

WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!

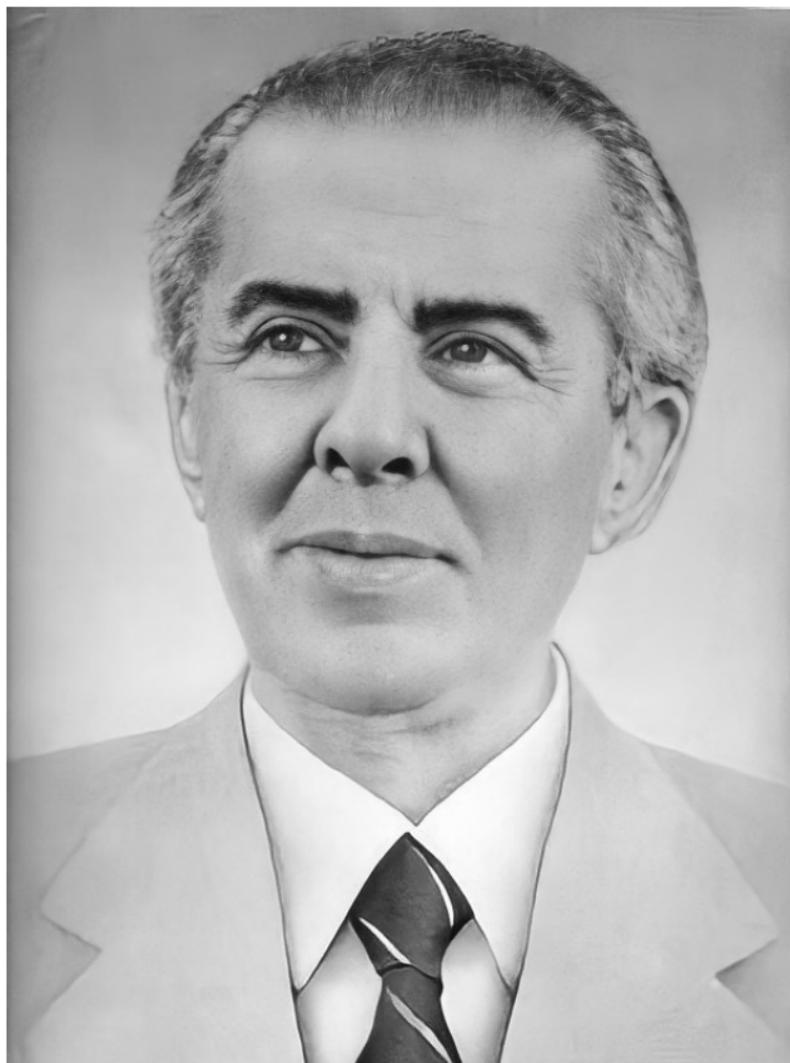
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***When the Party
Was Born***

*Excerpts from the
Reminiscences*

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The grave situation which was imposed on the Homeland by fascist occupation charged us communists with great responsibilities. Whereas in the decisive days before April 7 the communist groups, divided and struggling against one another, were unable to create a single leadership and to mobilize the people for armed actions against the aggressors, now the situation following the occupation made organized, uninterrupted communist work even more essential. We had to act to organize ourselves for resistance and to show people what Italian fascism was and what aims it had; we had to denounce its demagoguery, the character of the measures it took and the cunning methods it employed, claiming that it came to rescue the country from Zog, that Albania would have its own government, etc. We had to organize the resistance and the propaganda against the quisling government of Vërlaci, which carried out the masquerade of “the union of Albania” with “the Italian Empire,” headed by Victor Emmanuel III, who a lit-

tle earlier had assumed the title of “Emperor of Ethiopia” and now also assumed the title of “King of Albania.”

To accomplish these tasks was undoubtedly difficult, but not impossible. The big demonstrations which burst out all over the country in the first days of April against the Italian threat, the demands for weapons which the broad masses of the people made to the treacherous feudal government of Zog, the general expression of readiness to fight, the attacks on the Italian troops disembarking at Durrës, Vlora, Saranda and Shëngjin, were the signal for us communists that only by organizing and arming ourselves and by fighting would we be able to drive out the enemy who now threatened the very existence of our country and people; they were the best confirmation of the fact that our people would not tolerate the occupation and that with a reliable leadership they would rise to their feet and hurl the aggressors into the sea.

Nevertheless, although we members of various communist groups were aware of the need for struggle against the occupier and engaged in various practical forms of it, we were not managing to find a common language, to iron out our ideological differences and unite our forces and efforts. This was very damaging to the joint struggle against the common enemy. Even as groups, the occupation found us not properly organized. The work of the groups had not been extended to the broad masses of the people all over

the country, despite the correct instructions of the Comintern, which Comrade Ali Kelmendi had brought in 1932, and, subsequently, the new directives of the 7th Congress of the Comintern, which reached Albania in 1937, and recommended that we should go among the masses, work with them and there build and strengthen the new cells.

These instructions, in the spirit and the light of the directives of the 7th Congress of the Comintern, were defined in Moscow at a meeting organized by the Balkan Section of the Comintern, at which the state of the communist movement in Albania and the tasks which faced it were analysed. The broad perspectives which these directives opened up for the development of the communist movement in Albania were sabotaged by the Trotskyite elements.

The Communist Group of Korça accepted and adopted the instructions of the Comintern. This group achieved considerable success in its activity with workers, with the youth, and the craftsmen and small shopkeepers. Nevertheless, the characteristic of the comrades of the Korça group was sectarianism, which was expressed in closed work within the city of Korça, while outside Korça and in other cities the group carried out very ineffective work, if any at all. Certain anti-Marxist elements of this group took advantage of the sectarianism and other weaknesses which hindered the development and the extension of the communist movement, with the result

that some members of our group in Tirana split away from us. Some of them had formed a Trotskyite group, headed by Aristidh Qendro, as early as in 1936, while others, led by Anastas Lula and Sadik Premte, were showing signs of a new faction, which later, after the occupation of the country, emerged as a separate group known as the “Youth” Group.

I remember that soon after the occupation of the country the Korça group sent two representatives to Tirana to make contact with Anastas Lula and some of his comrades in order to make clear to them the new tasks in the situation of occupation and to persuade them to maintain their links with the group. However, the envoys of the Korça group were quite unable to persuade Anastas Lula and company, while in the ideas and life of this group they saw vile anti-communist Trotskyite acts of utter immorality. Horrified, they parted from Anastas Lula’s group and when they reported to us, the Korça group quite rightly decided to begin the ideological struggle against those Trotskyites.

That group had embraced all the theories and practices of anarchist Trotskyite gangsters: robbery, lies, corruption, wife swapping. They brought out new “theories” which were causing great harm to our struggle. According to Anastas Lula, Andrea Zisi and other Trotskyites, “the occupation of the country had its bad aspect, but also its good aspect: it was favourable, because the bourgeoisie would become established, in-

dustry would be built, the working class would be created, and then, it would be possible to talk about the formation of a genuine communist party, then it would be possible to talk about struggle against the occupiers.” “We must wait for the creation of the proletariat,” “work with the peasantry does not bring results,” was the propaganda they spread. Of course, the “theories” of those chiefs were not only anti-communist, but they served the occupiers and sabotaged the organization of the people’s resistance and struggle against them. The Korça group waged a merciless struggle against these traitors and their “theories” and actions, which were not only Trotskyite, but were also identical with those of the Albanian fascist party, created by the occupiers.

The Korça group had a correct line on these capital problems, but it has to be said that Koço Tashko’s bad influence interfered with the broad development of this line. Outside Korça, and especially in Tirana where the work of the group had been left in the hands of Koço Tashko, the process had virtually marked time. Claiming that it was he who had brought the instructions of the Comintern from Moscow, Koço Tashko posed as a big shot, as the representative of the International in Albania, but the truth was that he did not know how to work with people and was as sectarian as he was opportunist.

Zogite reaction had attacked the Korça group, but, nevertheless, it remained the biggest,

most important group, not only because of its numbers, but especially because the ideas of this group were more correct than those of other groups. Our Korça group took a correct view of the great danger of the fascist occupation and fought in its own ways, but had it acted energetically and with the necessary maturity, through sounder and more intelligent organizational work to liquidate all that mountain of personal "resentments," contradictions, squabbles and ambitions or slanders, which were not lacking among communist groups, it would have exerted a greater influence to bring the communists together and would have speeded up the formation of the Party. Facing the great danger of fascism which had occupied the country, the road of Marxist-Leninist unity was greatly neglected. Consequently, even after the occupation the groups not only remained in their old positions, but their squabbles and contradictions were increased and exacerbated. Koço Tashko and Anastas Lula were a great hindrance to improving the situation in this direction.

Nevertheless, the fact is that in Korça, where Comrade Miha Lako led the group, in general, the work went well. Especially on the eve of the occupation and immediately after, the activity of the group became more vigorous than ever. We met regularly, discussed and determined the stands which we had to take to the great and difficult problems that faced us.

In the first place, we had to safeguard and

further strengthen the sound unity within our communist group, must not permit any splits in its ranks or any sign of fear or panic in the face of the terror and reprisals of the fascist regime. I remember that in the early days of April, when the occupying forces had still not entered the city, someone proposed that some of our comrades known to the authorities and the fascist agents for their anti-fascist activity should leave Korça in order to escape internment or prison. Stern objections burst out:

“All the people of Korça, all the people of Albania are anti-fascists,” we pointed out in the meeting. “Thousands of people are demonstrating in the streets shouting ‘Down with fascism!’ Then, how can the communists withdraw from the people? The opposite is what must be done. We must be the first in actions and demonstrations, we must show the people the true road of the struggle and liberation, we must convince them through our own example!”

And in fact, this is what occurred. The communists of the Korça group, of which the workers of the city made up the main core, were not frightened or stopped by any danger. The workers had a great influence on the pupils, who at that time we called students. The Lyceum of Korça was an important support for the resistance against fascism. The pupils of this Lyceum, with their revolutionary teachers, intensified the spirit of the anti-fascist demonstrations of April 1939 day by day, and later, especially af-

ter the founding of our Communist Party, they turned the Lyceum into a real revolutionary hotbed, a source of cadres of the Party and partisans of the National Liberation Army.

The idea of my going to Tirana “to become a shopkeeper” was not accidental and did not arise simply from my dismissal from my job. No, this was something carefully considered and calculated by our communist group. As I have already mentioned, especially after the fascist occupation of Albania, the Communist Group of Korça became more than ever aware of its old weakness of being closed within the city of Korça. This isolation had not only hindered the further extension of the ranks of the group and all the work that had to be done to explain the situation to the masses and mobilize them, but it had also limited the possibilities to establish links of collaboration with the other communist groups.

Koço Tashko, who stayed mainly in Tirana, was not doing any good organized work or even propaganda by word of mouth. Koço’s work consisted of a few “academic” conversations with the intellectuals, but even these with hesitation and fear that he might be detected by the police. In general, I can say he was both a megalomaniac and a coward. Of course we did not arrive at this conclusion about Koço immediately and at that period, but only later and gradually, because his work showed what he was, while at first we did not know him properly. With some comrades of our group who were in Tirana at that time, such

as with Xhevdet Doda, and with Demir Godelli in Peqin and others, all he did was hold skin-deep conversations, try to get to know them individually, curse and struggle against other communist groups, especially the Shkodra group and Anastas Lula's faction, which was steadily assuming the form of a separate group. But Koço abused these groups indiscriminately, without making any distinction amongst their members, some of whom were resolute communists, and without taking any initiative to make approaches to or talk with them. Therefore, the need had arisen for more organized and intensive work outside Korça, especially in Tirana, which was not only the centre of fascist reaction at that period, but also the place where the main representatives of the other communist groups were located and operating. Precisely at these moments I was dismissed from my job and the centre of our communist group took this opportunity to first send me and subsequently some other comrades to Tirana. There, on the instructions of the centre, we had to set up the Tirana branch of the Communist Group of Korça, to extend the activity of the group on sound foundations and organize the anti-fascist movement in the capital and the other districts of the country.

After we discussed and reached agreement with Miha, Pilo and other comrades about the main directions of our work in Tirana and other zones, the way had to be found to establish ourselves there so that we could act "legally" under

the eyes of the people and the authorities. In the course of these discussions the idea arose of embarking on a "commercial venture," that is, of opening a shop in Tirana, which we called "Flora" and which was very quickly to become one of the most important bases of the communist and anti-fascist movement...

We were preoccupied by two main, basic objectives for the great ideal which was burning in our minds and hearts: to increase the number of members of the group with resolute workers, with craftsmen, with revolutionary students and intellectuals as much as possible and in all the cities, and to make a start in the countryside where our work was, you might say, almost zero; and the second objective, to eliminate on a principled basis the quarrels and disagreements with the other communist groups which were operating in Tirana, Shkodra and elsewhere and to achieve a true unity with them, because the question vital to our country, the formation of the Communist Party, depended on this.

The main decisive thing was extension of links with the workers, because they would comprise the steel base of the Party which we were going to form. We understood that if we would achieve this, there was no force which could defeat us.

On this question we had taken good initial steps. We had created contacts and had held meetings with revolutionary workers, but this activity had to be intensified. The new worker com-

rades were advised to create links and to associate with the young people of other groups, to get into friendly conversation with them, to speak against the fascist enemy, against the quislings and so on, but cautiously and without exacerbating the situation, while preserving the individuality of our "Party." "Listen comrades," I stressed to them, "this has great importance for the future."

And this is what was done. They all worked tirelessly and considerably extended their circles with courageous young workers. These active young workers were impatient, they wanted struggle and actions against the enemy. They came all the time to the "Flora" shop where they found me or Pilo, and after they had reported to us, asked the usual question: "What should we do today, what should we do tomorrow?"

In this same period I went to Gjirokastra, too. Elements of different communist groups had been active there for years. I met some of these comrades and we talked about the problems facing the Albanian people, and first of all, facing the Albanian communists. Among other things I pointed out that, although we were members of different groups, we ought to work closely together because we had the same ideals and were fighting for a common cause. I told the comrades that "our fight against the occupiers cannot really get going or be crowned with success without rejecting the unhealthy views and spirit of groups, therefore we ought to make every effort

to find a common language and to create the conditions which will lead us towards the founding of a single party, the Communist Party of Albania. That is the task which faces all the sound revolutionary forces of the country, which faces every comrade regardless of whether he is in the leadership of the group or a rank-and-file member, regardless of whether he works and struggles in Tirana, in Korça, in Shkodra, in Gjirokastra or anywhere else.”

Meanwhile our work in the countryside was still weak, therefore it emerged as an important task to create links with the peasantry. At that time we fought especially against Anastas Lula's Trotskyite views about the problem of the countryside, views which aroused confusion and, if they were spread, would cause very great damage, not only to the work of the party which we were going to form, but also to the outcome of the war against the occupiers.

According to Anastas Lula and his followers, the Albanian peasantry was “backward,” “conservative” and “reactionary” and the communists could not work or create organized links and bases with it! I shall have some more to say about the reactionary views of Anastas Lula and his associates, but here I want to point out that the Korça group not only had correct views on this problem, but also struggled to defend its views. Especially after we came to Tirana, our interest and attention to the peasantry was further increased. This theme had interested and at-

tracted me personally for some time, not only because as a communist I was aware of and understood the need for linking the cause of the working class with that of the peasantry, but also for another reason: I had been acquainted with and admired the great revolutionary and patriotic traditions of the Albanian peasantry since my childhood and youth, its ceaseless struggles for freedom and national independence...

Without the peasantry our Party would be unable to fulfil its mission. Comparing the views of Anastas Lula and company on the character of our peasantry with the distorted and denigrating views of the Esadists, the Zogites and the money-lending bourgeoisie on this problem, I saw clearly that in essence they were almost identical. Therefore, we had to fight hard against the Trotskyite and reactionary views on the peasantry, because only in this way would we create a genuine Marxist-Leninist party. At first, however, this struggle was waged more from the theoretical angle, because concretely the countryside was untouched territory for us. In this direction we stressed the view of "toilers," as we expressed it, when we explained to the comrades of the group from the theoretical aspect the problem of the alliance of the working class with the peasantry, which was vital to the liberation of the Homeland. The worker comrades understood this need, although it must be acknowledged that the people of Korça were somewhat sectarian about it. Through patient persuasion we were

struggling to gradually overcome this obstacle. For my part, I had begun the work through the contacts I had established with Myslim Peza.¹

After my meeting with the *çeta* of Peza, we immediately began to send our comrades there. Likewise, on the basis of the agreement which we achieved with the Shkodra group on common actions, subsequently the Shkodra group sent comrades to that *çeta*. Thus, the comrades of this group, too, were fighting alongside our comrades and this was a fine thing which was to strengthen the belief that this group, too, was for struggle, and thus, one of the baseless accusations which some raised about the group was overcome.

We also established contact with the peasants of Dajti and Kruja, because we had good comrades there. Meanwhile, I continued to extend my contacts with my former colleagues, anti-Zogite and anti-fascist teachers. Our circles were being extended also with other intellectuals some of whom I knew and some Koço Tashko knew. Koço Tashko, as an older man and a former vice-consul in New York,² worked especially with the

¹ Myslim Peza (1897-1984). Democratic patriot and anti-Zogite fighter. After the occupation of the country he became one of the most distinguished figures of the Anti-fascist National Liberation War. He was vice-president of the Democratic Front of Albania, vice-president of the Presidium of the People's Assembly (1946-1982), People's Hero and Hero of Socialist Labour.

² From 1922-1925 Koço Tashko was vice-consul of the Albanian government to New York.

elderly nationalists who had gone into exile in the time of Zog and had returned with the “wagons” of the Italians. Koço enjoyed talking and there was no danger of him compromising himself with them.

Besides our efforts to extend the work of our group and the anti-fascist propaganda among the people we had also worked and achieved some successes on the other main question, that of contacts with the other communist groups.

First, however, I want to say something, in general, about the situation and main views of the Shkodra group and the “Youth” Group, as I have done about the Korça group. The truth is that we created a complete idea about the situation of these two groups when we began open discussions and made self-criticism on behalf of the groups during those historic days and nights when we laid the foundations of the Communist Party of Albania. Before that time no group had a correct and accurate opinion about the other group. The opinions of the Korça group about the other groups and their opinions about our group were in flagrant contradiction with one another. In our personal ideas there were some nuances which showed that something was changing, that some road of communication and rapprochement between us was opening up, but, in general, we had to obey the same rigorous stand of the group and this kind of discipline kept us still divided, cold and resentful towards one another. It was precisely the meetings in the first

days of November 1941 that shed full light on the good points, the weaknesses and the shortcomings in the work of groups, and on what things linked us together and how we should unite, and on what things divided us and how we should get rid of them once and for all. But this took place later. Now let us dwell on the concrete situation of the groups.

In general, the Shkodra group was made up of good comrades. They included workers, students and a few intellectuals, but few peasants, if any at all. Of course, like every group, it had sympathizers from various strata. The Shkodra group, too, had a closed character; most of its members were in Shkodra, but a number of members of the group, workers and especially students, were in Tirana.

In the Shkodra group that internal organization and discipline which the Korça group had created was lacking. The links of its members were loose; their actions were not dictated by a more or less affirmed leadership, and individual instructions and directives were issued according to the occasion. The Shkodra group could not be controlled, not because its members did not meet and did not receive instructions, but because the meetings which they held were extremely secret and nothing was said outside them about actions.

The Shkodra group had not accepted the directives of the Comintern to dissolve the sectarian "cells," to send the communists among the masses of workers, peasants and intellectuals, to

work with them and to create new, clean, powerful cells ready for the struggle with the best of them.

These views of the leadership of the Shkodra group against the directives of the Comintern were in conflict with the love which many fine members of the Shkodra group nurtured for communism, the Soviet Union, Stalin and the Comintern, and this was tragic. These members included Vasil Shanto, Qemal Stafa, Kristo Themelko, Tuk Jakova (who subsequently betrayed the Party and conspired with the Yugoslav Titoites against the Party and the socialist Homeland), Nexhmije Xhuglini, Ali Demi, Nazmi Rushiti, Qamil Gavoçi and many other comrades.

The comrades of the Shkodra group were resolute anti-Zogites and anti-fascists and, especially after the occupation, they, too, threw themselves into revolutionary actions, demonstrations, distributing leaflets, etc. But this group had at its head a cunning Trotskyite, Zef Mala, who when he was imprisoned told Zog's police all he knew about his own group and other comrades. He posed as an intellectualized proletarian, but was nothing but a petty demagogue and intriguer who carried on undermining work. He published two numbers of an allegedly theoretical bulletin of the group (which was called the "Green Bulletin" from the colour of the cover) with which to nurture its members. But the ideas and opinions which he spread were extracts from Trotskyite

manuals which were published in fascist Italy. (The Korça group, too, published a bulletin which looked at through today's eye had no great weight, although mistakes of the line in its articles were rare.)

From the first moments when it was formed as a separate group the Shkodra group tried to link up with the Korça group, but, unfortunately, this was replaced by a connection with harmful consequences: about the end of 1937, Zef Mala came into contact with Niko Xoxi, a vile, Trotskyite element, who betrayed the Korça group and Ali Kelmendi.

When he saw he was unable to dominate the Korça group, Niko Xoxi, stuffed with all the archeio-Marxist diversionist rubbish of Andrea Zisi, went to Shkodra and Tirana and there very quickly he found a common language with Zef Mala, as you might say, the pot found the lid to fit it. After engaging in a series of intrigues, slanders and causing confusion, these two renegades managed to take over the reins of leadership of the Shkodra group.

After this anti-Marxist link-up we saw all sorts of theories alien to the revolutionary movement in Albania spring up in this group, which hindered it from finding and embracing a correct revolutionary line. In the second half of 1940 the leaders of the Shkodra group had made deals with the "Youth" Group, which was led by Anastas Lula.

Especially after the link-up with this group,

the penetration of erroneous ideas became even more pronounced. Unlike the Communist Group of Korça, which was based on the workers and was comprised mainly of workers, the Shkodra and the "Youth" groups concentrated their attention mostly on the school, on the intelligentsia. The theoretical and organizational ideas imparted to these young people, especially by the leaders of the "Youth" Group, as well as by Zef Mala and Niko Xoxi, had no sound Marxist bases, nevertheless, especially after the fascist occupation, these groups intensified their efforts to win over as many of the secondary school students as possible, especially in Tirana, Shkodra and Vlora and, to a lesser extent, in the other cities of the country. For all its shortcomings, the communist propaganda carried out with the school youth was to play a positive role.

The grave moments which the Homeland was experiencing under the fascist occupation, the hatred which the youth nurtured for the occupiers, the drive and enthusiasm seething in their youthful hearts, you might say, naturally wrote off the aims and "dreams" of anti-Marxist leaders about the "quiet" preparation of "pleiads" for the revolutionaries of the future! No, the revolutionary youth who came under the influence of one or the other group did not do this for "the tomorrow" that never comes, but did it for today, for the moment, for the struggle which was boiling up and up to erupt. They entered the communist movement and considered them-

selves communists with the sacred idea that they must throw themselves immediately into demonstrations and actions, that is, take up the cause of the war and the revolution which were problems on the order of the day. This is the main reason why, despite the leaders' work of sabotage, the rank-and-file of these groups were for the war and for the Party, and exerted their great influence in settling the disagreements which existed between groups.

Both in the Shkodra group and in the Korça group no small role was played by harmful localist solidarity, which had no sound basis. But the mistakes were more pronounced in the Shkodra group because of the Trotskyite influence of Zef Mala, Niko Xoxi and Andrea Zisi and others, while resolute communists with clear ideas like Ali Kelmendi, Miha Lako, Pilo Peristeri and other proletarians led the Korça group.

Another difference between these two groups was the stand adopted towards Marxist-Leninist literature and theory. The members of the Shkodra group were more assiduous readers than those of the Korça group. The Korça group was characterized more by practical action. However, it must be said that, while the members of the Shkodra group and the "Youth" Group did more reading, the literature which they used which came from Greece or Italy, was uncontrolled and the interpretation of what was read was erroneous; in the "Youth" Group especially the interpretation was Trotskyite. Equally dis-

torted and basically un-Marxist was the aim from which the leaders of these groups proceeded in the “profound” study which they allegedly made of the literature which came into their hands. Under the influence of Zef Mala and Niko Xoxi, before the fascist occupation, the Shkodra group embraced the anti-Marxist theory of the “training” and the “preservation of cadres,” a theory brought to Albania by the archeio-Marxist adventurer and trickster Andrea Zisi. According to this “theory,” the conditions for a true revolutionary struggle of the masses did not exist in Albania, indeed, neither the working class and the bourgeoisie, nor class struggle existed! Consequently, those who followed this view had arrived at the conclusion that until the conditions for the revolution(!) had been created, the communists should not do anything, but “prepare themselves theoretically,” to acquaint themselves thoroughly with the “literature,” and to “protect themselves,” that is, to hide from the real struggle with the aim that, when the “dreamed of” moment came, these “learned” men could proclaim their knowledge in the streets and take power!

Regardless of the aim and orientation of the leaders on this problem, however, it must be said that the work done on studying that part of the literature which was truly Marxist was to play and did play a positive role in the revolutionary arming of the sound rank-and-file of the groups.

Most of the members of the Shkodra group were brave, courageous people. Despite their

Trotskyite leaders, Zef Mala and Niko Xoxi, they worked to organize the fight against fascism. We must not forget that they were under the surveillance not only of the Zogite police, but also of the “police” of the Catholic clergy. This was a great danger in Shkodra which infected people like a disease.

Zef Mala, the leader of the group, ended up as an agent of the Zogite police, who betrayed all the comrades and the work the group did. Zog’s police arrested the main comrades of the Shkodra group, tried them and condemned them to various terms of imprisonment. When Albania was invaded, Qemal, Vasil and others broke out of the prison and Qemal was wounded in the arm when the gendarmes pursued him.

What stand did the Shkodra group take towards the occupiers and the Trotskyite chiefs? It must be said that all its members, like those of the Korça group as well as the rank-and-file of the “Youth” Group, were as a whole opposed to the occupiers and the quislings. They hated the fascist occupier and wanted to fight; therefore, they came out en bloc in demonstrations and in actions. On the other hand, however, as I mentioned above, there was confusion in their ranks caused by the pseudo-Marxist “theories” which the Trotskyites spread. This confusion was eliminated in stages in the rapid flow of events which followed.

These were the good and bad characteristics of the Shkodra group. It is understandable that

in these conditions there were quarrels and a struggle between it and the Korça group for “hegemony” over such questions as “which is the party,” “which has links with the Comintern,” “which has the correct line,” “what role the workers will play and what role the peasantry,” “what views should be taken of the family, marriage, private property,” and many other things and, undoubtedly, the opposing views we had on these questions divided us from one another and neither side made concessions. But apart from questions of principle which divided us, our links were damaged also by the petty-bourgeois arrogance of Koço Tashko, who nurtured the idea that “it is useless to try to talk to them or make approaches to them.” And it was even more regrettable that he was referring even to those comrades of the Shkodra group, like Vasil Shanto and Qemal Stafa, who had proved their courage and communist determination before Zog’s courts.

What was the “Youth” Group? Here I am not going to write its history because the Party has done that in its analyses, but I want to point out some truths. This group had its centre in Tirana. It had branches in other cities, especially in Vlora. At the head of this group were two “hot-headed” anarchist Trotskyites, Anastas Lula (Qorri)¹ and Sadik Premte (Xhepi).² In the time

¹ The Blind.

² Xhepi, short form for Rexhep, meaning pocket.

of Zog these two elements posed as anti-Zogite. while in the time of occupation as anti-Italian. They posed as communists, but the “theories” which they spread had nothing to do with communism. These two elements sowed confusion among the youth.

After attacking the treacherous factional work of Aristidh Qendro in Tirana in 1937, the Korça group regarded these two elements as its members and put them in contact with the comrades of the group who went to attend school or to work in Tirana. However, Anastas Lula and Sadik Premte, by taking over from Aristidh Qendro all his anti-Marxist baggage and taking advantage of the localism of the Korça group which did not carry out its work properly in all those places where there were young people, formed their own faction in the Korça group.

As time passed, this faction, while retaining some formal links with the Korça group, intensified its disruptive work and at the beginning of 1940 emerged as a separate group. This was the time when we were working and struggling to settle disagreements with the Shkodra group and, indeed, had succeeded in creating a sort of joint “Central Committee” between the Korça group and the Shkodra group.

I am not going to dwell on the essence of this agreement, which at the meeting to found the Party we rightly described as an agreement from above, a social-democratic grafting, but I only want to point out that precisely when the so-

called joint Central Committee was formed, it was discovered that there was still another group which had been camouflaged up till that time. That was the "Youth" Group. Its open emergence, the attack which it launched against the Korça group and all its anti-Marxist arsenal made the work started for the settling of disagreements even more difficult.

In Tirana Anastas Lula and Sadik Premte maintained contact with many young people whom they had turned into enthusiasts filled with immoral, Trotskyite, gangster theories. They directed the courage and anti-Zogite, and later anti-fascist and anti-Italian, determination of these young people into anarchist and gangster actions. These were characteristic of only some of the young people of this group and only in Tirana, those who had become and remained later the lieutenants of Qorri and Xhepi in their ideas and actions. But not all the members of the "Youth" Group in Tirana, in Korça and especially in Vlora, were like this. With their Trotskyite slogans, Anastas Lula and Sadik Premte were able only to wage a factional struggle against the Korça group by making the accusation that it was not a communist group, but they were quite unable to extinguish or even to weaken its struggle against Zog and the occupiers. This was their "Achilles' heel." In general, the rank-and-file of the "Youth" Group were pure, extremely patriotic, courageous, anti-Zogite and anti-Italian, and they loved communism. In Vlora, in particu-

lar, despite the fact that Xhepi was from those parts, he could not and dared not restrain the anti-fascist activity against the Italian occupiers because he was faced with Hysni Kapo,¹ a resolute communist, anti-Zogite and anti-fascist, a comrade with great decisive influence in Vlora, who stood at the head of many young comrades of the city, the Commercial School and the villages.

Immediately after the founding of the Party, Hysni Kapo became the pillar of the new organization of the Communist Party which was being built in Vlora and, under the leadership of the Party, fought together with his comrades to totally wipe out the hostile influence of Xhepi and Qorri in Vlora, where they attempted to create their hostile faction. Hysni Kapo's struggle against them in defence of the new Party was the signal for the final liquidation of the Trotskyite views and practices of the heads of the former "Youth" Group and some of their followers, who did not come to their senses even after the forming of the Party.

I am not going to speak about the "Zjarri"² Group or any other, because there was nothing Marxist about them and their leaders were open

¹ Hysni Kapo (1915-1979). One of the most distinguished leaders of our Party and the Albanian state. He was a member of the Political Bureau of the CC of the PLA since 1946, secretary of the CC of the PLA (1956-1979), People's Hero and Hero of Socialist Labour.

² Fire.

provocateurs. The founding of the Party smashed them completely.

This then, in general, was the situation of the main communist groups in Albania at the time when we, while working legally in "Flora," were increasing our efforts to reach agreement with our "opponents" with whom, in fact, we ought to have been comrades fighting for the one ideal.

At the moments when we had intensified our efforts more than ever and were moving towards finding a common language for the final rapprochement between groups, an important event was to exert its revolutionizing influence on the entire political situation in the world, as well as on the communist and anti-fascist movement in Albania: on June 22, 1941, the Hitlerite hordes launched their perfidious attack on the Soviet Union.

The Hitlerite attack on the Soviet Union was a great shock for all the Albanian communist groups and individual communists. Before this attack took place we had had to wage a stern struggle against the propaganda of the fascist and pseudo-democrats who, misrepresenting the non-aggression pact between the Soviet Union and Germany, slandered that the Soviet Union had "formed an alliance with Hitlerite Germany," that the "Albanian communists should not fight the fascist occupiers because Italy is the ally of Hitlerite Germany with which the Soviet Union is linked in the non-aggression pact."

The duty devolved on us communists to com-

bat the fascist propaganda and, at the same time, to make clear to everybody and not only to our relations, because there were even comrades of the groups who did not understand the situation, why the Soviet Union had signed the non-aggression pact with Hitlerite Germany.

The barbarous Hitlerite attack on the Soviet Union not only shocked us, but showed clearly that we and not the enemies were right, that Stalin had never betrayed communism and the Soviet Union. With the Soviet Union's entry into the war our great hope and confidence in our victory was strengthened. Now the Albanian people's fight against fascism would have another great support: the war of the Soviet peoples led by Stalin against German nazism. Now the Albanian communists and our people, who had not sat with folded arms, would step up their efforts and fight all over the country. All of us had to fight the occupiers and the quislings. The communists and the groups had to put aside their squabbles and resentments once and for all...

Besides disagreements, at that time there was also strict secrecy between communist groups. Each group fanatically and jealously protected its own members and did not readily allow a member of one group to make contact with the members of another group. The fear existed especially among the leaders that one group might "take" the members of the other! This "fear" was not without foundation. Trotskyite and factionalist elements such as Aristidh Qendro, Niko

Xoxi, Zef Mala, Anastas Lula, Sadik Premte and others had made it a line of their activity to carry out disruptive work in other groups with the aim of splitting the others from anti-Marxist positions and taking members from them.

The sound communist elements of the Korça group and such comrades of the Shkodra group, as Qemal, Vasil and others, thought and acted quite differently on this problem. In wanting to establish links with one another we had never proceeded from the separatist aim of “winning over” this or that member of the other group. No, we proceeded from the correct principle that we were all communists, comrades of common ideals, that we were fighting for a common cause, hence we ought to talk and unite for the sake of these lofty ideals and not for the selfish, sectarian aims of groups or factions.

It was precisely from these motives that I proceeded when I insisted to Koço Tashko that I should meet Vasil Shanto and Qemal Stafa and they proceeded from the same motives when they took the initiative and met me. Fortunately, especially after the fascist occupation of the country, the rank-and-file communists of different groups began to link up and talk together on the job, at school, etc., like real communists and to take part in joint actions, in demonstrations, strikes and protests, regardless of what the factionalist and Trotskyite leaders said and the orders they issued. As time passed this linking up of the communists from below grew steadily

stronger and more widespread, a thing which was certainly an important factor in the creation of the Party itself.

Then I met Vasil Shanto and Qemal Stafa time after time. At these meetings the main disagreements between our groups were being ironed out more and more, while gradually we reached agreement in principle that in the near future our groups should be dissolved and we should decide to found the Communist Party of Albania. As I have already pointed out, the first steps towards this historic unification were taken through the joint actions and activities which were steadily increasing, especially from August to November 8, 1941. Among these, the agreement to send members from the two groups to the *çeta* of Peza had special importance. Nevertheless, much still remained to be done, both to win the agreement of the other groups to our aim and to further iron out the former disagreements or new ones which emerged. Therefore, in this period our meetings with Vasil became more frequent...

For our part we, as a group, held a number of working meetings and prepared ourselves well for the big meeting which was to be held between representatives of the three communist groups in which comrades Miladin [Popović] and Dušan [Mugoša] would take part, too.

We decided that we should put forward, in the first place and above all, the question that the first day of the meeting should be considered the

historic day of the dissolution of groups and the founding of the Communist Party of Albania, while the discussion, proceeding from this basis, could and should continue as long as necessary to clear up all the problems and disagreements which existed. I insisted firmly on this matter, because I was convinced that we should not go to a joint meeting without being determined for the great aim of the dissolution of groups and the formation of the Communist Party.

We must not allow ourselves or the others to go to this meeting simply to make accusations and to quarrel, I told the comrades, but we must go there in order to achieve our objective.

I proposed that we should ask Miladin to get the approval of the others on the question that right from the outset the meeting should take the decision in principle to found the Communist Party of Albania, so that we could then continue the discussion and debate as members of a formed party. This decision was necessary because from the other groups there would be elements, especially such people as Anastas Lula and Sadik Premte, and perhaps others, too, who did not want the formation of the Party. As Trotskyites they were against this organization, therefore, it was to their advantage to continue to deepen the split. All the comrades agreed to my proposal.

The second question which we decided in our group was the way in which the problems should

be presented. We discussed that we should defend the correct ideo-political and organizational line of the Korça group, not in a factional spirit, but in a true communist spirit, should acknowledge the weaknesses in our work and accept the just criticism which the others would make of us and accept them without heat or rancour. We would consult with one another and adopt a stand about each criticism which would be made of us. We had to criticize strongly and unhesitatingly all the anti-Marxist, Trotskyite and liquidationist views of all the groups and leaders, which had played an inimical role in the Albanian communist movement...

All of us were preparing for this day which would mark the greatest historic event for our people. Many of us had gone underground because rabid reaction was operating everywhere, but we continued the work we had started with a new optimism, with great hope, which gave us much greater strength. Even though the terror was becoming ever more savage, our people's war was extending. Demonstrations, strikes, distribution of leaflets and armed attacks on the occupiers and quislings had become more widespread.

October 28, the date of the "March on Rome" and, at the same time, the first anniversary of the attack which the Italian fascists launched on the Greek people in 1940, an attack which we had denounced a year before by putting up leaflets in the streets, was approaching.

We decided that on October 28 of the year 1941 we should organize a big demonstration against the occupiers and the Vërlaci quisling government. Our group proposed that we should carry out a large-scale joint action with the other groups, in which the people and the youth would participate widely, with members of all the communist groups at the head of them. The comrades of our group authorized me to meet Vasil Shanto and Anastas Lula and to call together the “commission of action” (which we had established in principle, but which had never met). When I spoke about the demonstration which we intended to organize, Vasil gave his approval without hesitation, while Qorri, stammering, said we should call the commission together and discuss it there.

The commission met. Vasil Shanto, Anastas Lula, Mustafa Gjinishi, Mustafa Kaçaçi, Hasan Reçi and I were present. I made the proposal and the discussion began. Vasil and Mustafa Kaçaçi immediately approved the proposal for carrying out the action. Mustafa Gjinishi was in favour, but he added that “we must take care because they might open fire on us,” etc. Fat and lazy, Hasan Reçi was unable to make up his mind, while Anastas hesitated. He was certainly against it, but could not say so. We decided that the demonstration should be held and should begin from the Rex cinema,¹ where the fascists were go-

¹ Today the “17 Nëntori” cinema.

ing to hold a commemorative ceremony. We were to pack the cinema with our people who, as soon as the meeting opened, would begin to shout the slogans: "Down with fascism!", etc., smash the seats and pour out in the streets shouting anti-fascist slogans and singing patriotic songs. Outside other comrades and patriots would be waiting for them. It was decided that each group should do its own work in order to go to the demonstration in a body and we parted. As we heard later, as soon as we came out from the commission, Anastas Lula had met Xhepi who was waiting for him, and told him:

"Tell the comrades that it was decided that the demonstration shall not be held."

But they were unable to stop the demonstration or to stop members of their group from participating.

This was a continuation of the disruptive work of sabotage of these camouflaged enemy elements who, both at this period and before and after the founding of the Party, raised countless serious obstacles and difficulties for us.

The fact is that at this period they seemed to support the idea of cooperation between groups and agreed to take part in the Founding Meeting and in the joint actions that were carried out on the eve of this event. The reasons for this are numerous and well known, but I want to stress one thing: Anastas Lula and Sadik Premte "united" with us not because they had any trace of communism in their mind, not because they were

grieved for the Homeland which was languishing in slavery or because they were concerned about the cause of our people's war; on the contrary, they avoided these cardinal problems. However, the circumstances, the situation compelled them to act as they did. First of all, it was the base of their group, the sound communists and all the revolutionary young people linked with them, who consciously, under the influence of events and of communists and sympathizers of other groups, united with the idea of joint actions and with the idea of forming the Party as quickly as possible. At that period Anastas Lula and Sadik Premte were aware that they would be rejected by the rank and file of their group if they did not swim with the current. So, they joined up. But regrettably they joined up as saboteurs. This was to be proved very quickly.

On the other hand, the comrades of the Shkodra group played a major role in winning them to the idea of joint actions and the creation of the Party. As is known these two groups, that of Shkodra and the "Youth" Group, had reached an agreement, but whereas at first collaboration between them was on a distorted anti-Marxist basis, later, and especially from the second half of 1941, the Shkodra group, besides improving its own internal situation, also exerted an influence on the base of the "Youth" Group so that it saw the perspective more clearly. In the autumn of 1941 and in October, especially, even Anastas Lula and Sadik Premte saw they could not re-

main aloof from this work. The work of our comrade, Miladin Popović, who frequently met comrades of the “Youth” Group, including Anastas Lula and Sadik Premte at that period, played its role in this.

Thus, these two elements came round to the common idea of forming the Party, but they came to it reluctantly, because they had no alternative, and with dark aims of sabotage.

Their attempt to sabotage the big demonstration of October 28, 1941 was part of these aims, but their efforts were unsuccessful in this case, too.

It was a big, powerful and furious demonstration just as we had foreseen. We fought with the carabinieri and fascist militia and blood flowed. The demonstration had an extremely great echo. It became the touchstone for the unity of Albanian communists and showed the inexhaustible strength of our people, their hatred for and determination to fight against fascism and the quislings.

All this resistance which was building up under the leadership of the communists, the exposure which was being made of the occupying power and its tools had shown up the quisling government of Vërlaci in its true colours. Now fascist Italy needed an iron hand, a tried and hardened criminal to suppress the people, “in order to exterminate the communists” and the patriots en masse, to carry out demagoguery no longer from the “feudal and anti-peasant” positions

through the figure of Vërlaci, but from the “nationalist and democratic” positions. And fascist Italy found this criminal hand in the person of Mustafa Merlika (Kruja), who one month later was appointed prime minister in place of the deposed Vërlaci.

This barbarous quisling, as a fascist senator, had distinguished himself for his rabid hatred and stand against communists and the people, as well as for his speculation with the patriotic feelings of the Albanians of Kosova in order to plunder the wealth of the people of Kosova in favour of the Albanian fascist merchant bourgeoisie which was being created, and to strengthen the exploitation by plundering Italian companies which speculated to the detriment of the whole Albanian people. In undeclared talks and in meetings in the cinemas Mustafa Kruja threatened the communists with bullets and called for collaboration with “democratic nationalists” of the type of Ali Këlcyra and company, who had long been feeding from the Italian trough. As prime minister Mustafa Kruja was to fill the prisons with our comrades and with patriots, was to hang and kill, to increase the Albanian fascist militia and make it a tool of the Italian fascist militia. But our resistance and struggle were ablaze. The powerful demonstration of October 28, 1941, which the Albanian communists organized and led, proved this.

On the following day I was obliged to go underground. This, too, has its own history.

On the morning of October 29 the carabinieri appeared suddenly at “Flora.” Two of them, with their chests crisscrossed with shiny leather belts and their revolver holsters open, came inside, while the others stood outside. Only at that moment did we realize what a great mistake we had made. We had thought that in the great confusion of the previous day’s clash, the fascists could not have identified us among those hundreds of thousands of demonstrators who shook Tirana. But now here were all of us “workers” of the “Flora” shop facing the terrible trap.

“Enver Hoxha!” shouted one of the carabinieri, “*Dove é¹ Enver Hoxha?!*”

Pilo [Peristeri] and Ilo Durdha stood frozen at the counter with napkins in their hands. A moment’s silence followed, but I pulled myself together, looked up from behind the till where I was sitting as “owner-partner” and very “politely” tried the only possibility that could have been tried:

“He is here, inside, wait a moment please, and I’ll inform him,” I said in a calm voice and with exemplary “readiness,” as if I could hardly wait to do these Italians a valuable service!

I had hit the target. They believed me. I went into the inner room of the shop, calling in a loud voice, “Enver, you are wanted,” quickly opening the small back door which had been put in especially for such an occasion. I jumped into a nar-

¹ Where is? (Italian in the original).

row lane, crossed the yard of an old woman's house and from there, through the "Vlach quarter," I reached the great boulevard, which I crossed "quietly," but keeping my eyes skinned for any movement. A few moments later, when I had entered the people's quarter across the boulevard, I was convinced that the fascists were left with nothing but my name.

I said goodbye to our dear "Flora," the modest shop, where for two years on end we had sold cigarettes and sausage legally, while illegally we prepared for the revolution. "Flora" was a small shop with walls of mud and brick, but within those walls we, a handful of the sons of the people, gathered tête à tête and ardently discussed our communist work, reported on what we had achieved and worked out plans for greater and more fruitful work; there we ironed out a series of disagreements with the comrades of other communist groups; from there we set out with leaflets and on missions to every corner of the capital and to other cities of the country. There I had met my unforgettable comrades, patriots and revolutionaries, Vasil Shanto, Qemal, Misto, Mihal, Dullë Keta and with scores of other sons and daughters of the people.

And now I was obliged to part with it, obliged to put an end to my "legal work." But I did not regret this parting. It was bound to happen very soon in one way or another, because it was obvious that the tide of the popular insurrection was rising and the hour of the great decision

was approaching. The only thing that kept me anxiously worried all of that day was the fate of the rest of my comrades. However, late that evening I sprang to my feet full of joy when I saw Pilo enter the illegal base where I was established. He was in high spirits.

“You pulled it off beautifully,” he said. “What a slip!” And he told me in detail about the confusion and anger of the carabinieri when they realized what had occurred. Fortunately, they had done nothing to our comrades. Apparently their names had not yet been entered on the lists of the fascist police.

We got down to work immediately. There was no time to lose, the 8th of November was ahead of us.

In the darkness of the night before the dawn of November 8, we set out for the small house which was awaiting us. In these reminiscences I shall not describe it, because the house where the Communist Party of Albania was founded has now become an outstanding monument of our country, known to young and old in Albania, as well as to thousands and thousands of foreign friends, comrades and visitors. All the surrounding lanes and alleys were guarded by calm and resolute armed comrades. Earlier, careful investigations had been made of all the families around the house. They were families of poor workers, apprentices and patriots.

In the darkness of the night we entered the small house one by one, in order and in silence.

All the windows had been sealed from inside with blankets. No light could be seen. No sound could be heard. Complete illegality. We entered that small house with great hopes, with indescribable joy and confidence, but I tell you frankly, overriding all this we felt a certain anxiety. Undoubtedly each of us, coming there with the great desire for the formation of the Party, asked himself: "How will things go? Will we achieve our sacred aim?" There I found Miladin, Dušan, Vasil and Qemal. I embraced with the Yugoslav comrades and the others. But to tell the truth, the comrades of the Shkodra group and I embraced with more warmth than usual. When the leaders of the "Youth" Group came our meeting was cool, but with no sign of hostility.

We had all gathered. From our group, those allocated to take part in the meeting were Koço Tashko, Pilo Peristeri, Enver Hoxha, Koçi Xoxe and Sotir Vullkani. We had all arrived with the exception of Koçi Xoxe, whom we had dispatched to Korça a few days earlier to inform Miha and the comrades there about the policy we had decided to pursue at the Founding Meeting, as well as to give the final instructions about a big demonstration which we had decided should be organized in Korça on November 8. Those present from the Shkodra group were Qemal Stafa, Vasil Shanto, Kristo Themelko and Tuk Jakova, while from the "Youth" Group, Ramadan Çitaku, Anastas Lula, Sadik Premte and a comrade from Kosova were present...

On November 8, 1941, the first meeting of representatives of the three communist groups commenced.

As the longest established and biggest group in the communist movement of Albania up till that time, the honour of opening the Founding Meeting belonged to the Korça group. As I have noted earlier, the group had charged me to speak. I rose to my feet:

“Comrades,” I began. “It is a great joy and honour for our Korça group, and for me personally, that we have been given the right to speak first.”

I was very moved, but gradually “the motor” got started.

“First,” I said, “I invite the meeting to honour the memory of all those communist comrades and other brave fighters, Albanians and foreigners, who have fallen and are falling on the battlefield fighting against fascism for the peoples’ freedom; to honour the memory of Ali Kelmendi, Mujo Ulqinaku and the ordinary sons of our people who resisted the fascist invaders with rifles; to honour the memory of heroes of the Spanish War, of heroes of the great Soviet Union who are giving their lives in the war for freedom against the nazi beast; to honour our brothers, the Yugoslav communist heroes who have fallen on the field of battle.”

We all stood in silence for one minute. Then I expressed our heartfelt thanks to the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and its Central Com-

mittee for the assistance they were giving us through comrades Miladin and Dušan who, together with us, strove and made their contribution to the achievement of this day's meeting.

After this I presented the proposal of the Korça group about founding the Party on the first day, as we had decided in our group, for the reasons which I have already mentioned when we had discussed the matter in the group and about which the documents of the Party speak. I have spoken about some of these reasons previously and they have been presented in other documents, but here I want to mention some things as I remember them:

“Comrades,” I said as soon as I had begun my speech, “on behalf of the Korça group I wish to welcome the first joint meeting of representatives of the three communist groups and the comrades present. We hope that the proceedings of this meeting will achieve complete success. For our part we are convinced that the discussion which will take place in this meeting will be fruitful, but this depends on all of us. We of the Korça group are convinced also that you, too, have come here not so that we will quarrel like enemies, but in order to discuss matters fiercely if need be, but as communists. Above all it is the principles which will guide our work, which have and must have priority for us. These principles must be unsullied, always according to the precepts of our great teachers Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. These are the principles which must

foster and guide our political, ideological, organizational and military opinions and actions, first of all, and then those of all Albanian communists. Is this what has occurred up till now? We of the Korça group want to say at the outset that we believe these principles have been understood and applied in various ways by the communist groups: sometimes they have been applied well, sometimes they have been half-applied and in many cases they have been badly distorted. We have gathered here precisely to put our Marxist-Leninist principles in order, while we must reject, fight and kick out the disguised Trotskyite, anarchist and fascist views. We shall discuss all these things and we are of the opinion that we should keep nothing in the back corners of our minds, but should honestly lay on the table everything that we have in our minds and hearts, because only in this way will we be able to reach agreement and to serve our great cause which has to do with the present and the future of the people and the Homeland. We communists, especially, must place the cause of the liberation of the people and the Homeland above everything. The purpose of our lives is and will remain the struggle for the happiness of the people. Therefore, comrades, first let us consider the present, then we can consider the past and together arrive at conclusions about how to organize and lead the struggle in the future.

“It is clear to each of us that our Homeland is suffering greatly. For more than two years our

people have been languishing under the heel of detested Italian fascism and the treachery of the quislings. The satrap Ahmet Zog, the big landowners and the local bourgeoisie prepared this unendurable slavery for our country and our people. Our people have never bowed in submission to foreigners and local despots. Always they have taken up arms, through the centuries they have fought for freedom and have won, have been suppressed again and again have risen in rebellion and have shed their blood demonstrating that the Albanians cannot live without freedom.

“The occupation of the country was a great shock to all of us. The idea of the liberation of the Homeland filled our hearts and engaged our energies, but the occupiers found us communists divided and quarrelling, at a time when we ought to have been more united than ever. The whole country was seething like a volcano about to erupt. Powerful people’s demonstrations burst out everywhere.

“It is true that the great duty and honour devolved on us, the communists of various groups, to organize these demonstrations and stand in the forefront of them, but we did not perform our task as we should have done. Together with the people we, too, shouted: ‘Weapons, weapons, we want weapons!’, but from whom were we demanding these weapons? From Ahmet Zog, the treacherous bandit chief who sold out the Homeland and who, to escape the people’s anger, fled with his suitcases filled with gold? Or did we de-

mand them from the Zogite officials, senior officers and other traitors who were getting ready to welcome the occupiers with flowers?

“This was a mistake which we communists made. We should not have asked for weapons, because those who held them, the feudal landowners and the bourgeoisie, were our enemies, enemies of the people. These enemies could not have given us weapons because they needed them themselves to drown the people’s resistance in blood and to support the occupier. We should have attacked the depots, seized the weapons by force, armed the people and organized them in guerrilla units and *çeta* and attacked the enemy everywhere. We did not put up this resistance at first. Why? Because, in the first place, we communists ourselves were divided and unorganized, because we did not all conceive the struggle against the occupier in the same way.

“This state of affairs amongst us was greatly in the interests of the archeio-Marxists, Trotskyites and agents of the bourgeoisie and fascism, who took advantage of it to spread their hostile, anti-communist and anti-Albanian theories more easily with the aim of keeping us split and divided as they had done during the Zogite regime. For more than two years the Italian occupiers, the quislings and the pseudo-democratic traitors have been exerting all their strength to crush the steadily mounting resistance of the people. We, the communists, entered the fight against the occupiers, but this was more a ‘bloodless’ war: to

prevent people enrolling in the Albanian fascist party, to boycott the ‘dopolavoro’¹ and ‘Dante Alighieri,’² to refuse to give the fascist salute and so on. Of course we did not fail to carry out propaganda against the occupiers, minor acts of sabotage or to distribute some leaflets. But, without wanting to go into detail. I have to add that the three groups did not wage even this struggle in the same way and as we should have done. There were groups that waged this struggle under the influence of the views of their archeio-Marxist and Trotskyite leaders such as Niko Xoxi, Aristidh Qendro, Andrea Zisi, Dhimitër Fallo, Zef Mala and others, who were and are provocateurs and disguised fascist agents.

“Consequently, our communist groups rather than think about organizing and beginning the war properly, tried only to reach social-democratic agreements with one another.

“Naturally, we had first to create unity and get rid of factionalism, but this could not be achieved with such a compromise which brought nothing constructive, because it extended the fields for the dissemination of defeatist ideas: ‘we cannot begin the war,’ ‘we have no proletariat,’ ‘we cannot form a communist party yet,’ ‘first we must prepare the cadres,’ and other Trotskyite

¹ “After Work” (Ital.), fascist organizations to mislead the workers and the youth.

² Association to disseminate the Italian language and the fascist culture in Albania.

slogans like these, which stank of the fascist occupiers, at whose workshops they had their source.”

At this moment the profound silence which had prevailed among the audience was broken as someone shifted irritably in his chair. Anastas Lula could hardly keep his seat. I paused in my speech for a moment and saw that he was wiping his glasses with the corner of his jacket. Then, taking advantage of the brief pause I made, Anastas interjected:

“Excuse me,” he said with resentment and sarcasm, “but I think we should respect some rules. We gave the representative of Korça the honour of opening the meeting and the right to speak. But do you hear what he is saying?! He is not speaking for the Korça group, he is speaking for all, on behalf of all of us. What is this?!”

“No,” I said keeping my temper. “I have not undertaken to speak on behalf of all. But on behalf of the comrades of the Korça group and on their instructions, first, I want to present to the meeting a proposal which seems to us very important and a matter of principle.”

“What is this proposal!” Sadik Premte came to the aid of Anastas. “We have not yet begun the analysis.”

“Have a little patience, comrades Anastas and Sadik, because we have just begun to speak and all of us will speak,” and I went on with my speech again. “The past of the communist groups must be made a lesson for us. Today we have

great hopes. Oppression and dire poverty are hurting the people deeply. They are ready to take up weapons and fight. The youth are burning to fight. We communists are convinced that we will win, that the victory will go to the people. Hitlerite Germany has attacked the glorious Soviet Union, but without any doubt it will be smashed by the Soviet peoples and the Red Army organized and tempered in revolution by Lenin and Stalin. We must organize the armed struggle as quickly as possible. It is up to us communists to prepare, organize and lead the general uprising. But how can we organize and lead it? Split into groups, divided with all kinds of opinions as we are, when there is no coordination of our actions?

“Comrades, are we going to continue even in this underground meeting, which we are holding under the threat of the savage occupier that has captured our country, to quarrel and fail to find a common language as communists in the face of the storm? We of the Korça group think we should go on like this no longer. Why, is this the way Marx teaches us? Is this the way Lenin and Stalin teach us? No, they teach us the opposite. We must be united like a fist against the enemy, must be organized and fight the enemies mercilessly until we win our total victory.

“We must fight as our people have always fought from the time of Skanderbeg and even before, all through their history. Like our people who have never sat with folded arms, we, too, must fight for a free, democratic Albania without

occupiers, without traitors, without oppression and exploitation. And for this we must unite like communist brothers, linked together for a single aim. We can make no progress by going on as we have done up till now, we cannot and must not continue any longer with compromises like the previous ones. Everything must be done in an organized way. We must judge everything and act in everything in the way our Marxist-Leninist ideology shows us, following the example of the Bolshevik Party. This ideology must guide our meeting today, which, I think, cannot achieve the results we are aiming at if it is guided by the unhealthy spirit of groups.

“In order to put an end to this group spirit, first of all we must decide to dissolve the groups and form the Communist Party of Albania. Are we or are we not Albanian communists? Do we or do we not want to form and have our own Communist Party, which will lead our people in the fight and accomplish the minimum and maximum program which we will define? Let us first answer these main questions and, if we are communists, let us discuss matters as such, with a sense of responsibility, with clear minds and open hearts.”

I paused for a moment, took a deep breath, in order to gain control of my feelings and, in a somewhat louder voice, I said:

“Comrades, the proposal of the Korça group is:

“Let us form the Communist Party of Alba-

nia on the basis of the mandates which the comrades of the groups gave us before we came to this meeting and, after first deciding solemnly and unanimously to found the Communist Party of Albania, let us continue the debate and discussion.

“Our decisive aim is the formation of the Party. The objective needs demand this, the working class, the communists, the historic moments through which our country is passing and the people who are calling on us to throw ourselves into the fight together with them demand this. Comrades, we cannot put off this main objective another moment longer. The time and the situation demand the immediate formation of our Communist Party of the new Lenin-Stalin type, as the vanguard of the national liberation movement and the struggle for a people’s democratic Albania.

“The party which we shall found will give correct solutions to all the problems and questions we shall discuss. This time we communists will think, discuss, decide and act with a new spirit, with another style and method, because from now on we and all our comrades will have our Communist Party.

“That is all I had to say at the start, comrades,” I said and sat down.

I was carefully watching every movement of the calm, silent, thoughtful faces of the comrades, who listened attentively to my speech. Un-

like the others, Anastas and Xhepi were a little fidgety while I was speaking and, when I had finished, their faces were frowning and glum.

We had a break and smoked one cigarette after the other. For my part, I was pleased, but also worried. I was concerned especially about the stand of the Shkodra group and some of Anastas and Xhepi's comrades. If they united with us, I would not mind what Qorri and Xhepi did. The Party would overwhelm them. During the break I noticed that Miladin was talking with Qemal and Vasil, while Dušan talked with Anastas and Baca. The two groups talked quietly. Anastas sat with his head hanging but from time to time raised it to put in a word, while Xhepi listened to what Dušan and Qorri were saying. Qemal and Vasil were cheerful, talking freely with Miladin. I had no doubt that they were talking about the things I had presented. We returned to the meeting again.

Qemal Stafa took the floor. We listened attentively. I remember only the essence of the main ideas of his contribution. He made a correct introduction about the struggle which we communists should wage against fascism and then went on to prove with theoretical arguments and with examples from life what fascism was and the danger it posed. He said that fascism was the sworn enemy of the peoples, the communists and the revolution. He quoted some excerpts from Dimitrov's famous report.

"However, we," continued Qemal, "to a

greater or lesser extent, did not understand or properly apply the instructions, advice and directives of the Comintern and Dimitrov. That was a great mistake on our part and we of the Shkodra group make self-criticism for this. We have some criticism to make of the Korça group, too, but I am not going to raise it now, because I agree with Enver that we should return to these matters later.”

This was very pleasing and heartwarming to me because I realized that Qemal and his comrades must agree with me and our proposal for the formation of the Communist Party of Albania.

Then, Qemal continued:

“Of course, since we are communists, we must look things right in the eye and try to judge them correctly and realistically, because, to tell the truth, to one extent or another, we have not looked at the issues as true communists. And for this there are many reasons which it is our duty to analyse so as to dispel the confusion and darkness from our minds. We must eliminate the conceit and intrigue which have taken root in some and which, in our opinion, have created the grave state of rivalry, because every group considered itself a party and each pretended that it was linked with the Comintern. Even those groups which had no connections were seeking links with it in all directions.”

“They were seeking seals of approval. Just let us ensure any seal like that of the rotten Zisi and

the ‘party’ is formed!” interjected Pilo with a laugh.

“That’s precisely what happened,” Qemal agreed. “But we forgot that no seal could make the party, because the Communist Party is not made by any seals which are secured, but by the efforts, by the revolutionary struggle it wages at the head of the masses. That was the situation,” he continued, “but none of us made a sound, principled analysis of our work. As we know these unhealthy sentiments brought about the outbreak of the unprincipled struggle between us. The enemy occupied the country and we quarrelled with one another instead of attacking the enemy. We of the Shkodra group think that an end must be put to such a situation. Why must it be ended?”

Continuing his speech, Qemal linked the issue with the world war and with the occupation of our country, with the absolute need to organize the armed struggle. Thus, he, too, arrived at our conclusion and he ended his speech by expressing firmly:

“We approve the proposal of the Korça group which Comrade Enver Hoxha presented, to found the Communist Party of Albania immediately. Any subsequent discussion and conclusion will be put off till the party is formed.”

My heart was filled with indescribable joy. It seemed to me that Qemal had been my comrade throughout the whole of my life, from childhood up to that moment when, in that small room, we

were discussing one of the greatest issues in all the age-long history of our people. I wanted to embrace him and his comrades strongly. It seemed to me that all the obstacles were wiped out, the party would certainly be born.

I waited impatiently for a break in the proceedings. Once we emerged from the room I approached Qemal, gave him my hand, pulled him to me and embraced him strongly. We kissed and said to one another, "Long live our Communist Party through the centuries!" Then, I embraced Vasil and Tuk, while Anastas stood apart, smoking furiously and turning over his cunning plans in his head. All our group shook hands with Qemal. Meanwhile Qorri and Xhepi, who were green with anger, made no move towards Qemal, just as they made no move towards me when the comrades were congratulating me after I spoke. However, Ramadan Çitaku approached Qemal and shook hands with him just as he had done with me...

The break passed quickly and we returned to the room where the talks were taking place. By now it was dark, because in November the days grow shorter and nights fall quickly...

Soon we were back in our places. The meeting recommenced. The small kerosene lamp on the table threw a pale light over our faces. It was assisted a little by the flames of the fire burning on the hearth, on which Vasil or the comrades sitting closest to it threw a little wood from time to time. A pot of beans for supper was simmering

on the fire and their bubbling accompanied the contribution of the unhappy Anastas Lula.

As far as I remember he began his contribution differently from us:

“We have gathered,” said Anastas, “to discuss the work which the different communist groups have done and to judge the line which each of them has followed, to decide which groups had a correct line and which a wrong line. Naturally, our group has a lot to say in this direction, especially against the Korça group and against its leader, Koço Tashko, in particular, who was one of the main culprits for the split. However, we of the ‘Youth’ Group have noticed that for a long period he had not been alone. He and a number of other comrades of his group have damaged the cause, have always posed as the law-makers of communism, have pretended that their group alone was the party and that only they had links with the Comintern.”

Anastas was commencing with attacks in order to sabotage the meeting. It was apparent that he had not made even the slightest formal correction to his course. His stand was truly revolting, but we had to maintain our aplomb because we knew very well that he was a dirty provocateur. Koço’s face flushed with anger and he fidgeted in his chair. Anastas continued:

“Whenever any comrade returned from political exile abroad, the leadership of the Korça group immediately claimed that directives of the Comintern had arrived (obviously he was refer-

ring to the directives which reached the Albanian communist movement in 1937), but we were aware that other comrades not of the Korça group and who had links with the Comintern came and they brought directives (he was referring to Andrea Zisi — the archeio-Marxist, who came from Greece bringing his seal made in Athens, which read something like this: ‘ACP, Section of the Comintern’). Who were we to believe? At that time we believed those who our communist consciousness told us were right, so we began to withdraw gradually from the Korça group until in 1940 we emerged as a separate group. The Korça group has accused and still accuses us of being splitters, factionalists, Trotskyites, archeio-Marxists and whatever else it likes. We are none of these things, but we are genuine revolutionary Marxists.”

Koço could stand this no more and said to Qorri:

“Trotskyites is just what you are! And the worst Trotskyites at that!”

This was just what Anastas wanted, because he was ready for that and he replied:

“Don’t you interrupt my speech, Koço Tashko, because that is what you’ve always done, you’ve always been arrogant.”

“While you have been a ‘lamb’ Anastas Lula,” I interposed, “and what’s more, ideologically we can describe you as an ‘angel’.”

“I shall speak about the ideological issues later,” said Anastas, “because we have gathered

here precisely to consider our work from the ideological aspect. We must thrash out these matters first and then come to the conclusion about who is on the right course, you of the Korça group, or we.”

At that moment Qemal joined in saying:

“Define that ‘we’ better! What do you mean by ‘we’?”

This made it clear that Qemal Stafa divided the Shkodra group from the “Youth” Group.

Anastas was shaken because he was left on his own without allies, but with the coldness of a snake he replied to Qemal’s interjection:

“Of course I am speaking for our ‘Youth’ Group, but I cannot understand, Comrade Qemal, why you of the Shkodra group have now changed your opinions, because our two groups have been in unity of thoughts and actions. We were convinced that our ideological and political stands were correct communist stands. We of the ‘Youth’ Group are still of that opinion.”

This was Qorri’s second provocation, this time aimed at the Shkodra group, made deliberately both to insult and to threaten that group lest it broke away from his group.

Qemal gave him an instant, firm reply:

“Our two groups have had similar opinions on a lot of things, but have also had differences. The thing that united us was the spirit of factional work which had blinded our eyes and did not allow us to see the contradictions between our two groups, because we had directed the edge

of our struggle against the Korça group. However, communists are people who reflect, because new horizons are being opened to us, and they help us to judge more profoundly the situation and major events which are taking place. This change in our opinions is not just a bourgeois change, as you think, Anastas Lula, but a communist change,” said Qemal.

“You are quite right, Comrade Qemal,” I said, “that is what we communists of the Korça group think too.”

Anastas was being pinned with his back to the wall. But as the people say, a snake has seven lives, he doesn't die even if you cut off a bit of his tail. Anastas Lula continued:

“Of course you have the right to change your opinions (this was a further provocation, everything he said during the whole period of the meeting was a provocation), but we have the right to defend our opinions. And the opinion of our group is contrary to the procedure of the action which you proposed, Comrade Enver. You put the issue in a distorted way; instead of first discussing the issue and then seeing whether or not our opinions are in accord, whether or not the time has come to decide on the formation of the party, you of the Korça group propose that we should form the party first and then discuss the issue.”

That was another cunning manoeuvre of Anastas Lula and Sadik Premte in order to sabotage the formation of the party.

A firm reply had to be given to him, but care had to be taken to avoid exacerbating the situation to the extreme before founding the party. This had to be borne in mind, not on account of those two incorrigible Trotskyites, but on account of the rank-and-file members of the "Youth" Group, who were misled and who would certainly become good members of the party we were going to form. An immediate flare-up might cause their withdrawal from the meeting, a thing which could enable them to have an argument to say to their group: "We undertook no commitment." On the contrary, we had to be very careful towards them and succeed in founding the party which was the unchangeable desire of all the communists of this group, too, regardless of the opinions and desires of their chiefs. Once the party was formed, the discussion could develop into heated arguments, because then they would take place within the party, within its Marxist-Leninist norms.

Therefore, without allowing Anastas to go any further with his work of sabotage, I intervened:

"Comrade Anastas, the proposal of the Korça group is not wrong at all. It is Leninist, it is not in the least in contradiction with the theory and norms that guide the activity of the Bolshevik Party which Lenin founded. Were Lenin still alive or if we had the possibility to ask Stalin, they would certainly advise us: 'First form your communist party, because you have dragged

matters up long enough, then make Bolshevik self-criticism, set new tasks, and go forward into battle and to victory as the vanguard of the working class.’

“Therefore, it is not the differences which we’ve had up till now, but the lofty task which the situation imposes on us that must determine our decision to found the party. Our differences must be settled, must be ironed out through discussion and debates, but not about the question of ‘whether or not we should form the party’. The situation is ripe to create the party with such a unity that it will be up to the task of the liberation of the Homeland. This is what we think.”

“Who do you mean by ‘we’?,” interjected Sadik Premte immediately. “Are you referring to yourself and your four comrades, or do you include all of us with that ‘we’?!”

“When I say ‘we’,” I replied to Xhepi, “of course I have in mind much more than myself and the four comrades of the Korça group. We haven’t come here by accident; we have been sent here. Our communist groups have sent us, and when I say ‘we’ I have in mind all the conscious rank-and-file communist comrades who are demanding the founding of the party at all costs. And believe me, Sadik, that ‘we’ includes the soundest part of the members of your group, whether or not you and Anastas like it.”

“It’s not true. And we don’t allow you to speak on behalf of our comrades!” Anastas Lula sprang up angrily.

To avoid giving cause for further heating of tempers, I turned quietly to Anastas and Sadik and once again explained to them the reason from which we proceeded in the proposal which we made.

Qemal Stafa stood shoulder to shoulder with me:

“Comrades,” he said, “this major question which Comrade Enver presented should not be taken as if here we have to do only with the desire and will of the comrades of the Korça group. No, this is the will of all of us, of all communists and all revolutionary democrats. I expressed my opinion, but I want to stress that the people are demanding that we lead them in the struggle which they have begun, but the communist groups divided by all kinds of ideas cannot play this leading role. Only a party with unbreakable Marxist-Leninist unity can lead the struggle. Therefore, Anastas, we are making no mistake if we form the party first, and then discuss our differences.”

Having said this and turning to me, Qemal added in a very friendly fashion:

“Excuse me for interrupting you, Comrade Enver...”

I, who remained on my feet all this time, continued:

“Comrades, we, the groups, have scored some successes, but we’ve also made mistakes. Not only you Anastas, but we of the Korça group and those of the Shkodra group, all of us, to a

greater or lesser extent, have made mistakes. We are not going to conceal them, but on the contrary, are going to condemn them all from whatever side they have been made. At this meeting, which I consider historic, it is not the will of any one group that should predominate, but the sound will of Marxist-Leninists, the iron will of Albanian communists who have decided to form their party and fight valiantly, ready to make the ultimate sacrifice for their people, until the people are liberated once and for all from the bondage of occupiers, landowners and the local bourgeoisie. The will of those communists should prevail who have decided to carry out the revolution and to bring the working class to power in order to build socialism.

“Comrades, all of us know what sort of party we want, what sort of party we should form and with what features we must temper it. I said at the outset, but I stress it once again, that we are going to create a party of the Lenin-Stalin type, in which factions and the group spirit, such as they have been amongst us up till now, cannot exist. This situation must be ended! In our new party which we are going to found we must establish unity of thought and action and not impose the will of one or the other. Our party will be guided by one theory, by the theory of Marx and Lenin; any deviation from it and the bearers of the deviations will be punished mercilessly. In our party there will be democracy in the expression of opinions, but there will also be discipline

and centralism. We will discuss and decide on these matters one by one and will also decide on the structure of the party, what forms its cells and committees will have. In this discussion we will also have the assistance of Comrade Miladin. Therefore," I turned to Anastas again, "I think there is no sound reason why you should not associate yourself like the other two groups with the proposal that first we should found the party and then develop our discussion as members of the party and no longer as members of groups, should discuss the issues in the spirit and on the basis of a communist party and not in the spirit of communist groups."

At this point I wound up and sat down. The comrades proposed we should take a break.

After the break, Ramadan Çitaku spoke. I met Baca for the first time at this meeting. He made a good impression on me, and my heart warmed to him immediately. He spoke little, was restrained in his gestures and conversation and smoked cigarettes inhaling the smoke deeply. He was young although he looked older because of his moustaches, and for this reason we nicknamed him "Baca."

Baca, who spoke in a deep voice, did not go on for long. In substance he said:

"We have gathered here to solve our problems, because we can no longer go on in the way we have done. I want us to form the party and I agree with what Comrade Enver proposed. I am in the same group with Anastas and Sadik, but I

cannot understand Anastas' reasoning. I am convinced that many comrades of our group will think the same way as I do. What is wrong with founding the party as quickly as possible? We have criticism and self-criticism to make, but from now on I want the party and not the groups. Therefore, I am for the founding of the party."

After these few words Baca sat down. His words were another blow to Qorri and Xhepi, but this time to their surprise, from a comrade of their own group.

Following Baca, Miladin spoke. Dušan translated with occasional corrections from Baca. He spoke for about an hour. First, he thanked us for rescuing him from the internment camp and for the great trust all of us displayed towards him. He said that this trust is due to the Communist Party of Yugoslavia.

"I am a member of that Party and, on the proposal of the Albanian communists, I have been instructed by it to give my modest aid and what small experience I have, placing them as an internationalist in the service of the Communist Party of Albania which you are going to form," he continued. "Among all the Albanian communist comrades I have found a communist affection and sincerity towards me. You opened your hearts to me and so did I. We have been acquainted for only a short time, but it seems as if we have known each other long since. This situation has been created because we are internationalist communists."

After speaking about his love for the Albanian people, about his respect for them, for their courage, their manliness, their trustworthiness and their wisdom, "with which I am well-acquainted," he said, "because I have lived among Albanians in Kosova and Montenegro," Miladin continued:

"You have told me about the Albanian communist movement, about the existence of groups, with various opposing views, about the good results and the shortcomings and mistakes that have shown up in their work. We have discussed things together frankly. As a comrade, as a communist, I have openly expressed some ideas of mine which may or may not be correct, because I cannot claim to know the situation in your country and your work as well as you do. You yourselves are in a position to know and do know the situation of the country, the people and your communist groups, not only in general, like the idea I have been able to get of it, but in depth and in an analytical way. It is up to you to analyse and decide. I am convinced that you will decide correctly. When you consider it reasonable I would like you to allow me to speak, to express my opinion on a series of problems of principle which I am sure you will raise, to give you the experience of my Party on how it has solved some analogous problems. You yourselves will judge whether or not what I have to say is reasonable. The decisions which you will take are up to you and to nobody else."

We listened to this fine comrade, to this sincere communist with great attention.

Miladin gave a brief but clear outline of the international situation. He spoke about the decisive role of the Soviet Union and the great Stalin, and about the partisan war in Yugoslavia led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. After speaking about the importance which the formation of the party in our country would have, Miladin concluded:

“I fully associate myself with Comrade Enver Hoxha’s proposal that before anything else the Communist Party of Albania should be formed as quickly as possible. Such a great historic act is correct politically, ideologically and organizationally. The situation which has matured requires this.”

Our faces beamed with joy. This Yugoslav internationalist communist, our comrade, was of the same opinion as we. We adjourned for a break. All of us, including Qorri and Xhepi, embraced Miladin. The signs were good. We sat down to supper with an excellent appetite and great joy in our hearts. Like the other comrades I no longer felt that burden of anxiety I had felt at the start. The sky was almost clear.

After supper we went straight back to the meeting. Koço Tashko asked for the floor. Naturally, at the outset he supported the proposal about founding the party, tried to give a theoretical outline about just and unjust wars and we thought that he was going to close his contribu-

tion quietly and gently with this. But Koço Tashko forgot what we had decided and began to make insinuations about other groups, precisely on the problems which we had to discuss after the formation of the party. It was just as well that he did not go on for long and sat down quickly because I would have been obliged to intervene. Nevertheless, his “professorial,” *embrouillé*¹ tone and his insinuations did not fail to cause a coldness which was quickly cleared away by Pilo Peristeri and Vasil Shanto, who spoke to the point and briefly in favour of the immediate founding of the Communist Party of Albania. Koçi Xoxe, Tuk Jakova and other comrades expressed similar opinions. The last to speak was Anastas, followed by Sadik Premte. We listened in silence. This time Anastas spoke briefly.

“I withdraw what I said before and associate myself with the proposal that we should form the Communist Party of Albania.”

Sadik Premte also expressed solidarity with the rest.

For a moment silence fell. For many of us the solidarity of Anastas and Sadik was always suspect.

“Let us put it to the vote. Everyone has expressed his opinion,” said Koço Tashko.

“Let us put it, but who is to do so? Here we are all equal...,” put in Anastas Lula not without malicious intent.

¹ iInvolved (French in the original).

This truly was something that had not occurred to us before. But Miladin rose to the occasion.

“The issue here, comrades, is not one of leaders or presidiums,” he said. “The problem is quite simple: the proposal can be put to the vote by the one who presented it.”

Then, very excited I rose to my feet and said:

“Comrades, on the basis of the proposal of the Communist Group of Korça and the opinions expressed by all present, I am putting the following resolution to the vote: ‘Today on November 8, 1941, the representatives of three communist groups, of Korça, Shkodra and the ‘Youth’, meeting in plenary session and after constructive discussion in the communist spirit, basing themselves on the mandate given them by the comrades of their groups, founded the Communist Party of Albania.’ All in favour raise their hands.”

All present raised their hands. There was no vote against or abstention. All of us were filled with indescribable joy. The main step, the decisive task which we had set ourselves when we set out for this historic meeting, had been crowned with success!

Then, I declared:

“The Communist Party of Albania has been founded unanimously. Long live the Communist Party of Albania!”

Happy and deeply moved all of us rose to our feet, raised our clenched fists in salute and under the light of the kerosene lamp sang *The Internationale*, keeping our voices low, and then cheered and cheered for the Communist Party of Albania, but always in an undertone: “Long live the Bolshevik Party!”, “Long live Stalin!”, “Glory to Marx, Engels, Lenin!”, “Long live the Communist Party of Yugoslavia!”, “Down with fascism!”, “Long live our heroic people!” And so on...

Thus, on the night of November 8, 1941, our Party was born, the Party which was to lead the Albanian people in the greatest battles of their whole history. It was born from the bosom of the people, from their revolutionary fire and ardour undimmed through the centuries, it emerged like a sun shining through the hideous darkness of the fascist enslavement and terror which had engulfed the people and the Homeland.

The next day and up till November 14, the debates continued. All the comrades who took part in the meeting spoke. The debates were tense and frequently fierce. It was often forgotten that since November 8, we ought to have spoken from the basis of the established Party, in the spirit of this Party, and many continued to argue from group positions.

Koço Tashko took the floor. He tried to back up his statement with quotations without reference from our classics, which he claimed to have learned in Moscow. Koço naturally defended the

line of the Korça group, a thing that was correct. We all did this when we spoke, but in his enthusiasm to defend this line, Koço Tashko attributed all the good and positive aspects of the work of the Korça group to his “leadership.” Of course he was not objective in doing this. Meanwhile, he “forgot” to point out the shortcomings and mistakes in the work of that group. His self-criticism of the work of the group was feeble and non-existent in regard to himself.

Koço also dealt with the question of the Comintern directives.

“The Korça group,” he said among other things, “was the only Albanian communist group which accepted and put them into practice, while the other groups not only refused to accept them, but also combatted them fiercely and in the most condemnable form of factionalism.”

At this point Koço opened the chapter of his criticisms and attacks on the Shkodra group and the “Youth” Group, criticisms which were correct in principle. He began from the enemy of communism, the archeio-Marxist Niko Xoxi who, after he was condemned by the Korça group, took refuge in the Shkodra group, where he became one of its leaders, and together with Zef Mala organized the struggle not just against the Korça group, but against Marxism, against the Comintern and, naturally, against the Soviet Union and Stalin. It was logical that these elements would follow the course of Trotsky and so they did, while the “Green Bulletin” which they

put out was nothing but a Trotskyite rag. Koço Tashko did not overlook Aristidh Qendro, Anastas Lula and Sadik Premte. He accused Anastas Lula not only of being a close associate of Aristidh and Sadik, of creating the faction subsequently called the “Youth” Group within the ranks of the Korça group, but also of involving the Shkodra group and setting it on a wrong course.

The discussion went on in this electrified way all day with one comrade after another taking the floor and often interrupting one another not politely, but sometimes with a fierceness that went beyond acceptable bounds.

Anastas Lula spoke after Koço. He tried to attack all the work of the Korça group with vindictive, baseless slanders and allegations. He went so far as to attack Ali Kelmendi, saying that he was hasty and unfair in the criticisms and condemnations he had made against Niko Xoxi and Aristidh Qendro.

We could not tolerate accusations against Ali Kelmendi and forgot that we were meeting under conditions of complete illegality.

“Watch your step, Anastas Lula,” I shouted at him, “because you are speaking from a Trotskyite position and we cannot allow anyone to attack the unsullied figure of the most outstanding militant of the Albanian communist movement and a comrade of the international communist movement. We do not permit you to sully the figure of our veteran communist comrade

who taught us how we must fight Zog, the feudal landowners and the bourgeoisie, to impugn the reputation of the man who brought us Dimitrov's speech¹ and fought until his death, always honoured by the international communist movement. Are you Anastas Lula trying to compare the figure of this great Albanian communist with two dirty archeio-Marxists sent to Albania by the blackest Greek reaction to fight communism?"

Pilo Peristeri jumped to his feet in fury and attacked Anastas Lula with clear facts about the immoral activities of him and Sadik Premte, who had elevated these activities to pseudo-Marxist theories.

"Such theories and views are diabolical and vile," roared Pilo. "To accept them means to demoralize our pure youth, to set them on the road of corruption. Are you, Anastas, seeking to break up the family and its code of honour with your Trotskyite theories?! We communists of the Korça group," continued Pilo, "know all about the undermining activity of Niko Xoxi and his vile intrigues to split us, but with Ali, Miha and other comrades we defeated Niko Xoxi and he went away and made up with you. Well, you are welcome to him. He showed what he was, an agent of Zog, who betrayed the comrades present here, Qemal Stafa, Vasil Shanto and others to the

¹ In 1937, Ali Kelmendi brought Georgi Dimitrov's instructions on the creation of the communist movement on a sounder political and organization platform in Albania.

enemy.”

Qemal Stafa took the floor and made a correct and mature contribution. It was apparent that he, Vasil and his other comrades were more realistic in their judgement of situations, saw the events and the activities of the Shkodra group in the past as well as their collaboration with the “Youth” Group from a different standpoint. In substance, Qemal said:

“We reject the irresponsible statements of Koço Tashko and of the Korça group, generally, that we of the Shkodra group are not communists, but Trotskyites. No,” continued Qemal, “we are conscious and resolute communists, we have fought with conviction in order to disseminate communism in Albania to the best of our ability. There have been mistakes in our work, we know and admit this, but they came about because evil, anti-communist people like Zef Mala and Niko Xoxi got into the Shkodra group and were able to take advantage of our immaturity to spread wrong, harmful, Trotskyite opinions and ideas amongst us. (Qemal with communist honesty listed them one by one.) But what about the Korça group and Koço Tashko, personally, didn’t they make mistakes? He did not speak about them, but I am going to do so, because this is my right.”

And Qemal began as follows:

“I condemn Anastas Lula for that judgement he made about comrade Ali Kelmendi. I believe now, and this was my opinion previously, too,

that Ali Kelmendi was a communist fighter and, although I never met him, I respected and still respect him as an internationalist communist who came from the Soviet Union. Why, then, did the Shkodra group not accept the directives of the Comintern? We made a mistake.”

“Everybody knows you made a mistake,” Koço Tashko interrupted him. “But why did you make a mistake?! Tell us that!”

“Yes,” replied Qemal, “I will do that, so listen to me, comrade Koço.” And he went on: “We made a mistake because you made a mistake too. With your group spirit you wanted to exploit these directives to raise your group above the others. Obviously, we of the Shkodra group, too, were infected and heavily infected with this spirit and so it came about that we did not accept the directives. We tried to establish contact, but we fell among provocateurs. But you, Koço Tashko,” continued Qemal, “did you, in particular, make any attempt to persuade us, to come and discuss with us? No, right to the end you did not. All you knew was to pose as ‘a great man,’ ‘with great knowledge,’ ‘with great theories.’ Only Enver approached us and talked with us as a comrade, while you never did.”

“Please, son, don’t deny my work,” Koço objected angrily. “In the discussions a year or two ago, when we reached agreement with you, was I not present and did I not make my contribution?!”

“Are you referring to the compromise?”

Qemal asked Koço with bitterness. "During the two days that we have been here, we have condemned that sort of 'agreement' as a dirty compromise without foundations."

"As a social-democratic compromise. Life itself destroyed it before it came into operation," I interjected.

"That is true," continued Qemal. "So, comrade Koço, it is unfitting for you, saying that you have had links with the Comintern too..."

"I have!" shouted Koço.

"Then try to maintain its reputation. I meant it was unfitting for you to boast to us about past actions which were wrong. We, too, were involved in those actions such as the compromise we mentioned, but now we condemn the stand we took at that time. Therefore, I appeal to you to reflect on your stands and to recognize your mistakes and faults and those of the Korça group. As for the 'Youth' Group," continued Qemal, "I am of the opinion, and I speak on behalf of the Shkodra group, that the rank and file of this group are sound like ours and that of the Korça group. But anti-communist, Trotskyite ideas have penetrated into our group and into the others, ideas which in this new light we can now see more clearly. However, you, Anastas Lula, and you, Sadik, who spoke in the same language as Anastas, are not showing yourselves to be sincere communists in any way. You are dodging the issues. In our view you have made and are continuing to make grave mistakes, but the worst of it

is that you are not making the slightest attempt to recognize them.”

Qemal ended his contribution by calling on them to change their ways.

The debate and discussion went on in this way every day. All of us were advancing in our analyses. The criticisms were taking the correct course and being backed with more solid arguments, the self-criticisms were becoming more and more profound and the common mistakes and mistakes of each separate group were gradually being acknowledged. Thus, day by day the terrain was being cleared of impediments. The days were passing filled with debates. This was a great school for us, a school which we had never had before. In the contributions to discussion everyone expressed his opinion without hesitation about how we should judge and act on this or that problem in the future. I can't remember how many times all the comrades spoke or intervened in the discussion.

For my part I spoke many times, sometimes to interject a short reply, sometimes at some length. The other comrades acted in the same way.

I remember that I spoke after Qemal and supported his views on a number of matters. The substance of what I said was this:

“I associate myself with the criticism Comrade Qemal made of our Korça group for sectarianism and the lack of a healthier comradesly spirit and greater patience in the debates we have

held in the past with comrades of other groups. Comrade Koço did not point out this wrong stand, but I am stressing it and we have to acknowledge it, because it has caused great harm in the past. We must not allow such manifestations to pass into the Party and must free ourselves from them, but without acknowledging them we cannot combat them.

“The sectarianism of the Korça group has been expressed also in its acknowledged parochialism, which has damaged the extension of the work of the group and prevented it from making contacts on a more extensive scale with the communist and democratic movement all over the country. The comrades in Korça also have exerted an influence over the comrades of the Korça group, who are not in Korça, to work in a more or less closed and parochial way. Such views and stands narrow the horizons of work and vision, create a feeling of self-satisfaction and egotism and foster the conceit, especially amongst those who have such tendencies in their character.

“In such a situation, comrade Koço (I turned towards him), our Korça group let the way open to the Trotskyites Niko Xoxi, Aristidh Qendro and others to leave Korça and make contact with revolutionary young people in different cities of our country, thus destroying that necessary revolutionary work which the group itself should have done with them in organized ways. What did those of our group do for those in Tirana and

in Shkodra? What did you do in Tirana, comrade Koço? How did the 'Youth' Group emerge as a faction from our Korça group? Don't we, too, have our share of responsibility for these mistakes, these deviations and this sterile struggle which went on amongst groups? I think we have, if we analyse our work somewhat more profoundly. Naturally, I do not accept the mistakes and faults of other groups and their members, either for our group or for us as individuals. But to the extent that we are to blame for those mistakes and faults, we have to acknowledge them and not wash our hands of them."

Then, I went on to examine another question:

"Comrade Vasil and you Anastas Lula," I said turning towards them, "you and your groups made a great mistake that you did not adopt the Comintern directives. This gravely damaged the advance of the communist movement in Albania, permitted the penetration of Trotskyism into our ranks and hindered the organized mass struggle against Zog and his regime. You must acknowledge these mistakes."

"For our part we have no reason to acknowledge them," objected Anastas. That was the type he was. He made vindictive hints, but said nothing to back them up.

"How come you don't acknowledge your mistakes?" demanded Sotir Vullkani. "Tell us why."

"First, tell me when those instructions arrived in Albania?" said Anastas in a tone of

gloating triumph.

I realized what the old fox was getting at, so I replied calmly:

“In 1937.”

“But in 1937 we were not even a faction, let alone a group,” said Anastas gravely. “We began to create our group in 1938 and emerged as an independent group in 1940. Why, then, should we bear responsibility for something that happened before we were ‘born’?”

He gave the comrades a triumphant look and sat down convinced that he had struck us. But I did not leave him long to savour his “triumph.”

“Anastas Lula,” I said, “you should put aside the sophisms and cunning ‘arguments’ of a bad juggler with figures and judge matters correctly! True, the instructions of the Comintern arrived in Albania in 1937, but they were not just for that year, but for the whole period ahead of us, that is, for the time when you began to form your faction and the time when you came out openly as a group. Moreover, the essence of them — the necessity for the linking of the communists with the masses, the work with the masses, the formation of a broad anti-fascist front — is valid for today, for tomorrow and will be valid for the future too. Without winning over the masses, without creating strong links with the whole people, with all the forces around the Party, our cause will not advance. The great leaders of the proletariat teach us this, this is the spirit of the directives of the Comintern. Therefore, Anastas Lula, I re-

emphasize that you should acknowledge the grave mistakes which you have made up till now and must not allow them to be repeated.”

“Only the Korça group accepted and adopted them,” said Koço boastfully.

“It is true,” I continued, “that the Korça group made no mistake in this direction and for this we are indebted, first of all, to Ali Kelmendi for the correct orientations he had given our group when he was in Albania. We accepted the directives of the Comintern and tried to put them into practice. But we must judge the matter correctly: How did we apply these directives? Did we completely liquidate the old closed sectarian cells and did we go among the broad masses of the people? Did we set to work to create sound militant new cells from the ranks of the people and to build a truly organized detachment not only of workers of Korça but of the whole country? Comrade Koço,” I turned to him, “we must recognize openly that we did not fulfil the tasks we undertook. True, we disbanded the cells, but those we formed a little later were just about the same as the former ones, with a small difference in their numbers and principles. It is true that the influence of the group was felt a bit more amongst the masses, but only in the city of Korça. It is true that the youth of Korça were organized better and were under the influence of the group, but outside the city, in the countryside and outside the district the question was left to spontaneity. With the few small nuclei that we

created there we cannot pretend that our group seriously took in hand and applied the great ideas of the Comintern properly. We cannot avoid our great responsibility and cannot fail to acknowledge these defects and shortcomings. The other groups acted completely in opposition to the directives of the Comintern and, of course, their responsibility is greater.

“I personally still put great importance on these questions,” I stressed, “because they have had harmful consequences for our work in the past, and if we do not make a clean sweep of the shortcomings and mistakes which the groups have had, our newly formed Party will suffer greatly. Are we going to go on maintaining the group spirit in our Communist Party? In no way! We must bury this spirit once and for all here today. But we would be naive to think that when we emerge from this meeting everything will go smoothly. No, we will have to wage a merciless struggle against the spirit and the unhealthy methods of the group work and will fight factions and factionalists without hesitation. We must emerge from this meeting freed from the feeling of the superiority or infallibility of any group and armed with the feeling of the steel Marxist-Leninist unity of the Communist Party of Albania which we have formed.”

When we were discussing the political, ideological and organizational stands we had taken against the fascist occupiers and the quisling government, I made another short interpolation

amongst those of comrades of various groups:

“We of the Korça group,” I pointed out, “have said and say that we have not been wrong either in line or the stand which we have maintained and continue to maintain against the fascist occupiers. In regard to the two other groups, and more precisely their leaders, through their wrong views, they have tried and up to a point have managed to hinder the anti-fascist activity of the rank-and-file communists, the youth and others.”

“That means to say,” objected Sadik Premte, “that you, too, are of the opinion that the Shkodra group and our ‘Youth’ Group have not been opposed to the Italian fascist occupation. This is an accusation...”

“I didn’t say any such thing,” I replied.

“Koço Tashko said it openly, but that’s what your remark is getting at,” continued Sadik.

“It isn’t at all as Sadik Premte says,” I pointed out to the meeting. “The issues I am getting at are these:

“If Koço Tashko with his ill-controlled and irritable remarks has implied that the two other groups have not taken a stand against the occupiers, I dissociate myself from this opinion of his. All of us, together with the people, rose against the occupiers and the traitors, all of us came out in demonstrations and demanded weapons to fight, but we have to recognize that we were not in a position to organize the struggle and attack the enemy in the first days. Later we recovered,

organized our resistance and propaganda against the occupier better and thought more seriously about the war, but even then we did not manage to have all the groups do this work in the same way. My opinion is that the Korça group took a more correct view of the problems and the tasks ahead of us. The Shkodra group was resolutely opposed to the occupier, was anti-fascist, but, as I pointed out earlier, its leaders were not clear on a number of major issues of principle. Meanwhile, the leaders of the 'Youth' Group and precisely the two comrades who are here, Anastas Lula and Sadik Premte, were not at all clear on these issues and, moreover, there was an anti-communist and Trotskyite tinge to their views."

"We protest again! You are making a grave accusation against Sadik and me," said Anastas, springing to his feet. "What is the basis for what you say?!"

"I base what I said on a series of views and slogans which you have adopted and propagated," I said and I explained the defeatist content of their slogan, "the time to fight has not come yet, because we have neither organization nor weapons," and I went on to denounce and condemn the views of such leaders as Aristidh Qendro, Andrea Zisi and others that "we should infiltrate the Albanian fascist party and the police in order to find out what is being done there," that "it should not be considered wrong to betray secrets to the police," etc. In fact, the rank and file of the groups did not accept these slogans,

but the anti-Marxist leaders whom I mentioned, who were agents of the bourgeoisie and the occupier, managed to impose themselves in a thousand ways on and keep the rank-and-file comrades under restraint.

“We had to explain the Soviet-German non-aggression Pact to the comrades of the Korça group,” I continued. “We did this among the people, too, because this was a very delicate question which the enemy was exploiting to the maximum, so we had to explain the content and aim of that pact to the comrades, to make clear to them and convince them that the Soviet Union was and remained what it had been, the glorious homeland of Lenin and Stalin.”

Continuing to explain this problem, I underlined that while the Shkodra group was not as active as it should have been, the “Youth” Group was totally inactive in this direction, indeed, it used the non-aggression pact to serve the Trotskyite theories of its leaders. “You see,” Anastas said, “it is proved that you were wrong and we were right when we said that the time to fight has not come,” and he continued, “we are right to consider that we must wait until the country is industrialized and the proletariat created and then form the party,” “that we must train the cadres before we hurl ourselves into the struggle,” “we must protect and not sacrifice the cadres,” and other such rubbish now well-known to all. However, this hostile work by the Trotskyite leaders of groups impeded the rallying of com-

munist energies in resistance and struggle. These Trotskyite chiefs continued their defeatist activity even when the Soviet Union was attacked. They tried to sabotage the strikes and demonstrations which, in the end, the Korça group and Shkodra group managed to organize jointly.

I continued to speak also about the close collaboration we had managed to establish with the outstanding patriot, Myslim Peza, and with other patriots. I specially stressed the question of the peasantry, pointing out clearly its great role in our liberation war and saying that the Korça group had taken a correct view of this vital question in principle, but had done very little about it in practice. The others had underrated it both in theory and in practice, while Anastas Lula and company, with their anti-Leninist theory, had abandoned the peasantry to the bourgeoisie and fascism.

I demanded that we should appreciate all these major questions correctly, because we had to make up for the time we had lost.

Fiery debates took place about these problems just as about the previous ones. Anastas' group capitulated. He was obliged to admit reluctantly that some of his ideas had been wrong, "but... that it wasn't precisely like that..." that "in practice, it was so but..." a hundred "buts." All his admissions were just to throw dust in our eyes, and, as life itself showed, they were rocks above and below the water, were mines laid in the road of our resistance and fight against the occu-

piers. This road had to be cleared for the Party and the people, the visible and invisible mines had to be defused. Therefore, during those days, at those fiery moments when the fate of the people and the Homeland was decided, the Albanian communists waged a great fierce battle and triumphed.

The communists of the groups who were present at this meeting were freed from a lot of harmful views with which they had crammed their heads. They brought them out in the open, discussed them freely and condemned them, made fierce criticisms of one another and gained immensely from this great school. In particular, our whole new Party which we had formed was to gain a great deal.

What would this Party be like, how would it be organized, what would be its minimum program for the times we were passing through? All the comrades of the groups who took part in the discussion of these vital questions gave their opinions which were in general in accord. I, too, dealt with this problem at length in my contribution, saying in essence:

“Comrades, we have decided the major issue, the main thing, we have founded the Communist Party of Albania on a Marxist-Leninist basis. Likewise, we have frankly discussed the good and bad aspects of the communist groups. It’s true we have attacked the evils, but we must continue to struggle and, from now on, we must not allow these or similar mistakes dressed up in other

forms to occur again in the new circumstances which the National Liberation War will create for us. We must put the good aspects of the groups, especially the positive aspects of the work they have done, in the service of the Party and the war, but we must not content ourselves with those few results which have been achieved. In order to strengthen the unity in the Party, from now on we must not permit any discrimination in the ranks of members of the Party irrespective from what group they have come. There must not be any group prejudices retained in the back of anyone's minds."

"That's right," interjected Vasil Shanto, "and I propose that from now on we should not hear anyone say: 'I am a member of this or that group.' From now on there are only members of the Communist Party of Albania."

"I agree completely," I said and continued. "There are no longer members or leaders of groups, they don't exist anymore. From now on there will be the leadership of the Party, the Central Committee and the regional committees. The formation of the Party liquidated the groups forever, hence the spirit and practice of their work must be eliminated too. With the election of the Central Committee by this meeting we liquidate 'the power and influence' of leaders of communist groups. I repeat once more what Vasil said: there are no longer members of groups. From now on there are only members of the Communist Party of Albania."

“Who will be the soldiers of the Party, that is, its first members? The comrades here discussed this and the others will discuss it later. I associate myself with the idea that the soldiers of our Party will be the organized members of the former communist groups of Shkodra, Korça and the ‘Youth’ after they have been screened, therefore, we should take the decision that immediately after this meeting we should prepare exact lists of the members of groups as quickly as possible. I say exact meaning that the lists should not be enlarged with people who have not been active or who are suspect, in order to increase the number so that one or the other group will dominate in the Party. But neither should we present short lists in order to conceal and retain activists for eventual factional work outside the Party. These lists must be handed over as quickly as possible to the Central Committee which will be elected.

“There has been a great deal of discussion on the foundations on which the Party must be built. My opinion is that our Party should be built following the example of the Bolshevik Party, both organizationally and ideologically. According to this experience, as far as I know, its basic unit must be the cell, in which the communists will militate. The members of the cell will elect its secretary and the communists of the region or their delegates will elect the regional committee of the Communist Party of Albania. For the time being, I think that the Central Committee should appoint the main cadres of the regional committees

and the political and organizational secretary until the conditions are created for their election to be done by the regional organizations of the Party. When we create suitable conditions, the whole Party will send delegates to the National Conference which will play the role of the Party Congress and in these circumstances, as such, will be the highest instance of the leadership of the Party, which will determine its line and elect the Definitive Central Committee.”

In the meeting there were vigorous and concrete discussions, valuable debates and proposals about the functioning, norms and principles of the new Party. Almost all the comrades rose and spoke one after the other, or expressed their opinions in various interpolations. With these discussions and debates the programmatic line of the Party, the foundations and norms on which it would be built, were being worked out. Thus, amongst other things, we stressed:

“In our Party there will be democratic centralism, open and sincere Bolshevik criticism and self-criticism will prevail. In all its activity our Party will base itself on and be guided by the theory of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. Our Party is against factions and groups, which it will fight mercilessly. Our Party will encourage the expression of opinions, but the opinion of the majority will predominate over that of the minority, which must obey the majority. Our Party must have steel discipline, must have Marxist-Leninist unity of thought and action. Without internal steel dis-

cipline and unity our Party, which will do battle with a large number of enemies, cannot lead the fight successfully.

“The Party will combat all anti-Marxist ideologies and currents. In order to accomplish this effectively, however, we must insist energetically on raising the theoretical, political and ideological level of the cadres and members of the Party by studying the Marxist-Leninist theory.

“Our Party must be the organized vanguard of the working class, while it considers the peasantry as a friendly class, an ally of the working class, and will rely heavily on it because our peasantry will play a major role, both during the National Liberation War and after.”

This was an important problem which had to be stressed and all the communists had to be clear about it. Our Party had been founded as a Party of the working class, which would be guided by the Marxist-Leninist ideology regardless of the fact that in our country this class was very small, made up of a number of wage labourers, apprentices and craftsmen, and were scarcely tested in the experience of strikes and clashes, or trade-union and class struggles.

There had been workers' strikes in the past in various cities of our country, but they were on a small scale and not coordinated with one another, both because the number of workers was small and because there was no organization in trade-unions and no developed industrial bourgeoisie. The workers' strikes like those in Korça,

Kuçova and Shkodra, naturally, have had an economic class character, but they had also assumed an anti-state character against the government and its oppressive measures. The strike with the most marked class character was that of the Kuçova workers, which was directed at the same time against capitalist exploiters, who were the Italian concession holders. While the “Puna” association in Korça had the initial forms of the rally of workers and craftsmen of the city to defend their economic rights against the employers. This association had also struggled for democratic and political rights up to the point that its members and sympathizers came out in the streets demanding “bread” and fighting with Zog’s gendarmerie. Of course, I am not going to dwell at length on this problem here, because the Party has made a general analysis of this capital question and our historians and sociologists will certainly deepen it with further studies, but I want to point out that, when we founded the Party, we recognized the political, ideological and organizational shortcomings and weaknesses in the working class, but also recognized its fighting traditions, revolutionary spirit and historic mission, therefore at the Founding Meeting of the Party we underlined that our Party would be the organized vanguard detachment of the working class.

But, while bearing this in mind, the Party never underestimated the role and great weight of the peasantry in the war and revolution. From

its earliest days the Party took into account that in the fight against the occupiers, it and the class which it represented had to rely on the peasantry. The peasants were oppressed to the limit, had little or no land, lived in medieval feudal ignorance and unheard of want. Added to the misery of the peasantry over the centuries caused by the beys, the feudal lords, the usurious grand and petty-bourgeoisie, by the aghas and big landowners, was the oppression imposed by the Italian occupiers, the plunderers of the freedom and independence of the Homeland, who were bringing in their own colonists and driving the peasants from their land.

Our peasants had great revolutionary traditions. They had fought more than the city-dwellers against a series of occupiers, against their enslaving laws, against taxes and so on. The mountains and the villages, from which our peasants poured down upon the enemies, have always been the centres of resistance and liberation struggles. The progressive elements of the city, whether fighters with the pen or the rifle, had the peasantry as their main base. In regard to the development of the knowledge, the language and schooling it can be said that this began in the cities, but when it came to fighting, the progressive and revolutionary elements of the cities had the peasantry as their allies. Naturally, in those times when the working class did not exist, the peasantry was subjected to various influences. Then, too, a struggle was waged over who would win

the support of the peasantry, the emerging bourgeoisie or the beys, the feudal lords and the big landowners. The beys and the feudal lords supported by the Ottoman and other occupiers maintained their domination over the peasantry by means of force, although often enough they could not restrain the outbursts of the anger of the peasantry against occupiers and feudal lords. The folk songs, the glorious history of each epoch handed down by word of mouth, tell of this.

However, the progressive elements who were emerging from the urban bourgeoisie and the progressive patriotic elements with influence, who broke away from their class of beys and feudal lords, struggled to awaken the peasantry and became competitive with the feudal class in order to undermine its influence in the countryside.

Of course, there were other factors which competed in the struggle, which I have briefly mentioned, such as the various religions, in particular, the heads of which assisted both the foreigners and the exploiting class of feudal lords and the bourgeois speculators. Nevertheless, among the believers, among people of all religions, especially the Muslims and the Orthodox Christians, there were liberal currents which stressed the siding of the peasantry with the progressive bourgeoisie. The patriotic revolutionary spirit, the struggle against poverty and oppression impelled our proud peasantry not towards atheism, as we communists understand it, but on

the course of thinking: "I have a religion, because that's the way it is, because I was born of that religion and that's how I will die." In the great struggle which awaited us we were going to rely precisely on these masses, on these traditions, therefore in my contribution I pointed out:

"The Party must combat sectarianism and opportunism, both in thought and action. We must increase the ranks of the Party, first of all, with sound worker elements, but also with peasants and other revolutionary fighters. All those who are admitted to the Party must be tested in struggle for the achievement of its aims. We must close the doors of the Party to spies and provocateurs, to gossips and cowards, to factionalists, anarchists and intriguers who will try to penetrate its ranks in order to cause confusion and to create the terrain for anti-Party Trotskyite work.

"The merciless organized struggle against the occupiers and traitors must occupy the main place in the program of our Party. Our aim is the general armed uprising, in which the whole people must be mobilized, but in order to reach this stage the simpler forms of struggle, demonstrations, acts of sabotage, executions of enemies and repeated actions must be carried out. In the cities the Party must organize the guerrilla units, while in the villages it must form partisan *çeta* and units of freedom fighters from which, in the course of the war, it will organize the big units which will form the people's army. Therefore, the Party must extend its work among the masses

and carry out wide-ranging political activity everywhere in order to mobilize the people, all honest individuals, all the patriotic and anti-fascist forces in the great struggle. The whole people must be convinced that the only way to escape from slavery is to fight arms in hand and that they will triumph in this fight. The people must be convinced about the strength and the correct line of the Party. Our new Party must be in the forefront of the fight; wherever the danger is greatest, wherever the sacrifices are greatest, that is where the communists must be.

“The Party must tell the people that it is fighting so they themselves will take power and, when this is achieved, the Party would carry out major economic, cultural and social reforms. The Party will tell the people that ‘freedom must be won, it is not donated.’ Therefore, the Communist Party of Albania which has been formed will lead the National Liberation War and the people to victory. This must be the great mission of the Party in general outline.”

After these opinions had been expressed and all the comrades had discussed these important problems, finally we decided unanimously that these principles and the conclusions and decisions of this historic meeting, which founded the Communist Party of Albania, should be summed up in the “Resolution of the Meeting of the Main Communist Groups of Albania on the Formation of the Party.”

After all this we came to the final question:

the election of the Central Committee. First, the comrades agreed to the proposal that this Committee which we would elect would be provisional until the calling of a National Conference of the Party. But who would be elected? This was not a simple problem, bearing in mind that chiefs of the former groups, those who had always pretended to be at the head of everything, were taking part in the meeting, and they would certainly have liked to be in the “leadership” of the new Party. And then, which former head of a group would be “the chief” at the head of the Central Committee? The Communist Party of Albania had been founded, but the confusion of the former groups had not been and could not be eliminated so quickly from the minds and consciousness of their members. Therefore, many comrades including me were of the opinion that the former chiefs of the groups should be left out of the leadership altogether. This decision would have exceptional importance for unity of leadership of the newly formed Party, and consequently for the whole Party.

Because we judged matters in this way, we had to find a way at all costs to leave out the chiefs. And the possibilities for this existed. Besides the period before the meeting, the six or seven days of debates at the meeting, especially, had shown up the chiefs in their true colours. They had been attacked more heavily than anyone else and blamed for the former weaknesses in the communist movement of Albania.

At this point Miladin, in his role of arbiter among the groups, intervened to make a wise interpolation. He said:

“Comrades, here I am taking account of an opinion or a proposal which comrade Tashko made some time ago. He proposed that as one of the heads of the former groups he should not be elected to the Central Committee. I think that the proposal is valid, not only for him, but also for the others. Therefore, looking at Koço’s personal proposal in a general context, I suggest to the meeting that none of the leaders of the former groups, neither chairmen nor vice-chairmen, should be elected to the Provisional Central Committee.”

Immediately I remembered that during a conversation before the meeting, at which some of our comrades and Miladin Popović were present, when we were talking about how the chiefs of the groups had hindered our unity in the past and were still a hindrance to it, Koço Tashko’s face had flushed with anger and on the spur of the moment he had said:

“If I have been a hindrance then remove me. Though it is not I who have hindered unity, but those of the Shkodra and ‘Youth’ groups...”

I was convinced that Koço did this simply for demagogy, in order to appear “generous,” “principled,” “devoted to the cause,” etc. Moreover, Koço had repeated this statement in passing in one of his interventions during the meeting.

When Miladin said this, Koço Tashko

seemed stunned and he said:

“Just hang on a minute..., don’t misunderstand me... What I meant was...”

“You were quite right,” said Pilo in a serious tone, but not without a touch of irony. “I agree that the chiefs should not be elected.”

Anastas Lula and Sadik Premte kept their tempers in check. They did not know who to take it out on, Koço or themselves. Only Vasil Shanto took the decision of the meeting calmly and with the generosity of a true and devoted communist. I don’t remember who proposed the “compromise,” which was accepted, that the list of candidates to the Central Committee should be prepared and presented by a commission of three people made up of the comrades who had been more or less at the head of the groups and were taking part in the meeting. So, Koço Tashko, Vasil Shanto and Anastas Lula were appointed to the commission. But this commission did not operate apart from consultations with the comrades present at the meeting and not just each with the comrades of his own group, but also in consultation with others. The list was drawn up taking into account the past of the candidates, which was their role in the meeting, also bearing in mind their class origin and establishing a correct proportion between those with worker origin or status and intellectuals. It was taken into account that, within the possibilities, a certain balance should be maintained in including the soundest representatives from the former groups in the

Central Committee.

Thus, after discussion of these questions and the characteristics of the candidates which were presented, the meeting elected the Provisional Central Committee of seven persons.

In order to ensure unity there was no election for chairman or secretary of the Central Committee.¹ Complete parity was made the foundation of the whole work as it had been for the preparation and the conduct of the proceedings of the Meeting for the Founding of the Party. Nothing should be done which would create the impression that one group had more rights and advantages than the other.

Thus, after seven days of intensive work the meeting came to an end with a great victory, the founding of the Communist Party of Albania, with a correct line and a clear program.

With joy in our hearts and full of enthusiasm we set to work with zeal and optimism.

¹ Known historical facts and official documents of the Party show that Comrade Enver Hoxha led the (Provisional) Central Committee. He was elected General Secretary of the CPA at the 1st National Conference, held on March 17-22, 1943 in Labinot (Elbasan). The Conference also elected the Definitive Central Committee, comprised of 15 members and 5 alternate members, and the Political Bureau.



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