against other Albanians. We saw soldiers in the south surrender to the rebels. If anyone attacks this building, I don't think I'll defend it". This is a retort from a "Ghek, ardent follower of Berisha" to the journalists who have been trying constantly to distort the clear social

causes of the rebellion, attributing it to "ethnic hatred" and "prophesising" a new Bosnia. The Italian government temporarily wins on points in an imperialist race with the Greek government when the Italian ambassador meets representatives of the rebels of Vlores. They agree that humanitarian aid from Italy will be sent, on the condition that the committees persuade the insurgents to turn their arms in. This "diplomatic success" very soon turns out to be next to nothing.

11.3.97

11 out of the 13 rebel towns present a united front with common demands. They form a "Committee of National Salvation" in Gjirokaster. Among other things they demand Berisha's departure and their participation in the negotiations among the parties. The Vlores committee announced that the agreement reached the previous day between some of them and the Italian ambassador was null and void and that they would accept humanitarian aid but without any conditions.

In two towns in the north military stores get looted by ardent supporters of Berisha who intend to move to Tirana to support the Democratic Party. The common effort by all parties to keep the situation under control (and save their own hide) leads them to appoint as premier a member of the Socialist Party coming from the south (an ex-mayor of Gjirokaster), Bashkim Fino. The new premier declares that he wishes, of course, to "create a dialogue with the people". However, the Ministry of the Interior remains under the control of the Democratic Party. The new parliament passes a bill providing for general amnesty to all rebels on the condition that they turn in their arms by the end of March.

12.3.97

The rebellion advances rapidly to the north coming close to Tirana (a military store, just 35 kms south of Tirana, gets looted). A panicked Berisha mentions citizens' committees in the north and their need to get armed, obviously trying to present a new force to weaken the south and insinuating civil war between the north and the south. However, even in the north there are a lot who declare against his party, as well as in Tirana where the situation is still confused. In the capital there are armed people, both anti-government and pro-government (like, for instance, some soldiers who were driving in 8-9 trucks at dawn shooting and crying out against the south and in particularly Vlores) but no open clashes took place except that in some cases shooting could be heard. It's quite likely that a riot which never became known got crushed.

The notorious "dialogue with the rebels" of the new government has not started yet while 2 leading members of the party of the Democratic Alliance assumed more or less the representation of the "Committee of National Salvation" of the 22 rebel towns. Also, the party's leader rejected the agreement between the political parties and Berisha and sided with the rebels.

In the rebel villages of the south the committees have brought back into effect the elders' rule, the sub-prefects and the popular trials, to which members of the secret police (the

SHIK) were mainly brought, and whose trials or judgements were far from mild and magnanimous.

13.3.97

The new government requested that a multinational "peace" force should be sent to Albania and both Italy and Greece were among the first ones who rushed to enter themselves as part of it.

In many towns controlled until recently by the government there takes place lootings of military stores and clashes. Thousands of people raid a camp in the outskirts of Tirana crying out their demands in just one sentence: "Our money back and off with Berisha's head!". In Tirana tanks could be seen guarding public buildings and volleys of machine-guns were heard while the cops had vanished from the streets. The state TV broadcasts an announcement of a new (and rather suspicious) "Committee of National Salvation of the North", based at Tirana. It supports the government and premier Fino, asks for seriousness from the citizens, points out that people in the north are not against the rebels in the south but on the contrary seek dialogue and ends with this curious wording: "The Albanian people on the whole took up arms to defend the country against internal and external enemies".

14-23.3.97

Berisha recovers both by the military help of his armed praetorians who defend Tirana against a possible rebellion, terrorising everybody in the streets, and the political help given by the Socialist Party; despite the friction between the two major parties, the Socialist Party proves to be the best ally of the Democratic Party and salvaged the state taking very concrete measures: the old Sigurimi (former secret police) is reorganised trying to police the country in exchange for Fatos Nano's release; on the 14th of March Fino starts reorganizing the police force asking former and present cops to return tempting them with high salaries. Such efforts at bringing the state mechanism into operation again were relatively successful not only in Tirana where there weren't any chances of a rebellion but even in the south where the government tried to assimilate the committees. As proof of this, representatives of 11 committees met with Vranitzki and consented to the multinational military force!

On the 20th of March in a display of power Berisha rejects (through parliament) the government motions to lift press censorship and to get the state TV under the supervision of the government and not of parliament.

After touring Albania high-ranking diplomats from all EEC countries drew up the "Appeldorn report" concerning the situation in the country. Among other things they point out the necessity of aid given to reorganize the penitentiary system (the seven prisons of Albania got ...emptied and destroyed), they ascertain the lack of reliable information regarding the organisation and number of men in the police force (an indication of the extent of the state's disintegration) and they are "troubled" with the armed volunteers (hard-core fans of the Democratic Party and members of SHIK) who help the cops.

In the meantime the two major parties blame each other for deepening the state crisis: the Socialist Party is accused of "supporting" the committees (Fino met with the Vlores committee although representatives of the local authorities were also present) and the Democratic Party is accused of parliament's rejection of 2 bills regarding media control and operation. Having mentioned parliament, it's worth reporting that the ex-minister of Foreign Affairs said that half the MPs were armed at the last session!

In Tirana a second demo "for peace and order" takes place with the contribution of some pro-government organizations, like the Women's Union, under the auspices of the Soros Foundation.

The resigned chief of the secret police Gazidede, as well as Berisha himself, accuses the CIA and the Greek-Orthodox lobby as responsible for the rebellion.

26.3.97

Gazidede becomes clearer regarding the causes of the rebellion: he attributes it to a Greek plan to occupy South Albania (or North Epirus according to Greek nationalism - Epirus being a province of Greece, bordering on Albania) where the Greek minority lives.

According to Gazidede the plan was drawn up in 1990 but carried out in 1997. Such attempts at explaining social explosions and in particular a rebellion may seem ridiculous, but they are understandable since they derive from a chief of the secret police; however, they are based upon some older truths concerning Greek nationalism. In 1996 the Greek cultural attache in Tirana had revealed that between 1990-1993 (under the right-wing government) there were plans in the Foreign Office for the occupation of north Epirus and Greek agents were in Albania handing arms on to Greek-speaking people. In March 1995 there had been the arrests of 7 armed members of the Greek nationalist/terrorist organization MAVI (Liberation Front of North Epirus), which, based on Epirus, assassinated 2 Albanian soldiers at a borderline outpost and were handing out nationalist leaflets to Greek-speaking people of south Albania. Its members were secret police agents -an "autonomous" group according to the Greek state- in cooperation with Greek officials of the embassy in Tirana.

The above mentioned activities were already known to the Albanian government and Berisha rushed, a bit belated, to take advantage of them. In Tirana, in the meantime, the participation of secret agents in armed gangs patrolling the streets of the capital causes friction even within the Democratic Party.

28.3.97

On the 28th of March the "Committee of National Salvation", consisting of representatives of 18 regions, held a meeting in Vlores and issued a manifesto (signed by 7 political parties as well). The main points of the manifesto are as follows: they ask for Berisha's departure in an official way, namely through Fino's government which they support. They do not want to be represented by parliament but they ask for the setting up of an organisation which will "express the free will of the people and the government of

National Reconciliation". They also ask for the government's and the parties' cooperation in reorganising the local government and the public administration; having as a basis the parties' suggestions, they ask from the government to reorganise SHIK(!) and to "restore public order" and finally they demand that the committees should be recognised by the government as an important factor which has to be present at the negotiations.

7.4.97

Vlores. The "Committee of National Salvation", in which, apart from the committees of the rebel towns of the south, some committees from Tirana and Tropoje (Berisha's hometown) participate as well for the first time, meet once again, accusing parliament for "irresponsibility and lack of legality" and expressing again their support for Fino's government. Regarding the EEC decision to send a multinational "peace" force the Committee declares that it will be welcome on the condition that it will "escort humanitarian aid, aim at the restoration of democracy (and not at support for Berisha) and guarantee free elections in cooperation with Fino's government and the reorganised local authorities". As far as the disarmament of the rebels is concerned they stick implicitly to their position that arms won't be turned in before the "free elections". Their statement regarding the multinational force was made after serious disagreements were expressed by some committees; in any case in the end all agreed that the role of the force should not be a political one.

9-10.4.97

The preparations for the mission of the military "peace" force enter the final straight. Its basic aim is to disarm the rebels and to enforce order (and thus end the rebellion) under the pretext of helping to distribute humanitarian aid. Besides Italy (which is in command), 7 other countries will send forces: Greece, Spain, Turkey, Romania, France, Austria and Denmark. The Greek batallion consists of regular officers of 5-year service and it is leaked out that there was a lot of difficulty in setting it up since many of those officers were not volunteers but, on the contrary, forced to take part. The Italian military secret police toured around Albania smoothing things out for the military force and trying to detect how the armed rebels are disposed towards the Italian soldiers in particular, after the Italian harbour guard sank an Albanian boat thus murdering 80 refugees.

17-20.4.97

"Alba" operation -the multinational military intervention in Albania- encounters its first difficulties. Vlores is considered to be "unsafe" and the situation there "uncontrolled". In a big rally in Vlores -with Fino and Pronti present- slogans against Berisha and for the return of the money were dominant, something which is not indicative of a spirit of conciliation that could lead to disarmament. SHIK managed to collect some arms in a few towns (Korca and Berat), which anyhow did not participate in the rebellion so fervently. Berisha himself has become stronger since the beginning of the rebellion, takes part in official talks and asks persistently the multinational military force to disarm "the criminals of the south".

25.4.97

In one of its sessions, the "Committee of National Salvation" accuses Berisha and "the extremist followers" of the Democratic Party for sabotaging the work of the government (not paying the monthly allowance for cops, delaying the payment of pensions etc). They express their support not only for the government but even for the multinational force, as long as it follows its official status. They also ask all committees to try to reorganise local authorities. However, apart from these reactionary resolutions, they also repeat that their objective is the fall of Berisha and the return of the stolen money. Finally they make clear that they will not cease to exist until the new government guarantees the full repayment of the money.

9-10.5.97

The multinational force is stationed without any reactions from the people. In a particular case, in Vlores, Greek and Italian soldiers were also asked by the committee to patrol the streets so that the schools could open, in contradiction with what the committee had recently decided in respect of the force's status. In general, the soldiers behave very carefully, avoiding any provocation and the people, especially the young armed rebels, are rather suspicious towards them. It's mostly Berisha, who feeling powerful confiscates "Koha Jone", the main opposition newspaper, and continues demanding the disbanding of the committees and the people's disarmament.

11.5.97

Albanian political parties agree that early elections should take place on June 29. They arrive at this compromise after several threats, mainly from the oppositional parties, to boycott the poll, all trying to guarantee a better percentage through the electoral law. Not a minor role in the final compromise was played by the European envoy Vranitzki, who reminded the politicians that postponing the vote will only make the "international community" reluctant to give financial aid; in other words, that capitalism needs stable governments and unarmed workers.

The Democratic Party, together with the other 9 parties, demand that the committees should be disbanded by the 14th of May, in an ultimatum-like message, which remained ineffective since the committees had already arranged for a meeting for the 16th of May. However, people in Vlores, in their daily meeting indignantly consider this decision by the parties to be a political betrayal. Even local branches of the parties in the south have stopped supporting the committees and they even ask for special forces to be sent to Vlores with the pretext of stopping "gang warfare". In response to this the rebels start blocking the entrances to the town, which proves effective enough. In one incident of the so-called Mafia gang war a car was set on fire in which a SHIK agent was found. The Italian and the Greek states increase the number of their troops, although all foreign soldiers have still not dared intervene in the country's affairs in any direct way.

14-22. 5. 97

The committees held a meeting on the 16th of May in Vlores. The parties' ultimatum was ignored, as expected, and nobody raised the question of disarmament. They only held to their previous decisions. As time passes, the burden of survival in the south reveals its

impact on the future of the rebellion: up to 12,000 young people immigrate to Italy, of which many were the hard core of the rebellion. Berisha on his part starts his electoral campaign from Kavaje, a town controlled completely by his party. He even had the nerve to go to Fier and even attempt to enter Tepelen, where his guards were violently chased away. This was a reply to an attack against two leaders of the committees of Tepelen and Memalie, Giuleka and Lato. In Tserrië the rebels did not allow Berisha to have an electoral meeting. When two days later he sent special forces there, people chased them out of the town. In Tepelen the local committee issued an announcement about Berisha: "the dictator is the enemy of the people and he is not given the right to come and speak in our town". In Premet special forces sent by Berisha to prepare his electoral meeting were driven back after fights with the rebels.

Early June

Armed gangs terrorise the population in the south (more than 15 people were killed within just two days) and most of the incidents cannot be explained clearly. Indeed, since all agree that such bloody attacks are organised by the Democratic Party, most of them are blind acts of violence in order to discourage thousands of Albanian immigrants in Greece (predominantly pro-socialists) from entering the country to vote.

In Elbasan, in an electoral visit by the Democratic Party, a little boy mocked Berisha and his bodyguards beat him up. Hundreds of angry people approach and the guards start shooting, injuring some, while they escape quite hastily.

Berisha himself is attacked in a supposed murder attempt with grenades, where quite "accidentally", he remained safe and sound. Also, the first attack against the multinational force (Greek soldiers) was made in Tirana by unknown men armed with grenades, an incident that remains a mystery.

18-25.6.97

New attack against the Greek military force: according to a rather ridiculous version of the story from the Greek newspapers, Albanian Mafia men approach the camp of the Greek soldiers in Elbasan trying to ...sell them drugs. When the soldiers turn them away, they start shooting at the sentry, who shoots back killing one of them. Without any surprise, the Albanian police later announce that the dead man was one of the most dangerous outlaws. Some days later, on the 24th of June, armed men shoot at a Greek military motorcade and then leave. A similar incident takes place in Fier this time against Italian soldiers. It is a real puzzle who and why organises the attacks against the multinational force, since the population behave towards the foreign soldiers suspiciously or indifferently (and only in some cases almost enthusiastically) but never aggressively. And of course we are referring to open manifestations of the people and not to what several armed groups are doing.

Murderous attacks and killings go on until the day of the vote (15-20 people are killed every day) in cases that cannot be grouped together: members of the Democratic Party, the guard at the Greek consulate in Gjirokaster, a man of the former consul who was recently substituted after accusing the Greek ambassador for close relations with Berisha

and involvement in illegal activities. However, the Greek state quite openly shows its support for the Socialist Party helping organize one of its political meetings in Athens. It also made easier the journey to Albania to vote for thousands of members of the minority or Albanian immigrants. The cops grant thousands of visa-like notes to would-be voters, in some cases charging them for 50,000 drs (~200 dollars). Since almost all Albanian immigrants in Greece come from the south of Albania, where the Socialist Party is dominant, it is clear who the Greek government favours, apart, of course, from the Greek minority party (the Party of Human Rights).

29-30.6.97

Although the abstention was very high and some killings occurred, the joke called "elections in rebel Albania" finally takes place letting the socialists win with a high percentage (around 50 to 60%). Berisha declares that he will resign after the second round of the elections is finished, while some cadres of his party (the Minister and the Junior Minister of the Interior, the leader of the president's guard and a high-ranking officer of SHIK) flee abroad for fear of what may follow out of revenge against Berisha's regime.

"Omonia", the Greek minority organization and the Party of Human Rights suffer a crushing defeat in the first round. Those minority MPs actually elected were either candidates of the Socialist Party or got elected in places where scarcely any minority people exist (Korca, Elbasan). Apart from the minority leadership's nationalistic politics which is quite ineffective during a generalised revolt against class exploitation, another reason for the indifference and indeed hate shown by most of the Greek-Albanians is the fact that a lucrative business has been set up around the issue of immigration by officials of the minority organization. The consulate in Gjirokaster is the centre of all kind of "bureaucratic" processes necessary for issuing visas(costing 150,000 to 250,000 drachmas), falsified certificates of hellenized Albanian names, passports etc. Besides, the harmonious relations many cadres both of "Omonia" and Party of the Human Rights had with Berisha as well as how they have personally prospered from their dealings with the Greek Foreign Office were some extra reasons for their defeat. Just before the elections the ex-president of "Omonia" was "kidnapped" supposedly by political opponents. At least, this was the official explanation of his daughter, candidate of the party of the minority, who "heroically" appeared in the Greek media addressing the kidnappers and defying their threats and warnings not to stand for parliament. However, her acting was not appreciated by the voters who reacted to such a poor performance by leaving her out of parliament.

2.7.97

Hundreds of angry supporters of the monarchy (some of them armed)and members of the president's guard storm Skenderbeg square in Tirana burning posters of the Socialist Party, shouting curses against Nano, the Greek state and the "restoration of communism" in protest against the supposed "electoral fraud". Behind this absurd but dangerous reaction presumably one can discern Berisha trying to orchestrate an atmosphere of insecurity and pressure against the socialists, before the second round of the elections.

3.7.97

Second protest meeting of the supporters of the king, this time with king Leka Zogou himself at the head, armed and in battle suit. When some of them started shooting and throwing dynamite the cops replied with real bullets against the demonstrators. The result was one man dead and several people wounded.

22.2.98

The Nano government is still enjoying "immunity" by the Albanians who either as immigrants or within the country wait for the satisfaction of the basic demands of their revolt: their money back and Berisha's persecution. The atmosphere is heavy and full of suspense interrupted frequently by armed assaults against cops at night, without being certain whether they are committed by Berisha people or not. In Shkoder, some heavily armed men burned down the police station, blew up the court of law and set 35 prisoners free after a demonstration by supporters of Berisha. The latter were caught a week before the assault, when cops exchanged fire with some MPs of the Democratic Party. The town was soon taken back by the police special forces (not surprisingly the first sector of the public services that was reorganized so quickly). Four days later the Democratic Party demonstrated in Tirana against the government defying police veto on the demo. Such desperate actions of Berisha to exploit people's discontent in his own favour, actually help the government both to strengthen its own position against its political opponents and to stress a feeling of fear, confusion and insecurity in society presenting consent to its "recovery" plans as the only realistic way.

March-May 1998

It's been less than a year that the socialist party took the power and many Albanians remain armed (except, of course, for those who left the country again as immigrants). It seems that there is a fragile equilibrium between them and the government based on a Balkan-type compromise: policing is not at all heavy and the ruling party is promoting supporters, friends and relatives to positions in public services, making a western diplomat in Tirana comment that "the number of those fed on the government is constantly increasing". Besides, a lot of western non-government organisations keep on supplying the population with material aid. However, the basic demand of the rebellion has not been satisfied yet.

Supposedly by March, a year after the rebellion, the government had promised that they would have returned the money stolen by the banks. According to a foreign company, charged by Nano with the "investigation" of the fraud, "unfortunately" those banks can only return almost 15% of the initial capital of the people. Further promises followed this disappointing result, like legislative regulations in future to compensate them. While this tactics of constantly postponing the repaying of the money seems to work, a plan of further privatisations is under way in the hope of selling to foreigners what's still left public: telecommunications, chrome and copper mines and oil. To attract investors in a country where the proletarians showed recently such a contemptuous and indeed hostile behaviour towards them, is not an easy thing to do. The government hurriedly is passing laws to protect foreign investments. They are even thinking of setting up a service of securing foreign investments, under the auspices of the World Bank which will

compensate foreign companies 100% for losses in periods of war or political crisis. It's quite clear what these people have in mind and what are still frightened of. What is still not clear is to what extent their fears are going to be confirmed once more...

Notes

(1). Enver Hoxha addressing the People's Assembly in 1947 quoted in Adi Schnytzer, *Stalinist Economic Strategy in Practice. The Case Of Albania* (Oxford, 1982)

(2). Measures like the establishment of joint heads of privately owned livestock were highly unpopular amongst the peasantry and many people preferred to slaughter their animals than have them collectivized by the state.

(3). The authoritarianism of the state could be exercised in methods like the following ones: "restrictions on freedom of expression . . .Intrusion into family life: privacy and protection of the family were abused particularly in the regime's paranoid search for signs of religious activity. Child and adult informants and the interception of mail were the most common methods employed . . .Torture and detention: an extensive system of prisons and labour camps held individuals in unspeakable conditions because of their political and religious beliefs . . .Restrictions on personal movement: travel outside the local area or residential relocation within the country required prior written authorisation, Attempted escape from the country was considered to be treason, punishable by at least ten years imprisonment and the possibility by the death sentence" from Derek Hall, *Albania and the Albanians* (London, 1994)

(4) "It was reported that some workers in the Buqize chrome mines averaged only twenty work days per month in 1972 and that industrial enterprises of the Skrapar district lost 14, 456 working days through unjustifiable absenteeism" Adi Schnytzer, op cit.

(5) However, women were not seen merely as national wombs. As in most states of the ex-eastern bloc, the constitution guaranteed women's equality with men, which would be interpreted as the right - almost the obligation - to have a job. Imposed atheism in 1967 also helped promote the ideology of women's emancipation through wage labour. Religion was - rightly seen as a kind of bondage that tied women to the home. For the regime the attack against religion served a double purpose: on the one hand it established the idea of the women-worker instead of the woman-believer-slave (that's why atheism was largely favored by women) and on the other hand it crushed an antagonistic source of power that could threaten the party's efforts at developing a unifying national identity; Roman Catholicism, Christian Orthodoxy and Islam were also seen as agents of imperialist penetration by Italy, Greece and Turkey respectively.

(6) One or two stremmas per peasant family was allocated to cultivate vegetables and sell them to urban markets.

(7) Noel Malcolm, *Spectator*, 28 March 1992, quoted in M. Vickers and J. Pettifer, *Albania - From Anarchy to a Balkan Identity* (London, 1997)

(8) There are several Italian companies and fewer Greek ones which however do not employ a lot of Albanians, Although an Italian businessman in Vlores said in the beginning of the rebellion that they went on business as usual, since what was happening was part of the risk involved in such investments, many Greek businessmen returned to Greece bankrupt. Greek investments are of low cost and they are subsidized by the Greek state provided that they are directed to the Greek-speaking areas in the south, Only recently 3 Greek banks have settled in the country.

(9) We should note here that in the slang of the rebetes in Greece this word means bugbear, terror, fake macho, something which indicates the Albanian origin of many Greek words. Let us not forget we are talking about a Balkan neighborhood.