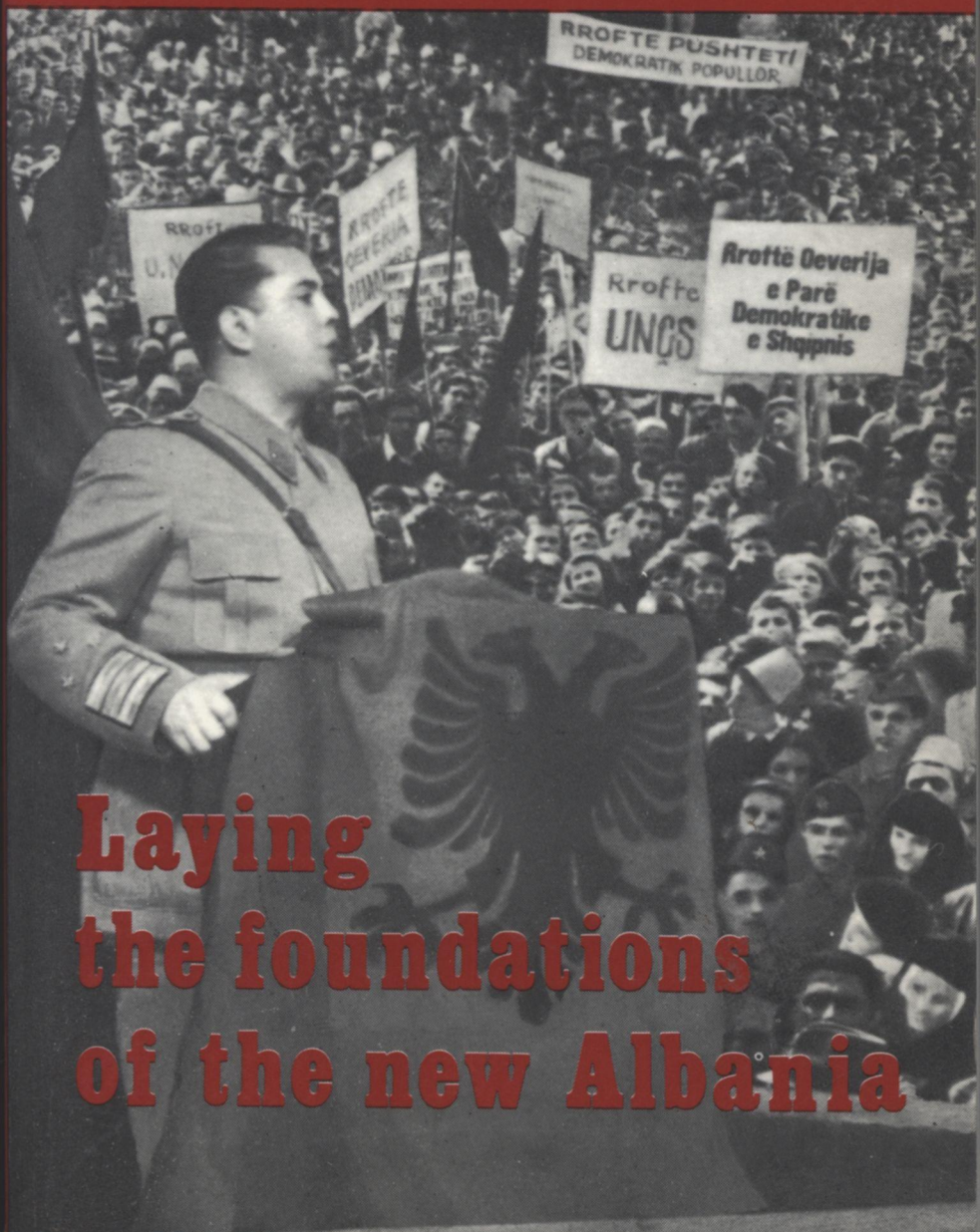


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# ENVER HOXHA



**Laying  
the foundations  
of the new Albania**

**WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!**

ENVER HOXHA

***Laying  
the foundations  
of the new Albania***

MEMOIRS  
AND HISTORICAL NOTES



## **Publisher's Note**

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OF THE HOMELAND AND THE TRIUMPH  
OF THE PEOPLE'S REVOLUTION**

## **BY WAY OF AN INTRODUCTION**

In the many centuries of the history of Albania, our people's state power and the monolithic unity of our people, embodied in the organization of the Democratic Front, are two of the greatest and most brilliant achievements, two of the most monumental works of the epoch of the Party.

These two immortal monumental works, like the Party itself, which was and remains for ever their powerful brain and heart, were not born in marble halls, were not the product of «great minds», lolling in the easy chairs of cafes or parliamentary seats. No, they were born from the barrel of the partisan rifle, in the fire of the war for freedom, were nurtured in the bosom of the people, and the humble homes of the people became their place of residence.

Today, looking back over more than four decades, we Albanian communists feel proud that ever since the days of their creation, the Democratic Front of Albania and our people's state power, under the leadership of our glorious Party, have performed their tasks and mission for the people and the Homeland with honour, have been tempered in the sternest battles

and tests, have withstood and defeated the plans of all internal and external enemies and have been turned into impregnable fortresses of triumphant socialism and the fine new life which is flourishing in Albania.

Their honour and glory will be raised higher and higher in the future, because the blood of 28,000 of the finest sons and daughters of this land (1) has been poured in their foundations, because they have been set up, raised and cemented with sweat, toil, countless efforts and sacrifices by our people and our Party. They have been and will remain for all time the inviolable creation of the people, defending and expressing their lofty aspirations, and the Marxist-Leninist line and ideology of our Party of Labour will always inspire them and pervade them like a red thread.

As to how we managed to create and build these immortal works, that is a whole history. Many documents of that time, besides providing vivid evidence of our work and struggle for the creation of the Front and the state power, also, comprise, to some degree, the first written history of the process of their birth and construction. Later, in the years of Liberation, we have written and spoken again and again about them and about the whole glorious period of our history, when the people, enlightened and led by the Party, succeeded in liberating the Homeland from the chains

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1 As one of the more active participants of the world anti-fascist coalition, Albania occupies one of the first places in regard to human and material losses during the Second World War, compared with the size of its territory and its population.

of foreigners and themselves from any kind of class oppression and exploitation.

These two colossal achievements of ours will continue to exist and function through the ages, but the earliest times, the moments when we laid the foundations, when in the heat of the war we created the National Liberation Front and our people's state power, shall never be forgotten. We have looked back over that unforgettable period again and again, not from nostalgia, but in order to illuminate the problem from all aspects and to make as clear and concrete as possible to the younger generations how we, their parents, managed to overthrow the old and set up the new.

This is the purpose of these notes of mine, written at various times in the form of reminiscences about historical events, which I am now handing over for publication.

On the eve of the 40th anniversary of the liberation of the Homeland and the triumph of the people's revolution, they are intended both to pay great homage to the outstanding deed of our Party and people in the years of the National Liberation War and to refresh the memory of the past, which has always been the foundation of the future which it has always served and illuminated.

*August 1984*



## I

### **THE NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT — A FRONT OF STRUGGLE AND UNITY**

The emergence of the Communist Party of Albania on November 8, 1941 as a powerful current enlivened the energies of the Albanian people, roused their hopes in the future and terrified the enemy.

This was a decisive event, a most important act, because for the first time in the many centuries of the history of the Albanian people the Party of the working class, the only Party which, having the revolutionary ideology as its guide, would lead the people in the struggle and to victory, had placed itself at the head of the people.

This historic moment was very quickly reflected in the struggle of the Albanian people, which grew steadily stronger, becoming ever better organized.

With joy and enthusiasm we communists welcomed this great victory of which we had dreamed and for which we had struggled for a long time. Now

we had the Party which was to guide all our efforts, which would teach and educate us, would lead us in the struggle for the liberation of the Homeland and, later, towards the realization of our ultimate ideal - communism.

The newly formed Party was faced with many great tasks.

Linking up with the people, acquainting the masses with the program and aim of the Party, the mobilization and organization of the masses in the life-and-death struggle with the fascist occupiers and local traitors was one of these tasks, indeed, one of the main and most important tasks. Without the people, without the masses, a communist party, whether newly formed or with a long period of existence and activity, can achieve nothing.

We Albanian communists understood this axiom of Marxism-Leninism. What made our work difficult was the fact that in the grave conditions of the occupation and terror we had to come out before the people, to win them to our cause, to organize and lead them at a time when we also had to organize ourselves, to build and temper the Party and to prove it in struggle as a capable, reliable and irreplaceable leading force.

This was something unprecedented in history, but as you might say, this was our «fate». Had we waited until the Party was built and strengthened, until it extended to all parts of the country, had we worked only «within the Party» and then addressed ourselves to the people with our program for struggle, this would have been catastrophic, not only for the Party,



but also for the fate of the people and the Homeland. Therefore, conscious of the situation through which we were passing and the difficulties which we had, we did not wait. We went into action at once, facing up to all the tasks at the same time, including that of making the people conscious and uniting them in that fighting union which was soon to take the name of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Front of Albania.

## **1. The foundations of unity**

Through all the centuries of their history, the Albanian people have always striven and fought to be united in the face of any invasion which threatened their freedom and the motherland. This tradition was handed down from generation to generation as a great lesson and legacy, and precisely herein must be sought one of the sources of the vitality of our people, of their ability to withstand the most ferocious and powerful enemies and occupiers and to avoid assimilation by them. Now, at the grave moments through which the Homeland was passing, facing dangers which threatened its existence, we communists would undoubtedly base ourselves firmly on the rich patriotic and fighting traditions of our people, on their tendency and readiness to unite in the fight for freedom. The examples of the Skanderbeg era, of the efforts of the outstanding

men of our Renaissance, of the famous Albanian League of Prizren, (1) and the popular general uprising which brought Albania its Independence, and so on, were to inspire not only us communists, but also all the honest, patriotic people to whom the fate of the Homeland was dear.

Apart from this, there was something else which was to assist us in the great mission ahead of us.

For some years, the idea and appeal of the Communist International for the creation of the Anti-fascist Front everywhere had been one of the topics of the debates and the main concern of the best communists in Albania at the time of the communist groups. In particular, the Communist Group of Korça, especially after the arrival of the instructions of the Comintern in the autumn of 1937, increased its efforts to break away from the former closed and sectarian work in order to link up more with the masses through youth organizations, workers' associations, etc., and to create a «democratic bloc», like that which triumphed in the municipal elections in Korça. Likewise, the other Groups, especially that of Shkodra, had created some links and were striving to extend their influence among the ranks of intellectuals, white-collar workers, officers and, somewhat less, among restricted circles of manual workers as well. However, all these efforts

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1 It was set up in June 1878 and during the three years of its activity fought for the political and military union of the Albanian nation, for self-government, national unity and in defence of the territorial integrity of Albania against the Great Powers and the neighbouring chauvinistic monarchies.

amounted to very little and, following the blows which the democratic and revolutionary movement in Albania suffered in the summer of 1935 with the defeat of what is called the «Fier Movement»,<sup>(1)</sup> and at the end of 1938 when nearly all the members of the Group of Shkodra were arrested and brought before the court, it must be said that the old sickness of the groups — rotten secrecy and turning inwards, isolation from one another, and especially isolation from the masses, became even more apparent.

The fascist occupation of the country in April 1939 shook this grave and harmful situation of our communist movement to its foundations. Immediately we sensed and understood better than ever that we would not be able to organize the resistance to the occupier properly, because we ourselves were still divided, without an organization and a clear revolutionary program, and were still unknown to the masses and had not won them to our cause to the degree that they would follow us consciously. It was essential to overcome these weaknesses in a revolutionary way as a decisive condition both to form our Communist Party and in order to get closer to and link up with the masses.

In the new situation which was created after the occupation, the Albanian communists of that period, especially the rank and file of the groups, understood these tasks correctly and, parallel with the efforts for

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1 The movement was aimed at overthrowing the Zog regime. It failed because of lack of a revolutionary leadership, insufficient organization and isolation from the masses of the people.

the formation of the Party, also increased and intensified their efforts to make themselves known to and link up with the masses. True, this work was still unorganized and unco-ordinated, true, especially at first, it was done from the positions of «gaining influence» over and as a kind of «contest» with the other groups; nevertheless, the fact that the communist elements began truly to go among the people, to become known by the people and to know the people, had importance.

Personally, I retain the finest and most unforgettable memories from this phase, especially after I came to work in Tirana in January 1940.<sup>(1)</sup>The daily relations with the workers of the «Flora» factory and, even more, the direct work in the «Flora» shop, with the great possibilities for contact with elements of the most varied strata, brought about that very quickly we were to establish around ourselves a broad circle of worker activists and sympathizers. By getting closer to them, through ceaseless cautious work, we gradually extended the circle with other worker comrades, with craftsmen, the unemployed and the circle of their families and relatives. While the relations of our common or similar jobs served as a means to get to know them, the basis for the strengthening of this acquaintance was the political conversations against the oc-

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1 By decision of the centre of the Communist Group of Korça, Comrade Enver Hoxha was sent at that time to Tirana to organize the anti-fascist movement against the Italian occupiers, to extend and step up the activity of the Group on sound bases, as well as to establish connections among the communist groups of the country.

cupiers which we, seemingly by chance, opened up with them whenever the possibility presented itself. Of course, there were dangers in opening up these conversations and going deeply into them, especially with new acquaintances, but one fact remains significant and unforgettable for me: on almost no occasion did I, or the other comrades of the group who were working in Tirana, encounter any opposition or fear on the part of the worker comrades about the things we said to them. On the contrary, as soon as we broached the subject, it was they who found the opportunity to express their profound anger and hatred against the usurpers of the freedom and independence of their Homeland, it was they who, with their class logic, were not content merely to express their hatred but also asked: «What are we going to do about it?»

This situation, which we encountered everywhere, filled us with confidence and impelled us to work harder for the founding of the Party and to think about how we should organize and channel the popular hatred which was building up and almost ready to erupt.

This was the situation throughout the country. At that period I had to travel to many towns and worker centers, such as Durrës, Shkodra, Korça, Vlora, Fier, Gjirokastra, Kuçova, etc., and everywhere the mounting hatred and readiness of the Albanian working men to fight against the occupation and the exploitation by the Italian fascists could be seen clearly. In the meetings which we held, the other comrades of our communist group reported the same situation; the outstanding militants of the Communist

Group of Shkodra, Vasil Shanto and Qemal Stafa, with whom, beginning from the summer of 1940, we became closely associated and formed an unbreakable friendship, also had the same assessment of the situation in the country.

Although not with the same dimensions and intensity of work as in the city, as early as this phase we began to go to the countryside, too, and saw clearly that the same situation as in the ranks of the workers, apprentices and the unemployed of the cities was simmering there, too.

As for the youth, especially the school and student youth, it must be said that they were completely ready to follow the communists in any action and activity. Their ardent feelings of patriotism, badly hurt by the state of occupation, had made our youth unrestrainable in their open opposition and protests which they expressed almost every day in their mass resistance to the Italianization and fascistization of the school, in their demonstrative refusal to give the fascist salute, in their boycott of the lessons in the fascist doctrine, the Italian language, the corrupting organizations and associations which the fascists tried to create, and so on.

Thus, proceeding from the idea of the indispensable need for an antifascist popular front (which later, when it was created, took its «official» name the National Liberation Front), and from the profound conviction that the achievement of it was completely possible, the Albanian communists had begun the work in this direction immediately after the fascist occupation. In undertaking this heavy burden we were

aware of our lack of experience in connection with the tasks and practical construction of this front and its organizational forms, but we were firmly convinced that in the course of the work and struggle, especially after the founding of the Party, we would gain experience and practice would suggest to us the appropriate forms.

Naturally, throughout this whole phase we encountered many anti-Marxist concepts and distorted ideas about the anti-fascist front and the possibility of forming it in Albania. In the ranks of the Group of Shkodra, in particular, for years there had been elements who had disseminated completely alien, capitulationist views and theories on this problem. For example, about the end of the summer of 1941, when we were in the phase of intensive preparations for the founding of the Party, in a conversation which I had with a comrade from the Group of Shkodra, as soon as I began to talk about the links with the masses and the need to unite them in a powerful Front, the comrade replied quite bluntly as though this were something which «brooked no discussion»:

«The anti-fascist popular Front cannot be created in Albania!»

«Why?» I asked in astonishment.

«Because there are no political parties in our country as there are in France, Italy and elsewhere! With whom will talks be held? With whom will the agreement for the formation of the Front be reached when there are no parties?»

«You're wrong!» I told him. «According to what you say, efforts should not be made in our country,

the masses should not be mobilized in a fighting unity for the overthrow of fascism.»

«This is something specific to our country which comes from its backwardness!» said the comrade in a tone of regret. «Turkey and Zog have left us in this plight. If there were different parties, each of them would have its influence among the masses, the parties would talk about the Front and, when they reached agreement, the masses would automatically join the Front!»

«Well then,» I asked him patiently, «in your opinion under whose influence are the masses in our country?»

«Under no one's influence!» he replied brashly.

«No. You are judging things wrongly, proceeding from a wrong evaluation of the parties, the Front and the masses. True, in Albania the masses are not under the influence of any party, but don't forget that at this moment, especially, they are under the influence of hatred for the occupier, under the influence of the desire to fight for freedom, under the influence of their profound patriotism. This is precisely what we must grasp. Indeed, I think it is not a misfortune but a great blessing that there have not been and there are no organized political parties in our country. The true Front, the steel Front, is that which is created from below, through direct work with the masses, by linking up with them, by seizing on their seething hatred for fascism and their desire and readiness to fight. In this way we'll find a common language with the people, will touch them on the sore spot and they will be pleased to follow us and will unite. This is



the Front and we Albanian communists and our Party must fight for such a Front!»

«And how are we going to do this when we still do not have an organized party?» he asked.

«We are struggling for this, and very soon we shall have our party. Indeed, the necessity for the unity of the masses in the fight makes the founding of the party even more urgent. With the Party at the head we'll achieve everything.»

The comrade seemed to be convinced by what I said to him, although I knew that such concepts about the Front had long been propagated by the Trotskyite elements in the Group of Shkodra and, moreover, had become established in their organ, *The Green Bulletin*. We were to encounter these views and wage stern battles against them and were aware that other mistakes might be made, too, but all these would be corrected in the course of the struggle and work. The only irreparable and fatal mistake would be if we were to remain idle, to wait for «different parties to be created», «to train the cadres», to wait for the «formation of the industrial proletariat» and other views of anti-Marxist factional elements, which the revolutionary communists rejected and which the Party totally condemned later. History would not excuse us for such a mistake.

Hence, the formation of the Party found us in a situation when all the objective and subjective possibilities for the formation of the anti-fascist Front were in existence. What was most important was the fact that in the ranks of the communists and cadres of our newly formed Party, as a result of the earlier

work and the analyses made at the Founding Meeting of the Party, the conviction was being implanted that our Party could and must create the anti-fascist Front of the Albanian people through direct concrete work with the masses, without waiting for and without seeking agreements and machinations with the self-styled leaders that is, as a Front formed from below.

As is known, in the Resolution which the Founding Meeting of the Party adopted, this unity was called «the fighting unity between the working masses of town and countryside», and this was nothing but the idea of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Front of the Albanian people. Likewise, the first document of our Party, which came out simultaneously with the Resolution, was the first open militant Appeal which our Party addressed to the people, making its program clear to them and inviting them to unite in the struggle for freedom and independence!

Now the Party, with organized and multiplied forces, with its clear militant program, was to intensify and further extend the work to build up that powerful fortress of the united people against the strength and vitality of which the nazi-fascist legions would smash their heads and the efforts and plans of internal and external reaction would be thwarted.

This unity of the masses, under the leadership and banner of the Party, would make possible the outbreak and successful accomplishment of the revolution, for which the conditions existed in Albania.

The feudal regime of Zog, with its oppression, poverty, hunger, imprisonments and thefts, had angered, enraged and filled the people with hatred for

that regime, bringing them to the point of revolt. Precisely when this revolt and anger of the masses was seething, the occupation of the country prepared by Zog and the feudal bourgeoisie filled the cup to overflowing. Now the hatred of the people and the antagonistic struggle between oppressors and oppressed reached its culmination. Thus, the occupation of Albania by Italian fascism had marked the beginning of a change of national importance. This situation had to be understood and handled correctly, because it was pregnant with revolution. The Albanian communists and their Party understood this state of affairs precisely and decided to emerge as masters of the situation and become the leaders of the revolution. Hence, the grave, difficult, but glorious historic task devolved on our Communist Party: to raise the people in revolution, lead them in struggle for the liberation of the Homeland and take them and the working class, of which it was the vanguard, to victory.

Lenin teaches us that the revolution is a most serious question for the fate of a people. Therefore, if you begin it, you must carry it through to the end.

If the people are not aroused in struggle against the occupiers or against bourgeois capitalist rulers and exploiters, if the people are not prepared politically against those whom they have to fight and overthrow, if in the course of this preparation the relative strength of the forces in action is not studied and analysed, there can be no revolution; in such instances there may be attempts, there may be resistance, which would be chaotic and temporary, but not revolution and no achievement of the objectives which

a revolution seeks, whether it be a peasant uprising, a bourgeois-democratic revolution, or a proletarian revolution.

Every revolution must have a programmatic platform which indicates to the masses the limits that must be reached and the reasons why one situation must be changed into another situation. It must be explained to them dialectically why it is necessary to pass from one stage to another, why the conditions have matured for such a qualitative change, it must be made clear to the masses, on the basis of a real economic, political and national analysis, what are the reasons that filled the cup to overflowing, and the road which will be followed and the means which will be employed to make this qualitative change must be made clear to them. Finally, after analysing all these things, it must be made clear that this change, this decisive turning-point, cannot be achieved except through armed insurrection, through revolution.

After he took his step against Albania in April 1939, Mussolini hoped and was convinced that everything would go off just as he had planned. But the opposite occurred. None of his preparations was able to deceive or to subdue the Albanian people. At no time had history known Albania and its people to accept enslavement by foreigners. It had known only the ceaseless wars of the Albanian people against foreign invaders.

There was no doubt that this is what would occur this time, too, but this had to be made a reality. The struggle had to be organized. It was not easy, but neither was it impossible. However, it would be a savage

war. For its determination and patriotism and the great aim of liberation, this war would be like the previous liberation wars of our people, but it would be unlike them from the stand-point of its strategy, tactics, dimensions and organization. The times in which we were organizing the war were no longer those of our fathers and forefathers: we were facing the same savage, criminal enemies, refined in ideology, in politics, in methods and activities, but also armed to the teeth with the most modern weapons, destructive and harmful in every direction, which had not been seen in former times.

By engaging in a great propaganda campaign about such a destructive striking force, the nazi-fascists aimed to instil panic before their forces undertook the attack. The psychosis of terror and the «Fifth Column» were two of the main weapons which preceded the legions of Rome and Berlin.

Nevertheless, the peoples, united around clear ideals and aims, with correct and courageous leadership, were to triumph in this gigantic war which had burst upon them. The peoples and nations, who were determined to live free, were to triumph over the modern weapons and armies of the enemy, because the former waged a just war in their own countries, while the latter waged an unjust war of plunder in foreign countries.

Our Party was clear about the broad outlines of the situation and, together with the people, went into the fight not unprepared, because from April 7, 1939 until November 8, 1941, a little more than two years had passed since the passive and active resistance

against the occupiers and the Albanian quislings had begun.

After the occupation of the country, the resistance of the people, and first of all, of the working class and peasantry, against the regime of Zog became more crystallized and assumed more advanced forms. The hostility and resistance of the Albanian working people and peasantry to the regime of Zog, now combined with the sentiment of national liberation, were the basis on which the Party and its leadership relied in order to mobilize the will of the nation, the strength of the people, their opinions, aspirations and desires, in a fighting unity for the liberation of the Homeland and the people.

It is easy to talk about it, but in order to accomplish this program, toil and sacrifice, courage and heroism, wisdom and patience in thoughts and actions were required of the Party.

First of all, the confidence of the people in their own strength had to be created. The idea had to be eradicated from the minds of many individuals that it was impossible to withstand such a great power as fascist Italy and that «one million cannot fight 40 million», ideas which the «Fifth Column», the collaborators and the quislings propagated and encouraged, and the occupiers backed up with the divisions and tanks which they had concentrated in all parts of the country.

The people had to be convinced with facts, through actions, through policy and through propaganda, that the valour, the daring, the patriotism and the clear political thinking of the Albanians, of our ancestors, had not died out, but were more fiery than

ever. And the Communist Party of Albania, which was the bearer of all these outstanding virtues of our people, would launch thunderbolts upon the occupying enemies.

At the same time, the National Liberation War, which the Party undertook to lead, had to have clear aims, a program acceptable to our people, a program which would mobilize and enliven healthy energies. The people, and first of all, the working class and the peasantry, had to know and understand why they were fighting and what the victory would bring them. The bitter past, when the people's wars and uprisings were bloodily suppressed by the feudal lords, aghas and usurers, was fresh in their memory. The people could not be aroused to fight and shed their blood for their age-old oppressors. The Communist Party of Albania was a guarantee that the past would never again be repeated, but this had to be proved in practice with a program, with action, with fighting and with policy.

Through its program, the Party had to make clear to the people that this would be a great, fierce, complicated and difficult war. Therefore, great political and military organization was necessary. All this the Party made clear to the people and it told them (just as it demonstrated in deeds) that the communists would be in the forefront of the fight, would be the first to hurl themselves into the flames, would give their lives fighting but the war could not be waged only by them, without the masses.

This resulted from the idea that the communists could not fight and triumph without the people. The people make the revolution.

In all this activity, the question of alliances and the definition of allies would be decisive. The leading role of the working class, on the basis of our main principles, and the alliance of the working class with the friendly class — the peasantry, especially with the poor peasants with no land or little land, is known. Precisely this alliance, to which we devoted the greatest importance and attention, was to be the key to the victory in our National Liberation War.

However, we also knew the other side of it: this alliance of the working class with the peasantry, under the leadership of the working class, which was to become the pivot of the unification of other patriotic and progressive strata, had to be created in accord with our concrete conditions and situation, and to this end, our Party had to make analyses not only of the political economic situation of classes and strata, but also of the specific, special links of groups and clans, of the positive and negative influences, old and new, within Albanian society.

We recognized the truth that the Albanian working class was still few in numbers and without great experience in the class struggle, but right from the outset we were convinced that this working class was and would be the first to embrace the call and program of the Party and would play, just as it did, the great role which belonged to it in the popular revolution as the vanguard class of the society. Its most faithful ally undoubtedly would be the peasantry which not only suffered under a mediaeval exploitation, but had always been the source of liberation and social struggles in the past. The brilliant patriotic and



democratic traditions of our peasantry, now kindled to a fierce blaze by the intolerable state of occupation, were the most powerful argument, also, for the necessity and possibility of the creation of the alliance between the working class and peasantry and to refute those reactionary views which presented the peasantry as an ignorant, down-trodden mob, useless and unreliable in war. The fact that in the conditions of our country, this class would be the greatest source and the broadest base of manpower for the National Liberation War made our work to win the support of the peasantry for the program of the Party even more necessary.

So, while we were conscious that the working class and the peasantry would constitute the main basis of the fighting unity of the people, at the same time, we knew that the past had left its mark on our society, blemishes which were obstacles to unity and made the creation of alliances difficult. Religion had done its work and continued to poison the minds and hearts of individuals. The clergy, the beys and bayraktars(1) had striven not only to exploit but also to «subdue» and «tame» our brave and indomitable people, whom the regimes of the past had kept in cultural and political obscurantism.

True, when the country was occupied there were no parties, either reactionary or progressive, leftist, etc., but the factors which I listed above, and many others like these, operated as if there were innumer-

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1 Representatives of the gentry in the mountainous areas, especially in North Albania.

able «parties» which shrivelled the energies of the people and kept them divided in order to be enslaved and exploited more completely.

Another danger which threatened the struggle and fighting alliance of the people was that section of political emigrants, sons and representatives of oppressing and exploiting classes who, like scores of revolutionary patriots and democrats, had gone abroad when Zog came to power,<sup>(1)</sup> but unlike the true patriots and democrats, had never been linked with the troubles of the Homeland and the people. They remained abroad for 15 years and the majority of them degenerated completely politically, becoming the trusted men, allies and agents of that foreign power which fed and paid them. They posed as anti-Zogites, but were also anti-communists, and they returned to Albania together with the Italians in 1939. Their pretensions that they «should govern the country» were categorical. They were completely divorced from the life, opinions and aspirations of the people. They thought that the outdated ideas of corrupted bourgeois democracy, which they nurtured, were appropriate to the time and applicable to the country. And when? After the world had undergone such great changes. They had returned to Albania as «the cream

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1 After the triumph of the June 1924 Bourgeois-Democratic Revolution, Ahmet Zog, who had taken refuge in Yugoslavia, in December 1924 suppressed the June Revolution and established his reactionary regime with the encouragement and assistance of the reactionary Serbian government and the support of its troops as well as of internal Albanian feudal reaction.

of Albanian nationalism» and, regardless of the fact that many of them received fat salaries from the occupiers and had completely entered their service, they maintained contacts with those «anti-fascist and anti-Zogite» elements who thought that these emigrants, who returned from abroad, were politically as they were 15 years earlier (!). The danger which these individuals posed to the National Liberation War became clearer later, when they created the traitor organization Balli Kombëtar, which, to the very end, assisted the fascist and nazi occupiers with demagoguery and arms against the Anti-fascist National Liberation Front and its leadership, the Communist Party of Albania.

Being rabid anti-communists, they in no way welcomed the formation of the Communist Party of Albania and its program proclaimed in the Resolution.

These elements, together with the fascists, called the Communist Party of Albania «a party of foreigners and not of Albanians», «a party of Slavs, Russians, etc., and not of Albanians». They described the National Liberation War as «a crazy war, without prospects and harmful to Albania». They said that the leaders of the Communist Party of Albania and the Anti-fascist War were «hotheaded youths who do not know how to conduct politics», and spread a thousand other slanderous rumours.

This was the situation at that time amongst this collection of individuals, a situation which the Communist Party of Albania and its leadership studied many times both during 1942 and later.

During this period the Party also had to carry

out a similar study in regard to religious beliefs in Albania. We analysed the religious beliefs in two directions: the concrete influence of religion among the broad masses of the people, and the danger from the religious hierarchy. I shall not go into these analyses at length, but it is necessary to define certain main features on which the Central Committee of the CPA based itself in its work with the masses immediately after the founding of the Party and through the whole period of the War.

It is known that there were three religious beliefs in our country: the Moslem faith, which was the most widespread, the Orthodox Christian faith, which ranked second, and the Roman Catholic faith, less widespread, was centered in Shkodra and extended to the highlands of Shkodra, to Lezha and down to Durrës, where there was a bishopric. In Albania there were also some Moslem believers included in minor sects, without influence among the people, with the exception of the Bektashi sect.

In regard to the clergy, their influence was as follows: the Catholic priests, irrespective of their various «orders», such as Jesuites, Franciscans, etc., were men without a Homeland who depended on the Vatican even for the smallest thing. In Albania, as in other countries of the Catholic world, the Catholic Church had the same pyramid organization, the same organization of churches, parishes, monasteries, religious or state schools, the same rites and liturgy, the same method and style of work in general. Their incomes, their salaries and everything else came from their plunder of the believers in the forms of donations, or even

through compelling their believers to bequeath their liquid and fixed assets to the Church.

All the clergymen of the Catholic Church, from the upper one down to the deacons and parish priests, were learned people who had gone through theological schools with iron discipline, had learned the methods and tricks of suppressing the will of people through the fear of God, Christ and the apostles. The Catholic believers had to obey the church *perinde ac cadaver*\*. The spider's web had entangled the believers in the laws of the church, the canons and laws of the reactionary bourgeoisie, and these were all a collection of chains which bound and oppressed the believers. The Catholic Church and its clergy were extremely obscurantist and conservative, as well as adaptable and flexible when necessary, but always in alliance with the reactionary regimes like those of Prince Wied(1) and Ahmet Zog (indeed, they did not fail to poke their fingers into the bourgeois-democratic regime of Fan Noli), as well as with every foreign occupier of Albania, including the Austro-Hungarians, the Italian fascists and the German nazis.

Only our regime of the dictatorship of the proletariat put an end to the evil, reactionary and collaborationist activity of the Catholic Church.

But let us not depart from the period that we are analysing. This was the situation in the hierarchy

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\* as a dead body (Latin in the original) in this context, blindly.

1 Wilhelm von Wied, German prince, a tool in the hands of the imperialist powers. In February 1914 the Great Powers proclaimed him «Prince of Albania». His rule lasted from March to September 1914.

of the Catholic faith and its believers in this historical period. The senior priests were double agents of the Vatican and the Italian occupiers. For us, however, for the National Liberation War, there was a broad field, the people of the North, the Catholic laity. There were also some poor members of the lower clergy, who, following in the footsteps of outstanding figures of our national cause and culture such as Budi and Bogdani, Ndre Mjeda and Shtjefën Gjeçovi, might now listen to what we had to say, because they lived closer to the sufferings and problems of the people. In these directions we were to work and make progress.

The Moslem religion and its hierarchy were not a serious obstacle to the struggle against the Italian occupiers as the Catholic religion was. Even before the occupation of the country, but still more so after it, the hierarchy of the Moslem religion was weak, without any experience to worry us. The mosques existed. They had a hodja, but those who practised the religion were very few. The rites had been abandoned, no marriages were conducted according to the Sheriat and everything else, such as the observance of Ramadan and the feast of Bajram, had become routine customs which were practised here and there in certain regions mostly «from force of habit.» The hodjas were all ignorant, none of them was able to propagate the philosophy, ethics and the morality of the Koran, and no one understood the Koran, because it was recited in a foreign language (Arabic). Although the hodjas were conservative in their customs they had neither the ability nor the political capacity to exert any influence through the Islamic thought. The

broad masses of the people were virtually liberated from the bonds of religion, the development of the intellect of the Moslem believers was more extensive, and there was much greater liberalism and tolerance. Hence, the work of the Party in arousing the people to fight encountered almost no serious obstacle in this direction.

Among the Bektashi sect, also, a large proportion of the believers traditionally have displayed patriotism and have fought for the liberation of Albania.

The situation was similar with the Orthodox Christian faith, too, both in the hierarchy of the church and among the believers.

Historically, a section of the Orthodox priests, especially the simple priests in the villages and even some in the cities, those who lived close to the people, who after religious services laid aside their priest's hats to take up the hoe or some other tool to do some work, have fought and striven both to gain the independence of the Church and, especially, to introduce the Albanian language into the church services. It is self-evident that these efforts of theirs would run into opposition from the Patriarchate of Constantinople and later, especially from the reactionary Greek Church, and it was by no means rare for the latter to commit monstrous crimes against patriotic priests who loved the people, the Homeland and the Albanian language, who wanted the independence of the Albanian Church. Their efforts and aims in these directions, in the historical context, had great value and were expressions and components of the struggle for independence which was waged in all the Albanian territories.

Our people honoured and respected these martyrs, not simply of the Church but of the cause of Albania. They include Papa Kristo Negovani, Father Stath Melani, Dhimitër Misha, Papa Llambro Ballamaçi and others who, like other outstanding patriots who strove for the Albanian language and school, Naum Veqilharxhi, Petro Nini Luarasi, Koto Hoxhi, Pandeli Sotiri and tens of others, were poisoned or murdered in the most barbarous ways by the Greek Patriarchate.

The «reasons» for which the Greek clerical reaction acted in that way towards these patriots were astonishingly cynical! It murdered and eliminated them simply because these sons of Albanians proclaimed that they were Albanians, that they wanted Albanian spoken in the church just as in the homes, the streets, fields and the schools, murdered them because they defended the legitimate right of the people to their territories. In reality, however, behind the «reasons» and «religious motives» of the bishops lurked political motives and aims, the territorial ambitions of Greek chauvinists towards Albania. This anti-Albanian chauvinism was so unrestrained that it «linked» its territorial pretensions with and «based» them on the extension of the Orthodox religion! Their chauvinist blindness went so far that reactionary bishops did not want to see that the Orthodox religion extended not only to certain zones on the border of our territory with Greece (which include the villages of the Greek minority with about 20,000 inhabitants in the first years of the National Liberation War and about 50,000 inhabitants today), but this religion,



like the Moslem religion, extended all over Albania, to precincts and regions of Gjirokastra, Saranda, Përmet, Korça, Vlora, Tepelena, Fier, Lushnja, Berat, Elbasan, Durrës, Tirana and so on! Precisely on the basis of this absurd logic, certain reactionary bishops of Great-Greek chauvinism pretend that 400 thousand Albanian citizens, formerly linked with the Orthodox religion, are Greeks. Hence, were the religion to be the basis for determining the national identity of a people, according to this crazy logic of the chauvinist bishops, more than half of Albania would belong to Greece (!), a thing which the Greek chauvinists, the champions of Greater Greece(1) have always dreamed of and demanded. Precisely in favour of these dreams of occupation and annexation they had persecuted and murdered our honoured patriots, including patriotic priests and believers, who had risen, together with their brothers of the Moslem and Catholic religions, to defend the territorial integrity of Albania from the annexationist appetites of neighbouring chauvinists.

Hence, this close combination of the cause of the Church and religion with the national cause, giving priority to the latter, had brought about that not only the laity of the Orthodox faith but also most of the simple priests, were brought up and educated with the feeling of patriotism.

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1 Ideological platform of the chauvinistic Greek big bourgeoisie which sought to create a great empire including a good part of the Balkan Peninsula, which was considered Greek only because it was of Christian Orthodox faith.

So, the Party had the question of religious beliefs at the centre of its attention during the whole period of the National Liberation War, but also after the war, because in order to arouse the people to fight for the liberation of the Homeland and build a new Albania we had to avoid hurting their feelings.

In regard to the intelligentsia, extensive, qualified, differentiated work at various levels had to be done. In general, the terrain of the work with the intellectuals was suitable. The exception to this were the top officials, who not only accepted fascism but also secured fine material gains from it. In general, «cultured» officials of this category were corrupted by all the regimes, and were among the first who willingly enrolled in the «Albanian» Fascist Party set up by the occupiers.

However, generally speaking, the intelligentsia of our country was patriotic, anti-fascist, and opposed to the occupation of the country, therefore, the Party was to give great importance to this stratum of the people, too, because by means of it, the patriotism of the boys and girls would become more and more tempered and encouraged.

Such wide-ranging and detailed analyses of situations, the ratio of forces, etc., were the fruit of debates which we held in the meetings of the leadership, in meetings with comrades of the Party in the capital or from the terrain. They were a great assistance in our day-to-day and future work, because the first and indispensable thing in order to accomplish our tasks as communists, that is, as leaders of the masses, was to orientate ourselves correctly in that dif-

ficult situation of enslavement, terror, intrigues and spiritual and physical sufferings and hardships which had descended upon our people.

Thus, its unshakeable loyalty to and faith in the revolutionary theory of the proletariat as well as its thorough knowledge of the reality of our country were two fundamental factors which enabled our Party to determine a correct line, to give precise instructions on ideological, political and organizational matters including building the militant unity of the masses around the program of the Party and all the other problems.

In speaking about these analyses and studies which the Party carried out and on which it relied, it should never be thought that first we waited until these were carried out in complete and final form and then began the work with the masses, or that we charged working groups or mobilized specialists and experts to do them. No, the «specialists», the «working groups», were we ourselves, all the communists, from the rank-and-file members to the main leaders, who acquainted ourselves with and summed up the situations along with the concrete day-to-day work.

All of us, then, from the main leaders and cadres of the Party to the ordinary members, set about this great task with determination. Now, after the founding of the Party, the very situation in which we were obliged to live and fight helped us to enter more widely into contact with the working people. Almost all of us were sons and daughters of the working people, many of us were illegal and as such we spent the days and nights in the poor quarters, going from one house

to the other, amongst the common folk, workers, and craftsmen, some of whom were unemployed or plied their trade from their homes. Everywhere we were surrounded and protected by the love and care of the ordinary people for our fate and we felt that in essence this was an expression of the love and concern of the people for the fate of the country.

Basing ourselves on this situation, we worked and instructed all the comrades to exploit every possible opportunity, personal acquaintance and friendship, celebrations, funerals, weddings, chance or organized meetings, and, you might say, in a natural and daily conversation with the masses we propagated the line and program of the Party at every moment. And the fact is that what we said was readily accepted, because we touched on the most sensitive problem of the nation. War against the occupier, war, merciless war against the occupier and traitors! — that is what the communists and our sympathizers propagated day and night and, of course, this could not fail to warm the hearts of our people who have always distinguished themselves as great fighters for the cause of freedom.

This intensive propaganda, day by day, by word of mouth, with leaflets, communiques and appeals, was made clearer, more credible and acceptable to the people, because the communists accompanied their words with deeds. They were propagandists and fighters at the same time, they attacked fascism and were pursued by fascism. This could not fail to make a profound impression on the masses. Our comrades in the cities fought, organized actions, acts of sabotage,

executed enemies, at a time when the rifle fire of guerilla units and partisan çetas was being heard increasingly everywhere. The hatred and fury of the fascists was unleashed upon the communists with greater savagery and, of course, the love and trust of the people was bound to be directed more and more each day towards us, the sons of the people, who called and worked for the creation of the patriotic unity of the whole people in the fight against fascism.

Here it is difficult to mention and to reproduce concrete occasions, because these were conversations with the people, with tens and hundreds of individuals from the poor quarters of towns and villages all over Albania. It must be said that with this category of people, that is, with the common folk, no problems arose for us during our talks, there was no need at all to make special efforts how to present matters, to find out what unexpected thing the person we were talking to might come out with, how we would reply if he dodged the issue or raised this or that «delicate» question, etc. No, we reserved this great effort for prior preparation for another category of people, for those types who posed as «patriots», as great «politicians», but who waged the «war» in cafes with spectacles tipped on their noses and coffee and cake on the tables in front of them. With the people we spoke openly, without any fear that we might touch on something that should not be mentioned, and rather than work to «convince» them, this was a consultation with the people to talk about common problems. In these unforgettable meetings we learned from one another; we were astonished at the almost irre-

strainable desire of the ordinary people to rise in the fight, to liberate the Homeland «tomorrow» if possible. Naturally, from the wide range of talks with the people the Party gathered facts, learned the situation better, felt the pulse of the time, the level of the revolutionary situation. As this situation was maturing more and more, more and more the people openly expressed their sympathy with and love for the communists. The spirit of the people, thirsting for freedom and ready to fight, convinced us that we were on the right road and impelled us to work harder for the accomplishment of our decided program.

In the work with the people we felt at ease, saw ourselves on our home ground and spoke to them very simply and clearly: we are going to wage the war, in the course of the fighting we shall organize ourselves, Will strengthen this organization and, when we drive out the Italians or any other occupier, together with them we will get rid of all those traitors who prepared the occupation and who now oppress us, fight us, and are growing fat at our expense. WE shall decide what we are going to do, and when we say «WE» we have in mind not simply ourselves as communists, but all of you, the whole people, who gave birth to us and raised us.

Thus, what we said settled into place like a well-fitted stone and we felt that when any door of the people was opened to us, their hearts had been opened to us first; we were convinced that when everyone, known and unknown, sheltered and protected us, it meant that **they, the thousands, the people**, were with us, with the Party.

The Party devoted the greatest care and attention to this work which steadily increased. In every meeting of the cells as well as in the leading organs of the Party, the work with the masses was a question which would be reported on and discussed, it figured on every agenda. If you look over the documents of that period, which refer to the main meetings after the founding of the Party, or the reports which we sought and information material which came to us from all the regional committees and from all parts of the country, you will see that the problem of linking up with the masses, to win the support of the masses, to unite them in a steel unity, was one of the main problems discussed. It was no accident for example, that the first, the most important meeting held after the founding of the Party, the First Consultative Meeting of the Activists of the CPA in April 1942,<sup>(1)</sup> centered on the analysis of our work for establishing links with the masses of workers, peasants, the youth, the women and all to whom the question of the freedom and independence of the Homeland was dear. Likewise, at the Special Conference of the Party in June 1942, at other meetings at national level, too, as well as at the meetings of the regional committees, or the frequent meetings of the Central Committee, we had made it an inviolable rule to report one by one, without exception, on what we had done, what we had achieved, and what remained to be done for uniting the patriotic masses around the Party in the

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1 Enver Hoxha, Selected Works, vol. 1, «8 Nëntori» Publishing House, Tirana 1974, pp. 3-30, Eng. ed.

fight for freedom. Obviously very much more remained to be done. On this vital question we did not permit any laxity, any deviation. As a result of this wise, organized work which the Party carried out, the fact is that the number of workers in the towns with some sort of industrial development who joined the Party or were linked with it, increased continuously. In the direction of the countryside, too, results had been achieved and in a number of districts, especially in Central and Southern Albania, the peasantry expressed itself in favour of the line of the Party and was displaying readiness to take up arms.

In connection with bringing the peasantry into the Front and including it in the armed struggle, amongst others there were two special difficulties which emerged for us. First of all, there was the question of the influence which the bayraktars and pseudo-patriotic elements had in the countryside; besides this, it was essential to implant in every communist the complete conviction that the basis of the Front for which we were fighting would be the alliance of the working class with the peasantry, especially with the poor and middle peasantry. Although the majority of the communists were clear about this task, some still nurtured the view, long since rejected, that the Front would be created on the basis of an agreement with the nationalist chiefs and that the participation of the peasant masses in the war would come about automatically from this agreement. There were occasions when these views were expressed quite openly.

That is what occurred, for example, in December 1941, at the 1st Conference of the Party Organization



of Tirana in which I took part as a delegate of the Central Committee. The Central Committee placed great importance on this conference, which was held in the home of Bije Vokshi, of course in secrecy, and in which about twenty people took part, because the weight of the Party Organization of Tirana would be the greatest.

When we were discussing the problems of linking up with the masses, amongst others, a comrade got up and raised the question that the work in the countryside presented many difficulties and, according to him, to convince the masses of poor and middle peasants to throw themselves into the fight would require a long time.

«What do you think then,» I interjected, «should we achieve the unity of the people without the peasantry?»

«My opinion,» replied this comrade, «is that we as a Party, should work and win over the gentry of the village, the nationalists who have influence in the village. If we have the gentry with us, then the peasantry will follow us, too.»

Today, such a presentation of the question would astonish even a school pupil, but at that time, such views were still widespread. The bulk of those participating in the conference opposed this wrong idea. Nevertheless, seeing that it found an echo in some other comrades and knowing what a danger such a view presented to the line of the Party, I considered it reasonable to make a long interpolation to explain the political and ideological line of the Party about

the National Liberation War in the clearest possible terms. I replied to the particular comrade somewhat sternly, because the question itself was serious.

«To present the question in this way,» I said in essence, «means not to be clear on what a communist party, a party of the working class, is. Our Party is the party of the masses and its strength, I repeat, lies in the masses. Our Party will certainly appeal to and work with great patience to make all the elements, strata and social classes, including the gentry, conscious and mobilize them in the great war for the freedom of the Homeland. But it is one thing to work to mobilize the gentry of the village in the Front and in the war like the whole people, and another thing to base your hopes for the unification of the masses on the influence of the gentry. Therefore, we cannot do our work with the masses by making agreements and deals with the chiefs who have more or less influence in the village. Our Party does not buy its influence and authority from others and, least of all, from the gentry, but wins it through work and struggle, from its direct links with the masses, by explaining its program and aims to the masses. In the relations between our Communist Party and the peasantry there is no room for 'third parties', because the social base on which the Party will rely in the liberation war and the social revolution will be the workers, the peasants and the honest intellectuals, and not the aghas and beys, the merchants and landowners or the pseudo-patriotic lawyers.»

In this way, by safeguarding the principles and

correct line of the Party, correcting the shortcomings and attacking the distorted views and, above all, by working intensively, the base of the Party grew steadily stronger and its links with the people were ceaselessly extended.

Right from the outset, the Party devoted particular care especially to the work with the Albanian youth, who, with their inexhaustible energy, enthusiasm and vitality and lofty moral qualities, were to be the most active striking force in the war for liberation. Not fortuitously, on the initiative of the Provisional Central Committee, a few days after the founding of the Communist Party of Albania, the organization of the Communist Youth was set up, and not fortuitously the Party appointed one of its finest members, one of its most mature and glorious leaders, Qemal Stafa, to head it. The objective of the Party in the work with the youth was to bring the youth as close as possible to the communist ideas and the Party, to prepare them ideologically and politically and to organize them for resistance and war against the occupiers. We communists had set ourselves this great objective in the time when we militated in different groups, but now that we had formed the Party, the work with the youth was placed on sounder and more scientific foundations. We took into account the fact that the youth also had its own class composition, that the youth lived among and came into contact with worker, peasant and intellectual families and, for this reason, they could and must become transmitters of the word of the Party, agitators for its militant program.

So, another objective of our work was that through the youth we should spread and strengthen the idea of the resistance and the war against the fascist occupiers and their collaborators among the broad masses of the people, should strengthen the opinion on the necessity of resistance within the families by means of the young people, so that cohesion of the anti-fascist political opinion would be created and the elderly, the parents, would be linked with the youth, with their own sons and daughters. The Party believed, and time confirmed this, that the youth, with their inclination to embrace everything new and progressive, would not only spring into the front ranks of the anti-fascist war, but would understand the ever new ideas of militant communism and would defend them with conviction, courage and heroism, and that the communists and cadres of the Party, those who applied and propagated its program, would emerge from their ranks.

The Central Committee of the Party instructed the leading comrades of the youth that work with the masses must be intensified in this direction, too, that like the members of the Party and the honest patriots, the youth, too, should go among the masses, become acquainted with them, should do their utmost to make contact, to talk with them, to explain to them and to evaluate everything, even some very minor work which in appearance had no value, but which created in the individual with whom they were working the feeling that he «was doing something for the Homeland». I gave this advice to Misto Mame, Mihal Duri, Perlat Rexhepi (when he left the house where

we had just formed the Party for Shkodra) and to other comrades.

The work of the Party had a colossal effect. By achieving these major objectives the Party opened the way to win the hearts and minds of the youth, just as it was winning the love, respect and trust of workers, peasants and all honest people.

The enemy understood the aim of the Party and it must be acknowledged that it found itself in difficulties. It used both demagogy and terror, but all in vain. The *dopolavoro*, (1) the «cultural» clubs, the propaganda through the press, radio, films and books, the fascist organizations for the youth and children, this whole arsenal of ideological and political diversion was insufficient to divert the Albanian youth, the lovely flower of the people, from the road of honour and bravery. The sons and daughters of Albania were not taken in by the promises of fascists, but followed Qemal and Vojo [Kushi], Perlat and Margarita [Tutulani], and other heroes of the National Liberation War. No section of the Albanian youth, from the worker, school and intellectual youth to the youth of the countryside, where at first work proceeded with difficulty, remained outside the sphere of the work of the Party for education and mobilization.

Thus, the worker and peasant youth were the main objective of the work of our Party, thereby correcting the tendency of the period of groups which had concentrated the work with the youth mainly on

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1 Fascist centres which «organized free-time activities» in order to deceive the working people.

the school youth. Naturally, the Party worked with them, too, not only because they would make their contribution in a war where every person and every rifle counted, but also because they would be the future intellectual cadres which the Homeland would need after Liberation. In the work with the school youth we did not concentrate only on the pupils of the secondary schools of the country, who in general were strongly linked with the communists and were some of the most active participants in the demonstrations and actions, but we also devoted special attention to those university students who were continuing their studies abroad. Through its members the Party called on the students to abandon the fascist schools, to boycott the Union of Albanian Fascist University Youth, (1) formed by the Italians, to hurl themselves in the struggle against fascism and its salaried minions. Most of them responded to the call of the Party, because they themselves were linked with the people, especially those who came from families which were not well-to-do and with a bursary obtained through a thousand efforts, and with the odd bit of money which they received from home, continued their higher studies in Italy or some other country. In connection with this I remember a meeting which I had with a university student at that time.

One day I happened to be in the base, no. 66, Shëngjergj Street, together with Qemal Stafa. If I am not mistaken it was April 1942 (just after the Con-

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1 Organization which the fascist occupiers created to corrupt the Albanian university youth.

sultative Meeting of the Activists of the Party) and I had gone there dressed as a painter and equipped with the brushes and other tools of the «trade». We had just begun to talk when Bije Vokshi came in and told Qemal that a comrade from Shkodra had come and wanted to meet him.

«Who is he?» asked Qemal and when Bije told him the comrade's name, he gave her permission to bring him into the room.

When the comrade who had asked for Qemal came into the room he greeted us.

As soon as Qemal saw him, he embraced him and asked when he had come from Italy, how the comrades were, whether he had met his family, and so on. The newcomer replied and began to ask Qemal about his family, about Vasil and other acquaintances who were not in the least unknown to me. As soon as he was assured by Qemal that he could speak without hesitation in my presence, the newcomer from Italy, where he was studying medicine, said:

«A group of students who are studying in Italy have sent me here. We have met and decided to return to Albania.»

The comrade told Qemal that a short time earlier, one of the Albanian students, a member of the Group of Shkodra, had received a postcard from Hajdar Dushi with a surprising text, «your mother is missing you», at a time when his mother had long been dead.

«Then,» the comrade told Qemal, «we said that something important had occurred in Albania. We called together some comrades from Florence, Parma

and Siena and decided that I should come here and establish contact with the Group. In Rome,» he went on, «I met Sami Baholli who read me the Resolution of the formation of the Party. The comrades instructed me to tell you that they are ready to come back and go into illegality.»

Qemal, who listened attentively, was overjoyed at the readiness of these young comrades. I, too, was overjoyed, but in order to tease him I said to the comrade:

«A few days ago, five or six intellectuals here in Tirana promised us they would go into illegality, but they soon changed their minds.»

Qemal tried to hide his smile, because he understood my joke, but his comrade turned on me a little hurt and replied:

«I don't know you and you don't know me. But Qemal knows me and many of our comrades there. These are not empty promises. Just say the word and I guarantee you about thirty people, perhaps even more. We want only one thing, that when we come here you secure the necessary bases and contacts for us, because we do not know how to find our bearings and shelter.»

I shook hands warmly with this young man who was called Nikolla Shurbani, an old friend of Qemal's and a former member of the Group of Shkodra, and began to ask him about the activity which the Albanian students had carried out in Italy, about the state of their morale, the situation in that country, and so on. I also asked about a number of students who had been members of the Communist Group of Korça whom I had known personally. Then, I said to him:



«We have no doubts about the readiness of our comrades and are sure that they will make a valuable contribution to the cause of liberation. As to the question which you raise about returning to illegality in Albania, I think this should be done gradually, according to the concrete orders and instructions which we will give you at the proper time.»

We talked a little longer, then parted with Nikolla, while Qemal and I continued our interrupted conversation. The comrade from Shkodra was not mistaken; the bulk of our students in Italy, as worthy sons of their own people, responded to the call of the Homeland and the Party, returned to Albania and fought valiantly for the liberation of the country.

Thus, the propaganda and organizational work of the Party was finding wide support among the workers, craftsmen, the poor of cities, the peasants and the youth. With one sure step after another the anti-fascist patriotic unity of the masses was being created around the Party.

Right from the outset this unity of the people around the Party began as a militant unity which was being created and would be steeled in the course of actions, beginning from the simplest up to the General Armed Uprising.

The instruction was given that non-Party people from the ranks of known sympathisers and activists, especially young men and women, should take part in actions, acts of sabotage and the elimination of spies, together with the communists. Likewise, great importance was given to the organization everywhere of mass demonstrations in which the people, led by

the communists by coming out in streets and squares, by opposing fascism and clashing with the forces of the regime, would see what a colossal force they comprised, would further strengthen their sense of unity and fighting spirit, and also make clear to the category of pseudo-patriots that they must make up their minds and decide: either with the people in the fight against fascism or with fascism in the fight against the people.

After the founding of the Party such demonstrations were held in all parts of the country, just as the fire of partisan rifles began to be heard more and more, the number of çeta steadily increased and the ranks were strengthened with forces that came from town and countryside.

Of course, the fascists were bound to respond to the stepping up of our struggle with greater terror and more unrestrained savagery. But we were not afraid of this. The war could not be waged otherwise.

Precisely when through the tireless work of the communists and with activities of every kind we were becoming linked ever more closely with the people, Koço Tashko came to a meeting very «incensed» and made a «protest»:

«The Party is tending towards sectarianism!» he said «indignantly». «We are harming ourselves and the people.»

«What are you talking about?» I asked him. «What is this sectarianism?!»

«The demonstration of April 7 [1942] in Tirana should not have been held, nor in Durrës or anywhere else. What did we gain by it? Did we over-

throw fascism?! Not at all! On the contrary, it became even more savage and will intimidate the people with the terror it has launched. Come to your senses, comrades! Through the sectarianism of a few we are ruining that great work that we are doing day and night by talking, by agitation and propaganda!»

It was quite clear: the opportunist and drawing-room «communist» was incapable of understanding the work with the masses more profoundly or otherwise than as an agitation by word of mouth, agitation which he personally and types like him carried out in feeble routine ways, and moreover, restricted to a few intellectual dandies and cafe politicians.

«No,» I replied angrily, «we'll never act according to your logic. We are fighting to win over the people, not simply with words and by no means just to receive a verbal approval. We don't need just the blessing of the people, but we need their strength, their dauntless fighting spirit. Only by getting this colossal force into activity, by channelling it correctly and leading it in actions will the war be waged. This is the only way that fascism will be driven out.»

«I agree in principle, but it is too early for demonstrative actions!» continued Koço Tashko. «First, we must convince the people that we are somebody, so that they trust us, and then we should bring them out on the streets. Otherwise, we'll lose our hold on them right away.»

«The people will not shy away from us because we lead them into actions, demonstrations and war,» I said. «They will back away from us only if they see we're nothing but word-mongers. As for the people

being intimidated, this is a stupid judgement and far from the truth. Tell me, where do we find shelter when the fascists are pursuing us? Who protects us, who escorts us from base to base? The people, the people who know us and are following us precisely because they see that we are battling with the occupier. The people are alienated by cowards, by those who only talk, but not by brave fighters.»

We continued the debate for some time and all the comrades strongly opposed Koço Tashko's views. I must say that, fortunately, within the ranks of the Party we did not have to waste much time with elements who held such views, who wanted to play at «peaceful war», without «rifle shots», without activities, because there were few such individuals. The people followed us into demonstrations and battles, the people, especially the youth, trusted us and united around the Party precisely because this was the road of the war, of action, more than for any other reason.

While it still had not assumed its organizational forms and its program was not yet fully defined, the foundations of the Anti-fascist Front of the Albanian people were being laid.

## **2. Patriots and Pseudo-patriots**

Right from the outset our Party correctly laid down that the whole people, all social classes and strata, without distinction as to political, ideological,

religious and other views, should be included in the war for the salvation of the country. The main thing which could and must unite these force was the stand towards the foreign occupiers, the uncompromising war against them. This was the basis on which the Anti-fascist National Liberation Front would be organized, a front in which, apart from the working masses of town and countryside, all the other forces and elements, all those who were interested in the freedom and the existence of Albania and the Albanian nation would take part. And in this context, a major, wide-ranging job, frequently extremely complicated and wearisome, was that which we had to do with the patriotic elements or those who posed as patriots, that is, with all those who at that time were called nationalists.

The term «nationalist», as we used it in that period, must not be confounded with the meaning which this term has assumed today in political literature to denote elements with bourgeois-nationalist views, as opposed to the Marxist-Leninist principle of proletarian internationalism. The term «nationalist» was applied to those fighters who in past times had fought against foreign occupiers who aimed to eliminate us as a nation. Precisely from the word «natio» taken from the Latin language, emerged the term «nationalist» which we used during the war and is found in my writings of that period.

The truth is that this was a term which included a wide range of people, from the elements with a patriotic past and activity to the intellectuals who were

known or proclaimed themselves as people with patriotic and democratic sentiments. Thus, in a certain sense with the term «nationalist» we made a differentiation between communists, on the one hand, and other people with whom we had contacts and worked. As early as the time of the communist groups, but especially after the founding of the Party, the work with the «nationalists» was a sector in which all the communists were involved. Naturally, this was done according to the possibilities which each member had, according to his social circle of acquaintances and relatives. In the cells to which we belonged we reported on all our work, including the work with intellectuals and patriots, exchanged opinions and consulted one another about our activities. When some member encountered difficulties with the person with whom he had been appointed to work, then he handed over the job to another comrade and found the way to introduce him to that person.

The formal aspect of the work was a problem in itself: you had to be introduced to them and then to enter into their circles, to take part in the conversations which they held and to manage to understand as far as possible, for example, what political inclinations a person might have, how far you could go with him, when you should go ahead and when you should stop at general conversations in order to disguise yourself from a spy. Because we should not forget that the regime of Zog, and subsequently the fascist regime, were regimes of spies who watched and saw with whom you associated, with whom you talked and

what you talked about and who «branded» you accordingly. From this aspect at that time there had to be both a special strategy and tactics, because amongst the intellectuals, teachers, professors, merchants and nationalists, there were good people but also weak ones, as well as all kinds of rogues down to outright spies and collaborators of the enemy.

In the talks which we held with them, after we were convinced about their predisposition, we put forward our stand as communists and as a Communist Party. Our fundamental thesis was that in this grave situation for the Homeland all Albanians had a common aim — the fight against the occupiers for the liberation of Albania. In the face of this imperative duty all the differences in ideological convictions and political sympathies, religious and regional differences, had to take second place. This was the moment, we communists stressed, when we must reflect deeply on the words of the patriotic poet (1) that «the religion of the Albanian is Albania.»

This was one of the most difficult tasks which the Party and its members, from the leadership to the individual communists, had to do. Here I am not referring to the danger that threatened us in this work, the possibility of being spied upon or betrayed, or the probability of the introduction of some agent provocateur element into our ranks. Of course, these dangers existed, but what work could the communists and honest patriots do without danger? They had

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1 Pashko Vasa (1825-1892).

taken these dangers into account since they had entered the struggle against a savage, cruel and cunning enemy.

The greatest difficulties were in another direction, in which mere bravery did not count for much, but which required tact, political acumen, cool-headedness and prudence. The Party comrades had to stand up to great tension, not only physical, but also nervous and psychological. We had to talk and quarrel for whole hours, time after time, with all kinds of blockheads who were not only unconvinced by our correct arguments which were as clear as the light of day, but also tried to convince us of the opposite with ridiculous «arguments» and pettifogging sophistry! Apart from other things, it took great patience and self-restraint to avoid telling these «patriots» bluntly, «To hell with you!». However, the work of the Party and the cause of the war demanded something else. Sometimes a comrade would come to us seething with disgust to report about a meeting which he had had and ask us to relieve him of this task and seek our approval to brand this or that person as a traitor. «No!» we would tell him, «the day will come when the cup is filled and then we shall do this, but meanwhile, carry on with the work, refute and expose his arguments and when you are convinced that he truly does not want to fight, then we'll give him up as hopeless.»

The readers, and especially the young ones, may open their eyes and ask why such niceties were necessary with these elements, who should be put in their place. Of course, the moment would come when



the Party and the people would also turn the rifle on all those who united with the nazi-fascists in words and deeds, but before this, efforts had to be made to turn them from the road of betrayal and involve them in the war against the occupier.

In working with the nationalists, the Party had in mind the strategic aims of the war it was leading, the major interests of the people and the Homeland. First of all, the Party proceeded from the view that the broader the mass participation was in the Popular Front the more furiously the war would be waged and the more certain the final victory would be. Then, it must not be forgotten that many of the known nationalists of that period had, to various degrees, a certain influence in different districts and cities of the country or among the circles of the intelligentsia. The incorporation in the Front of tens and tens of outstanding patriots, known to the people for their progressive sentiments and democratic opinions and as anti-Zogite fighters, was a victory of the policy of the Party, because these people, besides their contribution, their personal abilities and capacities, possessed great authority among the people, which they put at the disposal and in the service of the National Liberation War.

The struggle of the Party to unmask such pseudo-patriots as Lumo Skëndo, Ali Këlcyra, Qazim Koculi and others, and to bring them out in their true colours, yielded similar results. Many of these individuals were neither stupid nor without influence. Some of them profited from the reputation of the families

whose names they bore, some from the two or three shots they had fired in Vlora in 1920(1), some others from their stands, adopted in opposition to Zog or the momentary participation in the June Revolution of 1924.

It would have been political short-sightedness to have turned the rifle on all of them as early as 1941, as some might think. This would have been harmful both to the war and to the Party. This human «ore» had to undergo a process of selection and from it, apart from the filth which would be thrown aside, pure metal would emerge, and time and the war would do this sorting out. The line of the Party was correct: the patriotic elements should be brought into the war and their influence amongst the masses used for the benefit of the war; the demagogues, the disguised tools of the occupiers, should be unmasked by asking them the question: «Are you going to fight for Albania or not?» And the people would see, as they did, who were true patriots and who pseudo-patriots.

In the context of extending the work with the nationalists we devoted special attention at that time, especially, to work with the intelligentsia, aiming to make the patriotic and democratic elements participants in the war.

The Albanian intelligentsia at that time was numerically small and this was a result of the low level of economic and cultural development and the ob-

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1 Reference is to the War of Vlora of 1920 against the imperialist Italian invaders which ended with the victory of the Albanian people.

scourantist policy of the regime of Zog. Apart from all the other evils which they perpetrated on the country, the «august» monarch and his circle did their utmost to leave Albania in darkness and ignorance, because the darkness and ignorance of the masses are the best allies of oppression and exploitation. Zog and his regime did nothing for culture, art and science, however much he, together with his degenerate and corrupt sisters, who ironically, despite their utter ignorance, took the arts, culture and sport, which virtually did not exist in Albania, under their «patronage», posed as supporters of these things.

Nevertheless, through the efforts of the people, of the sons and daughters of the people and contrary to the desire of the feudal-bourgeois regime, it was made possible to set up an education system with primary and secondary schools to teach the sons and daughters of the people, who with their unerring intuition and their broad horizon of history prepared the youth for the new days. With great difficulties and coping with many economic privations, some of the young people went abroad where they attended higher studies. All these people comprised the soundest part of the Albanian intelligentsia which was opposed to the anti-popular and reactionary section which originated from the beys, usurers and merchants.

At the time of which I am speaking the teachers and professors comprised the majority of the intellectuals, while there was a smaller number from other professions, such as doctors, engineers and jurists. The intelligentsia was not a homogenous mass, either from its social composition or from its political con-

victions, which were ill-defined. Besides this, with the exception of one section, especially the village teachers, the intelligentsia was not so closely linked with the people and was acquainted only superficially, at second-hand, with their problems. This does not mean it was not patriotic. No, in general the Albanian intelligentsia was patriotic and anti-Zog, and subsequently proved its patriotism in its stand in the war against the occupiers.

Those closest to the people were the teachers who were more intimately linked with their sufferings and problems. Under the regime of Zog they were at the bottom of the small pyramid of the education system, scorned by the intellectual «aristocracy», regarded with suspicion by the regime, and received a pittance. And even that tiny salary was paid once in five months, and occasionally once in nine months. So, in order to live they had to go and sell their pay vouchers to the moneylenders, of course, at a discount. I myself did this during the few months that I worked in the secondary school in Tirana at the end of 1936 and the beginning of 1937, for which I was paid by the hour without any fixed salary and received nothing at all when I was sick or during school holidays.

In general, the teachers had completed or half completed their secondary schooling within the country. Rarely one of them knew some foreign language, but there was no foreign literature which they could read in order to develop themselves. The intellectuals of this category were with the people and detested the regime of Zog and its top functionaries. They were closely linked with the pupils and their families, were

patriots and democrats and when Albania was occupied they united with the workers and pupils in demonstrations against the occupiers and most of them took part in the partisan war.

The «professors», as we called the secondary school teachers of that time, figured higher in the hierarchy of the education system and the intelligentsia, in general. Unlike the ordinary teachers, generally speaking, they were more remote from the people and the work with them was more complicated. Of course, even among the professors there were many who loved the Homeland and the people, who hated the feudal-bourgeois regime and the fascist occupation and linked themselves with the National Liberation Movement and the Party. But the majority of them were integrated into the oppressive system of Zog and fascism, were content with their own situation, and as for the condition of the masses, they did not worry their heads about that. Intellectuals of this type considered themselves the «élite» of the education system and boasted that they were the «intelligentsia of the country» and that «the regime had need of them». Many of them had been abroad where they had graduated from higher schools, some in Italy, some in France, some in Austria or Germany, some in Greece, a few in the United States of America. Some of the older ones had graduated from Turkish schools.

Other members of the «intellectual élite» were the doctors, engineers, architects, agronomists and others, without forgetting either those who had graduated in law and became advocates or judges, or

the journalists, in the ranks of whom there were some who were well-known, a section with progressive democratic tendencies and views, while the remainder were completely in the service of the reactionary and anti-popular regimes. Of course, here I exclude such intellectuals as Medar Shtylla, Omer Nishani, Xhafer Kongoli, Gaqo Tashko and tens of others who I mention in these notes, and who knew the difficult situation of the masses and who proved themselves with deeds to be democrats and patriots. Here I am referring to those intellectuals, who after gaining higher education, through the money which their fathers had fleeced from the workers and peasants, came back to Albania with the pretension that they were bringing culture and civilization, but who, in fact, came to share in the exploitation of the masses. They had taken nothing of real value from European civilization, apart from some foreign language, a certain amount of knowledge of the craft they had learned and «modern etiquette», along with the top hat or bowtie, without which they were never seen in the streets or cafes. And these civilized intellectuals were not ashamed to put themselves up for auction on the marriage market, because almost all of them were fortune-hunters. It is natural that many of them became bourgeois, were «pushed» into high offices and became «examples» for the less fortunate. These individuals were lost to the cause of the people, were superficial «democrats», «liberals» only in certain manifestations which were hangovers from the countries where they had attended school.

In general, the intellectuals with higher schooling

and in top positions either integrated themselves with and became pillars of the regime or, even when they were democrats and anti-Zog, did not see the future of the country clearly. There were some of them who did not like Zog and his regime and who deep down were anti-Zogites, but who did not have the courage to act or even to express their views openly. There were only a few of them who spoke openly, of course not out in the street, against Zog and his regime. But even these few engaged in «academic» talk about laws, measures, prices, ministers, and so on. But it was extremely difficult, not to say impossible, to find in them a consistent spirit of resistance, or even less, any attempt at resistance. Of course, this came about also from the fact that Zog, whom they abused, had shut their mouths because it was a time when economic misery reigned among the people, when the worker toiled the whole day breaking stones in the heat of summer for two to three leks a day, while people of this category received ten to fifteen gold napoleons a month, and were well-dressed, owned comfortable homes, furniture and radios. Thus, these elements with some democratic and anti-Zogite veneer found it more suitable to take a comfortable position: to enjoy the blessings which the regime provided for them and to whisper the occasional criticism against it.

In general, these intellectuals, as soon as they returned from abroad, aimed to get a good job and especially in Tirana. At that time, whether you had graduated as an agronomist or an engineer, the place for you was in the ministry, and if there was no job for you, it was created, because neither the agronomists

nor the engineers had anywhere to work, agriculture was at a very low level and no investments were made to boost it; nothing was built except the odd prison and homes for the wealthy. Thus, the agronomist was found a job in some office, while the engineer residing in Tirana drew the plans for the home of the big merchant. The doctors, for their part, set about making money, while the professors competed with one another to get a job in Tirana or in the Ministry, or if they could not manage this, went to the few cities in which there was a secondary school.

There could be no talk about organization in the ranks of the intelligentsia. Especially amongst the soundest part of it, of course, there were efforts to do something, to change the existing situation. Some of them established links with the communist groups, but these were sporadic or on an individual basis. In the ranks of the intellectual «élite» which included the professors, the doctors, the jurists, the journalists and individuals of other professions, there was a kind of division, on the basis of their links and affinities created by the type of culture and the country in which they had received it. Hence, opinions circulated that «so and so is of Deutsche Kultur» because he had been to university in Austria or Germany, «so and so is of French culture» because he had been in France, he who had been to university in Italy was of «Italian culture», and so on. This tendency, which created formal affinities between groups, encouraged a spirit of xenomania and brought about the isolation of the intelligentsia from the main problems which



were preoccupying the Homeland and the people.

When I was in Tirana, prior to the occupation of the country by fascist Italy, apart from contacts with progressive and democratic intellectuals, I was given the opportunity to come into contact also with the milieus, opinions and psychology of that section of intellectuals that the regime pampered. In the Royal Road there was a small café, which at that time seemed a big one, called *Bella Venezia*. This *Bella Venezia* was frequented by the «élite» of the capital and the major sycophants of the regime from Fuad Asllani, the foreign minister, and other ministers, to the «top personalities of culture». They gathered there according to the English custom, at five o'clock. Once or twice, a comrade took me with him to this club of the intellectual «élite». And what did I see there? A circle of arrogant, conceited cosmopolitans. It was sickening to watch them eating cake and drinking tea with their «aristocratic» ways and whims like ladies in drawing-rooms. There you could hear all sorts of languages spoken, according to the particular clans, and Albanian was spoken mixed with whole phrases in foreign languages, just as we have read in Tolstoy about the Russian aristocracy which mixed Russian and French. The talk in these circles was about «politics on a grand scale» and discussions about art. There you could hear judgements delivered with «absolute competence» about Chamberlain, about Titulescu, about Hitler, about Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, about Goethe's *Faust*, about the *Nibelungen*, but not a word was said about the suffering of the peasant of Myzeqe, whom

Zog, the Vrionis and the Vërlacis fleeced and who died of malaria.

To speak openly with these people was dangerous. They would hand you over to Zog or the occupier, if not directly, indirectly, by denouncing you. As I said, however, the whole intelligentsia was not like this.

I personally was aware of this truth from the contacts which I had established with a whole circle of teachers and intellectuals of various professions during the years I worked in the secondary school of Tirana and the *Lycée* of Korça. The fact is, however, that our links with the intellectuals were extended further and placed on a sounder basis after the Group of Korça shifted the centre of gravity of its work to Tirana, at the beginning of 1940, and especially after the founding of the Party, when we evaluated the work with the intellectuals as one of the most important fields of the work of the Party with the nationalists.

Like the other comrades, I continued to extend my contacts with my former teacher colleagues who were anti-Zogites and anti-fascists, such as the Tashko brothers (Aleko and Gaço), Aleks Buda, Minella Karajani, Nonda Bulka, Sotir Angjeli, Baltadori, Nexhat Peshkëpia (who later became a Ballist and fled on the eve of Liberation), Vangjel Gjikondi, Selim Shpuza and the writer and publicist Shevqet Musaraj, who later became an active member of the Party Regional Committee of Tirana and with his works and writings made an outstanding contribution to the pro-

paganda of the Party during the National Liberation War.

We made approaches also to other intellectuals, such as the doctors Xhevdet Asllani, Fejzi Hoxha, Enver Zazani, and Hasan Jero, the architect Luarasi, engineers like Andon Lufi, Llazar Treska, Rrapi (I don't know what became of him later), the economist Pasko Milo, Naum Stralla and a number of others. Many of them united with the people and the Party in the fight against the occupiers from the first days. One of them was my comrade in the war and the work, Haxhi Kroj, who is the nephew of Avni Rustemi, and who faithfully followed the patriotic course of that great teacher of the people and fought and now works as my secretary with exemplary competence and devotion as one of the senior members of the Party.

We also made approaches to Abaz Xhomo, an old friend whom I had known in the *Lycée* and in France, as well as other anti-fascist elements like Ali Bakiu and Syrja Selfo who, although they were merchants, assisted the war. Syrja, in particular, spared nothing for the National Liberation War and was ready to find and pay the rent for the houses which we needed as bases for the illegal comrades. Indeed, he assisted and maintained my family who had no income at all during the war.

Thus, our circles were being extended with other intellectuals. Some of them I knew, some others Koço Tashko, although he worked especially with the older nationalists who had fled in the time of Zog and returned with the «wagons» of fascist Italy.

One of the finest representatives of the Albanian democratic intelligentsia, who right from the outset linked his life with the cause of the liberation of the Homeland, was dr. Medar Shtylla. Medar was a patriotic and progressive man, linked with the people, had graduated from the *Lycée* of Korça but before my time, because I remember that when I went there from the *Lycée* of Gjirokastra, I did not find him at that school. Afterwards he went to France, to Toulouse I think, where he studied veterinary science. The direction of the higher studies which he had chosen in itself implied that he was a man of the people, close to the peasantry, to the land and the livestock, and so he had not chosen a fashionable and profitable profession such as that of a doctor or lawyer.

I got to know Medar well when I returned from France, and I liked him and linked myself with this unpretentious, modest, quiet, honest man with wide knowledge and culture, who aroused one's respect. He was a man of few words who made no «fuss» and did not like boasting and showing off. Certain «smart Aleck» intellectuals said derisively about him: «He is taciturn because he works with animals». But Medar Shtylla was a wise and kindly man with character and courage. He loved the Homeland and the people with his whole heart and soul, and this he proved at the most difficult moments.

My comrades and acquaintances had told me about the sympathy and respect which Medar enjoyed in the villages of Durrës, and the peasants of Durrës, Kavaja, Shijak, and the workers on the Xhafzotaj farm could not but love Medar Shtylla who had linked

himself so closely with their troubles and worries. He fought for the rights of the workers who were not paid regularly, encouraged them to raise their voices and protest even to the Ministry of Agriculture of that time. Medar was well aware of the strength of the workers of the farm and the peasants, but he also knew very well how frightened the venal government officials were of this force. Thus, fearful of the outbreak of some revolt, and despite their reluctance, the authorities were obliged to fulfil at least a part of the demands of the workers of the farm.

Bordering on the Xhafzotaj farm lay the lands of the Italian ITALBA company which aimed to get the land of this farm into its clutches. Medar Shtylla, who was well-acquainted with the exploiting character of Italian imperialism, who grieved over the plight of the poor peasants and the encroachment of the territory of his beloved Homeland, fought heart and soul to prevent the Italian company from achieving its ambitions. Through these actions he won the hearts of the people and earned the hostility of the authorities. Not only did he behave with the workers on the farm like a close friend, but he also tried to create decent living conditions for them. Medar insisted that the workers of Xhafzotaj should be paid more, and in fact, they did receive more than the workers employed by the Italian company. However, this did not suit the exploiters who fattened themselves on the sweat and blood of the poor, therefore they demanded that the workers of Xhafzotaj should receive the same pay as those who worked for the Italian companies. Medar protested and fought for the opposite. All these things

had made Medar Shtylla very close to the workers and peasants who opened their hearts to him about every problem which worried them. But the thing that linked them most strongly was their great love for the Homeland and freedom, their hatred for the occupiers, which was ready to erupt in war to drive the foreigners from our land.

The Italian occupation found dr. Medar working as a veterinarian in Durrës. It was the period when the communists of the Groups had stepped up the work for the formation of the Party. At that time I, like the other comrades, was continually engaged in making contact with communist comrades, with workers, with well-known intellectuals, with «nationalists» as we called the non-party patriots at that time and later. One day I went to Durrës and met our comrade Telat Noga to discuss with him some problems of our work, including the question of bringing patriotic intellectual elements into the liberation movement. I said to Telat:

«I want to go to meet my friend, Medar Shtylla, whom I think we should activize. Do you know him?»

Telat replied:

«That's a very good idea, Enver, because everybody speaks about him with respect. Through him we will make greater headway in the countryside because the peasants love him.»

At this time Medar had begun his resistance, as you might say, by denouncing the occupiers, the traitors and quislings, the fascist state apparatus, the pseudo-patriots and pseudo-anti-Zogites, whom he knew very well and had seen with his own eyes embracing

the fascists. I was convinced that this would be Medar's stand. From what I knew of him and what Telat said about him, I was certain that we would understand each other very well and would link ourselves together firmly as two ordinary soldiers of the people and for the cause of the people.

I went looking for him and found him sitting in a café in the street which runs down to the port. He saw me as soon as I approached him and, with that pleasant behaviour of his, rose to his feet and, when we had exchanged greetings, invited me to sit down:

«Come along, Enver, sit down and drink a coffee with me.»

I thanked him and sat down. After exchanging the inquiries about each other's health and so on, usual at such meetings, he asked me whether I was doing any good, making any money by selling cigarettes in the «Flora» shop, and after I replied that I was managing to earn a bare living, I asked how things were going with him.

«Oh,» he said, «I try to do something, because I can't stand this suffocation.»

«We are sick to death of these dandies, Medar, therefore we ought to put them in their place,» I said, indicating some Italian officers who were strolling around, talking and laughing loudly.

«*Les salauds\**,» said Medar, and we continued to talk in French in low voices, because in this way there was no danger that some spy might understand what

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\* The scoundrels (French in the original).

we were saying. That café, like all the cafés of that time, was certain to have its own permanent spies.

«We have to fight,» I said to Medar. «We are reorganizing ourselves, the people are listening to us and we must advance towards the liberation war. Of course, this war has its dangers, it might cost us our heads, but for the liberation of the Homeland every sacrifice must be made, therefore, we have taken death into account.»

We went on talking like this, tête-à-tête, for about half an hour.

After listening to me attentively, Medar declared resolutely :

«I am ready to fight, I have no hindrances. True, my wife, Maria, whom you know, is an Italian,» he continued, «but she hates fascism just as we do. (And she proved her anti-fascist feelings and love for Albania, as the daughter of the people she was, by remaining in illegality in Tirana during the whole period when Medar was with us in the mountains.) «Tell me, Enver, what should I do?» asked Medar. «What activity should I carry out, with whom am I to maintain contact?»

«Come to 'Flora' as though to buy a packet of cigarettes and there we can talk more freely,» I told him and after shaking hands firmly we parted.

As far as I remember we did not manage to meet at «Flora» because I was obliged to leave the shop and go underground, but we maintained contact with Medar through other comrades. He linked himself closely with the war and the Party, and the National



Liberation Front entrusted him with work among the peasants, intellectuals and others. Later, when his activity began to strike the eye of the authorities, Medar went underground and became a tireless organizer of national liberation councils in cities and villages. We met again in Labinot at the 2nd National Liberation Conference, at which Medar was elected a member of the General Council. In this function, too, he was among the most active. He was dispatched with tasks and came back to report to us wherever the Council and the General Staff happened to be, in Çermenika, Shmil, Gurakuq, Orenja, Shtylla, and elsewhere. Kindly, smiling and modest as ever, Medar made his reports, received his new tasks and instructions and off he went again.

Meanwhile, the other comrades all over the country were working and achieving results in the work with the intellectuals and with the patriots and other progressive elements. Through patient work the ranks of the sympathizers with the liberation movement were extending, the number of true patriots and democratic elements, who expressed their readiness to fight shoulder to shoulder with the whole Albanian people, shoulder to shoulder with the communists, to liberate the beloved territory of the Homeland from the jackboots of Mussolini's fascists, was growing. The Central Committee also appointed people who were to engage especially in this direction of the work of the Party, and they were Koço Tashko, Anastas Lulo and Mustafa Gjinishi. The truth is, however, that the main work in the direction of the nationalists was done through the meetings and contacts of all com-

rades of the Central Committee and other comrades at the base and the centre. Anastas Lulo's intention was not to increase the influence of the Party, but to undermine it and to create his own faction together with Sadik Premte (1); Koço Tashko shut himself away with his old men in cafés and engaged in «grand politics» with them; while Mustafa Gjinishi was more active, but there were always suspect and mysterious things in his contacts and connections. Thus, in reality, this «division of labour» did not exist for long and, in fact, all of us were engaged in this problem. In Tirana and the other cities and districts of the country intensive activity was carried out by the communist comrades, meeting and talking with elements in whom they had some hopes.

In my reminiscences I have given detailed accounts about the many contacts and strong links which I created immediately after the fascist occupation with the revolutionary and democratic patriot, Myslim Peza, who was among the first who linked himself closely with the Party and its program and made an outstanding contribution to the accomplishment of this program. Likewise, both I and the other comrades, before and after the founding of the Party, had established contact and found a common language, the language of the fight for freedom and independence, with other

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1 Anastas Lulo and Sadik Premte, former heads of the Group of the «Youth», had tried to impede the creation of the CPA in November 1941. After its founding they opposed by all manner of means the political line of the Party and set up a dangerous Trotskyite faction in its ranks. In June 1942 the Special Conference of the Party smashed their faction and expelled them from the Party.

patriotic elements. One of these was Baba Faja Martaneshi [Mustafa Khani] whom I was to meet in the days of the Conference of Peza but of whom the comrades had spoken to me before, on account of his anti-Italian views and his influence among the people of the district of Martanesh. Baba Faja was one of those clergy men who wore the cap and the cloak of a dervish, but who had Albania in his heart and in his hand the rifle for its liberation. His activity, the talks which he held with the friends and comrades and with the believers and those in trouble who came to his *tekke*, the meetings disguised as religious feasts, had come to the notice of the black shirts. As Baba Faja told me later, once when he had gone to Tirana, Hilmi Leka(1) and a truck-load of carabinieri had gone to the hotel where he was staying, seized him and taken him to General Agostinucci. They had interrogated and threatened Baba Faja and kept him under arrest for a few days, but since they did not have many facts and he was a person of influence among the people, they released him.

Baba Faja returned to Martanesh and continued his work in his *tekkes*, because he had two *tekkes*, one down in the village and one higher up where Baba stayed during the summer. To keep him under surveillance the Italians set up a carabinieri post near one of the *tekkes*, but Mustafa immediately got up and went and settled in the other.

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1 Editor-in-chief of the fascist newspaper *Tomorri* and minister of culture of the quisling government during the fascist occupation of the country.

The Party sent people to make contact with Mustafa Xhani. Immediately after the formation of the Party, Qemal Stafa and Sami Baholli met Mustafa Xhani, while later Ramadan Çitaku, Kadri Hoxha and others were sent to his *tekke* as delegates of the leadership of the Party.

Patriotic Baba [Faja] was enthusiastic and optimistic about the war which we had begun, and not long afterwards he took up arms, formed his çeta and began the armed struggle at the head of the people of Martanesh. But Baba Faja did not discard his clerical cap and robe, and he was quite right, because in this way he rendered even greater service to the line of the Party and the National Liberation Front for uniting everybody in the war without distinction as to region, or political and religious beliefs. I can picture in my mind this fine, honest and brave man: a handsome fellow with bushy black eyebrows, penetrating eyes and a beard which suited his broad face very well.

Through Myslim [Peza] we also made contact with Haxhi Lleshi, who after returning illegally from Yugoslavia, lived in hiding in the district of Dibra. Haxhi went from house to house in Zërqan, Homesh, and other zones, carried out anti-fascist propaganda, urged the peasants not to pay taxes and to rise in armed revolts. The fascist authorities did everything in their power to capture Haxhi, but the people protected their own son, because they knew very well the patriotic traditions of Haxhi's family as well as the stand which Haxhi Lleshi himself had taken before the fascist occupation.

Likewise, the comrades of the Party in Elbasan, Korça, Gjirokastra, Vlora, Dibra, Skrapar, Shkodra, Tropoja, Berat, Kurvelesh, Kukës, Myzeqe and elsewhere extended their links with the patriots of those districts and their brave and freedom-loving people. Thus, right from the beginning patriotic elements like Spiro Moisiu, Zylyftar Veleshnja, Riza Kodheli, Hysen Zalosnjaja, Sinan Ylli, Hasan Pulo, Rexhep Sulejmani, Ali Niman Doçi, Hasan Gërzhalliu, Shaban Arra, and many others joined the ranks of the national liberation movement.

In the course of this work, at this period, not only did we lose any illusion we had had about certain elements who had artificially retained the reputation of patriots, but we also understood that a new danger was emerging on the scene in the ideological, political and military struggle which was being waged and would become more and more intensive: besides the open quislings whom Jacomoni (1) had made prime ministers and ministers, senators and prefects, a praetorian guard of the fascist regime was crystallizing in more disguised forms, more dangerous and perfidious than the Vërlacis and Merlikas, because the members of it, like Mithat Frashëri, Ali Këlcyra and Kolë Trojara, shamelessly played the fraudulent role of democrats, patriots and even anti-Italians.

The role and reputation as «democratic patriots» had stuck to these elements from the relatively re-

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1 Francesco Jacomoni, former minister plenipotentiary of fascist Italy to the Zog regime and Vice-roy of the king of Italy until March 1943.

mote past, the period when, after gaining its independence, Albania strove with great toil and efforts to set out on the course of progress and development and to consolidate its independence. In particular, the numerous and extremely complex events of the years 1920-1925 were to exert an appreciable influence on the lives of these elements.

That was a period of a powerful political struggle in which a whole generation of revolutionaries and democrats, who called and fought for the destruction of feudalism and the rescue of our country from the clutches of imperialist powers, was coming to light. The revolutionary democrats like Avni Rustemi, Halim Xhelo and others, were true sons of the poor people, anti-feudal fighters for a true, consistent, revolutionary democracy. They wanted and fought for the liberation of the peasant from the yoke of feudal lords and the bourgeoisie, wanted and fought for the agrarian reform and the economic independence of the country. These elements understood the danger which threatened the country from the imperialist powers and supported Luigj Gurakuqi<sup>(1)</sup> who was opposed to granting oil concessions to foreign powers such as Britain, Italy, etc. However, the democratic movement of that period was not compact and it included elements and groups with various political tendencies and views. Avni Rustemi and his associates were representatives of the radical wing of

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1 Outstanding revolutionary democrat, minister of finances in the Provisional Democratic Government formed in June 1924.

this movement and did not put much trust in the «reforms» which the other «democrats» allegedly demanded, therefore, they thought, quite correctly, that they should organize the popular masses and that violence should be used if the need arose. Avni Rustemi was the founder and soul of the *Bashkimi* (Unity) association which had a very progressive program for that period and whose activities extended all over the country. With its revolutionary ideas and political activity this organization was assuming the features of a revolutionary democratic party in which the younger generation was to comprise the main force. And in fact the *Bashkimi* association founded by Avni Rustemi had some success, formed its branches in various cities of the country and gained influence and authority. It was this association which organized the demonstration of the people in Fier in which they marched past the mansions of the feudal beys, the Vrionis, carrying a coffin and shouting revolutionary slogans such as «We shall bury feudalism» and «We shall divide the land amongst the peasants».

Seeing the danger which threatened them, the feudal lords, the beys and the aghas did their utmost to snuff out that movement, and one of the desperate acts of reaction was the assassination of Avni Rustemi in Tirana. Through this act the feudal coalition intended to intimidate the people and the revolutionary and democratic elements and deprive the movement of one of its most outstanding leaders. But things did not turn out like that. The people were even more revolted by the murder of their own son. Avni's body was taken to Vlora where a huge crowd took part in the

solemn funeral. To this day I remember how shocked we were by the news of the murder of Avni. I was with some friends in the middle of the Bazaar [in Gjirokastra] one day when Bahri Omari, the husband of my eldest sister, Fahrije, took me aside and said:

«Go home quickly, fetch me my suitcase, and tell them that I am going to Vlora, because the beys have murdered Avni Rustemi.»

I was dumbstruck. I ran home, got the suitcase and brought it to him as quickly as I could. At that time Bahri Omari was a deputy of Gjirokastra, a representative of *Opinga* (1) the democratic group which was opposed to Myfit Libohova(2) and his supporters.

As soon as it received the news the Gjirokastra branch of the *Bashkimi* association mobilized its members who, armed with rifles, boarded trucks to march on Tirana. We, younger ones, too, surrounded the trucks and wanted to climb aboard, but they stopped us because allegedly we were still young, unarmed, and so forth. I remember that Kiço Karajani and I were stopped and taken away by dr. Karajani, Kiço's father.

The murder of Avni Rustemi angered the people. The call was issued from Vlora, and the June Revolution broke out. From Kruma and Dragobia, from Vlora and Gjirokastra, from Korça and all parts of the country thousands of volunteers set out to attack

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1 Progressive democratic association with its centre in Gjirokastra.

2 Representative of the Albanian feudal landowners and reactionary bourgeoisie, agent in the pay of Italian imperialism.



the feudal rulers in Tirana. In the forefront of the volunteers were the members of the *Bashkimi* association.

The Revolution triumphed and, after routing the mercenaries of Ahmet Zog, who fled to Yugoslavia, the insurgent forces entered Tirana where the bourgeois-democratic government of Noli was formed. We know what happened to the Noli government, we know its work and political activity not at all in favour of the political and economic reforms of the «democratic» elements of that period. I shall not dwell on this here, but I want to point out only that the Noli government did not rely on the masses, did not apply the major reforms which had been promised, the bourgeois elements which formed it and supported it did not show consistency and militancy to carry out the program which they had proclaimed. Noli himself was afraid to carry the revolution forward by using violence and did not rely on the revolutionary drive of the masses and outstanding revolutionaries and patriots like Bajram Curri, Luigj Gurakuqi, Halim Xhelo, Riza Cerova, and others. And deprived of its main revolutionary leader, Avni Rustemi, the active revolutionary force of the *Bashkimi* association dwindled away. The bourgeois democratic elements in Parliament and in the government began to play with parliamentary cards as puppets in the hands of allegedly «democratic», but in fact, imperialist foreign powers, and the whole tragic performance and democratic masquerade ended up as it did. With the aid of Serbia and Wrangel's white guards Zog and his clique entered Tirana and the leaders of the June Revolution, democrats and elements of various hues,

went into exile, where they formed the anti-Zogite political emigration which was dispersed all over the world, from the Soviet Union to America, France, Italy, Switzerland, and elsewhere.

I shall have more to say later about the anti-Zogite emigration and the role which it played in the subsequent events, but here I want only to point out that it was heterogenous in character, both from the stand-point of its social origin and from its political tendencies, activity and consistency on the road of democracy. It also included democratic elements and even communists who, in those years, worked for the dissemination of progressive ideas and fought the Zog regime. For example, many elements with democratic tendencies, like Fan Noli, Halim Xhelo, Riza Cerova, Omer Nishani, Hasan Prishtina and others joined KONARE(1).

Besides KONARE, which two years later took the name the Committee of National Liberation and was orientated towards a consistently democratic line, there was also the group called the *Bashkimi Kombëtar* [National Union] which declared itself anti-Zogite, but which was for keeping Albania as it was, only without Zog.

This group of emigrants included the bulk of the inconsistent elements of the June Revolution, the offspring of wealthy bourgeois or landowner-bourgeois families, top officials and former deputies of the opposition against Zog, who had united with the demo-

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1 The Revolutionary National Committee, an organization of Albanian political emigrants formed in Vienna in 1925.

cratic movement of the years 1920-1924, not because they loved the people and genuine democracy, but, some of them, for their class interests as representatives of the new Albanian bourgeoisie which wanted development and enrichment; some others as opponents of Ahmet Zog and his circle, and others still because they had been «carried away» in the upsurge of the revolutionary spirit which prevailed in Albania during that period, etc., etc. Very close to the *Bashkimi Kombëtar* as to its class composition and views, was the so-called Zara Group which took its name from the Dalmatian city where Benito Mussolini kept Mustafa Kruja and company as a reserve with which he threatened Ahmet Zog whenever he wanted to put pressure on him. Mustafa adopted a pose of hostility to the heads of the *Bashkimi Kombëtar* such as Ali Këlcyra and company, because they preferred the French franc and the Yugoslav dinar to the Italian lira.

Regardless of all this, however, the fact that these elements had taken part in the democratic movement of 1920-1924, and especially the fact that after Zog's assumption of power almost all of them had emigrated and had remained far from the Homeland, or rather, far from their properties, for fifteen years on end, had given them the reputation of «democrats», «patriots», and «politicians». Now that they had returned to Albania we had to make approaches to them, too, with the aim of putting their patriotism to the test and bringing them out on the battlefield.

Otherwise, with all their intrinsic complexities which fascism fostered among them they would be-

come a major obstacle, indeed, one of the most dangerous obstacles, to the National Liberation War, to the unity of the people in the war and, especially, to the future of Albania.

Therefore, right from the start we decided to contact these «patriotic politicians» and call on them to fight, just as we did with the other patriotic intellectual and nationalist elements.

One of the most typical and dangerous people of this category was Mithat Frashëri, alias Lumo Skëndo, the pseudonym he had frequently used in his literary and political «works». I call him one of the most dangerous, not only because over the years he had vested himself with the halo of a great «patriot», but because he had also been clever enough to avoid compromising himself openly in his collaboration with the occupiers, and indeed did not occupy any official post in the administrative apparatus of the «Albanian state». This degenerate scion of the renowned Frashëri family, taking advantage of his family name and the fact that he was the son of Abdyl Frashëri, the great patriot and politician of our country, posed as the heir to the spirit of the Renaissance, as the absolute arbiter of the fate of the Albanian people. He had spent his life in the cafes of the East and the West, accepted salaries and subsidies right and left and shed crocodile tears over Albania which he truly «loved», but only to possess it in order to sell it and make deals with it. Unlike many others, who, although they betrayed later, had fired a few shots in the past, Lumo Skëndo had done nothing for Albania apart from two or three worthless literary and political pamphlets and some

abstruse talking. The people's war and his active work in the service of the occupier brought out the true colours of this «patriot» who fled across the sea with the ships of the defeated enemy.

I had been introduced to Lumo Skëndo previously by some friends of his in the intellectual circles of the capital. From time to time I had exchanged a few words with him when I went to buy some book in the bookshop which he kept in the Royal Road, today the Road of Barricades. To tell the truth, I had heard both good and bad things said about him; some mentioned Mithat Bey with respect as «the leader of Albanianism», others described him as a demagogue and perfidious, and indeed it was said that Avni Rustemi had exposed him as such and as a collaborator of Esat Pasha.<sup>(1)</sup> Nevertheless, Mithat Bey had a great reputation and, moreover, did not fail to say the occasional word in condemnation of the regime and the occupier and to speak with regret about «the Homeland which the enemy has invaded». In any case, bearing in mind the reputation of his family, I had the opinion that this person might serve the country. The comrades and I had decided that it would not be a bad thing to make approaches to such an element.

One morning, in the time when I was still legal, I went to his bookshop. He was alone. He shook hands with me.

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1 Esat Pasha Toptani, typical representative of the treacherous Albanian feudal lords, tool of the imperialist powers. He was assassinated by the revolutionary democrat Avni Rustemi in Paris in 1920.

«How are things going, my boy?» he asked me.

«What do you expect, Mithat Bey!» I replied. «A great evil has fallen upon us and we young people cannot sit idle. We want to fight, to get organized. We are convinced that you will help us.»

«I am ready to help you, but only if you listen to me,» he said.

«Go ahead, speak, Mr. Lumo, you know that I respect you.»

«Come in here,» he said and took me through the door behind him into a sort of store-room where he kept books and some old magazines and newspapers.

«Sit down,» he said, pointing to a chair, while he sat on another facing me.

We sat like this for some moments without speaking and I waited. Lumo was turning something over in his mind. He took off his glasses, wiped them with a piece of cloth and then put them back on.

«Listen, my boy,» Lumo began and took off his glasses again, «I am going to talk to you and will help you, if you follow the road of your uncle, the patriot Hysen Hoxha.»

«I am following his road,» I replied, «and following it faithfully.»

«No,» said Mithat Bey, «that is not so. He was an ardent nationalist, was with Ismail Bey(1) in Vlora when the flag was raised, he fought together with

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1 Ismail Qemali (born in 1844), diplomat, politician, patriot and indomitable fighter for the freedom of Albania. On November 28, 1912 he raised the flag of independence in Vlora and chaired the first Albanian government. He was poisoned by the Italian imperialists in 1919. People's Hero.

Çerçiz Topulli(1)and others, while you, his nephew, have taken a bad, anti-Albanian course, you are a bolshevik and bolshevism is the enemy of Albania.»

I was dumbfounded. I felt my temper rising, but I controlled myself and said to him:

«Mr. Lumo Skëndo, you are insulting me over the thing which I hold dearest, my love for the Homeland and my people. I am an Albanian communist and that is what I will be until I die. The communists are loyal to the people to the death and I am proud of the work of my uncle and not only of him, but also of your father, Abdyl Frashëri. They fought against foreign occupiers and we communists are fighting against the occupier of our Homeland. It seems to me, Mr. Lumo, that you are not disposed to follow the course of your father and the Frashëri brothers,(2)that is, you are not for the liberation of Albania. This will bring great joy to the occupiers and a 'neutral' stand in these difficult times must lead to betrayal!»

I walked out of the shop angrily and left Mithat Frashëri trying in vain to answer me, because he was so surprised that he stuttered more than usual.

That was the period when these «democratic patriots» permitted themselves the tone of a haughty

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1 Çerçiz Topulli, commander of a çeta of patriots fighting against the Turkish occupiers during the Albanian national movement for freedom and the independence of the country. People's Hero.

2 Abdyl Frashëri (1839-1892), outstanding personality, leader of the Albanian League of Prizren; Naim Frashëri (1846-1900), great Albanian national poet; Sami Frashëri (1850-1904), outstanding ideologist, scholar and statist.

teacher in their conversations with us communists. The idea of «the élite of the nation», which was so firmly implanted in their minds and which they propagated themselves, did not permit them either to understand the great and inexhaustible strength of the people, or to see that the times had changed and they had lagged behind the development of society which, according to them, had remained as it was twenty years earlier. They not only said, but up to a point also believed that we, the communists, and our Party, which had assumed the burden of the organization of the war, were children, incapable of running things and giving leadership. They, of course, had a great hatred for communism, although they calmed themselves with the idea that «Albania is not Russia» and «bolshevism is not for the peasants and the ragged poor of Albania.»

During meetings and heated arguments with the representatives of this category of nationalists, we communists gained first-hand knowledge of their views and true aims. Below I shall speak in more detail about the origin, features and aspirations of this category of pseudo-patriots, but here I want to point out that as early as the time of the communist groups and especially later, when the Party charged us with the task of talking with them in order to clarify them and, if possible, to convince them that they had taken the wrong road, we had long, complicated and wearisome talks with the «patriot fathers» who never tired of making endless speeches full of sophistry, traps and tricks.

When I came to Tirana and Esat Dishnica and I



opened the «Flora» shop I frequently visited Bahri Omari. After the defeat of the June Revolution of 1924, Bahri, like many others, had remained in exile and returned to Albania in 1939 with the caravans of political emigrants, settled in Tirana, and so it happened that I went to visit him time after time, especially until I was able to get a house and bring my father, mother and younger sister, Sano, to Tirana. Bahri was a bourgeois liberal who behaved correctly in his family and social relations, while in his political opinions he was opposed to us. Nevertheless, after the arguments about political questions which occurred between us he tried to prevent these from becoming excessively bitter. At that time I still hoped that Bahri might be brought closer to us because, despite the contacts which he maintained with merchants, aghas and leading Albanian fascist officials, he posed as an anti-fascist and did not fail to say the odd word against the occupier. Apart from this, through Bahri I had the possibility to create many links, to contact the nationalist elements and to acquaint myself better at first hand with their «currents», «tendencies», «groups» or their organization, which was an important task for the work of the Party.

In fact, in the period before the formation of the Party and, indeed, even later, when the Conference of Peza had not been summoned, the Anti-fascist National Liberation Front had not been formed and they had not formed the Balli Kombëtar, it was difficult for us to distinguish the trends and affinities of the future heads of that traitor organization. We knew that Ali Këlcyra, Kolë Tromara, Bahri Omari, Sheh

Karburnara, Sejfi Vllamasi and others were of one «trend». I had never heard Bahri speak with sympathy either of Lumo Skëndo or Mehdi Frashëri and others of this ilk. Possibly they had divided their roles, possibly Ali Këlcyra was engaged with them, while some other like their friend Xhevat Korça, for instance, was allowed to join the quisling government; Ali Këlcyra himself, the son-in-law of the Vrionis and their ally and, of course, also an ally of the Vërlacis, did not take an official position as far as I know so that he would be able to pose for a while as a «pure patriot».

Hence, when I went to see Bahri I did this not simply for a family visit but also to talk to him in order to convince him or to persuade him to link up with the National Liberation Movement. Not only was Bahri not convinced by our arguments, but he pretended that he and his friends, headed by Ali Bey Këlcyra, were the greatest anti-fascists, the greatest anti-Italians and the greatest democrats that Albania had seen! Naturally it was easy for me to shoot down their «justifications» one after the other, and the facts and their activities provided me with weapons for this.

«This is our policy, this is our tactic,» said Bahri Omari.

«But whom does this policy and tactic serve?» I asked him.

«The people and democracy!»

«Very well, but can't you reason? The people can never be with you or your policy, because they hate the occupiers and condemn collaboration with them.»

«That is what you communists say,» replied Bahri.

«It is not only us that say this. Everyone can see that your 'tactics' is anti-patriotic. You pretend you have the people with you, but you are wrong. The people are with us, because we don't engage in 'grand' politics and 'delicate' diplomacy, but, my word, we wage the war for the liberation of the country.»

Like many other pseudo-patriots, Bahri had become a member of the «Council of State», created especially for men of this type, whom the fascist regime had around it and kept in reserve for the bad times which were to come. We «friends», cousins and acquaintances did our utmost to persuade them to leave their employment with the fascists, even used satire, allegedly jokingly, although really meaning it, but it was all in vain.

Dr. Omer Nishani, whom we had known as a democratic man, a member of KONARE and a collaborator of Halim Xhelo in the newspaper *Liria Kombëtare* (National Freedom) (1), was included in this organ set up by the vice-regal administration as one of the details of the decor of the «Albanian state». However, dr. Nishani was not of the legion of those collaborationists. His joining the «Council of State» was truly a mistake, but he was soon to correct it and, as I shall show later, the Doctor became one of the outstanding militants of the Front and the National Liberation War.

I remember that one afternoon Esat Dishnica and I went into the *Kursaal* Café where we saw all these

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1 Organ of the Revolutionary National Committee (1925-1935), published abroad, mainly in Vienna.

«councillors» gathered round the tables talking amongst themselves.

«Come on,» said Esat, «let's get in amongst them and break up their conversation.»

«All right,» I said, and we went up to them.

Esat had a wry humour. After greeting them he said:

«Have you come out of school? Pardon us if we have disturbed you because perhaps you were going over your lessons.»

Dr. Nishani, who was a sympathizer of ours and, therefore, called «red», laughed his usual hearty laugh and invited us to sit down. We did so. Kolë Tromara turned to Esat and said to him:

«It's all very well for these fellows who have nothing and couldn't be anything else but communists, but you who are the grandson of Ali Bey, who ruled the peasantry of Korça, why are you trying to show off to us?»

«Precisely because I am the grandson of Ali Bey,» replied Esat with his characteristic aplomb, «I want to redress to some degree the sins and evils which my grandfather has committed.»

Occasionally I met Kolë Tromara and Sheh Karbunara in the *Kursaal* Café and the conversations which ensued were about the most commonplace things. When we met in the street we greeted each other. Kolë Tromara's face was not unknown to me, because I had seen him several times in Paris and his arrogance and self-presumption had made an impression on me. He held his head high, wore American-style spectacles, dressed in black clothes like the Quakers and

walked, looked and spoke as if he were «carrying the whole world on his shoulders». Sheh Karbunara I had met in Bari. I had never seen Kolë Tromara in Bahri's home, but I had met the Sheh there. Sheh Karbunara was a clever cunning devil, very guarded in his words. He lived in Lushnja, or more precisely in Karbunara, in his *tekke*-home, and his acquaintances from Lushnja, Berat, Durrës, Tirana and other regions continually visited him there. The Sheh, under the cloak of a democrat and with his authoritarian manner of a «politician» who knows and understands the problems well, undoubtedly also exploited the religious mystique of the «cap and the gown» and certainly took money from anyone. From what I had heard, he himself also went here and there, not only to Tirana, to his former friends in exile, but also to his other friends, well-known merchants. He was very dangerous with his *bonhomie*\* which concealed a diabolical nature.

How many fruitless meetings and talks had I at that time with these thick-headed individuals bent on their road of betrayal! It would be of no value to mention all of them (and in fact I could not do so) but many, if not the whole lot, became arch-reactionaries, quislings or leaders of the Balli Kombëtar.

By chance I was introduced also to Vehip Runa who, in the period before the 1924 Revolution, posed as a democrat. I had heard my father speak of him. Vehip Runa was from our parts, Labëria, from Kurvelesh, if I am not mistaken. The fact is that Vehip's

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\* French in the original.

family was well-known in Kurvelesh as a wealthy influential family and both Vehip and his brother had reputations as brave fighting men. After the overthrow of the Noli government, when the regime of Zog was established, Vehip Runa, as a clever and cunning kulak, immediately turned his coat and placed his influence in the service of Zog who knew how to make the most of it. Thus, the «democrat» Vehip Runa had undergone a metamorphosis and had turned into a bayraktar of the south. Naturally, his «army» was not very big and his influence was based not so much on the people of Kurvelesh, or the city of Gjirokastra, as on the owners of large flocks and, especially, on family and marriage connections which had to be taken into account. Thanks to these connections and as a reward for the services which he performed for Ahmet Zog, Vehip Runa managed to be appointed prefect, left the village and turned into a «civilized personality» of the city.

When Zog fled from Albania, Vehip Runa, of course, abandoned Zog and offered his hand to Italy. He turned his coat again, became prefect again, under the quisling regime.

He was a tall, well-built man, with knowing eyes set in a characteristic long, sallow, deeply wrinkled face. He had assumed the appearance and the manners of the top men of the regime; he had retained both their detestable appearance and also the cunning of the rich peasant. In his glittering eyes one could see the savagery along with the «gentility» of a «civilized man» and the cunning of the agha. He spoke in a low «polite» voice with such words as «Mr. Enver», «my

boy», and many expressions of this nature with which he wanted to indicate his superiority and influence among the masses.

Now Vehip Runa had linked up with his old friends of the time of «democracy» who had returned from exile, and was once again an «anti-Zogite» and a «democrat». He was a top functionary of the fascist regime and whispered here and there as if allegedly «there was nothing else he could do», just as «there was nothing else that his friends could do». «We have to work from within to overthrow fascism in peaceful ways», that is, «we must take the castle from within», and when the horse died these venal lackeys were ready to strip off its shoes, to seize power and to «establish democracy»! This was the thesis which Vehip outlined quietly, in a low voice, to me, «Mr. Enver», «the son of my friend Halil», and, as he put it, the others were of the same opinion as he. This conversation took place during a lunch in Bahri Oman's house to which Vehip Runa had been invited and at which I and Skënder Pojani were present, too.

Skënder Pojani was a dissolute bey, portly, with spectacles and a moustache, an inveterate philanderer, despite his advanced age. This bey was a shareholder of STAMLES (1), had a well-filled wallet, went in and out of the homes of his Italian friends and was friendly with the other beys who gathered round the «honey pot» of fascism. Naturally, he was a friend also of these so-called democrats whom he supplied with «spe-

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1 Albanian tobacco and cigarette commercial-industrial shareholder company.

cial» cigarettes as well as with cash, when they asked for it. He was an adventurer bey, but for Kolë Tro-mara, Sheh Karbunara and persons of that ilk he was «popular and a democrat».

During the conversation I told Vehip Runa that I could not agree with his opinions and actions. During the whole time that I sat there with them I used the same quiet tone and tried to oppose their thesis with convincing arguments. I had no hope at all in Vehip Runa and Skënder Pojani, but it pleased me to knock down their arguments and to place them with their backs to the wall. When I was speaking, Vehip Runa, who had long been acquainted with my ideas, pretended to be astonished and tried to counter my arguments.

«Mr. Vehip,» I said to him, «why do you want to complicate issues which are clear? Fascist Italy has occupied us, it is colonizing us and wants to wipe us out as a nation and a people. Can you not see this, or do you not want to see it? Italy and all those who have occupied us have always had this aim. Our people have always fought for freedom and now they are going to fight to liberate themselves once and for all. Therefore, for us the problem is clear: either we will fight together with the people, or we will fight together with the occupier against the people. This is how I present the problem, Mr. Vehip. Take your choice. We have chosen the first course.»

«We too, Mr. Hoxha, have chosen the first course,» replied Vehip sharply.

«Then abandon the second!» I told him.

«This is a tactic, my son,» said Vehip. «This is where we differ. We intend to strangle the fascist re-



gime with our men, to get control of everything by working under the lap, in a word 'quietly and gently and get our own way'.»

I interrupted him saying:

«Mr. Vehip, we are opposed to your policy 'quietly and gently and get our own way', because with the occupiers the people can never get their own way, will get nothing, therefore we can be neither gentle nor restrained with the enemies, but will be savage and merciless, because this is the only way that we'll save the people.»

After these words of mine, Skënder Pojani, who up to that point had been too busy eating and drinking to say anything, intervened in the conversation:

«Oh, no, Mr. Enver,» he said, «we cannot agree with you. People will be killed, and towns, villages and whole districts burned.»

«Mr. Skënder is quite right,» said Vehip supporting him, turning to me. «If we follow the course that you advocate, our people, who are only a handful, will suffer great losses. Is this what you want? What do you say, Bahri?» he asked Bahri Omari who had taken no part in the conversation.

«I have talked continually with Enver,» replied Bahri, «but I do not agree with him. You try to reach agreement,» and he relapsed into silence.

«We have great love for the people and the Homeland,» I told them, «and we never want to see the people killed and the country devastated. On the contrary, we want to have the Homeland free and the people the sovereign masters in our country. But this will not be achieved either by sitting idle, or by

'taking the castle from within', as you think,» I continued. «The freedom and happiness of the people can be achieved only through war, therefore we have decided to fight back at those who have attacked us and robbed the Homeland of its freedom and sovereignty, to drive them out and liberate the people.»

«But isn't this what We want, Mr. Enver?» asked Skënder Pojani.

«The 'tactic' which you use shows that your strategy does not have such an aim.»

«Why, my son,» replied Vehip Runa, «isn't our strategy for the liberation of Albania?»

«Excuse me for speaking somewhat harshly,» I replied, «but your expressions 'quietly and gently and get our own way', your tactic to 'take the castle from within' and without firing a shot, obliges one to think that your intention is not to overcome the problems of the Homeland and the people, but to go about it so that when fascism is defeated, you gentlemen will take power and act with Albania in the way that pleases you.»

There was a moment of silence, Skënder's fork tapping on his plate was the only sound heard in the room, but Vehip gave him an angry look and Skënder put it down.

«Listen, son,» said Vehip eventually in a tone in which gentleness was giving way to open threats. «We are well aware of what democracy is and we have fought for it. You were still a child when Bahri, Mulla Halil and I voted for *Opinga* and were democrats.»

«I may have been a child at that time, Mr. Vehip,»

I said, «but I am a child no longer and the people and I, as a son of the people, suffered the consequences of your 'democracy' under the regime of Zog and are suffering them now under fascism.»

«Yes,» interjected Bahri, «the only point in which I agree with you, Enver, is that democracy did not exist under Zog and does not exist under fascism!»

«In that case,» I replied, «give up your collaboration with fascism. You did not bow to Zog, so be consistent.»

I glanced at Vehip Runa, Zog's erstwhile prefect, but he pretended not to understand the allusion and directed his eyes and his fork to the rissole on his plate.

«Then,» I went on, «you must bear in mind that the people want to fight, you cannot restrain their desire for freedom long with tactics. That is why I say we ought to unite and fight. If we are united and organized, then we'll have fewer losses and will win freedom more quickly.»

Vehip raised his head. «Mr. Enver,» he said, «we know the people better and they know us better. Therefore, it is not precisely as you say. I need go no further than to tell you about Labëria which I know like the palm of my hand. Zenel Gjoleka and I have been there and the people told us that we must wait, that we have no weapons, that they will burn our homes if we open fire.»

«I don't agree either with you, Mr. Vehip, or with Zenel Gjoleka who is doing the opposite of what Zenel Gjoleka, the brave of the brave of Labëria, did against the Ottoman occupiers,» I replied. «We, too, know Labëria, just as well and possibly even better

than you, because we know the people and the true patriots there. Hatred for the enemy is simmering there. The people want to fight and are fighting. Of course, there are a few wealthy individuals, like the Shuko Qanas, Bilal Nivicas and Hasan *Zagarët*\* who not only do not want to fight the enemy, but even worse, are fighting against the people of Labëria, which is an heroic region and it will continue its heroic traditions.»

«Whom are you telling about these traditions, Mr. Hoxha?» asked Vehip in an ironical tone. «We come from there and these traditions belong to us; we can talk about Gjoleka, Çelo Picari and others.»

«What do you think we are, Italians, or collaborators of the Italians?» I replied angrily. «The heroic traditions of Gjoleka of Labëria and all the heroes of the country of all times belong to the people. We are the sons of this heroic people and have the right to be proud of these heroes, and it is our duty to follow in their footsteps. But there is one thing you ought to know: Gjoleka of Labëria and Çelo Picari were brave and strong willed, because they were patriots and fighters against the invaders and because they based themselves on the people. You have heard, I believe, how the people sing to these patriots. They eulogize the outstandingly brave individuals to whom the common people have given birth and whom they have made fighters of rare valour. Hence, this people who have always considered freedom the most sacred thing and have had courage flowing in their veins cannot

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\* Dogs.

think as you do. Your views and pretensions are harmful. History shows that we and not you are right.»

«But you have no one in Kurvelesh, Mr. Hoxha, you have only a few youths whom nobody knows.»

«I believe you must have heard of Balil Nesha,» I replied. «Nobody knew Balil until he fought the detachments of Turkey and the people recognized him, honoured him and composed a song about him,» and I quoted some lines from a folk song,

*Kuç, Kallarat and Bolena  
Rose with Balil to a man  
Gunfire broke loose at the river  
And death knocked at every door.  
Balil, you star of bravery!*

«We have comrades like this in Kurvelesh, since you mentioned that region,» I continued my reply to Vehip. «They are going to fight and if you continue your 'tactic' the influence you have there, which seems to you dominant, will be wiped out. We needn't go further than your brother, Mr. Vehip, who is with us and not with you and is fighting the occupiers. I have heard talk about your bravery, Mr. Runa, and know that you have influence in Kurvelesh, therefore it would be good if you were to put it at the disposal of the war for the liberation of the Homeland: abandon the course you have taken, because it is wrong, go no further towards disaster, unite with our people's war and place yourselves in the service of the great cause of liberation,» I concluded.

But Vehip Runa's reply was:

«We are fighting for Albania in our own way. We do not have the same views.»

«It is your right to stick to the views you have,» I said bluntly, «but I tell you once again: the people and history will not excuse you for what you are doing. We have done our duty towards you. I see that you have no regard for us, but we do not measure our work with the yardstick of your regard. The people are with us. They love and support us. Without the people and without us you'll slide deeper and deeper into the mire.»

After these words I stood up, putting an end to the meeting with Vehip Runa, who was and remained at war with us, and assisted the occupiers to the end, until the people gave him the punishment he deserved.

Apart from other things, in the conversations with these individuals, the absurd belief they had in the «authority» which they allegedly enjoyed amongst the people made an impression on us. Of course, this overweening belief in their own «worth» had its source in the fact that they knew nothing about the people, about the changes which they had undergone in their outlook, psychology and political maturity. These individuals believed that since they had been «deputies» and had «worked» in exile, they still retained the reputation of anti-Zogite politicians and «pure democrats» and, consequently, were men of influence. Amongst themselves they had divided their spheres of influence. Being from Korça, Kolë Tromara thought that he had Korça behind him and only needed to issue the call and Korça would spring to its feet to

follow him (!). Ali Bey was not content only with Këlcyra and Dangëllia, but posed as a person of influence among all the «democrats» of the country. Indeed, he thought that he even had the peasantry in his pocket, regardless of the fact that he was the scion of one of the most barbarous families of beys, notorious for murdering peasants by throwing them from the cliff on which their mansion was built into the Vjosa River. Apparently, Ali Bey thought that these details of his family record and the fact that he was the son-in-law of the Vrionis increased his authority and this self-styled democrat was convinced that the peasantry would follow him! It was the same with all of them: Qazim Koculi, «the hero of the war of Vlora», thought that he had the people of Vlora with him whenever he wanted, Sejfi Vllamasi was the one who would take the place of Zylyftar Poda(1) in Kolonja, while Rexhep Mitrovica thought that he personally was Kosova, for which the hearts of these venal officials allegedly were bleeding.

However, history showed that their titles and power were only their dreams, because the people not only did not follow them, but on the contrary, swept them away and tossed them into the garbage bin, where they belonged.

There were also some who did not take the trouble to camouflage their true aims and interests which linked them with the Italian occupiers. Even in con-

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1 Commander of a çeta of Albanian insurgents during the Ottoman occupation of the country.

versation they were threatening and aggressive, because they considered our efforts and our war a direct threat to their posts and profits.

Reiz Selfo, a big Gjirokastra merchant, talked to me one day about the «blessings» which fascist Italy had brought Albania. Of course, he did not fail to shed a few crocodile tears over «the lost freedom» and «the unhappy Homeland,» but the essence of what he had to say was that «this evil that has come upon us also has its good points, because jobs are opening up, there are goods in the market, the Albanian schools have not been closed», and so on and so forth.

Naturally, I rejected this «thesis», telling him that the enemy had captured our Homeland, enslaved us, imprisoned our people, was colonizing us and also exploiting us economically.

«Anyone who defends the occupation of the country by foreigners is a traitor,» I told Reiz Selfo. «The profits and blessings that you talk about, Reiz, are for the collaborators of fascism. You big merchants are certainly making fabulous profits, while the people grind corn husks for bread and are struck down by the enemy's bullets. Why should your friend Qemal Vrioni complain about Italy when he is drawing profits by selling the land of the country to Italian agricultural companies? You big merchants strangled the small shopkeepers and live like lords. Look at that great green jewel on your finger (he was wearing a ring which was certainly very costly). You are the friends of Jacomoni and Shuk Gurakuqi, the minister



of finance, get fat import licences and pose as patriots. What patriotism is there in this?»

Bahri Omari, in whose house this meeting took place, opened his mouth and said:

«Reiz, better leave off this conversation.»

«No,» said Reiz, «I won't, because these red ragamuffins are boasting of their patriotism as if they are going to make Albania.»

«We are going to make it. We reds, together with the people, and the people will be with us!» I replied.

«We'll never allow your seed to sprout on our soil,» declared Reiz Selfo angrily.

«Remember these words, Reiz Selfo,» I said to him, «because I for my part will not forget them. When the people take power tomorrow you'll no longer speak in this language, but you will fill your pants,» and I begged Bahri's pardon for the expression I used.

Bahri Omari again begged us to close that subject. Reiz shut his gob and I got up and left. I do not know whether the traitor merchant, Reiz Selfo, remembered those words of mine, but when the people's state power confiscated his stock and wealth, or even later, when the people's court sentenced him to death for his criminal activity during the nazi-fascist occupation and after the liberation of the Homeland, this rabid enemy had learned nothing from the fate of his friends, because apart from other things, he implicated himself in terrorist activities. In the first years after Liberation he was one of the organizers of the terrorists who threw a bomb at the Soviet Embassy in Tirana.

Once I had a fierce quarrel with Abaz Omari, a cousin of Bahri's from his father's side, who was also a relation of ours, because he was the nephew of my uncle, Hysen Hoxha. We had known each other since our childhood and when we were young men he often came to our home. We were about the same age (perhaps Abaz was two or three years older than I), and he, too, had attended the *Lycée* of Korça and had gone to Paris to continue his studies. But after staying there for four years kept by his father who was a merchant and landowner in Fier, he had returned to Albania without a diploma and worked in his father's business for some time. Later he married a woman with a handsome dowry and returned to France with her money, took his diploma in law and returned to become an advocate. I had not met him for a long time until one day after the occupation of the country I found him visiting my sister Fahrije. We embraced, I congratulated him and after the usual small talk, as always, we began discussing the political problems. I remember that in the past Abaz presented himself in our discussions as an anti-feudal, a democrat and a leftist. But what did I find: when I spoke to him about the war, about the necessity for it and so on, it turned out that from being a «leftist» Abaz had become a «rightist», from a democrat he had become an ardent defender of the wealthy, in a word, he had turned his coat. We quarrelled and who knows how the quarrel would have ended had my sister not intervened. Never again did I see this man who became a guard dog of Ali Bey, a Ballist and an open collaborator with the German occupiers.

I shall not dwell at greater length on all the talks and debates which I had with these individuals, but I want to say that despite our efforts to convince them they were determined to follow their course, just as we were determined to follow ours. We had wasted a lot of time and energy and lost our tempers with them. We had plenty of work to do and would do it even without them because we knew and saw that we had the people with us. Naturally in the future, too, we were to make efforts to turn these elements back to the right road of the people's war against fascism, but we were always clearly aware that we did not base the fate of the war on them. Regardless of their «decisions», the war had begun and was mounting day by day — let them sit and philosophize about their tactic of «satisfying everybody». The honest patriots all over Albania were taking to arms. More importantly, the masses of the people, the workers and peasants, and especially the youth, were more and more openly expressing themselves in favour of the program of the Communist Party for war against the fascist occupier.

This, you might say, was the preparatory work in the direction of realizing our objective of forming a front of all honest Albanians. Of course, some time had still to pass until, on September 16, 1942, the National Liberation Front was established on a complete organizational and political basis, as a militant union of the masses, which under the leadership of the Communist Party of Albania, was to accomplish the liberation of the Homeland. Here I want to point out the

importance of this first preparatory phase, when we laid the foundations of the Front, because without this phase it would have been impossible to achieve the historic Conference of Peza.

### **3. Towards the Conference of Peza**

The work of the Party in all zones of the country to build up its ideological, political and organizational strength and to arouse the people in the war was yielding its fruits. From political and demonstrative actions we were going over on a broader scale to the armed struggle and, especially in the spring and summer of 1942, a large number of partisan units and *çeta* were operating in different regions of the country. Thus under the leadership of the Party the monolithic unity of the people in the battle for national liberation was becoming an ever more tangible reality. The Provisional Central Committee, which was attentively following the situation and the war which was developing gradually, arrived at the logical deduction that we were passing into a more developed situation with broader horizons, therefore it was concluded that, along with the organization and extension of the National Liberation War, the time had come to consider the political organization of this war.

To our Party which was clear on the character and the final objective of the National Liberation

War, it was obvious that the organs and organisms of the old state power, its forms and content were no longer appropriate or useful. Our war would mobilize the broad popular masses, and we would be unable to accomplish this task with the old forms of the Zogite regime. The Party, which was far-sighted, was certain that the National Liberation Movement would be extended and strengthened, that *çeta*, battalions, and brigades would emerge from the people and a true army of the insurgent people would be created. But the war was not waged only in the mountains, it was waged everywhere, in the mountains, in the cities, in the villages, in the suburbs. It would be and was a people's war to which the young pioneer who stuck up leaflets or carried a letter, the housewife who welcomed and farewelled illegal fighters and partisans, and the fighter who attacked the enemy arms in hand all made their contribution. All this struggle behind the enemy's lines had to be organized and guided and this would not be done by the organs of the quisling state, but by new political organs to which the people's war itself would have to give birth.

Thus the many tasks for the unification of the masses, for the organization and extension of the National Liberation War and the prospects of the development of the revolution made it indispensable that in the course of the war, the new state power, the people's state power, which would have nothing in common with the state power of the feudals and the bourgeoisie, should be set up. The concrete forms in which this state power was realized would be created gradually, but right from the outset the Party was

clear about one thing: its social basis would be the broad popular masses.

As everyone knows, the foundations of the people's state power were laid during the war with the national liberation councils, which were a new form that the Party used as the most suitable for our country. It was an old tradition of our villages and regions that, in the absence of a centralized political power, the more important problems of the life of the village should be thrashed out in popular assemblies and the decisions which were taken there became law. We find this form of popular self-government realized in the major events of our history, when, on the initiative of outstanding patriots, great conventions were summoned for the defence of the Homeland. The Assembly of Lezha(1), the Albanian League of Prizren, the Assembly of Gërçe, (2) the Congress of Lushnja, (3) etc., to which the people sent their own representatives to solve the problems and to defend their land and freedom from the aims of imperialists and the greed of chauvinists, were of this type.

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1 Political and military alliance created in March 1444 under the leadership of Gjergj Kastrioti — Skanderbeg, for the unification of the country in the war against the Ottoman invaders.

2 The assembly was convened in June 1911 in the North of Albania to demand the territorial-administrative autonomy of Albania.

3 Summoned on January 28, 1920. It rejected the secret London Treaty of the year 1915 which envisaged the division of Albania, demanded the country's complete independence, proclaimed the overthrow of the traitor government of Durrës in which Albanian secret agents of Italian imperialism participated, and elected the new national government.

Now we had to employ this sound popular tradition while, of course, enriching it in content and form in accord with the tasks of the war and the future.

The Provisional Central Committee issued the instruction for the setting up of councils, for the first time, in February 1942. I remember that the comrades and I discussed this problem at length, especially to define the tasks that these councils were to carry out and the way in which they would be formed. Of course, such discussions were natural, because none of us had either experience or even the necessary knowledge in connection with the functions and prerogatives of organs of state power. Nevertheless we proceeded cautiously in this direction, and determined those functions in conformity with the needs of the war and the real possibilities which these councils would have in that period. A fundamental and very important thing in the directive of the Central Committee was that these councils were described explicitly as the embryo of the new state power. For the first time in the history of our people, the liberation war was combined with the struggle for the establishment of a new political power after the victory. This is due solely to the correct leadership of our Marxist-Leninist Party, thanks to which the National Liberation War assumed the character of a popular, democratic revolution.

The leaders of the party organizations in the terrain in particular were instructed that the members of these councils should be supporters and activists in the war for freedom in words and deeds, those who had won the love and respect of the people. Initially,

these councils were to serve to rally the masses to the war against the occupiers, would provide volunteers for the partisan *çeta*, would administer justice and maintain order among the people in the liberated zones, would organize propaganda and the collection of aid for the National Liberation Movement, and so on. The work began quickly in this direction, too. and in certain districts of the country, especially in the south, the first councils began to be set up in the liberated zones.

All these successes which we were achieving step by step were having ever greater influence in the life of the country and seriously disturbing the «security» and «calm» which the occupiers proclaimed.

While the communists and the Albanian people rejoiced over these successes, over the correct and reliable course which the National Liberation War was taking under the leadership of the CPA, those of the ilk of the self-styled «fathers of the nation» reacted quite differently. Since they were rabid anti-communists, the herd of «patriots», «democrats», «anti-Zogites» and «anti-Italians», who, in fact, were all subsidized from Jacomoni's treasury, were infuriated and seriously shocked by the direction which events were taking.

To their astonishment and terror, precisely those «children» whom up till yesterday they had underrated and labelled with all sorts of epithets, were really taking over the leadership of the war, winning the support of and uniting the people around their program. Even «worse», the organs of the fascist state were being overthrown and new organs, the national lib-



eration councils, were being formed! These things, especially the question of councils, could not fail to frighten the «fathers of the nation» to the depth of their souls. Were events to continue in this way there was the danger that they would be left biting their fingernails. Therefore, the moment came when precisely those who, up till yesterday had left nothing unsaid against us and disdained us, scenting which way the political breeze was blowing and on the orders of Jacomoni, were obliged to make approaches to us, of course, with their haughty politeness, seeking to meet us «children» in order to «consult with us and to find a common language».

We, of course, on the basis of the defined line and platform of the Party, did not refuse to meet and talk with them, although we were convinced, and became even more convinced, that their aim was not to reach agreement to collaborate in the war against fascism, but «to find a common language» with us, that is, to divert us from the course on which we had set out and to integrate us into their own capitulationist and collaborationist policy!

One day, early in the summer of 1942, while I was working in a base, I was informed that a comrade wanted to meet me, because he had some news for me personally. I knew that comrade, who was from Korça, and I told them to bring him in. When he came in we embraced, I asked him how things were going, had he arrived from Korça in recent days and about my old comrades. Then the comrade told me:

«Two or three days ago, Fazlli Frashëri sought

me out and said to me: 'Please find the possibility to inform the Professor that Mr. Fazlli Frashëri wants to have a meeting with him. I am ready to go anywhere the Professor chooses.' I told him,» continued the comrade, «that I did not know where the Professor was, but if I met him, I would tell him.»

«The old fox!» I exclaimed, and then told the comrade: «Come back tomorrow and I'll give you my answer.»

Fazlli Bey Frashëri, who posed as a democrat, was one of those elements of the feudal bourgeoisie with a hundred flags in his pocket, who turned whichever way the wind blew. I had heard about him and had also met him myself when I was in Korça, especially in the days when we were trying to organize the resistance against the Italian occupation. As a man without scruples or principles, he tried to increase his authority among the strata of intellectuals in Korça, amongst the ranks of the mercantile bourgeoisie in the city, to be on good terms with the beys, the landowners, such as Maliq Bey Frashëri and many aghas of Korça, and to preserve his influence among all the Zogite politicians and pseudo-democrats, the sycophants of the tyrant. He posed as a liberal anti-Zogite, but in fact was a camouflaged Zogite. In Korça there were rumours, and these were in the interests of the regime, that Zog summoned him to the palace from time to time and consulted with him.

This «fame» was fostered by his own supporters and those of the regime who said: «Zog walks on two legs in Korça: with the Moslem leg of Fazlli Frashëri and the Christian leg of Koço Kota and Pandeli Evan-

gjeli.» The latter two were openly advisers of Zog, were even appointed prime ministers, while Fazlli kept out of the limelight. He was *I'éminence grise* of the despotic monarch. At the time when I met him in Korça he rarely went to Tirana, but in Korça he was the friend of all the prefects who came and went.

Fazlli Bey had a division of roles with his brother Qazim, or Qazka, as the people called him derisively, one of the biggest and the most ruthlessly exploiting employers and merchants of Korça. Fazlli's influence with Zog, Krosi and Koço Kota was channelled through Qazka, who received the favours of the regime, doing business for it, made deals with the big merchants of Korça, with the beys and the aghas, while Fazlli Bey played the role of someone who was not involved in these affairs because material matters were allegedly of no interest to him. Fazlli posed as an idealist, a great politician, a man of culture and a philosopher. Ah, in these directions «he was number one»!

In Qazka's house, because Fazlli was a bachelor, he certainly gave advice and concocted intrigues with Tefik Mborja, who after the occupation become minister of the «Albanian» Fascist Party, and his brother Selim Mborja (a big merchant who, together with an Italian, was the owner of the brewery), with Petraq Katro, another big merchant and fascist of the first hours. These and their associates were Fazlli Frashëri's true friends, but he guarded against exposing himself, gambling or whoring as they did. As the cunning fox of the bourgeoisie he was, Fazlli rarely frequented the centres where these degenerate

bourgeois gathered. He went only to the café near the church of Shëngjergj where old Korça patriots such as Gavriill Pepo, Idhomene Bratko and others gathered. He carefully pursued this «line» in order to create his reputation as a «patriot».

In the afternoons you could see Fazlli Frashëri, winter and summer, strolling up and down the boulevard, talking usually with the same professors of the *Lycée* of Korça, especially Stavri Skëndi, who became one of the leaders of the Balli Kombëtar of Korça, a certain Niko Stralla, the agent of the Italians, Vili Jatru, whom our guerilla units executed in the name of the people, and the utterly immoral Andonaqka of Frashëri, an agent of the Americans. These comprised his select and permanent «intellectual» associates. He was very rarely seen in public with merchants, beys or aghas; as for students, workers or craftsmen they did not come into the question at all.

Fazlli Frashëri posed as a peripatetic philosopher, but not because he was a follower of Aristotle, because he knew nothing about his philosophy; from the famous thinker of antiquity Fazlli had taken only the custom of discoursing on his «thoughts» to his «disciples» during long strolls in the boulevard. When they were weary, partly from walking and partly from the reasoning of the teacher, the members of this group of «philosophers» returned to Nando's café where they drank tea and ate cake. There, too, Fazlli Frashëri with that pockmarked face, which he sometimes stroked as if he were rubbing down his horse, continued his «discourse». Fazlli talked and his acolytes listened. Stavri Skëndi and Foto Bala, professor

at the *Lycée*, ardent sympathizer of the Duce and fascist of the first hours, were the «nightingales» who sang, of course, in tune with Fazlli. These two were «disciples» of Fazlli, but possibly also something more than this. The former, Stavri Skëndi, our sworn enemy and agent of the Americans, fled from Albania on the eve of Liberation and went to the United States of America where he continues the struggle against socialist Albania, while Foto Bala was jailed as an agent of fascist Italy and his father, Dhimitër Bala, another active enemy of our state, was shot by sentence of the people's court.

Twice, or at the most three times, I had occasion to meet Fazlli during his strolls, when I had no alternative, because I happened to be strolling with my colleagues from the *Lycée* in the boulevard when Fazlli appeared in front of us and joined us in our stroll. On these occasions I heard the conversations which were carried on in these circles. When my «colleagues» introduced me to Fazlli he appeared to be pleased; he knew me, of course, by sight, while we of the Communist Group of Korça knew what Fazlli really was. During these brief strolls I heard how the «philosopher» bey outlined the «grand» policy of Britain, America, Germany and Italy. Once I intervened in the conversation and asked him:

«But what do you think about the policy of Russia, Mr. Fazlli? You are a liberal, a democrat and I know you are not afraid to tell us.» And I stressed these last words because he himself liked to repeat them. My question fell on the others like a bombshell, they looked at one another and were waiting, cu-

rious to know how the «professor» would get out of this predicament. Fazlli paused, stroked his chin and replied very gravely:

«I don't know much about it, Mr. Hoxha, because the Soviets and Stalin conduct a closed and conspiratorial policy.»

«How can that be?» I asked him. «The policy of Lenin and Stalin has always been clear, while America, Britain, France and the others have concluded secret treaties and agreements to the detriment of the peoples and to the detriment of Albania. We Albanians know very well that it was Lenin who made these back-stage deals public. While today, from what we hear, all the bourgeoisie and fascism are attacking the Soviet Union and they have their reasons, because they know that the Soviet policy will bring them defeat.»

«That is your opinion,» said Fazlli, «but we think differently. We are democrats, but not extremists.»

«I see that,» I replied with a tone of irony and said no more.

Right till the end Fazlli Bey tried to play the role of the «democrat». As soon as the Trotskyite Zai Fundo arrived in Korça, a little before the occupation, his first meeting was with Fazlli Frashëri, the fascist Petraq Katro, the American agent Stavri Skëndi and the pseudo-communist Koço Tashko. The Group of Korça rejected Koço's proposal for collaboration with Zai Fundo, who had come to Albania to sabotage the founding of the Communist Party of Albania and the war against the enemy. But he was quite unable to do

this. Later he joined up with the British and Gani Kryeziu(1)and received the sentence he deserved.

This, then, was Fazlli Frashëri, the representative of the mercantile bourgeoisie and the arrogant part of the intelligentsia of Korça who, already utterly corrupt, become even more corrupt and placed themselves completely in the service of the new patrons, the fascist occupiers.

I consulted with the comrades, who knew who Fazlli was just as well as I did, and we decided that I should meet him. The following day I summoned our comrade and instructed him:

«Go to Fazlli and tell him: 'The Professor will meet you in a house at such and such an hour.' Go and get him, take him by a round-about route through the alleys to Gabrani's house.»

All the members of the household of our unforgettable comrade, Sabaudin Gabrani, were friends of mine and their home, one of our wartime bases. Gabrani's father was from Libohova, a very fine man and a friend of my father's. His sons and daughters were all with us, very active fighters of the youth. All of them, without hesitation, hurled themselves into the fire of the liberation war. Sabaudin fell a martyr, while his sisters emerged from the war sound and well and are communists and outstanding party workers today. Gabrani's mother, too, was a very fine person, sweet-spoken, wise, quiet and brave. She welcomed and farewelled us without any fear. These two elderly people were some of those thousands and

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1 Secret agent of the British.

thousands of patriots who not only gave their children to the Party and the National Liberation War, but also placed themselves in its service. Nevertheless they would say to us: «What are we doing? Nothing. We only hope that you come out of it alive.» They were simple folk and did not appreciate what great assistance they gave the liberation war. They were the people without whom we could not have fought, without whom we, the armed fighters, would have been left «like fish out of water».

I said goodbye to the comrade whom I sent to find Fazlli and went to my friends' home. There I found Sabaudin's father who welcomed me warmly, as always.

«In a little while a man will come here to meet me,» I told him, «they call him Fazlli Frashëri. Will you allow me to do this?»

«Our home is yours,» said the wise old man. He went on: «I have heard the name of Fazlli Bey, but watch out for the beys, don't forget the bey from our part, Myfit Libohova. You must never trust them.»

«Don't worry,» I told him, «because we know this fellow and all his ilk very well. They are just as you said, but we have our eyes open and brains in our head.»

«When he comes,» said the old man, «I shall bring you a coffee and you will excuse me if I interrupt the conversation.»

I thanked him and at the appointed hour I was awaiting Fazlli Bey. I heard the gate creak as it opened and saw our comrade enter the yard together with Fazlli. I met him on the porch; I shook hands



with him, we exchanged greetings and went into the room.

As soon as he sat down, Fazlli stroked his face and after asking about my health began the conversation.

«Bad times have come upon us, Professor. The foreigner has occupied our Homeland,» and he shook his head gloomily.

«This is the doing of Zog and his friends,» I told him. «They fleeced the people thoroughly and in the end sold the country to Italy. I believe you remember the meeting in the townhall of Korça, Fazlli Bey? It was your friend, the prefect Vasjari, who precisely when we were demanding arms threatened us and cordoned off the Kapshtica road through which Zog was going to abscond with the people's gold. Is that not so?»

«I remember, Professor,» admitted Fazlli, «but you know that I am a democrat and I want the country to be free.»

«Then, sir, what do you intend to do to liberate the country?» I asked. «We are greatly interested in this and if we find a common language we shall forget the past. It is the present we are concerned about, because we have the enemy in our Homeland, therefore, first of all, we must get rid of him, then sort out what disagreements we have between ourselves. Because we have disagreements, Mr. Fazlli, is that not so?»

«That is so, Professor, but I, too, am of the opinion that it is precisely the existing situation on which we should concentrate and exchange ideas.»

«Go, ahead, Mr. Fazlli, I am listening,» I said, while I thought to myself, «Who knows what he will bring up now.» And so he began to outline to me his own ideas about the external situation. He emphasized the strength and savagery of the Italian fascists, spoke about the rise of Hitler and the attack on the Soviet Union, sang the praises of the great strength of Britain and America and did not fail to mention also «the strength of the Soviets who are fighting,» as he put it.

After bombarding me like this for a good half hour and satisfied with the analysis he made of the situation, he finally got round to the purpose of his mission:

«In view of all these things,» continued Fazlli, «we consider that we are in a grave situation, that we are a small country and at the mercy of great powers which, if you dare to raise your voice, will crush you.»

Unable to contain myself I butted in: «That means, Mr. Fazlli, we small countries should just suffer in silence?!»

«No,» the bey hastened to say, «obviously we have to fight, because nothing can be won without fighting, and up to this point I agree with you. But since we are a small people it is very important for us to pursue a wise policy. Policy, Professor,» Fazlli raised his voice in the tone of a teacher, stroking his face as usual, «now has great importance for us. We must begin with a wise policy towards Italy, must outwit them, must put them to sleep and gradually raise our voice in such a way that 'the meat is roasted

without burning the spit', as the outstanding patriot, Mithat Bey, says.»

«Are you speaking on behalf of Mithat Bey?» I asked him.

«Yes,» he said, «on behalf of him and many others.»

«Go ahead then, continue!» I said.

«Very well, excuse me, but I am going to speak frankly: you are communists, we are not; you formed a party, we have not formed one and are against forming any party; you are doing a great deal of propaganda among the people to arouse them to fight immediately, we have another tactic; you are also taking steps towards the seizure of power, we have a different idea about the future. We do not like all these things that you are doing, but that is your affair. It seems to us, however, and please understand me correctly, Mr. Hoxha, that you are tackling the Italians head on, biting off more than you can chew. You are killing some of them, but they are killing and imprisoning thousands. We are concerned about the youth, the flower of our country, Mr. Hoxha. Have you considered what great harm will be done to the future of Albania if the enemy destroys them? This is what worries us, Mr. Hoxha.»

«Then, in your opinion, Mr. Fazlli, what ought we to do?» I asked him, inwardly simmering with uncontrollable anger.

«Look here, Professor, we think that for the time being you should not act; let us organize a number of meetings in order to study a joint policy which we should pursue towards the Italians, because we,

too, are many, Mr. Hoxha, and you will excuse my saying so, but we are older and the people know us better. Thus our two sides will reach accord and the people will agree to this, too, because we shall save them from death and destruction.»

«Is your brother Qazka still engaged in trade with the Italians?» I asked him.

«What has Qazim's trade to do with this question?» retorted Fazlli Bey, feigning surprise, because I had touched him on a tender spot.

«I asked this question, Mr. Fazlli,» I said smiling at him, «because I want to sum up the political opinion you presented to me. For you, to conduct a wise and cautious policy means we should engage in trade with fascist Italy, because for you the word 'policy' could be translated as 'Qazka's trade'.»

«Qazim is engaged in trade and not in politics,» replied Fazlli, «these are two separate things, Professor».

«They are not as separate as you say,» I told him, «but if you have finished I can tell you the opinion of our Party.»

«Please do,» said Fazlli, «I have finished.»

«We, the communists, have been sure all along that the formation of our Communist Party was a bullet in the heart of the Italian invaders and their friends who are very well aware of the great value which the existence of a leading force, and especially the Communist Party, has for a people who are going to fight. But now you have confirmed from your own mouth that you, who call yourselves nationalists, too, were displeased that we communists formed our Party and are fighting to apply its program for the liber-

ation of the Homeland. You told me this yourself, but you produced no argument to show me what mistake we communists made in forming the Party.»

«We think, Professor, that this is not the time to form parties. You have formed the Communist Party, we could form our party, others might form a third party, and so on. What do these bring apart from division of the people? Is this not to the detriment of the war, and in favour of those who want to harm Albania?»

«No,» I replied to Fazlli Bey, «if this were so the fascists and their friends would not be so upset about it. We set up the Party precisely in order to unite the people and not to divide them, and this will certainly be achieved, because our program is what the people want. Moreover, Mr. Fazlli,» I continued, «you condemn us communists because we have formed a party, but you said nothing about whether you are against the 'Albanian' Fascist Party which your friends set up.»

Fazlli scratched his face and said:

«We are opposed to it, too.»

«You are opposed to it only in words,» I told him, «because all your friends hurried to enlist in it.»

«They have to eat, Mr. Hoxha, because otherwise they can't keep their jobs.»

«But the people and we, the sons of the people, don't we want to eat? And we do eat, but we eat the crusts of the people and not the rolls of the fascist Giro(1) and his friends. You yourself said that you na-

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1 Giovanni Giro — Italian fascist hierarch, expert in Albanian affairs in the plans of the Italian fascist government for the invasion of Albania.

tionalists do not want to form a party. Why not? Let me tell you: you are unable to do so, because however much influence you may pretend to have the people do not trust you and do not follow you. Apart from this, you, and I am not speaking just of you personally, do not want to fall out with the occupier. He does not allow you to form your party, therefore, he shows you the way, join the fascist party.

«The other main reason that you do not want to have a party is that you neither want nor intend to fight against the occupier. You issue the reactionary slogans: 'You can't form a herd of rabbits', 'Two Albanians never get together', and so on, while we have complete confidence in the unity of the people who have always risen in struggle against foreign invaders. The feudal lords, the beys, the merchants and the spies have always divided the people, and now they are trying to play the same game, but now the Albanian people have their own trustworthy leader, the Communist Party. You do not want the people to have this leadership so that they will not rise in insurrection and will not know which way to go. Without the Communist Party there is no struggle and without struggle there is no Communist Party. Mr. Fazlli,» I continued, «our Communist Party is at war to the death with the fascist Italy and its collaborators. For the Italian fascists we have only rifles and bombs, there is no diplomacy and compromise with them. Time after time, we have called on you and your friends to join forces with us in the fight against fascism, but you want to play 'politics' with them. Hence, we are not in agreement, we are divided on the main thing,

on the basic issue. Now we consider it necessary to warn you:

«The first course: you should unite with us in the war against the occupiers and traitors, and when I say unite, I mean not with deception and trickery, as you have done up till now, but in fact. You must take this seriously, and don't think for one moment that you will be able to deceive us. This is the course of honour, the only patriotic course which our forefathers have taught us.

«The second course is to sit idle, to remain neutral, neither with us nor with the Italians. This is not an honourable course, not in the least patriotic, and it is hard to maintain such a stand in these times when the whole world is ablaze and our people are fighting. Only cowards take this stand.

«The third course is that of betrayal, of secret or open collaboration with the occupiers against the people who are fighting. The traitors can put on any kind of mask, but we shall tear it from them. Treachery will be mercilessly crushed by the strength of the people.

«The Communist Party of Albania has chosen the first course and it could not do otherwise. You proposed a course to us: 'Play politics with the Italians!' We reject this proposal and propose to you our course which is the only course for true patriots.»

«You are stubborn and don't know how to conduct politics,» said Fazlli.

«That is just what Mithat Bey also told us at the time when the country was invaded and I was still legal and had a shop where I sold cigarettes.»

«Mithat Bey wanted to come, personally, to meet you and he'll be sad when I report to him about our conversation,» Fazlli told me.

«It would have been difficult for Mithat Bey to come and meet me and he had no reason to do so, because it was he, and not I who broke off our connections. Nevertheless, he has sent you, and I received you, I listened to you and you heard my reply and no doubt you will transmit what was said here to Mr. Mithat. Nevertheless,» I continued, «I want to stress, and I speak on behalf of the Communist Party, that we will be with all those who follow the course of the war. The war will unite us even with Lumo Skëndo and his associates, provided they join in the fight against the Italians and the quislings. I want to tell you also, Mr. Fazlli, something in connection with your claim that the people are with you, that 'the people know you and that no one knows or listens to us'. First, that is your opinion, but not ours. Second, and this is the main thing, be sure that your opinion is wrong. Indeed you sought this meeting, because you can see that the people are and will be completely with us, with the Communist Party of Albania. You will be left with the degenerate beys, the aghas, the blood-sucking merchants, the spies and the quislings. That is all that will remain of your 'army' if you stick to your present course. Don't take this as a threat. Take it as the last assistance we are offering you. Consider your situation well: we do not need you, but you need us, because the people, justice and power are with us.

«You say, Mr. Fazlli, that the youth will be killed



and the country devastated. Every liberation war will have its sacrifices, heroes and martyrs. The country may be devastated, but the people and the youth will not be wiped out, although the fascists will be. After the war, the people and the youth will be steel, will strike the sparks from the flints. The Party and the war will temper them and teach them not to be deceived by individuals with a hundred flags in their pockets. The people themselves will take power into their own hands and what Naim said about Albania will occur: 'Happy the man who lives to see Albania a lady!'

«This is our reply, Mr. Fazlli. I beg your pardon if this conversation has been somewhat heated, but it was frank. We say to you: Think over our proposals and we hope to see you again in the fight against the occupiers.»

I stood up to imply that for my part the conversation was over. Fazlli Frashëri stood up, too, we parted and I never saw him again.

As soon as Fazlli left, our host entered the room and, seeing me tired, put his hand on my shoulder, pointing to the coffee cups on the table and said:

«This coffee that you drank with the bey doesn't count. Let us drink another together, to make you feel better.»

«Yes, let's drink a coffee together,» I replied to that good old man. And we sat and talked together for a while. When the time came for me to leave I had forgotten both the bey politician and all his filthy ilk.

This meeting with the representatives of the Communist Party sought by the pseudo-patriotic elements

was neither the first nor the last in that period. As I said, the café politicians who were playing the game of fascism had begun to be frightened by our growing strength among the people and were to make all kinds of efforts to divert us from the course on which we had set out. In this surprising «zeal» of theirs to «reach agreement» with the communists, we ourselves saw another indication of the growth of the role and authority of our Party. Nevertheless, prudent and persistent in pursuing the line which we had decided, we would receive them, would always give them the answer they deserved.

Meanwhile we pressed on vigorously with the work for the extension and strengthening of links with the broad masses of town and countryside, with intellectuals and patriots of all ages, and the truth is that this main and most important «sector of work» was also the most successful for us.

Amongst the scores of people with whom I was linked during that time, the figure of an old patriotic teacher, in whom the fire of patriotism and hatred for feudal lords, traitors and the occupier was unquenched and never would be quenched, remains unforgettable and dear to me personally. I had seen him and learned something about his life at the time when I was a teacher in the secondary school in Tirana.

I was sitting drinking a coffee with a colleague of mine, another teacher at the secondary school, in a small café near the Old Bazaar when a slightly built, rather elderly man, dressed in an old blue suit and with a faded felt hat passed by. He greeted my colleague who rose from his chair and returned the

greeting with great respect; instinctly I stood up, too. When the man was out of earshot I asked my colleague.

«Who was that man you spoke to?»

«Don't you know him?» said my colleague. «He is Xhafë Zelka, a patriotic teacher of the Albanian school here in Tirana. They call him 'Xhafë the rebel', because he was a 'scribe' and fighter with Haxhi Qamili.»(1)

My curiosity about Xhafë Zelka, or «Xhafë the rebel», as they called him, was immediately aroused and I said to my colleague:

«That is interesting. Tell me what you know about him, and if possible I would like you to introduce me to him one day.»

My colleague knew something about Xhafë's simple life full of militant strivings. He told me that Xhafë was anti-feudal, had fought against the forces of Toptani and against Vërlaci,(2)and later, as the democrat he was, had supported the government of Fan Noli. When Zog came to power, they made a thousand difficulties for Xhafë, dismissed him from his job, re-appointed him and dismissed him again, until they abandoned him to his fate.

«You ought to hear him tell about the vicissitudes of Babë Qamil,» my friend said, «but I'll tell you one story myself just as Xhafë told it to me:

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1 Leader of the Peasant Uprising of Central Albania (1914-1915), which had a democratic, anti-feudal and anti-imperialist character.

2 One of the biggest feudal lords of the country, agent of Italian fascism, prime minister of the first quisling government in Albania (1939-1941).

«Babë Qamil and his soldiers emerged on the shore at Shëngjin. There he raised the long telescope he carried and began to examine the sea. On the horizon he saw quite a big vessel approaching. It was one of those big merchant ships that sailed to the Adriatic ports.

«Xhafë,' called Babë Qamil. 'Come here, Xhafë, bring out your paper and ink and write to that son-of-a-bitch steering that ship to keep clear of the shores of Albania because if he approaches I'll open fire on him with artillery and make such a hash of him that even the fish won't eat him.'

«Xhafë had stared at Babë Qamil, but with a stern look he had made him drop his gaze and write what he was told. Then, Babë Qamil ordered three soldiers to take a small rowing boat which was lying there and deliver the letter to the captain. 'If they take you prisoner', Babë Qamil said to them, 'try to kill one or two of them and say your last prayers, because my shells will smash both the enemy and you, my friends. What else can I do, this people must be defended and you will go to paradise.' However, they did not go to paradise because they came back safe and sound to the shore while the ship turned round and sailed away.

«That is what Xhafë told me, but he must know many such stories,» my colleague concluded his tale.

«Do you know any others?» I asked my colleague when he had finished, because I was very interested in the question of rebellions, especially the uprising of the peasants of Central Albania.

«If you want to know more, you had better ask

Xhafë yourself,» he said. «I shall introduce you to him one day, but don't imagine that he will start to tell you these things as soon as you meet. First you have to win his confidence, otherwise he will shut his mouth.»

Time went by. My colleague did not manage to introduce me to Xhafë Zelka, but whenever I saw him on Dibra Street I greeted him respectfully, speaking loudly enough to make sure he noticed me.

He looked at me with surprise, returned my greeting and continued on his way. Despite my great desire to become better acquainted with Xhafë I was unable to do so because I was transferred to Korça. Only after the occupation, when I began work in the «Flora» shop, was I able to get to know him and talk with him. During this period, I was continually striving to learn as much as possible about the peasant uprising of Central Albania led by Haxhi Qamili. Our erudite comrade, Selim Shpuza, told me in detail about the phases of that epoch, which the beys, the feudal lords and the emerging bourgeoisie called «the epoch of rebels

Since Liberation I have recorded my ideas about that important period of the peasant uprising in an article (1), in which, in the light of the Marxist-Leninist philosophy, I have tried to explain the objective reasons which caused it and to refute as baseless and anti-scientific both the distorted views and denigrating theories spread about the «rebellion» by the supporters of Toptani, Zog and the bourgeois usurers, who

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1 Enver Hoxha, Works, vol. 23, pp. 128-175, Alb. ed.

took over from the feudal lords, that is, climbed on the backs of the poor peasantry, and the incorrect opinions of certain progressive elements of the time who did not understand the class essence and complexity of that movement.

But here I am talking about Xhafë Zelka.

One day, from the window I saw Xhafë entering the «Flora» shop. I stood up and said to him:

«What can I do for you, Mr. Xhafë?»

«How do you know my name, my boy?» he asked me.

«The teachers know your name and have respect for old patriotic teachers like you.»

«Why, are you a teacher or a tobacconist?» asked Xhafë, who was unable to hide the pleasure he felt when he heard that he was respected and described as a patriotic teacher.

«I was a teacher, but the occupiers dismissed me from my job and now I sell cigarettes,» I replied.

He looked me in the eye and said:

«Could you let me have a carton of cigarettes?»

«Two, if you like,» I said.

«I haven't enough money for two but only for one.»

«Excuse me, Mr. Xhafë,» I said, «but we supply our friends on credit. Bring me the money when you have it. Do you have a shop?» I asked him.

«No, my son, but I peddle them, because I want to raise my children.»

I put three cartons of cigarettes in front of him, telling him to take them and bring me the money when he had sold the cigarettes.

He looked at me again and said:

«Should I accept this favour you are doing me?»

«When the pupil does this for the teacher this seems so little that I will not allow you to thank me.»

Xhafë Zelka touched his hat, took the cartons, said, «See you again my boy,» and went out.

Now my interest was not only to learn from Xhafë Zelka about the peasant uprising led by Haxhi Qamili, but also to link him with the war which we had begun. An honoured teacher and patriot like Xhafë would do a great deal of work in the circles that he knew. His words, inspired by our war, would have their effect, especially among the youth, when they saw that this war had revitalized the energies even of the elderly. The words and example of such people as Xhafë Zelka, with that wealth of experience of life and struggle which they had, would certainly serve also to expose those «patriots» who wanted to live with the aura of their «glorious» past, when their activity did not amount to even a tenth of that of Xhafë Zelka. Of course, I could not speak openly to him on the first day. I would keep close to him, would welcome him as he deserved and later our acquaintance would take its natural course.

A few days later he came and brought me the money. I brought out three more cartons.

«Are you going to do the same thing again, sir?» asked Xhafë.

«No,» I said, «it's not the same thing. This time you have paid, there's your money on the counter.»

«What's your name, my boy?» Xhafë asked me, looking at me attentively with his lively eyes.

«They call me Enver Hoxha,» I said, «and I am from Gjirokastra. Allow me to introduce my father.»

My father was sitting quietly in a chair, listening. Xhafë turned to him and greeted him. My father, who was a simple man, rose to his feet and bowed.

«A long life to your son,» said Xhafë.

«If God wills,» said my father, and being curious asked him: «Where are you from, sir, have you a family?»

Xhafë replied that he had daughters and sons, picked up the cartons, thanked us, said good bye and left.

When he went out the door, my father asked me:

«Who was that man? Does he have a shop?»

«What sort of shop could he have, he's stony broke,» I said. «That old man was together with Haxhi Qamili when they set fire to the palaces of Esat Top-tani.»

«You don't say!» said my father. «So we are even, he set fire to the palace of Esat Pasha, while Avni Rustemi finished off the villainous Pasha» and he fell silent for a moment, wrapped in thought.

«But where does this old man find the money to buy three cartons?»

«I give them to him on credit.»

«Say no more,» said my father, «I understand.»

When Xhafë came next time, not for cartons of cigarettes but simply because he was passing that way, I did not let him go immediately, but invited him to drink a coffee. Xhafë did not refuse.

«Tell me, Mr. Enver,» said Xhafë, «is it simply because I have been a teacher and you yourself have



been a teacher that you respect and honour me in this way?»

«Both for that, Mr. Xhafë, but more especially for the love which you have for the Homeland and the struggle you have waged for the good of the poor people. You have been deeply hurt by the occupation which Italy has imposed on us, and without doubt you have thought that the people will not endure this, but will rise and get rid of it. The insurgent spirit of the Albanians has never ceased to exist. Of course, the times have changed, the enemy is more ferocious, better armed, but are we going to be intimidated by this? I say no, Mr. Xhafë, and I would like to know what you, as a fighter of Haxhi Qamili's uprising, think?»

That wise and honest man, the patriot Xhafë Zelka, thought for a moment and said:

«Xhafë Zelka is no longer young, Mr. Enver, because were he young he would not be idling around like this.»

«The war for the Homeland takes no account of age, Mr. Xhafë. Everybody can contribute,» and I looked him in the eye, emphasizing the words, «and ought to contribute to the freedom of the Homeland. Therefore, I was sorry to hear you say that you are old. Xhafë Zelka does not age easily and he will find the remedy with which to combat the aging of his body, but not of his spirit.»

Xhafë drank his coffee in silence, looking at me as though trying to make me out. It seemed to me I had said enough for that day. The rebellious spirit

of Xhafë Zelka was such that it needed only a stimulus to burst out.

«Your words have given me something to think about,» said Xhafë and, lowering his head, added in a voice which made me tremble from emotion: «See you again, son!»

I could hardly return his greeting and I watched him for a long time as he walked slowly away.

Xhafë Zelka was an outstanding patriot and democrat. It seemed to him that I was «burdening myself» with the «assistance» I gave him. The honest old man, Xhafë Zelka, thought that I was making some sacrifice.

One day he came to the shop and I asked him:

«How many cartons do you want today?»

«None, Mr. Enver,» he replied.

«Why so, Mr. Xhafë,» I asked, «don't spare me.»

«No, my boy,» he said, «but I am tired. Now just give me a coffee.»

I called to Mali, our friend from Tirana who warned us when spies came into the small café he ran to eavesdrop on us, to make us a coffee. Mali was an elderly man, dressed in the traditional Tirana way, and when he brought the coffee, Xhafë, who certainly knew him, said:

«Take good care of the boys for me, Malo.»

«Don't you worry about that, Babë Xhafë,» replied Mali.

While he drank his coffee, Xhafë Zelka shook his head, saying:

«Now I know what's going on in that mind of yours.»

I replied with a laugh:

«Why, do you think I don't know what's going on in yours?»

We both laughed.

«Listen, son,» said Xhafë Zelka. I simply cannot help you now as much as I ought to do, my legs are done for, but I don't stop talking and I shall never stop talking against these fascist dogs.»

«Mr. Xhafë,» I said, «the tongue is not steel, yet it cuts. You have been and still are a fighter for the common people and we are following your course to save the Homeland.»

«You know better than we how to fight and good luck to you! Come closer and listen to me,» said Xhafë and spoke in a low voice. «I can't become a communist, but I want you to teach my children so that they link up with the Party.»

«There is no doubt about that,» I said. «Like all the children of the people, they will follow the road and teachings of their father. The war will teach them and the Party will always keep close to them and educate them to become valuable people.»

And, in fact, one of his sons became a resolute Party member and an excellent journalist, while one of his daughters, as Nexhmije [Xhuglini — Hoxha] who had her as a class-mate in the Girls Institute in Tirana of that time has told me, was an active teacher, both during the years of the war and later. As I have heard, Xhafë Zëlka's three other children, too, are simple people and honoured workers, just as their father, the patriot Xhafë Zelka had wanted them to be. All his life he fought for the poor people, for pro-

gress and freedom, and he lived for many years after the Liberation of the Homeland happy and contented in his old age.

All over Albania there were many such patriots who, although of advanced age, put all their strength in the service of the Homeland and the Party and, along with their fighter sons and daughters, became fiery agitators and propagandists for the freedom and independence of the country. Thus, regardless of the manoeuvres and attempts of the pseudo-patriots, we carried on energetically with the work for the unification and organization of the masses to raise this unity to a higher level and place it on sounder foundations.

In a meeting which we organized in June 1942, at which Ramadan Çitaku, Nako Spiru, Koço Tashko, Mustafa Gjinishi and, possibly, one or two others that I don't remember, were present, while we were talking about our contacts with the nationalist elements, I said to the comrades:

«The work is extending and the war is building up, but don't you think that the time has come for all this to be organized and centralized?»

«It is organized!» objected Koço.

«So it is,» I replied, «in a certain sense. The work which we, as a party, are doing with the masses and the nationalists is organized and centralized because the Provisional Central Committee is leading it. But in this direction there is still work to be done because there are comrades who do not keep the leadership informed about their connections, movements and various contacts,» and I glanced at Mustafa, but he said

nothing. «What I am getting at,» I went on, «is that the broad masses of the people, the patriots, must be organized, must have a unified political and military leadership, so that the National Liberation or Popular Front, what it will be called is not very important, which we are creating in fact, should be embodied concretely in certain organizational forms of its own and have its competent organs which will guide the work for the mobilization of the people in the war.»

Koço Tashko spoke again: «The Party leads the war and the masses!» he pontificated.

«That is one of our fundamental principles,» I replied quietly, «the Party will lead the Front and likewise the youth. But we must bear in mind that not only the communists and the sympathizers of the Party are taking part in the war. Both in principle and tactically we need to organize the masses in a militant organization with a program which will unite all those who want to fight.»

Baca (1) and Nako supported me, saying: «Taras (2) is right.» And even Mustafa expressed himself in favour of my idea. For him this offered possibilities of working for his own aims and avoiding the control of the Party.

«We should meet and decide about this as quickly as possible,» proposed Gjinishi. «We should create a leading staff and announce it through a Proclamation.»

«No,» I objected, «we mustn't be hasty in this

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1 Ramadan Çitaku's pseudonym.

2 One of Comrade Enver Hoxha's pseudonyms during the National Liberation War.

matter. We have no need for leading staffs on paper, no one will take any notice of them. My idea is that we should organize a meeting with representatives of our Party, as the only Party in the country, and various patriots and there we should decide how and when it should be done.»

«I can speak for northern and central Albania here!» boasted Mustafa. «Myslim Peza will not go against me, nor will...»

«Listen, Mustafa,» I said to put Gjinishi, exalted by his «own influence», in his place, «Myslim does not go against the Party, because he is linked with the Party and not with you or any other individual. In any case this was only an idea which we should discuss and the Central Committee will decide on it.»

In fact this idea had been hammering away in my brain for some time and in one way or the other I had already presented it to some comrades. I was convinced, and time confirmed this, that it was up to our Communist Party, after the work which it had done for about six to seven months, to take the initiative to embody the union of the Albanian people politically and organizationally in concrete forms. I talked it over with other comrades whom I met during those days and we decided that we should discuss it more extensively in a regular meeting of the Central Committee, define the measures which had to be taken about the content of the meeting and decide where and when it would be held.

Immediately after this, we issued the instruction that the contacts and work which the comrades would carry out with nationalists and other elements were

to be directed towards the idea which the leadership of the Party was developing in concrete forms for the organization of the meeting at which the political foundations of the unity of the Albanian people in the war against fascism would be laid. Special instructions were issued to the comrades in the districts to collect, study and send us information about those elements whom it was thought might take part in such a meeting.

Many of these elements we did not trust, nevertheless we tried with them, because the aim was to organize a broad meeting at which all the strata and political forces which expressed their readiness to fight, would be represented. It was important that the organs which would emerge should have the broadest possible representative basis and the decisions operative force. Like all the comrades I, too, was engaged directly in the accomplishment of the new and important task which we undertook and, to this end, I went to Peza to meet Babë\* Myslim.

As on all other occasions, Myslim expressed his agreement and readiness to take part in the meeting which the Communist Party proposed. Moreover, through his contacts and acquaintances, through the influence he had among various nationalist elements, he helped us to further extend our contacts. I asked Myslim for and he gave me recommendations for a number of people whom we could invite to the meeting and he expressed his readiness to talk with them himself, if

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\* Dad — term of respect and affection

we charged him with this task when the matter was finally decided. Among the first whom he mentioned were Haxhi Lleshi and Mustafa Xhani, who had long since expressed their agreement with the program of the Party, therefore, I asked Myslim to put us in contact with them, and if possible, to bring them to Peza for a preliminary meeting with them.

Not long after this conversation, Myslim sent me word that Haxhi Lleshi had arrived in Peza. The next day or the day after, I set out for Peza and arrived at Myslim's house where Haxhi had stayed during those days.

I embraced Haxhi and Mustafa Kaçaçi who had accompanied Haxhi to Peza. Haxhi was still young but looked older than his years on account of the difficult life he had lived. He was a short, sturdy-looking chap wearing a leather jacket. I liked his quiet and mature way of talking.

I told him that Myslim and the other comrades had spoken to me about his activity in favour of the people, both against the regime of Zog and against the Italian occupiers. I spoke more extensively about the program of the Party, about the organization of the war until we would achieve the general uprising of the whole Albanian people, about the efforts we had made up till that time, about the successes and shortcomings of our work, told him where we had had results and where we had not, stressed that the Party wanted to further strengthen its work, especially in the North, and that it would base this aim on the people of the North and the honest patriots of those districts. Then, I went on to tell him and asked his



opinion about the idea of organizing a broad meeting of representatives of the Albanian people.

Haxhi listened to me attentively, from time to time answering some questions I asked him. As I had expected, in his reply he once again expressed himself in favour of the program of the Party for the war and approved the idea of a conference for the unification of the Albanian people in this war.

In response to my request, he also gave me an outline of the situation in Dibra, spoke about the various influences there, and stressed that despite the disruptive activity of the gentry, the bayraktars, the people of Dibra would soon begin an organized armed struggle. The judgements and precise information which Haxhi Lleshi gave me were of great assistance to our work. Amongst other things I asked Haxhi to recommend to us some of the nationalist elements whom he knew, in order to put us in contact with them so that we could try to involve them, too, in the war.

Haxhi Lleshi mentioned a number of names and spoke particularly about Mustafa Xhani.

«We know Baba Faja,» I told him, «our comrades have talked with him. I am happy that you have the same opinion of him.»

«What about Bazi i Canës, [Abaz Kupa], Haxhi?» asked Babë Myslim, who up till that time had sat quietly, listening to our conversation.

«True, we know that he is one of Zog's former officers, and with Zogite sentiments,» I told Haxhi, «but it is said that he is one of those who want to fight.»

After a moment's reflection Haxhi replied: «I

came through Kruja on my way to Peza. I met Bazi, because I have a certain friendship with him; when the Italians invaded us he stayed for some weeks in my home, together with his family and several friends of his. I spoke to him and he expressed his opposition to the occupation of the country, cursed Mërlika(1) and Jacomoni, but when I asked him his opinion about an organized war, he replied: 'It's too soon, Haxhi, the Italians have the nut and the nut-cracker in their hands. They will smash us.' To put it briefly,» said Haxhi, «it seems to me that Bazi would not want to take part in it.»

I stayed a long time talking with Haxhi and Myslim and after we spent a night in Cikallesh, in the home of the patriotic peasants Arif Xhafa and Qerim Shima, friends of Myslim, I set out the following morning to return to Tirana.

That same day Haxhi and Kaçaçi left for Martanesh where they were to meet Baba Faja at our request, to put to him the idea of the Communist Party about the organization of the meeting. After listening attentively to Haxhi, Baba Faja slowly lifted his sheepskin rug, showed him his rifle and said:

«You are not the only ones to take up arms to fight the foreigners who have invaded the country. I, too, cannot tolerate the bondage which Zog brought us by selling our country to Italy. I personally and the whole of Martanesh are with you.»

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1 Mustafa Mërlika (Kruja), inveterate agent of Italian fascism, prime minister of the quisling government (December 1941-January 1943).

The case of this patriotic clergyman, Baba Faja, was not the only one. Later there were other clergymen who joined the National Liberation War heart and soul and fought in it. The activities of Mustafa Xhani had great propaganda importance among the people, because he showed the people that their religious convictions are one thing, while being Albanian patriots is another thing. «Regardless of whether you are a Moslem, Orthodox or Catholic, your first duty is the war for the freedom of Albania,» this is what Baba Faja told all Albanians through his personal fight. And this was completely in conformity with the line of our Communist Party for the unity of the whole Albanian people in the war for freedom.

While the comrades all over the country continued the work on the basis of the orientations and instructions which we had sent them, studying everything thoroughly with communist coolheadedness, the leadership of the Party decided that it should hold a special meeting to analyze the results achieved and define the tasks and concrete measures for the organization of the National Conference of representatives of the Albanian people. This was done in the first days of July 1942, at that meeting of the Provisional Central Committee of the CPA at which a series of important decisions were taken for the liquidation of the hostile factional work of Anastas Lulo and Sadik Premte. (1) At this meeting, we put forward the idea and thrashed out opinions about the organization of

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1 For more extensive information see Enver Hoxha, *When the Party Was Born (Memoirs)*, p. 317, 3rd Alb. ed.

the National Conference which would officially decide on the unification of the Albanian people in a militant organization which would be the National Liberation Front. To this end, I presented to the comrades at the meeting a summary comprising a number of points outlining the political platform with which the Communist Party of Albania would go to the Conference as its initiator, about the necessity of having a carefully considered and extremely precise program, as well as about the measures which we would have to take to ensure that the Conference was conducted normally.

«There are two things that we have to bear in mind,» I pointed out to the comrades. «First, we are going to present the platform, our program, to the Conference, but in fact we are presenting it to the people, and they will approve it; two or three individuals won't like this but that doesn't matter. Second,» I continued, «to those who may raise the question of the future regime in Albania we shall say that the people themselves will decide this after Liberation, through regular democratic elections. Besides this,» I stressed, «we must go to the Conference as a Party and not as individuals, with a delegation which we shall appoint jointly while the others will be nationalists who are already fighting, or whom we think we can persuade to fight in the future. Representatives of the Communist Youth and the Anti-fascist Women will also go to the conference.»

After I had spoken all the comrades took part in the discussion and the general outline of the platform of the Conference was adopted. It was decided that

one main report, which I was charged with drafting, as well as two subsidiary reports, one about the youth, the other about the women, would be delivered at the Conference. In regard to participation in the Conference, we agreed in principle on the criteria and appointed a group of comrades to prepare the list of those to be invited.

The place at which the Conference would be held was also discussed in that meeting. I had considered this matter in advance and jointly with some other comrades we had arrived at the opinion that we should hold the Conference in Peza e Madhe. I put this proposal to the meeting of the Central Committee, backing it up with a number of arguments.

«The holding of such a meeting in Peza, so close to Tirana,» I pointed out, «will be a strong challenge to the occupiers and Merlika. By holding this event in Peza we will say to them: 'See, right under your noses, we organized the Conference of the whole people to discuss the armed uprising.' In this way, we'll demonstrate to the invading enemy and the traitors the political, organizational and military strength of the Communist Party of Albania. This will terrify and infuriate the enemy, while it will give the people courage and confidence.»

That was the political aspect of the question. In regard to the other aspect: ensuring the safety of the participants and the holding of the Conference without incident, in this direction, too, Peza fulfilled all the conditions. Peza was the birthplace and battlefield of Babë Myslim. There, in Peza e Madhe the partisan fighting forces made up of communists and peasant

patriots, like the whole district of Peza which had joined in the armed struggle against the occupiers, would guarantee the peaceful conditions needed to conduct the meeting and take the historic decisions.

The comrades agreed and it was decided that the meeting should be held in Peza e Madhe, while the question of the time, if I am not mistaken, was set for the middle of August.

Immediately after this we set to work preparing for the organization of the Conference. We were aware that the Conference for which we were working would be a major event of historic importance, a concretization of the Marxist-Leninist line of the Communist Party of Albania. The repercussions of it would be incalculable.

At the July meeting we had decided to seek the agreement of patriots and «nationalists» to participate in the Conference and would present to them a general outline of its purpose, in order to enable them to prepare themselves to speak, but for security reasons we would tell them neither the day nor the place. The meeting had to be a broad one, not in the numerical sense, however, because for reasons of secrecy a meeting with 50 or a hundred people would not be suitable, but in the sense of its breadth of representation. It was important that the participants should be men with weight and influence among the people, patriots who represented the country from the North to the South. The names of a number of outstanding patriots, like Myslim Peza, Haxhi Lleshi and Mustafa Xhani, had long been on the list, and beside their names there was no question mark about their stand

towards the National Liberation War and the Communist Party. About the others we held continual discussions.

«Abaz Kupa must be invited without fail», Mustafa Gjinishi said to me one day.

«Why without fail?» I asked him, mostly to cool his ardour, because in fact we had decided to invite Bazi.

«He is a great patriot», said Mustafa in a less imperious tone. «He fought in Durrës on April 7.»

«That he was in Durrës I know,» I replied. «He may even have fought. But whether he fought for Albania or for Zog, this I do not know. I know, also,» I told him, «that since he returned, not only is Bazi doing no fighting but surprisingly, the Italians are not harassing him. Do you know anything about this?»

«He has influence in Kruja and Merlika is afraid of him,» replied Mustafa.

«Time will tell,» I said and bent my head over the material I had in front of me, implying that I was busy.

Mustafa turned to leave, but when he reached the door I said:

«Listen, Mustafa, what do you think, if we invite Abaz Kupa, will he come to the Conference?»

Gjinishi brightened up immediately and approached the table where I was working.

«Leave this in my hands, Comrade Taras!»

«Very well,» I said, «you have a talk with Bazi, as though coming from you, without telling him anything concrete, and take care,» I instructed him, «that Bazi does not think we are begging him to come. If he wants to come well and good, if he does not want to, let him go his own way.»

«I assure you he will come!» With these words Mustafa Gjinishi left and without doubt, as it was to become clear later, he went to co-ordinate matters with the other resident agent of the Intelligence Service, Abaz Kupi. (1) Meanwhile, we had been sounding people out and we knew that Bazi and other pro-Zog elements had said that they would come.

Precisely in the heat of these preparations the comrades from Vlora proposed that we should invite Skënder Muço to Tirana and talk with him. I had heard the name of Skënder Muço but did not know him personally. I had heard him well spoken of in the intellectual circles in Tirana, he was said to be a capable lawyer and was advertized as a learned, erudite, clever man and not corrupted. In Tirana, Vlora and elsewhere, he had the reputation of a democrat and the comrades of Vlora recommended him to us as a promising element. He must have been a few years older than I, had studied jurisprudence in Italy. He was not one of those who were openly opposed to Zog, but neither was he openly pro the regime. He was, so to say, a «reluctant» conformer and it was rumoured that precisely for this reason he had preferred to become a lawyer rather than a judge and to be «free and uncommitted».

Knowing all these things, as well as the special information which Hysni Kapo (2) and the other comrades

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1 Enver Hoxha, *The Anglo-American Threat to Albania (Memoirs)*, Tirana 1982, pp. 173-297, Eng. ed.

2 At that time political secretary of the Vlora Regional Committee of the CPA.



from Vlora sent us, we agreed to the proposal to meet him and informed the comrades that he should set out for Tirana. Mentor (1), one of the most active comrades in the region of Vlora, escorted Skënder Muço.

At the appointed time Skënder Muço, accompanied by Mentor, presented himself at the base. It seems to me we had chosen the house of a legal patriotic friend, aiming both to make some impression on this lawyer of the bourgeoisie and to enable him to see the reality as it was, to be convinced that we had strong links with other well-known patriots, too, and that we were not afraid of the reprisals of the occupiers.

We met, exchanged the usual greetings and when I saw that Skënder was waiting for me to begin, I said to him:

«Neither you nor I have time to waste Mr. Skënder, therefore, I think that first I should present the views of the Communist Party about the situation and what must be done in the future. Then I, as representative of the Party, would like to hear your opinion.»

«Very well,» Skënder Muço replied.

Then I gave him a brief outline of the political situation and the war, pointed out the barbarities and aggressive nature of the German nazis and Italian fascists, before going into our internal situation and pointing out broadly how we assessed it.

«Our opinion is, and this we have begun to put into practice,» I said concluding this question, «that all of us must rise in the fight against the occupiers, to repeat the epic of Vlora of 1920 and all the heroic

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1 The pseudonym of Ibrahim Dervishi.

wars which the Albanians have waged against various invaders since the time of Skanderbeg.»

«But, Mr. Hoxha,» Skënder Muço objected immediately, «allow me to remind you that present-day Italy is no longer the Italy of 1920. Now...».

«I know what you want to say,» I interrupted him, «but we must not be intimidated by the strength of fascist Italy. If we study the history of the wars of our people, we shall see that our enemies of all times have been much greater, more powerful, and well-armed, but our small people have never been afraid. This is an historical fact. Our people have risen in insurrection, have fought and triumphed in battle over their enemies, hence, although small they have conquered them, just as David fought and conquered Goliath. And we must not forget either, Mr. Skënder, that in our wars of the past we have always been alone against the enemies. No state has supported us, either materially, politically or morally. In history we will find only some writers or poets who subsequently wrote a book or a poem about the valiant deeds of Skanderbeg and the Albanians and their great role in defending Western civilization from the Ottoman invasion. Today, however,» I continued, «matters are different: the whole democratic world, all the progressive states, first of all the Soviet Union, but also Britain, the United States of America, and so on, have risen in struggle against the savage German-Italian nazi-fascist beast. So, in this war, we are not alone, as in the past. But we have to consider how we should organize ourselves, because, as the people say, 'If the baby does not cry, the mother does not put it to the breast'; if

we do not organize ourselves for war and rise and fight, neither the freedom, nor the independence and sovereignty of the Homeland can be won.

«This is how our Communist Party sees the situation, and we have been working for some time to rally our people in a militant unity, we are explaining the aims of the war to the people and convincing them that only in this way will the Homeland be liberated and their desires and aspirations be realized. As our comrades in Vlora have told you, we are working to unite the people in an anti-fascist organization and we have striven and are striving to unite all the honest patriots, wherever they are, taking no account of their regional differences, religious beliefs, or political outlooks, round this platform with the Communist Party of Albania. From this Front we must exclude the Albanian fascists and traitors. This will be a fighting Front, a great union of the whole people to drive fascism into the sea. I believe you understand these things well, Mr. Muço, because you originate from heroic Vlora.»

«I understand them,» said the lawyer, «but to wage this war, as you say, requires arms. Where are we going to find the arms?»

«Many have asked us this question,» I replied, «but we must not forget that neither our forefathers, our grandfathers nor we today have had or have arms factories, but arms we have had and we will have them again. We shall start with those old rifles we possess, and then we shall seize the weapons from the enemy by fighting and killing him and attacking his depots.

«That is why Mr. Skënder,» I continued, «we re-

gard the situation as favourable for the war and are optimistic about its outcome. The Homeland belongs to all of us, therefore all of us must defend it and fight for its liberation. We consider that the cause of liberation is not a monopoly of the Communist Party of Albania and its members alone, but a duty of the whole people, therefore our Party and its members are meeting and talking openly with a number of democratic patriots and anti-fascists all over the country in order to organize a meeting, naturally in great secrecy from the enemy, which we could call an assembly or a conference at which we shall talk as brothers, as comrades in such a great cause as the cause of the war against the occupier for the liberation of the Homeland. At this conference we should talk and decide to fight together, should thrash out our opinions about how we should fight with weapons, with the pen, with policy, how we should organize and lead this war, what military and political organs we have to set up in order to achieve the great success of liberation. As I have told you, our Party has a series of ideas, but in general outline, what I have told you constitutes only the essence and basis of these ideas. I presented them to you so that we could exchange opinions in principle in order to achieve this historic meeting. Of course, you will want to express your opinion, too, and I shall listen to you with the greatest attention and good will.»

Skënder Muço listened carefully to my exposé and for this I thanked him saying in conclusion:

«We believe that you, as a patriot and democrat, will be for this meeting in principle and we hope that you will add the weight of your authority to assist this

sacred deed. Now I give you the floor to express your opinion about the matters I put before you.»

As the lawyer he was, Skënder Muço began and ended his talk with an allegedly brilliant logic which in reality was not in the least brilliant. He began with emphasis, switched to a calm tone, made assertions, returned to metaphorical language, employed the phraseology of symbols, raised some doubts without asking direct questions and artfully retracted what he had said a little earlier in order to avoid committing himself to any definite decision. In talking with him, I realized that the only «arguments» which supported his reputation as a «clever and capable» man were his dodges, his incoherence in judgements and unprincipled assertions and retractions. His «ability» and «cleverness» were fictitious, the qualities of the lawyer who with cunning and empty rhetoric defended the guilty before a bourgeois court, which represented nothing but a bourgeoisie with thieves and criminals, from the ranks of whom emerged those law-breakers whom Skënder Muço defended. In his conversation with me, too, he tried to appear brilliant through the use of smooth and carefully chosen words, but his rhetoric and words could neither convince nor impress us who were equipped with Marxist-Leninist logic.

In essence, this is what he had to say: he agreed that the situation of the country was difficult and condemned the fascist occupiers, posed as an anti-fascist democrat, but did not fail to give me a long tirade, although it was neither the place nor the moment, to convince me that the Italian people were «talented, fine, industrious and democratic» and that

they should not be confounded with the Italian fascists (!). I interrupted him saying:

«Fascist Italy has invaded us and here we have on our backs whole armies which we have to fight. As to what the Italian people are in principle, that's another matter, but at the moment Mussolini has engaged them in war against us, therefore we must fight.»

«Agreed,» said Skënder Muço, «but I cannot go all the way with your arguments that Germany and Italy will be defeated all that easily. Look how they have got the Soviet Union, Britain, France and so on on the run. The United States of America is still not properly committed, therefore we should look before we leap and not bite off more than we can chew.»

«I cannot accept this assessment that you make of the situation,» I said. «It is true that the Axis countries have a temporary supremacy, but we must not forget that Hitler's 'blitzkrieg' has failed and his armies are being engaged in a long and difficult war. The time factor is working for the allies. Besides, the situation behind the lines, and here I include Albania, is becoming ever more worrying for the occupiers. I am confident that the anti-fascist coalition of the peoples will triumph.»

Skënder Muço listened to me with the superior smile of a man who «is well acquainted with these matters».

«Mr. Hoxha,» he said, «you know that I am a democrat and as such I hope for the victory of Britain and America, and I add, of Russia, but I think we ought to wait still and avoid the devastating attacks, ought

to wait until our allies consolidate the fronts and launch triumphant counter-attacks and then we should join in.»

«That is all very well, Mr. Skënder,» I said, «but even from the stand-point of solidarity with the allies it is not right that we should not fight when they are fighting. You want the allies to stabilize the front and, on the other hand, want the fascists to have a quiet situation behind the lines. That is not logical. From the national aspect it is even worse. We have the enemy in our Homeland oppressing us and shedding our blood, then should we not fight and defend ourselves? Skanderbeg cleared out from Turkey, returned to the Homeland and began the war against the Turks. Then how can we who are in our own Homeland fail to fight? That would be a tragic and inexcusable error.»

Skënder Muço interrupted me:

«Don't misunderstand me, I want to fight, but we are unorganized.»

«Our call is precisely that we should organize ourselves, and in order to organize we must meet, discuss and decide. This is what we propose.»

«But we would not be equal in that meeting that you propose,» objected Skënder Muço, «you will come as a Party and we as individuals.»

«Is there any other party in the country, Mr. Skënder?» I asked looking him straight in the eye.

«No, there isn't,» murmured the lawyer.

«Then we are obliged to appeal to individuals. We know that the individuals to whom we address our appeal have influence among other people and this pleases us, just as the existence of our Party ought to please you.»

«That is so,» said Skënder Muço, «but we cannot agree with the program of your Party; you are for the establishment of soviets.»

«You are mistaken,» I said. «Our Party has its program in which it speaks clearly of its aims. It does not say that we are going to establish soviets as in the Soviet Union; we have declared and declare again that the people themselves will decide the question of state power when they are liberated. In fact, Mr. Skënder, I can tell you that Zogite elements have agreed to come to the meeting, therefore what you say is not a sound reason for you to refuse to come.»

«Please understand me, Mr. Hoxha, I have not yet said whether or not I shall come, but I am asking some questions and seeking clarification.»

«I have no objection at all to questions and clarifications,» I told him.

«Well then,» continued Skënder Muço, «for example, why do you communists wear the star on your cap and not the eagle? Why do you place the red star over the head of the eagle on the flag? Excuse me for saying so,» said Skënder, «but Zog added his crown and Italy two axes to the eagle, while you place a red star.»

«Mr. Skënder Muço,» I said, «we communists have fought Zog who killed and imprisoned us, therefore we hate him and the crown which he had placed on the flag and the eagle. No one can deny the fierce fight which our Party is waging against fascist Italy and the Lictor's fasces.

«Our star is the star of freedom, of that freedom which is won at the cost of blood by fighting, it is the



symbol of the new world, of a democratic Albania. Our red star is the distinctive badge of partisans who are fighting with the star on their brow and the flag of Albania in their hand, with the red star over the eagle. When our people want to define a valiant fighter they call him an eagle, a brave man with a star on his brow. This is a right of ours and should not be an obstacle to your coming to the meeting. You could raise this question there, you are free to do so and as a jurist you should know that the Constitutional Meeting, which must be summoned when the country is liberated, will decide both the form of the regime and the flag, and it will decide whether or not the flag will have a star.»

«Then that is clear,» said Skënder Muço. «Thank you for your exposé and your invitation. I cannot accept it right now, because I must return to Vlora, discuss it with my friends and will send you my answer.»

«I trust that within ten days we shall have a positive answer.» I told him.

«Oh, certainly within ten days.»

So we parted with Skënder Muço. From the conversation which I had, and I told the comrades this, I formed the conviction that the people and the National Liberation War could not expect any good from him. He was a bourgeois intellectual who, in his soul, was imbued with the features of that bourgeoisie which passed judgement on those law breakers he defended, but who carefully preserved his disguise as a democrat, and since he secured his income from his occupation, he posed as a free professional man, independent of

any state power, who had his own «independent opinion», which he tried to display to me.

Subsequently, the «democrat» Skënder Muço turned his rifle against the Party and the people, and we replied to this traitor with the rifle.

Precisely at this time the comrades charged me with proposing to Bahri and his group to take part at the conference.

«I have had many talks with Bahri Omari and his clan,» I told the comrades, «and I am convinced that all of them have already chosen their course.»

«We should try once more, Enver,» the comrades told me, «and you can do this best.»

«Since you are charging me with this task, I accept it,» I replied.

I went, met him and said, «We think we ought to exchange opinions with one another, we ought to iron out our disagreements and in the interest of the Homeland organize a joint meeting against the enemy occupier just as the patriots of our country have done in the past,» and so on. As I expected, Bahri did not accept such a proposal. So I did not press the matter further with him.

I told the comrades about the result of my meeting with Bahri and we decided to make approaches to Kolë Tromara and Sheh Karbunara. Despite the doubt which I had about the success of this «mission» I undertook this task, too. I decided to make contact with the Sheh with whom I maintained «good» relations, but I did not get along at all with Kolë Tromara and I knew that I could not talk to him.

Sheh Karbunara was not in Tirana. He stayed in his religious residence in Lushnja. so I decided to get into contact with him through his son, Hysen, with whom I was acquainted because he was the brother-in-law of Syrja Selfo. My relations with him were good and I had visited him previously and did so later, too, when I was working in illegality, because at that time Hysen posed as being with us. Likewise, during the National Liberation War he posed as a sympathizer with the war, but after Liberation he began to display his true colours and was mixed up with the enemies of the people such as Shefqet Beja and others.

I went to Hysen's house and said to him:

«Listen, Hysen, you are to go to Lushnja to Baba Sheh and say to him that Enver wants a meeting with you and Kolë Tromara and if they like, also, with Sejfi Vllamasi.»

Hysen opened his eyes in surprise, but he agreed to carry out my instructions. Apparently he was dying to know what this was all about so he asked me:

«If the Sheh asks me what the meeting is about, what should I tell him?»

«Tell him that Enver has something important to talk over with them. Just that,» I replied.

I knew that the Sheh's curiosity would be tickled and he would agree to the meeting. «Qorri» (the blind) as we called Hysen, because he had a wall-eye, set off for Lushnja.

A few days later the news reached me at the illegal base where I was staying that Hysen wanted to meet me. I went to his house unexpected one night and

he told me that the Sheh agreed in principle to meet me, but when he came to Tirana he would discuss the matter with his friends and would let me know.

Eventually the news came that Sheh Karbunara, Kolë Tromara, and Sejfi Vllamasi agreed to the meeting which we would hold in the home of Kolë Kuqali, our common friend. I accepted and went there at the appointed time and date. Gjikë Kuqali was our comrade, while his father, Kolë, was a sympathiser of ours. When I entered the room I found the three had arrived before me.

«Shall I leave you?» asked Kolë Kuqali.

«Not as far as I am concerned,» I said, «so long as our friends don't object.»

«Bah,» sneered Kolë Tromara, «you cling to the branches, while the trunk is ours,» alluding to Gjikë and Kolë. «We have been friends with the Kuqalis in America, have been members of *Vatra* (1) together,» continued Kolë Tromara.

«It's very good that Kuqali is your friend and ours,» I said to Kolë, «but I think that the winner is he who has both the trunk and branches with him.»

«Okay then, and what has 'Comrade Red' got to tell us that he brought us here?» said Kolë Tromara.

I began to speak to them about the need for the war against the occupiers and quislings, the need for a joint meeting at which we would freely express our opinions about the organization of this war, etc., etc.

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1 Association created by the Albanian emigrants in the United States of America.

When I was done Kolë Tromara took the floor and gave me a «lecture» studded with those opinions with which I was familiar from Bahri and others, but with greater haughtiness and arrogance, indeed, even in insulting tones with such expressions as «I know what you reds are up to», «I've had to do with you», «you listen to Stalin», and so on.

I interrupted him and said:

«Mr. Tromara, I have not come here to discuss ideological issues. I made no mention of your political views, although I, too, have plenty I can say about you.»

«Go on then,» said Kolë, «we can hold our heads up.»

«And we can hold our heads up, too,» I said, «and our conscience is clear. But I wanted to meet you not to quarrel, although I am ready to do that too, if you like, but I have come to try to reach agreement, to put aside our differences for the sake of the great cause of liberation.»

«But who do you think is going to liberate this Homeland and how will it be done?» he asked.

«The people,» I replied, «all of us, together with the people through war and without compromise.»

«Without compromise! Ha! Ha! Ha!» Kolë Tromara laughed ironically, «But what was it Stalin made with Hitler, Mr. Red?»

Tromara was referring to the non-aggression pact which the Soviet government had concluded with Germany in 1939 after all the proposals which it had made to Britain and France for joint resistance to the nazi

danger had been refused. This wise act of Stalin's, which blew up all the plans of those who wanted to sit back and watch the destruction of the Soviet Union by Hitlerite Germany, infuriated the reactionaries who began a campaign of slander, the echo of which we hear to this day, that Stalin allegedly made a compromise with Hitler, that the Soviet Union divided the spheres of influence with Germany and so on and so forth.

«Stalin,» I told him, «offered his hand to your Chamberlain and Daladier, the friend of your idol, Herriot, and they not only refused his hand, but tried to and succeeded in unleashing Hitler against the Soviet Union.»

«Oh,» said Kolë, «how many times have I read this rubbish from Maurice Thorez in Paris!»

«Mr. Kolë Tromara,» I replied, striving to keep calm, «you asked me a question, I replied. It is no fault of mine that you apparently are not well acquainted with recent history. We'd better return to the point we had reached in the conversation. I told you the people will wage the war and we together with the people. What have you to say about this? It seems to me that these ways you are using to change the essence of the conversation and dodge the issue are not good and show that you do not want to reply to my question. Are you or are you not going to fight against fascist Italy together with its ally, nazi Germany, which the whole world is fighting?»

Kolë Tromara snorted and said nothing. When he saw that Kolë was hard-pressed, Sheh Karbunara took a hand in the conversation.

«We are going to fight. Since the English are fighting, we shall fight, too,» said the Sheh.

«Then the main thing unites us,» I told them, «and this is the crucial issue.»

«Are we going to go to war with five pence in our pocket? Where are your weapons?» said Kolë rudely.

«From what Mr. Kolë says,» I said addressing Sheh Karbunara, «it seems to me that he does not want to fight even in principle.»

I hoped to drive a «wedge» between Kolë and the Sheh, but this was not successful, because the Sheh, scratching his beard, said:

«What Kolë said is right. Where are our weapons? Italy has stores full of them.»

«We must capture them from Italy and in order to capture them we must dare to fight,» I replied. «Mr. Kolë, you know Danton's words 'Courage, courage and courage again'.»

«We are Cartesians and put reason, logic, above everything,» replied Kolë.

«It seems to me that you are Cartesians only in words, because if you had some sort of reason and were to analyse the situation at least as Descartes did, our talks would have had some result. At least, lay your cards on the table Mr. Kolë,» I said. «If you are a rationalist, as you claim, don't complicate matters as you are doing, and show yourself at least a nationalist.»

However, Kolë had put in the word «Cartesian» only to impress the Sheh and Sejfi who had never heard the name of Descartes. Sejfi Villamasi jumped in

and repeated the old refrain of the pseudo-patriotic «fathers»:

«That's all very well, Enver, but have you considered that if you fight this means that people will be killed and the country devastated? We have great responsibility for this.»

«When you decide to fight, Mr. Sejfi,» I replied, «you may be killed, but you will also kill, the enemy will devastate the country, but we will destroy them, too. The whole world is in flames. Why is it in flames? Why is it fighting? Because it wants to be liberated from nazi-fascist slavery. Do you gentlemen think you will be an exception to this law of the war?»

«No,» replied Sejfi, «we intend to fight and to manoeuvre politically, that is, to trick them so that the meat is roasted without burning the spit.»

«That is the wisest course,» said the Sheh, «and that is the course that we must follow.»

«But this means don't fight, but collaborate with the occupier, Baba Sheh, that course is suicide!» I told them. «No, we communists are for a course completely opposite to yours.»

«Then what do you want from us?» said Kolë raising his head flushed with anger, «Go and fight, no one is stopping you.»

«No, we have not asked and are not asking you for permission to fight, but the Party is appealing to you to fight together with us, and this we consider a patriotic duty.»

«Mr. Enver, how are we to go to this meeting?» asked Sejfi Vllamasi.



«In secret ways,» I replied, and I explained to them in general the main views which our Party would present for discussion. While I was making these explanations Kolë interrupted me:

«How are you going to the meeting, as individuals like us, or as a Party?»

«As a Party, obviously.»

«How beautifully the reds have worked it out! They go as a Party while we are to go there like pigs so that they can lead us by the nose,» said Tromara to his friends.

«What you say is not true,» I replied to Kolë. «It's not our fault that you have no party.»

Kolë interrupted again saying:

«Then wait till we form a party and are equal.»

«Allow me to finish,» I said to Tromara. «Second, we have no intention of leading anyone by the nose and would never permit ourselves such a thing. As for waiting until you form a party, which you may or may not do, this cannot be a reason for us not to meet.»

«But who will be the others at the meeting?» asked the Sheh.

«We have invited all those patriots whom we think will be ready to fight for the Homeland,» I replied, «Some of them have agreed to come and we are still talking with the others. I, for example, am charged with the task of getting your agreement.»

«That's all very well, Enver,» said the Sheh, «but we should wait a bit to see how the situation develops and what we are going to do. Why do we need to meet. Moreover, you propose to meet in secrecy!»

«Baba Sheh,» I told him, «our people have never

taken historic decisions hastily. Have you forgotten the Congress of Lushnja which was held near your *tekke*! Do I have to tell you why that congress was held, why we needed that congress, and why we did not wait a bit before holding it? No, Baba Sheh, your idea is not reasonable.»

Seeing that his friend was wavering, Tromara said angrily:

«Mr. Enver, do you want the answer from us? Here it is: We do not accept your proposal, we do not agree and will not collaborate with you.»

«That is quite clear,» I told them, «but you are assuming a grave responsibility before the people and history. We have no further obligations to you. But let me tell you that we are going to fight the occupiers and the traitors, are going to hold the meeting even without you, because the people are and will be with us!» (I was disgusted with them, but I managed to keep cool during the whole time that the conversation continued, some five hours.) I stood up, thanked our friend Kolë Kuqali, shook hands coldly with the others and left. Nothing else could be expected from such elements. However, while these false patriots demanded time «to think it over» or found a thousand and one «justifications» to sabotage the unity of the people in their uncompromising war, the people themselves, together with the communists, did not waste time «thinking the matter over» or in academic discussions. The reality was showing with numerous examples that, under the leadership of the Communist Party, the armed struggle and the political organization of the masses were being raised to a higher level and one of

the main links in the program of the Party, the formation of the National Liberation Front, was being achieved. The moment had come to sanction its founding *de jure*.

#### **4. September 16, 1942**

The people, with the communists in the forefront, were writing glorious pages in their age-old history. In Vlora, Skrapar, Kurvelesh, Elbasan, Përmet, Dibra, Shkodra, Mat, and elsewhere actions were being carried out and units and *çeta* raised; in Tirana the women held a powerful demonstration, in which they clashed with the fascists, against the internment of their sons on the Italian islands; on July 24, 1942, the telephone and telegraph lines were cut; the people's war was becoming a reality, just as the panic which had seized the enemy was becoming a reality.

During this period, together with the joy of victories we were also to feel great grief over the comrades who fell with honour on the field of battle. In Shkodra the history of Oso Kuka(1) was to be repeated

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1 Commander of an Albanian volunteer unit in the 60's of the 19th century. Fighting for the defence of the Albanian territories, he was encircled by Montenegrin bands in a house near the Shkodra Lake and rather than fall in their hands, blew up the house with himself and his 23 men together with many of his Montenegrin enemies.

by Perlat Rexhepi, Branko Kadia and Jordan Misja (1), while such communists as Myzafer Asqeriu in Gjirokastra. Teli Ndini in Vlora. Misto Mame and Mihal Duri in Tirana, were to raise the popular and partisan heroism to higher levels.

The reports about their heroic sacrifice found me in the heat of the work for the preparation of the Conference of Peza. I overcame my grief and sat down again to prepare the report. The rumble of the war which the people, headed by the communists, had launched and which had to grow even stronger after the Conference, must echo in every phrase of it. The time gave no one greater right than the communists to appeal to the people for merciless war against the enemy that had occupied the country, in the new history which was being written with the blood of the finest sons of the people no one could emerge with greater pride and honour than the communists.

About the beginning of August I had completed the report which I was to deliver at the Conference of Peza and meanwhile I had also drafted a Resolution which would be presented to the participants in the Conference for their approval. Meanwhile we had received positive answers from a large number of those invited. For our part we appointed a delegation which was to represent the Communist Party of Albania as

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1 Similarly, these three communists, besieged in a house in Shkodra, sacrificed their lives in June 1942 after a heroic fight against hundreds of carabinieri and militia who, failing repeatedly to take the house in which the communists had entrenched themselves, were compelled to call in an aircraft to bomb it.

well as the Communist youth and the Albanian anti-fascist women at the Conference, and were ready and had taken all the necessary measures; Babë Myslim was only awaiting the precise date and likewise Haxhi Lleshi, Mustafa Xhani and some others. We had decided on a date in the middle of August, or a little later, as the day when the Conference should commence its proceedings, but many «nationalists» like Lumo Skëndo and company either «delayed» giving us their replies or sought to postpone a little the date because they «were not prepared» and so the days were going by while we waited.

Of course we could not postpone the meeting indefinitely.

«We shall allow these gentlemen, 'the fathers of the nation' just a little longer, but if they don't come we will hold the meeting without them,» I told the comrades one day.

Thus, we finally decided that we should hold the Conference in the middle of September.

In the first ten days of September the other comrades and I established ourselves in Peza and moved only when this became essential. There we had established a small printing press on which the materials that the Conference approved, the Resolution, an appeal, leaflet, or communique would be printed. Those were days full of tension, because although the measures had been taken in time, there were problems right up to the last moment. On the eve of the Conference we also held a meeting of the Central Committee there, at which we discussed mainly the political event which we were organizing. Besides the members of the Provis-

ional Central Committee, Kristo Themelko, Ramadan Çitaku, Tuk Jakova and me, Nako Spiru also took part as political secretary of the Communist Youth of Albania as well as Koço Tashko as the comrade in charge of the work with the nationalists. At the meeting we approved the report which I was to deliver and the two other reports.

Special measures were taken by the Party cell of the *çeta* as well as by its commander Myslim Peza to protect the Conference from any possible attack by the enemy. To this end partisan patrols had been stationed at all points from which the movements of the enemy forces could be observed and on all the tracks on which their movements could be hindered.

The provision of food was a problem in itself. The comrades of Tirana as well as the patriotic peasants of Peza were able to ensure that the participants lacked nothing during those days. When I say «nothing» this does not mean that the comrades had secured roast meat and sweets, but we were not short of bread, stew and an occasional piece of cheese.

Those invited began to arrive after the first ten days of September and by the evening of the 15th the majority were there. We decided to wait no longer. If someone came during the night well and good, but the Conference would begin in the morning.

In Peza I had my first meeting with Baba Faja Martaneshi, who had come together with Haxhi Lleshi. Baba Faja's sincere face and quiet manner of speaking made an immediate impression on me. In those few days which he stayed in Peza, Haxhi Lleshi also had a meeting which surprised him.

In one of the breaks in the meeting Haxhi was telling me about the situation in Dibra, about the influence of bayraktars like Fiqri Dine and Selim Kaloshi and the fanaticism which prevailed especially over the girls and women in that district.

«This influence will be smashed,» I told him, «and the patriotic people of Dibra will come over to the war and the Party. The women and girls in Dibra will awaken, too, and their energies will burst out.»

«A little while back,» Haxhi told me, «Haki Stërmilli told me about a girl who had written him a wonderful letter about his book 'Were I a Boy'. He read me the letter which the girl had signed with the pseudonym 'Flaka' (Flame) and Haki said to me, 'Look, Haxhi, what fire is latent in the Albanian women'.»

I laughed because I already knew who Flaka was and I asked Haxhi:

«Would you like to meet Flaka?»

«Where is she? he exclaimed in surprise.

I despatched a comrade and a little while later Nexhmije came.

«Here she is,» I told Haxhi. «Let me introduce you. This comrade is Nexhmije Xhuglini or 'Flaka' that Haki Stërmilli spoke to you about.»

«But you are from Dibra!» exclaimed Haxhi, who knew Nexhmije's family well.

The two of them were happy to meet and I saw that Haxhi was pleased that a girl from Dibra was taking part actively in the work of the war and the Party.

The following morning, on September 16, 1942, the meeting which has gone down and will remain in history as the 1st National Liberation Conference of the

Albanian people, or the Conference of Peza for short, commenced. For the whole Albanian people and for us communists, in particular, this was a red-letter day. The years which have passed since have not diminished the significance and historic importance of this event, but on the contrary the colossal value of this historic event stands out even more clearly from the heights to which the Party has raised our beloved Homeland.

We held the Conference in a hall, or rather in a big room, (it could hardly be called a hall!) in Babë [Myслиm Peza's] house, with a table at the head and filled with chairs and forms. The comrades engaged in the organization had done their utmost to decorate the room. At the entrance, over the door, they had placed a thick piece of cardboard with the words: «Welcome to the delegates!». Inside, on the walls, they had hung our national flag and the portraits of heroes and outstanding figures in the history of our people, Skanderbeg, Ismail Qemali, Naim Frashëri, Luigj Gurakuqi, Bajram Curri and Avni Rustemi, in this way underlining the continuity of the wars for freedom, which our people had waged during the centuries against any invader and enslaver.

We took our places on the chairs and the forms, each sitting alongside his own friends and acquaintances. Of course there was no protocol in the seating of the participants, but the very places which each one took automatically indicated his position. Babë Myслиm, Haxhi and Mustafa Xhani had sat down beside us, the delegates of the Communist Party, Abaz Kupi was alongside Ndoc Çoba, both representatives of the «Zo-



gite trend», the «nationalists» of Mithat Bey's school a bit to one side, and so on. All told 17 delegates took part in the Conference. The delegation of the Communist Party of Albania was made up of Enver Hoxha, Ramadan Çitaku, Ymer Dishnica, Koço Tashko and Mustafa Gjinishi, Nako Spiru represented the Anti-fascist Youth and Nexhmije Xhuglini the Anti-fascist Women at the Conference. The «nationalist youth» were represented by Halim Begeja, who was also the delegate of the «father» of patriotism, Lumo Skëndo, who did not come himself.

In opening the meeting on behalf of the delegation of the Communist Party which was the initiator of the Conference, I thanked the delegates for their participation and proposed that Ndoc Çoba, as the oldest present, should be chairman of the meeting. Ndoc Çoba had been a member of the government which emerged from the Congress of Lushnja and since that time had enjoyed the reputation of an ardent patriot. Later he became one of the leaders of Legaliteti and placed himself openly in the service of the occupiers.

Another delegate proposed Nexhmije Xhuglini as secretary of the meeting to keep the minutes, etc.

The proposals were approved and Ndoc Çoba took the chair. The meeting was declared open, the historic Conference of Peza commenced.

At first all present rose to their feet to sing the National Anthem and then stood in silence in memory of the fallen in the Anti-fascist War. At these moments a partisan of the *Çeta* of Peza entered the room with a camera to take some pictures, but on the insistence

of Ndoc Çoba he was not allowed to photograph those taking part in the Conference.

After a little discussion during which the agenda was adopted, I was given the floor to deliver the main report on the national liberation councils. Since this report has been lost I shall try to give a summary of the main points which were dealt with in it and which constituted the basic mobilizing principles which the Party presented to the Conference of the representatives of the Albanian people. Now these principles have become historic. The National Liberation War and life completely confirmed their correctness.

The main fundamental idea which was presented by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Albania at the Conference of Peza was the **unification of the whole Albanian people and their organization in the war against the occupiers**. This was the cardinal point which I, on behalf of the Central Committee, elaborated to the Conference in the main report on the national liberation councils.

In particular I stressed in the report:

«These are tragic moments for the fate of the Homeland and the people. Faced with the cruel reality of the fascist occupation the people must be united to a man, the things which might divide us in our ideological, religious and other beliefs must be put aside and we should mobilize and link ourselves with one another for a great cause: for the liberation of the Homeland, for the salvation of the people as a formed nation in order to bar the way to the predatory aims of the enemies who, at all periods, have operated in order to split us up and to deny our existence as a nation. He

who truly loves the people and wants to see the Homeland free, independent and sovereign, must display this now, irrespective of his political convictions, religious beliefs or his region of origin.

«The war against the Italian fascist invaders and their collaborators,» the report stressed, «is the only alternative for the true patriots. Any other course leads to national and individual captivity, enslavement and misery. The Italian enemy and the quislings want to divide us, to split us, and their main aim is to isolate the Communist Party of Albania from the people and the war. For the enemy occupier this objective is decisive. For the liberation of the people and the Homeland, however, the existence and fight of the Communist Party of Albania at the head of the people, who are fighting and resisting, is decisive.»

When I reached this part of my report, I noticed that some of those present reacted by fidgeting or exchanging whispers. Of course, I expected that some of them, like Bazi, the «nationalist» elements, like Halim Begeja and one or two others, would be none too happy about the leading role of the Party, but we had decided we must stress this factor strongly and had prepared ourselves to reply to their open reactions. However, there was no such reaction and I continued with the report with the aim of making things clear to those elements in whom the filthy anti-communist propaganda of the occupiers and quislings might have taken root to one extent or another.

I went on to deal with the problems of the concrete political and military organization of our war, saying in substance:

«Our war is a national liberation war which has as its objective the complete liberation of the Homeland and the establishment of a democratic regime, the form of which the people themselves will decide after liberation. Hence, our war will be a political and military war.

«In order to achieve these two great objectives, it is necessary to organize the Anti-fascist National Liberation Front, which will have national liberation councils all over the country and the partisan *çeta*, which are the armed forces of the National Liberation Front. Later we shall go on to form bigger units and will also set up the General Staff.

«The Anti-fascist National Liberation Front will be extended all over our country in the liberated and non-liberated zones and its activity will be accomplished through the national liberation councils. The national liberation councils,» continued the report, «will carry out the political and propaganda work, the mobilization of people for the war and for resistance, and will ensure material supplies of every sort for the *çeta*, while in liberated places and zones, in which the old oppressive state power will be liquidated to its foundations, these councils will be and will affirm themselves as the new people's democratic state power, and in their form and content, will be nothing like either the feudal bourgeois state administration or the old councils of elders. These will be councils with a new content and spirit, because those taking part in them will be men of the people, fighters from all strata and of all religious and political beliefs, provided only they are anti-fascists and fight against the occupiers.»

I went on to speak concretely about the organization and leadership of the partisan *çeta* which would be the embryo of the National Liberation Army of the Albanian people.

Among other things, I said: «The partisan *çeta* will be led by commanders who may be communists, non-party patriots, and at the same time, by political commissars who must be communists. The decisions must be taken jointly by the commander and the commissar in complete harmony; in the relations between them and towards them there must not be any discrimination. The partisan *çeta* will fight under our national flag, under the flag of Skanderbeg, the flag which Ismail Qemali raised in Vlora. On their caps the partisans will wear the five-pointed red star which symbolizes a brilliant new era, which is being opened up to the Homeland and our people.»

In the report on the national liberation councils I also stressed as a main issue that the Communist Party of Albania, the only party in the country, leads the Anti-fascist National Liberation Front and the doors of the Front will be open to any person who wants to fight against the enemy and, who as an individual, considers the Front his own, in which he can freely express his opinions and suggestions in favour of the National Liberation War.

As to the question of the admission of other parties to the Front, this was not raised at those moments, because no such parties existed. No other class, stratum, or political grouping had emerged with its own party or with any program for national liberation. And any organization which was created after the Confe-

rence of Peza, like the Balli Kombëtar, was nothing but a creation of the fascist occupiers and other foreigners to hinder the liberation of the country.

In the report I dwelt in particular on the role and concrete tasks of the national liberation councils and on the practical organization of our work in order to intensify the setting up of the councils all over the country. After reporting on the work which had been done up till that time and the results which had been achieved, amongst other things, I pointed out:

«The councils, which must be formed freely by the people, should be set up both in the liberated zones and in the zones not yet liberated. Of course, in the villages and towns which are in the hands of the enemy, it is impossible to hold open and broad elections, but we shall work to ensure that these secret elections have the broadest possible representation so that those who become members of the councils are precisely those persons whom the people know and want.»

After I had delivered the report it was thrown open to discussion. Myslim strongly supported the theses of the Party. Replying to the dodges of the «nationalists» who had no desire to commit themselves concretely to the war against the occupiers, he asked the question:

«When are we going to fight? We cannot wait any longer. Today there are only two courses: either to fight against the occupier together with the people or to fight against the people; one thing is true: the people no longer trust those 'nationalists' who appeal to us to wait.»

Baba Faja Martaneshi, Haxhi Lleshi and others also took the same stand. In their contributions the other comrades of the Communist Party delegation gave an outline of the international situation and pointed out its repercussions on the internal situation.

Apart from our comrades, others present who, as time showed, had come to Peza with different aims, also spoke at the meeting. In general they expressed agreement with the report as well as with the war against the occupier, but by means of formal objections they tried to divert the Conference from its concrete and militant decisions.

One nationalist «democrat» present who subsequently became a Ballist, expressed himself for the Front, but from his narrow and distorted concepts he wanted to restrict the role of the Conference of Peza by comparing it with the Congress of Lushnja which was summoned against the government of Durrës. It was plain that this person's inclinations were for the creation of a «democratic government» by overthrowing that of Mustafa Kruja rather than for the war against the occupiers, which he «forgot» to stress.

«What you propose is utter nonsense,» I said in reply to him. «Do you think the occupier will allow you to overthrow Merlika and establish a democratic government? On the contrary, the occupier himself may overthrow Merlika and put another Merlika in his place. Today the problems of the people and the Homeland cannot be solved by government combinations, but only by war against the occupiers and traitors. When the war has been extended, when we have our own army, when we set up and strengthen the coun-

cils, then we shall set up our own government, not with the approval and signature of the Duce and Hitler, but signed with the rifle of the people.»

Halim Begeja, who came as representative of the «nationalist youth» but in fact was the eyes and ears of Mithat Frashëri and his clan, also spoke allegedly in favour of the war and the Front, but in fact he wanted to eliminate from them the leadership of the Party which would give them their militant spirit.

«We admit that the Communist Party is carrying on extensive activity...,» he said.

It was precisely this fact that terrified the occupiers and traitors, therefore, by means of their tools, they were bound to try to minimize, indeed to eliminate, the role of the Party in the National Liberation Front. Therefore, the spokesman for Mithat Bey proposed:

«There should be no leading party in the Front. Those who affirm themselves in the course of the war should lead it. If communism triumphs there is no force which can stop it. And likewise for nationalism.»

This «youth leader» who became one of the leading figures of the Ballist youth, this «patriot» who abandoned the Homeland and took to his heels together with the German occupiers, wanting to prevent the participation of our youth in the war, also said:

«We are of the opinion and insist that the youth should be withdrawn from the fighting activities, because with its tender age it is incapable of controlling its own actions or opinions.»

«Then, who is to do the fighting, only the elderly?» asked one of our comrades.



A ripple of laughter ran round the room where we were gathered, because everyone understood that without the youth there could be no thought of the war for the liberation of the Homeland. Here I want to jump ahead a little in the order of events which was followed at the Conference to mention that this problem was dealt with extensively in the report «The youth in the war against the occupier». In this report, as well as in that which Nexhmije delivered on the deplorable situation and patriotic revolutionary activity of the women and girls, the great importance of the worker, peasant and school youth and the women workers and peasants and housewives in this great war was raised and backed with sound arguments. In these two reports it was argued that without awakening the youth, women and girls and uniting them around the great aim of liberation, without engaging them in the war, in active resistance, everything would turn out weak, the sound and vital forces of the Homeland would not be toughened, but on the contrary, would be enfeebled. «The enemy must not be allowed to corrupt any woman or any boy or girl politically,» was the line stressed at the Conference.

In their contributions to the discussion most of those present at the Conference enthusiastically approved the judgements and proposals of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Albania about the fundamental problems which were presented.

Even Abaz Kupa, the representative of the Zogite trend, and some others approved the platform of Peza, not because they liked it, but because they intended to disguise themselves in order to act, as they did, in

opposition to the Front and the National Liberation War.

The question of the regime which would be established in Albania after the war was also raised at the Conference. This was a delicate question although for the Party the perspective was quite clear. The objective of the war of the Albanian people under the leadership of the Communist Party was not only the complete liberation of the Homeland, but also the overthrow of any oppressive feudal-bourgeois regime. The people were not going to fight to clear the way for Zog or his lackeys, whether his friends or «enemies». History was advancing, the people had awakened and their aspirations, which were represented by their finest sons and daughters, the communists and true patriots, were for an Albania free from any oppression, either external or internal.

Therefore, in the discussion of this question, I expressed the opinion of our Party that we should proclaim the liberation of the country and the creation of democratic people's Albania as the aim of the war. As to the form of the regime, let this be decided by the people after the war. Someone at the Conference advocated that we should proclaim a «democratic republic» as the form of the regime, but we, the representatives of the Communist Party, rejected this as inappropriate for the moment. The launching of such a slogan would not serve the unification of all the forces in the war and right from the outset would create a harmful and unnecessary opposition towards the Front.

Even Abaz Kupa expressed his solidarity with our formulation.

Bazi i Canës declared «solemnly»: «I love Albania first, and then Zog. After the war, the people can decide if they want him.»

But we had understood the state of mind of Abaz Kupa and the other Zogites and were not surprised when they took the first step against us. Bazi joined up with the bayraktar gentry and collaborated with the German occupiers. He did not accept the star, the partisan symbol (there was discussion about this and the word «partisan» at the Conference), and this was not simply because something symbolic of the nation was allegedly violated, but because it was an issue of principle for him: what would post-war Albania be, a new genuine democracy, or the old regime of Zog and the feudals and bayraktars? Of course, Abaz Kupa hoped and worked for the return of Zog; we took account of the complexity of this person, had our doubts and reservations and, with the passage of time, were to know him better and to become completely convinced that right from the start he was an agent and man of Zog, smuggled into Albania by the British Intelligence Service, which financed and instructed him. He had received instructions to accept our invitation, to take part in the Front, to pose as a fighter but not fire a shot against the occupier, and to await the time when he would receive further orders on how to act.

The discussion continued late into the night and on the following morning. After the conclusion of the discussion, Nexhmije Xhuglini, as secretary of the Conference, read out the draft of the Resolution which

we had prepared in advance. There was no essential objection and the Resolution was adopted. This document is published and well-known, therefore I shall not dwell on its content. Then we proceeded to the elections. The Conference elected the Provisional Anti-fascist National Liberation Council composed of seven people. From the Communist Party of Albania, Enver Hoxha, Ymer Dishnica and Mustafa Gjinishi were elected. Also elected as members of the Council were Myslim Peza and from the «nationalists» Abaz Kupi, Ndoc Çoba and Kamber Qafëmolla (the latter in his absence).

In the organization of the Conference everything went well. The residents of Peza took care of everything and in particular the secrecy was perfect. There was enthusiasm among the peasants and partisans, especially when the delegates sat and talked with them during some break in the proceedings. In one of these breaks an episode occurred which made the others of us laugh but left Abaz Kupi very glum.

We were trying our skill at shooting at a target when Abaz Kupi took the rifle, fired two or three shots, but failed to hit the target. Then in order to tease him Nexhmije said to him:

«Let me have a try, Mr. Abaz, because I have never fired a rifle.»

Believe it or not, she hit the target with the first shot.

Abaz was furious that a young girl should outdo such a «great fighting man». And Haxhi said to him:

«Don't be upset, Abaz, this is how it is with us

from Dibra. Even the girls know how to use the rifle.»

And as though to add even more to Bazi's discomfiture, Myslim said wryly:

«It seems your rifle's a bit rusty!»

So ended the Conference of Peza, which sanctioned the formation of the militant organization of the Albanian people, the Anti-fascist National Liberation Front. The very name of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Front had a profound political and military meaning; those three words summed up the idea of the unity of the people. But why? In order to create a fighting front. The idea and the action dominated in the word «front». This word expressed the sense of the mobilization of the active forces of the people organized in a fighting front, which required courage, heroism, policy, strategy and various tactics against a savage enemy. But for what war was this Front created? The answer comes immediately: for the liberation of the nation. Hence, it was this National Liberation Front which would mobilize and rally to its ranks all those anti-fascist forces which were to fight to liberate the Homeland. After this, our Homeland would assume a new form, would have a new regime which the armed people themselves would decide, the people who, by fighting with arms and making great sacrifices, would have the right to determine the form of the regime which pleased them. Nobody else, no external or internal enemy, would be allowed or would be able to impose his will on the Albanian people. This situation which was being created was the glorious deed of the Communist Party of Albania, the leading role of which was affirmed at the Conference of Peza.

When the proceedings of the Conference had come to an end Skënder Muço, Aziz Çami, Musa Puka and Kamber Qafëmolla arrived, too late to take part in the «wedding». We welcomed them warmly, talked with them and told them in detail about the Conference and the decisions that had been taken there. We also gave them the Resolution which we approved so that they could read it. They said they were satisfied, expressed their regret that they had not arrived in time, but endorsed both the decisions and Resolution of the Conference.

As I said above we had taken all the necessary measures to print the materials of the Conference. Indeed, during those days, we prepared an issue of the newspaper *Zëri i popullit* (1), which would announce this historic event and echo the Resolution of the Conference of Peza. The Resolution was printed quickly and all present took copies in order to distribute them and discuss the Resolution with the people. Of course, the bulk of them were to be distributed by our comrades in Tirana and the other cities and villages of the country.

Meanwhile, as soon as we finished the work in hand, I with several comrades decided to return to

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1 The reference is to *Zëri i popullit*, nos. 3-4 (October 1942), which included the article ***The Albanian People in the War for Freedom***, (pp. 7-11), which gave the good news about the successful holding of the Conference of Peza and enlarged on the importance of this meeting; and ***The Appeal of the National Liberation General Council***, (pp. 11-13), which called on the Albanian people to rise united in the war for freedom, for a free, democratic and independent Albania.

Tirana. This journey had to be made in great secrecy because it was suspected that the enemy might have heard about the meeting and tightened up the control of travellers. Besides this, we were to take with us no small quantity of materials for the comrades in Tirana and to send in other directions.

Babë Myslim promised us he would find a vehicle driven by a reliable comrade who had carried out such missions previously, especially in the period of the preparations for the Conference of Peza. He was a driver closely linked with the Party and the National Liberation Movement, whom I think was called Meti [Muhamet Qoli].

A day or two later Meti arrived at lunch time with a FIAT 1100 cc which he had borrowed from a friend of his and in the afternoon we set out for Tirana, together with Ymer Dishnica and Mustafa Gjinishi. We three were dressed as «intellectuals». I was also wearing a pair of dark sun-glasses. Under my waistcoat I had my revolver in my belt, while I had a twenty-shot automatic pistol in my briefcase. As I said, in the car we also had one or two sacks of materials, leaflets, and the Resolution of the Conference.

The journey from Peza to the outskirts of Tirana passed without incident, but precisely when we had passed the check-point and thought that we were out of danger, Tafari(1), without consulting us at all, said to the driver:

«Turn over there!»

«Where?» I asked in astonishment. «Do you want

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1 The pseudonym of Mustafa Gjinishi.

to lead us to the Italians like lambs to the slaughter?» and I pointed to the barracks right beside the place where he wanted to put the car.

«The barracks are far enough away,» he replied quietly, «while right here there is an inn owned by a friend of mine. We'll leave the sacks of documents there and enter the city with nothing dangerous aboard.»

I had no time to object because the car stopped before a filthy and delapidated inn of sorts. There was nothing for it but to get out quickly, hide the sacks in a corner of the inn and get back into the car.

It seems to me that our brief stop there attracted the attention of the soldiers and militiamen who were not far off and when we started off again in the direction of Kavaja Street (today the Conference of Peza Street) two or three carabinieri signalled to us to stop.

It was a Saturday, leave day for the Italian fascists, when the soldiers and especially the officers went into town and spent the time celebrating in cafés and restaurants. Because of the considerable traffic on the road we manoeuvred with difficulty. Meanwhile we noticed that two motorcycles were following us. But Meti did not stop and skilfully managed to shake them off. Thus, we escaped that great danger this time, too, and arrived at Kodra e Kuqe.

Furious that they were unable to catch us, the fascists had returned to Gjinishi's broken-down inn, searched it, and all the material we brought from Peza (the Resolution and leaflets) fell into their hands. Although we had another purpose for this material, we



«consoled» ourselves with the fact that the fascists were among the first to learn the great news: the Albanian people had decided to unite as a whole in the war to wipe them out!

Later we learned that Nako Spiru and two other comrades had run into an enemy patrol at Ndroq and had been arrested on their way from Peza to Durrës. As far as I remember Nako was not long in jail because he managed to escape.

Two or three days after our departure from Peza the Italians and the quisling government forces began their punitive operations in that zone. The fascists, who had now learned about the meeting held there and understood the danger of such a base of the National Liberation War so close to Tirana, had decided to clear Peza of the partisans and sympathizers of the movement. A force of 3,000 Italian and quisling soldiers attacked Peza in a powerful pincers movement. Through surprise attacks and rapid movement, our partisan *çeta*, under the command of Myslim Peza, together with the peasants who were united with it, escaped the encirclement with very few losses. The savage enemy poured its fury on the inhabitants, the women, the children and the homes of the people of Peza. One of the first to be burnt was the home of Myslim, the house of the Conference of Peza, which has been rebuilt today on the same foundations, just as it was, in order to keep it as a glorious reminder for the coming generations.

In Tirana we followed the development of events in Peza with attention and concern, although we had unshakeable confidence that the communists, the par-

tisans and the people of Peza would cope with the situation courageously and wisely. And that is what occurred. The enemy failed in his purpose and withdrew from Peza.

The Conference had a colossal effect among the people, aroused hope and trust in the Communist Party of Albania, confidence in the war and in victory. Among the enemies it aroused anger, fear and terror. The organization and decisions of the Conference were a heavy political and military slap in the face for them. Their positions in Albania were being shaken. After this, they would intensify the terror, the killings, the imprisonment of communists, patriots and the people, would put villages and whole regions to the torch, would hatch up and apply new manoeuvres with the chiefs of Albanian reaction, the pseudo-patriots and pseudo-democrats. But all this was in vain. Now the war of the people under the leadership of the Communist Party would become fiercer and better organized, and step by step, would drive out the occupiers while the reactionary rubbish in the service of the occupiers would be tossed into the garbage bin of history.

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## **II**

### **FROM PEZA TO LABINOT**

**(September 1942 — September 1943)**

The success which we achieved at the 1st Anti-fascist National Liberation Conference of the Albanian people gave us heart. A big stride forward had been taken towards achieving the final victory over the occupiers and the quislings. Nevertheless we were fully aware that we had only laid the foundations, while now the fortress had to be built upon these foundations. Ahead of us lay the main struggle and work, the most difficult and complex to cope with and accomplish. Thus, on the basis of the line of the CPA and the militant program which the Conference approved, people, communists and genuine patriots had to step up their efforts one hundred fold to make the National Liberation Front a steel striking force, and

the national liberation councils genuine organs for the militant mobilization, the defence and representation of the insurgent people.

## **1. In the forefront of the struggle**

At the time when we were in Peza we had defined and shared out the tasks for our work in the subsequent period. I was to work mainly in Tirana, where, apart from tasks on the line of the Party (of course there was no reason for this to be stated at the meeting of the Council), I was to carry out various tasks which were the responsibility of the Anti-fascist Council elected at Peza, was to work for the organization of the illegal national liberation council in the capital and, apart from this, I was also to have the work with the intelligentsia at the centre of my attention; Ymer Dishnica was to work with those nationalists who showed promise but had still not linked themselves with the National Liberation Movement; Mustafa Gjinishi had Central Albania under his «patronage», Abaz Kupa, as is known, had Kruja and Mat, and so on. Myslim Peza was not charged with special tasks since he was commander of the *çeta* of Peza, which of course, was a very responsible duty and made it difficult for him to move.

All the members of the Council and the others who participated in the Conference were instructed that, as soon as they returned to their towns and vil-

lages, they should begin the work to convey the spirit and decisions of the Conference of Peza to the people, to discuss the Resolution and to call for and lead the concrete work for the setting up of national liberation councils and partisan *çeta* and units. The people had to thoroughly understand the importance of the Conference and be mobilized to apply the decisions taken at it. Apart from this, the comrades were instructed to increase their contacts with influential nationalist elements, to speak to them about the platform which we had approved and to appeal to them, on the basis of this platform, to unite with the whole Albanian people in the National Liberation War.

Of course, the great success which we achieved at Peza, the election of the National Liberation General Council, and the fact that it had commenced its work, in no way meant that from now on only the General Council would be engaged in and answer for the problems of the Front and the national liberation councils. Had we judged the matters in this way and acted accordingly, that is, had we considered our work for the Front completed with what was achieved at Peza, and subsequently left everything in the hands of the General Council, this would have been one of the gravest and most fatal mistakes both for the fate of the cardinal issues of the war and people and for the fate of our Communist Party itself. This was not simply because in the composition of the Council, apart from representatives of the Communist Party and some consistent true patriots, the rest were unreliable vacillating elements or united with us for long-term aims of sabotage. No, even if all the mem-

bers of the General Council had been tested elements, genuine and consistent fighters, the work and role of the Party would still have remained irreplaceable.

Only the Communist Party, with its correct line, its clear program, the militancy of all its members and its consistency in carrying things through to the end, would enable the General Council to carry out its tasks and functions properly, the Front to be extended and strengthened on the soundest possible foundations and the councils formed and functioning properly all over the country and, as a consequence, the war would be ceaselessly extended, assume the character of a true general people's war and be crowned with success.

We were faced with many responsible tasks to ensure that this norm and maxim of Marxism-Leninism for the work of the Communist Party in the Front was applied correctly and consistently in the concrete conditions of our country.

True, the Conference of Peza had affirmed the leading role of our Party in the National Liberation War, but it should by no means be thought that after this everything had been finally settled. There were whole zones, especially in the North, in which our program and propaganda about the war had not penetrated to the proper extent and no results necessary for the unification and mobilization of the people had been achieved. Likewise, even where our successes were obvious there remained certain strata and groups which did not yet understand the role and the tasks which the moment required. Hence, we still had to work and struggle to ensure that the name of the

Party, the word and deeds of its members, were made known everywhere, penetrated everywhere and won the whole people over to our cause. Otherwise, without concrete struggle, without great and continuous efforts, the leading role cannot be won. That nobody will hand to you on a platter.

We have always mentioned the fact that the Communist Party of Albania was the only political party which operated in Albania as a positive factor and aid for our work. But while affirming this truth, it must in no way be thought that the leading role in the war, in the Front, etc., belonged to our Party and would be given to it automatically, since there was no other party to «compete» with or anyone else to whom this role could be given! No, the reality was quite different, extremely complex, difficult and with major problems.

True, there were no bourgeois political parties of various hues in our country, but there were all kinds of groups and circles and trends of the most varied hues and tendencies all of which, to a greater or lesser extent, had influence and connections. True, these groups and trends did not rise or express themselves against the occupiers, but they were not and no one allowed them to remain inactive, aloof from politics and activity. And since, in general, they were not against fascism, necessarily they would be against us, against our Party, and its program and line about the Front, the national liberation councils, the war, etc.

We were bound to clash with all of them and this clash became extremely complicated because, just as they did not come out openly against the occupiers, at first most of them did not come out openly against

us, either, but on the contrary, engaged in trickery and manoeuvres.

Let us not forget, either, that the inherited backwardness and ignorance, backward mental outlooks, both feudal and bourgeois, and in this context, the feverish propaganda against communism carried out by Zog and fascism for many years, were to remain major obstacles to our work.

Hence, all these groups, tendencies and mental outlooks stood alongside fascism, confronting our Communist Party as expressions of the bourgeois and feudal partisanship. Therefore, although in our work we were not confronted with organized political parties of the bourgeoisie and reaction, we were confronted with the class interests of the bourgeoisie and reaction, and their aims to safeguard their dominant positions, which were no less fierce and complex, no less cunning, undermining and dangerous and the outlooks and backwardness of the past. We had to do battle and fight against these, to clarify the minds and win the hearts of the people in order to make them aware of the right road which had to be followed.

It was essential that the Party increase its struggle and efforts a hundred-fold with the aim not merely of extending its leading role in the Front and the national liberation councils all over the country, but also, and most importantly, of safeguarding and ceaselessly strengthening it and ensuring that others did not seize this role from the Party. We had foreseen clearly that even that section of internal reaction which still had not declared itself as such, also, would organize itself and try to destroy the Front and the national



liberation councils with the aim of sabotaging the people's war for freedom and democracy. So, it can be imagined what a catastrophe would have occurred in these new situations had our Party, after the Conference of Peza, considered its tasks for the Front and the councils «completed», and subsequently concentrated its own forces, let us say, simply as an «assault force» to carry out combat actions. With the Abaz Kupis and Halim Begejas not only would Ali Këlcyra and company never be brought out in their true colours, but on the contrary, Balli Kombëtar, which was to be set up with all its criminals and gentry, would seize the reins and the Party would suddenly find itself faced with the organized and lethal attack of the forces of fascism and reaction.

The Party's being in the leading position was also essential for the prospects of the war which we were organizing with the broad participation of the masses of workers, peasants, the youth, women, patriots and others. The patriotism, the freedom-loving spirit of our people had been and were a great factor and motive force which played a major role for the unity and mobilization in the war, but now this alone was insufficient. Other elements and demands, the vital interests of the worker and peasant for the future had to be taken into account. So, if we were to assure them that these things would be settled justly and in their favour after liberation, undoubtedly the unification would be accomplished more quickly and the readiness to fight would be greater.

The basic and fundamental element which was to assure the masses of a new future, different from

the past, was precisely the fact that the Communist Party was at the head of the Front and the war, played its leading role there. On this issue we permitted no infringement or compromise, no agreement or attempt at sharing roles.

It should never be thought that this was something clear to all, and that it could be accomplished easily. On the contrary, the difficulties and obstacles were enormous, we faced attacks, accusations and pressures from all sides. Not only the fascists and their collaborators, Merlika and company, but many of those who still stood «aloof», waiting for «the day to come»(!), made accusations against us, our Party and our ideology, with all the anti-communist arsenal elaborated over the years. Especially after the victory we achieved at Peza, this campaign, anti-communist «in principle» and against the CPA in practice, assumed ferocious proportions. The «spectre of communism» was brandished in every speech of the traitor Merlika, who «lamented» that the people were being corrupted by a few individuals who had «sold» themselves to Moscow and Stalin, that we were allegedly against the honour, the family, religion, fraternity, Albania, etc., etc.!

It is obvious why this campaign was launched: now our enemies were more than ever terrified by the fact that the CPA was becoming the main force which step by step was rallying the masses, the people, around itself and engaging them in the war. As a result of this anti-communist attack, there were even some of our own comrades (I am not talking about the pseudo-patriots who were completely of one mind with Merlika), who as a result of the anti-communist

pressure of open and concealed reaction as well as of their own unclarity, lack of formation or long-implemented opportunism, «demanded» that we should not proclaim the name and role of the Communist Party among the masses and in the Front, because allegedly this brought us harm and alienated the people, especially the nationalists, from us!

«What do you think?» I asked one of these elements. «Should we hide the fact of the existence of our Communist Party, which is fighting, created the Front and called and organized the Conference of Peza and is in the forefront of the war?»

«Amongst ourselves, to the party members and sympathizers we can mention these things, but for the time being, not among the masses!» he replied. «We should not give the enemy the possibility to accuse and slander us. We should remain within the Front and proclaim only the Anti-fascist Council as the leadership.»

I felt not only that this comrade had gone too far, but that the other comrades, too, although they opposed him, were in need of a thorough explanation so that they would understand this problem properly, therefore, I continued:

«In principle the communist party never hides its existence in any circumstances. Otherwise, why was it formed, why should it exist? The party must keep its methods of organization, bases, internal documents, plans of actions and activities secret from the enemy, but never its existence, or its main slogans for a given phase and moment. Our main slogan at present is:

War against the occupiers and traitors for the liberation of the country! There is absolutely no reason why we should hide the fact that we, the communists, were the first to launch this slogan and are adhering to and applying it consistently with the blood of our comrades. The fascists are terrified by this fighting slogan, the traitors shy away from it, but not the people or the true nationalists. Our next slogan is: Unity of the whole people in the Anti-fascist Front! And there is no reason why the people or the true nationalists should be frightened off by this slogan. On the contrary, it is precisely because we make this a primary slogan that the people like us and are rallying round us.

«However, these are not the only reasons why we must proclaim the name and work of the Party,» I went on. «Look what filthy slanders and accusations reaction is pouring out against us and against communism in general. Were we to retreat, to hide ourselves, to remain silent, we would give the open and secret enemies the satisfaction of which they dream, while we would leave people who don't see things clearly at the mercy of the accusations of Mussolini and the Merlikas. Therefore, with all our forces and means we must do much more than hitherto to make clear to the people what communism is and what we, the communists, are, why we are fighting, what our stands are towards the Homeland, the family, society and the present and future of the country.

«I agree that these things are effective among the common people, but the nationalists will not feel sure of themselves,» the comrade made another sally to

«defend» his views with another attack. «Perhaps we should restrict ourselves at least in regard to the popularization of the Soviet Union.»

«Why?»

«Because directly or indirectly we imply that we are for the Soviet order, hence, we are already expressing ourselves about the form of our future regime. This is contrary to the platform of the Conference of Peza on this point.»

«These things should not be mixed up and confused!» I replied. «To popularize the Soviet Union and the great war which Stalin's glorious army is waging is one thing, and to demand the Soviet order is another thing. Apparently,» I said to him, «you have not read the articles we publish in *Zëri i popullit* carefully. Neither there nor in any of our other propaganda have we raised or do we raise the question of the order which will be established after liberation. But we defend the Soviet Union, Stalin and Bolshevism and will continue to defend them openly because the enemies accuse them openly. We must tell the truth about them, so that the people, the patriots know that beside them they have such a powerful ally as the Soviet people led by Stalin. On the other hand,» I continued, «true, we are consistent in our support for the platform of the Conference of Peza about the Anti-fascist National Liberation War, and this is our immediate aim, but we must never forget that the classes of the poor, the workers and peasants, are rising in this war for the liberation of the Homeland and for their liberation from any sort of bondage. As to how and when this will be achieved, that is another mat-

ter. When the time comes, we will provide the possibilities for the people to express themselves freely about the regime they want. But it is our duty as communists, as enemies of any kind of bondage, to prepare and make the masses conscious, in proper ways, in conformity with the fundamental problem of the moment, so that they choose the most reliable future. At the moment we do not tell them that the private property and the wealthy classes will be wiped out as in the Soviet Union, but simply tell them how life in the Soviet Union has been built, how the workers and collective farmers live there. None of this goes beyond the bounds of the slogans of the moment,» I concluded. «Therefore, our Party, through its line and the concrete work of its members, has to be not merely the most active in the Front and the war, but, more important, must be the promoter of the Front, the inspirer and true leading force of the war.»

At the same time we were being very careful to avoid and sternly attacked any manifestation of extremism or sectarianism, any excess in the tasks and slogans in the moments through which we were passing. Had we taken a soft stand towards the bearers of such views and actions, the consequences would have been bitter and the image and role of the Party in particular, and the whole of its work with the masses in general would have been sabotaged.

Regrettably, immediately after the Conference of Peza, the Party organization in Tirana was faced with such a danger for a moment. This was the time when Jacomoni, Merlika and the pseudo-patriotic reaction, infuriated by the success we had just achieved at Peza,

were intensifying and co-ordinating a campaign to discredit our Communist Party, to accuse it of being an organization of «terrorists», «sower of disruption», of «driving the people into a war of extermination», «disturbing the peace», «leading astray the masses, and especially the youth,» etc., etc.

Precisely during those days, one of the cadres of the Party Regional Committee of Tirana at that time (a little later he was expelled from the Party for grave mistakes) came to me and said that they had decided to carry out a major sabotage action as a reply to the fascist reprisals.

«I agree in principle,» I told him, «but what will this action be concretely?»

«We are going to blow up a school,» replied the comrade, all self-assurance.

«Blow up a school?» I was so shocked I almost shouted at him, but in order to find out how far matters had gone, I added «calmly», «Indeed? And which is this school?!»

«It is at the Tirana airport and it is important because the fascists have turned some of its rooms into a store,» he told me and was trying to show me where the school lay.

«You must not do this!» I interrupted him. «We are talking everyday about the importance of actions and acts of sabotage, while you have thought of something which is utterly harmful to our cause.»

«Counting the desks and the blackboards, too, there may be more than a hundred cubic metres of pine timber in the building,» the comrade tried to persuade me. «And apart from the material damage,

think what an enormous fire it will make! Tirana will be lit up for the whole night and it will have a great effect among the people!»

«Yes!» I said in an ironical tone. «The flames will rise from the boards at night while in the morning the 'flame' of the Merlikas will burst out: 'Look what the communists do!' the traitors will shout. 'They are burning your children's schools! If we fascists had not stopped them, they would have burned the pupils with the school.'»

«It's a fascist school!» the comrade persisted.

«Do you think the fascists are going to explain to the people what sort of school it is?! They will simply seize on the fact that a school was burned and will scream:

«'The communists are against schools, against children, against everything good...' So you see what a fine action you have planned to carry out!» I told him, and while I was continuing to explain the damage that such an action would bring us, I saw that he was fidgeting.

«What's wrong with you?» I asked him. «Don't you agree?!»

He was silent for a moment, pursed his lips and said in a low voice:

«The problem is that the unit has received its orders. I thought that you would agree and I approved the plan.»

«Off with you at once!» I shouted. «That action must be stopped immediately and you must report to us on how it ends.»

I waited anxiously but he did not come back and



neither did we see the flames «lighting up» Tirana that night. We learned later that the action had been attempted, but had ended in ignominious failure: one member of the unit had been wounded and captured by the enemy and this led to a further wave of searches and arrests.

At just about the same period as this harmful action we were faced with another ugly act: I was informed that two or three comrades of the Tirana organization, including such adventurers and factionists as Beaverbrook, Fiqret Sanxhaktari (the fiancée of the adventurer Agron Çorati before she became engaged to and married Mehmet Shehu) and others, allegedly in order to gain the release from prison of a newly arrested comrade, kidnapped the young daughter of Man Kukaleshi, the commander of the gendarmerie of Tirana, and sent the father a ransom note: «The comrade or your daughter.»

When they told me about this disgraceful business, I could not bring myself to believe that such a thing could cross the mind of any Albanian, let alone an Albanian communist. But the comrades verified the information immediately and assured me that the action had been carried out.

«This is adventurism and terrorism!» I shouted, jumping to my feet. «The kidnapped child must be released immediately, while the terrorists must be tried by the Party. At the very least they must be expelled from our ranks! This, if they have done this from stupidity or from political and ideological shortsightedness, but if they have acted from other motives (and here I had in mind the possibility of some trap or

provocation), the judgement and sentence will be different.»

As a result of our immediate intervention this ugly incident, the only one of its kind even in the history of our internal enemies (because this act could in no way sully the Party) was avoided.

A few days later we were to learn that the criminal spy, Man Kukaleshi, had replied there and then to the terrorist-type «demand» of Beaverbrook and Fiqret Sanxhaktari for the «exchange» with a fascist-type ultimatum: «If you do not free my daughter by such and such a time ten of your comrades, whom we have arrested, will be hanged in the middle of Tirana.» And in order to confirm that on matters of crime the fascists and their lackeys did not separate their words from their deeds, the order was issued on the same day and the building of ominous scaffolds in the centre of Tirana had begun.

Imagine what bitter consequences that adventurist action which I mentioned would have brought, had we not condemned it severely and stopped it immediately! Not only would ten comrades have lost their lives, but the enemies would have been given a new «excuse» and «argument» to launch another wave of fascist terror and anti-communist demagogy among the people! Although the further complications were avoided we analysed this case thoroughly and sternly, pointing out that such actions and attempts were not only alien to and detested by communists, but were also very harmful to the unity of the Party and the people. We instructed all the cells and guerrilla units to be prudent in the activities which they carried out, to attack the

enemy ceaselessly, to make life as difficult as possible for them, but never according to the whims of this or that individual.

«The actions which we now are carrying out at present in the cities,» I pointed out to the comrades, «have the purpose of damaging and making life insecure for the enemies, but they also have another great purpose: in them the people must see our strength, our ability and courage to attack the enemy even in his main strongholds. Therefore, the actions, elimination of enemies and acts of sabotage must be most thoroughly studied, very prudently planned and prepared and carried out so that they are always crowned with success. Otherwise, the consequences, especially among the people, will have a negative effect. On no occasion must we permit any action, however damaging it may be to the enemy, at the same time to provide the enemy with the opportunity to talk and slander against our Party and its line.»

These two harmful actions which occurred one after the other in a very short period, as well as the fact that at these moments the enemies managed to capture a number of comrades of the party organization and the communist youth in Tirana, not only hindered us in the work just begun for the implementation of the decisions of the Conference of Peza, but as I said, created a grave moment fraught with dangers for us. It was necessary to overcome this unpleasant situation immediately, to avoid any harmful consequence and to further enliven and strengthen the work of the Party in all directions.

At a meeting of the Party Regional Committee of

Tirana which we organized those days, in which we discussed the tasks we faced for the implementation of the platform of the Conference of Peza, we also stressed the problems which had emerged for us and those who had made mistakes were severely criticized and the necessary measures taken against them. (1) In order to strengthen the work in the Party Regional Committee and the whole work in the party organization of Tirana, amongst other things, we decided to dismiss the former organizational secretary (precisely the author of the «action» of the timber, who had displayed mistakes and distortions on other occasions, too), and I proposed in his place my unforgettable comrade-in-arms, the communist worker of the first hours, Kozma Nushi. Likewise, in place of Misto Mame who had fallen heroically on the field of battle in August, Nexhmije Xhuglini, the political secretary of the Youth Regional Committee of Tirana, was elected member of the Party Regional Committee.

«We are a party of ceaseless action,» I told the comrades, «but we are prudent in everything we do, and work everything out carefully so that we have only victories. We must not forget that the people have their eyes on us. They do not believe the slanders and accusations of the Merlikas and other lick-spittles against communism and the communists, but you can imagine what a negative effect any wrong

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1 Apart from other things, this meeting ruled that Agron Çorati, Beaverbrook, and Fiqret Sanxhaktari be expelled from the Party as factionalist elements infected with the group spirit as well as on account of their adventurist and terrorist views and actions.

action or stand on the part of our comrades could cause. Not only must we not permit any wrong action, any sectarian or terrorist act within our ranks, but we must keep our eyes open and guard against provocateurs and provocations which the enemy and its agents might hatch up.»

I stressed these things because it seemed astonishing and suspicious that both the action of the timber and the kidnapping of the child occurred immediately after the Conference of Peza, and at a time when a furious wave of terror and fascist demagoguery had been launched against our Party and its line.

Hence, we had to be always in action, vigilant and cautious in order to cope with the many problems of that period and to ensure that the image of our Party among the people and its leading role were kept unsullied and increased in strength from day to day as a decisive condition for the unity of the people and their mobilization in the war.

And the truth is that the reputation and role of the Party were ceaselessly enhanced, winning the love and trust of the masses. The heroic act of our brave comrades Vojo Kushi, Sadik Stavaleci and Xhoxhi Martini, who fell in a bloody battle which lasted six hours in October that year, saddened our hearts but, at the same time, further enhanced the name of our Party and its members in the minds of the people.

Precisely at these moments, in the upsurge of these events, we had to work for the implementation of the decisions of the Conference of Peza. As I pointed out above, after this Conference, too, we were to concentrate our main attention on the working class, the

peasantry and their component parts, the women and the youth, which constituted the social basis of the Front, of course, without in any way neglecting the work with the nationalists, the intellectuals, and so on.

True, we pointed out that the working class and the peasantry recognized the CPA as the party which expressed and championed their interests, but it should not in any way be thought that all the contingents of the workers and peasants had become conscious, as early as those moments, about the role of the Party or of the National Liberation Front. There was still a very great deal to be done to bring these classes closer to and activize them in the Front and the war, and we were more than aware of this.

In the direction of the countryside, in particular, and especially in certain zones of the North, both the Front and the national liberation councils were being introduced with greater difficulties. Undoubtedly, this was partly due to the influence of the bayraktars, the pronounced socio-economic and cultural backwardness, a series of old mentalities, etc., etc., but at the same time it was partly a result of the weaknesses of our work, and concretely of the party regional committees and organizations that operated in those parts. Seriously concerned about the situation, the Provisional Central Committee of the Party several times analyzed its own work, the work of the regional committees and its delegates in those zones, and continually issued orientations and instructions for the improvement and enlivenment of the work. Obviously, we did not expect, or even think, that the situation everywhere would be turned in our favour within one or

even six months but we insisted that the work should be done, that the communists should penetrate everywhere, carrying the word of the Party, the decisions of the Conference of Peza, and together with them, the crack of the partisan rifle.

I remember how, while we were talking about the results achieved and the difficulties which presented themselves at a meeting with some comrades who had just returned from the zones of the North, one of them said:

«It is difficult to get anywhere on political issues with the highlanders of the remote zones. Their ignorance and conservatism is so great that they don't even listen to what you say to them.»

«No doubt,» I said, «if we go to a peasant to talk about 'grand politics', if we try to lead him up all sorts of blind alleys he has the right to refuse to listen to us, indeed, close his door to us. All his life the deputies and officials of the anti-popular regimes and the reactionary hacks and impostors have been trying to fill his head with empty talk about 'grand politics'. The peasant doesn't listen to it and has no reason to do so. But if we sit down with him by his fireside, if we speak to him openly and frankly about the harvest, about his problems, about his poverty, about the enslaved Homeland, about the roguery, the killings and looting carried out by the occupier and his men, the peasant does not consider this politics, he considers it a talk about his daily problems, and you will see that he is able to speak about these things better than you. Let us leave political subtleties for those who are engaged in 'politics'. The common people, the

workers and peasants, are for action, are interested in what pains them and now their greatest pain, the source of all pains, is the enslavement which is strangling the Homeland. What should we do to get rid of this enslavement, this is what we should talk about with the peasant and the worker, that is what he has in his heart which throbs for the cause which we are fighting!»

Fortunately, however, such «excuses» and «arguments», which had they been taken at face value would have meant folding our arms and giving up the work, were few and far between. In every instance in which tendencies to underrate the work in the countryside or in the city were expressed in any form, we criticized them severely and the fact is that step by step the results of our struggle began to become apparent even in the most remote zones. The work of communists, and hundreds of patriots, who were now closely linked with the line of the Party and the program of the Front, brought about that in the first months after the Conference of Peza the role and authority of our Communist Party was further enhanced, and the militant unity of the people became even stronger and more consolidated.

The months which followed the Conference of Peza once again confirmed the correctness of the line, the strategy and tactics of our young Party. The results were obvious: the ranks of the Party had been increased while day by day the broad masses of the people, the workers, peasants, the intellectuals, the patriots, the Albanian youth, were pouring into the National Liberation Front, the fighting organization which the Party led.



The National Liberation Movement had now become a broad movement of the masses with a powerful political basis consisting of the national liberation councils and a growing military force. In the towns and villages, in the occupied zones and in the liberated zones, the councils carried out their functions and their authority among the people steadily increased. The fire of the armed struggle was spreading from South to North, the partisan *çeta* and units and guerrilla units were making life intolerable for the occupiers and the quisling traitors. Under the ceaseless ideological, political and military attacks, the evil regime which the blackshirts had established was experiencing a deep crisis. After Vërlaci, the hangman Merlika was squeezed dry and thrown aside, and Eqrem Libohova was brought to power. But neither the bey of Libohova nor the others who were to follow him would be able to provide a safe harbour for the rotten ship of the fascist regime; the ocean of the people's war and hatred was raging around it.

Of course, such a situation disturbed the enemy occupier who was obliged to make desperate efforts to alter the situation in his favour. Apart from the changes of puppets in the «Albanian» government and administration, apart from the stepping up of its military and police measures, a separate chapter in these efforts consisted of the total mobilization and rallying of reaction, especially that part which fascist Italy had permitted to remain in the «second echelon» up until that time. As the Communist Party realized clearly and history confirmed, the traitor «nationalist» organization, the Balli Kombëtar, was to have its own

main role in this. Our struggle with this grouping of reaction was to comprise another chapter in the heroic efforts of the Party and the National Liberation Front of the Albanian people.

## 2. The front of traitors

At the moments when we were in the heat of the work to put into practice the decisions of the Conference of Peza, especially in the month of November, a number of comrades from Tirana and other districts reported to us about many movements, meetings and contacts of certain «nationalist» chiefs, prominent amongst whom was Mithat Frashëri. We were certain that something was being prepared and issued instructions that the greatest vigilance must be displayed and everything must be reported to us.

Not much later, about the end of November and the beginning of December, through the first issue of the paper, *The War for National Liberation* (1), which had been published and distributed «illegally», we learned the news about the formation of the «nationalist» organization called the Balli Kombëtar. As soon as we received the news about this organization and its leaders, as well as a little later, when we were acquainted with its program, the notorious «Decalogue», we were convinced that we had to do with an organization spawned by the enemy occupier which had

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1 Organ of the Balli Kombëtar.

thrown this «reserve» into the struggle against the Communist Party of Albania, the Anti-fascist National Liberation Front and the partisan National Liberation War.

The name of the Balli Kombëtar itself explains the whole plan of the local feudal-bourgeois reaction and the aims of the occupiers. «Balli» is not simply a literal translation of «front» and likewise «Kombëtar» is not simply a translation of the word «national». No, the term does not have a patriotic or linguistic character but has a profound ideological significance. For reaction the «Balli» would not mean «war» as the «Front» meant for us. For them the «Balli» meant the «head», the «pre-destined national leadership», that is, the old unchangeable world «without end», the conservative world with oppressors and oppressed, the «Albanian national» world which rejects and fights progress and communism. This was the meaning of the Balli Kombëtar created by the Italian occupiers and by means of which the heads of Albanian reaction dreamed of how they could organize and run Albania in the future. The word «war» did not exist in the name of this organization or in its content, because it represented a world in its death throes. The Balli was to engage in war, both with propaganda and with arms, not against the occupier, however, but against the Communist Party of Albania, against the National Liberation Army and the new state power of the national liberation councils.

Mithat Frashëri, an arch-traitor, was placed at the head of this assembly of traitors, and around him such notorious elements as Ali Bey Këlcyra, Kolë

Tromara, Faik Quku, Nuredin Vlora, and others such as Fuat Dibra, Hasan Dosti, Lef Nosi, and so on, but in fact the Balli Kombëtar was led by Jacomoni, the viceroy of King Victor Emmanuel III and General Dal-mazzo, the commander of the Italian army in Albania.

As to the local scum who formed and led this organization, which they advertized as «patriotic» (!), the majority were precisely those pseudo-patriotic nationalist elements with whom we had been trying for more than two years on end and had done everything possible to win their support for the war, the National Liberation Front and the cause of the freedom and independence of the Homeland.

Earlier, when I mentioned the meetings and fierce debates which we had with them, I also said something about their character, origin and their political and ideological baggage. Now, however, I want to dwell somewhat more extensively on this aspect, to indicate the essence and origin of these individuals who, at the end of 1942, were advertizing themselves as the «head», the «cream» of the nation, and what Albania could expect from their organization, the Balli Kombëtar.

The bulk of these «certified patriots» comprised the caravan of the «anti-Zogite» elements who after a 15 years asylum on foreign soil had returned to Albania in the wake of the Italian army and under the protection of fascist bayonets. In the past they had been deputies to the Albanian parliament, prior to the government of Fan Noli, and had been present at the funeral of Avni Rustemi and taken part in the Revolution of 1924. They had differences in their political convictions because they expressed the most

varied opinions in a number of newspapers which they brought out during the bourgeois-democratic regime which the coalition of beys and feudals headed by Ahmet Zog overthrew. The democratic views of some of them were superficial and quickly faded, while the most of those who had posed as «partisans of *Opinga*» (1) were in fact champions of the aghas and the mercantile bourgeoisie which was building itself up by buying the lands of bankrupt feudal families. All of them, even including those who posed as farthest to the «left», were far from being revolutionary democrats, like Avni Rustemi, Halim Xhelo and others who were loyal sons of the people and consistent fighters for democracy.

All the elements of the «anti-Zogite» emigration with the exception of the communists, or «reds», as the «anti-Zogites and democrats» in exile called them, claimed to be supporters of Fan Noli.

But after the failure of the 1924 Revolution that erudite writer, Fan Noli, travelled from place to place, visited the Soviet Union, spoke and wrote well about it, stayed in Germany, wrote beautiful and powerful anti-Zogite verses, went to the United States of America where he became head of the Church, became more bourgeois, assumed all kinds of colours, and from being an anti-Zogite came to terms with Zog and his men. True, he did not become a convinced and active Zogite, nevertheless, he accepted money from Zog. He never fully understood our National Liberation War, did not prove to be a zealous champion of it to

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1 The common people.

the end, while, when the people were driving out the occupiers and traitors and establishing their own power, Fan Noli approved the British plan for the formation of an «Albanian government in exile». Nevertheless, we appreciate Fan Noli as a bourgeois democratic writer and politician, limited in his views, it is true, but who, on the whole, loved Albania.

Whereas these «disciples of Fan Noli» in exile were not even supporters of his, and before they worried about Albania, they hastened to ensure the manger from which they would eat. Mussolini's Italy paid some of them, Alexander's Yugoslavia others, while still others were paid by the French secret service, the British Intelligence Service, the Greek Asphalia, the American secret service, and so on. They were divided into groups, but not according to their political tendencies and views, each with its own program and organization, newspaper and other publications. Although they tried to present their political squabbles as originating from differences in their political views, in fact they were grouped according to the sources from which they received their subsidies, their flow of income. Each group had its «premises» in a café which the members of other «groups» did not enter. All their activity as «great politicians» amounted to reading that newspaper which was provided by the café where they sat all day indulging in idle talk and «academic» discussions about international problems which were accompanied by a few curses about Zog. When they ran out of words and their «opposition» spirit dried up, they began playing poker and bridge and each tried to rob the other at gambling.

The chiefs, of course, conducted the financial policy, sharing out the money according to the orders of the centre from which they received it, as well as according to their personal sympathies. The pockets of some of them were full but there were others who had nothing to eat for days on end. This undoubtedly created quarrels amidst groups feeding from the same manger and frequenting the same café. Of course, there were some who received income from more than one source, came afloat again, and if one of them were asked where he found this money, he would reply, «I won it at gambling.» In fact, however, these individuals were spies for various agencies.

I am not exaggerating these things. When I was a student in France, on my way back to Albania for holidays or on the return journey, I stopped both in Bari, where I caught the ship, and in Paris. During these transit stops I have seen how they lived with my own eyes. For instance, I was several times in the Stoppani Café in Bari which was one of the «best known» cafés of these emigrants in which the «honourables», former deputies and other members of the «Zogite opposition», like Bahri Omari, Sheh Karbunara, Muharrem Vilmasi, Qamil Çela, whom they considered a «red», an officer called Lekë Margjini and others of the same type gathered. In Bari there were other emigrants who came around, but these were the main ones, the «heirs to the anti-Zogite policy» and the *Stoppani* café was their «parliament». Allegedly to protect their lives the Italian government had openly appointed an official police guard for these «honourables» apart from others who shadowed them.

When I passed through Bari on my way to France, they asked me: «What's the news from Albania, what is going on? Do they or do they not like Zog? When is he going to die?» and lots of other questions like these. I don't remember any time when they asked me about the troubles of the people, the workers and peasants, or expressed revulsion about the way the workers and peasants were plundered and exploited. When I spoke about these things they listened to me with indifference, because the situation and movements of the masses were of no importance to these «partisans of *Opinga*»; for them the best news was if you told them that Zog had been ill because it seemed to them that the way was being opened for them to take power in Albania.

In the *Stoppani* café they dealt in «grand politics». Each of them expressed his own tendencies and sympathies in their conversations. Sheh Karbunara, for example, apparently ate the bread of the Italians but had a special admiration for the English. The Sheh was lively in conversation and attracted attention with his manner of speaking in the Myzeqe dialect and his loud laughter. He was clever and cunning but had not the slightest culture. He waited for Bahri Omari to read him a newspaper because Bahri knew several eastern and western languages. Bahri's culture, however, was «a little of everything», and of no depth. In his political views, he posed as a radical socialist because he had great admiration for Edouard Herriot, one of the leaders of the French radical socialists. *Le Temps*, a liberal newspaper with great influence in France at that time, was the source of Bahri's inform-



ation and interpretations. Sheh Karbunara and the others waited for him in the *Stoppani* café with the newspaper *Le Temps* in front of him.

«Come on, read it to us!» said the Sheh.

«Wait a minute,» said Bahri, «till I have a coffee with cream.» Then he began to glance over the headlines and gave them a brief resumé of the news and articles in the paper.

Meanwhile, the Sheh did not fail to say:

«That's all very well, but see what the English say about this problem. Forget about the others, it's the English that count.»

In their conversations they posed as anti-Zogitea and consequently, in low voices, said the odd word against Mussolini, while they «bombarded» Zog with words. But Zog did not worry about them at all, had no fear of them and simply ignored them because he knew that they represented no danger to him.

On my way back from France to Albania I asked these «honourable» gentlemen: «What's the news from Albania?» But there was nothing I could learn from them apart from scandalous rumours about the goings-on of the regime.

I remember once I found them in very high spirits.

«Things are going on very well!» they told me.

«What has happened?» I asked.

«Zog is dying,» said the Sheh. «We have reliable information that he has cancer and two famous doctors have gone from Vienna to examine him.»

«Baba Sheh,» I said, «have we any organization inside the country to overthrow him apart from this?»

The Sheh looked me in the eye and said:

«Yes, ... we have. But you reds want to know everything and you hide your information from us!» and he looked at Qamil Çela whom they considered a communist.

These pseudo-politicians, these supporters of the mercantile bourgeoisie and aghas had hatred for communism in their blood stream and this they demonstrated later. As for any organization on their part within the country, not only did this not exist, but they had not sent any newspapers, pamphlets or even a single leaflet into Albania. Their «activity» could not be compared even with that of democratic elements among the exiles like Omer Nishani or Fan Noli himself, whose disciples they claimed to be, let alone with the activity of revolutionary communist militants like Ali Kelmendi, Halim Xhelo and Riza Cerova, who worked abroad but also entered Albania legally or illegally, and worked under the threat of imprisonment, internment and murder. But what sort of organization could the clients of the *Stoppani* café claim to have when their links with the country were non-existent? Apart from a few former acquaintances, men of the bourgeoisie, aghas, top officials or some old intellectuals, no one in Albania remembered them.

The latter had considered it more advantageous to make their peace with Zog than to rove the cities of Europe, had submitted to the regime, lived and carried out their activity under the protection of the Krosis and Zog's ministers and had even gained some posts in the capital or were appointed its prefects in the districts. The Skënder Pojanis, Reiz Selfos, Vehip Runas, Qemal Vrionis and many others were of this

type. Now even their opinions were unified, they had become convinced Zogites, although some posed as apolitical, others as neutral and when they went abroad, especially to Italy, because that is where they went mostly to strike trade deals, they did not forget their old friends. They would meet in the *Stoppani* café, crack a few jokes, pose as democrats, relate some of the crimes of the regime and, as «friends and acquaintances», put a bit of money in their pockets.

Hence, the contacts of the emigrant «politicians» with Albania were made through men of the Zogite regime who went abroad, through officials, big merchants, land-owners and aghas, and these contacts were maintained not in order to conspire or do something against the regime, but in order to get some economic aid from it and to delude themselves by saying that they had not lost contact with Albania. This was not surprising. Even in the time of the Fan Noli government when these men were members of it, or elected as deputies, their links were not with the masses of the people but mainly with the liberal gentry of the city and, up to a point, with the gentry of the countryside. It was not the idea of the progress of Albania which linked them with the gentry, but their family and marriage links, and chance friendships which were widely developed in the social life of that time.

The «anti-Zogite democrats» of Paris comprised another group of this category of political exiles. That included Ali Këlcyra, Kolë Tromara, Qazim Koculi, Sejfi Vllamasi, Rexhep Mitrovica and others, but Tromara, Ali Bey, Koculi and Mitrovica posed as leaders. In fact none of them recognized the other as leader,

because they all «led», but they were leaders in words, commanders without an army.

I did not have the opportunity to get to know these people well, because I was a student without a bursary, with no money, and could barely pay for my board and lodging and rarely went out to visit some museum, to see a performance or to drink a cup of coffee. Sometimes my father sent me a few napoleons, sometimes my friends gave me a coin or two and sometimes I was able to give lessons in Albanian at a few francs per hour. But from what little I knew of them and what I heard from other Albanians they passed their time in the cafés and gambling clubs, going to the races, the cinema, etc. Obviously they had plenty of money.

«Where do they find it?» I asked Remzi Fico, a medical student who knew Kolë Tromara.

«They are well paid by the French government as the politicians they are,» Remzi told me.

Their centres were *La Coupole*, *La Source* and other well-known cafés. There they gambled, played politics, «overthrew Zog», «aroused the Albanian people», and shared out the francs and the dollars which the course of betrayal on which they had set out secured for them. The «anti-Zogites» of the *Stoppani* café had good relations with this group while they quarrelled with the group of Mustafa Merlika which Mussolini kept in Dalmatia and prepared for his future plans of invasion.

As soon as fascist Italy invaded Albania all these exiles returned from the cafés of Europe. Naturally, they were pleased to see their friends and established

political contacts with other «anti-Zogites» who had remained within the country or had returned earlier. Now, with the occupation of the country, these so-called anti-Zogite democrats either still held the posts which they had had in the time of Zog, or had been raised in responsibility, and with the aid of fascism, were further enriching themselves at the people's expense.

The «outstanding patriots» returned from Europe, sounded out the terrain, sniffed out where the lire came from and how, sounded out the quislings, the Italian and Albanian fascist hierarchs, posed as politically «undefiled», as «able men and politicians,» as «men who had made sacrifices for this nation», while «languishing» on foreign soil, so now that the «sea had turned into youghurt» they ought to be given not spoons but ladles. They were installed in homes, their salaries continued, but in what way, nobody knew. The occupier wanted to legalize these salaries, but the «fathers of the nation» put up resistance in this direction because this would mean that the pseudo-patriots would be compromised in the eyes of the people and committed to the dance. However, fascist Italy was to allow them to retain their disguise, just as long as it was in its interests, because it had taken into account the role of the reactionary chiefs of the political exiles in its plans for the occupation of Albania. It was not for nothing that Zog's «great friend» had long been working to organize them, had kept and subsidized them, allegedly in secret ways, because Zog did not dare make the slightest protest. Fascism had considered and was to use these men as a reserve for the domin-

ation of Albania and they were an important card in the Italian game of «the liberation of Albania from Zog». These elements had become puppets and as such nobody was going to ask them what role they were going to play in the prepared plot. And fascism divided the roles amongst the groups of these political exiles. Some of them, such as Mustafa Kruja and others, it used directly to govern its «colony», while the others it kept in reserve.

It was not that fascist Italy had no need of them, but it knew that it could not bring them into use before Vërlaci, Mustafa Merlika, Eqrem Bey Libohova, Maliq Bushati, and so on. They were «the first violins», while the others had to submit to the quisling regime of the occupiers and work for it and, moreover, at first shed the odd tear for Albania and Albanianism. All this was a puppet play but the captor Italy had not staged it for nothing. In this way, these pseudo-patriots, pseudo-democrats and fascists were brought into the dance of the Italian fascist occupiers. Some of them were made members of the «Council of State» created especially for them, while, as I said, the others became local fascist chiefs, and others still received «pensions» and bribes without occupying any definite post, so that they could retain for a while the reputation of «unblemished patriots» although all the time they carried on disguised propaganda against the people's resistance. The elements of this group temporarily left in reserve were closely linked with fascist Italy, but their role was to carry out subversive activity within the struggle of the Albanian people and to co-ordinate their demagoguery with the bludgeon which Mustafa Merlika wielded openly.

Their mission was to link the maximum number of people to the fascist band-wagon through deception and threats and to win over the peasantry and the intellectuals. In the end this dangerous activity of theirs had some results, especially among vacillating and cowardly elements. Thus, in order to suppress the people and their struggle, the fascist occupier worked from both sides: from the side of the Albanian fascist officials placed in government posts from which they oppressed and exploited the people, and from the side of the pseudo-patriots, pseudo-democrats and Zogites allegedly fallen in disgrace. These latter were the «politicians» of the *Kursaal* café and gambling clubs like the *Savoy* and other notorious establishments.

The fascist secret agency, which was everywhere and reported everything, turned a blind eye and a deaf ear when one of these «politicians» expressed some «criticism» of persons in power or the fascist regime in the country. The whole lot of them were a filthy scum among whom it was hard to find even one, however insignificant, who was undefiled.

Of course, apart from the knowledge which we had from the period prior to the occupation, we created a more complete and accurate opinion about them during our many attempts to «fan up» their patriotism, that is, to unite them with the war, with the Front, with the great cause of the Homeland. As I have already shown in detail, however, initially they treated us with total disregard, and, indeed, implied that they could hardly deign to talk with us «hot-headed young reds». There were two main reasons for this stand of theirs towards us in the initial stage of our contacts with them:

First, among these «nationalist-democrats», who lived on fascist hand-outs and who were neither nationalists nor democrats, the idea prevailed that they were the «most capable», were «proven politicians», that «the people loved and respected them» and, hence, they thought they were destined, when the favourable moment came, to take power and govern the country. Thus, with their delirium and these absurd illusions they had about themselves they could not even think, let alone accept, that their time had passed and that now new men were emerging from the ranks of the common people, ready to take over responsibility for the fate of the Homeland. Second, this «disdainful» attitude towards us in this first phase of the war was dictated to them by the fascist occupier and open reaction, with the aim that we, «young people», would be overawed by their «profound reasoning» and lose heart, hence, would «come to our senses», as they advised us, reconcile ourselves to the situation and, while swallowing the misfortunes of the Homeland, «enjoy the blessings of the fascist order»!

After years of idle talk and dreams in cafés, however, their calculations went even further than this, for them the occupation of the country by fascist Italy was a passing phenomenon for Albania and they thought that, when the Italians left they «would still have them as a support, provided we don't annoy them, as these boys are doing». Their ideas went further still: «If nazi Germany replaces Italy, that will be even better and it will help us; on the other hand, if both Italy and Germany are defeated, then Britain and the United States of America will triumph, they



will make the law and in that case we shall be even better off.»

As a result of these dangerous views and the economic and political interests they regarded the war of the Albanian people against the occupier, for which we were appealing and striving, as something terrible. In no way did they want to fight the fascist occupier, therefore, they did their utmost and employed every means to strangle the revolution in its embryonic phase.

Of course, regardless of the «disdain», «gibes» and «remonstrances» of these old men, harnessed to the fascist plough, we carried on with our work and were to witness all their metamorphoses which appeared ridiculous but, in fact, were done under orders. When, to their astonishment, they saw that we were really taking the reins of the war in hand, they were obliged and ordered to come and seek us out, to try and persuade us «for the sake of suffering Albania» to proceed no further on the course of «adventurism» which we had taken. Quietly and patiently, we explained our stand to them once again and continued on our course.

However, when all these manoeuvres and efforts of theirs to «soften» us got nowhere, when we organized the Conference of Peza and achieved one victory after the other, then «the fathers of the nation» received orders to change their tactic immediately: the notorious Balli Kombëtar emerged, or more precisely, was produced in the workshops of the vice-regal administration as a counterweight to the National Liberation Front, the councils and the National Liberation War which our Communist Party was leading.

Some two years later, in the course of the war, when we were on the eve of the liberation of Albania and finally settling accounts with the occupier and the whole of internal reaction, precisely on this problem we were to hear, amongst many others, this absurd paradox:

The Balli Kombëtar emerged allegedly as a result of the inadequate work of the CPA (!), moreover, as a consequence of a sectarian stand which we had allegedly adopted towards those elements who subsequently became leaders of the Balli Kombëtar (!).

This «gem», which we had heard for the first time from the mouth of Tempo in March 1943 in Labinot, was repeated at Odriçan and later at Berat by Tito's other delegate, Velimir Stojnic and was quickly taken up by Sejfulla Malëshova, Koçi Xoxe and others who tried to «justify» it.

Shocked and angry at the same time, I asked them, «What do you consider sectarianism?! The fact that all of us, without exception, have held meeting after meeting, frequently for whole days and nights, with all those dregs of history and patriotism? The fact that we have listened patiently to all their filthy insinuations and accusations against us when they deserved to be told 'go to the devil'?!»

«Then, why did they not come with you, but organized themselves in a separate organization?» Stojnic tried to «catch» me. «What drove them to the right? Why did they oppose the Front and the Party?»

«I can answer your question,» I told him, «but first it would be better for us to hear your opinion because you have more experience: why did the Mihaj-

lovićes(1), the Ustaše the Cetnici and a lot of others of the same type, become enemies of the National Liberation Front and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia? What took them from the side of 'patriotism' and pushed them to the right?»

Stojnić stared at me, dumb with fury. It was not just the anger and irony of my words which struck him dumb. He did not know what to say. Sejfulla tried to come to his aid:

«Each concrete problem must be examined and analyzed in the concrete conditions and circumstances of each country. Yugoslavia is different from Albania. We were talking about our country...»

«I know this principle of Marxism,» I said to Sejfulla, «but you, at least in this concrete case, are indulging in sophistry. Although I have no first-hand knowledge of the concrete conditions in Yugoslavia, or of the work of the CPY with the 'nationalists' and other elements, in principle I can state with certainty: those same factors, those same conditions, those same social forces, dictates and interests which gave birth to the Cetnici and Ustaše in Yugoslavia or the Zervistas in Greece, gave birth to the Ballists in Albania! However, I do not want to go into the experience of others because I have no intimate knowledge of it. But one thing I can assert with conviction: our Party acted towards the nationalist elements with the greatest

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1 Draža Mihajlović, agent of English imperialism, minister of war in the Yugoslav puppet government of London in 1942. He collaborated with the German occupiers against the Yugoslav national liberation movement and terrorized the ,Kosova people.

maturity. In our relations and work with them in the phase before they emerged as an organization there may have been illusions, undue hopes and even a certain overestimation of some of them, but there was certainly never any sectarianism!»

There is no need to dwell at length on these long arguments of those difficult days (many of them I have mentioned in greater detail in the book *The Titoites* [1]) but I brought up this fragment from the autumn of 1944 in order to compare it with the period and concrete situation under discussion, that is, the period when the Balli Kombëtar had emerged on the scene at the end of 1942. From this comparison between the Titoite accusation of «sectarianism» and our concrete stand, anyone, even the most ill-informed or ill-intentioned, can see clearly what a correct stand we adopted, what great work and efforts we made with the mixture of pseudo-patriots, what wisdom and patience we displayed in order to convince them to join in the war together with the people. And we should not forget: above I have mentioned only those efforts, meetings and debates (naturally not all of them and in full detail) which I made personally with the nationalists. But other comrades of the Central Committee, of the regional committees, other communists and cadres, honest patriots and revolutionaries all over the country, had many many similar meetings with such elements!

Hence, the Balli Kombëtar emerged on the scene

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1 This book is published in English and in some other foreign languages by «8 Nëntori» Publishing House, Tirana 1982.

not for any fault in our work with them, but because well before this, the CPA had emerged on the scene of history with a correct line, with a clear program, with the will, determination and ability to go among the masses and win them to its cause. Had our Party not existed, had we not achieved the successes which we achieved in less than a year of the existence and activity of the Party, that is, had we remained silent, then perhaps, reaction would not have made the effort to assemble and organize itself! In brief, they emerged as reaction not against the occupier, but as reaction against us, against the CPA, against the National Liberation Front and the national liberation councils, against the partisan *çeta*, units and detachments which were filling the country.

We were clear about this «development» of reaction from the outset. Indeed, even before we learned of the formation of the Balli we had discussed and taken into account the possibility of an organization of pseudo-patriotic reaction in order to oppose us.

Now we had to define and maintain such a correct, vigilant and prudent stand thanks to which we would ensure the greatest possible progress of our cause towards victory, regardless of the organizations and groupings which internal reaction was assuming and might alter in the future.

It is the merit of our Party that it accomplished this extremely complex and difficult task, too, with honour, without permitting any sectarianism or opportunism and as a consequence of this the solutions and results achieved were the best possible and most acceptable for the years of the war, but above all,

they were solutions which were vital to the future of the Homeland, the people and socialism in Albania.

On this problem, too, the work of our Party constitutes a rich experience of very great political and ideological value and importance. History has had its say about this experience. Since that period I have frequently written and spoken about that stern, complex but truly vital struggle which we had to wage along with the war against the occupier.

First of all, aware from the outset that reaction was organizing itself not against the occupiers but against us, convinced that if it were to fight with arms it would do this only against the CPA, the Front, the National Liberation Army and councils (and this is what occurred), towards the organizations of reaction we defined and applied a line and tactics which made it possible to avoid fratricidal war in the ranks of the Albanian people, and the disruption and disorganization of the patriotic unity of the masses.

Second, while compelling reaction, which had not raised a hand to fight the occupier, not to engage in open fight against the Party and the people, either (for as long as possible), at the same time we did not for one moment permit any weakening of the National Liberation War of the people or any violation of the leading role of the Party in the Front, in the councils or in the National Liberation Army, for the sake of «maintaining peace between us»; we did not permit any deviation from the program of the Party, that is, we did not accept or reach any opportunist or social-democratic unity or «fraternization» with the Balli or anybody else.

Third, thanks to the correct line, neither sectarian nor opportunist, towards reaction, and in the concrete case towards the Balli we managed to bring about a profound differentiation in its ranks; we were able to separate and save those who were deceived by bringing them over to our side; those who adhered to the principle «neither with one side nor the other» we neutralized and kept from fighting us; and we were able to bring out clearly before the eyes of the people the detestable figure and counter-revolutionary action of the traitor chiefs of reaction. And when matters reached the phase when we had in our possession a whole series of facts exposing the activity of these collaborators with the occupier, when they had been discredited in the eyes of the masses, their own treachery was to compel them to play the final act: left like a handful of dregs, without any hope for support, without any basis among the people, they went over openly to support the nazi detachments against our partisan forces and against the people who had risen in the general insurrection.

Now the armed struggle carried the differentiation through to the end. Thus, thanks to the line pursued by our Party, the liberation of the Homeland from the nazi-fascist occupiers coincided with the elimination of all those criminals, the former representatives of the exploiting classes, from the scene of Albanian life. A final result was achieved: the National Liberation War had been transformed into a popular revolution and was about to be crowned with success.

Precisely in this particular experience of coping with and defeating reaction lies one of the greatest

merits of the Communist Party of Albania, a merit which had profound and decisive repercussions both on the development of the war and for the reliable future of the revolution in Albania.

Then, how was the CPA able in those difficult years to define and apply such a line which saved the country from the counter-revolutionary organization and groupings of internal reaction?!

Above all, we arrived at this line and the great results achieved through our reliance on a correct and consistent policy, which had as its watchword from beginning to end: merciless, uncompromising war against the foreign occupier and their collaborators, and the unity of all the vital forces of the nation in this life-and-death struggle!

With this watchword we awaited the emergence of the Balli Kombëtar on the scene and were to pin it with its back to the wall right to the end until its total degeneration and destruction.

Thus, once we had learned the formation of the Balli Kombëtar and were acquainted with its so-called Decalogue in which the Balli proclaimed its program, we discussed the matter extensively and decided to attack it precisely on its weakest point, on its demagoguery and vows about «patriotism».

Among the points of the «Decalogue» of the Balli Kombëtar there was one about «a free Albania», and «the elimination of exploitation», and even the odd timorous word about «the war against the occupier», but apparently the Balli Kombëtar was preparing for war against the Martians because the Italian occupiers were not mentioned! In this way the chiefs of the



Balli Kombëtar were trying to safeguard their nationalist colours, so that they would be better able to play the role of the Trojan Horse in the ranks of the Albanian people who hated and were fighting the occupier.

We seized on this «reluctant patriotism» of the Balli Kombëtar and at the proper moment, at a meeting organized in Tirana, we told the representatives of that organization:

«We have heard about your organization and have read the program which you proclaimed. There you express your desire for a 'free Albania', 'for driving out the foreigners', etc. These are things which unite us because we have been fighting and shedding blood for these things two years now. As you know, the National Liberation Front of the Albanian people which unites all the masses, anti-fascist nationalist currents and organizations in its ranks, was formed some time ago. On the basis of the platform of the war, you, too, ought to adhere to this Front.»

«We do not recognize your Front!» replied the representatives of the Balli Kombëtar.

We talked to them patiently about the Conference of Peza, the participation in it and its decisions, but the men of the Balli Kombëtar again objected:

«We do not recognize either the Conference of Peza or its decisions!»

Since they were feigning ignorance, we, without losing our aplomb, told them that their chiefs, such as Mithat Frashëri, Kolë Tromara, Ali Këlcyra and others, were informed about the Conference, that Mr. Mithat had sent his own representatives, that Skënder Muço

had come to Peza in person, although he was late, and had accepted the platform, etc., etc.

Since they could not deny these facts, the representatives of the Balli Kombëtar played another card:

«Yes, yes, we know all this,» they said, «but you went to the Conference as a Party, while we nationalists were invited as individuals. We did not take part in it as an organization, therefore we do not recognize either the Conference of Peza or the National Liberation Front!»

«We would not have failed to invite you as an organization,» we told them, «but how could we invite you when your organization did not exist at the time when the Conference of Peza was held?!»

«How can you say the Balli did not exist? We were alive!» objected one of the representatives of the pseudo-patriots.

«We knew that you were alive, that's why we invited you,» was our reply. «But we could not read the cups to foretell the existence of an organization of which there was no living sign, not even with a leaflet or proclamation, let alone with rifles, and indeed none of you even mentioned it!»

But the delegates of the Balli Kombëtar were deaf in that ear. Then, the representatives of the Front said to them:

«Your objections are baseless and utterly formal. In our opinion it is of no importance whether or not you were at Peza. The important thing is that we agree to fight together against the same enemy. Are you for the war?»

«We are!» «agreed» the representatives of the Balli Kombëtar.

«Then, what is stopping you? We are presenting to you a concrete platform of struggle and unity which thousands and thousands of people all over the country have embraced months ago, so let us discuss the matter on this basis. We say to you: join the Front and take part in the war.»

«The National Liberation Front you are talking about is your Communist Party itself camouflaged with the name Front. By telling us to join the Front, willy-nilly you are asking us to take part in your Party!»

«No, even if you beg us we would neither ask this of you nor ever permit it,» we said. «You are trying in vain to confuse things which are clear as the light of day: the Communist Party is a political party the doors of which are open only to those who embrace a definite ideology — the communist ideology, to those who accept and apply given norms and principles which are extremely scientific and rigorous. You cannot do this and no one is asking you to do.

«While the Front, gentlemen,» we continued, «is a broad organization of the masses, the doors of which are opened to all genuine patriots, to all anti-fascist trends and organizations which are ready to take part in the armed struggle against the occupier. The main thing now is that we should all unite to win freedom. This militant union is the Front.»

«Even if this were so we could not join it, because the Front fights with the program and slogans of the Communist Party!» the representatives of the Balli Kombëtar tried to find a way out.

«But what are our concrete program and slogans?» we asked them, and continued: «The very thing that our National Anthem says: 'Around the flag united / with one desire / for one aim.' War against the occupier for the liberation of the country! Go ahead and present some more militant program or slogan which will serve the aims of the Homeland and the people better and we shall accept them.»

The representatives of the Balli Kombëtar were nonplussed by our suggestion and looked at one another in doubt until one of them, as the most senior, in a quiet tone of the man of wisdom, began to «teach» us their «great» «refined» policy. In essence the «lesson» was this:

«We recognize the Communist Party as a party which does not like fascism, and we, the Balli, do not like it either. But we differ over the way in which we should fight it. You communists are hasty, you are fanning up feuds, you are infuriating the Italians who are very strong and this fury is falling and will continue to fall on the people, on the youth. We must safeguard these forces because we need them for the future; after all, it's a pity to shed all this blood,» said the representative of the Balli Kombëtar and concluded: «The Balli is for waiting until the time comes, hence hasty actions should not be undertaken.»

«What time have you in mind?» we asked them.

«When fascism has been badly knocked about and has one foot in the grave. Then, we should rise, give it a shove and win freedom without much bloodshed!» replied the representative of the Balli Kombëtar.

«A strange strategy!» we said. «But there is one

thing we don't understand: if we have to sit idle, if all the enslaved peoples are going to sit idle, then who will knock fascism about and prepare it for us to give it the final shove?»

Our question left the representatives of the Balli Kombëtar in stony silence. They murmured something between themselves and then suddenly one of them raised his voice:

«It's impossible to talk with you. You are just trying to trap us with words. That's your aim!»

«No, our aim is to appeal to you and to convince you, since your claim that you are a nationalist organization and do not like fascism, to unite in the war against fascism. Apart from this line, apart from this logic, we recognize no other line or logic. Therefore think it over and decide. The doors Of the Front are open to you. It is awaiting you, but there is a limit to the waiting.»

«No, no,» the Ballists insisted, «we accept only the existence of your Party and agree to talk as party to party about what we should do.»

«As to what we should do, the Communist Party decided this at the time it was formed: war against the occupier! No one permits us to return to that phase which has long been over. Even if we wanted this, the wheel of history cannot be turned back. Therefore, if you are truly for what you say there is only one way: either you must join that militant unity which has long been created, or it is no use our talking.»

In essence that is how the first meeting of the representatives of the National Liberation General

Council and the representatives of the Balli Kombëtar, a meeting which was organized on the initiative of the CPA in Tirana in January 1943, began and ended.

We had foreseen and expected this stand of theirs; they came to the meeting with the aim of drawing us into an endless series of talks and «discussions» in which we would beat the air and, meanwhile, they would act with cunning and demagogy to disintegrate the ranks of the Front, to undermine the authority which the Party had gained among the masses and, consequently, to quell the National Liberation War which we were stepping up from day to day. That is what fascism had demanded of this counter-revolutionary grouping, therefore, in the initial phase the aim of the Balli Kombëtar was to neutralize our activity and to «gently» displace the Party from its correct line and the role which it had gained. This would have been a great victory and gift for Jacomoni and Merlika, and at the same time, a victory for the traitor chiefs of the Balli Kombëtar: they would have eliminated from the scene the greatest obstacle and sworn enemy of their aims and vital interests.

Obviously, however, these were the aims and calculations of the occupier and reaction, which we had long foreseen and which we opposed and would continue to oppose with all our might without making the slightest concession in our program and stand.

Someone may ask: when matters stood like this, that is, when the Party understood clearly from the outset what the Balli Kombëtar represented and for what sinister aims it was created, why was it necessary to talk with its representatives? Why did the Party and

the partisan forces not oppose this organization of the occupiers with stern measures right from the start?!

Of course, at first sight it might seem simpler and easier to have declared the Balli Kombëtar en bloc an enemy organization and turn the rifle against it from the start. But these matters must not be judged from those vile deeds of the Balli Kombëtar which the people saw and learned about in the summer or winter of 1943-1944, or from what everybody knows about now. These matters must be judged from the concrete situations of the autumn of 1942 and the beginning of 1943. These were the first months when the Balli Kombëtar had just emerged on the scene and, although in reality it was winter, for the Balli Kombëtar these months were the first and last spring in which it «flowered».

Although the backbone of the Balli Kombëtar was comprised mainly of the elements of the reactionary bourgeoisie linked with the occupier, as well as the anti-popular feudal lords and intellectuals it must not be forgotten that both through their reputation from the past and by means of manoeuvres, money and trickery, they managed to mislead and line up in the Balli Kombëtar a number of people from the backward strata and other confused elements. Our Party had taken this reality into account and could not underrate it. On the other hand, in order to make up for the time it had lost, the Balli Kombëtar set to work «vigorously»: it set up *çeta* and «councils», organized «regional committees», brought out a newspaper and leaflets allegedly illegally, but, in fact, with the knowledge and approval of the quislings and occupiers. In

order to give their organization, stuffed with all kinds of traitors and pseudo-patriots, a certain revolutionary» flavour, it was arranged that the «communists» of «Zjarri» (Fire)[1] like Hysen Lepenica and company, would set up their camp beds along with the ordinary criminals and thieves, in this lair of bandits with felt hats and bow-ties!

Moreover, before long the leaders of the Balli Kombëtar began to make the absurd assertion that they had formed their organization before the National Liberation Front was set up and, as a result of all these things, illusions and opinions were created among certain ill-informed strata that allegedly there were, not one, but two anti-fascist nationalist organizations.

Had we immediately declared open war on the Balli Kombëtar this would have meant leading the National Liberation War on a course extremely dangerous to its outcome: we would have been faced with a new, open enemy at a time when our proclaimed enemy was the foreign occupier. Even worse, a real fratricidal war would have flared up fiercely and this is precisely what the occupier dreamed of and did its utmost to kindle amongst our people.

These and other reasons compelled us to define and pursue a most correct and cautious line possible towards this grouping of reaction. If we were to save the misled and neutralize some of the other elements

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1 Trotskyite group formed in Greece in 1936 which carried out a pronounced hostile activity against the Communist Groups and the CPA in Albania. It was definitively smashed in the beginning of 1943.



and also strengthen and consolidate the Front, the councils and the National Liberation Army, this would depend greatly on this line.

We gave all the organizations of the Party correct instructions on these matters, stressing that they must pursue prudent and flexible tactics in the direction of the Balli Kombëtar without permitting any slipping into opportunism or into sectarianism, the latter being the more likely danger at those moments.

It is well-known that the Balli Kombëtar was created at a time when the prestige of the CPA and the Front had been enhanced, when the partisan *çeta* and units had been extended and their number was increasing continuously, when the people were seeing and becoming more and more convinced each day with facts that they were the only real forces in the war against the occupier. The international position of the National Liberation Movement had been strengthened also, especially after December 1942 when the foreign ministers of the three Great Powers of the anti-fascist coalition, the Soviet Union, the USA and Great Britain, recognized the war of the Albanian people and the post-war independence of Albania in public declarations. That was a blow to reaction within the country which screamed that allegedly the Axis Powers would guarantee the freedom and sovereignty of Albania, while the heads of the Balli Kombëtar were not pleased about this recognition because the authority of the National Liberation Front was increased.

In a talk with one of the main comrades of the Party Regional Committee of Gjirokastra (if I am not mistaken when he came to Labinot to take part in the

meetings which we organized on the eve of the 1st National Conference of the CPA),[1]in speaking about our attitude to the Balli Kombëtar he said:

«We do not waste much time with the Ballists. Either with us, or no shilly-shally. This divides us from them,» and slapped the barrel of his rifle.

«I don't know what you have in mind with that 'shilly-shally',» I said, «but our line is this: we must make every effort to draw the Balli Kombëtar effectively into the fight against the occupier without at any time falling for their 'tactic' of endless, meaningless, fruitless talk. As for the rifle, we will aim it at them only if they come out openly on the side of the occupier against us.»

«Why, do you think Ali Këlcyra can be brought round with talks?» persisted the comrade. «There is no end to his words, like his estates.»

«If it were only a matter of Ali Këlcyra or ten others like him,» I said, «I believe there'd be no need even for talks. However, we have in mind those misled elements which he and his associates have deceived and won over. We must win these elements, this base, away from them and they cannot be won either with empty words and appeals or by training our rifles on them. Then,» I continued, «we must not forget that the Balli Kombëtar presents itself through a democratic program as a nationalist organization, and unlike the quislings, it has not come out against the war for the

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1 Held on 17-22 March 1943 to examine the question of the preparation of the general people's uprising and the organization of the Albanian National Liberation Army.

liberation of the Homeland. We know very well why Ali Këlcyra and company present themselves in this way, but it should not be thought that everybody, especially certain strata of the people, see matters as clearly as we do. A wrong sectarian and extremist stand towards the Balli Kombëtar now would do us great harm.»

«Advanced», or more precisely, hasty opinions in connection with this problem had been manifested at those moments in the organization of the region of Korça, too. Of course, the comrades of Korça where the Balli Kombëtar had a relatively great influence, were thoroughly fed up with the activities of the spokesmen of the Balli Kombëtar and the bands of criminal brigands of Safet Butka and company who engaged in propaganda against the Party and the National Liberation Front and tried to sabotage the war and our work in that region. The anger of the comrades was understandable. But here we had to do with a delicate political question, and in such matters anger and revulsion, which on many occasions are bad counsellors, must give way to correct analysis of the situation, clear perspectives and flexible tactics. So, the Central Committee could not give its approval for attacks on the Balli Kombëtar, because such an action would have had negative repercussions for our war, and instead we sent a letter(1) to the leaders of

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1 This letter which at that time was sent to all party organizations in the regions is published in Enver Hoxha, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, «8 Nëntori Publishing House», Tirana 1974, p. 77, Eng. ed.

the Party in Korça in which we drew their attention to and explained the line towards the Balli Kombëtar.

Our position would be this: knowing the strategy and tactics of the Balli Kombëtar, our duty was to oppose them with our correct and far-sighted strategy and tactics. These would unmask and weaken the Balli Kombëtar, it would undergo a process of erosion and at a time when our fight was stepped up the leaders of the Balli Kombëtar would be openly recognized as collaborationists, the ranks of their organization would thin out and disintegrate, hence, its basis of honest but misled elements would abandon it, just as they did. Likewise, the comrades in the districts were instructed that the work of the Party and the Front must be further intensified and meetings and conferences should be organized with the people, the intellectuals and others in order to ceaselessly publicize and make clearer the line of the Communist Party of Albania and the program of the National Liberation Front.

Thus, by pursuing a correct strategy and wise and flexible tactics towards the Balli Kombëtar we had the initiative in our hands right from the start and step by step forced the chiefs of the Balli Kombëtar to come out more and more in their true colours. After their categorical refusal to join the Front in the war against the occupier we sent them a further proposal, «more advantageous» for them:

«Let us set up an initiatory commission with delegates of the Communist Party, the National Liberation General Council and the Balli Kombëtar and hold a big conference at which you can express your

ideas about the organization of the war and we can express ours.»

«No,» they replied, «because there you will be in the majority.»

«The majority or the minority cannot determine who is right and who is wrong,» we said to them. «However, since you are afraid of a conference between ourselves, let us go to the people. Let us come before the people, each express his own views and let the people judge us!»

To our surprise, either from blind faith in their own strength and influence among the masses or because they judged the masses with their own yardstick, at first they accepted this proposal of ours. Indeed, some meetings and assemblies of this type were organized. There the chiefs of the Balli Kombëtar paraded proudly before the people with endless ready-prepared panegyrics, full of great oaths, tears and sighs, but in the end, went away with their tails between their legs. Although they had little schooling in oratory, our comrades, communists and cadres, stood up before the people and with the simple but fiery words of the Party, talking about the war for freedom and love for the Homeland, gave the people heart so that there and then they derided and did short work of the demagogues and traitors. Immediately, on order from the «centre» the Balli Kombëtar gave up this «form of work» and decided to «explain» matters to the people on its own, without «opposition»!

A new phase began in the «development» of the Balli Kombëtar, the phase of slanders and accusations against the Front, against the national liberation coun-

cils and the line of our Communist Party. But it was already doomed. The people did not want pledges and «expressions of concern» but wanted concrete organization and extension of the armed struggle against the occupiers and, of course, expressed themselves in favour of the line of the Party and the National Liberation Front. Moreover, at these «meetings of its own with the masses» the Balli Kombëtar was openly displaying its features not only as a traitor organization, but also as a gang of ordinary thieves who stole everything from chickens to women's dresses. The process of exposure and self-exposure now began to assume broader proportions. Not only the people but the misled elements who had joined this nest of rogues by mistake began to fall off from the chiefs and the criminal thieves. Meanwhile, with all our means and forms of propaganda, with leaflets, appeals, at meetings with the people, in the press, etc., still without attacking the Balli Kombëtar by name, we defended and disseminated the correct line of the Party about the war, replied to the accusations and slanders of the Balli Kombëtar as they deserved, and above all, exposed its demagogic slogans of wait-and-see.

Our best propaganda, however, was provided by the partisan units, *çeta* and battalions which were making life hell for the enemy, and the national liberation councils in the liberated zones in the activities of which the people were seeing the birth of the new state power, their own state power. This propaganda was very effective and the broad masses of the people were coming closer and closer each day to the war, the Front and the Party. For us this had colossal importance.

Especially after the 1st National Conference of the CPA in March 1943, the need arose for more intensive work to speed up the deepening of the differentiation within the ranks of the Balli Kombëtar. The main thing which dictated to us the intensification of our work in regard to this organization was the orientation of the Conference to further strengthen and consolidate the unity of the people, the councils and the armed partisan detachments now that we were on the verge of the general armed uprising. As was decided at the Conference and the Central Committee instructed, in the work with the Balli Kombëtar the stress was placed especially on those ordinary folk who had no links with the treacherous activity of the chiefs except the hereditary influence of the Balli Kombëtar chiefs and their own political unclarity. In these efforts all our means, propaganda, direct talks and relations with those people and patient work to convince them would be used. Likewise, it was decided that further efforts would be made through talks with the leadership of the Balli Kombëtar.

As the leadership of the Party continually pointed out, the basis of these talks, as always, would be the uncompromising war against the occupier and the traitors and acceptance of the platform of the National Liberation Front. By means of these talks, which we were becoming more and more convinced each day were the final ones, we aimed to fan up even further the contradictions which existed within this organization right up to its leadership and, on the other hand, to deepen the process of the exposure of the Balli Kombëtar among the people so that it would lose even

what little credit it might still have among them.

As we had decided in the Bureau, I, personally, had two or three meetings with the representatives of the Balli Kombëtar at this time. One such meeting, as far as I remember, was held in the home of Bahri Omari in Tirana. I had Ymer Dishnica and Mustafa Gjinishi with me, while Bahri Omari and Kolë Tromara represented the Balli Kombëtar. It was almost night when we arrived at Bahri's house. We went inside and found the two of them waiting for us. We greeted them and took our seats.

«Go ahead and tell us what you have to say,» Bahri said to me.

«Ail right,» I replied, lit a cigarette and began to speak. First, I outlined to the representatives of the Balli Kombëtar our views about the development of the situation in our country, the successes which the National Liberation Movement had achieved, and the grave economic, political and military crisis which the fascist coalition was experiencing not only in our country but also in the world.

«As you see,» I pointed out among other things, «the development of the situation shows that we and not you are right. Contrary to what you have said in our earlier talks, not only has our war developed, and the people are taking part in it more and more each day, but this war has placed the occupier in great difficulties and is driving it to defeat. The people listened to us, and this was not because they liked the look of us, but because our program responded to their interests and the patriotic spirit which has never been extinguished in the hearts of all honest Albanians.



«The Juggernaut of fascism,» I continued, «is heading for disaster and there is no force in the world which can save it from final destruction. Hitler's ribs are cracking under the blows he is receiving from Stalin's army, while the foundations of the Duce's empire are collapsing. Hence the day is not far off when the people will triumph and then they will judge who have been true patriots and who traitors and cowards.»

I went on to talk about the prospects of the development of our war, and pointed out that at those moments, passivity and splitting the people were equivalent to treason. In conclusion, in the name of the National Liberation General Council, I appealed to them once again to abandon the course or which they had set out and unite with the National Liberation Front in the war to drive the enemy from the soil of the Homeland.

«This will never occur,» objected Kolë Tromara immediately. «We have told you we will not join the Front.»

«Very well, then, don't join the Front,» I replied coolly. «Instead let us cooperate in the war, you as the Balli Kombëtar and we as the Front. But we demand fighting and not words, and will allow no one to put a spoke in the wheel of our war.»

Bahri Omari spoke up, «We are not against cooperation. But do you come here as representatives of the Front or the Communist Party?!» he asked.

«We are delegates of the National Liberation General Council, that is, representatives of the Front,» I replied.

«No! We have told you that we do not agree to talk to you on this basis!» he replied. «We have laid down the condition: we talk only with the Communist Party as party to party.»

«But you are not a party,» said Ymer Dishnica.

«Then what are we?» objected both Bahri and Kolë immediately, feeling insulted.

«As far as we can see the Balli Kombëtar is an organization with nationalists of various political tendencies,» I told them. «According to our concept, a party has a unified political and ideological platform and an immediate and long-term program. The Front is not and cannot be a party, but is an organization in which the whole people take part. There are communists in it, but there are also nationalist elements who may have different opinions from us on many issues.»

«That's all very well, but the whole world knows that the communists lead the Front.»

«We have never concealed this and have declared it openly to you,» I told them. «Are you so frightened of the Communist Party? Up till yesterday, you described us as children whom no one would follow, while now you are so terrified that the Party is at the head of the Front. Moreover,» I continued, «neither today nor at any other time have we called on you to fight for communism, but for the freedom of Albania.»

«We are fighting for Albania. We have our *çeta* everywhere,» said Bahri. «But we also know how to conduct politics and to conduct politics means 'seven feints and one bold deed'.»

We must give the chiefs of the Balli Kombëtar their due: for feints and trickery they beat the band.

But as for bravery, what little they had they employed against the Albanian people. That is how this talk continued: we made proposals, they dodged them, until late into the night, without achieving any result.

In one of my last meetings with Bahri Omari, after a bitter argument, I said to him angrily (because I found it hard to keep my temper with such individuals):

«The people can never follow the traitors and their course of betrayal, they are going to fight against the occupiers and the traitors and will win!»

Bahri Omari understood that I was making a direct attack on him and replied:

«We shall see who are the traitors, you or we.»

«Yes, we shall see,» I told him, «but I want to make it absolutely clear that those who hinder the people's war and collaborate with the enemy are traitors.»

«Please, Enver,» said Bahri, «I don't want to talk politics with you any more. It is clear that we are opponents.»

«That is so,» I replied, «but I want to save you from a course which is a terrible disaster. I am sorry for you, but I tell you openly, I am even sorrier for my sister and your two sons.»

Poor Fahrije had dropped her head and was weeping. It was a tragic war: her husband on one side, her brother on the other. Neither gave way to the other. Fahrije was one of my dearest sisters, an intelligent woman and kindly to all. I loved her very much and I was sorry for her.

One evening when I went there Bahri was not at home and Fahrije asked me:

«Oh, Enver, tell me how is all this going to end up?»

«We must save Bahri from this course,» I told her, «because it is the course of betrayal. There is only one remedy, either with the people and their war against the occupiers, or with the latter.»

«But what ought I to do?» she asked me. «I tell him constantly: 'Have nothing to do with Ali Këlcyra, he is a bey. Give up your job in the state and we shall manage somehow, like everybody else.' But you know he is so stubborn.»

«Whether or not your husband is stubborn, that makes no difference. Today the only important thing is the life and freedom of the people whom we must save. I am giving him every chance and I shall go on struggling as hard as I can to try to save Bahri, but I warn you, sister, if he continues on this course we shall settle matters with the rifle.»

Through her tears my sister said to me:

«Enver, Luan can join you in the war, but I can't persuade Bahri.» And in fact Bahri was not persuaded either by his wife or by me, and went even further by taking part in the quisling government during the German occupation. However, Luan had linked himself with the National Liberation War from the beginning and worked actively in the organization of Communist Youth, together with Gjikë Kuqali and others. When I was in their home, through Luan I sent and received letters from the comrades; he became a partisan and later became a party member and a cadre

with a good formation. During the War, Fatos was a little boy, but later he went to school and now he works as an engineer.

At the same period we also had two meetings with representatives of the Balli Kombëtar, one in the home of Nexhat Peshkëpia, at which Bahri Omari and Halim Begeja were present, and the other in the home of Muharrem Vllamasi in which, besides Bahri and Kolë Tromara, Sheh Karbunara took part as the «intermediary». As the sly fox he was, he tried to keep the balance, maintained contacts with the Balli Kombëtar, but also kept his bridges intact with the National Liberation Movement.

In the past I had been in Nexhat Peshkëpia's home on many occasions because we had family connections: Nexhat's wife was a niece of the Hoxhats of Gjirokastra. Therefore I was often in Nexhat's home, which we considered as our own home, for lunch or for dinner and on these occasions we had vigorous political discussions. There were not many points on which I had political differences with Nexhat or his brother Manush, who had pretensions as a writer, as a poet, and was friendly with Shevqet Musaraj. At the time when I was unemployed and had no income, Nexhat occasionally lent me a little money, until I was appointed teacher. Fero, the wife of Nexhat and our niece, was a good woman linked with the people. Moreover at that time Nexhat himself claimed to be an anti-Zogite and anti-fascist, indeed he posed as a «leftist» and his views were somewhat anarchist. When I joined the partisans in the mountains I made several appeals to him to unite with the Movement, but,

like Bahri, he was not convinced and became a Ballist. On the eve of the liberation of the country Nexhat Peshkëpia, together with other traitors, fled to the United States of America where he fought us savagely until he died.

These last two meetings which we organized with the chiefs of the Balli Kombëtar in Tirana began and ended like the previous ones, with the same trickery on their part and the same straightforward and unyielding stand on our part. This time, however, in conclusion we pointed out:

«Overlooking the bitter past we again held out our hand to save you, but once again you do not want to follow the course that should be followed. Very well then, time is proving who is right. But there is one thing you must bear in mind: if you don't wish to fight against the occupier at least don't play the occupier's game, don't try to oppose our war, the war of the Albanian people against fascism and its collaborators. You must put an immediate stop to your campaign of slanders and attacks against the Front and the national liberation councils and the thieving and looting which your men are doing in the villages. You can take this as advice or as a warning, whichever you like. We are very clear about how much can be endured and tolerated.»

A few days after these meetings which were held in Tirana in the first half of May 1943, I set out urgently for Vlora to attack and finally clean up the dangerous anti-Party faction which Sadik Premte (1) had

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1 Enver Hoxha, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, «8 Nëntori» Publishing House, Tirana 1974, pp. 125-129, Eng. ed.

hatched up there. During the days that I was in the highlands of Vlora and in Mallakashtra, through Hysni Kapo I took the opportunity to have a meeting with Tahir Hoxha (one of the heads of the Balli Kombëtar in Vlora) and Hysni Lepenica, an officer and a member of the «Zjarri» Group who with a «çeta» of ten to fifteen men had attached himself to the Balli Kombëtar as an «attack force». The purpose of this meeting was the same as that from which we proceeded in the analogous cases which I mentioned above: to make one more appeal to the main elements of the Balli Kombëtar who were operating in the districts to come to their senses and definitely decide whether they were going to set out on the course of the war and true patriotism or going to sink further into the mire of betrayal and collaboration with the enemies.

As I have described in detail in the book *When the Party Was Born*, (1) however, this meeting too, which was held in the home of Gani Aliko in the village of Shkoza, began and ended without any result.

Both Tahir Hoxha and Hysni Lepenica tried to sidestep the appeal and strong and unshakeable arguments which Hysni Kapo and I presented about the necessity of the Balli Kombëtar joining in the war, by harping on the same old refrain as the other leaders of the Balli Kombëtar: «The war can't be fought the way you are doing», «you can't fight a war with boys», «we must safeguard our forces to be ready to strike the occupier the final blow», «the situation is not ripe», etc., etc.

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1 Enver Hoxha, *When the Party Was Born (Memoirs)*, Tirana 1983, p. 429, 3rd Alb. ed.

After several hours of argument during which Tahir Hoxha tried to calm things down, it was quite plain that the Balli chiefs of the district were going to continue the line of the chiefs in the centre. Therefore, in conclusion I said to them:

«The war is raging, Tahir Hoxha, and you know this very well, but you don't want to admit it! This war is organized and led by the Communist Party of Albania, by the National Liberation General Council which represents the people and this is precisely why the end of the Italian occupiers is near. You know this, too, although you don't want to admit it. We call on you to throw yourself unreservedly into the war against the occupiers and traitors while you've still time, because the interests of the National Liberation War require that we should be united. You are free to choose your own course, but it is our duty to tell you that if you proceed against the interests of the people, you are lost!»

We stood up, and as we were preparing to leave, Hysni Lepenica said to us:

«I want to have a talk with you on my own.»

We agreed, parted with Tahir Hoxha and the three of us, I, Comrade Hysni Kapo and Hysni Lepenica set off for the home of Uncle Murat in Dushkarak where we began the conversation with Hysni Lepenica. Since Lepenica had displayed some wavering during the debate with Tahir Hoxha and because of the fact that he was from the «Zjarri» Group, had some sort of a *çeta* and pretended to have fired a few shots, we thought that he was going to break with the Balli Kombëtar and unite with the Front and the National



Liberation Movement. It seemed to us for a moment that it was hard for him to abandon the Balli Kombëtar in front of Tahir Hoxha and that is why he sought this meeting alone with us. However, right from the start of the conversation it was quite plain that Hysni Lepenica had other aims. He raised two matters: first, the question of the «Zjarri» Group, «of which I have been a member along with Fetah Butka and others», as he said, and second, the question of Sadik Premte.

Hysni Lepenica was opposed to the treatment of his archeo-Marxist group and the struggle which our Party had waged against it, and also «to the way you and the Vlora Regional Committee dealt with the question of Sadik Premte».

I gave him the answer he deserved on both these matters, telling him: «We agree with nothing of the things you have said, Mr. Lepenica. We reject such views and will combat them.»

«You are wrong,» Hysni Lepenica replied. «You will lose and will be the cause of bloodshed.»

«It is not we that are wrong but you,» I told him. «You and not we are beginning the fratricide. We have begun the war against the occupiers and their collaborators and are going to carry it through to the end. We appeal to you once again, Mr. Lepenica, to unite with us and with the National Liberation War without hesitation.»

«In that case,» said Lepenica, «our conversation is over. We cannot agree with you on any question. You are threatening me with the rifle.»

«That is not true,» I told him. «It depends on you whether we exchange shots, but we are not going

to change our course. There is no force that can make us budge from our principles and from the sacred aims which the Party has set itself.»

«And we shall not change our course either,» said Lepenica.

So we parted with this arrogant Ballist, pseudo-nationalist and collaborator with the Italians, who was killed at Gërhot of Gjirokastra by his fascist friends, immediately after the capitulation of Italy.

For me personally these were the last meetings I had with the traitor elements of the Balli Kombëtar. I parted with them never to see them again.

Meanwhile, we carried on the work vigorously in all the other directions to put into practice the whole program of the Party and especially to apply the decisions and accomplish the important tasks which the 1st National Conference of the CPA set us. And the fact is that the work of the Party progressed, the war was extended, the people were being organized and armed. The army of the insurgent people was emerging in the heat of the war and already its rifles had been heard in a series of battles in which the enemy had suffered crushing blows.

Other major events lay ahead of us.

### **3. An historic meeting (Labinot, 4-10 July 1943)**

The events which had occurred since the Conference of Peza and the major tasks which emerged before

us dictated the need for a regular meeting of the leading forum of the National Liberation Front, the Provisional General Council, early in the summer of 1943. Such a meeting was essential both to analyse the work done by the Council and each of its individual members and to take a series of decisions which the historic moment forcefully suggested. The main one of these decisions had to do with the proposal of the CC of the CPA about the formation of the General Staff and the organization of our National Liberation Army, a task which had been put forward at Peza in September 1942 and for which the conditions for carrying it out had now fully matured.

With these things in mind we decided that the meeting of the Council should be held in the first days of July and the members of the Council should be informed of this in time. Although this was to be the first regular meeting of the full Council since September 1942 it must be pointed out that during this time this important organ had not remained idle and passive. On the contrary, its individual members had worked, had met and held discussions according to the possibilities which the situation offered. The members of the General Council or other comrades allocated by it had followed the work of the existing councils in the terrain, had worked for the setting up of new councils, had given instructions and brought out leaflets and appeals addressed to the people. Meanwhile, experience was showing that a number of members of the Provisional General Council elected at Peza were not only failing to justify the trust placed

in them, but on the contrary were either hindering or sabotaging the work.

Now, however, the question that presented itself was to guide the work with a broader range of vision and to provide the most effective assistance to the development of the war and the strengthening of the power of the national liberation councils.

We rejoiced at the fact that, besides workers and peasants, large numbers of intellectuals and other honest patriots were entering the ranks of the Front, the councils and our partisan units. They were becoming aware that hatred of and refusal to reconcile themselves to the occupier alone were not sufficient and that the active contribution of each of them was required in the great war which was raging.

Precisely at this phase, in application of the orientation of the 1st National Conference for the broadest possible participation of the school youth in the organized partisan war, the mass abandonment of the secondary schools of the country began. The first were a hundred senior students of the Normal School of Elbasan who, in an organized and demonstrative way, left the school on May Day 1943 and went straight to the mountains where they were incorporated in the ranks of the partisan *çeta* and battalions. A little later the students of the Lycée of Korça followed suit, at a time when students and teachers from all the other schools of the country were joining the partisan ranks. Thus, the fiercer and more extensive the war became, the more profound became the great differentiation between the working masses of town and countryside, honest intellectuals, sincere patriots and

democrats, on the one hand, and the pseudo-patriots and pseudo-democrats, on the other hand.

It was thanks to the Party, to its wisdom and bravery and its correct line that patriots and progressive people from the South to the North, such as Abaz Bekteshi, Avni Kapinova, Miltiadh Papa, Haki Fejzo, Mark Bali, Hasan Xhiku, Xhevdet Nepravishta, Mahmut Bedalli, Rasim Guri and others rallied round its program in the war for freedom. Hundreds of patriots and progressive intellectuals gave a great deal to the National Liberation War, but the Party gave them a great deal, too, raised and tempered them, educated them more and more in their views and outlook. They became able to understand and accept not only the current program of the Party but also its future strategy for the establishment of the socialist system in Albania. They identified themselves with the Party and many of them were accepted into its ranks where they have militated as loyal sons and capable cadres of the Party.

I clearly remember that day when Mustafa Xhani expressed to me the desire to be admitted to the ranks of the Communist Party of Albania. We were in the *tekke* of Martanesh (I went there many times at different seasons), and after we had had a long talk together, Mustafa said to me:

«Comrade Taras, I want to become a member of the Party.»

These words of Baba Faja made me very happy and I immediately replied:

«You fully deserve to become a member of the Party, Mustafa Xhani, therefore, make your applic-

ation and tell the comrades of the cell that Enver is in favour of your admission. I shall support you in this request because I am sure that you do not believe in religion but believe only in the Party.»

«For the Party I shall discard my clerical robes,» said Baba Faja Martaneshi.

«No,» I told him, «you should stick to the robes you wear. This is not a matter of deceiving people, but you wore the religious robes as a priest before the war and before the formation of the Party. Therefore, go on wearing them, because we have to respect the sentiments of believers and utilize the sympathy which the people have for you and the *tekke* of Martanesh. So, since you are resolutely for the war and love the Party, respect and apply its line, we will admit you as member of the Party.»

And the cell of the *çeta* admitted Mustafa Xhani as a member of the Communist Party of Albania. This was a great joy for Baba Faja Martaneshi. He embraced and kissed me, prickling me with that black beard which he combed with his fingers.

In these notes I have written in rather great length about Baba Faja Martaneshi, about his outstanding role in those years and the many links I had with him, but I must say there were tens of such patriotic clergymen all over the country who linked themselves closely with the National Liberation Movement and the program of the Party and gave their all for the freedom and independence of the Homeland. One of them was Ismail Tufa from Tirana, or Hodja Tufa, as everybody knew him and called him.

I had known this fine patriotic old man in the

grave days of illegality in Tirana when his home became one of the main bases of the Party's printing apparatus and the *hodja* himself acted as guard and advised us to block all the windows and gaps from which any noise might emerge, with quilts.

«It's true you are a *hodja*,» I said to him, «but I've never seen the Koran under your gown. In place of it you have a revolver. So you are a *hodja* with a revolver.»

The *hodja* chuckled and said to me:

«We are facing a war, Enver, and you boys teach us that we can't wage the war with the Koran but with revolvers.»

And, in fact, the patriot Ismail Tufa went through all the difficult years of the war in this way. He placed himself, his home and his sons at the disposal of the Party and the liberation war. One of his sons, a communist and our comrade, Met, gave his life on the altar of freedom, while the 75 year-old Hodja Tufa himself was captured and tortured by the Germans but he did not open his mouth. He was ready to die rather than tell what the executioners of the people wanted from him.

It was the great merit of our Party that with its correct political line it made approaches to, won over and placed in the service of the cause of the people and the Homeland such patriotic clergymen as Baba Laze and Baba Fejzo, Hafëz Halil Tophana and Hafëz Zagonjori, Father Pashko Vodica and Father Kokoneshi, Father Ilia Zagali, Muço the dervish, and many others all over Albania.

Breaking completely with the top clergy of the Catholic Church, with those reactionary bishops and chief muftis, who blessed the occupiers and enslavers of Albania, the progressive and patriotic clergymen, who had emerged from the people and lived close to the people and regarded the collaborationist clergy with hatred and scorn, made a valuable contribution especially to the unification of the people round the program of the Party and the Anti-fascist National Liberation Front with their words, stands and actions, with the rifle they slung on their shoulders and the partisan star they placed on their caps.

During the same period other intellectuals and patriots, amongst whom Omer Nishani was to be especially outstanding, were activated and made their contribution to the strengthening of the Front and the Movement.

I had been introduced to Omer Nishani when he returned from exile after the Italian occupation, but I had heard about him when I was at school in Gjirokastra, since his brother, Beso Nishani, was one of my teachers. Besides this I was friendly with his nephews, Emin and Ferik Shtino, the sons of Aunt Alo, the sister of the doctor, a very sharp-witted old woman like her brother. I have written about this woman in my reminiscences of my childhood (1). All of them had spoken to me about the doctor, but I had never seen him in Gjirokastra.

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1 The reference is to the book *Years of Childhood — Recollections of Gjirokastra* which was published in Albanian in 1983.



When Zog came to power at the head of the counter-revolutionary forces in December 1924 I had heard about Doctor Nishani as a politician, while amongst the pupils in the *Lycée* of Korça it was said that he was a communist. Years later, we of the Group of Korça learned that Doctor Nishani had his centre in Geneva, where he brought out the newspaper *Liria Kombëtare* on which he collaborated with Halim Xhelo, Naum Prifti, Ali Kelmendi, Riza Cerova, Selim Shpuza and other revolutionary leftist and communist comrades. This group had clearer political views than all the rest and it was they who organized KONARE which the group of Ali Këlcyra, Mustafa Kruja, Azis Çami and company undermined and fought. At an early age we had great admiration for Halim and Doctor Nishani who were called «reds» by the nationalist group of Ali Këlcyra, Qazim Koculi and others.

I do not know for sure whether the doctor emigrated first to Greece, to the Island of Zante, or whether he went to Greece later from Switzerland. In any case he stayed for a time in Switzerland, in Geneva, where the doctor, as he told me subsequently when we talked together during the war in Labinot and Orenja, was friendly with a leader of the «left» social-democrats of Switzerland, called Nicol.

When I heard that the doctor had returned to Albania (he had graduated for medicine but never practised this profession) after the fascist occupation, I wanted to meet him, although I regretted that he, along with the others, had joined the «Council of State». It was not difficult for me to meet the doctor. Bahri introduced me to him.

«Doctor, allow me to introduce Enver, the brother of Fahrije and son of Halil. He is a 'red' like you.»

«Oh,» said the doctor laughing, «Halil's son, are you? You have a fine father.»

«Like father, like son,» I replied, «as we say in Gjirokastra.»

«Hi, hi, hi,» the doctor laughed loudly, and then, «pth... pth...,» as though clearing something from the tip of his tongue, as we learned subsequently this was his habit. «You are not like Halil in one thing. You don't stutter like him.»

He inquired about my family and my personal situation, asked whether I had found work and why not, etc. Then he said:

«We old fogies have had our day, long live the youth, because you are the hope of the country. I haven't done anything much, but I fought Zog as much as I could. And I had good comrades on the newspaper who helped me in that direction. I did not give up, but what was I to do, die in exile? I was longing to see the country and my people. I came back, but these fascists and occupiers and all the rogues who serve them like dogs, I hate them like death. But you are going to say (and he asked my name again), then why did you join the 'Council of State'? I had to, because I have nothing to live on and I have a wife to keep. So this is what I am reduced to.»

«Doctor,» I said, «today I have met you personally for the first time, while my comrades and I have heard about your ideas and struggle a long time ago, and for this we have always admired you. You say

you joined the 'Council of State' because you wanted to live. It would have been better had you not done so, but we feel that in your mind and heart you are outside the Council because you are with the people, with the anti-fascist youth and are not like the Kolë Tromaras, Ali Këlcyras and company.»

«Oh, so, you know what they are, my boy,» said the doctor. «That is important. Don't expect anything from them.»

«Doctor, we are going to make efforts to draw everybody into the war against the occupiers, even them, if they are for the people's liberation war,» I told him.

«Try, if you have the patience, as for me I have done all I can and can't be bothered with them any more. All they know is to take their salaries, to eat and drink well, to pose as if they are the salt of the earth, but carry on with your work, Enver, because perhaps you will convince them.»

«Doctor,» I said, «the war against the fascist occupier requires the rallying and organization of the whole people. To drive the occupier from our land we have to make very great sacrifices. In the first place, we communists have to do these things and we are going to do them, because I, too, am a communist, Doctor,» I continued. «We are ready to sacrifice our lives for the liberation of the Homeland and the people.»

«Thank you for the trust you have shown in me, Enver, by telling me that you are a communist, when everybody knows that fascism cuts the heads of communists. I am not a communist, but I have lived and worked with them, I have respected them and they

have respected me. I shall tell you one thing: for you the road is not strewn with flowers, but go on, fight, because only by fighting you will save Albania,» said the doctor.

«Comrade Nishani,» I replied, «excuse me for addressing you in this way but I can't bring myself to address you as a doctor. We communists are still only a few, but we are determined. In the fight against the occupiers, our ranks will increase, because we have or are going to have the whole of the youth and the people with us. When we form our Party, young and old will be with it because it will be the Party of the common people. There is only one thing on which I cannot agree with you,» I added, «the idea that you expressed that you old fogies have had your day. No, the war, the people need everybody. People like you are a great assistance to the war, because you have maturity and a patriotic past. I am appealing to you to put these qualities of yours in the service of the people.»

«Enver,» replied the doctor, «your words and the trust which you show in me move me deeply. You are the first to speak to me like this since I set foot again on the soil of the Homeland.»

«I am a son of our people who have such great love for freedom and independence,» I replied.

«Listen, Enver, I will tell you one thing and you can rely on it: Doctor Nishani is with you to the death. When you consider it necessary let me know and I will be ready to do whatever the youth ask of me.»

With these words we put an end to our first conversation.

I informed the comrades of the Group of Korça about the conversation with Doctor Omer and told them that he was an element with good prospects for our work. They were pleased, approved my idea and entrusted me to maintain contact with him, to inform him from time to time about the general situation, the growth of the resistance and the extension of the movement.

I met the doctor on a number of occasions and my liking and respect for him increased. Omer Nishani was a man of broad culture and well-acquainted with a number of languages of the West and the East. In the meetings which we had I spoke to him about the necessity of forming a great union of all forces of the people, combining our possibilities in the difficult but glorious struggle which lay ahead of us. The doctor openly expressed his joy over this course on which we had set out and did not fail to express wise and mature opinions which were valuable to us in our work. Thus, he became completely at one with us in his opinions and aims and my conviction was strengthened that with such patriots the people's war would make progress.

When we formed the Party I had a long talk with him. I spoke about its importance, about the role it would play in the future of the country and the further extension of our National Liberation War. Likewise, I told him that from now on we must also do extensive work with the masses of the people and with the patriotic and nationalist elements to win them to our side against fascism. He was enthusiastic and very pleased about what I told him, congratulated me and repeated his readiness to help.

When we had prepared the Conference of Peza I had another meeting with him, explained its aims to him at length, whom we had invited and who had accepted. We had decided that we should not invite the doctor at the Conference, because (and this I explained to him) we did not want to expose him; his contacts and the propaganda which he carried out in favour of the Movement, while disguised as a man of the regime associating with «the fathers» of the «Council of State», would be useful to us for some time to come.

Doctor Nishani expressed his full agreement with the initiative of the Communist Party and the platform of the Conference, wished me success for the Conference, and said:

«I, too, will carry out propaganda about the decisions you are going to take, I will confuse the enemies in my own way and bring my friends closer to the Front. And mind,» he pointed out finally, «when you need me, you will find me ready.»

Omer Nishani kept his word and worked in Tirana as a zealous activist of the National Liberation Movement. And when the moments required him, the comrades and I talked it over and we thought that he would be valuable in the work of the General Council as a mature, patriotic and cultured man for the work of propaganda, the organization of the state, etc. We sent him word and the doctor left Tirana for the mountains where he stayed until the country was liberated.

Omer Nishani also brought with him another sympathizer of the National Liberation War, Kosta

Boshnjaku. I had heard the name of Kosta Boshnjaku, but did not know him personally. If I am not mistaken, he had stayed in Vienna as an emigrant, while in his youth he had been in Tsarist Russia, either working or with his family, and hence, had a good knowledge of Russian.

He was of imposing appearance, spoke like a «seasoned politician», gave himself great importance, and naturally abused Zog and Ali Këlcyra and defended communism, Lenin, Stalin and our Party.

Thus, more and more each day the fruits of the great work the Party had done with the nationalists were becoming apparent. A large number of patriotic individuals, who had understood the line of the Party and the National Liberation Front, were joining the ranks of the National Liberation Movement, the Front and the partisan *çeta* and battalions. They included, for example, Qirjako Harito, Ali Shtëpani in Tirana, Hasan Pulo and Jaho Gjolicu in Vlora, Spiro Bakalli in Durrës, Gavril Pepo in Korça, Dr. Petraq Popa, Fetah Ekmekçiu, Hafëz Musa Basha in Elbasan, Pasho Hysi in Skrapar, whom I knew personally and about whom I retain the best memories. Likewise, in the South and the North, along with such honoured patriots and fighters as Shpend Balia and Sali Mani in Tropoja, Gjon Marashi, Hajdar Alia and others in Shkodra, Llazi Bozo in Myzeqe, Haki Stërmilli in Dibra, Muharrem Butka in Kolonja, Siri Shaplllo and Kadri Baboçi in Gjirokastra, Stefan Thomagjini in Saranda, Haxhi Seseri, Babë Rexha and others in Kruja, Ollga Plumbi, Dr. Jorgji Jorgoni, Ela Gjikondi and others in Tirana, Hodja Deliu in Elbasan, Ali Kame and

Koço Stefani in Përmet, Tafil Tërpani in Berat and so on, scores of teachers, doctors, engineers, agronomists, writers and other white-collar workers all over the country united with the Front and the National Liberation Movement.

Right from the start the Party also did careful work with the former officers of the old army because it was convinced that although some of them, especially the senior officers of Zog's former army, would be pre-disposed to place themselves at the service of the occupier, a large number of patriotic and progressive elements would join us in our war. Of course, we recognized the fact that the work with people of this category presented difficulty, because in the past they had formed a privileged caste educated with anti-popular concepts and were well-paid to protect the rule of the «august sovereign». Nevertheless, we were aware of the opposition to Zog among the officers of lower rank. Some of them had even created a secret organization, the «Group of Officers», headed by Bedri Spahiu, where they talked about and discussed communism and, indeed, it called itself a communist group, although in fact it was more of a very tightly closed organization of officers without any links among the people and doomed to failure in its activity, just as it turned out. As well as this we knew that within their ranks there were elements with patriotic and democratic inspiration and it was our duty to link them with our war.

When the country was occupied, while all the reactionary officers became tools of the occupiers, retained their rank and received fat salaries from them,



many others, especially the junior officers, united with the National Liberation War. Some of them like Mustafa Matoriti, Reshit Çollaku, Memo Meto, Asim Zeneli, Pano Xhamballo and others fought, became leaders of partisan battalions and brigades and fell heroically in the sacred war for freedom. From the ranks of former officers emerged such comrades as Spiro Moisiu, whom the Central Committee of the Party and the General Council appointed commander of the General Staff of the National Liberation Army, or Shefqet Peçi, who joined in the war against the occupiers from the first days of the invasion and after the formation of the Party became one of the most outstanding cadres in the formations of our National Liberation Army.

Others like Dali Ndreu, Tahir Kadare and Hulusi Spahiu fought and during and after the war the Party charged them with various responsibilities, but after Liberation, in particular, the bad habits acquired during the period when they were Zogite officers as well as other political, ideological and moral disabilities impelled them on a wrong course and some of them threw themselves into the arms of foreign secret agencies and ended up as enemies of the Party and the people. However, these things were to be proved later. What I wanted to stress is the fact that the Party was able to carry out good and fruitful work with the officers of the old army just as with other strata, and was able to win over and mobilize in the war all those that could be mobilized. In the spring and at the beginning of the summer of 1943, when we were actively organizing large formations of the partisan army, the better part

of them were to become a valuable resource for the Party and the war.

Precisely at these moments, that is at the beginning of the summer of 1943, when we were preparing for the meeting of the General Council, Sejfulla Malëshova turned up in Albania as a «late arrivai». I personally had never met Sejfulla, but Ymer Dishnica and Koço Tashko who had known him abroad, the former in France and the latter in the Soviet Union, had spoken to me about him. However, it was difficult to create a coherent idea about Sejfulla from what Ymer and Koço told me about him because their judgements were diametrically opposite. Koço Tashko, who apparently had not liked him, told me that Sejfulla insisted that the centre of the group of Albanian communists, which the youth with democratic tendencies had organized when they went to the Soviet Union after the return of Zog to Albania, should be established not in the Soviet Union (and certainly not in Albania) but in Europe, in Paris, Vienna or Geneva. When I became better acquainted with Sejfulla I believed this and understood that Sejfulla Malëshova certainly preferred the life of the cafés in Paris to the real work and struggle in the Homeland. Dishnica had spoken to me quite differently about Sejfulla. He had known him in France, held him in special admiration, and was ready to talk to me for hours on end about the «wisdom» and «talents» of Sejfulla and about his «activity».

To tell the truth, some of the things that Ymer told us impressed us and we thought that a comrade like this, who «had worked in the Comintern», who

«had been a professor» in Moscow, who had some experience and theoretical knowledge and was a writer and poet, would be necessary for us.

I was not greatly impressed with Sejfulla in the first conversation I had with him when he arrived in Albania about June 1943. Indeed, I was rather disappointed by the replies he gave me when I asked him about Soviet Russia, about the experience of the Bolshevik Party or of the Communist Party of France. On these occasions Sejfulla assumed the appearance of a philosopher overburdened with the questions of disciples and gave himself an air of mystery saying, «We shall talk about these things.» Short and fat, with a voice that he deliberately deepened, he listened and looked like someone to whom minor matters were annoying. Right from the first days he did not fail to give «advice» and make criticisms, implying that «now that I have come we shall correct these matters». For my part I asked him about the situation in France, about some communist friends and acquaintances there, but it seemed that Sejfulla knew little about them.

«Well, how does he seem to you?» Dr. Dishnica asked me after the first conversation.

«I believe he will help us,» I replied, but apparently without the enthusiasm which Ymer expected. And when I saw that the doctor was surprised, I added:

«We shall get to know him better in the course of the work and the war.»

«He is a good comrade and with training, Enver.»

«We shall see,» I repeated, and left it at that.

But as it became clear, I was not the only one who «had some reservations» in the assessment of

«Professor» Malëshova. Some time after his arrival in Albania I was talking to Doctor Nishani one day and when our talk came round to Sejfulla, Doctor Nishani laughed and said:

«I am going to have trouble with Sejfulla, or he will have trouble with me.»

«Why?» I asked with interest, because I knew that the doctor had known Sejfulla abroad and also knew that Omer Nishani was a man correct in his judgements.

«We have some old problems related to the newspaper,» the doctor told me, and went on: «When we were in exile bringing out *Liria Kombëtare*, I asked Sejfulla to send us the occasional article from Moscow, but did Sejfulla bother? After I sent him five letters he deigned to send me his 'material': the title and two or three points as an outline, the supposed 'theses' for the article. After another five abusive letters, in the end, he would send us the article. Sometimes I would not publish it at all and sometimes Halim and I would completely rewrite it. A lazier bastard you could hardly meet,» continued the doctor with a laugh. «He wrote me a load of rubbish, 'the proletariat this, the proletariat that...'.»

«Why, were you opposed to the proletariat?» I teased him.

«No, indeed, I was not against the proletariat, but what Sejfulla wrote was a load of rubbish. For instance, he would copy something from a Soviet paper and write in an article destined for Albania: 'The industrial proletariat, especially that of the plants and building sites, must be at the head of the masses in

Albania'. And goodness knows what other rubbish. 'What proletariat are you talking about Sejfulla?' I wrote to him angrily. 'The industrial proletariat of your Malëshova(1) or Dunavat(2) of my Gjirokastra? Damn it, how are we going to keep up the paper with such foolishness!' Those are the very words I wrote to him, Enver, I swear to you. Go and ask him if it isn't true,» and the doctor laughed and I laughed with him over it.

Meanwhile, Sejfulla «acquainted himself with the situation», held academic conversations, especially with Ymer and Koço, tried to make out that he had been eagerly awaiting the day when he could come to take part in the war (and to this day I have remained in the dark why he waited until the summer of 1943 to return to Albania), and both because of the guarantees which Ymer and Koço Tashko gave us about him and because of the fact that «he came from the Comintern», we decided to co-opt him into the Central Committee, as a candidate and not as a full member, naturally.

Such, then, were the conditions and circumstances in which we prepared and, on July 4, 1943, began the meeting of the National Liberation General Council, which was held in Labinot in the house where the 1st National Conference of the Party had been held in March. Apart from the members of the Provisional General Council which had been elected at Peza we had invited to this meeting both Haxhi Lleshi and Sejfulla Malëshova who were to be presented to the

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1 Village in South Albania.

2 Quarter in the city of Gjirokastra.

Council as candidates to be co-opted as members of it. Thus, all told we were eight people because two members of the General Council, Ndoc Çoba and Kamber Qafëmolla, had not come although they were informed about the meeting.

I proposed the outstanding fighter Mustafa Xhani as chairman of this meeting and the others present were in full agreement with my proposal. Then the agenda was adopted, including as the first point a report on the external and internal situation which Ymer Dishnica delivered.

After listening to Ymer's report we discussed the development of the political and military situation in Europe, especially the delay in the opening of the second front by the Anglo-Americans. In my contribution I said that the allies might make a landing in Italy with the aim of isolating Italy and the Balkans from Germany and after this, it was likely that Germany would be attacked both from France and from elsewhere.

«In regard to the Balkans,» I pointed out, «I am of the opinion that the second front in this sector should be left to the national liberation forces of the Balkan countries themselves. The growth of national liberation movements, their successes in Albania, Yugoslavia and Greece, show that these movements are able to carry this burden successfully.»

I remember that Sejfulla, too, discussed this point of the agenda. He had decided to overawe us with his first public discourse, by making prophecies and bombarding us with quotations from various agencies and radio stations. Indeed, he even mentioned the name of

a South-African general who it seems had spoken about the development of events in the European theatre of the war!

In the discussion of this point on the agenda I suggested that the comrades should give us a short description of the situation in the regions from which they came. I remember that a fiery discussion was kindled when Haxhi spoke about the situation in Dibra. After mentioning the successes of our war there, he dwelt on the stand which the gentry of those parts maintained towards the National Liberation Movement and quoted facts to expose the game which such elements of the gentry as Fiqri Dine, Ali Maliqi, Myftar Kaloshi and others were playing.

«Their work stinks, comrades,» said Haxhi bluntly. «They maintain connections with us simply in order to hinder us, to prevent us from carrying out actions. The people have begun to understand this trickery of the gentry, the truth will out; many of their rank-and-file supporters have joined us voluntarily in our actions. The gentry have also hindered the work for the extension of the national liberation councils all over the zone. Now they have come out openly, the fig leaf has fallen from them. Listen to how they want to intimidate us,» said Haxhi finally, and he read two or three letters from Fiqri Dine to the partisan *çeto* of Dibra in the form of an ultimatum demanding the cessation of attacks on the enemy.

«We shall be patient, but we must reckon on fighting the war without them. Indeed, one day we may be face to face against them,» said Haxhi and sat down.

«Don't be hasty,» said Bazi i Canës [Abaz Kupa]. «The oak is not separated from its branches with one blow of the axe. We are fighting to unite and not to divide. We don't want to benefit the enemy, do we?»

«Really, the enemy deserves a bullet, and that's that,» said Myslim.

Bazi fidgeted and settled himself more firmly.

«By God, I cannot understand my friend Haxhi. He is from an honoured household in Great Dibra. But we are brothers, damn it! We ought to be together. If we are together the people will be together.»

Knowing full well what the reactionaries of Dibra were, this individual demanded collaboration with them, in fact, in order to postpone indefinitely any armed attack on the occupiers; after all, this was the task with which he had been charged. He himself acted in the same way as the gentry of Dibra and never fired a shot; the only difference was that for ulterior motives he had come to Peza and took part in the Council.

«What good are resounding words, Mr. Abaz?» I asked. «True unity is tested in war, this gathering today is an assembly of men. What sense is there in saying these things here today if they don't help us to step up the attacks on the enemy tomorrow?»

«Is there such a thing as a pledge?» Bazi insisted cunningly, «a man is bound by his word...»

«Today the Albanian is bound by this,» said Myslim and slapped the pistol in his belt. «I say, the war is differentiating the true men. In Peza and Shijak I did not win over the chiefs but I did win the poor. We have attacked fascism and see, we are stronger, the



people trust us, but why? Because we are fighting and not talking. Am I right?»

«Good for you,» said Baba Faja, «there is no other remedy. In Martanesh we have councils in every village and the people have swarmed round them like bees. We attack the enemy wherever we can and as much as we can. If anyone wants to join up with us, we say come along, one rifle more!»

This was the best answer to the views of Abaz Kupa.

After the other comrades had made their contributions, especially on the development of the war in their regions, we took a short break before going on to the other point on the agenda, about the activity and tasks of the national liberation councils. I had been charged with delivering the report on this point.

In the report I stressed the importance of the Conference of Peza and spoke about the work done up till that time for the setting up of councils everywhere and about their functioning as organs of the war and the political power, as well as about the obstacles we had encountered in this work not only from the occupier and the quisling authorities, but also from the «nationalists» gathered in the Balli Kombëtar.

I went on to speak concretely about the situation and the work of the national liberation councils in various regions and cities of the country such as Tirana, Durrës, Vlora and Mallakastër where, despite the difficulties, the work had proceeded well, as well as about other regions, such as Shkodra, Mat, Dibra and Kruja where we were still encountering great

obstacles from reaction. I criticized some shortcomings of our work for a centralized leadership of the councils by the General Council and stressed that our contact with the base had not been as continuous as the situation and our war required.

«The grouping of forces is becoming crystallized,» I pointed out. «The build-up of our war will further accelerate the process, therefore, it is an urgent task for the General Council to give the base greater assistance, to organize the people in the National Liberation Front and to strengthen the councils in the villages, the suburbs, the cities and regions.»

For this work to be done better the need was being felt for a document in which the rights, competences, and functions of the councils were clearly defined. Therefore, I raised the issue of a Constitution for the national liberation councils, the draft of which we had prepared in advance and which I would now read to the General Council for discussion. This Constitution, together with the Rules of the national liberation councils, would be finally approved at the 2nd National Liberation Conference which would be held later.

In dealing with the work which the Provisional General Council had done I went on to point out that not all the members of this important organ of the National Liberation War had proved up to their responsible tasks with which the Conference of Peza had charged them.

«The complete inactivity of two nationalist members of the General Council, Ndoc Çoba and Kamber Qafëmolla, has hindered the work,» I pointed out. «Like-

wise, the work with the councils has not gone well in Abaz Kupa's zone. Indeed, the councils have been hindered in their activity. Meanwhile, we hear that Ramazan Jarani, who is not a member of the Council but was appointed as aid to Myslim Peza for the work of the Council, has changed his tune and joined the Balli Kombëtar. Thus, all the members have not been properly engaged in practice with the work of the Council

Ramazan Jarani was a Tirana teacher with a good past as an anti-Zogite and anti-Italian. I had not known him well, but had merely been introduced to him by my teacher friends. At the time when we were working for the preparation of the Conference of Peza I asked to meet him, and this meeting was organized by Mustafa Gjinishi who recommended Ramazan most ardently. I had two talks with him, clearly explained our views in connection with the meeting we planned to hold with the nationalists and the platform which we would present. Since Ramazan Jarani expressed full agreement with us and promised that he would support us in everything, we charged him with the task of carrying out propaganda against the occupiers among the nationalists of Tirana. He accepted this task and even told me that in time of danger I could go to his home, a simple Tirana home, in the same street as the house in which Vojo Kushi and his comrades were killed. I was pleased with Ramazan's readiness because every element gained for the war for liberation was a success for the work of the Party. For a time it seemed that he would keep his promise; he took part in the Conference of Peza, expressed his

solidarity with its decisions and his readiness to work to carry them out. However, not long afterwards Jarani's enthusiasm cooled and Myslim complained to me that he not only did not carry out any of the tasks which were set him but had virtually broken off contact with Babë Myslim.

«What's going on with Ramazan Jarani?» I asked Mustafa Gjinishi one day.

«I know him as a good man,» replied Mustafa. «I shall go and talk to him.»

Not long afterwards, when I was in Labinot, the comrades from Tirana sent me the news that Ramazan Jarani had turned his coat, abandoned the Front and joined the Balli Kombëtar.

This was the metamorphosis of this renegade, which I explained to the members of the General Council who were present.

In close connection with these problems and the whole stage which our war had reached, the meeting of July 1943 held an extensive discussion on the need which had arisen for the formation of the General Staff of all the armed forces of the insurgent people.

It had been discussed and decided at the Conference of Peza that at the proper moment, with the extension of the armed resistance to the fascist occupier and, especially, with the increase in the number of partisan *çeta* and units, a central staff should be created as the centre to direct the military operations of the new army which the people would create.

And now, after a year of struggle and all-round efforts, we judged that this moment had arrived.

In the summer of 1943 the armed struggle of the Albanian people had assumed wide proportions. The number of partisan *çeta* was incomparably greater than a few months earlier, their composition had been increased and strengthened and their fighting activity, which they carried out all over the country, was dealing the enemy crushing blows. In those *çeta*, which were called regular units because they functioned permanently, about 10 thousand fighters took part, besides about 20 thousand other fighters in the territorial *çeta* (1) and guerrilla units. On the recommendation of the Central Committee of the Party, we had gone over to the organization of battalions as bigger and more powerful units, capable of carrying out operations on a broader scale against the enemy, and the instructions had been sent out and measures were being taken for the creation, in the near future, of the first partisan brigades.

For all these reasons, charged by the Central Committee of the Party, in one of the sessions of the meeting of the National Liberation General Council I rose and said to the comrades:

«From the analysis which it has made of the situation and our forces, the Central Committee of the Communist Party has arrived at the conclusion that the

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1 Volunteer self-defence units formed in the liberated regions which carried out attacks on the enemy and opposed enemy operations side by side with the partisan *çeta*. They were also a source of manpower for the completion of the regular partisan units.

dimension which the National Liberation War has assumed and the achievement of the final victory over the enemy have made the organic unification of all the partisan units in a national army, directed from a single centre, urgently necessary. We propose to this Council that it should examine and endorse the proposal of the CC of the CPA about the formation of the General Staff of the Albanian National Liberation Army. If we accomplish this task the armed struggle of our people will be more organized and will be more successful in achieving its political and military objectives in the future.

I went on to stress that the formation of this specialized organ for the military leadership of our war was necessary also for the co-ordination and collaboration of our National Liberation War with the war of the countries of the anti-fascist coalition, especially with the great allies, the Soviet Union, USA and Great Britain, and in particular, with the national liberation movements of the peoples of the Balkans.

The members of the General Council welcomed the proposal about the formation of the General Staff and expressed the belief that the existence of such an organ would further strengthen the National Liberation War and would bring the day of our victory over the enemy closer. After this historic decision was taken the composition of the General Staff was discussed and it was decided that the General Staff of the National Liberation Army should be comprised of 12 people, concretely — Spiro Moisiu, Enver Hoxha, Myslim Peza, Haxhi Lleshi, Mustafa Xhani, Ramadan

Çitaku, Abaz Kupi, Ymer Dishnica, Dali Ndreu, Mustafa Gjinishi, Sejfulla Malëshova and Bedri Spahiu. The National Liberation General Council also decided that the organizational structure of the General Staff should be left to the Staff itself at its first meeting.

On the following day the General Staff of the National Liberation Army met, decided on its organizational structure, and divided the responsibilities among the members. The Staff would have a commander as well as its political commissar, just as all our partisan detachments had. I proposed that Comrade Spiro Moisiu, as a patriot and specialist on military matters, should be charged with the task of commander of the General Staff. The Major, as we usually called our comrade, was one of those patriotic officers in whom love for the Homeland and the people and hatred for the foreign enslaver were stronger than their desire for position and rank with which Zog and fascism tried to lure them.

Precisely on account of his patriotic merits, as well as the fact that Spiro Moisiu was a senior officer with experience, the General Staff appointed him as its commander. I was appointed as political commissar of the General Staff.

On July 10, 1943 we publicly proclaimed the historic decision about the formation of the General Staff and the organization of the Albanian National Liberation Army. This day has remained and will remain as one of the most outstanding events not only of the National Liberation War, but of the whole epoch of the Party, as the day of our People's Army,

the liberator and glorious defender of our socialist Homeland.

Besides other decisions which had to do with the organization of our army, with the creation of regional commands, and the command of the 1st Operational Zone, with the organization of the partisan military power in the rear, etc., at the meeting of July 1943 we devoted special attention also to our stand towards the Balli Kombëtar in the future.

In the report which I presented to the meeting, I made a detailed analysis of the work we had done and the efforts we had made right up till those moments to convince the Balli Kombëtar to take part in the war against fascism and accept the political line which we had endorsed at the Conference of Peza. In this wide-ranging analysis which I made of the problem I had in mind two main aims. First, to give those members of the General Council who had not been in continuous contact with the Council detailed information about the line pursued and the concrete activities which had been carried out, and second, to define the platform of talks which we envisaged to hold with the Balli Kombëtar, calling on it for the last time to really involve itself in the war and give up its collaboration with the enemy and the struggle against the National Liberation Front and the Communist Party.

Those who spoke in the discussion that followed the report approved the line pursued and described all the efforts made up till that time as correct. Finally it was decided that one more meeting should be held with the representatives of that organization, at which they would be asked to give a clear and final



answer as to whether or not the Balli Kombëtar was going to take part in the war.

As far as I remember the first to take part in the discussion of this question was Ymer Dishnica.

Ymer concluded his contribution by saying: «I think that in the talks which are to be held the Ballists must be told: 'With you or without you we are going to wage the war to the end,' and we should appeal to them once more for a fighting unity to defeat the occupiers and for a free and democratic Albania.»

I mentioned this contribution of Ymer Dishnica's in order to stress that Ymer, who was to head the delegation of the General Council to Mukje, was not only clear in advance about the position that ought to be maintained but, at least from the words he said, also seemed to have a correct view, personally, about the Balli Kombëtar and the stand which had to be maintained in the meeting with its representatives.

After Ymer I took the floor again and said in substance :

«Our objective is to involve those who have still not understood the war which we are waging, in this war. Also among the chiefs of the Balli Kombëtar we should differentiate those elements who have not compromised themselves and should try once again to convince them to fight by speaking to them frankly and clearly, explaining to them the character of our National Liberation War.

«In regard to the talks which we think should be held with the Balli Kombëtar we should send them a letter with our proposal and give them a short time,

not more than five or six days, to reply whether or not they want to meet our delegation. We are not going to give them any longer than this, and if they do not come to this meeting or conference, we shall wait no longer but shall publish our letter in the newspaper *Bashkimi* (1) so that the people will see once again who is opposed to unity in the National Liberation War.

«We are not going to stand on ceremony with the Balli Kombëtar,» I continued. «The basis of the agreement which we shall propose to them should be this: organized, uncompromising armed struggle against the occupier; the Balli Kombëtar must recognize the national liberation councils as the only people's democratic state power; it must purge its ranks of the collaborationists, criminals, spies and speculators; it must immediately stop its fighting and propaganda against the Front and the Communist Party, the positive elements of the Balli Kombëtar must take part in the Front, they must disperse their 'councils', etc. This, then,» I concluded, «should be the platform for the talks which our delegation should hold and we should appoint the delegation here.»

The members of the General Council and those of the Staff who had been invited to the meeting, endorsed my proposals which were accepted as the basis for the talks that would be held in the near future with the Balli Kombëtar. It seemed that everything was clear even to Ymer Dishnica and Mustafa Gjini-

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1 Organ of the National Liberation General Council which began to be published in March 1943.

shi, who only a few days after this meeting were to play a capitulationist role in achieving the notorious Mukje Agreement.

#### **4. A dangerous trap and a betrayal**

Conscious of the importance and the difficulties of this final meeting of our delegation with the representatives of the Balli Kombëtar, immediately after the meeting of the General Council I summoned Ymer Dishnica and Mustafa Gjinishi and talked with them several times not only to ensure that they thoroughly understood their delicate mission but also to define precisely, down to the smallest details, the main points on which the talks would be held.

«In your conduct and presentation there must not be even the slightest tendency to waver from our platform. Likewise, you must bear in mind that on no account should you beg the Balli Kombëtar to unite with us; we did not beg them at the beginning when we were few and we certainly will not do so now. We must set the tone for the talks,» I told them, «and they must clearly understand that with this we are holding out a hand to them for the last time so that they can get out of the impasse and make amends for their crimes.»

«Of course, of course,» approved Dishnica, while Mustafa Gjinishi nodded his head and added:

«Don't you worry, we shall act properly!»

After discussing the matter at length with the leading comrades of the Party who were in Labinot during those days, we decided that Abaz Kupa should be added to the delegation of the National Liberation Front.

«As you saw for yourself,» I said to Ymer, «Abaz approved the platform of the talks which you will lead as the head of the delegation of the Front with the chiefs of the Balli Kombëtar, but both you and Mustafa must take care to control his activities and not allow him to get up to any of his tricks.»

«Don't you worry,» repeated Mustafa Gjinishi, who could hardly contain his joy that Abaz, too, would be in the delegation. «Abaz might influence the delegates of the Balli Kombëtar.»

«We are informed that there is friction between the chiefs of the Balli Kombëtar, and you must exploit this. As to what influence Abaz will have, this we shall see. I shall talk to him myself. If the need arises,» I told Ymer, «you can also draw in the comrades of the Party and the Front from Tirana or Durrës.»

«Probably this need will not arise,» said Ymer confidently.

«Who knows,» I said, «but bear it in mind!»

Before he left Labinot I also had a talk with Abaz Kupa.

«You, Mr. Abaz, will be in the delegation,» I said, «and we believe that your authority and acquaintance with the chiefs of the Balli Kombëtar will have a good influence on them.»

«I shall do my bit,» Abaz «promised» and added: «I have only one request...»

«What is it?» I asked.

«I want to take Major Jahja with me!»

«I have no objection,» I replied, «I know Jahja Çaçi personally. Talk it over with the Doctor [Y. Dish-nica] and decide this between yourselves.»

Who was this Jahja Çaçi? In the time of the Zog regime Jahja had been a senior officer, but after the occupation it was said that he was a patriot who wanted to fight, therefore, we had worked to win him over to the Movement. In this direction we were helped by the fact that his wife was a sympathizer of the Party and an activist of the National Liberation War and remained such to the end. Their son, Hektor, too, was completely with us, was activated in the youth organization, subsequently fought in illegality, joined the partisans and became a good communist and cadre. Bearing in mind what was known about Jahja, as well as the participation of his wife and son in the National Liberation Movement, I went to his home one day and talked with him: «Mr.Enver,» he said, «I cannot part with my wife or my son and, moreover, I think that this course of yours is right and I am going to fight together with you.»

In reality, however, he did not do so. He did not follow the course of his wife or his son or the National Liberation War. He remained with us for the sake of appearances, seemed to lean more and more towards Bazi i Canës, and when we broke with Bazi and expelled him from the Front, Jahja Çaçi followed him, and ultimately joined the ranks of Abaz Kupi who appointed him «chief of staff of the Zogite forces»

which opposed us with arms and which we liquidated when the 1st Division advanced to the North(1). That was the end of Jahja Çaçi. At the time about which we are speaking, however, in the summer of 1943, we had nothing against Jahja except some reservations about his closeness with Bazi in whom, as I have said, we had never placed any trust.

Although all the issues had been thoroughly thrashed out and everything was clear, still I was not free of worry because I knew what traps the «diplo-mats» of the Balli Kombëtar were capable of setting. Therefore, before Ymer left for Tirana I had one more talk with him.

«It was no accident that you were appointed to the delegation, and moreover as its leader,» I told Dishnica. «We have been together in talks with various nationalists on a number of occasions, hence you have some experience and know what traps they can set; on the other hand, you are not unknown in their circles. But more importantly, you are a member of the Bureau, hence, have great responsibility to the Party; there are two things you must bear clearly in mind: first, that the National Liberation Front is the only force which has fought and is fighting against the occupier, and second, never forget that our Party is and will always be the organizer and leader of the National Liberation War...»

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1 In June 1944 the 1st Shock Division went over to the regions of Central and North Albania to take part in the general offensive of the Albanian National Liberation Army for the complete liberation of Albania.

«Without doubt, without doubt,» approved the Doctor.

«If we insist on our positions, according to the platform which we have decided, your work and the work of the delegation is simple, otherwise, the situation will become complicated. Therefore, don't stray in the slightest degree from the theses we have approved. You must guard against unexpected news and make contact with the Party Regional Committee of Tirana and keep us continually informed about everything through the comrades there. For our part, we shall assist you within our possibilities, although you have the issues clear. Don't forget that this is a preliminary meeting, and this should make your work much easier because no decisions will be taken at this meeting, and you have only to put to the Balli Kombëtar those matters about which we have talked so many times that I am sure you know them by heart.»

«But what if the delegates of the Balli Kombëtar declare that they accept our points?» asked Dishnica.

«I don't think the chiefs of the Balli Kombëtar will accept them,» I replied. «Perhaps there are still some elements left in the ranks of the Balli Kombëtar who want to fight and in fact there are such elements, but I believe that most, if not all, of those who come to the meeting with you, will not accept our demands. Nevertheless, we openly proclaim our platform and this will have repercussions both within the Balli Kombëtar and among the people. When they refuse to accept our demands, then we shall unmask them openly as traitors and the people will understand once again that Lumo Skëndo and company are to blame

for the 'fratricide' that the traitors like to talk about.»

«Agreed,» said Ymer, «but let us suppose that the delegation of the Balli Kombëtar accepts our platform.»

«In that case you will consider your work completed, because this is your task and you will tell the delegates of the Balli Kombëtar that they should publicly declare that they agree to take part in the war against the enemy and that they recognize the national liberation councils as the only political power of the people in Albania. Then you will tell them that they must begin the war concretely, that is, their *çeta* must attack the Italians and the gendarmerie and army of the Tirana government, must expel the criminals from their *çeta*, withdraw all the members of the Balli Kombëtar from the quisling institutions and disperse the 'councils' of the Balli Kombëtar. When we see to what extent they carry out these things in practice, because hitherto they have told us many lies, then we can begin to talk about a national conference, as we discussed, in which the Balli Kombëtar will take part and at which all the questions of unification will be put forward and settled. But this belongs to the future and you will tell the Ballist delegates that you are not going to talk about this now because you are not authorized to do so by the Council.»

«I assure you that everything will go well,» said Dishnica.

«I hope you are right,» I laughed, «but don't forget that 'he who sleeps with dogs wakes up with fleas'. You will have to do with old foxes...»



«Their trickery is proverbial,» laughed the Doctor, «but this time they will be penned up and have no room to move.»

«Maintain contact with Gogo [Nushi] (1) in Tirana and keep us informed of everything,» I repeated once again.

«Without fail,» promised Ymer.

Thus, he set out for Tirana while we others took the road for Korça. There we stayed in Shtylla, Kucaka and Vithkuq, giving first-hand attention to the final preparations for the inauguration ceremony of the 1st Shock Brigade.

Some days after Ymer left a courier sent by Gogo brought a letter from the Doctor addressed to me. In his letter Ymer gave me a brief report on the situation in Tirana and the «nationalist» circles, wrote about the enthusiasm which the announcement of the General Council about the formation of the General Staff of our army had aroused among the people and about the shock which it had caused in the circles of the Balli Kombëtar and reaction; he reported on the formation of an anti-fascist committee of university students and other information which, of course, it was necessary for us to know about. On the main question for which he had gone to Tirana, however, there were only a few words. The letter stated briefly that Mustafa Gjinishi had had a meeting with Lumo Skëndo and Hasan Dosti, but not a word about what was said there. «Of course, they will have talked about the

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1 At that time member of the CC of the CPA and political secretary of the Party Regional Committee of Tirana.

meeting of our delegates with theirs,» I thought to myself.

In the evening of July 25 on a battery radio with which I was never parted, we heard the news about the coup d'état which brought Badoglio to power and the arrest of Mussolini. This was an event which spoke clearly of the profound political and economic and military crisis of the fascist regime, which by sacrificing its Duce wanted to save itself. In any case this event was bound to have repercussions in our country and we had to be prepared for this. A few days after we heard this news, since we had had no information either from Ymer or the Party Regional Committee of Tirana, I sent a letter to Gogo in which I criticized him over the lack of information about the work for the meeting with the Balli Kombëtar, and about the reaction which the fall of Mussolini had caused among the people, in the quisling circles and in the Balli Kombëtar. Likewise, in the name of the Central Committee I gave instruction for the organization and enlivenment of the work of the Party, the press and propaganda, for swift and skilful actions in conformity with the conditions and circumstances. «We must get rid of the bureaucracy in our Movement, otherwise we will lose,» I pointed out.

In the end, during the first days of August a letter came from Shafingo(1) in which he «informed» me about the first meeting which they had had with the representatives of the Balli Kombëtar. I read the letter quickly and when I came to the end I thought perhaps

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1 The pseudonym of Ymer Dishnica.

I had read it carelessly, because, to tell the truth, I understood very little from it. I read it again and was convinced that, although Ymer's report contained the «minutes» of a meeting which had been held in the village of Tapiza near Tirana, and although names and facts were mentioned, telling us about Lumo and Dosti, about Bazi and Mustafa, and describing the exodus of the Ballists of Tirana to the «mountains», and so on, it said nothing clear about the things we expected. The fundamental issues about which Dishnica should have reported in the letter were passed over superficially with two or three obscure points which meant nothing.

One point, which spoke of the idea of the creation of a «Joint Committee», especially attracted my attention. It was not difficult to sense that there was a trap lurking in the idea of the formation of this «committee.»

«It seems that something strange is being drafted at Tapiza,» I said and glanced at the comrades around me.

«What was that?» said Sejfulla in an absent-minded tone as though heavily burdened by his own thoughts.

«The Doctor writes that at Tapiza they have produced a draft on a four-point agreement and one of the points seems to be the formation of a 'Joint Committee'.»

«Is that so?» said Sejfulla, and after a moment's thought, added, «nevertheless...»

I could stand no more of this and interrupted him:

«For the moment, since the Balli Kombëtar is not fulfilling our conditions for unity, is not really throwing itself into the war and is not purging its own ranks of the criminals, there can be no talk of any kind of organ or 'committee' of the Front with the Balli Kombëtar.»

«Excuse me,» interrupted Sejfulla, «but does Ymer explain how the question of this committee was discussed?»

«No, he doesn't,» I replied, «but Ymer has no reason to enter into such discussion for which no one has authorized him, and indeed I particularly warned him about this.»

«What does he write regarding the reaction to the overthrow of Duce?» asked Nako.

«It seems that this has further whetted the appetite of the Ballists to capture the government seats as quickly as possible,» I told the comrades, «because, as Ymer writes, the chiefs of the Balli have left their easy chairs in Tirana and are 'hastening' to the mountains.»

This refers to that episode in the tragic-comic history of the traitor chiefs of the Balli Kombëtar which occurred at the end of the summer of 1943 which everybody knows about now and was described so beautifully, precisely and humorously a little later by our comrade and co-fighter, the revolutionary writer, Shevqet Musaraj, in his famous «Epic of the Balli Kombëtar».

As soon as they learned the news of the overthrow of the Duce, and after taking good care to make sure that the fascist horse had really cast its shoes,

the «captains» of the Balli Kombëtar jumped for joy, thought that everything would now be plain sailing for them and deemed that the time had come to share out the government seats. However, in order to draw a veil over their treachery up till that moment and give themselves the aura of «liberators» the Ballists, in their ardour to take power, abandoned their «illegal» offices and the cafés of Tirana for a few days and sallied forth to the «mountains» in a demonstrative way, without, of course, forgetting to take along their coffee services, supplies of raki and liquor, pyjamas and camp beds. Dressed in uniforms and loaded with bandoliers of cartridges, with revolvers, binoculars, grenades and the dispatch cases of staff officers, the çeta of the Balli, specially summoned to the zone where the meeting between the delegation of the Front and that of the Balli was held, put on a show of «strength». This pack of wolves was still living in the past and thought that although they had not fired a shot, it was their right to govern the still occupied country. What does it matter, they thought, that the people, the partisans and the communists had shed and were shedding their blood for freedom, he who uses others to draw the chestnuts out of the fire for him is the stronger. According to them, they had only to strike a patriotic pose and put on some parade at the proper moment, and as soon as the Italians left they expected to enter Tirana and elsewhere as «liberators» and take the reins in hand. According to them, the «élite» remained «élite» and what could they do other than rule and govern!! As for the people who had seen and heard of the evil deeds of the Balli

Kombëtar, the leaders of the Balli thought: We will close their eyes with the «valiant deeds» we shall perform in the closing stages and, if these are insufficient we shall also stage an «historié act»: we shall declare the independence of the country and annul the decisions of the «assembly» of April 12, 1939 which proclaimed the unification of Albania with Italy and offered the crown of Skanderbeg to Victor of Savoy!

How this first «sally» of the Balli to the mountains ended up is well known: as soon as the German armoured cars entered Tirana, the crestfallen «heroes» of the closing stages hastily resumed their café «illegality» and sent word to the nazi *Kommandatur* that they had gone to the mountains simply to spend the summer!

However, all this was to occur a little later; let us return to the moments when we had just received the first letter from Y. Dishnica and were trying to imagine what our envoys were engaged in hatching up there with the traitor chiefs Mithat Frashëri, Hasan Dosti and others.

From the ironical tone in which Y. Dishnica described Hasan Dosti's proposal about the «proclamation of independence», I formed the impression that on this, at least, our delegation would not fall into the trap of the Balli Kombëtar. Nevertheless, I said to the comrades:

«From what Ymer writes I can't understand anything concretely or clearly, but we must insist with him that he must firmly reject the proposal they are making. The Ballists must be told that the independence of Albania is not won with charters and agree-

ments. They must be told: 'With this agreement you gentlemen want to cover up and wash your hands off the act of occupation of April 7, 1939, in which you and your friends participated and gave your blessing to the Italian fascists. Now you want to involve us, too, in covering up that grave act. No!' They must be told: 'We shall win independence through fighting, therefore we shall talk about this and this alone'.»

These and other worries which arose in my mind from Ymer Dishnica's obscure information impelled us to demand detailed clarification as quickly as possible, therefore we decided to send him an urgent letter. However, I had hardly completed the reply to the first letter when a further letter arrived, a letter which added to my concern and, to tell the truth, also made me angry.

«It seems to me the Doctor is wasting his time there,» I told the comrades, and handed them Ymer Dishnica's letter.

Sejfulla took it and read it quickly from beginning to end assuming a troubled expression.

«The issues are important, Enver, and there is nothing wrong with discussing them and thrashing out opinions,» was his reply.

«What rubbish you talk, Sejfulla!» I said impatiently. «We instructed Ymer and Mustafa about what they should discuss and they are discussing other things. Listen what he writes,» I said and I took the letter back and read, 'In the talks the idea of the proclamation of independence and of ethnic Albania confused us!' I cannot understand why he should get himself involved with these questions.»

«The Balli would have raised these problems,» put in Nako.

«Of course, the Balli has raised them, but Ymer and Mustafa should not have permitted the discussion of these issues. They should have presented our platform and demanded their reply to it.»

«You are right,» said Nako, while Sejfulla said nothing more.

Ymer Dishnica's second letter still did not tell us anything of major importance and, as I learned a few days later, did not inform us accurately about the way the discussions had developed. Only one thing was clearly implied: at Mukje, near Tapiza, where the «second phase» of the talks was held, the Balli Kombëtar had conducted the orchestra and, instead of our delegation and especially Ymer Dishnica and Mustafa Gjinishi setting the tone for the meeting and demanding answers to the questions which we put before them, Mithat Bey and Hasan Dosti had diverted the platform of the talks in the way they wanted. This fact alone was sufficient to draw the conclusion that our delegates were not carrying out the instructions which they had received from the leadership of the Party and the Standing Committee of the General Council. Ymer did not write that meanwhile the agreement had been reached; not only was he confused but he had fallen completely into the trap which the Balli Kombëtar had set.

That same day I sat down and wrote a long letter which has been published,<sup>(1)</sup> therefore I shall mention only the main issues which I put before Ymer Dishnica.

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1 Enver Hoxha, *Works*, vol. 1, pp. 419-427, 2nd Alb. ed.



«It seems to us that the talks have developed on the wrong course,» I pointed out in the letter. «You did not go there to discuss independence and ethnic Albania but to put the Balli Kombëtar with its back to the wall and present its delegates with these issues: they must join in the war immediately, agree to collaborate with the councils and, after they have fought, they can join the Staff and take part in a national conference to which patriots from all parts of the country will come.

«These things should be the essence of the talks and such crazy things as the proclamation of independence without driving out the occupiers should not be discussed. And to cap all,» I pointed out to Dishnica, «this was raised by the Ballists who have not fought, and apparently have no intention of fighting.»

In the letter I suggested to our delegates that the Balli Kombëtar's insistence on the «proclamation of independence» and the «annulment of the decision of the Assembly of April 12» should not be treated simply as the formalist and scholastic insistence of a jurist.

«If you glance over the list of participants in that 'assembly',» I wrote in substance to Ymer, «you will find all the Balli Kombëtar there. We and the people have never recognized that decision, therefore, we have no reason to become partners with the Balli, which through an allegedly juridical act wants to absolve the sins it has committed.»

I went on to instruct him that he must not enter into discussion of the issues which the Balli Kombëtar raised, must not become further involved with the

juridical sophism of its chiefs, and repeated once again, indeed in the form of separate points, what the objective of the talks which were being held should consist of.

At the end of the letter I advised Ymer to remain vigilant and cool-headed in his judgements, to avoid being carried away by events, but use them in our favour; I rejected the slogan that Mustafa Gjinishi had launched that «fascism is dead» and stressed that we still had to wage war against it. Besides this I wrote about the hostile activities of the Balli Kombëtar gangs against our forces and enclosed in the envelope a number of materials which showed that the Balli Kombëtar was continuing the war against us and its collaboration with the enemy. They had many facts about all these things but in my letter I also described episodes which had occurred in the zone of Korça where we were established at the time that Ymer and Mustafa were flirting with the delegates of the Balli Kombëtar at Tapiza and Mukje.

The letter with the instructions for Ymer Dishnica was dispatched immediately and arrived at the destination in a very short time, considering our conditions of communication, but meanwhile Ymer and Mustafa had hastened to complete their accord with the Balli Kombëtar without waiting for the opinions and directives of the leadership of the Party.

Less than two days later we learned that a leaflet had been published in the name of the «Committee for the Salvation of Albania» which spoke about the unity which had been achieved between our National Liberation Front and the Balli Kombëtar! This news

alarmed us and we judged at once that, regardless of the content of the leaflet, the announcement of a unity with the Balli Kombëtar and the formation of a «committee» at a time when that organization had given no proofs, was a very wrong and harmful action and in complete opposition to our line. We asked the comrades in Tirana to send us a copy of the leaflet urgently and immediately wrote a circular addressed to the organizations of the Party condemning the Mukje agreement.<sup>(1)</sup>In this circular, in the name of the Central Committee of the Party I ordered that the agreement must be torn up, no mention must be made of it and our propaganda must explain our line and the conditions on the basis of which it was possible to achieve a genuine unity.

After I had written the circular I gave it to Nako and Sejfulla to read.

«Perhaps we should wait a bit, until the leaflet arrives and then we should judge it,» they said.

«Certainly not!» I said categorically. «Even with the little that we know about it, that agreement must be condemned immediately, otherwise we will cause confusion in the Party and among the people. Do you agree that our delegates have violated the line?»

«It seemes so,» said Nako, while Sejfulla merely nodded his head.

«Then, have you any objection to the content of the letter?»

«No,» they both replied.

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1 Enver Hoxha, *Works*, vol. 1, pp. 428, 2nd Alb. ed.

«Then, we should send it and when the leaflet arrives we shall see how deeply Ymer and Mustafa have committed themselves.»

And this is what was done.

When a copy of the notorious leaflet approved under the olive-trees of Mukje reached us on the following day, we understood even more clearly what a mess Ymer and Mustafa had made, what treachery had been committed and what dangerous traps had been set for the Party, the people and our National Liberation War.

In the office of the Staff at Vithkuq I thumped my fist on the table and immediately wrote Ymer a letter (1) without attempting to conceal my anger at this base betrayal which had been committed against our war, the blood we had shed, the privations we had suffered, the victories achieved and the lofty ideal which we had aroused in the hearts of the people and the partisans. Realizing the dangerous consequences which the Mukje agreement might have, I could not contain the anger which was simmering within me. I knew that the mistake of Mukje was not the mistake of our Party, but the mistake of one or two individuals, while the Balli Kombëtar would exploit this mistake, just as it was doing, almost before the ink with which Ymer had signed the disgraceful Mukje agreement was dried. If this inexcusable step, this grave mistake, were not eliminated immediately, it would have unimaginable consequences among the

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1 Enver Hoxha, *Works*, vol. 1, p. 432, 2nd Alb. ed.

masses of the people, for the fate of the war and our revolution.

«You have fallen completely into the positions of the Balli Kombëtar, which is trying to hide its past,» I wrote to Ymer Dishnica among other things. «Your leaflet talks about ethnic Albania and says nothing at all about our war against fascism, not one word about the Communist Party. You have put the Balli Kombëtar, which is a basket of crabs, an organization with a limited number of individuals, on an equal footing with the National Liberation General Council which represents the Anti-fascist Front of the people.»

I pointed out to him also that through this compromising act, with one stroke of the pen, the councils, the Staff and the army, which we had built up with so much bloodshed and sacrifice, had been wiped out and in place of them a «Committee for the Salvation of Albania», which in fact would dig the grave for Albania, had emerged!

In conclusion, I informed Ymer Dishnica that the Central Committee sternly denounced the opportunist Mukje agreement as a grave violation of the political line of the Party. At the end of the letter I ordered him to break off any kind of talk and to make no other agreement. I pointed out to Ymer, Mustafa and the others that they were divested of any authority to represent the National Liberation Front; if necessary, the Party would send another delegate there.

In that situation it was essential to act in such an urgent way because every day that passed after the announcement of the Mukje agreement, to which the

Ballist propaganda gave the greatest publicity without delay, would cause harm to our work and the war, would cause confusion among the members of the Party and other participants in the National Liberation Movement. Therefore, without waiting for the meeting of the Plenum of the Central Committee or of the Political Bureau, which in the wartime conditions would have required time to organize, I discussed the question with those members of the leadership of the Party who were at Kucaka. Apart from Nako, who was a member of the Political Bureau, Sejfulla, who had been coopted as a candidate member of the Central Committee, and some other comrades of the leadership of the Party, who were in the Korça zone during this period, I also summoned Koçi Xoxe, who had returned from accompanying Tempo to Greece (1) and was engaged in minor matters in the villages. In connection with my stand towards the work of Ymer Dishnica and Mustafa Gjinishi there was no opposition. Indeed, even Sejfulla, who was a close friend of Ymer's, was unable to come out in his defence and expressed his solidarity with the common view. Only Koçi Xoxe, as though without any ulterior motive, threw in a poison pill, by saying:

«We shouldn't have held these talks at all. See what has come out of them.»

Sejfulla pricked up his ears.

«Your idea is wrong,» I replied to Koçi. «The decision which we took to talk once again with Balli Kombëtar was correct and on the line of the Party.

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1 Enver Hoxha, *The Titoites*, «8 Nëntori» Publishing House, Tirana 1982, pp. 42-74, Eng. ed.

The platform of the talks which we approved was correct, too, but Ymer and Mustafa completely violated it.»

«But see they have compromised the line,» said Koçi Xoxe.

«They compromised the talks, but not the line of the Party and the Front. We condemn the act of Mukje precisely because it violates our political line.»

Time confirmed how correct and salutary was the clear-cut and intransigent stand which we decided to take towards what was hatched up at Mukje. Had the Party accepted the betrayal of Mukje its hands would have been tied, it would have been obliged to make other opportunist concessions, would have been swept by confusion and have been split, would have lost everything gained, including the trust of the masses. Acceptance of that agreement and the so-called Committee for the Salvation of Albania would have threatened and tragically jeopardized the future of the Homeland. According to the agreement which Ymer Dishnica signed, this «committee» would have equal representation from the Balli Kombëtar and the National Liberation Front and would aim to become the supreme organ of the war and the state; the Ballist members of it would do their utmost to eliminate the General Council, the General Staff, and above all the leading role of the Communist Party. The very creation of this organism would mean sharing power with the big bourgeoisie and the feudal lords who, through such representatives as Ali Këlcyra, Mithat Frashëri and others, would attempt to realize their own interests. Initially, they were obliged to recognize us as partners

and fight to place themselves on an equal footing with us, but in the future they would attempt to get rid of us, to seize the reins of power and to establish a moderate feudal bourgeois regime in Albania with a democratic disguise.

History is not short of instances which prove how dear is the cost of opportunist mistakes at the key moments of the war and the revolution. The capitulationist acts of the leaders of the Greek Communist Party with the local reactionary organizations and groupings, the Greek counterparts of the Balli Kombëtar, cost the Greek people and the Greek Communist Party dear. Up till that time the Communist Party was the greatest organizing and leading force in Greece in the war for the liberation of the country from the German occupiers. The communists were the initiators for the formation of the Liberation Front of Greece, the EAM, in September 1941. In this Front in which the Popular Democratic Party and other patriots also took part, the Greek Communist Party played a leading role and succeeded in raising the people in the war for national and social liberation, began and built up the armed struggle and created the National Liberation Army, the ELAS. Later, however, the leaders of the Greek CP lost their bearings and submitted to the pressure of reaction and the Anglo-American «friends». Si-antos, the general secretary of the party, in the absence of Niko Zachariades, who was in a concentration camp, acted as a provocateur and agent of the British, but even the others did not react against the agreements which were made in Lebanon and Caserta where peace was made with reaction and a joint government formed.



The subsequent development of events in Greece is well-known and it is not difficult to understand the grave responsibility of the leaders of the Greek party. Here I want to note that, as early as that time, our Party expressed its opinions about Varkiza and their other agreements, describing those acts as betrayal to the Greek Communist Party and the Greek people. This opinion, together with other reservations about the views and actions of the leaders of that party, I have expressed to Zachariades and Partsalides when I met them personally and at the joint meeting we had with Stalin and Molotov in January 1950. (1)

Our Party did not fall into such traps and did not permit any trifling with the interests of the people and the Homeland. It acted with courage and maturity, although it was a young party and small in numbers. It had the great strength of the people which gave birth to it, faith in the correctness of the unerring Marxist-Leninist theory, had the courage, wisdom and ability to avoid any mistake or act of treachery by individual persons at the proper time, as was the case of the grave betrayal at Mukje.

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1 Enver Hoxha, *With Stalin (Memoirs)*, «8 Nëntori» Publishing House, Tirana 1984, pp. 165-200, 2nd Eng. ed.

### **III**

## **THE NATIONAL LIBERATION COUNCILS — THE ONLY STATE POWER IN ALBANIA**

At the end of the summer of 1943 the Italian occupiers and their open collaborators were clearly in their death agony and this was accompanied not only with the mad fury of those who were drowning but also with the whetting of the appetites and stepped up efforts of the reactionaries «held in reserve» who hoped to exploit the situation to take over the reins of Albania without firing a shot. Our Party, the only organized internal political force, which at the head of the people had made the maximum contribution to drive the occupiers to their death, now faced other grave and decisive tests and tasks.

Those who up till then had simply been seat-warmers must in no way be allowed to benefit from the bloodshed and sacrifices of the people, the communists and all genuine patriots. That role and indisputable authority which the Party, the National Li-

beration Front and the national liberation councils had established in the course of the war must in no way be lost and allowed to fall into the hands of others in those decisive moments. On the contrary, they had to be safeguarded and further consolidated not only *de facto*, through the armed struggle, but also *de jure*, through unshakeable decisions of the representatives of the people. The conditions for an important and decisive step towards this consolidation had matured. The moments had come for the organization of the 2nd National Liberation Conference of the Albanian people.

## **1. A decisive moment towards the seizure of power**

### **(The Conference of Labinot, 4-9 September 1943)**

The 2nd National Liberation Conference of the Albanian people, or as we call it for short, the 2nd Conference of Labinot, undoubtedly occupies one of the most prominent places in the chain of historic events of our National Liberation War. In the history of the creation, strengthening and steeling of the people's state power in Albania, in particular, the organization of this Conference and its decisions have had and will continue to have exceptional importance and value.

In stressing the importance of this event, it should never be thought that the idea about the organization of this Conference arose suddenly at the end of August 1943, or that we were impelled to hold it by what occurred at Mukje. No, the situation in August 1943 and the events at Mukje were to serve simply as factors to accelerate the holding of this Conference as quickly as possible, but the idea of and the need for organizing it had risen and been put forward much earlier.

At the Conference of Peza in September 1942, at which we laid the foundations of the Front and the national liberation councils, we pointed out that in the future, when the councils had been set up and extended over most of the territory of the country, when their role and authority among the people had been increased and consolidated, the 2nd National Liberation Conference would have to be organized in order to sum up what had been achieved and to define the tasks for the future. In assessing the great work which had been done in this important direction of the war, the 1st Conference of the CPA in March 1943 arrived at the conclusion that the conditions for the 2nd National Liberation Conference of the Albanian people were maturing, while a few months later, at the meeting of the Provisional General Council in July 1943 in Labinot, it was finally decided to call together the meeting of representatives of the Albanian people in the near future. Indeed, we charged the «Standing Committee» or «Secretariat» of the General Council, which we elected in July in Labinot, with the preparation of the coming Conference as its main and

urgent task and began the preparatory work immediately after this.

I have stressed these things in order to underline once again a great truth: we never allowed any meeting, especially a meeting of national proportions, to be held hastily, because the «opportunity arose» or because «matters developed in this way». No, just as the Party took the initiative about holding the Conference of Peza when it judged that the conditions were ripe and the possibilities existed for that Conference, so it did in regard to the 2nd Conference. We never permitted or agreed to hold hasty meetings or conferences unnecessarily, simply for the sake of holding them, or to decide things for which the time had not yet arrived.

The fundamental problem on which the Conference would focus its attention was that of the strengthening and consolidation of the role of the national liberation councils, the recognition of these councils by all those who expressed themselves and were in favour of real and concrete war against the occupiers and, in connection with this main problem, the tasks for the extension and further organization of the great general struggle against the foreign yoke were to be discussed and decided.

Precisely in the context of these tasks and preparations our final attempt was made to hold talks with the representatives of the Balli Kombëtar at Mukje. As I have already related in detail, the demands which we decided to present to the representatives of the Balli Kombëtar were completely in conformity with the problems which were to be discussed

at the 2nd National Liberation Conference. If the Ballists were to accept our demands (a thing which their traitor chiefs could never do) we would allow them time to confirm and prove in the war just how serious they were about these demands and then we would invite them to take part in the Conference. If they refused our demands we would report to the Conference what great efforts we had made and the work we had done with the chiefs of this organization, would produce proofs and arguments that the Balli Kombëtar was a traitor organization and the Conference of the representatives of the people would finally decide on the stand to be taken towards it in the future.

Thus, at the proper moment and on the basis of a thorough analysis and mature judgements we decided to organize the 2nd regular National Liberation Conference and as early as July, along with other tasks, we began to work for its preparation.

The events which occurred and the situation which was created immediately after this proved how correct and well-considered our decision on the organization of this Conference had been.

The outstanding event with the most profound repercussions on the development and complication of the situation at these moments was the fall from power of the fascist dictator Benito Mussolini on July 25, 1943. This news, which was clear evidence of the imminent capitulation of fascist Italy, gave us an immense joy, because our people, along with other peoples, had made a major contribution to this end of Italian fascism, and it presented us with new tasks. On

the one hand, we had to mobilize and lead the masses of the people more vigorously in order to help bring about the capitulation of fascism as quickly as possible and, on the other hand, we had to display vigilance and determination to ensure that the fruits of the victory went only to the fighting people to whom they belonged.

In these directions the dangers and difficulties were increasing and becoming more complex. The fall of Mussolini suddenly obliged the marionettes of the nation to stage a new «anti-fascist» farce. Those who up till that time had been fattening themselves at the trough of the *impero* and praying for Mussolini, took to the mountains, trying to turn the declining hour of fascism into the «7 days of the creation of the world»; by presenting themselves as «valiant fighters» they thought that their turn had come to take over the power which was destined for them alone for eternity! From whom would they take over this power? These political swindlers were unrivalled at making deals: if there were no foreign interference they were sure that the Italian fascists would toss the state power to them like a coin in an upturned hat; if the Germans came in, as the omens were indicating, they would present themselves as «internal liberators» and, under the protection of the nazi bayonets, would do whatever the Gestapo demanded of them until Hitler fell, too, and then power would remain in their hands. However they would emerge just as triumphant, indeed, even with greater honour(!), if the Anglo-American allies were to fill the vacuum created after the departure of the Italians, as was rumoured.

They knew very well that Churchill was not less anti-communist than Mussolini and Hitler. True, if the British and the Americans, as members of the anti-fascist coalition, were to set foot in Albania they would hold the reins themselves after the war, but for the heads of national betrayal this minor «evil» was also a great blessing: under British protection the old world would guarantee and consolidate its state power; let whoever wanted to pay the cost.

Thus, however the situation developed, whichever foreigner came to Albania, there was no danger for the «fathers of the nation»: they would rally to any shameful banner. For them there remained only one great, dangerous and mortal enemy: the National Liberation Movement of the Albanian people led by the Communist Party. Hence, in the situation which was created after the fall of Mussolini the chiefs of the Balli Kombëtar saw more clearly than ever that the main immediate and future enemy to their dreams of power was the CPA, the Front and the national liberation councils. Therefore, with a thousand and one tricks and manoeuvres, they mobilized all their forces to rob the people of that power which the people, led by the Party, had created and were strengthening at the cost of sacrifice and bloodshed.

Hence, we had to cope at all costs with this great danger which had long been in existence but which now emerged openly confronting us with all its savagery and cunning. At all costs we had to affirm and centralize that real power which we had created and were strengthening through a bloody war in order to prevent the «liberation» manoeuvre, which the Ballist



gangs were staging, from finding acceptance in any way.

And precisely when we sent our representatives with clear-cut instructions to place the Balli with its back to the wall, an action which would have greatly strengthened our authority and assisted us in our subsequent stands, what we know about happened at Mukje: Y. Dishnica and M. Gjinishi, instead of placing the Balli Kombëtar with its back to the wall, adopted the stand of the Balli Kombëtar. This grave and inexcusable act of capitulation and treachery made the situation and our tasks immensely more complicated, and for a moment, placed a new weapon in the hands of the chiefs of the Balli Kombëtar to carry on their counter-revolutionary game to seize power.

Although we immediately denounced and condemned the Mukje agreement, still this did not mean that internal reaction, especially the traitor chiefs of the Balli Kombëtar, would give up their manoeuvres and feverish efforts to rob the people of the fruits of their war. The main aim of a possible Anglo-American landing on our shores, especially at these complex moments, would not be to fight against the Italians, now at their last gasp, but precisely to support and secure the positions of internal reaction with the objective that, by this means, imperialism would maintain the old world with its old enslaving connections and dependence in Albania.

Hence, it was more than ever essential to unmask the «anti-Italian» manoeuvres of internal reaction and smash to smithereens the efforts and aims of all those

who wanted to seize from the hands of the people those historic victories for which they had shed and were shedding torrents of blood. It was essential to further strengthen and extend the unity of the Albanian people in the National Liberation War and especially to strengthen the state power of the national liberation councils from every stand-point, as the only legal political power of the people in Albania,

And who could and must discuss and decide about these historic needs better than the people themselves through their lawful representatives? The moment for summoning the 2nd National Liberation Conference, for which we had been preparing for some time, had now arrived.

As soon as we inaugurated the 1st Shock Brigade, together with a number of other comrades, I set out immediately from Vithkuq and after a non-stop march through Gora-Opar and the zones of Librazhd, arrived at Labinot, in the last ten days of August to find that Ymer Dishnica also had returned there. There we held a meeting of the Political Bureau in which those comrades who had the possibility to come took part and we asked Ymer for a detailed report on the activity of the delegation at Mukje. Although Ymer Dishnica admitted his guilt, he tried to justify himself with the «unexpected situation» and the alleged lack of instructions, etc., etc. At this meeting we proposed his expulsion from the Bureau and left the discussion and decision of this matter for a regular meeting of the Central Committee of the Party which we envisaged to hold in the first months of autumn. (Circum-

stances developed in such a way that the plenum was held in May 1944.)

During those same days, the National Liberation General Council at one of its meetings rejected the opportunist agreement of Mukje and decided that the 2nd National Liberation Conference, for which the necessary preparations were almost completed, should begin its work on September 4. This Conference would not be a meeting of individual elements, but a broad assembly of representatives of the people of different regions and of their organs of power, the national liberation councils. These representatives would be mandated delegates to a meeting which would take decisions important to the future of the Homeland.

Timely measures had been taken also to ensure the best possible organization of the Conference. The national liberation councils in the districts and regions had been informed about this important event, about the main problems which would be presented, and had been instructed on the procedure to be followed in the election of the delegates. The organizations of the Party in the regions also had been instructed by the Central Committee to regard this as a serious matter and to take all the necessary measures to ensure that the election of delegates, their departure and arrival at the destination would be carried out without any incident. The number of delegates for each region would be in proportion to the number of councils existing in that particular region. Thus, those regions and districts where the work for setting up councils was not going well had a smaller representation. According to the instructions, each delegate would be

provided by the national liberation council of his district or region with a mandate enclosed in a sealed envelope. The mandate had to be carefully safeguarded because without it no delegate would be allowed to take part in the proceedings of the Conference.

Precisely at this period of preparations for the 2nd National Liberation Conference, or a little earlier, through the comrades in Tirana we received an invitation from Ali Këlcyra who informed us about a meeting of the «Committee for the Salvation of Albania».

Before the war, when I was a student in France, I had once had occasion to meet the feudal «democrat». I remember I was on my way back from Albania where I had been on holiday and in Bari had met Bahri Omari, who had given me a letter for Ali Këlcyra who lived in Paris. I visited the bey in his home at the address which Bahri had given me. It was a very fine apartment, a thing which impressed me as surprising for an emigrant. Ali received me coldly and haughtily, and reluctantly ushered me into the sitting room. Only when he learned who had sent me did he change his tone, offered me a cigarette and rang the bell for his French maid whom he ordered to make me a coffee. While I was drinking the coffee he asked me what I was studying and what news I had from Albania. The bey of Këlcyra listened to me with indifference and boredom. So I, too, remained cold, replied to his questions very briefly and got up and left as soon as I had drunk the coffee. Since that time I had never set eyes on him, either abroad or in Albania, when he returned together with the occupiers. But we had heard what he had been up to. Ali Kël-

cyra was one of the «prominent» propagandists of reaction and the Balli Kombëtar, one of those who more than any other vented his spleen against the war for liberation, against communists and partisans. What is more, the traitor Ali Këlcyra was not content merely with words; together with his brigands he took the side of the Italian troops in the punitive operations in regions where our *çeta* and battalions were fighting, burnt homes and killed people and launched perfidious attacks. We knew about all these activities of his and had warned him about them. Once we arrested him, but let him go telling him to watch his step because he would not get off so lightly next time. On the eve of the Conference of Labinot, that is, at the time when Ali Bey Këlcyra invited us to the «Committee», we had captured a new document proving his treachery and that of the Balli Kombëtar. This was the shameful «protocol» which Ali Këlcyra had signed in Hotel *Dajti* with General Renzo Dalmazzo, in which he openly pledged the collaboration of the Ballists with the fascist troops.

Although it was clear what reply would be given to the invitation of the Balli Kombëtar, I also informed the other comrades who were in Labinot during those days about it. I did not call any special meeting on this question, but seized an opportunity when several comrades had gathered in the room where I was working. It seems to me they were Spiro Moisiu, Nako, Omer Nishani, who had come to us during those days, and perhaps some others. I told them about Ali Këlcyra's invitation and said:

«As we have decided, I shall write to Hysen(1) to make clear to the Balli Kombëtar once again that we will have nothing to do with Mukje, let alone participate in the so-called Committee for the Salvation of Albania, I believe we are all of the same mind.»

All the comrades agreed. As we were talking Sejfulla entered the room and we explained our stand to him.

«Is that what is decided?» asked Sejfulla Malëshova and looked around fishing for some disapproval of what we had decided.

«Why, don't you agree?» asked Spiro Moisiu.

«I agree in principle,» Sejfulla hastened to reply, «but I am racking my brain why they have sent us this invitation.»

«It's not worthwhile,» I said to him there and then, giving him no chance to start one of his debates. «In my opinion, Ali Këlcyra's invitation, which in fact is an invitation from the Balli Kombëtar, is a provocation. They know very well that we have rejected Mukje, but by inviting us to their famous 'Committee' they intend that we should get together once again, hold a discussion, quarrel with one another and cause a split. This is the one aspect, the other aspect is that they want to pose as people who stick to agreements and to find an occasion to spread the word everywhere, 'See we want unity, but the communists break their word'.»

«That is what I am getting at,» said Sejfulla. «We are giving them such an occasion.»

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1 The pseudonym of comrade Gogo Nushi.

«Take it easy, Sejfulla,» said Nako. «The Balli seizes on every occasion to slander and gossip. Don't you worry about that.»

Sejfulla said no more and thus the question of the «Committee for the Salvation of Albania» was closed.

Meanwhile we pressed ahead with the work of receiving the delegates to the Conference and taking the final organizational measures. Initially we thought we should hold the Conference not in Labinot but in a more remote zone, Shmil, since Labinot had been exposed once and the danger existed of an attack by the enemy or reaction. We informed Sami Baholli of this opinion and suggested to him the school in the Qafa hamlet of Shmil, as a suitable place. After inspecting it, however, Sami and another comrade decided that the school building was unsuitable for such a meeting because it was too small and in bad repair, so, in the end, we decided that this Conference, too, should be held in the Bahollis' house in Labinot.

The comrades in charge of accommodating the delegates did great work. With the help of comrades from Elbasan and the surrounding villages they collected food and blankets and even found a good cook. Sami worked tirelessly, moving around all the nearby villages. The final touches to these preparations, especially from the aesthetic aspect, were given by Nexhmije, Ollga Plumbi and Ela Gjikondi, who arrived in Labinot two or three days before the other delegates.

As at the 1st National Conference of the CPA, we adapted a part of the big room in the upper storey

of the house as the hall for the meeting, separating it from the other part with a red curtain. Behind the curtain were the stairs leading to the ground floor, while on both sides of the stairs there were two small rooms which were used for work and as sleeping quarters. On the curtain we hang the portraits of Skanderbeg and Ismail Qemali.

The delegates began to arrive on the 2nd of September and by the next day almost all had come. The following day, September 4, 1943, the proceedings of the Conference of Labinot commenced. It was attended by about 50 delegates, elected by the national liberation councils of the whole country, delegates of anti-fascist organizations which had adhered to the National Liberation Front, from the General Staff as well as the members of the Provisional General Council. One of those missing was Abaz Kupi, to whom we had sent the invitation and the list of the problems that would be discussed in time, but, as he was to say, «work had prevented him from coming». Thus began the proceedings of the 2nd National Liberation Conference at which, from September 4-9, the delegates from the whole country, with a heavily loaded agenda (frequently the proceedings which began in the morning continued till midnight), discussed and reached decisions on problems of historic importance.

The main problem which the Conference dealt with was the question of the political power in Albania, seeing this closely linked with the real achievements of the national liberation councils from the moment when they were formed and, undoubtedly, in close connection with the new situation which had



been created in the summer of 1943 and the tasks which emerged from this. Although each of the 6 reports delivered at the Conference and the many contributions to the discussion about them dealt more extensively with particular aspects or problems, a common idea linked them and pervaded them all: the real power which we had managed to create through an all-sided struggle with arms, with propaganda, with concrete work with the masses, etc., etc., now had to be centralized and proclaimed the only state power of the people in Albania. Every effort must be made to ensure that this state power carried out its tasks and role in the best possible way all over the country and was strengthened and protected as the inviolable power of the insurgent people.

The report on the internal and external situation, with which the proceedings of the first session began, examined the questions of the development of the anti-fascist war on an international level in close connection with the developments of our National Liberation War and especially with the major results in this war.

«Our war has dealt the fascist enemy and its collaborators uninterrupted blows, has made life hell for them, and we are proud that our people have made and are making a major contribution to the final defeat which is threatening fascist Italy,» said the report. «This is precisely what has enhanced the authority and prestige of our National Liberation Movement and won it recognition in the international arena.»

One of the delegates in his discussion said: «We

have not sought or achieved our recognition in the international arena through ambassadors or diplomatic missions, but through the war against the occupier. The liberation war is and will be the foreign minister of the Albanian people.»

In this poetic way, the comrade touched on a great and incontestable truth: the recognition in the international arena of our people's armed struggle constituted, at the same time, an important factor and a guarantee of the recognition and affirmation of the other major achievements and results of this struggle; especially at those moments this aspect of the problem assumed particular importance. As I said, there was talk and the obvious possibility of an Anglo-American landing in the Balkans, and while it was true that we recognized and spoke about their role in the anti-fascist alliance, at the same time, we also knew their secret and sinister aims and interests in Albania and in other countries. Hence, it was important that, if they were to land at those moments, they found us not only in command of the war against fascism, but also in command of our own affairs, masters of our own country. That is, they had to see and be obliged to recognize not only a people mobilized in war, but also a people who, as a result of the war, were now effectively exercising their power through the national liberation councils.

This problem was thrashed out even more clearly and directly in the Conference in the discussions of the report on the situation, activity and present and future tasks of the national liberation councils. Delegates from Tirana, Shkodra, Durrës, Vlora, Gjirokas-

tra, Elbasan and elsewhere spoke concretely about the extension and strengthening of the national liberation councils in the regions, cities and villages, about their major role in the mobilization of the people in the war, about their aid for the detachments of the National Liberation Army and the solution of the vital problems of the people, especially in the liberated zones.

«In the national liberation councils, the people are seeing themselves not only at war but also in power,» said Medar Shtylla amongst other things. «The more we enhance the role and activity of the councils, the more the mobilization of the people in the war will be increased, because the ordinary folk are convinced that the bloodshed and sacrifices will not be in vain.»

Amongst others Koço Tashko, also, took the floor and began his contribution with a criticism about the «remarks» and «dissatisfaction» which Sejfulla Malëshova had expressed in the report on the situation and the activity of the councils in the terrain.

«Sejfulla must not forget that Rome was not built in a day!» said Koço.

After enunciating this adage, however, he considered it in order to make a «criticism» himself, not about the councils at the «base», but about their «higher» organs.

«There is parochialism in the General Council,» he said (he himself was not a member of the Council). «Baba Faja is interested in Martanesh, Myslim in Peza, Haxhi Lleshi in Dibra.»

«We work where we are fighting and will go wherever we are needed,» Haxhi replied to him.

Clearly, what Koço Tashko was concerned about was not the «parochialism» of Haxhi, Myslim and Mustafa Xhani. His aim was to denigrate such active comrades who were members of the General Council, of which Koço thought he ought to be a member sine qua non, just as he claimed that he certainly ought to be a member of the leadership of the Party.

«We have had and have members of the General Council and delegates charged with the qualities and competences of members of the Council in all zones,» I said speaking to Koço Tashko. «Let each of us do his best in his own zone or sector and there is no reason for anyone to criticize us for parochialism. True, Myslim is more interested in the situation and role of the councils in the zone where he is fighting,» I continued, «but he is not interested in his own power there, but in the power of the national liberation council of his zone. The same is true of Haxhi in Dibra, Hasan Pulo in Vlora, the others in Korça, Gjirokastra, and so on. The work of all of us together, on the basis of the platform of the Conference of Peza, on the basis of the collective orientations and directives, makes up the whole. And in my opinion, the whole, the general, the main thing, has gone and is going well.»

In any case, neither Sejfulla's excessive «criticisms» and expressions of «discontent» about the activity of the councils in the terrain, nor Koço's «criticism» about «parochialism» had any influence on the correct and mature discussion of the problems for

which we had gathered, although they caused a certain amount of argument and hilarity. We took them more as lack of knowledge of the real state of affairs on the part of these two comrades, as consequences of personal discontent and their hasty and ill-considered desire to achieve within a few months or a year what in reality required work, toil and experience over whole years and decades.

Of course, I am not saying that in the activity of the councils at those moments we did not have shortcomings or weaknesses. On the contrary, we recognized the shortcomings, struggled to improve the work as much as possible, always aware that not everything would be achieved immediately and aware, likewise, that any maniac demanding «absolute perfection» would have plenty of things on which «to seize» even after this! For us the main thing was that the councils were in existence, that they were carrying out their activity, that they were recognized by the people as such and playing the role of the state power of the people in Albania!

Now, this result had to be proclaimed in law, so that this real power which the people had created in the heat of the war, would not be seized by others. As I said, the dangers in this fundamental aspect were by no means hypothetical. The time had come to take another stand towards reaction which was now posing as «anti-fascist», to tell it bluntly and firmly that the people would no longer tolerate it to manoeuvre at their expense.

I had prepared a report «On Our Attitude Towards the Different Trends Outside the National Liberation

Movement» which I delivered at the Conference about this problem of first-rate importance. I shall not dwell on this report, because its content is known and it has been published (1), but I want to re-emphasize only some fundamental aspects which have to do mostly with the reasons which impelled us to prepare and present this document to the Conference and what the Conference discussed and decided about the problems raised in it.

Although the central point of the report was our attitude towards various trends and organizations in the country, in fact, the whole report was a reflection of the line and work of our Party for the formation and strengthening of the National Liberation Front and the national liberation councils. I outlined to the Conference the history and problems of the whole process which had developed, both before and after the Conference of Peza, pointing out that while the masses of the common people, genuine honest patriots, had united in the National Liberation Front and joined in the war, the whole lot of pseudo-patriotic elements of the most various shades and tendencies were standing more and more aloof from and opposing the Front and the Anti-fascist War.

In the report I dealt in particular with the question of the Balli Kombëtar, the conditions and reasons for its emergence, the great amount of work we had done and our patient efforts to involve it in the war, and in concluding this question I said:

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1 Enver Hoxha, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, «8 Nëntori» Publishing House, Tirana 1974, pp. 172-189, Eng. ed.

«The Balli Kombëtar has waged an all-round ideological, political and military struggle against the National Liberation Movement. It has tried to split it, to arouse the people against the communists and genuine patriots, moreover, in spirit, its chiefs have been and still are with Italy and Germany and have supported the quislings from Mustafa Kruja to Maliq Bushati, whom they themselves recommended to Jacomoni. The Balli Kombëtar has been a supporter of all the occupiers' political manoeuvres from the 'ethnic Albania' to 'the Albanian Army' and 'Albanian Gendarmerie'. The chiefs of the Balli pose as patriots, but,» I stressed, «the burnt-out villages of Vlora, Mallakastra and other districts where they guaranteed peace and quiet for the fascist legions and, indeed, collaborated with them, are evidence of their patriotism. And these collaborators with fascism, who have stained their hands with the blood of the finest sons of the people, are so shameless as to appeal to us to 'return to Albanian patriotism'!»

In the course of this exposé I dealt in detail in my report with the question of the Mukje meeting, the reasons why we decided to go to this final meeting with the chiefs of the Balli, with the shameful and impermissible compromise into which our representatives fell, and, in particular, I dwelt on the grave political consequences which flowed from it and clearly explained the reasons why we immediately denounced the Mukje agreement as invalid and tore it up.

«The comrades entrusted with this task proved incapable of defending the line of the General Council, but, instead, fell into the lap of the Balli Kom-

bëtar, accepted its platform, and the Balli Kombëtar suddenly emerged as an organized party, as if it had allegedly fought as much as, if not more than, the National Liberation Front.

«At the particular moments through which the country is passing,» I went on, «the chiefs of the Balli, who up till now have not fired a shot against the occupier, and who are seeing the strength of the state power we have created, pretend they accept the role of a partner in it, but always with the intention of seizing the whole power. It is impermissible for us to fall into this tragic mistake. The power of the national liberation councils is the power of the insurgent people and not of gangs of traitors and counter-revolutionaries. Now that we have rejected the Mukje agreement they are trying to find other ways to take power. We must close off any path or possibility for them to achieve this, and one of the first and main acts in this direction is the decision we propose this Conference should take: we should declare the national liberation councils the sole state power of the people in Albania. We must take this decision not only because it is a step for which all the conditions for it have fully matured but also because there is an indispensable need to do so. After all, we are legislating an accomplished reality, confirmed by our war and our work, recognized by the people and functioning effectively in Albania. With this act we will block the way to both internal and external reaction in their manoeuvres and aims to seize power.»

The participants in the Conference applauded this report which I delivered on behalf of the National Lib-



eration General Council. This showed that they, like the entire people whom they represented, approved the correct political line of our Party and the National Liberation Front, because this correct and consistent line was the source of all the concrete results we had achieved. And one of the greatest victories was precisely the new state power that was emerging, the power of the national liberation councils, the power of the people. We were at the dawn of a new epoch for Albania.

The approval of the stand which the General Council had adopted towards the Balli Kombëtar and other currents, in general, as well as towards Mukje, in particular, was virtually unanimous, from all those who took part in the discussion. Many of the representatives of the people at this Conference spoke on this question. They supported the line pursued by the General Council, condemned the opportunism of Ymer Dishnica and Mustafa Gjinishi and brought up facts and arguments to prove that the Balli Kombëtar had gone over irrevocably to the positions of betrayal.

One speaker said, «The Balli is awaiting the fall of Italy and like the 'the eldest son' is demanding its inheritance. Its aim is to assemble its forces in order to be strongest in the struggle for power.»

Another said, «The Balli Kombëtar has reached agreement with the Germans, too, considering them as an eventual occupier.»

In his contribution Ymer Dishnica in general accepted the blame for the great mistake he had committed, although he tried to justify it with the circumstances.

«When we heard of the fall of the Duce,» said Ymer among other things, «we were taken by surprise and did not appreciate this moment properly. We thought that the fact that the Balli officially agreed to reconciliation with the National Liberation Council was a great success.»

As for Mustafa Gjinishi, here, too, he again tried to dodge his responsibility with all kinds of excuses such as «we were out of contact», «we did not know all the facts», etc., etc. At the Conference Gjinishi did not fail to attack the stand of the Party and the National Liberation Front towards the Balli Kombëtar, which he even tried to defend:

«Now the comrades are saying with firm conviction that the Balli was formed to fight us. In that case why did we go to that meeting? But this is not so, previously they did not have this aim. On the question of the slogan of the Balli 'death to the traitors', also, we should not take it amiss, assuming that it is aimed against us. I think that it would have been better had we not held any talks at all with the Balli Kombëtar,» said Gjinishi.

I interrupted Mustafa Gjinishi, «You alone, apparently, are the only one who has not understood that the Balli Kombëtar is an organization which was formed to oppose the National Liberation Movement. The other comrades and the people have understood this, but I believe that your purpose is to make the General Council a partner in the mistakes which you and Ymer have committed. The Council has been clear about what the Balli Kombëtar was and you were present at the meetings when we discussed this

problem. We were not wrong to send a delegation to Mukje. You made the mistake and the Council disapproved what you did.»

The other comrades who discussed this point also directly or indirectly gave this disguised agent of the British, of Abaz Kupa and of all the reactionary forces the reply he deserved.

In their contributions they said, «The line we have followed has been correct and its results are apparent in practice; the Balli Kombëtar has been unmasked among the people and many whom it had misled have joined up with the Movement. Mukje, too, would have assisted the National Liberation War had our delegation there taken a firm stand.»

Apart from those mentioned above, Nako Spiru, Sejfulla Malëshbva, Haxhi Lleshi (who dealt in particular with the work done with the bayraktar chiefs of Dibra), Abdyl Agalliu (a delegate from Vlora), Mustafa Xhani, Omer Nishani and others also spoke about this point on the agenda. All of them, bringing the voice and will of the people of the zones they represented, proved and affirmed the major role which the national liberation councils were playing and were unanimously in favour of proclaiming these councils the only political power of the people.

To conclude the discussion, I took the floor again and, in underlining the many major tasks which emerged for the national liberation councils, I pointed out among other things:

«Now that the power of the councils has been centralized and proclaimed the only power of the people, it is essential that the General Council, which

this Conference will elect, should set up a network of different organs and sections everywhere to organize the work in every field, in the economy, education, propaganda, etc. There must be no field in which the work is lame, the role of the councils must be felt and asserted everywhere, otherwise the war itself would be crippled and the future of the people jeopardized.»

The Conference examined the problems related to the strengthening of the state power in close connection with the strengthening of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Front and the strengthening and inclusion in the ranks of the Front of all the organizations of the masses formed by the Party.

Comrades Nexhmije Xhuglini, Ollga Plumbi and Ela Gjickondi spoke in detail at the Conference about the struggle of the women and stressed the need for a better organization of the Albanian anti-fascist women.

On this problem, Ymer Dishnica, who spoke on every point of the agenda, indeed, two or three times, declared:

«The Albanian woman does not carry scented handkerchiefs, but illegal leaflets!»

After supporting the idea of the formation of the organization of the Anti-fascist Women, he went on to express the idea that this organization should take part in the General Council as a separate section. This idea of Dishnica's was fundamentally wrong, and I rose to reject it.

«The National Liberation War and the Front admit to their ranks any person who fights against the enemy, including the women,» I said. «However,

there is no reason for the women to come into the Council as a separate section. We cannot create separate sections in the National Liberation Council for men and for women, for the elderly and the youth. If we were to do this, tomorrow we would have to create in the Council sections for groupings according to political, religious and other tendencies, which is contrary to the spirit of the decisions which this Conference is taking.»

Ramadan Çitaku supported my opinion and explained that the Council would have sections for different sectors of the life of the country, for finance, education, etc., but not for separate organizations.

Around the report which Nako Spiru delivered on the Albanian Anti-fascist Youth there were many contributions which had to do with their organization, militant spirit, enthusiasm and revolutionary aspirations.

«The youth are taking part in the war en masse and demanding that they should be free to achieve their own desires in free Albania. The war for liberation will produce a youth in which the finest virtues of our nation are developed and further enhanced. The Homeland itself will benefit from this,» was stated at the Conference.

In close connection With the central issue and the other matters that were thrashed out there, the Conference also analysed the problems which had to do with the further strengthening of the armed struggle and, in this context, the National Liberation Army of the Albanian people.

The fact is that right from the outset, from the

time when the first national liberation councils were set up, a natural and integral connection had existed and been strengthened between the councils and the *çeta* and bigger detachments of our army. Throughout this whole period, as well as subsequently, while the councils devoted a large part of their work and activity to the mobilization and involvement of the masses in the war, the partisan detachments and units, for their part, displayed special care and attention wherever they fought and operated for the formation, protection and strengthening of the councils. And now that the councils were being proclaimed the only power of the people in Albania, our National Liberation Army itself had increased in numbers and strength, comprised tens of *çeta* and battalions which fought all over the country, the 1st Shock Brigade had been formed and had begun its battles. We were in the process of forming the 2nd and 3rd Shock Brigades, military operational zones, etc., and functioning at the head of them was the General Staff of our Army.

The comrades who spoke about this problem, including Haxhi Lleshi, Spiro Moisiu, Ramadan Çitaku, Ethem Barhani, Hulusi Spahiu and others, stressed the necessity of the extension of the ranks and numbers of the partisan battalions and brigades and the better organization and training of these units to defeat the nazi foreign occupier which was entering Albania and to defend the victories which we were achieving.

One of the contributors to the discussion, I think it was Ethem Barhani, spoke about the fight that had

taken place at Burrel in the beginning of August. In this attack the partisans had been joined by volunteers from Mat and Kruja and «surprisingly» the *çeta* of Abaz Kupa in whom, now that fascist Italy was on its last legs, an astonishing «will to fight» had been aroused. Precisely because of their participation, however, it had not been possible to liberate the town.

«You astound me, my dear fellow,» said Kadri Hoxha in a sarcastic tone, «in the region of Elbasan with all those *çeta*, we are unable to draw in other people in large numbers, while it seems that in Mat 2,500 volunteers have turned out.»

«You don't get volunteers by hiding yourself in Orenja or in the house of Beg Balla, as you do,» I replied to Kadri there and then. «Besides, you shouldn't measure the flow of volunteers into our army with the one or perhaps five people you try to mobilize. Most of Elbasan, Librazhd and Gramsh are bases for partisans!»

The debates continued in this way on this problem, too, and as though to cap it all, at the end of the respective session, Ymer Dishnica got up and said in a solemn tone:

«I ask our national poet to compose a poem, an anthem for the army!» and he fixed his eyes on Sejfulla.

The «national» poet made a show of objecting a little before finally «yielding»:

«I accept!» he said, but I don't know what happened about Lame Kodra's(1) poem, whether or not he wrote it or simply neglected it as he usually neglect-

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1 The pseudonym of Sejfulla Malëshova.

ed the jobs with which he was charged. But one thing I know for certain, that our army continued the war unconcerned about whether or not Sejfulla wrote the «anthem».

Of course, in the days and nights of the proceedings of the Conference, amongst the mature contributions full of content and responsibility for what was said and decided, there was bound to be some such occurrence or note of humour. From this aspect, however, the culmination was the «original» proposal of Hulusi Spahiu who suggested the creation of a decoration, a proposal which caused hilarity in the hall. Hulusi, who still had not begun the fight in Albania, was thinking about medals and decorations.

«What made you think of the decoration?» I asked him during a break.

«It is needed,» he said, «to distinguish those who fight best, who...»

«The time will come when we'll have our decorations,» I replied, «but now we have other problems. However, there is one thing you should know,» I added with a laugh, looking at the comrades round about, «we won't give you even one.»

«Why?» he asked me.

«Because you will lose it at gambling,» I said, and told the comrades, as a joke, of course, an old gambling story between Hulusi and Tahir Kadare, about which I have written elsewhere.

When the discussion of the reports was completed, the Conference elected the Commission for the final drafting of the Resolution and the Appeal addressed to the Albanian people. We had prepared a



draft of the Resolution in advance, but now it had to be enriched in the spirit of the discussion and the decisions of the Conference so that it would serve in the best possible way to make things clear to the people, the national liberation councils, and so on. Doctor Nishani, Nako, Sejfulla, Medar and I shut ourselves up in a room and, taking into account the reports and the discussions at the Conference, drafted the Resolution which has been published.

While the Commission appointed was working in one of the rooms of the second floor, one of the members of the General Council read the Constitution and Rules of the National Liberation Councils to the delegates. These were important documents, the first founding acts, you might say, the first «Constitution» of the new people's state power.

It was late after 10 o'clock at night and there was an idea that the Conference should conclude its proceedings on the following day. But since only a little work remained to be done, we decided to continue. In this way, the delegates would be able to leave for their own places the following morning. So, we read the Resolution and the Appeal which we prepared and went on to the elections. The Conference appointed a commission to prepare a list of the candidates and, while the commission began its work, the participants in the Conference took a break. Thus, the delegates went downstairs emptying the hall. Only two or three remained behind, including Spiro Koleka and another comrade of the secretarial group, Dhimitër Evangjeli, who were fiddling with a «Philips» radio which was placed in a corner of the hall on a table near the balcony.

We prepared the list which would be presented to the Conference and I said to the comrades:

«Let's go outside to freshen up a bit and smoke a cigarette with the delegates, because the doctor [Omer Nishani] won't let us smoke as much as we like.»

We went downstairs and were talking with the delegates and partisans, when Koleka suddenly came out on the balcony and called with great excitement:

«Comrade Enver! Comrades! Italy has capitulated!»

What was expected had occurred. Fascist Italy was finished. The «8 million bayonets» which were going to secure the *spazio vitale*\* for Italian imperialism and revive the Roman Empire, had tossed their flags at the feet of the victors. And among these victors were we, the Albanian partisans and fighters, who defeated the legions of Mussolini with our makeshift rifles.

The news was enthusiastically welcomed by all the comrades. They embraced, threw their caps and hats on the air and even fired a few shots despite our intervention. In the group where I was, two or three comrades began to talk about going down to the cities to take power and begin the work for new democratic Albania.

«But what about the Germans?» I asked them.

«The Germans!» they said with some surprise, but quickly came to their senses and added, «They, too, will clear out one day because we are fighting!»

«All of us must be clear about this,» I told them. «The nazis will not leave Albania unoccupied and,

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\* Living space (Italian in the original).

moreover, they will occupy the parts of Italy the allies have not entered. The liberation of Albania would threaten their positions in Greece and other countries in the Balkans. Therefore, we must strengthen our power, but must not imagine that the war is over, there is a sterner fight ahead of us. We must have our weapons ready.»

Thus, the capitulation of Italy created a new situation for which we had to be prepared. Therefore, we decided to conclude the elections that night and to discuss the measures which had to be taken in a new political and military situation the following day, September 9.

The Conference elected the National Liberation General Council comprised of 62 members. For its part the Council elected a Standing Committee of 16 members: Mustafa Xhani, Myslim Peza, Omer Nishani, Enver Hoxha, Kosta Boshnjaku, Ymer Dishnica, Ollga Plumbi, Liri Gega, Haxhi Lleshi, Fetah Ekmekçiu, Medar Shtylla, Nako Spiru, Sejfulla Malëshova, Ramadan Çitaku, Abaz Kupi, and Spiro Moisiu.

Immediately after the elections the comrades began to discuss the situation. We were all overjoyed and concerned about the serious tasks ahead of us, but it was after 4 o'clock in the morning. We were in need of sleep, therefore, after consulting the comrades of the presidium, I rose and said to the participants in the Conference:

«The presidium thinks we should interrupt the discussion because it is late and the comrades have to rest. We will continue tomorrow, or rather today at 10 o'clock.»

We broke off and went off to our beds, but I continued to talk with Omer, Medar and others about this event for a while. No doubt, the others did the same thing.

The next morning the final session of the Conference began. Omer Nishani was the first to take the floor:

«It is logical,» said the doctor, «that the enemy should surrender to our armed forces, that is, to the National Liberation Army which is linked with the allies. Therefore, I propose that we should send a note to the Italian generals, in which we demand the unconditional surrender of their men, armaments and equipment. Apart from this, we should publish a leaflet or appeal addressed to the Italian soldiers.»

Other comrades discussed the proposal and we decided that an appeal should be addressed to the Albanian people, in which it should be stressed that now the general armed uprising against the German occupiers and the traitors and the establishment of the state power of the national liberation councils all over the country was on the order of the day. Likewise, Doctor Nishani's proposal of a leaflet addressed to the Italian soldiers calling on them to fight against the nazis, was approved, and the General Staff was charged with presenting our demands to the Italian command in Albania.

After these decisions were taken Ramadan Çitaku, on behalf of the Standing Committee of the General Council, spoke about the organization and the functions of sections. These sections would be: the social section to assist regions, families and individuals gra-

vely damaged by the war and to ensure normal life for them, the sections of health, the economy and finance, the press and propaganda, and the section of education. We were setting out on the road of the construction of the new democratic state.

So ended the proceedings of the 2nd National Liberation Conference which took decisions of the greatest importance for the armed struggle of the Albanian people and their state power. The general armed uprising and the power of the councils, the only power of the people in Albania, were the two main slogans with vital importance for our country and its future approved at the Conference, which the delegates took with them in order to disseminate and work to apply them all over Albania.

## **2. Facing the great test**

The situation created after the capitulation of fascist Italy demanded swift actions and urgent measures. We must not let anything slip, especially now that the initiative was coming completely into our hands. Therefore, we decided and immediately issued orders, that the forces of the National Liberation Army should occupy all the zones and cities which had been in the hands of the Italian occupiers and establish the power of the national liberation councils there. Besides this, we decided that, just as at Barmash and else-

where, we should continue the uninterrupted attacks on the nazi detachments which were still not fully deployed in Albania. It was particularly important to liberate those inhabited centres which our forces had the possibility to take and to establish the power of the national liberation councils there.

Irrespective of how events would develop subsequently (this would depend especially on the level of the military intervention of the nazis or the Anglo-American allies), the establishment of the power of the councils in the cities and other inhabited centres would have very great political importance. The people would see and feel the strength, authority and ability of their own power, while the pseudo-patriotic reaction and the Anglo-American external reaction would understand better that their political manoeuvres had failed and were no longer of any use. Therefore, the strengthening of the state power, of the councils and the army everywhere, the mobilization of the people around the national liberation councils and in the ranks of the National Liberation Army and the discrediting of the Balli Kombëtar to deprive it of any influence among the people, presented itself as a vital task. In this way we would have the strength and the right to say to the allies, if they were to make a landing, «You have come to Albania only to fight Hitlerite Germany, but the government of the country is and will remain in the hands of the National Liberation Movement!»

In the context of all these measures and tasks the General Staff planned, in conformity with the situation, a possible assault on the capital so that it would

be liberated and our state power in all its links established there, too.

To this end, immediately after the conclusion of the 2nd National Liberation Conference, while the delegates set out for the regions and the zones which they represented, a part of the General Staff of the National Liberation Army left Labinot and established itself near the capital, at Arbana, where the command of the Group of Peza was also established during those days. Here the organization and inauguration of the 3rd Shock Brigade, an event in which Spiro Moisiu and I and other comrades of the General Staff were to take part, would be carried out. As I said, however, our establishment in this zone was conditioned especially by the political and military situation which could be created in our country in the case of some eventual landing of the allies in the Balkans and, especially, in Albania.

As soon as we had established ourselves in Arbana, I summoned Comrade Gogo Nushi to inform me about the state of our forces and the enemy forces in the capital and to discuss with him the tasks of the moment.

«What do you think?» I asked him, «How many armed forces could be raised from Tirana to support a co-ordinated attack of the partisan forces from the surrounding hills?»

«Apart from all the forces of the guerrilla units, which are armed and ready to go on to the attack at any moment, I am convinced that the youth and the people will willingly rise in the attack for the liberation of the capital,» replied Gogo, but went on to

say, «The worse of it is we are short of weapons.»

«You know what the well-known song says, 'If you have no weapons, find them, seize them from the hands of the enemy',<sup>(1)</sup>» I replied. «Don't worry about the weapons,» I went on, «we will help you and the people themselves know where to find them.»

«You are right,» said Gogo, «there will be no lack of boldness and courage. The people can hardly wait to see Tirana free.»

«Of course,» I continued, «this is a very delicate and extremely important matter which can be discussed only in the party regional committee. We shall launch the attack on Tirana only when we are convinced that it is essential, that we are sure of victory and, most important, for the moment, only if the allies land in Albania in order to present themselves as liberators. We appreciate their war, but we alone have been and are the true liberators in Albania and we shall have power in our hands alone.»

After Gogo and I had discussed these problems in detail he set off immediately for Tirana to present everything which we talked about so the party regional committee, so that the people and the guerrilla units would be mobilized and ready if it was decided to launch the attack for the liberation of the capital.

Meanwhile, a number of battalions and *çeta*, apart from the forces of the Group of Peza and the 3rd Shock Brigade which was in the process of formation, had been brought into the zone around Tirana for this purpose. Likewise, we gave the order for the 1st

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1 Folk song of the period of the National Liberation War of the Albanian people.



Shock Brigade to be deployed in the zone around Tirana and Elbasan, cutting the communication routes between the cities and attacking the nazi convoys. The partisan forces under the command of Haxhi Lleshi were also to take part in the assault on Tirana after the liberation of Kruja. Besides this, we called on the Italian army to surrender to the partisan command, to take to the mountains in the war against nazism and to refuse to continue in the service of the Germans because it would end up in their concentration camps. We made this known to them by means of appeals and through our comrades whom we sent to talk with them, because, of course, at that time, we did not possess radio transmitters. Some of the Italians responded to our appeal.

While we were in Arbana, a number of senior Italian officers, including the air-force commander in charge of the aerodrome of Shijak, came to us. Amongst them was a colonel, the son of General Pirzio Birolli, who commanded the Italian forces in the operations in Montenegro. They came dressed in white summer suits and silk shirts, presented themselves to our Staff, gave their names and, for our part, I congratulated them because they had not surrendered to the Germans. However, an Italian artillery battery continued the war against us, shelling Arbana. So, I told the colonel, the son of Pirzio Birolli:

«The whole Italian army is surrendering, so, go with one or two other Italian officers and call on that battery to cease fire and surrender.»

He agreed, took his stand in an open place and shouted to the battery:

«Surrender to the Albanian partisan command, because Italy has capitulated! See, we have surrendered.»

Then, this battery instead of firing on Arbana fired on the son of Pirzio Birolli and his men and blew them to pieces. I don't know what became of his father, but he, too, may have met his death in Montenegro at the hands of the Yugoslav partisans.

In their barracks and stations, the other Italian officers, of course, were used to taking a bath each day. One of them, an air-force colonel, asked one of our partisans to heat a bath for him.

«What do you want?» asked our partisan.

«A bath,» replied the Italian calmly.

«So, the gentleman wants a bath, eh!» said the partisan, smiling, and added, «There is your bath, in the Erzen River(1). Go and wash as much as you like, there is no other bath here. We are at war and this is the countryside. When we liberate Albania we'll have baths. Do you agree, signor?»

The Italian who wanted a bath was not a bad chap. He stayed with our forces to the end. As I have been told, in Italy after the war he was promoted, and when he was eventually pensioned off visited our embassy from time to time. He had become our friend.

Thus, with the capitulation of Italy a number of Italian units, indeed, even one division, the *Firenze* Division, commanded by General Azzi, surrendered to us. Our forces disarmed the division and were ordered to send Azzi and his whole staff to Arbana. I received

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1 River in the vicinity of Tirana.

them there and after the usual greetings, I spoke about the changes and the situation in the government of Mussolini's Italy, which Badoglio had taken over, as well as the situation of the Italian army and the Italian command. I also told General Azzi that, in my opinion, the Italians who surrendered to us should take the honourable road to atone for their sins and mistakes by taking part with us in the war against the Germans.

Amongst other things I said to him, «We can sign a joint declaration calling on the other Italian forces that still have not surrendered to unite with us. After this we should ask them individually and let those who wish to fight keep their rifles, while those who do not wish to fight should surrender their weapons and go to our liberated zones and work there together with the peasants to produce their own food and to assist the war.»

I reached agreement with Azzi on this.

Some of the surrendered Italians expressed their desire to fight and did so. We incorporated them in several units of the National Liberation Army; some of them we incorporated in the 1st Shock Brigade, in a battalion which we gave the name of the founder of the Italian Communist Party, Antonio Gramsci.

With the disarming of the Italian units after the capitulation of Italy, we took possession of rifles, machine-guns and bombs. With these weapons we equipped a number of partisan battalions and territorial battalions which we organized at that time, and also kept some weapons to strengthen the 3rd Shock

Brigade, and especially the 2nd Shock Brigade which was weaker from the point of view of equipment.

Likewise, we emptied the Italian depots of as much materials, such as food and clothing, as we could, and transported it deep into our liberated zones. A good part of these supplies we shared out among the people of Peza who had fought and been burnt out, while the remainder we kept for the needs of the war and the partisan forces.

Thus, after a stem and bloody war which lasted for several years our small but valiant and indomitable people, mobilized and led by our Communist Party, managed to conquer the hordes of the Italian Empire and triumph over them. Triumphant as they were, however, our people displayed towards the erst-while killers and occupiers the qualities of a great people: those who wanted to make amends for their evil deeds and contribute to the war against nazi-fascism, they accepted as comrades-in-arms, while to the others who did not take this honourable course, the doors of the houses and cottages in the villages were opened and the people protected them from the nazi fury until the war was over.

After Liberation, in March 1945, the Italian under-secretary of state for war, Mario Palermo, came to withdraw the Italian troops who had surrendered to us. Palermo was a communist; at that time the communists were taking part in the Italian government, and Togliatti himself was minister of Justice. We welcomed this man warmly, not so much as a government personality but as a communist comrade, talked with him about the stands of our Party, about

the stands of our new state and about the future of our country and its prospects. We also spoke to him about the fierce war which Italian fascism had waged in our country and the great damage which it caused us and also told him that we spared nothing to oppose Italian fascism and the fascist army. Then, we told him that, despite this, after its capitulation, we acted in a humane manner with the Italian army, called on the Italian soldiers to take to the mountains, and those who wanted to should fight, and in fact a few of them did fight. We also signed a protocol with Palermo defining the procedure for the transfer of all the Italian troops in Albania to Italy. All those who were unarmed boarded the ships which came from Italy while we sent the partisans who had fought in the ranks of the *Gramsci* Battalion to Italy with full honours and all of them armed. I do not know whether the former Italian under-secretary for war is still alive, but although he was an old man and a member of the Italian revisionist party, whenever he met our comrades, he spoke to them with sympathy and affection for the Party of Labour of Albania and about the meetings and talks which he had had with us. Subsequently, he published a book about his visit to Albania in which he speaks in friendly terms about the talks which he had with me and my comrades in connection with the problem of the repatriation of the Italian army. Here I am referring to the repatriation of the living, because the repatriation of the dead army took place much later. When the bones of the dead army were to be transferred, a general came, but he was a fascist and took the bones of fascists.

But let us return to the autumn of 1943 which began with the capitulation of fascist Italy and which became one of the periods of our most intensive political and military activity; the period in which we had overcome the greatest difficulties and dangers and the most severe tests.

In particular, I want to point out that during this period, a structure of our organs of power, from the suburb, village, city and regional councils to the National Liberation General Council and its Standing Committee, was set up over virtually the whole country. In the liberated regions and cities, the national liberation councils became the sole organs of power which administered and governed on behalf of the National Liberation Front and the interests of the people. They brought life back to normal, ran the economy, and education, saw to the provision of supplies for the people, carried out propaganda and organized the collection of aid for the Movement and the sending of volunteers to the detachments of the National Liberation Army which was dealing ceaseless blows at the new nazi enemy. This was the general test of the new state which was emerging in the heat of the war. Good reports reached us from all over the country about the work and struggle of our comrades, the enthusiasm of the people and their determination to proceed on the course that the Party showed them.

Precisely in this tense but optimistic atmosphere the reports which reached us from Gjirokastra, where Bedri Spahiu, the political secretary of the party regional committee, had made an impermissible polit-

ical mess, struck an unpleasant discordant note. Contrary to the clear instructions of the Central Committee and the Standing Committee of the National Liberation General Council, after the capitulation of Italy, the comrades of Gjirokastra had allowed the Ballist gangs to enter the city and it was only after them that our units entered the city. Instead of driving out the brigands of the Balli Kombëtar and establishing the sole and undivided power of the national liberation council in the city, Bedri Spahiu allowed the power of the Balli Kombëtar to exist alongside it and exercised his oratory in polemics with Ali Bey in the *Qajë e Pazarit*, in the centre of the city. Thus, Ali Bey and the other Ballists strutted like lords in the streets and cafés of Gjirokastra, the Ballists committed all sorts of filthy crimes, while Bedri Spahiu «exposed» them with words. This was a condemnable political flirtation which gravely violated the line of the Party and the National Liberation Front. As soon as I received the report I sat down and wrote a stern letter to the Party Regional Committee of Gjirokastra in which I condemned their action and explained to them once again our current stand towards the Balli Kombëtar. In essence I pointed out to the comrades in Gjirokastra:

«No power other than the power of the national liberation councils must be permitted. You have allowed the Balli Kombëtar to establish itself and are content with your alleged exposure of it. You must understand clearly that now there can be no more talk of unity with the Balli Kombëtar, but only about smashing this reactionary traitor organization. We must act energetically, not only with political work,

but also with military operations. We must use weapons to clean up that filth and establish our power everywhere.»

In Berat, too, as we were informed, an analogous event had occurred, and for this we criticized the leading comrades of the Party Regional Committee of Berat. We thought that the situation would be put right when, to our astonishment, a few days later, we received another report, even more scandalous than the first, indeed so unbelievable that we urgently sought verification of it. It turned out that the command of our troops in the region of Berat had entered into an ugly compromise with the German occupation forces. As though it were not enough that the Ballists made the law in Berat, that the criminal Abaz Ermeni strutted about tearing up our proclamations and the bulletins of *Zëri i popullit*, with his own blood-stained hands, Gjin Marku, who was the delegate of the Central Committee, and Mestan Ujaniku, the former commander of the region even allowed the German soldiers to enter the city after they were «searched» by our guards at the entrance to Berat! The nazis entered peacefully, looked around, gathered information, pretended to buy something in the shops, while the partisan command looked on. Similar things occurred in Lushnja, too.

We demanded urgent explanations from Gjin Marku who, in his letter of reply sent to the General Staff, admitted the situation and, indeed, wrote that «Germans had even entered our offices»! Such a stand without precedent in all those years of our National Liberation War demanded a clear and stern



stand. Together with Spiro Moisiu we drafted a letter to the command of the region in which, after criticizing them for the lack of regular information about the situation, we stressed the gravity of this mistake from the political stand-point. At a time when we were fighting the Balli Kombëtar and reaction with arms and propaganda, when we were accusing them of collaboration with the nazis, a partisan command had come to terms with the nazis!

«You should never have reached agreement with our most ferocious enemies,» we wrote, «even if the whole army had been wiped out in the fight against them.»

We discussed this grave act for which Gjin Marku was mainly responsible, through party channels, too, and decided that at the first meeting of the Plenum of the Central Committee we should discuss both the capitulation of Ymer Dishnica at Mukje and the question of Gjin Marku, and that the latter should be expelled from the Central Committee.

At these moments it was important to attack not only such opportunist actions which were in flagrant contradiction with the line of the CPA and the National Liberation Front, but also the manifestations of euphoria which were seen in some organization or individual comrades. While instructing that the establishment of the power of the national liberation councils should be pressed ahead with all over the country, the Central Committee also pointed out that the security of the cadres of the Party and the Movement should be safeguarded and that only those comrades for whom it was essential to emerge openly as leaders of the state power should be exposed. In general,

this instruction of the Central Committee was applied correctly, but on some occasion we had to criticize certain comrades for the violation of security, for the unnecessary movements of illegal comrades as if they were legal, by vehicle in the middle of the day, and so on.

In particular, we strongly criticized the Party Regional Committee of Elbasan which completely let go the reins in this direction. Not long afterwards the comrades of this organization received a grievous blow on account of the euphoria they had displayed: a number of communists and cadres of the National Liberation Movement, including the political secretary of the region, Tomorr Sinani, were arrested by the Gestapo assisted by the Ballists.

Thus, through uninterrupted struggle and activity, with keen vigilance and a correct and consistent stand in every step, we were successfully passing one difficult test after another in the situation created after the 2nd Conference of Labinot. It was becoming clear to everybody that the authority of the National Liberation Movement had greatly increased and, in this context, the national liberation councils were not only capable of holding the reins of the country, of acting and dictating in the name of the people, but, more important, were determined not to allow anybody to threaten or damage the victories achieved.

Precisely at these moments, in the midst of all this work, we were to be faced with a new threat and a fresh effort of reaction to attack us on all fronts, to divide the people and to rob them of what had been achieved through struggle.

We were in Arbana when we received a leaflet issued by a «Zogite National Party», unheard of up till those moments, but signed by such «well-known» bayraktars as Fiqri Dine, Muharrem Bajraktari, Myftar Kaloshi, Abaz Kupi and others. Through this leaflet the «Zogite National Party», freshly cooked up in the secret kitchens of reaction, proclaimed its existence and gave «the masses» the sensational news: «the star of the nation», the despot Ahmet Zog, had not yet set. He was alive and living well in England and, moreover, he was holding talks and preparing plans for «liberation» with Mr. Churchill himself (!), and the British Intelligence Service was mobilized to find where those wretched *opinga*\*, which the sovereign was not able to put on in April of 1939 (1), had been lost! Hence, let the nation rejoice, shouted the «Zogite National Party», because the saviour will land (from the skies by British balloons) and until the *opinga* are found all patriots and people must unite around the party of the August Monarch to fight (of course, against the National Liberation Front and Movement), because we are sure of the future: the monarchy and the monarch!

In commenting briefly to the comrades who were in Arbana that day on this leaflet and its asinine content, I said:

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\* Traditional Albanian green-hide shoes.

1 Irony on the statement that «in case of aggression Zog will put on the *opinga* and rush to Durrës to meet the Italian aggressors with bullets». It was put into circulation by Zog's men in the first days of the April 1939 fascist aggression on Albania in order to deceive internal opinion.

«This whole thing is evidence of a manoeuvre hatched up against us by internal and external reaction. Convinced that they have achieved nothing with the Balli Kombëtar, now the reactionaries have started to exhume Ahmet Zog from the grave, to powder and perfume his corps in order to create the impression that the monarchy and the monarch were and still are legitimate and in power in Albania! The point is quite plain: there is no reason to create another state power in Albania, no reason to recognize the national liberation councils. Hence: struggle against them in the name of the monarchy, and not struggle against the occupiers in the name of Albania!»

Mustafa Gjinishi, who spent most of that period in the zone of Peza, said with a veiled gloating in his eyes, «The rogues have picked a very suitable moment. This will cause all sorts of problems and a lot of work for us!»

«Undoubtedly the problems and work will be increased,» I told him, «but as for the moment they have picked, it is mostly to the disadvantage of reaction itself. The sudden emergence of Zogites on the scene will confuse and split the ranks of the Balli Kombëtar more deeply. Let us not forget that, regardless of their motives, for years on end the chiefs of the Balli Kombëtar have been opposed to Zog, and now the presentation of the return of Zog as the saviour and heir to the state power will terrify a good number of them and make them abandon the Balli Kombëtar and come closer to us. But that is another matter,» I continued. «Time will show what will happen with the various trends and groupings of reaction. As far as we are

concerned, the moment when the Zogites have emerged on the stage is more in our favour. Now we have the National Liberation Front, have the councils and our army all over the country, and have an authority and power which is recognized and functions. Towards this reactionary 'party' we shall maintain that same clear-cut stand which we decided towards the reactionary Balli Kombëtar!»

«Herein lies the evil and our greatest problem,» interrupted Gjinishi, confident that this time there was nothing on which I could catch him. «The Balli Kombëtar has been discredited, but the Zogite party has just emerged. If we attack it immediately they will say: Are you for war against the occupiers, as you declare, or are you for war between parties? This will compromise us greatly!...»

«I don't understand from what position you are speaking?!» I said to him, hardly able to control my anger.

He was silent for a moment, gave me a resentful look and continued quietly:

«The comrades and I understand you correctly, Comrade Taras, and in essence matters are as you present them. However, what I am concerned about is the prudent tactics that we must pursue, that is, to avoid violating that platform which we have decided and proclaimed at Peza and also at Labinot.»

«Why? Where do you see any violation?» I asked him.

«If you attack the Zogite party immediately, without giving it a chance to discredit itself amongst the people as a collaborator with the occupier, it seems to

me that this will be taken as a violation of the platform of the Conference of Peza. We have declared that we are not opposed to different nationalist parties and organizations. Is that not so?!»

«Here there are two things, Mustafa,» I replied, «either you have not understood the platform of Peza and Labinot, or from haste you are falling into mistakes and interpretations which are inexcusable even in a beginner. We have been and are for collaboration with any progressive, nationalist or other party which accepts the platform of the Conference of Peza, joins the National Liberation Front, recognizes the national liberation councils and, while preserving its independence as a party, fights within the framework of the Front against the occupiers and traitors for the liberation of Albania. Is that not so?» I asked him.

«Yes! That is so!» muttered Gjinishi.

«Then,» I continued, «which of these basic conditions does the 'Zogite National Party' fulfil?! Not one of them! On the contrary, not only does it not fulfil any of these demands, but it calls on the National Liberation Front to come under its umbrella, and even worse, raises the problem of the regime at these moments and, moreover, has decided both the form of the regime and the persons to head it, the monarchy as a regime and Ahmet Zog as king! In view of all this, is there anything about this so-called party, to which we should kowtow according to you, Mustafa, that is less 'discrediting' than there is about the Balli Kombëtar?!»

«That is definitely so,» intervened Spiro Moisiu. «We must tear the mask from the evil face of the

'Zogite National Party' as we did with the Balli!»

«Your logic convinces me, Comrade Taras!» said Mustafa Gjinishi, trying to cover his tracks. «I took a superficial view of matters since I had no time to reflect on them deeply. But I was also confused by that damned signature of Bazi i Canës at the bottom there and what it says about Churchill. I thought to myself, 'Bazi is a member of the Standing Committee of the Council, and Churchill is the leader of our great ally, Britain, therefore,' I considered, 'we couldn't oppose them openly as do the Ali Këlcyras and Mehdi Frashëris.' But I see it was a hasty judgement.»

«As for Abaz Kupi,» I told the comrades, «as a member of the Standing Committee of the Council and of the General Staff, he must render account for what he has done. With this leaflet that he signed he has openly admitted that he has been in our ranks up till now with other aims and missions. As for Churchill and his talks with Ahmet Zog, we have no reason to worry. The people know the despot Ahmet very well. We shall tell the people openly that, if it pleases Churchill and he has the time, let him talk about our question with Ahmet Zog day and night, but we and we alone will decide the future of Albania.»

After this, having discussed the problem and thrashed it out thoroughly, we instructed all the organizations of the Party in the regions, and especially in Tirana, about the clear-cut and consistent stand which must be maintained towards the Zogites.

At the same time, we instructed both the organizations of the Party and the national liberation councils that the struggle against the Zogites and the

chiefs of the Balli Kombëtar should not in any way be taken or treated as a separate struggle or as the main one for us.

«A new enemy, German nazism, has occupied our Homeland,» we instructed the comrades, «therefore, we must concentrate all our forces against the occupiers, and, along with the occupiers, also against the Ballist and Zogite traitors who collaborate with them. We must not forget that the strings were pulled in London to bring the 'Zogites' on the scene, but they might also have been pulled in the corridors of the German Gestapo. The nazis are striving to implant and encourage the split, to deceive us so that we concentrate the war against the local reactionary groups and parties that pop up and wither like toadstools. Therefore, vigilance and prudence! If the fire on our land burns up the nazis, their tools, the local brigands, will be burnt up along with them.»

So, in the autumn of 1943, amongst so many difficulties and tests, we began and consistently and bravely carried on the battle with the other tool of the occupiers and local and foreign reaction, the Zogites. A little later, this so-called party, a nest of criminals and hired mercenaries, was to organize a so-called congress in Tirana from which it was to emerge with a symbolic name drawn from the past, Legaliteti. In this way the scum which comprised it wanted to say that they were allegedly the «legal» representatives of and heirs to a «legal» regime which existed somewhere... (in the plans of the British and the dreams of the venal officials of the nation), and which now



was emerging on the scene to re-establish the monarchy in Albania.

But, as in the case of the Balli Kombëtar, with Legaliteti, too, reaction had reckoned without the host. As I have said right from the outset we discovered and correctly defined the reactionary character and aims of this grouping and immediately opposed it everywhere with our line of exposure and open attack. Both from the correct stand which our Party adopted immediately and because of the universal hatred which the masses of the people had for the time of the Zogite regime, Legaliteti never established any solid roots. It remained mostly a grouping of chiefs, agents of the British and the old regime, supported by gangs of brigands, in the forefront of which were the mercenary forces of Abaz Kupa and a few other bayraktar chiefs.

Meanwhile, the emergence of Legaliteti on the scene was to quickly confirm what we had foreseen: the upset and division in the ranks of the «heads of the nation», especially among a number of elements of the Balli Kombëtar. Clear that the Balli Kombëtar had lost all hope of success and now, frightened by the possibility of the reappearance of Zog, various pseudo-nationalist elements were finally obliged to turn their eyes to the National Liberation Front and were agonizing over the step which they had to take. Indeed, they sent word to our comrades in Tirana that they had in mind to break away from the Balli Kombëtar, to form a «democratic party», to join the Front as a party, to recognize the councils and take part in the armed struggle against the occupier!

We sent word to the comrades in Tirana to tell

them they were welcome, but they must stick to and carry out what they promised. The Front was not and would never be a shelter for swindlers. The Front was a fighting organization.

We waited for them to come, naturally without being greatly concerned whether they did or not, because, after all, it was they who were seeking assistance and salvation and not us, but we heard no more of them. They were finished from every standpoint. Some of them reconciled themselves to the former situation and the new occupier, some decided «to give up politics», while others decided to sit on the fence.

Although it is not worth while to dwell at greater length on these gentlemen of the past era, I shall mention just one more thing which is linked with them, but especially with an «idea» or «proposed initiative» of some of our comrades.

We were still in the zones around Tirana when Sejfulla Malëshova came from the city one day and presented to me a «brilliant» idea to which he had converted Nako Spiru, too.

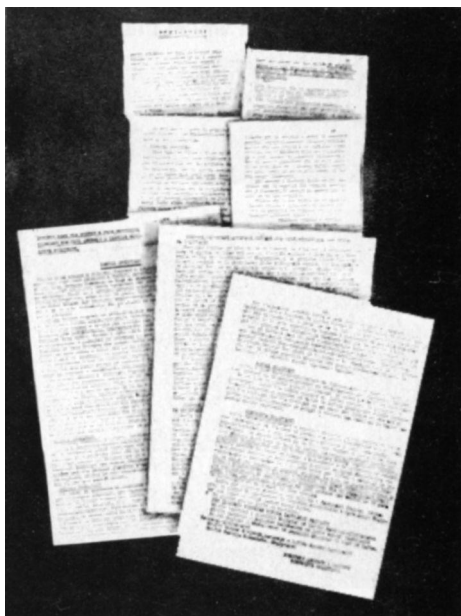
«The waverers in the ranks of reaction are unable to do anything with their own forces. They are not forming the democratic party with which they will join the Front. We have the idea we should encourage and help them to form a party, but not a social-democratic party; something more progressive, perhaps a democratic, or even better, a democratic-republican party.»

«Interesting!» I said with gentle irony to avoid putting him off. «But why is this 'assistance' from us needed?»

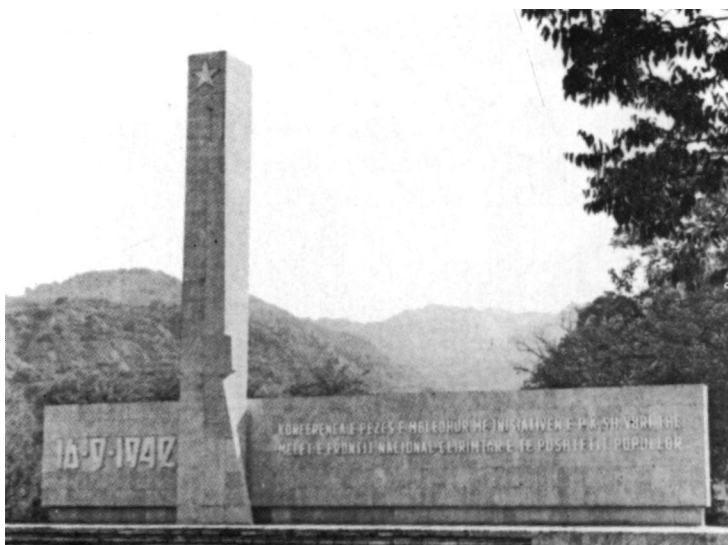
«We should exploit the contradictions in the ranks



**"The Party Has Been Founded".  
Tableau by Painter Shaban Hysa**



**Facsimiles of the Resolution of the  
Founding Meeting of the CPA and  
the Appeal addressed to the Albanian  
people, November 1941**



**Monument dedicated to the historic Conference of Peza,  
September 16, 1942**

**The house in which the Conference of Peza was held**



**Participants in the Conference of Peza**

**ENVER HOXHA**



**MYSLIM PEZA**



**MUSTAFA XHANI**

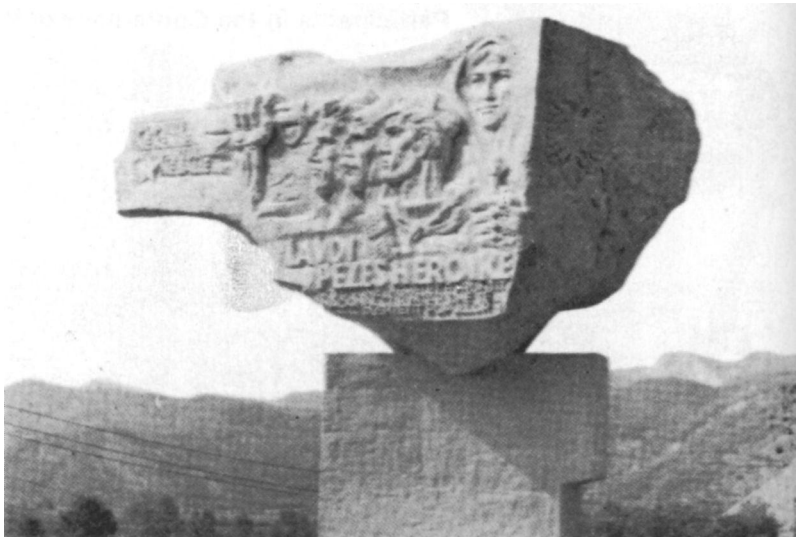


**NEXHMIJE XHUGLINI**

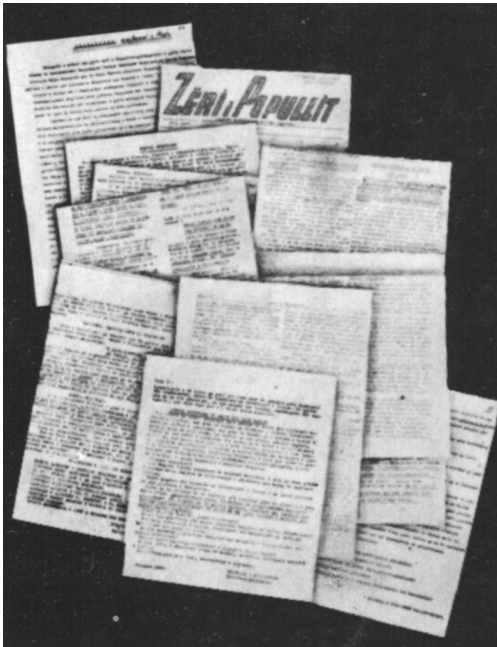


**HAXHI LLESHI**



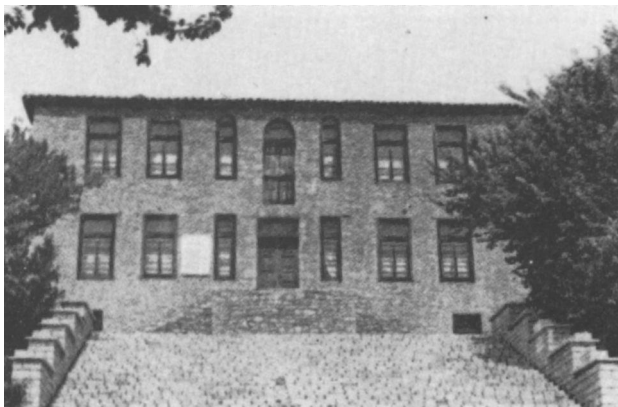


**"The People on Their Feet, the Party at the Head". Monument dedicated to heroic Peza, work of People's Sculptor, Muntaz Dhrami**



**Facsimiles of the Resolution of the Conference of Peza and other documents announcing and analysing the decisions of this historic event**

**View of the house in Labinot, where a series of important meetings of the CPA and the Anti-fascist National Liberation General Council were held during the year 1943**



**"Labinot, July 10, 1943". Tableau by People's Painter, Guri Madhi**



**Comrade Enver Hoxha, founder and organizer  
of the Albanian National Liberation Army**





**Participants in the 2nd Anti-fascist National Liberation Conference held in Labinot, September 1943**

**The state power of councils — the only state power in Albania**



**In the difficult  
winter of 1943-1944**



**"We Break the Encir-  
clements". Tableau by  
Merited Painter, Fat-  
mir Haxhiu**



**Towards the historic Congress**



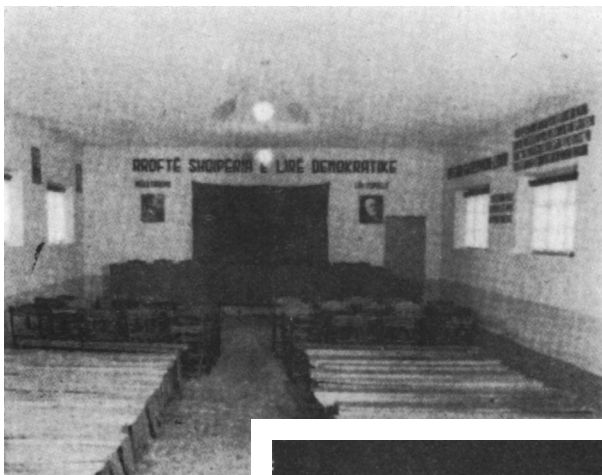
**The building in which the Congress of Permet was held**



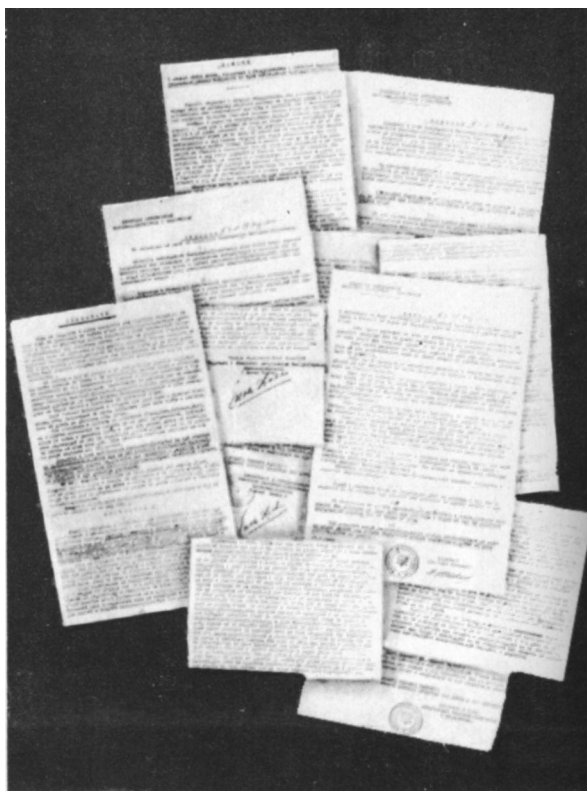
**Comrade Enver Hoxha delivering the report  
at the Congress of Përmet**



**Përmet, May 1944. Comrade Enver Hoxha with other members of the Anti-fascist National Liberation General Council**

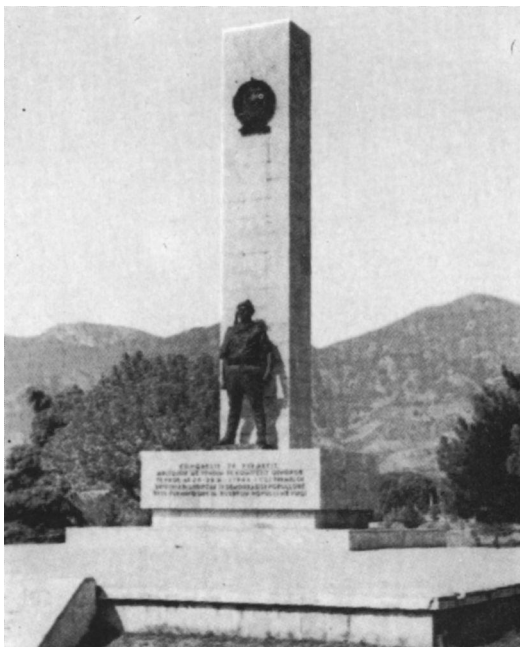


**The hall in which the Congress of Përmet was held**



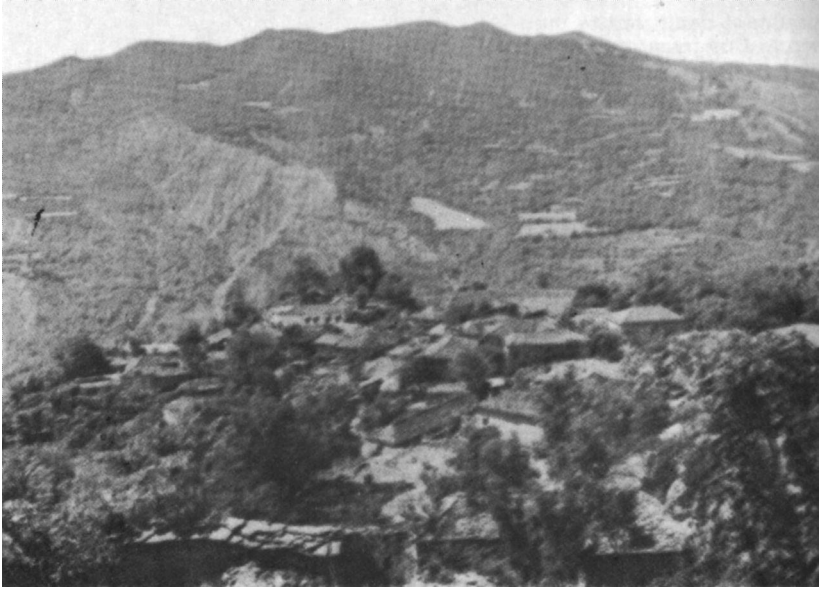
**Facsimiles of the documents of the Congress of Përmet**

**Monument dedicated to the historic Congress of Permet which brought the people to power. Work of People's Sculptor, Odhise Paskali**



**Permet today**





**View of the village of Odriçan**

**Detailing the plan of the general offensive  
of the ANLA. Summer 1944**

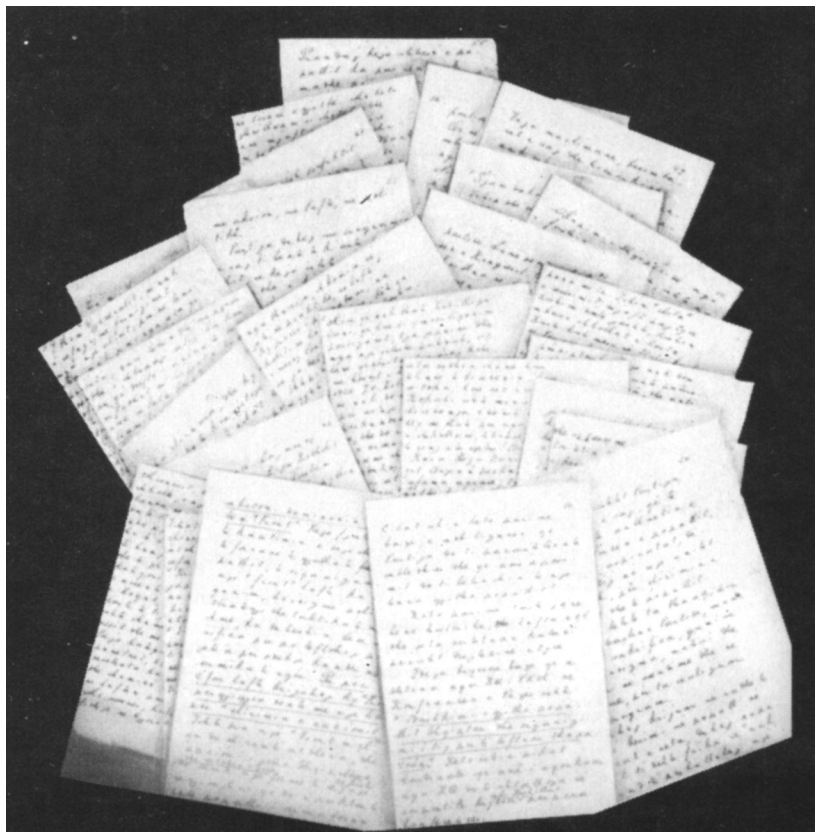






**The home of Vitori Jorgji (above) and Konstandina Londari (below) at Odriçan of Përmet, where Comrade Enver Hoxha has lived and worked in the summer of 1944**





**Facsimiles of manuscripts of Comrade Enver Hoxha's memoirs and historical notes on the work and efforts for the creation of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Front and the emergence of the people's state power**

of our opponents, deepen the split and extend the differentiation in their ranks,» Sejfulla replied proudly.

«And for this we, the members and cadres of the Communist Party, ought to teach and encourage them to form a party?»

«We consider this a course with great possibilities!» continued the «professor». «Imagine what an effect it would have if a part of the Balli Kombëtar broke away to form a separate party and this party publicly proclaimed its adherence to the Front! The platform of the Conference of Peza...»

«Excuse me for interrupting you, Sejfulla», I said, «but in this concrete instance you have judged matters precisely like the social-democrats of parliamentary debates. We are members of the Communist Party and it is impermissible for us to take the initiative or to encourage the artificial creation of other parties, and we have absolutely no reason to do so. If various nationalist, democratic and other elements or groups themselves manage to form a party which agrees to and really joins in the war against the occupier, adheres to the Front and accepts the national liberation councils, then we have no objection to recognizing this party, respecting its independence and, indeed, if it proves capable and if our brains shrivel and become mouldy, let it win the leading role in the Front! We have made this clear and correct stand known to all and will consistently adhere to these Leninist principles. But to involve ourselves in deals or efforts in order to urge those who are incapable of doing anything to form a party, this is anti-Marxist in principle and very harmful in practice!

«In brief our stand is and remains this: if they want to and are capable of doing so, let them create their own party and call it what they like, but we have told them and tell them again: if they truly want to fight there is no reason to waste their time with talk about parties. Let them join the Front, either individually or in groups, begin the fight and we shall respect them, just as we shall demand that they, either as individuals or as parties, recognize and respect not only the independence of the Communist Party in the Front, but also the leading role which our Party has won through colossal struggle and efforts.»

Sejfulla appeared to be convinced by my arguments and for a certain time had nothing more to say about this «party».

Five or six months latter, however, when we had just broken out of the enemy encirclement of the winter and were established in Panarit, I received a letter from Nako Spiru in which, to my astonishment, he repeated Sejfulla's proposal about encouraging the formation of a «democratic-republican party» and now with members of the Front (!) in its ranks. I sent a stern and terse reply to Nako and, through him, to the main author of the «formation of parties», Sejfulla, and instructed them to waste no more time on such matters but to get on with the work.

Subsequently I grasped the true meaning of Sejfulla Malëshova's proposal better in the context of all his right opportunist views. Sejfulla Malëshova envisaged the future of Albania in the establishment of a bourgeois democracy, with a parliament in which various parties would play their cards and bargain

for portfolios and reforms and in that game Sejfulla might «very well» become leader of the «democratic-republican party» or some other party which he might dream up, if the Communist Party did not act according to his line and desires. After the liberation of the country he openly expressed these views until the Party finally attacked him as an opportunist and a defender of the interests of the bourgeoisie.

I had had an argument with Sejfulla prior to this, a little while after he returned to Albania to give the Communist Party of Albania and the National Liberation Movement his «advice». At that time Sejfulla thought that we would welcome him like rain in the desert and we would accept every word of his as pure gold. He was unreserved in telling us about his «activity». He did not know the Marxist-Leninist maturity of our Party and thought that he would readily peddle his opportunist ideas. Thus, in one of our conversations he boasted to me how, when he was in Paris, on his own initiative, he had tried to meet Zog, to talk with him and concoct an alliance with that murderer. Sejfulla told me about this «line» of his quite convinced that it was a stroke of «political genius» and was very surprised when I told him that he had not done well in trying to meet Zog because we would not form an alliance with him.

«In regard to Zog,» I told Sejfulla, «our only duty is to cut off his head, not once but ten times over.»

Sejfulla, with those small eyes which he always kept lowered because he was afraid to look you straight in the eye, and that pose of the «great man from Mos-

cow», which he adopted to compensate for his small stature, said to me:

«Why do you speak like this, Comrade Enver? I, too, am opposed to Zog, but this is a political tactic and you don't understand this.»

«I understand it,» I replied, «but I don't understand the tactic as you do, just as you don't understand it as I do.»

Sejfulla Malëshova brought out his convincing «argument», saying:

«Moscow recommended this policy and this tactic to me, therefore, you ought to agree to it.»

«You say that Moscow recommended it to you,» I interrupted Sejfulla, «but I am convinced that this is not so and you worked it out for yourself. The Bolshevik Party and the Comintern could not advise us to embrace the executioner of our people who personally prepared the 7th of April and brought the Italian occupiers and who, when the people demanded weapons to attack the invaders, took to his heels like a dirty thief. Moreover, even after the occupation Zog is still what he was — a murderer of the people and the enemy of their Homeland, a sworn enemy of our National Liberation War, therefore, it is useless for you to press this matter,» I pointed out to him. «And I order you not to speak to anyone about it because we will expose you before the Party as a saboteur of the National Liberation War.»

Flushed with anger, Sejfulla said to me:

«I shall write to Moscow about your attitude.»

«Write to whoever you like!» I replied. «And don't think you can frighten me with what you say! Let the

Party and the people judge me, let even the Comintern judge me if need be.»

But let us return to the autumn of 1943, packed with so many events, difficulties and dangers which we encountered and withstood successfully.

As I said, our stand towards and struggle against the Ballist and Zogite reaction were not a «separate struggle» but constituent parts of the great and stern war which we were waging every hour and every day against the nazi foreign invaders who immediately, after the capitulation of Italy, poured into Albania with all their savagery.

As we had expected, the new occupiers began to accompany the military occupation of the country with feverish demagogic propaganda. Then the quislings and the Ballists and their propaganda began to make interpretations of the fundamental «theses» of this demagogy, trying in this way to draw a veil over their shameful collaboration with the new occupiers. The plans of «ethnic Albania» were brought out again from the drawers and strong-rooms of the Italian occupiers, the army and the gendarmerie of the «sovereign» Albanian state were concocted, and so on.

The new occupiers did not hasten to set up a government immediately, but established a provisional executive committee headed by Ibrahim Biçaku and, as soon as they gathered some of the «fathers of the nation» in a so-called assembly, they created the Regency, with Mehdi Frashëri, whom they brought by aircraft from Rome, Lef Nosi, Father Anton Harapi and Fuat Dibra. We sent Omer Nishani to Tirana in an effort to draw Mehdi Frashëri into the National Lib-

eration Movement but this traitor had made up his mind to do the dirty work for the Germans in return for the money they paid him.

The Balli Kombëtar was integrated openly into the repressive apparatus which the occupier set up; the finest buildings in the towns were placed at the disposal of the Balli Kombëtar; its regional committees sent recommendations to the quisling organs about the people who should be given jobs, etc. The open German-Ballist collaboration with arms would not be long delayed, either. At this time the quisling-Ballist propaganda activized all its forces.

Of course, under this torrent of propaganda even among our men there were elements who wavered and broke. It could not have been otherwise. War and the revolution are difficult, demand sacrifices and self-negation: in the course of the struggle, there will be some who have joined it fortuitously, who become weary, frightened and capitulate. These individuals desert and from this the revolution loses nothing, on the contrary, becomes stronger.

That is what occurred with Sotir Kondi who was a member of the national liberation council of Tirana. With the capitulation of Italy and the coming of the Germans Sotir Kondi had declared the war over! According to him, the departure of the Italians meant that Albania had now regained its freedom and independence while the Germans were merely «in transit» and not occupiers. Thus, he considered that the war was over!

Of course, such views, which we had attacked and were attacking every day, became extremely dan-



gerous when they were expressed by a person who adhered to the Movement and, moreover, occupied an important place in it.

I summoned Medar Shtylla, a member of the Standing Committee of the National Liberation General Council, and informed him about these views.

«You are to go to Tirana,» I told him, «as the delegate of the General Council and to convoke a meeting of the national liberation council of Tirana about this matter.»

«Very well,» replied Medar as ready as ever.

«At this meeting,» I continued, «you will listen patiently to Sotir Kondi. Then try to convince him that his views are wrong and explain the line of the National Liberation Front, show him with arguments and facts what the Germans are and what our duty to the people and the anti-fascist coalition is. Bear in mind that your arguments must be clear, because apart from Sotir Kondi there might be some other element who understands these matters wrongly.»

«I shall do as you say, Comrade Enver,» replied Medar.

«Besides this,» I added, «take this opportunity to talk with the members of the council of Tirana about the current tasks and explain the meaning of the decisions we took in Labinot once again. After you have listened to the other comrades of the council and Sotir himself, if he does not retract his stand, then he must no longer be a member of the council of Tirana or even of the Front.»

A few days later Medar informed me about the meeting of the national liberation council of Ti-

rana which was held in the home of Aleks Buda, one of the patriotic intellectuals who linked himself with the National Liberation War and is one of the most outstanding men of science in our country today. The efforts and arguments of Medar and the other comrades had not convinced Sotir Kondi who from those moments was declared a renegade from the National Liberation Movement. As Qirjako Harito, one of the finest and most active comrades of the national liberation council of Tirana of whom I retain the finest memories, told us later, the true reason for the desertion of Sotir Kondi was the pressure which had been exerted on him by the quisling Mehdi Frashëri who had threatened him by telling him that the Gestapo had been informed about his activity.

After our intervention and with the intensive activity and leadership of the Party Regional Committee of Tirana, the national liberation council in the capital continued its work normally and, in the conditions of savage nazi terror, affirmed itself as a representative and resolute defender of the people and the great cause of our war.

Thus, a month went by while we, from the zones close to Tirana, followed the development of the situation step by step, worked and struggled to keep on course and not allow anyone for one moment to damage the great work which we had achieved and were consolidating through the war and endless efforts and sacrifices. Meanwhile, events continued to develop rapidly.

The British allies, for their own reasons, postponed the landing in the Balkans. Meanwhile Tirana had

become the main centre in which the cream of the nazi-Ballist forces had assembled and entrenched themselves. Automatically, the projected plan to liberate the capital was removed from the agenda. In the new conditions which had been created an assault on the capital would not only cost us heavy losses and bloodshed, but more importantly, we were convinced that even if we were to liberate the capital city, it was still too early and beyond our possibilities to hold it for long. To have entered there for a day or two and then be obliged to withdraw would have been an adventure and demonstrative gamble with effects much more negative than positive. We would launch our offensive on Tirana when the time came and we felt that that day would not be far off.

Hence, we gave up the plan of the assault on Tirana and were making ready to move deep into the hinterland, towards Shëngjergj, and then towards our main base, the highlands of Elbasan.

On one of those days, the morning of October 9, as far as I remember, when we were still in Arbana, we heard rifle and machine-gun fire. We got up, asked whether the comrades who were on guard outside knew anything and, while the firing continued, we all got dressed, armed ourselves and made ready for an attack. Thereupon we saw a courier sent by Myslim running towards us. He told us that Arbana was being attacked by the Germans who, it seems, had learned from their spies that we were in that village. It must be said that our forces were taken by surprise at a time when the enemy had operated with great speed and had prepared both a frontal attack, from the hills

facing Arbana, and likewise from the two sides of the Erzen River, from the north and the west, from Mullet and the Beshir Bridge. From the Beshir Bridge and Mullet they came through the Erzen Valley with tanks, while the infantry came down from the hills towards the Erzen River.

We went down from the village immediately, crossed the road amongst the shrubs and met Myslim, who reported to us on the situation, and rapidly reinforced the position of our troops. We carried out these actions in the course of the fighting. Myslim moved to the left side of the fighting, facing the Germans, and I together with a few partisans to the right, likewise facing the Germans at the mill which they were trying to take and from which they could attack Arbana and cross over to this side. The fighting raged fiercely.

In order to liquidate this action of the Germans it was necessary not only to hold our positions but also to counter-attack. We decided to launch the counter-attack from the right, that is, towards the north, outflanking the Germans and then frontally, by crossing the Erzen River and attacking them fiercely from the mill. To this end, we sought and found Kajo Karafili whom we ordered to lead a squad around the German flank, to cross the Erzen, to climb a key track and then, when they had arrived at the positions which we decided, we would launch the attack from both flanks. And this is what we did.

As a result of our concentrated attack the Germans were unable to cross the Erzen, but they kept up continual fire with mortars which they had placed on

the left side of the Beshir Bridge, although the shells flew over our heads and fell 100-150 metres away from us. As a result of the successful realization of our plan, the Germans withdrew and by afternoon the battle was over. In this battle the peasants of the zone assisted us arms in hand and took part bravely in frontline fighting.

As soon as the fighting was over, together with several other comrades, I crossed the Erzen and visited the site of the battle. With my own eyes I saw the bodies of ten dead Germans and gave orders that they should be buried immediately and covered with lime because I was afraid of the spread of an epidemic.

At this time I saw some partisans bringing in a civilian prisoner who had come from Shijak towards Arbana through Alltat.

«Who is this?» I asked the comrades.

«A German spy of Czechoslovak nationality.»

«Interrogate him!» I told them.

Our men (one of whom knew a little German) interrogated the spy and, as soon as they threatened that they would shoot him, he told them that the Germans had brought him to observe our positions because they intended to continue the attack on Arbana beyond that village. Our comrades tried this spy before the partisan court and shot him.

In this battle, the German nazis lost about 40 dead, a number of mortars, heavy and light machine-guns, rifles and automatics. Found amongst the dead nazis was a prominent person whose identity we learned later from a ring he was wearing, which the partisans handed to Myslim. The ring of this nazi who left his

bones at Arbana proved that he was the nephew of Hermann Goring. Doctor Nishani begged Myslim to give him this ring for his wife who was an Austrian and wanted to keep it as a souvenir of the Albanians' war against the German nazis. Myslim, of course, gave it to him.

So ended the battle of Arbana, a fierce fight, but crowned with our victory.

After this battle we were informed by the comrades of the Party Regional Committee of Tirana that a traitor assembly was soon to be summoned under the aegis of the occupiers! Comrade Gogo Nushi, on behalf of the comrades of Tirana, proposed that the assembly should be attacked with artillery. We immediately approved the proposal and instructed that this action must be carried out successfully.

On the morning of October 18, 1943 the palace in which the «fathers of the nation» had gathered was shelled from the hills of Tirana, while the leaflet which the Party issued echoed the enthusiasm of the people: «How do the people reply to the assembly of the Gestapo? With CANNON!» It took «the fathers of the nation» two or three days to pull themselves together and they were assembled again in a cinema of Tirana under the protection of the German bayonets. There decisions were taken about the «independence» and a message was drafted to the «national hero» Abaz Kupa!

Throughout this whole period, the National Liberation General Council, as the supreme organ of the new state power which was being created and consolidated by the partisan rifle, was engaged, together

with all the leaders and rank-and-file of the Party, the army and the Front, in carrying out the historic directive of the Conference of Labinot on the establishment of the national liberation councils all over the country. Such indefatigable comrades as Medar Shty-11a, Spiro Moisiu, Omer Nishani, Fetah Ekmekçiu and Haki Stërmilli, who went from village to village, from one partisan detachment to the other, set up and led the national liberation councils at the base and together with all the comrades carried the work forward, remain unforgettable in my memory. Faced with this intense and fruitful activity, or as you might say, faced with this offensive of our National Liberation Movement, the Balli Kombëtar found it preferable to emerge from «illegality». At first it tried to establish itself in the cities and then climbed on to the bandwagon of the nazi army and its leading figures emerged in all their «patriotic»(!) splendour as ministers, prefects, criminals and executioners! The open integration of the Balli Kombëtar into the administration and the repressive apparatus, its filthy propaganda against our Party and the Front, the armed attacks of the Ballist gangs against the National Liberation Army brought us to the conclusion that the Balli Kombëtar had completely consummated the crime of treason to the people and the Homeland. The only language in which to talk to it now was that of the rifle.

While declaring all-out war against the Balli Kombëtar with propaganda and with weapons, the Central Committee instructed the organizations of the Party in the terrain and in the army that even after this, they should act with care and prudence towards

those elements who had not stained their hands with blood and proved able to understand the course on which they had been misled through ignorance, the influences of the past and political naivety. The efforts to pull the misled and the deceived out of the mire of treachery must never cease. In no way should the Lumo Skëndos, Kolë Tromaras, Safet Butkas and other criminals of the Balli Kombëtar be treated on the same basis as the misled long-suffering poor peasants who followed them. In general, this policy was followed and gave results; many of these misled elements realized in time where the mule of the Balli Kombëtar and other traitors was carrying them, broke with them and made amends for their mistake by fighting alongside the people. As I said, the same stand as towards the quisling Balli Kombëtar, was adopted towards its British style quisling sister, Legaliteti. In the direction of this «party», however, there was still something left undone: one of its chiefs, Abaz Kupa, had to render account for his betrayal of the Front, the General Council and the General Staff of our army.

Hence, we demanded that Abaz Kupa should come to render account for his activities, but he dodged this and finally, at the end of October, we received an «official» letter addressed to the Standing Committee of the National Liberation General Council in which Kupa, «the lesser Zog», informed us «seriously» that «the Zogite party, of which I am a member, has been formed with the aim of fighting the occupier, as we have done up till now»(!). Kupa went on to express the readiness of his «party» to reach agree-



ment and «collaborate openly and sincerely» with the National Liberation Front, and asked us to set the date and the place for the meeting.

As soon as I received the letter from the bayraktar of Kruja I told the comrades: «Abaz Kupa wants to get over the river without getting wet, avoiding being condemned for the betrayal which he is committing, and, moreover, wants us to recognize his 'patriotic merits' and talk with him as equal parties!»

«Let him come to render account to the Standing Committee and the Staff,» said Spiro Moisiu. «There we shall see when Abaz has allegedly fought the occupier.»

We thrashed out this problem at length and in the end, summing up the joint opinion, I concluded:

«We should tell Abaz Kupa not to get too big for his boots, and demand talks with the Front. He must come to meet the Standing Committee of the General Council and to render account for what he is doing, otherwise we should tell him we'll attack him without mercy.»

While we were waiting to meet Abaz Kupa, he was receiving assurances from the Gestapo and the Wehrmacht, from Mehdi Frashëri, from Davies and McLean(1), strengthening his links with the chiefs of

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1 Edmond Davies and Bill McLean, envoys of the Intelligence Service at the head of British military missions to Albania, who carried out a broad hostile activity against the National Liberation War of the Albanian people (See Enver Hoxha, *The Anglo-American Threat to Albania (Memoirs)*, «8 Nëntori» Publishing House, Tirana 1982, pp. 29, 80, 225. Eng. ed.).

the Balli Kombëtar and even organizing the «Congress of the Zogite Party» which took «decisions» about the future of Albania. Following our stern insistence Abaz Kupi promised to come to Orenja on November 25. We waited for him on the appointed date but Abaz Kupi did not show up. After he failed to come on the date we had set, and when we sent him an ultimatum in which we warned him that we would attack him as an enemy and a traitor, Abaz Kupi was frightened and agreed to present himself to the Standing Committee of the General Council at Shëngjergj on December 7.

When I arrived in Shëngjergj I found Ymer and Sejfulla there. They had arrived on the evening of December 6, and as they told me, had contacted Abaz and reached agreement that the meeting would be held the following day.

«Very good», I said, «that is what we have come for. Tell Abaz that we are ready and waiting for him to come and explain his actions.»

We sent one of the comrades, who accompanied us, to the house where Abaz Kupi was staying and waited. Before very long our envoy returned:

«What did Abaz say?» I asked him. «When is he going to come?»

«He refuses to come to the meeting of the Standing Committee,» he replied. «Abaz told me, 'I have resigned from the Council, therefore, I agree to talk with the National Liberation Council as a delegate of the Zogite party.'»

I realized what the cunning bayraktar was up to. He wanted both to escape his responsibility for violat-

ing his pledge and also to secure recognition of his «party» by the National Liberation Front.

«Let him not come to the Standing Committee if he doesn't want to,» I said to the comrade, «but like it or not, he is going to render account to us, and we are going to tell him our opinion straight to his face. Likewise, we shall warn him to watch his steps and not play the games of the Germans and Mehdi Fra-shëri, and to give up his flirtation with the Balli Kom-bëtar, because otherwise we will lump them all together. As for his resignation we shall give him our reply by expelling him from the General Council, and will make this decision public so that the people brand him a traitor. While as for the recognition of the Legaliteti by the Front, we should tell him that he will never achieve this and point out to him that any party outside the Front will be attacked as a traitor organization and tool of the occupier.»

We were all in agreement and we decided that I, Dishnica and Fetah Ekmekçiu should meet Abaz Kupi. This meeting was held in a house in Shëngjergj. It was a two-storey house, as far as I remember, and when we arrived there, Abaz had preceded us, while his «body-guard» had surrounded the house and looked at us threateningly.

«Abaz wants to frighten us,» I told the comrades, and we continued on our way taking no notice of the guards. We climbed the stairs together and the three of us entered the room where Abaz was waiting, while our two or three partisan escorts remained outside.

I have described how the conversation developed

in the book, *The Anglo-American Threat to Albania (1)*, and shall not dwell on it. There I have spoken about Bazi's absurd theses that he was allegedly the first to begin the war, that he had liberated Kruja and his megalomaniacal claim that all the parties (read: the National Liberation Front) should amalgamate in «the party of His Majesty», etc., etc. In the end, after we warned him that if he dared to act against our forces he would be wiped out together with his pack of followers, this «great man» was frightened and left, saying, «I don't annoy anyone if they don't annoy me». We returned to the house of Ali Shtëpani where we had stayed in Shëngjergj and there held the meeting of the Standing Committee of the General Council and expelled Abaz Kupi. Thus, we finally broke with Bazi i Canës and the fate of him and his associates was that of all the traitors: they joined up completely with the detachments of the nazi occupiers in order through them to secure support during the war and power after the war (without failing to make deals with the British, too).

Naturally, for the period of the war, this uniting under arms of reaction and the foreign occupiers was to increase our difficulties and the blood our comrades would have to shed, but this same act would make matters somewhat easier for us in the future when we liberated Albania: the differentiation between the people and reaction, between the oppressed and oppressor classes, had reached its culmination. We would settle accounts with the exploiters more easily,

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1 Enver Hoxha, *The Anglo-American Threat to Albania, (Memoirs)* «8 Nëntori» Publishing House, Tirana 1982, pp. 249-258, Eng. ed.

and so it turned out. Indeed, from those moments we began to settle accounts radically: some of the reactionaries were killed in the battles with our forces, others took to their heels on the eve of Liberation together with the Germans, and others again were captured by our forces and were condemned by the people's courts for the crimes they had committed. Abaz Kupa himself adhered to the principle of «taking to his heels» and with the aid of the British managed to get away in order to embrace the «brilliant star» of the nation in exile.

After we finished our work in Shëngjergj we returned to Çermenika where the commencement of the German offensive of the winter 1943-1944 caught us. After so many difficulties and tests which we had successfully overcome, now the people, the Communist Party, our National Liberation Movement, the Front and the councils were faced with another test, one of the gravest, most difficult and most dangerous. But through unrivalled courage, bravery and endurance, we were to pass this great general test, too. As to how we acted and how we emerged from that grave winter, when the fury of the nazis, the Ballists and Zogites was unleashed against us, together with the savagery of the weather and the cunning of the British allies, history has had its say and I personally have written on a number of occasions about those unforgettable days and nights (1).

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1 Enver Hoxha, *The Anglo-American Threat to Albania, (Memoirs)*, «8 Nëntori» Publishing House, Tirana 1982, pp. 142-172, Eng. ed. *Among Simple Folk*, «8 Nëntori» Publishing House, Tirana 1984, pp. 195-313, Alb. ed.

Here I want only to recall once again the care which we took at the beginning of this offensive, amongst many other things, of the security of the «old fellows,» as we called Omer, Kosta Boshnjaku and others, because they were older than the rest of us. When we saw that it was impossible for them to keep up with us on the difficult tracks of the encirclement in the savage winter, I sent two comrades to take mattresses, blankets and a stove to the cave in the Guri i Muzhaqit and we decided that Omer, Sejfulla and Kosta Boshnjaku should stay there until the heat of the German attack had passed. I had been several times at Guri i Muzhaqit, where the cave was like a room. In winter it was covered with snow, the roads to it all blocked and no roads went beyond it, so all measures were taken, supplies of food were left there and two partisans appointed to stay with them. I talked with Omer Nishani and told him of our opinion that, in the conditions of the war and the winter, it would be better for them to stay in this cave.

«Of course, you will not be as comfortable as in the home of our friend, Ali Shtëpani, in Shëngjergj, but there you'll be safe from the enemy attacks until the heat of their offensive is over,» I told him. «It is impossible for you to keep up with us in this deep snow through the forests and oak scrub, especially with the zone full of Germans and the Ballists of Azis Biçaku.»

«Very well, let it be as you decide,» said the Doctor.

I accompanied them a part of the road through

snow and then we embraced and parted. They took the road for the Guri i Muzhaqit and we of the General Staff began our odyssey.

We were to meet again with Omer Nishani and a good part of the leadership of the Party, the Front and the army in the spring of 1944 when the people and their army, under the leadership of the Party, had completely passed the great and stern test. The difficulties and battles had made us tougher, the moment had come when we would finally crush the occupiers and the traitors, the moment had come when in the small, heroic and unforgettable town of Përmet, we were to hold the Anti-fascist National Liberation Congress of the Albanian people, the decisions of which were to open a new page, a new epoch in the age-old history of Albania.

## IV

### THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE NEW STATE

The enemies' hopes of destroying the National Liberation Movement and wiping out its leadership through the winter offensive of 1943-1944 «by the time the new leaves burst their buds», (1) were smashed by the heroic resistance of the people and our Army. Fighting in difficult conditions, in grave situations, the Front, the Army and the national liberation councils had not only safeguarded their existence but had tempered themselves politically and militarily, had increased their ranks and had accumulated valuable experience.

We suffered losses and damage during this grave and difficult test: brave comrades fell in bloody battles against the nazis and the Ballists and some died of hunger and the bitter cold of the winter, well-known councillors and activists of the Front and the national

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1 Said ironically about the hopes of internal reaction.



liberation councils were killed, savage massacres like that of February 4, 1944 in Tirana(1) were perpetrated in the cities, but none of these testified to the weakening or, even less, to the defeat which the foreign occupiers and reaction aimed to inflict on us. On the contrary, the people, the communists and the partisan forces turned their grief for their fallen comrades into a source of strength, resistance, and greater mobilization and replied to the savagery of the enemy by further extending and tightening our ranks. Our National Liberation Army, which now comprised a number of shock brigades, scores of regular partisan battalions and *çeta*, as well as scores of *çeta* and units with volunteer forces all over Albania, faced up to the enemy's general offensive of the winter with unrivalled heroism.

Indeed, precisely when the enemy's general offensive had reached its culmination, when the nazis and the reactionaries of the Balli Kombëtar and Legaliteti everywhere were trumpeting about the elimination of our National Liberation Movement, three other big formations, the 5th, 6th and 7th Shock Brigades, formed in the first months of 1944, as well as many other battalions and *çeta*, were added to the previous fighting formations of our Army. It was conclusively proved that the National Liberation Movement was indomitable and invincible. Above all, during this period our Communist Party, the leading staff of the

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1 In an attempt at terrorizing the population of the capital, in the night of February 4, 1944 the nazis and their Albanian tools barbarously massacred 84 men, young men and women and tortured hundreds of others.

war and revolution, had grown and been further tempered. It had functioned, guided and organized, had fought and led with heroism, maturity and valour.

Thus, the last spring of the war found us stronger. Very soon afterwards, on April 5, the General Staff was to issue the order of the day for the partisan units to go over to the offensive, foiling the plans of the Germans and reaction who had intended to launch another offensive during April.

Truly, the moment had come when we had to go over to a greater and more general «offensive» in all directions and fields.

## **1. On the eve of historic events**

Immediately after we broke out of the winter encirclement, the greatest concern of the moment was to install ourselves in a secure base, to establish communications with the organizations of the Party, with the state power at the base and the detachments of the Army, wherever they were, and to intensify the work. Initially we stayed briefly in Panarit, a big village of the Korça district on the border with Skrapar, linked with the Party and the National Liberation War. Functioning in Panarit at that time was the party course, our first party school, in which the cadres of the Party and of the National Liberation War were trained ideologically and politically, studied

Marxist-Leninist literature, and were acquainted with the principles and norms of the construction, organization and functioning of the Party of the working class of the Leninist type, such as our Party was. We stayed a few days in this village, rested and acquainted ourselves in general outline with what had occurred during our encirclement, with the activity of the comrades, met and talked with those taking part in and the «teachers» of the party course, and so on. In Panarit we had all the conditions for our work, and at first we thought we would stay there. But, as I said, this was a big village which both the Germans and the «fighters» of the Balli Kombëtar were very keen to take. Apart from this, its geographical position made Panarit an objective which could easily be captured by the enemy and, indeed, without warning. In regard to this we were concerned not only about the danger which would threaten the comrades of the leadership of the Party, the Front and the Staff (and this was a matter of great importance), but also about important secret documents which might fall into the hands of the enemy. Hence, we agreed we should not stay in Panarit and thought we should go to Skrapar, to the village of Backa, which was separated from Panarit only by Marta Pass.

Backa, too, was a fine big village, lying in the valley of a stream, with people renowned for their bravery, hospitality and pride. During the National Liberation War, Backa was completely with the Party and I believe I am not mistaken if I say that the Balli Kombëtar found no place in Backa. Apart from other things, the village was the birthplace of Riza

Kodheli, our comrade-in-arms, a brave fighter and loyal son of the Party and the people. Uncle Riza, as we called him, because he was an elderly man, had begun to fight foreign intruders at the beginning of the century and, when the Party raised the people in the war for liberation, he united with the Party and the people and became one of the valiant commanders of the National Liberation Army.

After we reached Backa, however, and were taking a stroll there, a little further away I saw a group of houses standing on a small flat on the side of a hill opposite us.

«What is that village?» I asked the comrades who were with me.

«It is Helmës,» replied one of the residents of Backa.

«Is it far from here?» I asked.

«About half an hour's walk,» was the reply.

I liked the position in which Helmës was placed and I was also attracted by the fact that it was a small isolated village, where our presence would not be noticed. I told the others of these ideas and we sent comrades to look at the concrete situation, the possibilities of finding housing there, etc. The comrades returned satisfied from their «inspection» and told us that the inhabitants had expressed their readiness to keep us and shelter us as long as we liked, «until the liberation of the country», as they had put it.

Thus, on the following day we settled in Helmës, a small village with ten to twelve houses and lots of gardens with apple trees, and here amongst the apple trees we set up the tents where some of the comrades,

the partisan guards, and so on, were housed, while we occupied two two-storey houses, the only ones in this village. Meanwhile, through couriers and by radio, we established communications with the terrain and the Army, and the work began again with intensity, in accord with the demands of the situation which was developing and changing from day to day.

In the first place, the comrades gradually acquainted themselves better and more thoroughly with the situation and the work done by the Party and the organs of the National Liberation Front during the past winter, with the results of the fighting of the units of our National Liberation Army, with the current state of its forces, armaments, cadres, etc., etc. Likewise, the information and reports which came to us from the comrades in the terrain brought us up to date with the political situation within the country, and on the basis of all this information we created a more or less complete vision about the situation of the national liberation councils, too.

Although they had stood firm and carried on intensive activity, still the wave of reaction which struck them had had its consequences: there had been elements who had wavered and been broken, and there were even occasions in various villages when they had not functioned. One of the first measures which we took in this direction was the decision of the Standing Committee of the General Council about holding new elections for the national liberation councils.

This decision was essential, because a relatively long period had passed, a period of many events and difficult situations, in which all those elements who

had been elected to the councils had been put to the test to justify the people's trust. The new elections, however, were not in any way to mean a complete change in composition of the former national liberation councils. The people would decide whether this or that former member of the council had justified their trust. There would be no room for traitors, cowards and opportunists in the organs of the war and the new democratic state power.

Likewise, the national liberation councils in the regions were instructed to proceed with the organization of the national liberation conferences in those regions and cities where these had not been held after the Conference of Labinot. The Standing Committee of the General Council devoted special care to these conferences which were to be schools for all the delegates from the villages, districts and cities of Albania.

Hence, throughout this period, the leading organs of the Party and the National Liberation Front were making a precise examination of the situation and, on the basis of analyses, were defining the concrete measures which had to be taken in the political, organizational and military planes.

Above all, it was essential that along with stepping up the attack on the nazi hordes and their collaborators, we should do everything to arrive at the liberation of the country as well prepared politically as possible. This meant that we had to concretize the great victories achieved and sanction them in laws and forms approved by the people. The moment had come when the slogan of our National Liberation War, «For a free, democratic, people's Albania», had to be

concretized. Such decisions which, of course, the leadership of the CPA and the Anti-fascist General Council would discuss and define, could be finally taken and sanctioned only by a broad meeting, a great national assembly of representatives of the Albanian people, which would express the aspirations and desires of the people. Thus, the need arose for the preparation of the 1st Anti-fascist Congress of Përmet.

This would be a constitutional congress which would legalize the power of the national liberation councils as the only state power in Albania, and on this political basis the foundations of the new democratic state would be laid and the legislative and executive organs would be elected on the basis of the will of the people. Thus, the way would be blocked to the manoeuvres of reaction, inside and outside of Albania, as well as to the efforts of the Anglo-American imperialists to impose a regime according to their desires on the people, and «a government» which they might form eventually inside the country or abroad.

After thoroughly discussing in the Political Bureau the idea about holding the 1st Anti-fascist Congress, we decided to present it to the Standing Committee of the National Liberation General Council at a meeting organized on April 15, 1944 at Helmës, in a room in the home of Mehmet Myslymi, which served during those months as the premises of the leading organs of the Party and the war and in which Ymer Dishnica, Doctor Nishani and others were quartered. Along with other comrades I was quartered in the home of Novruz Bilimani. I retain fine memories of the people of those two houses who were always ready

to help us in every way, and especially of the kindly, sweet-spoken Nurihan who looked after us and cooked for us. Almost all the members of the Standing Committee had come to this meeting. The only ones missing were Myslim Peza and Mustafa Xhani, who could not leave the fighting front, Nako Spiru and Ollga Plumbi, who remained in Tirana because it was difficult to move, and Fetah Ekmekçiu, about whose fate we had no reliable information. On behalf of the leadership of the CPA I took the floor to present the proposal about summoning the Anti-fascist National Liberation Congress.

In essence, I said to the comrades: «Today our National Liberation Movement is recognized in Albania and throughout the world as the only political and military power which represents the supreme interests of the Albanian nation. We have won this recognition through our correct policy, through the heroic struggle of the Party and our people. Now, in the circumstances of the new, higher stage which our National Liberation War has entered, the leadership of the CPA has arrived at the conclusion that it is essential to have higher organizational forms in our movement and, above all, to have a legislative assembly and a provisional government. In order to secure these it is necessary to organize a congress of representatives of the Albanian people who will freely decide on the future of the Homeland, transmitting the desire of the people who have elected them. Within the country the congress will have a major political effect and the people will applaud its decisions, because they have been fighting for these things for four years. Like-



wise,» I stressed, «its echo will be great outside the country, too, and will have an influence on our relations with the allies. The Congress will provide the country with its lawful government and with this, it will put an end both to the manoeuvres of internal reaction and to the underhand work of the allies.»

The comrades received my speech with enthusiasm, and in their contributions to the discussion unanimously approved the proposal for summoning the Congress, as well as the procedure for the election of the delegates.

Immediately after this we began the concrete preparations for the Congress, which, as I shall relate below, it was decided should be held in the town of Përmet. On the following day, together with the Resolution, the national liberation councils of every region were sent a letter of instructions from the Standing Committee of the National Liberation General Council in which it was pointed out that the delegates should be selected from the ranks of militants and fighters, true representatives of the people, while not allowing enemies of the people to infiltrate it by stealth, etc.

That same day we sent a special circular to the regional committees of the CPA and the political sections of the brigades of the Albanian National Liberation Army in connection with this major event, stressing the importance of this Congress and its decisions, which would have profound repercussions both inside and outside of Albania. Therefore, in the name of the Central Committee, the comrades of the Party were instructed to exert all their strength to ensure the complete success of the Anti-fascist Congress.

During these days all the comrades were working from morning till night. We had to deal with the current problems of the Party and the state power, to follow the development of the military situation, to reply to the letters and reports which the couriers brought us every day from the regional committees, the councils, brigades, battalions, and so on. Besides all these permanent jobs, we were faced with a whole series of matters which had to be settled and work which had to be done for the preparation of the Anti-fascist Congress. All this demanded time and mental and physical tension, but at that time we were young and could sit working for whole days and even forget to eat. But the main thing was that we were working with a light heart and joy in our spirits because we saw that our work and struggle had not been in vain and were convinced that we were working for a happy future for the Homeland and the people.

The truth is that the other comrades like Omer, Medar and Baca tried to ease the burden on me and had undertaken to deal with the organizational or «technical» questions which were also giving rise to plenty of problems.

Meanwhile, we decided in principle whom we could invite to the congress as guests and prepared the invitations. Dr. Nishani, as I said, had rolled up his sleeves and was extremely serious and concerned about his work. He personally saw to the preparation of invitations and the «tickets», as we called the delegates' mandates at that time, which he signed in the name of the Standing Committee of the National Lib-

eration General Council, verified the lists, the full names and all other details to which he devoted the necessary care. Doctor Medar Shtylla was equally correct and scrupulous. Both of them had a marvellous education in work: whatever they did they did well.

One of the first invitations which we sent out in the name of the Standing Committee of the National Liberation General Council was that which was sent to the Standing Committee of the National Liberation General Council of Kosova and the Dukagjin Plateau, our brothers with whom we were linked not only by the common ideals of the war, but also by language, blood and nationality. In the invitation signed by Omer Nishani we wrote to our Kosova brothers about the decision of great historic importance which we had taken for the calling of an Anti-fascist National Congress, which would mark a new stage in our war, and expressed the desire that a delegation of the Council and of the main Staff of Kosova and the Dukagjin Plateau should come to this congress. «The coming of that delegation,» we wrote, «will be the most vivid indication to the Congress of how our traditions of the war for freedom bring us together with our brothers.»<sup>(1)</sup>

We waited for the representatives of the National Liberation Movement of Kosova and the Dukagjin Plateau until the day the Congress was due to start, and still hoped that they might come during the days

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<sup>1</sup> A copy of this document is preserved in the Central Party Archives.

when the Congress was in progress, but in vain. We do not know what happened, but no delegation or reply reached us. In what free time we had, when we gathered for a few moments in the room where I stayed, or when we were eating together in a common dinning-room, we talked about many problems, including the preparations for the Congress, the holding of elections of delegates in the regions and zones, the measures which had been taken for their coming, and so on. We instructed the printery we had at Lavdar to prepare slogans and flags, to secure portraits of leaders of our Renaissance, war heroes and others, and besides all this, we did not overlook to ensure the presence of a photographer.

In brief, all measures were taken to ensure that everything would go like clock-work. Meanwhile, we made the necessary preparations and in the middle of May 1944 summoned the Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPA, which, among the main problems, discussed and decided on the matters which would be raised at the Congress of Përmet, the decisions which the Party would propose should be taken there, and so on, considering this event a key moment in the course of our work for the deepening of victories and the prospect of the development of the revolution which the Party was leading.

Speaking about this fundamental problem, in the report (1) which I presented to the Plenum, amongst other things I stressed:

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1 Enver Hoxha, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, «8 Nëntori» Publishing House, Tirana 1974, p. 290, Eng. ed.

«The development of the National Liberation War and the proportions which it has assumed, the political situation abroad and the internal circumstances today **demand that we take important decisions and summon a congress to elect the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council which will have the attributes of a legislative and executive organ**, from which the Anti-fascist Committee with the attributes of a provisional government will emerge.»

While giving the detailed reasons why this congress had to be summoned and the importance which it would have, I once again drew the attention of the comrades of the Plenum of the Central Committee that we must all prepare ourselves to face up to the coming events.

«In the situations which will develop, we shall have to take decisive stands,» I pointed out. «Therefore, we must have a strong Party, must have sound cadres with political and military training, must strengthen and temper the unity of the working class and the peasantry around the Communist Party.»

In particular, I stressed two possible developments for which we had to be prepared: an allied landing in the Balkans and a rapid withdrawal of the nazi forces from Albania.

«It is our duty to take great care and not allow our allies to meddle in our internal affairs in any way,» I told the comrades. «The decisions of the Congress of Përmet, which will give the people the legislative and executive organs of power, and lay the foundations of the new democratic people's Albanian

state, will play an important role in this direction. On the other hand,» I continued, «it is necessary to eliminate the outlook which is apparent among many comrades and partisans that, with the expulsion of the Germans, we have finished all our work and have only to lay down our arms and go home. We must make clear to all the comrades and partisans that we will never lay down our arms, not only when there is no enemy force left in our country and the Albanian people have won complete freedom, but also after this. The new state which we are creating must be defended and we who are creating it will defend it.

«The greatest guarantee of our victory is the unity of the Party. We have duties to the Party, we have duties to the people, therefore, we must set to work and accomplish those duties to the letter, with determination, not sparing even our lives.»

All the proceedings of the Plenum, the report which I delivered there on behalf of the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Party, as well as the mature and enthusiastic contributions of the comrades, showed that now we had entered the decisive phase of the war, the period when the Party and the people were to harvest the fruits of many years of fighting. The liberation of the Homeland was close at hand, new horizons were being opened to the revolution.

Meanwhile, not only in Përmet, but all over the country preparations for the Congress were being made, the elections of delegates being held and measures taken to send them to destination. According to the decision of the Standing Committee of the General

Council the liberated zones and those that were still occupied, the battalions and brigades of the army, the Anti-fascist Youth Union and the Anti-fascist Women's Union would be represented at the Congress. In the liberated regions the delegates to the Congress would be elected democratically by the people by open vote, while in the occupied zones the delegates would be appointed by the national liberation council of the respective region. In the partisan battalions and brigades, the delegates would be elected by open vote in general meetings of the fighters.

In the liberated zones the elections of the delegates to the Congress turned into real celebrations. Men, women and young people who had the right to elect a set number of representatives according to the zones in which they resided, took part in them. Thus, the whole population of the free zones expressed its opinion about its finest sons who would carry its will, desires, dreams and belief in a happy future to the great convention. The meetings everywhere were lively, mature in judgement and in the end decided on honest patriotic elements who had fought throughout their lives for Albania, and new cadres who had matured in their thinking from their experience in the National Liberation War. But above all, a new major victory was that among the delegates there were also women who would carry their word and ardent love for the Homeland, the people and the Party to the Congress.

The members of the regional anti-fascist councils in the non-liberated cities and zones met to decide who would be the delegates to represent them at the

Congress in an entirely different atmosphere, more quietly from external appearances, but with the same enthusiasm in their hearts. One by one and vigilant against observation by the enemies, they went to the houses which were bases of the war, and there, after fiery debates, in which love and respect for the comrades of the war predominated over everything, they appointed the delegates.

Thus, the election of delegates was carried out in time in accordance with the instructions which we issued. Now, however, a great difficulty emerged for the delegates, especially for those of the zones of the North, Tirana, Korça and elsewhere, where the enemy, who may have learned something about the holding of the great assembly in Southern Albania, had increased the number of guards and spies at the checkpoints and had banned the movement of people on the roads by automobile if they were not accompanied by Germans. But no obstacle was going to stop the delegates on the road to the Congress. Under the noses of the Germans and their spies, by crossing the rivers and taking new tracks, the bulk of them were to arrive at the Congress.

Great secrecy was maintained about the town in which the Congress was to be held, so that the enemy would not be able to organize a mass attack against Përmet. Only a limited number of comrades knew the place in which this historic event was to be held. For the dispatch of delegates to Përmet we had appointed people who would guide and accompany the delegates through the mountains, from detachment to detachment. The delegates from the southern districts



were to go directly to Përmet, while for those from the North we had charged the comrades in Tirana with the task of assembling them in Peza and accompanying them from there to the South.

We had discussed the question of ensuring peaceful conditions during the proceedings of the Congress and, in the name of the General Staff, I had ordered a number of brigades and detachments of the National Liberation Army to take up strategic positions and block the roads which led to Përmet with a clear-cut order: the enemy must not pass in the direction of the town. Thus, when the time was approaching for the proceedings of the Congress to commence, the partisans of the 5th, 12th, 7th and 8th Shock Brigades occupied their firing positions with their arms ready round the clock from Tri Urat to Berat, Skrapar, Tepelena, Zagoria and Lunxhëria, Kolonja and Vithkuq. Besides them, other brigades of our army, dispersed over wider areas, were to operate to protect historic Përmet. The comrades of the General Staff were convinced that our heroic partisans would perform the lofty duty with which they had been charged with devotion and, in fact, that is what occurred. The historic Congress of Përmet took place in complete calm.

When everything was ready we set out for Përmet. The weather was fine, the spring was apparent everywhere. Going down into the Vjosa Valley on the slopes of the mountains and hills you could see houses and cottages built on the cliffs. The people struggled even on the rocks to gain a bit of land. The land and the climate were suitable for the trees and

the crops, but the anti-popular regimes of the past had done nothing to benefit this place or this people, or those anywhere else in Albania. We talked with the comrades about what great wealth our country had and about our marvellous, generous, industrious and brave people who deserved to be happy.

After Liberation, the Party rebuilt Përmet from its foundations and made it one of the most beautiful towns of the Homeland, but in May 1944 we found it devastated and burnt. Three times on end the enemy had reduced this small town beside the Vjosa River to rubble and ashes, but when we entered it we were deeply moved by the enthusiastic welcome, the shouts and cheers of the people, happy to have their own sons, the fighters, delegates, partisans, young men and women, amongst them, who gave the town a liveliness which it had never seen before. The great event which was taking place, history itself, made Përmet, during those days, the capital of the new Albania which was being born in the war.

It was not by chance that the 1st Anti-fascist Congress of the Albanian people was to be held in Përmet and not in some other place. We had decided this when we were in Helmës. We could have met in other places, but we chose Përmet for two main reasons: first, in order to show the people that the Party and the National Liberation Army were on the verge of victory, that our war had now passed into the phase of the liberation of cities, that victory was imminent and we were able to hold such a great Congress of historic importance not only in the mountains but also in the cities. Apart from this, I proposed

Përmet because it included Dangëllia, Frashër, where the most outstanding and glorious men of our National Renaissance were born. The Party honoured the great patriots who were born on the soil of Përmet, Naim, Sami and Abdyl, the great poet, the great philosopher and the great politician. We were well acquainted with Naim's poems, with Sami's book, *Albania, What It Has Been, What It is, and What It Will Become*, and the efforts of Abdyl for the independence and territorial integrity of Albania. By honouring these outstanding men of the Renaissance, fighters with the pen and the rifle, we showed the people once again that the partisans, the communists, were their worthy sons, and not the traitors, such as Lumo Skëndo and Mehdi Frashëri, even though they were from the Frashëri family. We showed the people that the Party appreciated and honoured the patriotic traditions and the patriots, and their heirs were the people and the communists and not the traitors sold out to foreigners.

From the time the Party began the war at the head of the people, it based itself on these outstanding traditions of fighting and heroism. For us, the National Liberation War was not a separate link in the chain of the battles which our people had waged to defend the Homeland, to ensure their existence as a nation, with their own language, culture and all their national features. It was a continuation of those battles, but at another time and with a loftier content. The heroes of our former wars were heroes whom we, the communists, honoured as did the whole people, and we propagated their names and deeds. There was the odd comrade who did not agree with this correct

attitude of the Party, but we attacked these views as wrong and harmful.

«Why do we need Skanderbeg or Naim Frashëri! They were feudal!» said «the proletarian conscience» of the Party, Koçi Xoxe who, as was to be proved later, through his savage, sectarian, Trotskyite policy, was for the destruction of the Front.

«They were great fighters for Albania,» I told him. «Their names and deeds will remain in the popular memory through the centuries. We communists are the continuers of their work in new times.»

Just as our National Renaissance evoked the great name of Gjergj Kastrioti — Skanderbeg and made him a symbol of the resistance and the war for freedom, during the National Liberation War our Party evoked not only our National Hero but also other famous patriots and men such as the Frashëri brothers, Ismail Qemali, Luigj Gurakuqi, Bajram Curri, Avni Rustemi and others, and honoured their heroism and work.

But let us return to Përmet in those unforgettable days, let us recall the historic Congress which opened a new epoch in the history of Albania, the epoch of socialism.

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## **2. The historic Congress of Përmet**

I always remember with nostalgia the Përmet of May 1944. with its festive appearance, the decorated Congress hall, the clean dining-room with long tables,

the comrades whose rifle barrels clicked together when they embraced one another. All these things challenged the ruins caused by the war and filled our hearts with great joy. In my mind's eye I can see the comrades, young as they were at that time, vigorous, laughing, enthusiastic, remember Hysni Kapo, a steel pillar of the Party and the National Liberation War, Babë Myslim, the wise, loyal and valiant fighter, Gogo Nushi, sparing with his words but a tireless worker. I remember my other cofighters and collaborators of the wartime years, Spiro Moisiu, Medar Shtylla, Doctor Nishani, Esat Dishnica, Hasan Pulo and many, many others who made their contribution to the brilliant course on which the Party led us.

When I remember Përmet of those heroic days I seem to become much younger than I am today when I am writing these lines. It is natural that one's memory is not so fresh as to bring to mind every individual detail, but even now that marvellous «fluid» of those heroic but difficult times, that great enthusiasm of the unforgettable days of the Congress, that ardour which seethed in our hearts, seethes in and pervades my whole body with that same force and I feel that I am still young.

We passed the evening and night of May 23 in a joyful atmosphere. There were the songs and dances, the ardent talks, the militant sketches which were to continue during all the days of the Congress and which the partisans presented on makeshift stages set up on the ruins. Indeed, the week of revolutionary art was held in Përmet during those days. Here the theatrical

group was formed from the best partisan actors, and the history of our theatre of socialist realism began.

Dinner for the delegates was put on in a former enemy barracks, thoroughly cleaned and tidied up, with long tables and plates and glasses for everyone. On the odd occasion there was also a glass of raki and a simple snack. There were two dishes at each lunch and sometimes we even had halvah!

And so, on the following day, May 24, 1944, amidst the enthusiasm of the people and the partisans, the delegates and the invited guests entered the historic hall in which the proceedings of the Congress were to be held. We, the comrades of the Standing Committee of the Anti-fascist National Liberation General Council and the General Staff, entered the hall at 10 o'clock. The delegates and guests, old people and youth, partisans and commanders, women, clergy, patriots, welcomed us with a long ovation and we all stood and cheered together.

The hall had been freshly whitewashed. A big Albanian flag covered the wall facing us, while alongside it the portraits of Skanderbeg and Ismail Qemali were placed. Around the hall one metre from the floor there was a chain interrupted by the slogan: Death to Fascism — Freedom to the People.

The Congress opened with one minute's silence for those who had fallen in war and after this solemn commemoration of those who had given their blood, their youth and their lives for the freedom of the Homeland, Omer Nishani delivered the introductory address. Making a brief summary of the efforts of our freedom-loving people, he evoked the movements of

the Albanian people to defend the land of their forefathers, pointed out the injustices which had been imposed on our country by the imperialist treaties, spoke about the struggle of our people to defend the Albanian territories in the North and the South and mentioned the Albanian League of Prizren. In his speech Doctor Omer Nishani stressed the fact that at the key moments of their history, our people had always sent their finest sons to national conventions in order to discuss and decide the fate of the Homeland. This is what had occurred at the Albanian League of Prizren, and at the Congress of Lushnja in 1920, which took decisions for the protection and strengthening of the independence of Albania.

«This is what has occurred and is occurring in the recent years, too,» pointed out Doctor Nishani, «when our Homeland has been attacked by hordes of enemies and threatened by the greatest dangers. The representatives of the people gathered at Peza to put the war on sound foundations, gathered later at Labinot in order to centralize the authority and power which they had won through fighting, and today we have gathered here in Përmet in order to discuss and to take some of the most important and historic decisions. To speak about how we have arrived to this great day, what struggle, problems and difficulties have been overcome and the decisions which this assembly, unprecedented in our history, must take,» concluded Doctor Nishani, «I give the floor to Comrade Enver Hoxha. On behalf of the National Liberation General Council he will deliver the report 'On the Development of the National Liberation War of the

Albanian People in Connection with International Events'.»

I had taken part, spoken in and chaired important meetings and conferences of the Party, the Front and the state power for four years on end; on all these occasions, together with the confidence and determination which the strength of the Party and the war gave me, I had also felt profound emotions, but the emotions which I felt on this occasion, while I was making ready to deliver the report, were of a special quality and I shall never forget them.

However, the prolonged applause and ovations of the delegates, their uninterrupted enthusiastic shouts gave me time to pull myself together and my voice resounded with that assurance and strength which this great event required.

The report which I delivered at the Congress has been published,<sup>(1)</sup> therefore, here I shall mention only some fragment or passage which had particular importance because of the moments at which it was delivered.

Thus, while speaking in detail about the development of events and our war since April 7, 1939, about the stages through which this war had proceeded, about the difficulties which had been overcome, etc., I devoted special importance to bringing out and stressing the historic role of our Communist Party as the fundamental factor for the unity of the people and the victory of the National Liberation War.

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1 Enver Hoxha, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, «8 Nëntori» Publishing House, Tirana 1974. p. 325, Eng. ed.



«The Communist Party of Albania placed the lives of its members and everything it had in the service of the Homeland and the people,» I declared at the Congress. «It became the organizer and true leader in the armed insurrection against the occupier and the most rabid reaction, it has always stood in the forefront of the war and has striven to unite the masses of the people and all honest nationalists and patriots in a common front against the occupiers.»

This declaration which was received with enthusiastic cheering reflected an indisputable historical fact. Even before this, during the war, we had spoken about the role of the Communist Party, about its leadership in the Front and the National Liberation Army, and more importantly, applied this in practice. Now, however, it was of great importance to affirm the Party as the decisive factor of the victory at such a great event as the Congress of Përmet. With this, in principle and practice, we reaffirmed and safeguarded the leading role of the Party for the future.

In my report I went on to speak about the efforts of reaction to undermine and sabotage the National Liberation War, to alienate the people from the Party and the Front. In this part of the report, too, I gave an historical account of the forms which this hostile activity had followed, of the demagogic tactics of reactionary and collaborationist groupings from the open quislings like Kruja, Vërlaci, Bushati and Libohova, to the Balli Kombëtar, Abaz Kupa and Legaliteti, and the new quislings like Mehdi Frashëri, Ibrahim Biçaku and others. The report proved their treachery with arguments and facts. As a «fresh» fact I men-

tioned the efforts of reaction to enter into alliance with Balkan reaction, not only to strangle our war, but also to sell the Homeland to the chauvinists of neighbouring countries.

During those days we had captured authentic documents which proved such a thing and we displayed these in a corner of the hall where the Congress was held. Amongst them was a letter signed by the «chairman of the Ballist Central Committee», Mit-hat Frashëri, sent to the renegade Dhimitër Fallo in which the latter was instructed to reach agreement with the other members of a «commission» which was to hold talks with representatives of Greek reaction. This so-called commission was comprised of Fallo, representing the Balli Kombëtar, Xhavit Leskoviku, representing the quisling government, Koço Kota representing «the Zogite party» and they had even dug up «representatives of Kosova»! Amongst the captured documents were passports freshly issued by the quisling government, a letter of recommendation signed by the «foreign minister», Bahri Omari, to the «friendly government», as well as a letter setting out 8 or 9 «points» on which the «agreement» with the Greek reactionaries was to be achieved. According to these «points», the Balli Kombëtar, amongst other things, agreed that the Albanian armed forces should be amalgamated with the reactionary Greek forces in a joint army, commanded by the Greeks, which would be employed to suppress the national liberation movements in Albania and in Greece. What is more, these traitors had expressed their readiness to sign an accord with the Greek government in Cairo to give

Greece the so-called Northern Epirus, to place our country under the rule of the Greek monarchy, with «autonomous» rights, that is, to sell the Homeland to the Greek chauvinists, (1)

Like all the others, however, this «card», too, was burnt in the hands of reaction. And it was burnt not only because we discovered their filthy deal over the future of the Homeland in time, but because now such games no longer had any value. They were unable to turn a people who had risen to their feet and had their own Communist Party as their leadership, from their course. We immediately gave Dhimitër Fallo the sentence he deserved as a traitor and criminal and executed him in the middle of Korça, to the great dismay of the quislings and reaction who covered the walls of Korça with posters about his «murder» and ordered that his funeral should be conducted with «majestic solemnity» and «at the expense of the municipal council». Subsequently, after Liberation, Xhavit Leskoviku and the former Zogite prime minister, Koço Kota, whom our people found where he was hiding, also rendered account and the two of them together, along with other criminals, were placed in the dock in the people's court.

After my exposé of our war against the occupiers and traitors I went on to deal with the question of the measures and decisions necessary for the liberation and future of the country in the light of international events.

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1 These documents are preserved in the Central Party Archives.

«The situation today is such that our people, who have suffered, made sacrifices and shed their blood, should have a state system which will ensure them their freedom and genuine democracy,» I stressed amongst other things in the report, and in this context, I presented the tasks which the historic Congress of Përmet had to accomplish.

«It is the duty of the delegates to this Congress, chosen by the sovereign will of the people and who represent all the strata of our society,» I said on this issue, «to take the proper measures for waging the war through to victory and to ensure the future of the Homeland. It devolves upon our Congress to establish political, legislative and executive organs which will be able to overcome any obstacle which may emerge for them, will represent the Albanian people properly, both inside and outside Albania, and be able to prevent any attempt, from whatever direction it is made, intended to hinder the realization of the desires for which our people are fighting and shedding so much blood in this great liberation war.»

The delegates greeted the conclusion of the report which I delivered at the Congress of Përmet with prolonged applause and cheering, thus expressing their revolutionary optimism, joy, and determination to forge ahead on the road which the Party showed us.

For me, the moving enthusiasm and the ardour with which the delegates spoke in the discussion will remain unforgettable. The representatives of the people spoke about the victories of our Army, about the people's state power which was functioning vigorously, brought out new facts about the activity of the reac-

tionaries and approved the decisions which were proposed. To say that the hall was electrified is putting it mildly; the festive atmosphere and the enthusiasm of those present found the opportunity to burst out when Doctor Nishani, at the opening of or during sessions, reported the most recent news about the successes of the partisan detachments on the fighting front, or read the letters of greeting which came to the Congress. Among them were the greetings of our comrades Baba Faja and Haki Stërmilli, who were unable to attend this historic convention.

The discussion of the report continued for nearly two days. Hysni Kapo, whom the Party had charged with the task of political commissar of the 5th Shock Brigade, took the floor and in his contribution spoke about the birth and extension of the armed struggle of the Albanian people, stressing the fact that it was the Communist Party of Albania which had united the people and aroused them to fight.

Amongst other things, Hysni said: «We started our war, a war of a new type which trains the people and educates them politically, with small units and went on to form *çeta*, battalions and brigades. The formation of the General Staff strengthened our organization, and, from the time it was created, it has led our National Liberation Army very well,» he said. «Today we have 12 brigades and we are going to have divisions and army corps. The victories we have achieved have increased the confidence of the people in victory and the formation of a people's democratic government.»

In his contribution Spiro Moisiu also spoke about

the organization of the National Liberation Army, stressing that its equipment and armaments were secured solely by capturing them from the enemy, because the «aid» of the allies had amounted to almost nothing. Spiro Moisiu also mentioned to the delegates a fact which testified to the growth of the striking force of our war and also to the resolute, principled stand of the Party against any treacherous compromise.

«The German command,» he said, «sent an officer to us and proposed that our General Staff should send representatives to Tirana to talk and reach agreement with the Hitlerites. But we declared to the Germans that we are going to fight until nazism is wiped out. The National Liberation Army has come out to fight for the people and freedom and will continue the war through to victory, without any compromise with the occupiers or their tools. We began the war with the trust in the people and that is how we shall finish it.»

Doctor Medar Shtylla also made a fiery speech about the progressive traditions and ceaseless efforts of our people for freedom and popular justice. He stressed the right of the people to decide their own fate, a right which they had won through the barrel of the gun.

In the course of the war, our Communist Party developed these marvellous traditions and gave them a new content. The militant unity of the people, educated and tempered by the Party, through the example of the communists, guaranteed their freedom. Our strength lay in these many-sided links of the people with the Party.

Myslim Peza rose and said: «We fought the occupiers and traitors as hard as we could. They have killed us and burnt our homes, but no one has said, 'the Party is wrong,' because they know that the road of the war is the right road of the people, the road of the Party is my road, too. At first we were not organized. The Party united and organized us. The people of Peza have opened their doors night and day to the young men and girls. They all call me 'Babë'. Why do they call me this? Have I loved the people or not, this you can say.»

There was a burst of applause:

«You have loved them! Long live Babë!»

It was a source of special joy and pride to see all these men, a few gray-headed and others of middle age amongst the majority who were young men and women, but who united as one, had all risen to fight for the fate of the Homeland. The Congress was the most vivid expression of this powerful unity which the Party had created.

«This Congress represents the whole Albanian people,» said Haxhi Lleshi in his contribution, therefore, all will recognize its decisions, will recognize the new government, because it is their government.» He went on to say, «The British mission has assisted reaction. We are going to describe them as reactionaries, too, because we are allies with the peoples, but not with those who assist reaction. In Dibra, Mat and Luma there are partisan *çeta* and battalions that are fighting the occupiers and reactionaries and the people support these *çeta* because they know they are fighting for their freedom. Meanwhile, Radio London most-

ly mentions the names of reactionaries as if it is they who are fighting. We say to Radio London, which has spoken about the Balli Kombëtar as though it has fought, that it should be better informed. Likewise, the British must be well aware that Legaliteti which they support represents nothing. The people of the North, too, in Dibra, Mat and elsewhere, have the greatest hatred for Legaliteti and the regime of Zog which built only jails, but no schools or hospitals. The people have seen with their own eyes that those who call themselves Zogites plundered Burrel, but as for fighting, they have never fought against the occupier.»

The most «fiery» contribution against Bazi i Canës and Legaliteti was ... that of Mustafa Gjinishi! This did not surprise me. We already had proof that he was an agent of the British; as I have written in the book *The Anglo-American Threat to Albania*, when we left Helmës for Përmet, Mustafa Gjinishi was the last to leave the house of Uncle Mehmet, thinking that we were with the caravan which had gone ahead. We had just turned a corner from which Helmës could no longer be seen when we saw a British soldier hurrying somewhere. The unexpected appearance and haste of this British soldier made an impression on us, so we watched carefully and managed to see the British soldier quickly hand a letter to Mustafa Gjinishi. When we demanded the letter from Mustafa Gjinishi, he refused to hand it over. We gave him a severe dressing down, threatening him with everything, but he simply repeated: «Do what you like, but I'll not give you the letter.»



«We shall talk in Përmet,» we told this agent of the British who had received orders from his employer to sabotage the Congress. But it was too late. The Gjinishi card had been burnt once and for all.

Now, caught like a rat in a trap and on the verge of total exposure, he was trying with his «fiery speech» to camouflage the mission with which he had been charged by his employers and to spare himself for the future. He stood up and said that Bazi fled to Yugoslavia with two bags of gold and returned with twelve (he knew these things well because he was up to the same game), that Legaliteti was the offspring of Mehdi Frashëri and the Gestapo, because they themselves did not have the brains to organize, and, indeed, said that Bazi kept British officers with him in order to welcome the allies with flowers.

In the pathetic tone, the «angry» cries of Gjinishi against Bazi and Legaliteti, and his «oaths of loyalty» to the Communist Party and its great work(!), I clearly saw the desperate attempts of the secret agent to throw dust in our eyes. But it was too late, now no tactic was of any value to him. But as early as those difficult years we learned a great deal from the way in which he acted, and all this was a valuable lesson for the future.

Time was to prove that other Gjinishis, too, with their «appeals» and «loyalty» to the «cause», with their «dedication» exaggerated to the point of flagrant sectarianism, were simply trying to hide their claws in order to win the confidence of the Party and the people, to capture key positions in the Party and the state and from there, with stealth and cunning, to more

easily play the dirty game of the foreign masters who had bought them. However, nothing was to escape the vigilant eye of the Party. Sooner or later, they were to stick their necks out and the Party and the people would cut off their heads.

However, these were isolated individuals, whom the situation, the war and vigilance of the Party had brought out or would bring out in their true colours. Through their sound and lively contributions, the delegates showed the deplorable position of such elements as Mustafa Gjinishi.

Nevertheless, although we knew very well from what position Gjinishi «had made a mistake» at Mukje and in whose favour he worked and «fought», we allowed him not only to take part and speak in the Congress of Përmet, but also to retain the functions which he had in the organs of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Front and the Council. We acted in this way, as you might say, for political advantage, in particular to avoid giving the British allies cause and opportunity to take a more hostile stand towards our National Liberation Movement, especially now that we were forming the Anti-fascist Committee with the attributes of a people's democratic government which, apart from other things, would seek the recognition and support by the allies.

The question of Ymer Dishnica and the reasons why he, too, took part as a delegate in the Congress of Përmet and was re-elected to the leading organs of the Front and the state was rather different.

As I pointed out above, we removed him from the leadership of the Party in September 1943 for his

grave mistake in the capitulation of Mukje, while the 1st Plenum of the Central Committee of the Party, on May 15, 1944, officially decided to expel him from the top functions he had in the Party. Meanwhile, however, he retained the functions he held in the leading organs of the Front and the state, took part in the Congress of Përmet, and was even elected to and worked for a while in the Anti-fascist National Liberation Committee as director of the department of health. We acted in this way, proceeding from the fact that Ymer Dishnica fell into his grave mistake at Mukje as a result of his incorrect political views and ideo-political immaturity and not because he was impelled by secret aims and motives, as was the case with Mustafa Gjinishi. Thus, while his petty-bourgeois softness and opportunism led Ymer Dishnica into the act of capitulation at Mukje, it was the role of a secret agent, with which he had been charged by the Intelligence Service, which led Mustafa Gjinishi to that act.

At one of the sessions of the Congress, that brave fighter from Skrapar, Zylyftar Veleshnja, spoke. The Congress had appointed Zylyftar, who had been seriously wounded in the war a short time earlier, to the presidium, and from there he rose to speak leaning on a walking-stick.

«Comrades,» he said, «I greet you with 'Death to Fascism!' I am a villager from Skrapar, a former miller. In my earlier life I toiled to exhaustion, I fought as best I could, and considered myself a revolutionary, but did not know what to seize on and

what course to take. Fortunately for me and for the people, the Communist Party of Albania emerged and knew how to lead us in the war against the occupiers and traitors. Now I feel that I have been reborn and have wings.»

I had heard a great deal about Zylyftar Veleshnja, about his patriotic activity and the struggle which he had waged both in the past and now in the National Liberation War. A determined opponent of Zog and his savage oriental regime, a comrade-in-arms of Riza Cerova, a participant in the Fier Movement, he had experienced prison and the cruelest tortures, and later had gone to Greece to escape persecution, but there, too, had suffered every sort of difficulty, including political persecution, unemployment and hunger. After the fascist occupation of the Homeland, Zylyftar returned to Albania and was one of the first to respond to the call of the Communist Party and take up arms.

As soon as I learned that Zylyftar had come to Përmet among the delegates I called him to me and we embraced warmly. I offered him a stool and we sat down because he had a leg in plaster and found it difficult to stand.

«I am very happy about our war and our Congress. Let us enjoy free Albania!» he said, his eyes shining.

I spoke to him about the internal situation, the victories we had achieved, and the imminent liberation of our country, and he was as happy as a child. He told me about the patriotism of the people of Skrapar and about their love for and trust in the Communist Party. I begged him to tell me about the fight-

ing in which he had taken part, but Zylyftar was reluctant to say much about it. I asked about his wounded leg and advised him:

«You must look after yourself and get treatment.»

«I'll get over it,» Zylyftar Veleshnja replied. «I am only sorry that it has happened at this time. The leg hinders me a bit because I can hardly move. I went to Çorovoda, where we held the elections for the delegates, on four legs, riding a mule. But I got there and it was a great gathering of people from the villages. They spoke beautifully and courageously criticized and rejected two candidates and they were right on the mark. I was overjoyed and I never thought about my leg, it seemed to me I should fly, let alone walk! And that's how it seems to me now, too, that's why I'll say I'll get over it.»

A month or two later we were able to send a group of seriously wounded partisans to Bari (1) for treatment, together with our military mission which was to hold talks with the Allied Mediterranean Headquarters. Amongst them was Zylyftar.

After this first conversation I met him at other times and liked to talk with him because he was

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1 During July-August 1944 the delegation of the General Staff of the ANLA and the representatives of the Allied Mediterranean Headquarters held talks there about aid in military material which had to be given to the National Liberation Army and breaking off relations between the British Command and the reactionary forces of Abaz Kupa. The British and the Americans did not fulfil these demands and, even after the talks, continued their hostile activity against the National Liberation War of the Albanian people.

pleasant and wise in conversation and a great one for cracking jokes. One day he told us a story which made us laugh till we cried. When he was a patient in the partisan hospital of Zabërzan, Zylyftar had seen how the British «fulfilled» our requests. We needed and asked them for weapons and ammunition as well as medicines, bandages and plaster, while the British dropped us piss-pots! In the partisan hospital, where there were a lot of these piss-pots, the wounded nicknamed them «Churchill.» They used them to collect up soiled gauze and bandages when their dressings were changed, bits of food and so on. One day a British doctor had gone to the hospital to see the wounded. As he was walking among the beds one of the wounded has asked the nurse:

«Please, bring me the 'Churchill'.»

The British doctor had heard this and asked our doctor who was accompanying him:

«What is he saying about Churchill?»

«He says that Churchill sends them to us.» had replied the doctor.

«All right!» the British doctor had said.

However, let us turn from the «generous aid» of the British prime minister for our partisan hospitals and go back to the sessions of the Congress of Përmet. As I said, the discussion of the report which I delivered continued for two days and could have gone on longer, because all the delegates wanted to speak, to tell about the war in their regions, to express their joy and faith in the Party and to approve the historic decisions. To the representatives of the towns, villages and partisan detachments, it seemed that they

were not fully carrying out the instructions which the people and the partisans had given them if they did not stand up in the Congress and express in words what they had in their hearts.

The delegates listened with enthusiasm to the contribution of the delegate of the Greek minority in Albania, who spoke about the correct leadership of the Communist Party of Albania, which united the people and made them brothers and gave the members of the Greek minority the same rights as the fraternal Albanian people.

«Our arms united in this war for freedom indicate our common purpose, our common faith: your freedom is our freedom,» he said.

Nexhmije Xhuglini, a delegate of the Anti-fascist Youth Union, made a fine contribution at the Congress. She spoke about the war and the efforts of the Albanian youth, who under the leadership of the Communist Party, grew up, were educated and became a great force in the war for liberation. She mentioned the many martyrs whom the youth had given for our sacred aim, expressed the grief of all the youth and the people that Qemal, Misto, Margarita, Mihal and other beloved comrades of the youth were not amongst us. In her contribution Nexhmije pointed out that it was the Communist Party which led the youth and gave them the ideal for which they were fighting.

«After the appeal of the Party,» she said, «the youth stepped up the struggle in the countryside, in the towns and the schools, took to the mountains and, thus, the flame of the liberation war was set ablaze. The school and student youth left the schools and

universities, not to become blacksmiths, as Lumo Skëndo says, but to fight. Here, in Përmet, the foundations of the new Albania are being laid on the ruins of burnt villages and unploughed fields. The youth know what the people want and what they are in need of. Therefore, they will work for the building of people's democratic Albania with the same enthusiasm and love for the people which they have shown in the war. The youth have before them the faces of their heroes and are concerned to raise the flag for which they fell, higher and higher.»

The continuation of the war through to victory, the election of the National Liberation Council and the Anti-fascist Committee and other decisions of national importance were discussed by many delegates, who with their words raised the enthusiasm to an even higher level. The delegate from Vlora, Hasan Pulo, made such a contribution in concrete and simple terms.

«The great day of May 1 was also the day of the election of the delegates to this Congress,» he said. «In Mesaplik more than 500 men and 200 women voted for their representatives, with tears of joy in their eyes, because thanks to the sacrifices made and the blood shed, these people, for the first time, were given the opportunity to vote not under the bayonets of Tafë Kaziu and the nooses of Ahmet Zog, but freely, according to their own will. I am not going to speak at length here,» he said, «but I tell you that the people are for the war and have charged me to inform the Congress and the new Government which we are going to create here that the whole of Vlora has confidence in the National Liberation Front



and the Communist Party! They also instructed me to ask the Government to do everything possible to seek the coming of a Soviet military mission here!»

His closing words were lost in the applause and shouts of the delegates: «We want the Soviet military mission!»

This was a long-standing desire of ours which had its source in our love for the Homeland of the giants of the revolution, Lenin and Stalin, for the first socialist country, and our respect for the Soviet Army which had heroically withstood the Hitlerite attack and now, guided by the Stalinist military art, was crushing the nazi beast and driving it back towards its lair, Germany. The coming of a Soviet military mission would be a joy for the people and our army. We had British missions in Albania, but these were uninvited guests who we were obliged to accept from the respect which was due to our allies, while the Soviet officers would not be official guests but friends we could welcome wholeheartedly. Before this we had tried to establish contact with the Soviets, and had asked the Yugoslav comrades to transmit our desire to the Soviet command. They had told us it was hazardous to drop them by parachute, that they also had great difficulties in making contact with one another, etc., etc. Nevertheless, during the days when the Congress of Përmet was being held, by chance a Soviet officer was present at our General Staff and we had invited him to take part in the Congress. He expressed the desire to say a few words of greeting to the Congress and we fulfilled his desire.

«This Congress shows the world once again that

the peoples oppressed by fascism have risen to fight,» he said.

He spoke about the Soviet society which knew no oppression and exploitation, about the heroic war against the nazi hordes, and went on to give a brief account of the victories of the Red Army which was at the gates of the Balkans.

«Only those peoples who fight and raise their voices for freedom, only they deserve to live,» he said in conclusion. «Your Congress shows that the Albanian people know that freedom is gained only by fighting for it.»

After two days of discussion, on May 26, we went on to the next phase of the proceedings of the Congress — the election of legislative and executive organs of our people's state power. This was an historic moment with decisive importance for the fate of the Homeland and the people, the crowning of the people's war for freedom and people's Albania. The moment had come when, with the will of the Albanian people, the foundations had to be laid of a new state which would fight for the fundamental interests of the popular masses, of workers, peasants and the patriotic intelligentsia. The Anti-fascist Council, which would be our first Constituent Assembly, and the Committee, with the competences of a government, would not be the outcome of combinations of European chancelleries, or ghosts of the past, which the imperialist powers maintained and subsidized in order to use them against peoples who hated them. The new state which we were building had the support and trust of the people, had its own army which was fight-

ing heroically and would soon drive out the enemy, and had a whole system of organs which effectively and really ran and administered the country. The main organs of this state were emerging from a great assembly of representatives of the people who came from the fighting fronts.

«I have been charged with the great honour of opening this session, one of the most historic sessions of this Congress,» said Doctor Nishani, speaking with emotion. «The moment has come for us to elect the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council, that Council which will be charged with the role and functions of electing the Anti-fascist Committee, the first Democratic Government in the history of Albania.»

Doctor Nishani went on to explain to the delegates the procedure for the elections, spoke about the number of the members of the Council, and so on. It was proposed that a commission comprised of comrades with authority and well-known in the war should be appointed to nominate the candidates who would be presented to the Congress.

«How many members will this commission have?» somebody asked.

«It will be well to restrict the number to 10-15 people,» said Doctor Nishani.

Mehmet Shehu, the delegate from the 1st Shock Brigade, too arrogant to stand up, spoke first.

«I am going to make some proposals which perhaps may be accepted. I think that the members of the General Council and the General Staff should be elected to the commission and a few of us, from the mob...»

This person's dose of conceit was mixed with the sense of discontent which was simmering within him. His opinion of himself was so great that he scorned and underrated other modest members of the Party and comrades of the war, whom he scornfully described as the «mob», that is, an amorphous worthless mass destined to approve the opinions and decisions of others. In his own opinion, Mehmet Shehu thought that he had not been given his due, because we had left him among the «mob», despite the fact that he had been elected as a candidate member of the Plenum of the Central Committee and had been appointed a brigade commander. But Mehmet Shehu wanted more, both to satisfy his own ambition and to carry out the instructions of his patrons. During those days I was to have a separate talk with him about such expressions of conceit and other mistakes, during which I criticized him sternly and there and then he made a «strong self-criticism», as was his custom. But let us not «interrupt» the proceedings of the session.

After the necessary proposals were made, Omer Nishani asked:

«Do you want to add to the list of the commission? Or are these names sufficient?»

The delegates raised their clenched fists because that was the way they voted, and the list was approved. The commission left the hall to compile the list of candidates for members in the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council.

We had just begun compiling the list in the side room, when a burst of applause was heard from the hall.

Doctor Nishani, who was bending over his notes, raised his spectacles with his index finger and asked:

«What's going on?»

The nimble Nako, darted from his chair, entered the hall for a moment and came back laughing.

«Professor Sejfulla is entertaining the delegates with his poetic muse,» he said looking at Doctor Nishani, perhaps because he used a Gjirokastra expression for «entertaining».

«Tch, tch,» Omer Nishani made a disapproving, noise and went on with the work.

From the hall came the imposing voice of the «revolutionary poet», as Dishnica described him on this occasion to the listeners, and then, in another tone, the appropriate explanations: «written in the year such and such», «written in the conditions of protracted political exile», etc., etc. For some days. Sejfulla, who was a classical sloth, had been displaying tireless activity. He discussed and theorized about issues, met delegates, recited, inquired whether we had any task with which to charge him, etc., etc. It was quite obvious that Sejfulla wanted to advertise himself in every way as a theoretician, as a man acquainted with the affairs of the state and as a poet to boot.

After about two hours of discussion the commission compiled a list of 115 candidates, we returned to the hall, and the session recommenced. Doctor Nishani read through the list twice and gave explanations about each of the candidates proposed, while they stood up in turn and «were introduced» to the comrades. In general, all the candidates proposed were approved by the delegates, and this was natural, be-

cause we had had in mind that those to be elected to the Council should be honest patriots, whether communists or not, militants of the National Liberation War, who had distinguished themselves in their work and struggle in the terrain and in the army. Understandably, however, there was room for additions to the list. In compiling the list of candidates we had also taken account of a series of other factors such as the ratio between Party members and non-party members, their geographical distribution, as well as their various religious beliefs, which was a criterion that had importance at that time. Thus, there were no essential reservations about the candidates proposed except that the names of a number of candidates, who should be added to the list, were proposed. Since the composition of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council could not be enlarged without limit, however, it was decided that the total number should remain what it was, but there was discussion about whether one candidate should be replaced by another comrade. And, in fact, after the convincing arguments and reasons presented by the comrades there were some candidatures that were replaced. For example, at one moment Comrade Hysni Kapo rose and said:

«I have no objection to the comrade proposed, who fully deserves to be elected. However, proceeding from the fact that he is an armyman and other candidates from the army from the zone which he represents have already been approved, I think that we should replace him with another candidate who is a civilian.»

Almost everyone expressed agreement, when up got Mehmet Shehu and said:

«There is an intrigue going on here! It doesn't seem to me right that because someone is a military man he should not take part in the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council!»

«Is your complaint about this concrete instance?» we asked him, «or is it related to the general principle?»

«Both,» he replied, «but the main thing is the general principle.»

«Then, you are wrong,» I told him, «I don't know whether you listened carefully to the list which Doctor Nishani read, or to what extent you are acquainted with the candidates proposed, but, as Hysni said, the names of many comrades from the army are there on the list.»

In fact, in the election of delegates we had had in mind that as many comrades as possible from the army should come to the Congress. Obviously, by taking up arms and shedding blood they had given a great proof of themselves to the people and the Homeland. The delegates from the army made up more than 40 per cent of the total. Likewise, in the list of candidates for the Council there was a good ratio between comrades from the army and civilians, thus Mehmet Shehu's «criticism» «in principle» was completely out of place. Hence, his «concrete» concern was for the concrete candidatures and obviously, above all, he was trying to open the way for a place for himself in the Anti-fascist Committee.

After discussion and explanation the composi-

tion of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council was approved. The new Council received a long burst of applause.

«Now,» said Doctor Nishani, closing the session, «we instruct all the delegates to the Congress to maintain secrecy about those elected who are in illegality in the zones still occupied by the enemy.»

After lunch, during which I had a friendly talk with my old friends Miha Lako, Babë Myslim and Esat Dishnica, in the afternoon we began the first meeting of the new Anti-fascist National Liberation Council.

At this meeting the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council took very important decisions: about the functions and tasks of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council, its Standing Committee and the Anti-fascist National Liberation Committee; about preventing the return of Zog to Albania; about awarding badges of rank in the National Liberation Army. With the competences and prerogatives with which it was charged, the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council, or ANLC as it was called for short, would be the supreme legislative organ of the new Albanian state. It was the Assembly, our People's Assembly, in the time of the war and the first months of Liberation, until general elections were held in Albania for the Constituent Assembly, which, carrying on the work of the ANLC, would finally settle the question of the form of the regime, appoint the new Government and adopt the Constitution. With the decision which the representatives of the people at the Congress of Përmet would approve, the functions and competences of the



Standing Committee of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council and Committee, as the supreme executive organ with all the attributes of a Provisional People's Government, were also defined.

At this first meeting of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council, after the draft decisions which I mentioned were read, discussed and adopted, we went on to the election of the Standing Committee. After about an hour's discussion in the commission appointed for the proposal of the candidates, a list of about 30 persons was prepared and Doctor Omer Nishani read this list to the members of the ANLC.

«This is the list proposed by the commission,» he said, «is there any objection?»

There were no objections to the comrades proposed and all the candidates were approved unanimously.

«Then,» said Omer Nishani, «please, bear in mind that the election of the last four comrades to the Standing Committee must not be publicized until they are informed, because they are in towns which have still not been liberated. Now, will all the comrades who were elected to the Standing Committee remain in the hall, while the others withdraw?»

A few minutes later the first meeting of the Standing Committee of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council commenced.

«Since there are few of us, you may now smoke,» said Omer Nishani who had categorically prohibited smoking during all the sessions of the Congress and the ANLC.

At this meeting, from which five members of the

Standing Committee, Baba Faja, Qirjako Harito, Ollga Plumbi, Gaqo Tashko and Gjergj Kokoshi, were absent, because they had been unable to come to Përmet, we elected the chairman and three vice-chairmen of the Standing Committee. Doctor Omer Nishani was elected chairman, with Baba Faja Martaneshi, Hasan Pulo and Koçi Xoxe as vice-chairmen.

It was after 8 o'clock at night.

«Will we continue with the election of the Committee tonight or tomorrow?» asked Nako Spiru.

«I think we should elect the Committee tomorrow,» I proposed, «because it might take some time and besides this we also have to examine some other laws.»

My proposal was adopted. We came out of the meeting hall together and, group by group, passed through the streets of the town thronged with the local people, partisans and delegates. A crowd had gathered in the main square where there were performances of songs, dances and sketches written by our writers, who, also, worked and fought for the liberation of Albania. But we could not stay as long as we would have liked amongst our friends and comrades because, although we were in «our free time», there was still a great deal of work to be done. During one of those «free» evenings I summoned Mehmet Shehu and talked with him about a number of problems which had emerged in the brigade he commanded, especially about his relations with other comrades of the brigade.

A short time earlier I had received a letter from one of the leading cadres of the 1st Shock Brigade,

who complained about the disparaging, disdainful and despotic attitude which Mehmet Shehu adopted towards him and a number of other comrades.

Hence, because of these things, as well as the astonishing interjections, expressions of discontent and gibes which he made from time to time, even during the proceedings of the Congress, I summoned him to a separate meeting and criticized him for these manifestations which were incompatible with the figure of a commander of a partisan unit. Amongst other things I spoke to him about the relations between the commander and the commissar and their relations with other comrades, whether functionaries or not, explaining the damage which his views and activities caused the Party and the National Liberation War.

As I have written elsewhere, when he was commander of the 1st Shock Brigade, Mehmet Shehu had been sternly criticized for his sectarian activities, contrary to the line of the Party, both in Myzeqe and in Çermenika during the enemy's winter general offensive. We had criticized him, also, for the distorted and disparaging views which he expressed in a letter in connection with the appointment by the General Staff of a former officer, linked with the National Liberation War, to an important military task. Contrary to the correct line which our Party followed towards officers of the old army with progressive and revolutionary tendencies and stands, Mehmet Shehu disdainfully called them *zabit* and expressed opposition to their promotion to various posts!

Mehmet Shehu «admitted» his mistakes, made a «self-criticism» and promised that such things «would

not be repeated». Later, he also sent me a letter in which he wrote that he always bore in mind the talk which we had in Përmet. However, the ink of this letter was scarcely dry before Mehmet Shehu, continuing his activities as a secret agent, was to oppose the order for the 1st Division to advance to the North, while somewhat later, in December 1944, in a letter addressed to the Central Committee of the Party, or more precisely to Koçi Xoxe (because it was addressed to him by name), Mehmet Shehu was to vent all his spleen against our Party, its line and sound leadership, fully in the spirit of and in unison with the accusations which Velimir Stojnic, Koçi Xoxe, Sejfulla Malëshova and others had poured out at the Berat Plenum in November of that year. I have written in detail about all these things elsewhere (1) and here I want to point out only that this letter addressed to Koçi Xoxe to some extent explains why, during the proceedings of the Congress of Përmet and after it, Mehmet Shehu was «upset» and «irritable» (in this letter, in his own handwriting, he complained that he was dissatisfied that he was not given the rank of general and not appointed to the General Staff of our Army!).

But let us return to the fiery and unforgettable days during which the proceedings of the Congress continued.

On the following morning, after the first meeting of the Standing Committee of the ANLC we met to

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1 Enver Hoxha, *The Titoites (Historical Notes)*, «8 Nëntori» Publishing House, Tiranë, 1982, p. 596, Eng. ed.

continue the work to appoint the Anti-fascist National Liberation Committee, that is, the first Democratic Government of Albania. The meeting was chaired by Omer Nishani who gave the floor to the members of the Standing Committee to make the respective proposals.

The first to speak was Ramadan Çitaku. He proposed that the Committee should have 11 departments: internal affairs, external affairs, the economy, reconstruction, justice, finance, the press and propaganda, education, health, the war, and public works.

«I also intend to propose the names,» he said in conclusion.

«Wait a minute until we agree on the number of departments,» Omer Nishani interrupted him.

Of course, many times before this we had discussed the questions of the organization of the state apparatus, the government, etc., had exchanged opinions and racked our brains because for most of the comrades this work was *terra incognita*: almost none of us had any previous experience in these matters; naturally, we knew in general what the legislative and executive organs were, had some knowledge of certain aspects of state organization, the structure of the local organs of power, and so on. We had read about the various forms of regime in other countries, about the monarchies and the different forms of bourgeois republics, and had interested ourselves in finding out as much as possible about the organization of the Soviet socialist state in particular. Amongst us we had Omer Nishani who had a fine juridical culture and a certain amount of experience in the

affairs of state administration, so we turned to him on many questions and when he knew the answers he showed us the way, and when he did not he racked his brains together with us. We thought that Sejfulla and Koço Tashko would contribute something from their experience in the Soviet Union, but they only theorized, especially Sejfulla, who had the greatest pretensions in this direction, but in most cases demonstrated nothing but his opportunism and ignorance.

We based ourselves, also, on what experience we had accumulated during the work of strengthening and centralizing the national liberation councils. This experience was very useful at basic level in the terrain, but in regard to the supreme organs we had much less experience. Up till that time we had only the experience of a short period since the Conference of Labinot at which, as I said, we had taken a step forward by allocating to the Standing Committee of the General Council certain functions and competences which gave it the features of the beginnings of a government. We had also set up several sections to direct different fields of activity of our state power. However, there were many things that we still did not know well. For example, on the basis of our previous talks and discussions Baca proposed the number of departments and named them. But had we thoroughly considered and achieved complete clarity on the tasks and functions of these departments? We thought we had and, generally speaking, the structure that we decided upon, with some modifications, justified itself. However, when we thought that we had settled this prob-

lem, one of the comrades of the Standing Committee got up and asked:

«What is this department of reconstruction?»

«It will be engaged in the reconstruction of objects destroyed by the war, the houses, the bridges, and so on,» explained Baca.

«That's all right, but we also have a department for public works and one for the economy. Don't they overlap one another?» asked another.

We discussed such problems over again and not only answered a question or a criticism, but made things clear to ourselves and defined the tasks of a department more completely and clearly. Thus, these discussions and debates became for us like a theoretical course on the organization and structure of the new state.

We spent a long time «arguing» over the naming of departments.

«Why should we call it the 'war department'?» asked Sejfulla Malëshova. «We are not for war, therefore, we should call it 'the department of the people's defence',» and he took the opportunity to speak to us about the character of our war today and in the future, about the foreign policy of the state, etc., etc.

«Very well, then, let us call it the 'department of war and national defence',» someone proposed and this was approved.

There were similar debates, also, about whether we should speak of the «department of the press and propaganda» or the «department of people's culture», «the department of the economy» or the «department of the people's economy», etc.

After overcoming this problem we went on to the proposals for the composition of the Anti-fascist Committee. One of the comrades proposed a list made up of 12 people, one chairman of the Committee, who would also be in charge of the department of the war and defence, one vice-chairman and the other members of the committee each of whom would run one department.

«Is there any other proposai?» asked Doctor Nishani.

«I think we should have two vice-presidents of the committee,» said Mustafa Gjinishi. «I propose Major Spiro Moisiu, the appointment of whom sounds good also because he is an Orthodox Christian!»

«Spiro Moisiu is commander of the General Staff and cannot take on this function, too,» Omer Nishani and I were of the one opinion.

«In our war we cannot take into account whether someone proposed is Orthodox or Moslem. Here we should proceed from the criteria of the candidate's work, ability, determination, etc.,» put in Sejfulla and looked at all around him.

Omer Nishani chuckled to himself because he understood that Sejfulla was interested in his own candidature.

«I think that for the time being there is no need for more than one vice-chairman of the Committee, and so we are left with Babë Myslim as the only candidate,» he said.

«I withdraw my proposai,» said Gjinishi.

Other proposals were discussed and it was reasonable and necessary to discuss them, because that was



the job for which we had met, so that we would elect the best comrades to the Committee, those who had the ability and skill and would be in a position to lead the work. Here and there, however, in the comments and contributions of some members of the Standing Committee there were signs of wrong trends and personal inclinations to occupy positions.

«Let us have a look at whether Doctor Nishani ought to be chairman of the Standing Committee and also in charge of foreign affairs,» put in Liri Gega, and immediately Koço Tashko took up the refrain:

«Won't the task of 'foreign affairs' mean neglecting the task of chairman of the Council?»

Omer Nishani, who was modest but also scrupulous on juridical matters, shrugged his shoulders and said: «It seems to me that the two don't go together.»

In unison with Liri and Koço, Sejfulla, too, thought that everything was in his favour and went on the attack to capture the «portfolio» of foreign minister. Thus, there were three candidates for this portfolio and each thought he was the most suitable.

In order to explain why we proposed the candidature of Omer Nishani, I intervened, saying:

«I think that the candidature of Doctor Nishani for the department of foreign affairs is appropriate, especially at present. In the present situation of our country there is nothing wrong with having such a well-known figure as Comrade Omer Nishani, chairman of the Standing Committee of the ANLC, a member of the government, too. On the contrary, this fact will have a good influence among the people.»

Likewise, we had judged that Doctor Nishani, as

a democratic personality, known at home and abroad, through his reputation and his work would greatly assist the strengthening of our links with foreign countries. Some years later, in 1947, when I went to Bulgaria at the head of a government delegation to sign the Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Aid between the PR of Albania and the PR of Bulgaria, during my talks and meetings in Sofia and elsewhere with Dimitrov, I learned that he, too, knew and respected Omer Nishani. Dimitrov had been well-acquainted also with Halim Xhelo and, likewise, with Ali Kelmendi and his activity as a communist and member of the Comintern, and expressed his regret that Ali had died. I talked to him at length about the former «anti-Zogite» emigrants and the efforts of our Party to persuade them to join in the war according to the historic directives which Dimitrov himself had issued as General Secretary of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, and went on to tell him how some of them fell into the mire of fascism. The unforgettable Dimitrov said to me: «The line of your Party has been correct,» and the old man was pleased when I told him about Noli and Doctor Nishani, who had taken a good stand; it was a special joy for me that such a personality as Dimitrov knew and was interested in the Doctor whom we had as Chairman of the Presidium of the People's Assembly at that time.

So we persisted and, in the end, it was decided that the name of Omer Nishani should remain on the list as the candidate to run the department of foreign affairs.

«Then, let us put the list to the vote one by one and as a group,» said Omer Nishani.

«Just a minute,» interrupted one of those present. «What are we going to call the members of the Committee who are to run the departments?»

That was another «problem», another opportunity for the reasoning of our «theoreticians». «If we get involved in this question it will take us another hour,» I thought to myself, so I proposed:

«They should be called: members of the Committee in charge of the work of the economy, education, and so on.»

«In charge of the work does not sound right to me,» said Sejfulla, pursing his lips.

«Then, what do you propose?» I asked him.

«I would have proposed 'commissar', but this would be considered leftist, therefore I say they should be called 'members of the Committee for such and such affairs'. It's a bit long but simple.»

«I don't see any difference from what Comrade Enver proposed,» said Ramadan Çitaku.

«I have a proposal that I know will not be accepted,» put in Nako Spiru, «let us call the members of the Committee 'secretaries'.»

«That's what they are called in America,» Sejfulla snapped at him, while Koçi Xoxe, the future minister of internal affairs, put the «seal» on it.

«I say, better call them 'entrusted'!»

In the end we got over this problem, too, and it was decided that the members of the Committee would be called «in charge of the work».

Then, we went on to vote for the candidates, one by one, and the list as a whole. The Anti-fascist National Liberation Committee was approved unanimously with the following composition: chairman and in charge of the war and national defence — Enver Hoxha, vice-chairman — Myslim Peza, member in charge of internal affairs — Haxhi Lleshi, in charge of foreign affairs — Dr. Omer Nishani, in charge of the economy — Dr. Medar Shtylla, in charge of the reconstruction — Bedri Spahiu, in charge of justice — Manol Konomi, in charge of finance — Ramadan Çitaku, in charge of the press and propaganda — Sejfulla Malëshova, in charge of education — Gjergj Kokoshi, in charge of public works — Eng. Spiro Koleka, in charge of health — Dr. Ymer Dishnica.

The next day, May 28, was the day of the closing of the Anti-fascist Congress of Përmet. The final session at which the historic decisions of the Albanian people would be approved was left for the afternoon; in the evening the delegates would celebrate together with the patriotic and hospitable people of Përmet, would say their farewells and on the morning of the following day each of them would set out for the place to which his duty to the Homeland called him.

An atmosphere of optimism and joy prevailed that day. It could be felt in the Përmet homes, in the streets, it could be read in the happy faces and smiling eyes of the comrade delegates, commanders and commissars, who came to meet us over matters of work, brought reports and information, received orders and instructions and set out readily on their duties. Meanwhile, others, friends and comrades, came

just to meet us and talk, to express their good will and say good-bye because «who knows, perhaps we'll never meet again». Like the other comrades, I was very busy and did not like to interrupt my work, but when the door opened and in came, say, Hasan Pulo, to invite me to drink a coffee and smoke a cigarette, I was not annoyed because these meetings with dear comrades and fine people freshened my mind, rejoiced my heart and increased my will to work.

In the afternoon, when we entered the hall the delegates who had taken their seats and were singing in different groups, welcomed us with applause and ovations for the Party, the Front and the National Liberation Army. They did not stop for minutes on end, however much Omer Nishani, who himself was very moved, called on the delegates for «order». In the end, when some «order» was established, the Doctor declared the session opened and gave the floor to the secretary of the Standing Committee of the ANLC to read the draft decisions to which the Congress was to give the final approval. The reading of the draft, which normally should have required an hour, took much longer because applause burst out after every decision, and even over separate clauses of the decisions. How could the delegates of this nation, who had fought for freedom and justice for centuries, not cheer wholeheartedly when they heard: «The new democratic people's Albania will be built according to the will of the people»! In these decisions they saw the crowning of the long difficult war, the aim for which thousands and thousands of their comrades had shed their blood, had sacrificed their youth and their

lives. They unanimously approved the decision that Ahmet Zog, the despot and traitor to the Albanian people, and his family would be prohibited from returning to Albania. When this decision was read, Omer Nishani who chaired the session, asked:

«Does the Congress approve?»

This time there was no clapping. The delegates expressed their opinion with shouts, «Down with Zog!» and stamping their feet. The Congress also unanimously approved the other decisions about the refusal to recognize any other government which might be formed inside or outside the country, about the continuation more fiercely of the war against the occupiers, the quislings, the Balli Kombëtar, Legaliteti and any other reactionary group. The Congress also endorsed the political line of the National Liberation General Council and the activity of the General Staff of the National Liberation Army, and expressed the desire that military missions of the Soviet Union and the United States of America should be attached to it. Then, the other decisions of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council and its Standing Committee were read to the Congress, including those about the re-examination and cancellation of all the enslaving political and economic agreements which Zog had made with other countries, about the functions and competences of the ANLC and its Standing Committee, etc., etc.

The decision of the Standing Committee of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council about the appointment and composition of the Anti-fascist Committee with the functions of a provisional government was received by the delegates with applause and ovations.

Thus, with these decisions of historic importance, which opened a new brilliant epoch in the ancient history of the Albanian people, the Anti-fascist Congress of Përmet accomplished its historic mission. With their clenched fists raised high, just as they saluted one another in the war for freedom, the delegates sealed a fundamental act which marked the birth of the new Albanian state and sketched the contours of the course on which Albania would proceed in the future. The whole revolutionary spirit of the Congress of Përmet, the experience of our National Liberation War, together with the historic decisions which were taken, were reflected in the Declaration of the Congress, which Sami Baholli read, and was applauded and approved unanimously.

This Declaration, which was soon to be made known to the whole nation, summed up the war of the Albanian people since April 7, 1939 with its fundamental stages and moments, noted the anti-national and anti-popular role of the regime of Zog, the quisling government and the Ballist, Zogite and other traitors and collaborationists, and strongly emphasized the role of the Communist Party as the leader and inspirer of the National Liberation War. In its analysis of the external factors, the Declaration stressed the war of the Soviet peoples and the Red Army, under the leadership of Stalin, as the main factor in the victory of the peoples' anti-fascist coalition, and made a correct assessment of the war of the Anglo-Americans and that of the peoples of the Balkans.

Following the reading of the Declaration and a number of messages, I, as chairman of the Anti-fascist

National Liberation Committee, delivered the closing address.

Amongst other things, in my short speech I said: «This Congress is one of the greatest successes of our Movement, is the tribune at which the opinions and desires of the people have been freely expressed for the first time in Albania, at which decisions important to the fate of our Homeland, to the development of the war and the creation of a happy future, have been taken.

«Conscious of the grave responsibility with which the Albanian people have entrusted us,» I went on, «we shall place all our strength and our lives in the service of the people and the Homeland and will remain loyal to the death to the will of our people for the achievement of an independent and democratic Albania.

«We shall take the decisions of this Congress immediately to the people and, together with the people, will fight to apply them, not sparing even our lives, will mobilize all the active forces of the people and, united around the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council and Committee, hurl ourselves more vigorously into the fight to hasten the liberation of our people!»

After my speech, all the delegates, one after the other, placed their signatures below the decisions which had been collected in the *Book of the Congress*, in that book in which in a symbolic way we put our signatures whenever we go to Përmet on the anniversary of that glorious event.

Thus, the Congress of Përmet, one of the most important events of our epic National Liberation War,



a monument built by the war and the wisdom of the Party and the people, a great deed with colossal importance for the future of Albania, came to a close.

At Përmet, Albania, led by its heroic Communist Party, demonstrated to friends and enemies that it was unwavering on its correct course. Accounts could no longer be made as in the past. Those times had gone never to return. History would never again be repeated as the enemies wished: the people had become masters of their own fate.

### **3. Towards the final victory**

Immediately after the Congress of Përmet we established ourselves in Odrіçan, a village built on a ridge, about an hour or two by foot from Përmet. Odrіçan was a small but pleasant village, with fresh water and fruit trees. The enemy had not burnt it, therefore we had somewhere to stay. The residents welcomed us with open arms and we were all billeted in their homes. They allocated me to a house at the top of the village, the master and mistress of which were patriots and, like the whole village, linked with the Party and the National Liberation Front and hated the Balli Kombëtar, Ali Bey and the reactionary Dervish of the *tekke* of Suka which was nearby. My hosts, especially Mother Vitori Jorgji, did everything they could to please me and provide me with conditions for

work and rest. Since Liberation I have met the old man several times in Përmet when I have gone there for anniversaries of the Congress. I do not know whether those fine people are still alive, but I have been told that their son, who was young at that time, is a good cadre and today works in the organs of the state in Përmet.

Beside the home of Mother Vitori was that of Mother Koce, as Kostandina Londari was called in the village and as we called her, too. Many a time I went to work or to sit in the home of Mother Koce, who as soon as she set eyes on me, would ask with motherly love and concern if there was anything I needed. She had no children, but during the time we worked in Odriçan she made all of us her children and, indeed, whenever our work required it, she made her whole house available while she moved into the small detached kitchen in the yard. I have the greatest love in my heart and the fondest memories about this kindly woman.

During the days of the Congress, but especially after we established ourselves in Odriçan, we discussed the political and military situation of the country in detail and took fresh measures and decisions for the further strengthening of the National Liberation Army, formation of new brigades, divisions and army corps, and so on.

One of the most important decisions of the days when we were in Përmet was that on the formation of the 1st Division of the Albanian National Liberation Army, which was evidence of the high level of maturity and organization which our army had achieved.

Now the Party and the people saw with justified pride how our heroic army had grown and been strengthened in the fire of the war for freedom and had become dear to the people and a terror to the enemy. At this period there were shock brigades, most of which had been formed after the enemy's general winter offensive, as well as scores of regular or territorial battalions, *çeta* and units, at the head of which were tested commanders, commissars and other political and military cadres such as Hysni Kapo, Shefqet Peçi, Adil Çarçani, Haki Toska, Manush Myftiu, Ramiz Alia, Rita Marko, Teki Kolaneci, Jaho Gjoliku and tens of others, functioning and carrying out powerful military operations in our country.

The ranks of our fighting formations were ceaselessly filled with sons and daughters of the people, and even with the more elderly, a thing which spoke clearly of the strength and indisputable authority which our liberation army enjoyed among the people. Not only was it smashing the nazi and Ballist forces everywhere and liberating cities and whole districts and zones one after the other, but also, with even greater force than before, it was playing a very great role in strengthening the national liberation councils, ensuring that they functioned in the best possible way, in defending and affirming the new state power which had now taken the reins of Albania firmly in hand.

Before long, in the ceaseless upsurge of the general armed uprising, we were to form other divisions as well as the 1st Army Corps of the Albanian Na-

tional Liberation Army, to which Hysni Kapo, the brave son of Labëria and loyal fighter of the Party, was appointed as commissar.

Thus, our people, the Party and the Government newly formed at Përmet had in their hands their powerful weapon and defender, the National Liberation Army, which had now been transformed into a regular army and was ceaselessly perfecting its methods and forms of fighting.

All these things enabled us to plan and carry out large-scale co-ordinated operations and to go over from the tactic of partisan warfare to the tactic of frontal warfare.

Included in this context is the order which we issued immediately after the historic Congress of Përmet for the 1st Division of the Albanian National Liberation Army to go on the offensive in the North in order to attack and rout the forces of the occupier and all the Ballist, Zogite and bayraktar reactionary forces in Mat, Dibra and elsewhere.

This order had special importance because it enabled the government formed at Përmet to exert its power in the North, too, where, especially in certain zones, internal reaction, supported and inspired by the British, was trying to retain dominant positions and hold on to the old state power. As I have written elsewhere, the aims of reaction went so far that they intended and planned for a «division of Albania into two parts» and in this «division» Northern Albania was to remain under the power of the Balli Kombëtar, Legaliteti and British influence!

But in pursuing this aim, too, reaction was wrong

in its calculations. Irrespective of the power of the bayraktars and the clergy, the National Liberation Movement had powerful support in the North, from Tropoja to Shkodra, from Dibra to Mat and Mirdita. The people of those parts, who suffered under the oppression of bayraktars, reactionary clergy, especially of the Catholic Church, were seething with the desire to transform their lives and to be free. This desire was in complete accord with the war which the Party was waging, therefore the resistance towards the foreigners and their tools was increasing day by day and the people were more and more coming to understand that the basis of their future and the course which they had to pursue, was the Anti-fascist National Liberation War. The development of events was to prove the correctness of the line of the Party and resulted in the valour and courage of the sons of the remote regions of the North being displayed as brilliantly as everywhere else.

Partisan units and *çeta*, like those of Dibra, Shkodra, Mat, Has, Çermenika and Martanesh, operated in the zones of the North right from the start and steadily increased their activity, extending it over the whole region.

The partisan *çeta*, which later grew into battalions such as the battalion of Dibra, the «Perlat Rexhepi» Battalion, the «Bajram Curri» Battalion, the battalion of Mat and others, had scored a number of victories in Dibra, Tropoja, the Highlands of Gjakova, in Malësi e Madhe, in Mat and Martanesh. With such patriotic and valiant commanders and fighters, as Ismail Poga, Din Bajraktari, Dulejman Çela, Idriz Mulosmani and

others, these units had not only made life intolerable for the Italian and German occupiers and the local reactionaries linked with the foreigners, but time after time, at the request of their brothers of Kosova and on our orders, had advanced into the depths of Kosova and Montenegro in aid of the National Liberation Movement of the Albanian population of those parts and the Yugoslav peoples.

Likewise, the finest sons of the North operated and militated all over Albania, wherever the Party had sent them, displaying great bravery, wisdom and devotion. You could find them in the partisan brigades, at the head of regional committees, fiery agitators for the line of the Party, fearless underground fighters, bold guerrilla fighters and ardent communists.

Bearing in mind all the fight which the people of the North were waging, as well as the profound patriotism of the people, we were convinced that, however much reaction and the foreigners tried to separate the North from the rest of the Homeland, they would never achieve this purpose.

Nevertheless, although such «ideas» and «plans» were evidence of the deplorable situation and disarray of reaction, it was impermissible for us to underestimate anything and we must not lose a single minute. Therefore, together with the order for the offensive in the North, we recommended to the comrades of the Party that they should be merciless with the heads of reaction and very open-hearted and kindly with the people of the North, must take care never to lose their patience, because they must always take into account the vile propaganda which the occupiers and

reaction had carried out among the people. We had to show the people of the North through our fight, through our stands and with our words that we were not what the traitors and bayraktars or Abaz Kupa and company said we were in their slanders of us, but, on the contrary, were the true liberators and those who had brought the people to power.

Precisely during those days the enemy began its second major operation, the June Operation, which for a while, prevented the carrying out of the order which I had signed in Përmet for the National Liberation Army to go over to the offensive. The June Operation was another stern test of the strength, courage and wisdom of our partisans, commissars and commanders, as well as of the ability of the Party and the General Command to lead the National Liberation Army.

Established at Odrigan, we were within the zone of the enemy offensive and at any moment could come under attack, especially if the Germans and Ballists learned that the leadership of the Party and the General Command were established there. Therefore, we had instructed the comrades and the residents of the village to maintain the strictest secrecy and, at the same time, had taken measures so that we could shift rapidly in case of danger.

One night Behar Shtylla and Stefo Grabocka came urgently and informed me that a German force was heading for Përmet, advancing through the highlands of Korça. I took the map, we marked the place from which the Germans had set out, noted the time at which they had started and calculated when they

might pass through or close to Odrіґan. We had only a few hours left. We notified the battalion of Riza Kodheli, with Misto Treska as commissar, to move up quickly and occupy positions in the forest facing Odrіґan, above the road which led to Alipostivan and opposite the road which came out of the village of Pagria. We took measures to ensure that the women, children and old folk were established in a safe place and finally, we of the General Command moved across from Odrіґan. I summoned Riza Kodheli and Misto Treska who reported to me on the positions of their forces and I gave the order to all that no-one should open fire without hearing three shots from my *Maiiser*.

We stood ready, waiting in silence. If the Germans were to burn the village, then it was certain they had received information that we were there and that we must be in the forests round-about and, thus, they would take the road of Alipostivan. The Germans came, the column passed through Odrіґan and Pagria with mules laden with light arms and mortars, continued on their way and emerged on the road below the forest. For two whole hours we watched them as they passed before us as on parade. They did not burn either Odrіґan or Pagria, but headed for Përmet which they put to the torch for the last time; all they did was re-burn the ruins. Hence, the Germans had not received information that we were in the zone of the operation. We returned to Odrіґan and continued our work.

Every evening, either in the house or in the porch of the small church at the end of the village, I gathered the comrades together and informed them about



the situation and the new events and consulted them. From Odriçan, we followed the development of the German offensive.

By carefully following the development of the fighting on the eastern front, we judged that the end had come for nazi Germany. It was being smashed under the terrible lethal blows of Stalin's Red Army, under the blows of all the peoples who were fighting heroically for freedom. Now the General Command understood clearly that the German offensive of June 1944 in Albania was the moment of the last desperate writhing of the dying beast.

In order to respond to this offensive in conformity with our strategy and the task of the rapid liberation of the whole country we continued to instruct the detachments of the National Liberation Army to resist the enemy operation with flexible and active defence, while avoiding the attacks of large formations of the enemy forces, with continual offensive actions against German and reactionary forces in order to tire them, break them up, demoralize them and wipe them out in the fire of the people's war. In this context the order for the 1st Division to move to the North, also, was a serious political and military blow to the Germans and the traitors, and to the aims and plans of the «allies». The carrying out of this order, despite the opposition of the British and the sabotage on the part of Mehmet Shehu, Dali Ndreu and Tuk Jakova, in fact, marked the end of the enemy offensive and the beginning of our general offensive for the liberation of the whole country.

As a result of all these successes on the front

of the war, the work for the organization and functioning of the new state which we had just created emerged more and more in the forefront. The activity of the state organs elected at the Congress of Përmet, which had been hindered for a moment during June on account of the military situation, was extended more widely and further improved immediately afterwards. From July to October the Standing Committee and the Anti-fascist Committee and its departments brought out a series of laws, decisions and instructions for the organization and revival of the economy, education, the health service, and so on. In the liberated zones work began to register and administer the national assets, to bring into production those few industrial objects which had remained from the past, to open schools, to ensure cadres for different fields, such as doctors, teachers, engineers, technicians, and so on. Through its activity, the new people's state showed that it existed not just on paper, but was really running and governing the country in the name of the people and with their full support and assistance.

Precisely in the upsurge of all this work the Party decided that the 1st Congress of the organization of the Albanian Anti-fascist Youth Union should be held. This was a major event, not only for the youth, but also for the Party and our whole people, because the youth were the most vigorous and active force in the war and tomorrow, after Liberation, this indomitable and organized army would play an irreplaceable role in the whole life of the country, in the reconstruction, in the political field and in the govern-

ment. Educated in the spirit of lofty patriotism, always the militant reserve of the Party, the youth would take over and carry forward the banner of our revolution unprecedented in the history of our people.

Precisely because we considered this event so important, we, the leading comrades of the Party, the Anti-fascist Committee and the Standing Committee, who had re-established ourselves in Helmës, despite the great amount of work we had to do, spent those days with our revolutionary young men and women.

The Congress was to be held at Helmës, in a beautiful meadow above the village. These were happy days full of work. Nako and Nexhmije prepared the report which afterwards we looked over together. The other comrades of the Youth Organization were preparing to welcome the delegates and all, including us «older» ones, were eagerly awaiting the day when the Congress was to open. The youth delegates arrived from all parts of the country. They came from the military detachments, from the *çeta*, from amongst the civilian population, legal and illegal workers, all youthful ardour and vigour, with great love for and loyal to the Party and the National Liberation War.

On August 8, the day when the Congress began, I left Helmës in the morning together with Doctor Nishani and other comrades and we climbed up to the beautiful meadow of Lirëz which resounded with songs and cheers for the Communist Party of Albania. All the delegates, happy, smiling and full of joy, opened the way for us, lining up on both sides of the road, and we passed between them as though we were

reviewing a guard of honour comprised of young men and women partisans standing facing one another, saluting arms. We took our places on the rostrum of the Congress along with comrades of the leadership of the Youth Organization such as Nako Spiru, Ramiz Alia, Nexhmije Xhuglini, Alqi Kondi, Tasi Mitrushi, and others.

There was a moment of expectant silence which was broken when the voice of a young man rang out, full of emotion, which affected all of us.

«Comrades,» he said, «in the name of all the delegates, who represent the youth of the liberated and unliberated zones, and all the detachments of our army, I welcome to the Congress of the youth the main leaders of the Communist Party, the Army and our new State. In expressing our heartfelt thanks to them, let me say that we consider their participation in the Congress a great honour, encouragement and assistance for the younger generation of Albania!»

This young man, still slim in build, but with keen eyes and fiery words, was Comrade Ramiz Alia. I met him personally for the first time at Helmës, although, you might say, we had long been acquainted at a distance. The comrades, especially Nako and Nexhmije, had spoken to me about Ramiz with respect and sympathy, as a skilful and militant young comrade who had distinguished himself, initially in Tirana, and especially in the organization and leadership of the Committee and Organization of the Youth of the region of Berat. Two months earlier I had received a letter from him, which struck me immediately for the competence with which he raised problems of the pol-

itical work and work with the youth in the 7th Shock Brigade, in which right from the outset, he had been charged with the duties of comrade responsible for the youth organization and work in the political section of the brigade. In my reply I congratulated him and transmitted the advice and instructions of the leadership of the Party to carry forward the work for the education of the youth. At that time Ramiz was quite young but with clear and mature opinions, a militant type and with initiative, qualities which he displayed again in the days when the proceedings of the Congress took place. At Helmës the delegates elected him a member of the leadership of the Albanian Anti-fascist Youth Union and from then on, through ceaseless work and fruitful activity, he was to advance further on the road he had taken as one of the main leaders of the Youth, and subsequently of the Party, and we were to be linked together in a close collaboration and friendship which is based on our work for the triumph of the ideal of the Party.

The hall for the 1st Congress of the Youth was the meadow, the sessions were held outside in the fresh air of Marta Pass.

Delivering a message of greetings to the Congress on behalf of the Central Committee of the Party, I spoke to the representatives of the Youth about the great trust which the Party had always placed in the heroic younger generation of Albania and made a high assessment of the great contribution of the youth in the war for freedom, and went on to point out:

«New battles await us to construct the Homeland, to strengthen the democratic state power, to set our

Albania on the road to happiness! Therefore, you young men and women of Albania who today are in the forefront of the gigantic struggle for the freedom of the Homeland, from these moments on must always be in the forefront of the work for the reconstruction of the country, for the elimination of its backwardness, for the defence and flowering of this soil which we are watering with our blood.»

The delegates welcomed my greeting on behalf of the Central Committee with ovations. With their enthusiastic cheers and shouts as well as in their contributions to the discussion, they expressed their love for and unshakeable confidence in the Communist Party and their determination to forge ahead unwaveringly on its course.

We, too, had great desire to stay there in the meadow of Lirëz, where the freshness, vigour and strength of the youth was predominant. However, we left the youth to carry on with their work because new work and tasks were awaiting us. As we were walking happily down the slope, amidst continuous cheers, we ceaselessly repeated the leitmotiv of our talks :

«We will certainly triumph over any enemy who emerges before us!»

Doctor Nishani, deeply moved, wiped away his tears with his handkerchief and said:

«Look what this Party has done! Look what patriotism it has aroused in the hearts of the youth!»

Leaving the youth above to carry on with their Congress, we members of the Central Committee of the Party, the Anti-fascist Committee and the Standing Committee of the Council continued our work from

morning till late at night, defining the measures to bring the day of liberation as close as possible, to heal the wounds of the war, to rebuild the homes, schools and bridges, to ensure the people's food, to revive that little industry we had, etc.

There was so much work that, as they say, there was scarcely time to draw a breath. But we were all confidence and optimism: after so many years of struggle and efforts we saw that freedom was close at hand, the people would enjoy it completely, as never before, in a new Albania without oppressors or exploiters.

It was quite obvious that the autumn of 1944 would be the last season of the occupation in Albania. The whole South had been liberated, together with the big main towns like Vlora, Gjirokastra, Saranda, Përmet, etc. Likewise, through bloody fighting the greater part of Central Albania had been liberated, while in the North the enemy still held control of some towns and communication lines as routes for their withdrawal beyond our state borders.

In fact, the occupation authorities, the quisling government and its administration had no real power: in all the liberated zones which in October of that year comprised about 3/4 of the territory of Albania, the new people's state power had been established and was functioning with its organs from the base to the centre. Everything indicated that the enemy was no longer capable of making serious attempts to re-establish the former situation; the complete liberation of Albania was a matter of weeks.

In these circumstances the leadership of the Party discussed the measures which had to be taken, es-

pecially in the political plane, in the face of these pending events, and taking into account the existing internal situation and the international relations of our new state, the Central Committee of the Party considered it urgently necessary to transform the Anti-fascist National Liberation Committee into the Provisional Democratic Government of Albania.

As I have said above, and as is known from history, although the Anti-fascist Committee which was elected in Përmet had all the attributes of a government (amongst ourselves this is what we called it), publicly we did not call it a government, and this was for several reasons.

True, the Congress of Përmet founded the Albanian state, new in form and different in content from the feudal-bourgeois state of the Zog regime; true, the supreme state organs which were elected at Përmet had the wide support of the popular masses, and expressed and wielded state sovereignty, but it must not be forgotten that in May 1944 a good part of Albania was still under the occupation and control of nazi troops and quisling administrations. At the same time, in May 1944, we had not yet created a complete network of administrative organs through which the government could run and control the whole life of the country. Apart from this, had we proclaimed the formation of a nominal government in May 1944, this would have raised the question that this government should be recognized by our allies, which would not have been tactically opportune at those moments. This because the Anglo-American allies, especially, of the extent of whose «sympathy» for us we were well



aware, would have refused us recognition, using as a pretext the circumstances which I mentioned above. Therefore, it was decided that the Committee should be turned into a government at a second step, when the general offensive of our army had almost totally destroyed the German occupier, internal reaction, and together with them, the hopes of «allies» to oppose another political force to the National Liberation Movement, as a counter-weight in the struggle for power.

In September 1944, the leadership of the Party considered that the conditions for this new step had matured and raised the problem for discussion in the meeting of the Standing Committee of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council. After pointing out to the comrades the reasons why at Përmet we emerged with the Anti-fascist Committee and why now it had to be turned into and proclaimed the Democratic Government of the new Albanian state, I concluded:

«The proposal that the Anti-fascist National Liberation Committee elected at Përmet should be turned into the Provisional Democratic Government of the new Albanian state is the logical continuation of the course on which the Communist Party has led the popular masses for the liberation of the country and the seizure of political state power. In this sense, the meeting which will approve this proposal of the Party will be a continuation of the Congress of Përmet, a 'session' of it which is held a few months later.»

All the comrades of the Standing Committee of the Council welcomed the proposal of the Central Committee of the CPA with enthusiasm and agreed that the 2nd Meeting of the Anti-fascist National Liberation

Council should be called in the first days of October. The precise date would be communicated to members of the ANLC later, together with the name of the city in which the meeting would be held, which was left to the General Staff to decide depending on the military situation. Only a few days after this meeting we learned that the city of Berat had been liberated. We decided immediately that the 2nd Meeting of the ANLC should be held there, taking into account that it was one of the main cities of Albania, in the centre of the country and with ancient historical traditions. However, the date for the commencement of the meeting was put back a little because the German troops still held their positions in Kuçova and a certain time would be needed to assemble all the members of the Anti-fascist Council. Meanwhile, we ordered our units which were operating in that zone to put an end to the resistance of the nazis as quickly as possible, and it seems to me two to three days before the commencement of the meeting of Berat, Kuçova, too, was liberated.

Thus, at the proper time we set out from Odriçan, travelled across Skrapar and, after a journey of two days, arrived at Berat late at night.

On the following day, when the people learned that the comrades of the Anti-fascist Committee and the General Staff had come to their city, they flocked into the streets. Men and women, old folk, mothers with children in their arms, boys and girls, pioneers welcomed us with songs and protracted cheers. For hours on end, the singing and cheering continued in the streets as well as in front of the building where

we had established ourselves on the edge of Mangalem precinct in which the district museum of the National Liberation War is established today, and which previously had been the house of the Vrionis.

The city was buzzing with normal happy life: the partisans and volunteers had established law and order. Berat had not suffered major damage from the war, although there was some destruction and burnt buildings, but in comparison with Përmet where we had met a few months earlier, Berat was in a much better state. During those days all of us, partisans and leaders, lived in an atmosphere which we had not experienced for a long time. The streets were full of life, the shops open and full of goods (of course, those goods which could be found at that time), and the cafés and restaurants stayed open late. Nevertheless, we did not «justify» the hopes of the merchants and owners of those businesses because, while we would have liked to buy something, we were short of money, and when the comrades managed to scrape up the odd *lek* from their pockets, they spent it on tobacco, a razor blade or to drink a coffee like «lords» in the *Colombo Hotel!*

During those days, the allied military missions of the Soviet Union, Great Britain and the United States of America, headed respectively by Ivanov, Smith and Thomas Stevens, alias Thoma Stefani, also established themselves in Berat. Of course, Colonel Velimir Stojnic and the other Yugoslav «friends» were there, too. We invited all of them to take part in the meeting of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council as representatives of friendly countries and allies in the common

war against nazi fascism. Of course, Ivanov and Stojnić accepted the invitation «with pleasure» and likewise the American from Korça, Stevens, who had also taken part in the Congress of Përmet as «an observer». Surprisingly, the British, too, unlike what they had done at Përmet, agreed to attend the meeting to which they sent Major Smith who had replaced Palmer who had left in the first days of October. After the setback they had suffered in their attempts to speak to us through the language of force, the members of the British Mission were now careful to mix a measure of «kindness» and «good behaviour» with intrigues and threats in their stands. Apparently they had finally realized that their plan with Abaz Kupi and others like him had no chance of success and now they were to try to work within the National Liberation Movement, within the Front, through other Trojan horses, in order to sabotage the victory of the people's revolution.

The historic meeting of Berat began on October 20. About 10 o'clock in the morning we members of the Standing Committee and the Anti-fascist National Liberation Committee set off on foot for the hall in which the meeting was to be held and which is preserved to this day as a monument of history. Both sides of the street were crowded with people who shouted greetings and threw flowers to us. In front of the cinema, partisans of a company of the 7th Shock Brigade which had fought for the liberation of the city were lined up saluting arms.

When we entered the hall, the members of the Council and the guests rose to their feet in applause. Nearly half the hall, the boxes and the gallery were

filled with people. We had fought together, everything was done in the name of the people, therefore, as they say, we laid our cards on the table: the people themselves would see how a meeting of their representatives elected democratically at Përmet was conducted. There was nothing wrong with this except that Doctor Nishani, who chaired the proceedings, had to work harder, being obliged to intervene on a number of occasions to persuade the enthusiastic people to cease their continuous cheering.

«Quiet, please,» said Omer Nishani «sternly», «we are at a working meeting and not a rally!»

Everything was simple, natural and moving. Here there were no «deputies» with gold watch-chains, tail-coats and tasselled epaulettes, no beribboned guards, no «protocol secretary» with the pile of dossiers, papers and ink-pots as in the parliament of the Zogite «fathers of the nation». The deputies to this «parliament» were simple folk, sons of the people who came from the fronts of the war. They had neither inherited titles nor estates but had love for the people which they had proven in battles and were determined to work for the happy future of the Homeland. This fact, alone, together with many others, showed that what was occurring in Albania was a radical change, the dawn of a new world, in which the scorned and oppressed of the past, through fighting, bloodshed and revolution, had won the right to decide the fate of the nation.

The hall had been decorated with flags, flowers and laurel wreaths. On the curtain at the back of the stage there was a very big flag of Albania, lovingly

embroidered, and on both sides of it the slogan «Death to Fascism — Freedom to the People». On the side walls there were portraits of patriots of the Renaissance and martyrs of the National Liberation War as well as banners with «Long live the people's state power!» and «Long live the National Liberation Army!», written in big letters.

The chairman of the Standing Committee of the ANLC, Dr. Omer Nishani, opened the meeting with a short speech in which he briefly summed up the internal and external situation and presented to the members of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council the purpose of the meeting.

«In this situation,» he said, «when three quarters of Albania are under our jurisdiction, the Standing Committee of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council considered it necessary to summon this meeting of the Council to approve the transformation of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Committee into the Democratic Government of Albania. The Standing Committee considered it reasonable that this decision should be taken solemnly by the whole Council, although on the basis of the competences with which it was charged at Përmet, it could have carried out such an act itself.»

The immediate applause of the members of the ANLC and the people present in the hall demonstrated in advance their approval of the proposal for this historic act which would be voted on at the end of the meeting. After Dr. Nishani's opening address I was given the floor as chairman of the Anti-fascist Na-

tional Liberation Committee to deliver the report in the name of this Committee.

After a brief exposé of the international situation, in which I stressed the major fresh victories of the Red Army, which was now fighting in Poland and Czechoslovakia and in East Prussia, as well as the fact that at last the Anglo-Americans had opened the second front in France, I presented a tableau of the successes which our people and our army led by the Party had achieved in the decisive offensive to drive the nazi beast from the sacred soil of the Homeland.

«The decisions of the Congress of Përmet are being successfully accomplished,» I reported to the Council, «Our divisions and brigades smashed the second German offensive and marched triumphantly towards Northern Albania and together with the defeats which they inflicted on the divisions of the Wehrmacht, they made the çeta of the Balli Kombëtar and the bands of Shefqet Vërlaci and Abaz Kupi, Fiqri Dine and Halil Alia, of Markagjoni and Muharrem Bajraktari, melt away like snow in the rain.»

In my speech I spoke with passion and inspiration about the epic heroism of our National Liberation Army, about our brave partisans, commanders and commissars, who uniformed or in rags, fed or hungry, in the summer heat or freezing cold, on the plains, in the cities and on the mountain peaks, fought with self-sacrifice, defended the Homeland, soaked every inch of this land in blood and fell with songs on their lips and made death «like birth». Where did this army find its strength and support, where was it armed, fed and sheltered? Among the people!

«Our army,» I pointed out in this part of the report, «has been armed in the war with the weapons it seized from the enemy in battle, has been fed with the bread of the people who shared their children's crust with the partisans. The homes of the people, the mountains and forests of the Homeland have been and are the barracks of our army. But,» I said, turning to the allied military representatives, «for the common interests of this sacred war, in order to arm the thousands of volunteers who are increasing the ranks of our army every day and in order to block the roads for the withdrawal of the German forces and to wipe them out, we ask our allies for weapons, weapons, weapons! No one can refuse us the right to fight; no one can break our will to fight and to win; but, we repeat, we demand weapons and ammunition!»

Who knows how many times I had addressed this request to our «friends», who can remember in how many meetings, talks, official letters and radiograms we had told them we were not asking for sweets and chocolates or anything else apart from weapons, cartridges and shells! We repeated these demands and received promises, hypocritical diplomatic smiles, excuses and offers to sell out the Homeland. We appealed to them for the sincere aid of the allies, but our appeals were like a *vox in deserto*\*. There was nothing we could do about it; this has been the fate of our people; rarely have we had loyal friends and sincere allies. But what of it, perhaps precisely this has made the people more vital, more indomitable and has convinced

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\* A voice in the wilderness.



them that they can expect freedom and happiness only by relying on their own forces.

In the report I dwelt particularly on the political effects which the formation of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Committee at the Congress of Përmet had had. Here I stressed the enthusiasm with which this event had been greeted by the Albanian people who, in thousands of letters, had expressed their joy over the formation of the first people's government and also expressed their will to support and assist it in its activity for the good of Albania.

Quite the opposite was the response of the reactionary circles and forces, for whom the formation of the Anti-fascist Committee was a bombshell which completely destroyed their fantastic dreams. «The formation of the Committee with the attributes of a revolutionary government,» I stressed particularly and not without purpose, «made ridiculous the attempts of reaction inside and outside Albania to create puppet governments without any sympathy or support among the people. Whoever engages in the production of such creations doomed to failure is playing the game of the enemies of the Albanian people!»

I went on to report about the work and activity which the Anti-fascist National Liberation Committee had carried out during this four-month period. In this part of my speech I presented to the Council a summary of the efforts of the Committee for the reorganization of the life in the liberated districts, in the cities and villages, about the measures which had been taken to get the economy functioning, to ensure food

and shelter for the population, to ensure the health service, the opening of schools, the development of culture and propaganda.

Both with their prolonged bursts of applause while I was reading the report and in their discussion of it later, the members of the Council made a positive assessment and approved the activity of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Committee.

Up till that time the Anti-fascist National Liberation Committee had based its work on a still embryonic, incomplete administrative system. Only the Committee had established a division of work, had the departments which covered the different sectors of the life of the country, while at the base, in the national liberation councils in the regions and cities, the organization had only just begun; they had just begun to set up separate sections, to create the administrative apparatus, etc. Of course, we were still at war, the state had just been born, and the cadres and experience were lacking. Everything would advance step by step, practice itself would suggest to us the appropriate forms and would teach us how to run affairs and govern.

After explaining to the comrades the manner of the organization and functioning of our new state, I went on to the main object of the 2nd Meeting of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council, the proposal that the Anti-fascist Committee should be turned into the Provisional People's Democratic Government.

«The Democratic Government which will emerge from this meeting,» I said, «will remain faithful to the political and military platform of the National Liber-

ation Movement and the decisions of the Congress of Përmet. In the first place, it will continue the task for the complete liberation of the Homeland and carry it through to the end. After the complete liberation of Albania,» I continued, «and after the situation has been stabilized, the Democratic Government will ensure and organize free democratic elections for the Constituent Assembly, which will decide the form of the state and approve the Constitution of the Albanian state.

«The government will seek recognition from the allies of the great anti-fascist bloc as the only government of the Albanian people, emerged from the war and from the ranks of the people, which represents and expresses the will of the whole Albanian people. The allies will recognize our government,» I pointed out, «because with their own eyes they have seen the sacrifices we have made in this terrible and unequal war, have seen the daily heroism of our small but indomitable people, who in very difficult conditions, hurled themselves upon the enemy with untold self-sacrifice.»

After the report which I delivered on behalf of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Committee, which took about an hour, we took a break during which a concert with patriotic partisan songs was given by the artistic groups of the military detachments and the youth of the city of Berat. The people in the hall and the participants in the meeting sang together with the «artists» on the stage. Perhaps this joint concert, outside the bounds of the stage, was a bit rough and did not satisfy the artistic demands of the conductor; there were some who sang flat, some who did not know the words of the songs properly, while some

forgot that the concert had a set program, and after one song was over, wanted to go on with another that they liked better; nevertheless, everyone was satisfied, happy and joyful; the comrades were rejoicing in their hearts and they showed this in their eyes!

After this break, the session recommenced with the greetings of representatives of allied countries, Who, speaking in general terms, praised our successes in the National Liberation War and expressed sympathy and support for our people. Of course, the greetings of each of them had their own nuances, depending on their aims and the stands which they maintained towards us, even if only in appearance.

For example, Smith, despite the criticism aimed at him for the insufficient, not to say, non-existent aid, did not mention that matter at all, but simply promised that «the allies will not forget their wartime friends in times of peace», as if to warn us that after the war, too, we would have plenty of problems with them; the American of Albanian origin, but totally degenerated, in broken Albanian, expressed his pleasure, «as an American soldier and an Albanian from his family origin».

The haughty Velimir Stojnić spoke longer than the others, and in his speech in the Serbian language the frequent repetition of the words Tito, Yugoslavia, the Balkans, etc. was very noticeable. When his speech was translated, it was realized that the Yugoslav colonel had spoken mostly about the war of Yugoslavia and Tito rather than welcome this historic event to which we had invited him; Stojnić spoke about «the unity of the Balkan peoples» and also mentioned the

famous «federation», promised «the aid and support of sister Yugoslavia», but did not say one word about the fight of our forces in aid of the National Liberation Movement in Kosova and Dibra as a concrete expression of the militant fraternization of our peoples and countries in the battles against the common enemy.

The greeting of Major Ivanov was welcomed with enthusiasm by the delegates. When he took the floor as well as at the end of his speech, the hall echoed with cheers for great Stalin and the Red Army, and in the midst of Ivanov's short address, one of the comrades in the hall shouted in the Russian language, «*Da Zdrastvuyet Sovyetskiy Soyuz!*»\* Of course, this was an expression of the great love which we Albanian communists had for the Bolshevik Party, for Lenin and Stalin, for the first socialist country in the world, and with this love our Party had educated the whole people, who saw in the Soviet Union not only the colossal force which crushed the fascist beast, but also the great supporter of the peoples of the world in the war for freedom and social justice.

Compared with the sincere and enthusiastic welcome it received from those present, Ivanov's speech was extremely dry. Indeed, in the assessment which he made of the war of our people, who by «fighting behind the enemy's lines, had given them great assistance», there were some signs of megalomania. I have written about my impression of this envoy of the Soviet Command. We had welcomed his coming with joy and considered it a great aid. However, we had

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\* Long live the Soviet Union!

no benefit from Ivanov, he gave us no precise information and when we asked him about something or sought his opinion, his only reply was: «I shall inform Moscow by radio», because he had a radio transmitter with him. Ivanov knew we needed weapons and military supplies, but his radio never worked to transmit our needs to the Soviet command and nothing came to us from there.

The tone of the contributions of our comrades participating in the meeting, who, in their fiery speeches, rejoiced at our freedom, expressed the will and aspirations of the people and their confidence in and optimism about the brilliant future, was entirely different.

In his contribution, the writer and fighter Haki Stërmilli spoke about the war of the people of Dibra who had revived and further developed their patriotic traditions in the National Liberation War, mentioned the names of sons of Dibra like Nazmi Rushiti and others, who had given their lives for a free and democratic Albania. In the name of the people of that district, Haki Stërmilli expressed his approval that the meeting should decide on the formation of the Democratic Government.

The patriot Hysen Zaloshnja brought the voice and will of the people of Berat and Skrapar. Perhaps his speech was not so well put together as that of the author of the book *If I Were a Boy*. Indeed. Uncle Hysen read the speech which he had written out rather hesitantly and, in the end, put aside the sheet of paper in front of him and spoke clearly in that popular idiom of his about the free life which the people of Skrapar and Berat had been enjoying for some little time; he also touched on problems which

were now emerging for the people's state power, dwelling especially on such «problems» as the health service, the schools, etc.

The next to speak was Met Seseri from Kruja, who pointed out that, despite the efforts of Mustafa Kruja and Abaz Kupi, the people of Kruja were never weaned away from the National Liberation Movement. Abedin Çiçi, Haxhi Lleshi, Ethem Barhani, Kadri Baboçi, Manol Konomi, Ymer Dishnica, Nako Spiru, Shefqet Beja and many others, I can't remember them all, all spoke in turn. The comrades who spoke unanimously approved the proposal for the transformation of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Committee into a Provisional Government.

In this session a fine and well-prepared contribution was made by Comrade Spiro Koleka, who at Përmet had been put in charge of the department of public works and was one of the most active comrades of the Committee. After stressing the importance of the meeting and expressing his approval of the decision which was to be taken, Koleka dwelt on the major economic problems which we faced.

«Besides the war with arms for the liberation of the country,» he said, «now we face another struggle in the front of work. We have many many problems which await solution in regard to industry, agriculture, the roads and bridges, houses, schools, hospitals, etc. To accomplish all these things requires ceaseless and tireless work, the collective work of all. We shall do all these things ourselves,» stressed Spiro Koleka, among other things, «because economic freedom, too, is not donated, but is gained through work and sweat»

The discussion continued on the following day, October 22. It was a Sunday and such beautiful fine weather that it was hard to believe it was the end of October. When we were going to the cinema where the meeting was held we were constantly surrounded by the people who were in especially large numbers at the entrance of the building. That day the vote was to be taken on the question of transforming the Anti-fascist National Liberation Committee into the Provisional Democratic Government. As I said, however, the voting would be only a formal juridical act; not only those who took part in the discussion, but also the others in the hall, through their enthusiasm which now grew in crescendo, had already expressed their approval. That day the atmosphere in the hall seemed to have reached its climax. The cheers and ovations which accompanied the words of the comrades who mounted the podium were such that the comrade who was keeping the minutes of the meeting had thrown up his arms in despair, powerless to catch the words which were said to record them in the minutes. Later, when the other comrades and I checked over the documents of the meeting, we laughed loudly when in the part of the minutes there were only the names of the speakers and the note, «Because of the great enthusiasm in the hall it is impossible to keep notes».

In this situation, after five or six comrades had spoken, and after the ceaseless shouts of the members of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council and the people, «Democratic Government!» and «Put it to the vote!», Dr. Omer Nishani declared the discussion closed and, after establishing a moment's silence, said:



«Let us vote on the proposal that the Anti-fascist National Liberation Committee should be turned into the Provisional Democratic Government of Albania, All in favour raise their fists.»

Everyone stood up with their clenched fists raised high. Together with the members of the Council, the guests, too, the people, rose to their feet and voted. This time, however, the scrupulous Omer Nishani did not notice «the violation of the rules of procedure».

After this historic decision, Dr. Omer Nishani announced that the Standing Committee of the ANLC had charged me with the task of head of the Democratic Government. In the afternoon session I was to present to the Council the program and composition of the Government.

In the afternoon session, on behalf of the Government, I made a programmatic declaration which expressed the commitment of the new Government to carry the war for the liberation of the country through to the end, to remain loyal to the historic decisions of Përmet, to strengthen the people's state power, to defend and guarantee the democratic rights for the popular masses, etc. At the same time, in the declaration I also announced the request to the allies for recognition of the Provisional Democratic Government as the only lawful government of the Albanian people. The composition of the Government was identical with that of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Committee.

Thus, on October 23, the 2nd Meeting of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council came to an end. The historic decision which it took for the trans-

formation of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Committee into a Democratic Government was an indispensable historic step, a logical consequence of the war and the popular revolution under the leadership of the Party. With this decision, the taking of political power by the working masses who had overthrown the old state power through war became a reality *de facto* and *de jure*. The importance of this historic decision was to be reflected later, too, in the deepening of the revolution, in the further steps which the Party took at different stages and at the proper time.

After the closing of the meeting, we walked from the hall to the premises where the Government had been established amongst the cheering people. A large crowd had gathered in front of the building where we had established ourselves. The chiefs of the allied missions, who had come for «a courtesy visit» to congratulate us, were astonished at what they saw and, of course, this did not please some of them. We parted from the masses of people who had surrounded us, but even when we went inside there was no end to the powerful cheering:

Long live free Albania! Long live the Democratic Government! Long live the Communist Party! Long live the heroic National Liberation Army!

Omer Nishani was deeply moved and put his hand on my shoulder:

«Enver, you must appear before them, don't you hear them?» he said and he took out his handkerchief and wiped his tears of emotion from his spectacles.

I went to the window and thanked them with words which came from my heart. I don't remember

precisely what I said, we had no microphones or loudspeakers, but the people understood what I was saying, passed it on from one to the other and cheered. They had confidence in their own sons, tested in the common war. On the insistence of the people, after me the other comrades also appeared at the window.

And now work! Work and struggle at the head of the Party and the people, leading the great battles which awaited us!

Several times a day I talked with Medar, Baca, Koleka, Gjergj Kokoshi, Bedri Spahiu and others about the problems of the departments of which they were in charge. Will, courage and a great deal of work were needed to cope with such urgent questions as the procurement of grain, the repair of roads and bridges, the opening of schools and courses against illiteracy. And all this at a time when the country was still at war, when in the liberated districts and cities the ashes left behind by the enemy's barbarity were still hot.

«Winter is approaching and a good part of the people are without food or shelter,» I told the comrades in these talks. «The work must be intensified in the villages and precincts to ensure that, by helping one another, each family has at least a room. The difficulties are great, but let us continue with that enthusiasm, confidence and determination with which we began the war. This is the only way in which to achieve our aim!»

Medar Shtylla raised another problem: «We must take measures for the protection of the livestock, especially the working oxen,» he said. «The autumn

sowing is not yet completed and we must give serious consideration to how this work can be done. We must have bread. We must persuade the peasants to use horses and mules, too, for the sowing; we have sent out a circular for this purpose and will see how things go...»

Thus, one after the other, we discussed and took decisions on various problems of the economy, culture, the health service, etc. For the things that we did not know, we asked comrades who were specialists, discussed with one another, and in the suggestions and opinions of the comrades found the most rational way. The most important thing was to respond to the enthusiasm and trust of the people with tireless work, day and night, to honourably uphold the responsibilities with which we had been charged and the promises we had made.

«This is no time for parades!» I told some comrades who insisted «we should go here, we should go there,» for visits and meetings. «We must get down to work, sleep little and don't forget we are not allowed to get tired! We will go to rallies and we will meet the people, but in the first place we must do our duty!»

We stayed in Berat about a month and the lights in the building which the Government had occupied, could be seen burning late and, not rarely, right through till morning. The comrades who were ministers were obliged to involve themselves not only in the main questions, but also in minor matters, down to technical details, because our «apparatus» was absolutely minimal and a whole ministry occupied only one

or two rooms in the government building. Somebody came to me and raised the problem of cadres, of deputy-ministers, but I cut him short saying:

«Later we shall have everything just as it should be. Now we ourselves are ministers, directors, and clerks, all in one.»

Another comrade came and complained that in his department there was nothing, neither means, funds, specialists nor material base. I understood him, the situation which he reported to me was real, but nothing could be achieved with «demands» and «complaints» to the Government.

«We waged the war with the people,» I told him. «The people who have nothing to eat themselves are keeping us, too, and we'll do these jobs together with the people. Where is the Government going to find what you want? We are striving for one cause, therefore we cannot separate the problems of our Government from those of the people; both today and in the future we shall turn to the people and no one else for everything. No manna is going to fall to us from Heaven.»

We had such talks, meetings and working contacts everyday, indeed, several times a day, but these neither wearied nor bored us. The work of the Party and the state, the leadership of our National Liberation Army in the final battles, were a burden which the Party and the people had charged us to carry and we would carry them on our backs indefatigably, especially now that we were on the eve of the great victory.

During those days in Berat, however, the grave situation which was created by the anti-Marxist and anti-Albanian interference of Tito's envoy, Velimir

Stojnić, and especially by the trap and plot which he was preparing, together with Koçi Xoxe, Sejfulla, Pandi Kristo and others against the Communist Party of Albania and the future of our Homeland, were causing us deep distress. As to what were the aims of this hostile plot, this we were to realize later, but as I have written in detail in the book *The Titoites*, as early as those days I was convinced that the line of our Party was being unjustly attacked by Tito's envoy.

In recalling those moments, I remember quite well what great efforts I imposed on myself to avoid communicating my concern and worry to other comrades. On the one hand, I had to fight to defend the purity of the line of the Party against the hostile work of the Yugoslav representative and the clique which he was forming, and on the other hand I had to overcome all my worries and welcome the comrades of the Council and the Government with a smile when they came to talk over various problems and to discuss the measures and decisions we would take immediately after we entered Tirana.

With sadness in my heart, but a smile on my face, I also welcomed the delegates of the city of Berat who came to me to convey their congratulations to the valiant Party which liberated the people. They were not aware of my desperation, did not know that a group of Trotskyites was throwing mud at this Party which the people loved so much.

After we had talked a little, one of the old men of the delegation from the city, said to me:

«Comrade Commander, we have a request from the people of Berat.»

«Tell me what it is,» I said with a smile.

«The people of Berat want our city, Berat, to become the capital of the new Albania.»

This request was something quite unexpected, and laughing I told him:

«When the history of the time of the Party is written, it will be said that for a time Berat was the capital of the new Albania, because both the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council and the first Democratic Government of our country are centred here now. Later, the Constituent Assembly will have its say and decide both the form of the regime that the new Albania is to have and its capital. I am unable to satisfy your request, but I can tell you that the opinion of the Party and the people is that the capital should be Tirana, which will soon be liberated once and for all.»

«Let it be as the Party sees best!» said the wise and patriotic old men of Berat. We parted warmly and I accompanied them downstairs. Their visit, their warm words addressed to the Party and the Government, eased my distress and increased my strength, but meanwhile I knew that up there in the offices where we worked and lived, there were other comings and goings, slanders, accusations and ceaseless pressures awaiting us.

During those days in Berat we were also preparing for two other important events, the Conference of the National Liberation Front and the Congress of Anti-fascist Women. The Conference of the Front which was held, if I am not mistaken, 3 or 4 days after the 2nd Meeting of the Anti-fascist National

Liberation Council, was to discuss and approve the decision that from now on the National Liberation Front should be a great political organization of all the honest people who fought for a free, democratic people's Albania, leaving the functions of state power to the national liberation councils. As we had agreed in the leadership of the Party, the organization of the Front would create its own cells everywhere, the councils of the Front, which would play a colossal role for the unification of the people, for the mobilization of all their creative energies and abilities in the service of the cause of the construction of the new Albania.

Precisely when we were preparing for this Conference as well as during its proceedings, Velimir Stojnić and Nijaz Dizdarević, in unity and collaboration with Koçi Xoxe, Sejfulla Malëshova, Nako Spiru and others, tried to attack and distort the line of the Party in connection with the National Liberation Front. The accusations about «sectarianism» which they had put on the agenda, were reflected in their «suggestions» and «recommendations» to extend the «bounds of the Front». Putting it bluntly, this would have meant that elements who, during the years of the war, had not fought or had even attacked us with arms, should be admitted in the National Liberation Front. Neither Tito's delegates nor their Albanian acolytes were short of «arguments» in favour of this. This was a stage on the way to realizing the plan worked out in Belgrade to attack the Communist Party of Albania, to show that during the years of its existence it had allegedly proved incapable of working



out and following a correct political line and thus, the terrain would be prepared for Tito and his men to take over the reins of Albania.

Koçi, Sejfulla and the others came to me one after the other as though by chance, and repeated the tale which I had first heard from Stojnić.

«The Front, as a broad organization of the masses, should not have, and there is no reason for it to have, strictly defined limits,» Sejfulla said to me on one occasion. «After Liberation, we, who have our state power, ought to have all the forces with us in the Front and not against us, otherwise there will be the risk of civil war!»

«I don't understand, what are you referring to concretely?» I asked him.

«The mistakes which have been made previously, which were justified for the circumstances of that time, we have the opportunity to repair today,» he said. «Thus, wisely and gently, we shall prevent possible opponents from taking the initiative. And what can they do to us within the Front? Practically nothing! They have no strength, have no base, and we'll tie their hands politically.»

«This would be the greatest favour which we could do them.» I interrupted. «Let us not forget that the Front is the political organization of the people, of patriots who have fought for liberation and the people's state power. While you propose we should allow into it traitors and criminals who will fight us from within tomorrow, and even provide the conditions for them to penetrate into our organs of power right up to the Government. This we must never

allow! This we did not do even in the most difficult times and we acted correctly and not wrongly, let alone now when the war itself has defined who remained to the end in the ranks of the enemy.»

«I don't say that we should allow them into the Party,» persisted the «professor». «The Front is not like the Party — let us not confuse the two notions, because we shall make political mistakes. Neither do I say that we should allow Mithat Frashëri into the Front or open its doors to Abaz Kupi! No, those would be grave blunders (!). But what would be wrong, for example, with Cen Elezi? He has stood aloof, is it in our interest to have him against us? Does he not have some people with him? Let us not forget the psychology of our highlanders, they follow the chiefs, trust them... Let us exploit this opportunity. The Yugoslav comrades also have a similar idea and we ought to value their practice, too; then historical experience teaches us that in the Soviet Union, too...»

«Listen, Sejfulla,» I broke into the lecture into which he was launching. «I am opposed in principle to opening the doors of the Front 'without limits' as you say. I do not rule out the possibility that we should discuss some concrete element, examine his past, the effectiveness of his stand and take a decision.»

This was the beginning of that campaign which was to reach its culmination at the 2nd Plenum of the Central Committee of the Party in Berat, with the accusations of Koçi, Sejfulla, Nako Spiru, Naxhije Dume and others, orchestrated by the Titoites, that allegedly «we had not kept close to the people», «the doors had been closed and the Front had become narrow», etc.

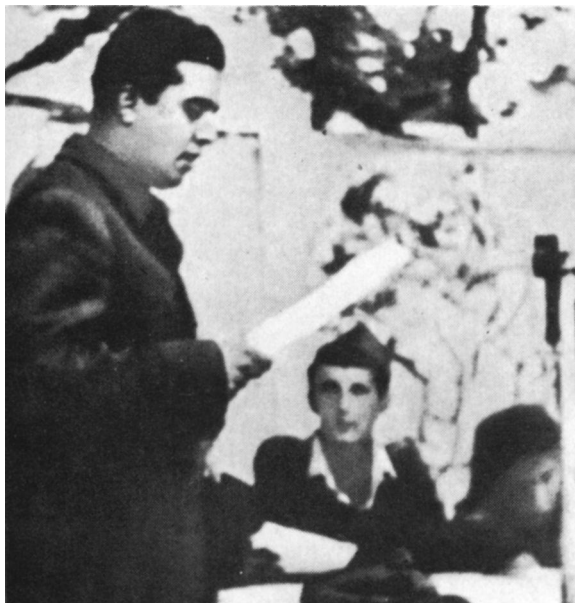


**The homes of Mehmet Myslimi (above) and Nevruz Bilimani (below) at Helmës of Skrapar where Comrade Enver Hoxha has lived and worked in the spring and summer of 1944**





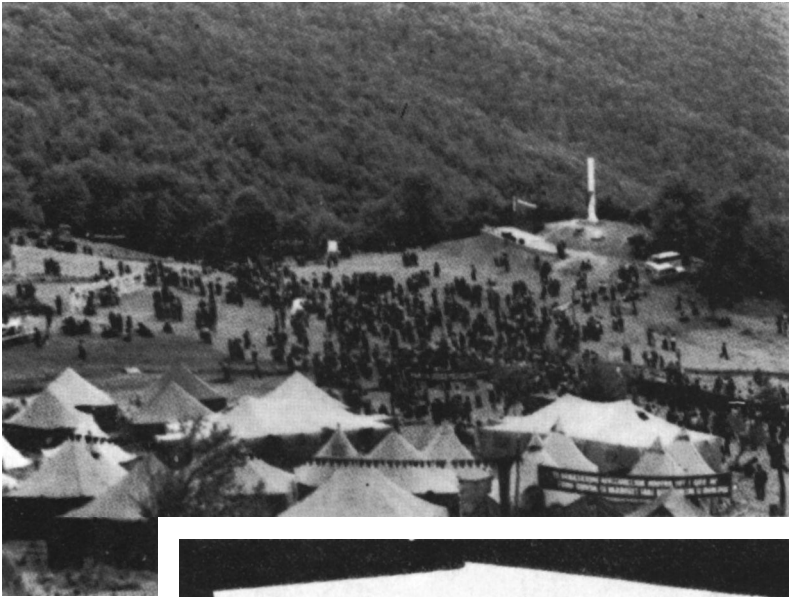
**"All the delegates, happy, smiling and full of joy, opened the way for us by lining up on the two sides of the road, and we passed between them as though we were reviewing the guard of honour comprised of young men and women partisans facing one another, saluting arms." (Helmès, August 1944)**



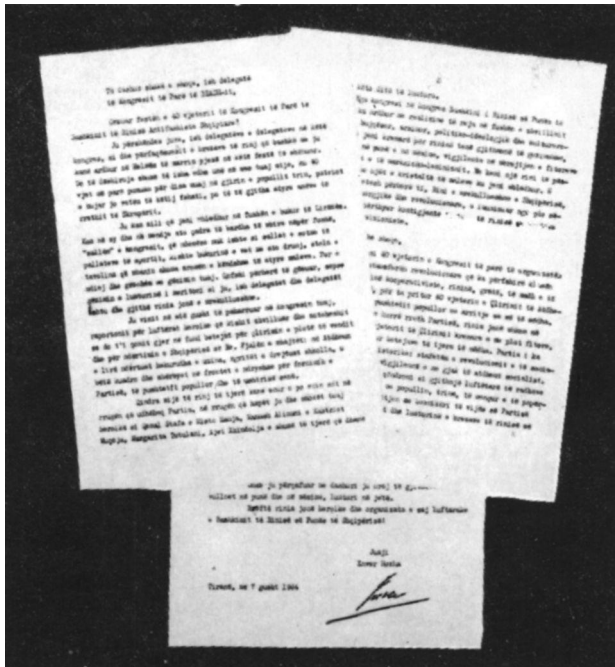
**Comrade Enver Hoxha  
greeting the participants  
in the 1st Congress of  
the Albanian Anti-fascist  
Youth Union, August  
1944**

**During the unforgettable days of the Congress**

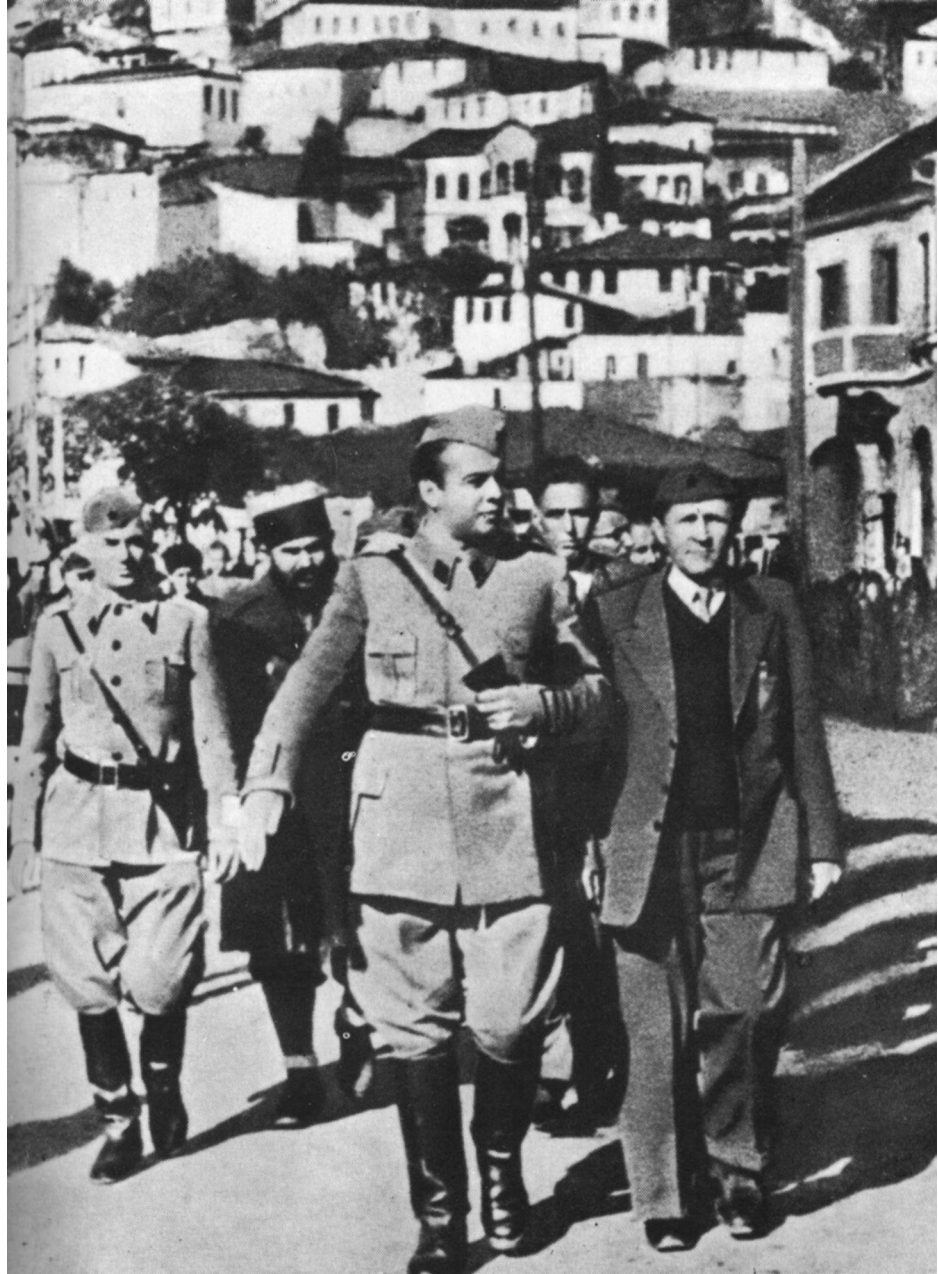




Helmës,  
August 1984



Comrade Enver Hoxha's message of greeting on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Congress of the AAYU



October 1944. In free Berat



**October 23, 1944: "The Democratic Government, which will emerge from this meeting, will remain faithful to the political and military platform of the National Liberation Movement and the Decisions of the Congress of Përmet."**

**The building in which the 2nd Meeting of the ANLC was held**







**Members of the First Provisional Democratic Government  
(from left to right: M. Peza, E. Hoxha, S. Koleka, M. Shtylla, H. Lleshi)**



**The first premises  
of the Democratic Government**



**Comrade Enver Hoxha, Prime Minister of the First  
Democratic Government in Albania**



**In free Tirana. November 28, 1944**



**The victors' parade**

**At the 1st Congress  
of the Democratic  
Front of Albania. Au-  
gust 5, 1945**



**Myzeqe 1945: "May  
you enjoy your own  
land!"**



**January 11, 1946: Albania — a People's Republic**



After such pressures which were exerted day and night, in the office and at meetings, in fact they did not manage to open the doors as they wanted to, but they managed to bring such elements as Cen Elezi, Dan Kaloshi and some others into the National Liberation Front through the window.

The subsequent hostile activity of the «patriots» of this ilk once again clearly demonstrated the correctness of our view and the aims of those who managed to impose themselves on us temporarily. It is interesting that the pressures of the Yugoslav envoys for «the extension of the Front» were in complete conformity, both as a general idea and down to the specific individuals, with those of the British, who demanded our «reconciliation» with Abaz Kupa and other chiefs of reaction.

Meanwhile, the enemy had not been finally driven out. From Berat I signed the order to the 1st Army Corps, divisions and brigades to attack and liberate Tirana. The operational plan for the liberation of the capital, which had been worked out, was a component part of the strategic plan which was to make possible that by the end of November no foreign enemy would be left in the whole of Albania. We had all the possibilities to achieve this objective. Now the National Liberation Army was comprised of over 70,000 fighters organized in brigades, divisions and army corps.

I discussed the final details for the liberation of Tirana with Hysni Kapo, who was the delegate of the Central Committee and commissar of the 1st Army Corps and was the cadre with the main responsibility for carrying out this plan.

And so, on the evening of November 16, the news reached us in Berat that Tirana, the capital of our Homeland, was virtually liberated. Only a few hours of life were left to the occupiers and traitors. With incontainable joy and special emotions I sat down that very evening and wrote the message addressed to the Albanian people about this great good news, (1) while on the following day, the morning of November 17, the final rifle shots were heard and the capital of our Homeland was liberated once and for all.

Now the road for Tirana was opened. After so many years of battles and skirmishes, toil and sacrifices at the head of the Party and the war for freedom, the moment had come for us, the sons and daughters of the people, to enter the capital in triumph.

I proposed that the Government should enter Tirana on November 28, the outstanding day of the proclamation of independence. The very choice of this day for the establishment of the Democratic Government in the capital liberated by the partisan rifles, would be significant.

Although in normal conditions the distance from Berat to Tirana can be travelled by car in not more than three hours, we set out from Berat a day earlier, because the roads were damaged and some unforeseen delay might occur. And in fact, our first journey through the newly liberated Homeland was unable to avoid a certain odyssey. As far as the Bridge of Hasan Bey, as the Vajgurore Bridge was called in those times, we travelled by some cars and motorcycles with side-cars which we had captured from the enemy or

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1 Enver Hoxha, *Works*, vol. 2, p. 586. 2nd Alb. ed.



had requisitioned. There we left the vehicles because, in their withdrawal, the Germans had blown up the bridge and the vehicles could go no further.

So we crossed the Osum River by what means we could find, and climbed into a bus which was waiting for us. When we reached the Kuçi Bridge we left the bus, crossed the river with difficulty on an improvised ferry, and continued on our way. At Rrogozhina we faced another obstacle, the Shkumbin River. We left the bus, crossed the river group by group in a small punt and with a few cars specially sent from Tirana, we turned to the right in the direction of Elbasan, because the road through Rrogozhina, Kavaja to Tirana was mined and the bridges blown up.

Since we had gone through countless difficulties during the war, the vicissitudes of this journey did not make any exceptional impression on us. On the contrary, it gave us the opportunity for jokes and humour. Nevertheless, during the whole time that we were travelling, looking left and right I thought of what enormous work awaited us, because the reconstruction of everything, from the burnt-out houses to these bridges without which we couldn't take a single step, had to be begun.

The city of Elbasan had been liberated for two weeks. From the balcony of the hotel which still bore the old name *Moderno*, where we decided to spend the night, I greeted the people who had filled the square and the streets. On the morning of the following day, November 28, our convoy set off for Tirana, affectionately farewelled by people crowding both sides of the road right to the outskirts of Elbasan.

From here on, too, the road was damaged, the fresh scars of the war were obvious everywhere. The German columns withdrawing from Greece were unable to pass the Kërraba Pass to go to the aid of their forces encircled by our forces in Tirana. Our powerful blows completely smashed them. Along the road we saw overturned tanks and armoured cars, burnt-out trucks shifted a little in order to open the road, piles of spent machine-gun cartridges, enemy soldiers' helmets, and so on. The closer we approached Tirana, the more destroyed enemy weapons were to be seen on both sides of the road. There was something beautiful and symbolic in this scene. The victors passed proudly among the smashed weapons and remnants of the defeated invaders.

We were returning to our beloved Tirana and for the first time after so many years, we entered there not illegally, with false names and documents, but freely and, moreover, triumphant! After a glorious and heroic war, Tirana, which for years on end had gone to bed and awakened amongst whistle blasts and alarm sirens and the curfew, was now liberated. Our eagle-eyed Marxist-Leninist Party which was never wrong in its line, because it had the desires and aspirations of the people in its heart, led this war. It undertook the heaviest, but sacred burden and bore it with honour, this time leading our people to complete victory, because along with freedom, it brought the people to power.

As we approached the capital, I felt excited and I remembered the days which I had passed there

when, together with beloved and close comrades, with Qemal, Vasil and others, we worked to form our Communist Party, the steel vanguard of the people, from the separate groups that were quarrelling with one another. I remembered our first demonstrations and actions, the days and nights when we passed illegally from one base to another, protected by the love of the simple people. Here in Tirana we had grown up, had been tempered, had gained experience to organize and lead and to carry out the tasks which our beloved Party had entrusted to us.

From the Palace of Brigades along the Elbasan Street to the centre, the aftermath of the heroic war was very obvious. The shells and bullets had left holes in the streets and on the walls of ruined houses and other buildings, while the minaret next to the clock tower in the centre had been cut in half by artillery fire.

Nevertheless we found the people of Tirana enthusiastic and optimistic, welcoming their government with songs. A great crowd had filled the streets and the big boulevard in front of *Hotel Dajti*.

From a simple tribune I greeted the people on the occasion of Independence Day which, for the first time after so many years of war, we were celebrating in freedom.

Speaking with great emotion, I said: «Today our glorious flag, red with the blood of heroes of the people who have fallen in this anti-fascist war, is waving proudly in the sky of free Albania. Five years have gone by under the heavy burden of fascist slavery, five times on each November 28 the blood of the heroic

sons of the people who clashed with the armed forces of the occupiers and traitors, has flowed in the streets of the cities of Albania. Thus, the National Day has become doubly sacred, as the day of independence and the day of the unity of the Albanian people.»

Frequently interrupted by bursts of cheering and applause, I spoke about the heroic fight of our people, who responded immediately to the call of their finest sons and, under the leadership of the Party, succeeded in liberating the Homeland once and for all and taking the reins of the future into their own hands.

«The construction of Albania, the development of the people's economy, culture and schooling, the raising of their standard of living, open a new page in our history, a history which it is in our hands to make and we shall make it just as glorious as the National Liberation War,» I said. «We shall emerge triumphant from this struggle, too, because now we have our own state power which belongs to the people and works for the people. Therefore, let us give our all for this state power, let us make it strong, because in this way we shall rebuild our devastated country, revive our agriculture and economy, rebuild the ruined houses, open schools and build hospitals. Albania will become a great work site. In the war for liberation we did not spare our lives and today we must not spare our toil and sweat. Young and old understand that they are no longer toiling for foreigners but working and building our own country, our own lives.»

They were historic moments, moving and unforgettable for the Party and our people! They were the moments of rejoicing at the great victory. With blood

and sweat, with toil and sacrifice, we had accomplished a gigantic and majestic work.

On the morrow of that unforgettable day we received the news of the liberation of Shkodra, which marked the liberation of the whole of Albania,

Precisely on that day, two divisions of the National Liberation Partisan Army, of that heroic army of the Albanian people which, with its blood, heroism and self-sacrifice, had scored victory after victory over the foreign occupiers and their collaborators, on the orders of the General Command crossed the border to assist in the liberation of the peoples of Yugoslavia. New victories were to be recorded in the glorious history of our People's Army. While the finest sons of our country were to shed their blood for the liberation of our brothers in Kosova, Montenegro and Macedonia and the peoples of Yugoslavia, in Albania November 29 marked the beginning of a new epoch, the epoch of socialism.

Thus, alongside the historic day of November 28, the great Day of the Flag, another great day, November 29, was marked, the day of the liberation of the Homeland and the triumph of the people's revolution. These two dates represent two different, but glorious periods of the Albanian people, two periods which will continue to shine in all their majesty as the years and centuries go by.

And now a new period was beginning. All of us were confident: just as we had accomplished a magnificent deed during the war, we would go on to build and defend the other deed we had before us, socialist Albania, even more majestically and marvellously!

## V

### **THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE: ALBANIA — A PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC!**

The new epoch commenced. Now our Party, the new Albanian state, with its organs born in the heat of the war, together with the people and at the head of the people, with multiplied forces, had to build the new Albania from its foundations. We had to prove and confirm to our people, to friends and enemies, to everybody, that we were capable, not only of taking power, but also of safeguarding and strengthening the new people's state power and making it effective and vital. We had to make Albania a country of free and happy people, an impregnable fortress against any enemy. And for this, mere good wishes, appeals or declarations were insufficient. These lofty aims would be achieved and confirmed, above all, through our work, through concrete deeds in all fields and in all directions. There was no time to lose, we had to savour the great joy of the historic victory of liber-

ation only in work, in the many, great, heavy tasks which it was essential to carry out.

## **1. The people's state power in action**

The first days, months and years when we laid the foundations of the new life will never be forgotten. We had political power in our hands, had the lofty ideals of the Party in our minds and hearts, had the great enthusiasm and confidence of the victory achieved and had the determination and readiness to do everything necessary for the benefit of this country and this people. Undoubtedly, all these things were a powerful base, a great source of energy and inspiration which impelled us and made us confident that, with work and all-round efforts, we would achieve everything that we lacked.

The fact is, however, that we lacked many things, much more than anyone who has not known Albania immediately after the end of the war, could imagine today.

Added to the poverty and backwardness of the past, the truly miserable state in which the regimes of the past had left the economy, culture, education and the people, were the colossal destructions of the past five years of war. We had to think about and secure as quickly as possible shelter for tens of thousands of inhabitants of devastated towns and villages, food for the people who were suffering hunger, as well as clothing and footwear, schools, workshops, and so on. We lacked the funds, we lacked the means,

we lacked the specialists, even with a minimal level of qualification. There could be no movement from one district to the other because even that feeble communications network which had been built previously had been blown up and completely paralysed by the war. Winter had begun and it would make the situation even more difficult. Meanwhile, although the whole country had been liberated, the last remnants of the old world, the criminals and mercenary bandits who had not managed to leave with the occupying forces, were lurking in the gorges, the forests and caves, and now, with the fury of wounded beasts, were seeking salvation in acts of terror and violence against the people, communists and councillors. Supporting them through visible and invisible links were the classes overthrown by the state power, and, of course, the foreign imperialist and chauvinist powers which could never accept the radical change which had occurred and was being made more complete in Albania.

All these (and I have mentioned very little of the shortages, the all-round difficulties and our enemies of those moments) confronted us and had to be overcome at all costs. Since we had triumphed over the occupiers and traitors and seized power through so much bloodshed and sacrifice, without fail we had to lead Albania forward for the benefit and happiness of the people, despite the anger and fury of enemies.

I remember a «story» which my father told me those days when we returned in triumph to liberated Tirana. A few days after the formation of our Democratic Government in Berat was announced, an old



acquaintance, a Ballist, had stopped my father in the street and had said to him sneeringly:

«Well, Halil, how do you feel now that you've become the father of the prime minister?» «Like all the common people,» my father had replied quietly, and tried to continue on his way, but the Ballist had caught him by the arm. «You're a cunning devil, Halil. It's just as well you are not riding the high horse, because you know very well that your son's government won't last long.» «What do you mean, you scoundrel!» my father had replied, but the Ballist had continued: «Do you really think that this government of ragamuffins from mountains, this worthless government, will bring Albania into the light!» «Shame on you!» had replied my father. «The government is not my son's but the people's, you villain, and will live as long as the people!...»

At other times, too, from various sources we heard how the overthrown hostile old world poured out poison and hatred against us, against the new people's state power. They even calculated when we would «capitulate» and be «overthrown» and took measures to bring about the capitulation which they desired and dreamed of as quickly as possible.

However, we were neither offended, nor dumb-struck by the gibes, curses, screams and prophecies of that world which we had kicked out. We continued our work with persistence and heroism, convinced that through toil and sacrifice we would achieve all the things which, to others, seemed impossible.

For the future, as hitherto, we had the Party as our guarantee and beacon-light which would deter-

mine and guide us on the right road, and now it was a party in power, young in age, it is true, but with great fighting experience, with a militant spirit and unshakeable determination to carry the work begun through to the end.

Many had tried and would continue to try in all kinds of ways, with various disguises, pretensions and theories, to replace our Party at the helm, but the fact is that we did not allow them to do so and did not fall into this tragic error. Especially in the first moments after Liberation, both the camouflaged counter-revolutionary elements within the country and the external forces, including the Yugoslav «friends», in particular, exerted great pressure on us to persuade us that now that we had triumphed we should not «proclaim» the Party openly, should neglect the Party and operate «within the Front», hidden in the Front, according to «the platform of the Front». Why? Because, they told us, if the Communist Party is proclaimed as a party in power, the «democratic facade» of the Front and the order will be damaged, the great democratic allies, Britain and America, will be angered, and will not recognize the government(!), those who are «unclear» will be frightened off, etc., etc.!

Although there were some who fell into these waters without evil intent, because that was how it seemed to them and what they had been accustomed to in the past, in general the bearers and inciters of such opportunist and capitulationist rumours and «advice» proceeded from deliberate aims of political diversion. They were not in the least concerned either about «democracy» or about «recognition of the gov-

ernment»: their real concern was to displace the Party from the leading role in the life of the country, to turn it into an appendage of the Front and gradually divert the whole course of the revolution, so that everything we had gained would slip from our hands and the people would again be placed in the shackles of the old slavery and old treaties.

This was precisely the aim, not only of such self-proclaimed bourgeois-democratic elements, as the Shefqet Bejas, Riza Danis and Gjergj Kokoshis, but also of Sejfulla Malëshova and company.

I can never forget that moment when one of them, Gjergj Kokoshi, with the «sincerity» of an innocent, committed one of the vilest and most irritating provocations against me.

Nexhat Peshkëpia, who was a close friend of his, had introduced me to Gjergj Kokoshi before the Italian occupation, when I was a teacher in the secondary school of Tirana. Nexhat and he spoke against Zog and against the Italian influence in our country and, indeed, at the first meeting at which he introduced me to Gjergj, Nexhat began to speak openly against Zog. Gjergj looked at Nexhat, no doubt querying whether it were safe to do so in front of me.

«Don't be afraid,» Nexhat told him, «Enver is ours, indeed, he is a communist.»

«This communism is interesting,» said Kokoshi and we began to exchange opinions, but from our first conversation it was obvious that on this matter he was not at one with me, while Nexhat was neither with me, nor with Gjergj, but was an anarchist. Only one thing united us: opposition to Zog and fascism.

At that time Gjergj Kokoshi was a professor with authority. In his political ideas, however, he was a liberal democrat, a supporter of parliamentarianism, especially British parliamentarianism. I continued my contacts with Gjergj Kokoshi later, too, especially after April 1939, until we brought him close to the National Liberation Front, and we considered this a positive thing for the National Liberation Movement. As I have said, Kokoshi did not display open vacillations during the War, was elected to the highest instances of the Front, and when we formed the Anti-fascist Committee and later the Provisional Government, we appointed him minister of education, which was a suitable post for him, because he was a man with knowledge of education and some culture. We had respect for him and, in appearance at least, he did not show any hostility towards our Party. And now, in the name of the «Front» and «our recognition in the world», as a «friend outside the Party», he, too, joined in the enemy plans to get rid of the Communist Party of Albania!

He based his «argument» on the claim that the governments of the USA and Britain would recognize our government if we «withdrew» the Party from the limelight, if «even just as a tactic» we hid its name and role.

«We will never do this,» I cut short Gjergj Kokoshi's «refrain», «because such an act would mean abandoning all we have won of our own free will in order to please the British. This would be betrayal not only of the people but also of ourselves.»

«But we are really in power!» Gjergj Kokoshi

said. «See, I am not a communist but I am a minister. Mr. Omer is not a communist, but he is president! True, you're a communist and general secretary of the Communist Party, but above all, the country and the world is recognizing you and ought to recognize you as prime minister! It is the state function that is prized and honoured in the international arena!...»

«And so, what?» I asked him with an anger I could hardly contain.

«I am coming to the point from which I started, or rather which you, too, are worried about,» continued the other fixing his eyes on me. «What would you lose from your power and authority, from your power as head of government, if you were not secretary of the Party, too?! Nothing, I think! And the same thing is true of the fate of the country. Since we have a Democratic Government in power, since the Front exists as a broad political organization, what harm would be done if your Communist Party were not proclaimed? None at all! We hold power and will yield it to no one. With...»

I jumped to my feet, cutting short his words: «I thought better of you, Gjergj Kokoshi!» I said. «From the craziness of your bourgeois intellectualism, or I don't know from what other position, you are not only throwing mud at our beloved Party, but also committing a grave provocation against me personally. Do you think that I and my comrades became communists and led the people in the war just to become prime ministers, or ministers and, now that we have taken 'power', we should abandon the Party, its cause and its victories?! This will never, never occur! We

did not fight to become lords over the people, we did not fight for a change of cabinets and soft seats, but we fought and will fight to the end to completely overthrow the old era. It is not you or I in power, but the people. The state we set up is not mine or yours, but the people's. The people achieved these victories through their struggle on the course our Communist Party showed them. And don't forget that you yourself became a minister, irrespective that you are not a communist, because during the war you agreed with, supported and applied that line and followed that course which the Communist Party showed us and on which it led us. However, the difference and the gap between us is apparently much greater and deeper than what we had thought or envisaged. You have fought for a soft seat, while we have fought and are fighting for Albania. This is the mildest reply that I could give you at these moments. As for your 'concern' about the role of our Party, let me declare to you clearly and unequivocally: we shall never allow ourselves to weaken its role, nor allow anyone, whoever he may be, to damage or infringe it!»

Gjergj Kokoshi\* went away like a wet hen and when he subsequently went even further on his course, which was the opposite of that on which the Party led the people, he lost both his soft seat and the remainder of his feathers. Below I shall speak about him and other «democrats» like him who, by chance or for subversive aims, had united with us during those years, but here I want to underline that never

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\* In Albanian means rooster.

at any time were we held up or confused by their efforts and insinuations.

It was a different matter, however, especially for a time, with the Yugoslav «friends» and the agents whom they had managed to recruit within our ranks, who, regrettably, included some of the main cadres of the Party.

Always voicing the same «worries», using the same «arguments» and «advice» as the bourgeois democrats, Tito's men, too, did everything possible to make us keep the Party in a state of illegality or, at the most, semi-illegality, to hide it in the Front, and merge it with the Front.

Their ceaseless efforts and pressures, especially their attempts to isolate me from the Party, achieved a certain degree of success. For a time an unacceptable situation verging on absurdity was created amongst us: although our Party was effectively the leading and guiding force, for «the sake of opinion» and external appearances, efforts were made to hide its name and to cover up its true role.

While there is no need to go into those details which are now well-known, I want to say only that, although the pressures of the Titoites truly had a certain effect, in reality our Party never wavered from the role which it had won through the strength of its ideas and the blood and work of its members. Whether or not we always advertised the word and the role of the Party everywhere, and here there was some concession which we ourselves considered absurd, nevertheless, in reality, it was the Party, from the base to the centre, which led and acted in the whole

life of the country, in the state, in the Front, in defence, in the economy and everywhere.

Precisely because we kept the Party in command and did not allow ourselves to weaken or to divide its role with anyone else in that grave and difficult period when many capitulated and degenerated, we, the «least experienced», «the youngest», we of the «worthless government», were able to overcome the mountains of difficulties and not only to safeguard, but also to assert, to strengthen and ceaselessly temper the state of the people in power.

Both during the war and in the new period of the work of construction, the Party and the new Democratic Government turned to the people, relied on the people, while winning over and mobilizing the people.

We can never forget the unprecedented mobilization, the indescribable enthusiasm of our marvellous people in the battles to heal the wounds of the war. Hungry and ill-clad, aware that in their homes or in the temporary shelter that had been provided for them they even lacked bread and beans for their children, nevertheless men and women, children and old folk, and especially our heroic youth, worked voluntarily, day and night, to build the new life from the ruins. Albania was turned into a kind of building site where, true, manual labour alone prevailed, but people worked with a will and desire because they saw they were working for themselves. This, of course, had a great effect to strengthen their unity and to enhance the love of the people for the Party and our lawful government.

The new state was establishing its authority first



of all in the economic field, by exercising control over all the enterprises and companies of Albanian merchants and industrialists, by requisitioning food and pharmaceutical products, means of transport, the buildings necessary for the state administration or for housing, etc., in some cases with compensation, in other cases without compensation. Likewise, all the assets of war criminals and political fugitives and the assets of Germany and Italy and of their citizens were confiscated. Gradually the nationalization of all the existing industry in our country began: the mines, the factories and the shops were nationalized or confiscated, became state property and were the first basis of the socialist common property.

Thus, by making wise and consistent use of the political power which we had created and won through the war, the Party orientated and led us on the right course to win economic power, to place the economy in the service of the people and in the hands of the people. Thus, automatically, the political power was strengthened, the confidence of the masses in its leading organs was strengthened and steeled, and the people felt and saw that everything was being done in their favour and in the name of their state power.

The sharp sword of the dictatorship of the proletariat was cutting deep into the bourgeoisie. The first measures and reforms were not only of an economic character, it was their political class essence which was their sharpest edge. This was the case with the imposition of special taxes on war profits. That was a measure with pronounced class tendentiousness, because it was a mortal blow to the mercantile bour-

geoisie who, during the war, as always, had fattened themselves on the blood and the suffering of the people.

The Party and the Front had given them their chance by making continual appeals to them to unite with, take part in or assist the war of the people, but the merchants, the bourgeois and the feudal lords not only did not listen to these appeals, but disdained them and opposed the people's war with the most unscrupulous ways and means. Now that the people were in power and exercising their own dictatorship, these measures did not express the injustice of a state (at no moment of the development of society can the people be unjust), but the most sublime justice to which society could aspire. Through these measures, any chance of returning to the past was destroyed once and for all and the foundations were laid for a new society, the socialist society.

In order to impose the people's justice and retribution upon those who had stained their hands with the blood of the finest sons of the country, those who had put villages to the torch and had served as collaborators with the occupiers, selling out everything and, above all, the Homeland, in March 1945 a special court was opened. A large number of criminals and traitors appeared before it, including members of the quisling governments, chiefs of the Balli Kombëtar and agents of fascism, such as Fejzi Alizoti, Tefik Mborja, Shuk Gurakuqi, Bahri Omari, Kolë Tromara, Hilmi Leka, Ibrahim Biçaku and others.

Meanwhile, in the name of the Democratic Government of Albania, I sent a letter to President Tru-

man in which I expressed the indignation of our people over the gentle treatment which the Albanian criminals, who had fled at the end of the war, were receiving from the Anglo-American authorities in Italy. This was a lawful demand and the failure to respond to it was another injustice committed against the Albanian people who insisted that instead of being treated gently and left at large to carry out their fascist intrigues against our people, Ali Këlcyra, Mithat Frashëri, Abaz Kupi, Kadri Cakrani, Koço Muka and Vehip Runa should be in the dock along with the other traitors and criminals, and there receive the sentences they deserved. It was not difficult to understand what the Anglo-Americans were aiming at in their preferential treatment of criminals and traitors to the Albanian people. It would not be long before they would be used as cannon fodder or else they would be trying to eat one another like a basket of crabs.

The court sentenced some of the traitors to capital punishment. This was a sentence they deserved, which expressed the will of the people who followed the development of this trial with great interest. During the days when the court was in session the people who followed the proceedings, both inside and outside the cinema building in which the trial was held, pronounced sentence in no uncertain terms, by shouting:

«Long live the people's justice! Death to the war criminals

Precisely at the time when the people's courts were condemning the war criminals, the traitors, the saboteurs and conspirators against the people's state

power, Koçi Xoxe, as minister of Internal Affairs, informed me about the activity of an enemy group which was being investigated and the main persons involved. In due course, he told me one day that Syrja Selfo had implicated himself in this group «for the overthrow of the state». I opened my eyes in surprise and said to Koçi:

«Syrja you say? It's impossible, you must be wrong! Syrja could not rise against the people's state power.»

Syrja was one of the Selfo family, who were big merchants. With the exception of Syrja and Halit, who joined the partisans, all of them were bad. The first amongst them was Reiz Selfo who was considered the head of the Selfo family. He was one of the most reactionary and expert swindlers in the circle of big merchants. He was on good terms with every regime, with Zog and the Italians. With us alone he did not get along, because for the crimes he had committed against the people and the Homeland we put him in his place and the court sentenced him to be shot. I was well acquainted with Reiz, with whom I had had occasion to meet, but rarely to talk. He was too important and «had no time to waste with people like us». Syrja, however, was a good friend with whom I often talked and he understood me; he was not a communist, but he was a patriot, anti-Italian and anti-fascist. He sincerely liked me, in particular, and I liked him. He was not on good terms with Reiz, but Reiz could do him no harm, because Syrja was more capable at his job and not evil like Reiz. Syrja assisted the war as much as he could and rented two houses which he

placed at the disposal of our illegal work. He contributed money to help our war and during the war he gave great help to me personally and, likewise to my family, when I went into illegality.

When we liberated Albania, Syrja rejoiced. We met one day and I said to him:

«The day for which we fought has come, but the struggle continues. Now we are going to impose war taxes on all merchants and they will be heavy. The Selfos will be included.»

Syrja replied:

«Do whatever you like. Take the lot and I shall help you. I just want to work, so go ahead and confiscate the lot.»

And that is what we did. Syrja was with us. He could never be separated from us.

And now, quite unexpectedly, Koçi Xoxe came to tell me that Syrja was allegedly implicated in a plot «to overthrow the people's state power»! Koçi Xoxe replied «calmly» there and then to my shock and open opposition:

«He has testified himself. He has admitted everything and signed his confession!»

«Bring me his testimony, because I know his signature.»

He brought it to me. I read it and saw that it was Syria's signature. I thought for a moment and asked Koçi:

«Did they torture him?»

Koçi swore black and blue:

«Certainly not. We have prohibited torture by decision of the Bureau.»

«Very well,» I said. «He must be put on trial, let the court judge him and the decision of the court be carried out.»

Later, when the treachery of Koçi Xoxe and the Yugoslavs was uncovered, when all their villainy came to light, the dossiers which they prepared in the Ministry of Internal Affairs for me and the others were discovered, too. The question of Syrja Selfo and some others was nothing but a trap to compromise me, by arresting my friends and torturing them to death to make them admit and sign what the group of Koçi Xoxe and the Yugoslavs dictated.

During this period this same Koçi Xoxe, to whom it meant nothing to put innocent people on trial, exerted all sorts of pressures and made every effort to lighten the sentences on real enemies who were placed in the dock. After reaching agreement with Sejfulla Malëshova and Nako Spiru, the three of them proposed in the Political Bureau that the lives of the criminals we had put on trial should be spared. In fact, Koçi's aim, both in his condemnation of innocent people and in his softness towards criminals, was to compromise me. This was the time when Koçi, in collaboration with the Yugoslavs, after the Plenum of Berat, had begun to prepare «materials» with compromising accusations and slanders against me. I rejected their proposals and told them that all the traitors and quislings, not excluding Bahri Omari, must be punished according to the sentences of the people's courts.

Likewise, Sheh Karbunara, too, was to receive the punishment he deserved later. This very wily individual, this Ballist and collaborator with the chiefs

of the Balli Kombëtar, who threw the stone and hid his hand, had not publicly proclaimed himself with either the Italians or the Germans. He had saved his skin, indeed at the moment when the Juggernaut of nazism was well on the way to disaster, he even posed as a sympathizer of the Front and the Party, although I had never had any faith in this «change» in the Sheh and was convinced that he was a man of reaction who hated our Party. He had fought, although in stealthy ways, against the National Liberation Front but, as I said, Karbunara had proved to be wiser than his friends like Kolë Tromara and Ali Këlcyra who, even when the National Liberation General Council called on them to unite with the National Liberation War against the Germans, not only did not accept their call, but on the contrary, as chiefs of the Balli Kombëtar and together with it, they openly entered the service of the occupiers. From that time on, we no longer addressed appeals to them, but aimed the rifle at them.

After the liberation of Albania, since Sheh Karbunara, Sejfi Vllamasi and one or two others were not declared enemies like their friends, we left them at liberty and did not arrest them, because we had no flagrantly compromising facts against them. Nevertheless, we gave them a serious warning that, if there was the slightest evidence that they were acting against the people's state power, they would be arrested and handed over to the revolutionary court. They agreed to this in words but not in deeds, especially Sheh Karbunara.

I remember that during the period when the trial of quisling traitors and war criminals was going on,

I was returning to Tirana one day from Berat where I had been on business. At that time I wore a general's blue uniform with red stripes and top boots. When we were approaching the village of Karbunara I saw the Sheh with his priest's hat and robe, who was standing in the middle of the road with his hand raised signalling to the car to stop. I told my driver to stop the car and allowed the Sheh to approach. I did not get out of the car because I deliberately wanted to humiliate him and to make this enemy understand that we, the Party and the people who had fought and triumphed, were in power. The Sheh, dragging his feet, opened the door of the car, bowed, wished me good day and held out his hand. I shook hands with him without moving.

«What do you want? Why did you stop me?» I asked him.

«First of all, to congratulate you,» he said.

«I have no need for your congratulations,» I told him. «Have you anything else?»

«I stopped you to beg you to pardon some of those who are on trial,» he said.

«I'll see to it myself,» I told him shortly. «The lives of traitors and quisling ministers in the service of the Germans, of chiefs of the Balli Kombëtar and anyone else who turned the rifle against us, have been placed in the hands of the people's justice. Your friends and associates, Sheh Karbunara, have stained their hands with the blood of the people and our comrades, therefore don't worry at all because I am certain that the people's justice will give them what they deserve.»



«It's very bad, Enver...»

«Listen, Sheh Karbunara,» I told him, «when I told you, indeed begged you, to abandon the road, of betrayal, you thought that the Italians and Germans were stronger than our people and our Party which you derided and fought. However, things turned out quite differently from what you thought and this was not a miracle of the fate and god in which you believe, but was a result of the mind, ability and bravery of the Party, the communists and our people.

«I know very well, that you, Sheh, were together with Kolë Tromara and company, but you tricked them cleverly, you threw the stone and hid your hand. We did not arrest you. not for the sake of your beautiful eyes, but because we did not have so many concrete facts about you, because otherwise you would be together with the traitors in the dock today. The communists, whom you abused, are the world's most just men, the kindest with the people and ready to sacrifice themselves for the people's greatest causes. Hence, you escaped once, but you will not escape a second time, therefore I advise you to keep your mouth shut and not conspire against the people, because, if you do, we shall put you in your place. That is all I have to say to you.»

The officer shut the door of the car, I left Sheh Karbunara in the dust of the road and never again set eyes on him. That enemy did not give up his activity against the people's state power. He became a participant in the plot hatched up by the Anglo-American agency of Shefqet Beja, Gjergj Kokoshi, Ri-

za Dani and others. So, Sheh Karbunara, too, was condemned by the people's court.

Their other associate, Sejfi Vllamasi, pulled in his horns, lived on what money he had accumulated until he was reduced to rags and, in the end, when he was hard pressed for food, was obliged to seek any sort of job. He had grown old. I had never asked about him. One day, when I was going to Vlora, I stopped at the farm at Gosa, met the director and asked him how things were going. He explained things to me. Close to the road there were some whitewashed sheds. I asked him:

«What are these sheds?»

«They are the pigs' stalls,» he told me.

«Let's go in and see,» I said.

I went inside and met an old Kavaja peasant. I knew that the old people of Kavaja were fanatical, especially in the early years after Liberation. Not only would they not eat pork, but they could not bear pigs at all, because this was «prohibited by the Koran».

«I'm pleased to see that you are keeping pigs,» I said to the old man.

«What else can I do?» he said. «I have to live.»

Then, after he recognized me, he said in a low voice:

«I'll tell you on the quiet, because you know our worries: I can't bear the sight of these pigs, but I love the Party and do what it tells me. You see this long stick? I use this to prod the pigs, because, by God, I can't bring myself to lay a hand on them.»

The three of us burst out laughing. Our laughter brought another wrinkled and ragged, elderly swine-

herd over to us. He held out his hand to me and greeted me saying:

«How are you, Mr. Enver?»

I raised my head to look at him, because the word «Mr.» in the mouth of a peasant, when they always called one another «comrade», attracted my attention. And who did I see? Sejfi Vllamasi! He had become a swineherd.

«Despite all you have done,» I said to him, «the Party of communists did not leave you without a job and you are earning your bread with the sweat of your brow for the first time in your life.»

«As you say, Mr. Enver, but now I'm an old man.»

«You have got older, that's the law of nature, but what can you do, you have to eat and in order to eat you must work.»

«That is so, Mr. Enver,» said Sejfi, «but could the government possibly give me a pension?»

«Pension, why? Because you have never worked, or because you have been in the fascist 'Council of state', or because you have never done a patriotic deed? In the time of Noli's Government you voted for the reactionaries, in exile you gambled while the people suffered, and then you came back with Italy and served it and the Germans. Are these the 'merits' for which you are seeking a pension?»

«Is this what this fellow has been?» intervened the peasant from Kavaja. «So, he's worse than these pigs. On my word, Comrade Enver, I did not know him.»

I saw Vllamasi once again a few years later on a

footpath in Fier. The «diplomat of the Balli» was bent almost double. I asked what he was doing. They told me that he had a small pension, because he had been a swineherd. The comrade who told me this was young and had never even heard the name of this Ballist, from whom and from whose associates we had suffered so many bad things.

And so, one after the other, the brambles and thorns of the past, the leeches who had sucked the blood of the people, the snakes who had venom on the tip of their tongues, began to be cleared away.

All these things strengthened the position and enhanced the authority of the Party and the new state; the masses of the people were becoming more and more convinced that the road on which the Party led them was their most secure future.

The warm welcome which the people gave the first laws and measures of the Standing Committee of the Antifascist Council (from the liberation of the country until January 11, 1946, when the Constituent Assembly met, this Standing Committee was the supreme legislative organ), was the greatest endorsement which could have been given to the correctness of the line which the Party and the peoples' state power were pursuing. The reforms of a democratic character which were undertaken at this period strengthened the economic basis of the state, strengthened the trust of the masses of the people in it, because now all were seeing that the new state was the irreconcilable enemy of the bourgeoisie, feudal lords and speculators, and that the democratic government was capable of running and organizing the life of the country. Life was

difficult for the people, but they were seeing with their own eyes that the Party and the organs of the state were doing the impossible to create conditions so that life could proceed normally and the wounds of the war and the past would be healed as quickly as possible.

One of the great and profound revolutions which we set about from the outset and carried through to the end through consistent efforts was the carrying out of the Land Reform. With this revolution in the life of the Albanian countryside we not only fulfilled one of the age-old aspirations of and the first promises which we had made during the war to the loyal ally of the working class, the brave and patriotic Albanian peasantry, but we also brought about a colossal transformation in the relations of production and opened the way to the birth of socialist relations in the countryside, which the Party had envisaged in its long-term plan.

Work for the drafting of this law, which, as is known, was adopted in the summer of 1945, had been going on for a long time. And both in the drafting and in the discussion of it, in the Political Bureau of the Central Committee and in the ANLC, fiery debates took place. The orientations of the Central Committee that the Land Reform should not only give land to peasants with no or little land, but should also eliminate the possibility of the birth of the kulak economy which exploited the work of others, were opposed with all sorts of manoeuvres, «criticisms» and «suggestions» by Riza Dani and Shefqet Beja down to Sejfulla Malëshova.

«True the toiling peasant must be given a bit of

land,» said Riza Dani, «but we must not go to extremes and kindle civil war, hatred and blood feuds in the countryside. We must not satisfy some and make enemies of the others!»

«Those 'some' whom you mentioned,» I replied to him, «are thousands and tens of thousands of peasants who have dreamed of the land all their lives, while pouring out torrents of sweat in favour of a handful of big landowners. It was not these big landowners who waged the war, but those who had nothing, the thousands. Therefore, we shall give the land to them without worrying much whether or not the wealthy peasants like it. As for civil war, it is silly to talk about it. Let those who are going to be expropriated try to raise their hand. The people will cut it off, because this is the time of the people and not of feudal lords and capitalists.»

Sejfulla Malëshova combated the Reform from a more «moderate» position:

«We should divide the land among the poor,» he said, «but must not forget the mentality of our peasants. They have had nothing at all and will be satisfied with little and will not be interested in large-scale agricultural production. Famine will threaten us.»

«Then, what do you think should be done?» I asked him.

«We should give the extremely poor masses a minimum area, just enough to fulfil their needs, while we should reduce the land of the present owners, but leave them at least 40 hectares. They know the value of large-scale production and will make their economies model ones and produce for the city, too.»

«That would be trifling with the Land Reform and with the peasantry,» I opposed him firmly. «And worse still, it would be favouring the kulaks.»

«Since my first works of the 30's I have always been heart and soul a declared enemy of kulaks,» Sejfulla Malëshova defended himself at once. «But now we have to think not only about the bread of the peasants, but also about the bread of the whole people. For the sake of the bread of the people we have to make some distinction and some concession towards the wealthy. Let us not forget, comrades, that these are profound problems. Let us not forget that to expect salvation from fragmentation into small-scale property means to decree general mediocrity!»

«I have read this in Lenin!» someone, Nako Spiru I think, intervened there and then.

«Exactly!» replied Sejfulla proudly.

«Yes!» I intervened to put an end to their «theorizing». «We all read Lenin and struggle to put his teachings and those of our great teachers into practice. But by confusing our aims, Sejfulla, you confuse and distort Lenin, too. He never was and expressed himself against the Land Reform. We do not think that we will find complete and final salvation in small-scale property through the Land Reform which we must carry out. No, we will find salvation in large-scale property, although neither capitalist nor feudal, but state and cooperativist socialist property. Let the farmer get the land which is due to him and, gradually, he himself will be convinced, and we shall struggle to convince him, that his salvation and the salvation of the state, that is the future, belongs to large-scale agri-

culture, collectivization. But, I stress: We shall go over to large-scale socialist ownership through the Land Reform, through giving ownership to the poor peasants who own nothing!»

Nevertheless, through the insistence of Sejfulla and with the open or silent approval of Koçi Xoxe, Pandi Kristo and others in the Political Bureau and the Central Committee of the Party, and subsequently with the support of the Riza Danis and Kokoshis in the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council, the Law on the Land Reform initially had a series of shortcomings, although it was an important event in the transformation of relations in the countryside. The law left large areas of land in family ownership for the so-called «model economies», up to a maximum of 40 hectares, which in the conditions of Albania was a very large area, and safeguarded the positions of the estate owners and wealthy peasants. Although this was the law which began to be applied at first, we felt that it had shortcomings and would not lead to the complete application of the principle, «the land belongs to the tiller». Therefore, in a series of meetings in the leadership of the Party and the state, in contacts with cadres, communists and rank-and-file people, we always discussed this problem and I insisted that the former law must be changed at all costs in favour of the poor peasantry, in particular, and in favour of deepening the socialist revolution, as a whole.

Especially after the 5th Plenum of the CC of the Party in February 1946, when we sternly attacked the opportunist views and stands of Sejfulla Malëshova, almost all had become aware of the necessity of chang-



ing the Law on the Land Reform, and in May the new law with a profound revolutionary content was promulgated. According to this law, all the lands, vineyards, olive groves, etc., of those who did not work them themselves were expropriated, while the peasants and owners who worked the land were allowed up to 5 hectares which could not be sold, bought or mortgaged. Only those who worked the land could hold and enjoy it! This had great importance, because it blocked the way to land speculation, eliminated any possibility of wealthy elements buying the land or enriching themselves by exploiting the toil of others. This was a great victory for our patriotic peasantry which had borne the brunt of the National Liberation War. The peasantry enthusiastically welcomed the proclamation of the Reform which linked it even more closely with the Party and the people's state power.

We decided that the application of the Reform should start with a symbolic act, therefore, together with my comrades, Dr. Nishani, Myslim Peza, Spiro Moisiu, Shefqet Peçi, Gaço Tashko, who had become minister of agriculture, and other comrades, we went to Lushnja where we witnessed the indescribable joy of the peasant of Myzeqe who wept while he held the land deed tight in his trembling hands. One could not but be moved by the most unexpected scenes of the expression of joy and love for the Party, the Front and the new state. I remember that amongst this truly popular enthusiasm and rejoicing I spoke with a voice that was trembling with emotion:

«Comrade peasants, you must always keep your eyes open and have your fists ready to strike hard at

the enemies of the people. The distribution of the land has begun, the deeds are being handed out, more and more each day you will have the assistance of your government. We will put all our possibilities in the service of the people. We do not promise you the heavens, but you can be sure that what we say we do. I offer you my heart-felt congratulations on the land which you have received. I wish you a long life to make our fields flourish generation after generation!»

The economic effects of this Reform, and especially its political effects on the outlook of the people, were truly among the greatest. The people swore «by the Party and the state», which gave them the land, which was equal to swearing «by my head!» By giving the peasantry the land which belonged to it in perpetuity, the Party and the state linked themselves even more closely with the peasantry.

Consistently, step after step, battling with difficulties and all kinds of enemies, the people, led by the Party, were taking economic power into their own hands and, in this way, becoming masters of their own fate in the broadest sense of the term.

But while the people felt great joy over the new situation which was being created, the bourgeoisie felt that the hour had come when anxiety and pessimism were covering its last days. These measures and reforms were mortal blows to this class which, faced with these attacks, tried to react, to organize, to find allies, roaming around in despair, ready to commit even the most hideous crimes. Although the situation, the setting and the atmosphere had changed radically, they did not want to believe their own tragedy. They wanted

to remain perpetual directors on the stage of the life of the people, therefore they began to draft and send petitions to the Anglo-American missions, asking them to intervene on their behalf with our Government, began to exert blackmail and to activize their men who had penetrated into the Government, the Front and even into the Party. Among them were Shefqet Beja, Gjergj Kokoshi, Riza Dani and others, who, as I have mentioned earlier, had united with the National Liberation Movement, had remained generally in favour of it, and had even been elected to leading forums.

My personal acquaintance with Riza Dani had begun late, either at Përmet or Berat, but the comrades of Shkodra had spoken to me about him long before. Like Gjergj Kokoshi, he was from Shkodra, an elderly man with influence in that city. A brother of his, Hasan Dani, was a big merchant who, after dipping his hand in Zog's «honey-pot», also enjoyed the honey-pot of fascism, as did many others, like the «democrat» Fazlli Frashëri and his brother Qazka, whom I have mentioned earlier. Riza himself, however, was a «liberal democrat», anti-Zogite, anti-clerical, and anti-fascist. In the context of our work with the nationalists, the comrades of Shkodra had linked up with Riza and he had agreed to fight and take part in the National Liberation Front. We were pleased about this and considered it a success.

I was better acquainted with Shefqet Beja, because I had talked with him more frequently. He had been a friend of Bahri's and of Muharrem Vllamasi, an anti-Zogite element who had been in exile in Bari. Shefqet and Muharrem were of the same age and both

had graduated from an Italian commercial school, but while Shefqet Beja pursued his occupation and became a big merchant, Muharrem Vllamasi became a «politician». In the time of the occupation by Italy, the «democrat and anti-Zogite» Muharrem became a federal, while with the formation of the National Liberation Front, Shefqet Beja united with us. He was a very clever type and, in the talks which we held, posed as a democrat, attacked and derided the Duce, Tefik Mborja and the company of fascist hierarchs. Shefqet's joining the Front, too, we considered a success. During the war I had long and open talks, especially with Gjergj Kokoshi and Shefqet Beja, whom I met more frequently, and kept them informed about the situation of the war and the forms of democratic organization of the state after liberation. They could not have any reservations towards the Party on the grounds that it did not keep them informed or consult them. They seemed to be frank in everything, in appearance had no complaints, and, despite the odd «doubt» or «misunderstanding», in general, they approved the program of the Party. They were somewhat dogmatic and out-dated in their ideas, grave, and «democrats» of the old style, but seemed to be mature men. I tried to avoid intensive polemics with them, since they were in agreement on the main issues.

And now, when the Party at the head of the people began the work for the reconstruction of the burnt-out and devastated country and started to put the major reforms into practice, these elements, although they did not come out openly against this consistent line of the Party, in reality began to move. They

frequently came to talk with me, sometimes together sometimes individually. Riza Dani and Shefqet Beja, in particular, were worried about the Land Reform, the war taxes on the merchants and the people's courts. I was not surprised at their attempts at intervention, indeed, I was sure that they would gradually increase. Therefore, I kept my temper with them and gave them the proper answers:

«They have enriched themselves at the expense of the people and they must disgorge what they have plundered.»

«The peasants shed their blood, their homes were burnt, they liberated the country and won their land in the country, therefore a genuine Land Reform will be carried out.»

«The war criminals must render account. They killed and burnt together with the occupiers, therefore they will pay for their crimes.»

«The country will be rebuilt from the start, therefore the banks, foreign trade, transport and internal trade, in general, will be in the hands of the people's state power.»

Of course, they raised their «democratic» reasons on all these issues, but I gave them the genuine democratic reasons. I felt they left my office unsatisfied, but were obliged to accept their defeat with a smile.

After all, it was no fault of ours that they were sliding towards disaster. Since we had dedicated everything to the cause of the people, it was impermissible for us to satisfy the desires and ambitions of worshippers of the old for the sake of a few «democratic» poses and manoeuvres. If they wanted to live and serve

like real men, let them unite with and continue on the road of the people, otherwise goodbye to them!

The main thing that rejoiced us and filled us with strength was the fact that the people approved, supported and enthusiastically applied the policy and line which our Party and the new state were following. In the course of the application of this line we saw and were convinced that the unity of the Party with the people, which we had created in the fire of the war, was becoming ever stronger. And now, after so many victories and achievements, the moment had come and the conditions had been created to carry out one of the fundamental commitments and tasks which we had set ourselves at the outset: the moment had come for the people to solemnly and freely express their will on the form of the regime which they wished to establish in Albania.

## **2. The proclamation of the People's Republic**

The people first raised the demand to express themselves on the form of the regime in August 1945, at the 1st Congress of the National Liberation Front, which, from that time onwards, took the name the Democratic Front of Albania.

This Congress, which took place in the atmosphere of enthusiastic approval of the policy of the Communist Party and its future program, amongst other things,

solemnly demanded that the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council and the Provisional Democratic Government hold elections in free Albania for the Constituent Assembly, which would proclaim the will of the people on the form of the regime and approve the Constitution of the country.

On the proposal of the Government, the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council approved this demand of the people, expressed through their organization, and charged a special commission with the task of drafting the laws on the elections to the Constituent Assembly. At the end of September the draft of these laws was presented to the meeting of the ANLC for approval. The Council declared its approval in principle of the elections and also discussed and approved the Law on the Elections and the Law on the Electoral Lists. The latter proclaimed that all Albanian subjects, men and women, over 18 years of age, had the right to elect and be elected. The former quisling ministers, war criminals and, of course, those who through their own fault had temporarily lost their political rights, were excluded from this right. Thus, for the first time in the history of Albania, real possibilities were created for the participation of all citizens in the elections.

I remember that this law was approved without debate or opposition, even from those liberal bourgeois-democratic elements who had managed to penetrate into the Council and the Standing Committee of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council. I mention this because, from the information we had, as well as from the great pressure which the British and Ameri-

can representatives were exerting on us, we expected a great struggle with those elements who were now charged with the mission of going on the attack to sabotage the line of our Party on the elections, of creating an «opposition» within or outside the Front and manoeuvring by means of it to seize power in the future. Apparently, however, they had saved their venom for the Law on the Elections. Therefore, they received the Law on Electoral Lists with smiles and even applause. Their faces looked sour only when I rose and sought an exception to the Law.

«I propose,» I said, «that an exception should be made for those who have still not reached the required age, but who have taken part in the ranks of the National Liberation Army. I think that it is fair to make this exception. Those boys and girls who have fought for freedom arms in hand, who, with full consciousness, have dedicated their young lives to the Homeland, have the right to say with their vote what they have said with the rifle. They have all the maturity necessary to make their judgement on the fate of the people.»

«I support Enver's proposal with both hands. We should include it in the Law without hesitation,» said Omer Nishani, who was among the first to speak.

«The young people of all ages bore the burden of the war,» said Nako Spiru, «therefore, it is their right to uphold the state power...»

All present approved my proposal and after this we went on to the discussion of the proposed Law on the Elections. Both for the preparation of this draft law and for the whole organization and crowning with



success of the election campaign we had to do a great deal of work and preparation, not only because we were short of competent and experienced jurists, and none of us had any sort of experience on these matters in the past, but also because, in general, no tradition about elections had been created in our country in the past, especially for supreme organs such as the Constituent Assembly. That slight experience on parliamentary elections in Albania which was created in the years 1920-1924 was not only the first and contained major mistakes, restrictions and distortions, but, more importantly, it was mostly a kind of «contest», a «parliamentary race», which took place between representatives of the wealthy classes, feudal lords and reactionary bourgeois, on the one hand, and the progressive and democratic elements who were or posed as representatives of *Opinga*, on the other hand. In general, the people themselves stayed or were kept away from these elections. After the advent of Zog to power and, especially, after he was proclaimed king in 1928, even that slight democratic element which appeared in the elections of an earlier period came to an end. From that time on, the vote in the farcical Zogite elections was decided by the whip, the bribe and the rifle butt, associated both with the general ignorance and backwardness of the masses and with their understandable lack of interest in the so-called elections.

Hence, we had to create everything from scratch, usually basing ourselves on what we read from the classics of Marxism-Leninism, what we had been able to learn from the experience of the Soviet Union,

and so on. Above all, we proceeded from the principle that we must formulate a draft law in which the people would be given the possibility and right to express their opinion and will as clearly, freely and directly as possible, that is, a law which would ensure all the guarantees for the normal and democratic development of this political activity of historic importance. The elections for the Constituent Assembly would be held on the basis of universal equal suffrage with direct secret ballot, and the law prohibited and condemned any kind of activity by anyone at all to violate these principles.

Although the draft law on the elections, which we had prepared with the greatest toil and care, guaranteed one of the most democratic and complete ways for the people to express their will, during the discussions for its approval a limited number of «democratic and liberal» elements rose in strong opposition to it.

Gjergj Kokoshi, in particular, launched a fierce attack on the law which was being discussed, and, in fact, that was an attack against the Democratic Front, the Party and the people's state power.

As soon as the draft law was presented, Gjergj Kokoshi demanded the floor and, after some hypocritical eulogizing of the Front and the people's state power, began to pour out his criticisms which, in fact, amounted to rejection of the draft law which was to be approved. Kokoshi's criticisms were a reflection of the profound concern of the overthrown classes, reaction and the imperialists who understood that in the coming elections they would have no chance of win-

ning a complete victory or even of securing an adequate number of deputies to create an opposition.

«Besides people of the war, there should also be people of the peace in the Assembly,» advocated Gjergj Kokoshi, «and there are such people even outside the Front.»

Of course, such an absurd division into people «of the war» and people «of the peace» on his lips had the meaning that even those who, when the Albanian people were fighting for the freedom of the country, sat looking on, drew profits and even secretly or openly collaborated with the occupier or the quisling government, should be elected to the Constituent Assembly. Gjergj Kokoshi wanted the merchants and property-owners, the beys and kulaks to be represented in the supreme state organ so that they could dictate their will there. This spokesman of theirs understood clearly what the opinion of the people was about their oppressors, therefore he demanded that the law should guarantee them unfair possibilities to be elected to the Assembly.

«The people organized in the Democratic Front, present their own candidates to the Assembly in the lists of the Front,» we told him quietly. «If those who are outside the Front desire to be elected, let them present their candidatures individually. The draft law recognizes them this right and, indeed, will defend it.»

«In comparison with the lists of the Front which has a brilliant organization,» Kokoshi admitted with regret, «the individual candidatures are doomed to failure, because these elements are not organized in political parties and do not have their own press or

propaganda. On the other hand, the men of the state power are all in the Front, thus no guarantees are given that other candidates will be elected.»

This was a vile insinuation against our people's state power and one of the comrades, who was a member of the Standing Committee, got up and quite rightly asked:

«Does Mr. Gjergj Kokoshi want the return of former regimes which will give guarantees of free elections?!»

Manol Konomi, the minister of justice, on behalf of the Government, explained to Gjergj Kokoshi the application of the principle of proportionality for different organizations and not for individuals on the lists.

Qirjako Harito, Siri Shaplllo and others also spoke in opposition to Kokoshi's «criticisms». They pointed out that through the war and its work, the Democratic Front had gained great authority and trust among the people and, if other political parties and groups did not exist, that was not its fault.

«The fact that no other group has been able to organize itself after ten months of liberation,» said Siri, «means that the creation of such groups has not been in the interests of the people. The people are with the Front. If there are some who want to organize themselves outside the Front, let them try, but they will run up against the strength of the Front and will lose. There is nothing we can do about this.»

Thus, this attempt of reaction to use the elections for its own aims failed. Its advocate, Kokoshi, was left in a minority of one. After this, like a drowning man clutching at a straw, he decided to play the last card

with which his patrons, the British, had provided him: he demonstratively resigned from the Democratic Front, in this way giving the signal for the creation of an «opposition», which, according to the British and American plans, was to take part in the elections as a counter-weight to the Democratic Front.

However, Kokoshi's gesture at those moments of general enthusiasm simply became a new theme for jokes: faced with our strength, the other *Kokoshis*\* became wet hens and did not dare follow Kokoshi into «opposition». He remained alone, in appearances of course, because in reality, while the other elements like him drew in their horns a little, behind the scenes they were to increase their savage activity to overthrow the people's state power. This was to be proved and documented a little later, when our organs of the dictatorship of the proletariat were to uncover all the threads of their plot and they appeared before the people's courts.

After his abortive attempt and, especially, after he left the Front, Gjergj Kokoshi surrendered his place on the stage to his friends, Riza Dani, Shefqet Beja and others. These two had been included in the lists of the Front and succeeded in being elected to the Constituent Assembly, because up till that time they posed as supporters of the program of the Democratic Front and had guarded against displaying openly hostile stands. Nevertheless, we had been vigilantly watching their activity and had seen that the dose of resistance in them was increasing from day to day.

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\* *Kokoshi* in Albanian means rooster.

For some time we had had reports that Riza Dani, Gjergj Kokoshi, Shefqet Beja and some others, who were convinced that our Party would go bankrupt, were linked with the British and American military missions. As was discovered later, it was these missions which organized and directed these elements to create the resistance and opposition, legal and illegal, against the people's state power, against the Party and the major reforms we were carrying out. We knew that these individuals went in and out of the British mission and were friendly with its functionaries. We considered this normal and realized that, if we were to make any comradely criticism about this, they would say to us: «There is nothing wrong with it because they are our allies.» We were soon convinced, however, that they did not go to visit the British or the American missions to talk about the weather or to drink a coffee or a whiskey, but to «complain about their problems» and co-ordinate their activity against us. My suspicions were quickly confirmed after a meeting which I had with the British general, Hodgson.

Some days after his arrival in our country, about the beginning of 1945, Hodgson, who was head of the British mission, sought an audience and I received him at the prime minister's office. He greeted me with his ruddy face and his cane under his arm, took off his cap and I invited him to sit down in an arm-chair. As soon as he was seated, he began pompously:

«I bring good news for the Front and your administration,» he said and handed me an official letter from UNRRA. «UNRRA,» continued Hodgson, «has

decided to assist you as the allies we are, with food, materials, etc.,» and he continued to list the aid. I handed the letter to the interpreter who translated it for me.

«I cannot read the signature,» he said at the end.

«Ask the general,» I told him.

«The note has been signed by Major Oakley Hill who has been appointed representative of UNRRA in Albania,» replied Hodgson.

«Is this fellow who was Zog's adviser on the gendarmerie still alive?» I asked him.

«Yes,» replied the general, «he is alive and now he has the opportunity to assist Albania again.»

«Except that, this is no longer the Albania of Zog, but Albania of the partisans and the people, therefore I am astonished at this coincidence that UNRRA has appointed Major Oakley Hill, who signed this letter, to our country when it is known that there is no longer a gendarmerie to train in Albania,» I told him.

Without doubt both the General and Hill were agents of the British Intelligence Service.

«Nevertheless,» I said, «we thank UNRRA for the sympathy which it has demonstrated, but,» I continued, glancing down the list of materials which UNRRA had decided to send, «we think that the quantity allocated does not respond either to our needs or to the losses which the Albanian people have suffered during the war.»

«I don't know what to say to you about that,» replied Hodgson. «In any case I have been informed that the representatives of UNRRA will come to Ti-

rana in a few days time, and so you can discuss these things with them.»

«Of course,» I replied.

(In fact the representatives of UNRRA came, together with the instructor of Zog's gendarmerie, but the discussions with them were in vain. They were engaged more with plots than with studying our requirements and the organization of the aid.)

«These goods,» continued the General, «will be landed at Durrës or Vlora or wherever you like, and a group of British officers and soldiers will land with them.»

«Why are these soldiers and officers coming?»

«To distribute the goods, naturally, wherever you allocate them.»

«Why, can't we distribute them ourselves? We are a state, we are a government.»

«It must be done in this way,» replied the General, «otherwise, the goods will not be supplied.»

«We do not refuse supplies from the allies,» I told Hogdson, «but we do not accept charity and you cannot impose conditions on us. We do not agree that any British soldier or officer should set foot on our land, or even in our ports. Everything will be handed to our port authorities in the presence of people from your mission in Tirana and we will give you a receipt to show that we received this or that commodity. This is the only procedure acceptable to us. Accept it if you wish, otherwise we refuse the UNRRA goods.»

The General, of course, was displeased, and went away saying with British phlegm: «I shall inform my government.»



Some time later Kokoshi and Beja came to me, allegedly for something else, and brought the conversation round to the UNRRA aid. I explained to them what had happened. Shefqet Beja began to say to me:

«That's all very well, Enver, but it's to our benefit, we're in need and we should make some concession, because it's a big government and is offended,» and all sorts of other such rubbish.

«Listen, Shefqet,» I said, «we are not offending anyone, but it is the British government that is offending us. What does it take us for? You who have been a merchant, aren't you able to distribute a few rags instead of the British coming here to do this for us? No, we will make no concession. If they want to, let them bring the goods on the conditions which we present to them.»

What intrigued me, however, was from whom had Shefqet Beja learned this and who urged him to intervene? Undoubtedly, the British General.

Only a little later, these two made another attempt in favour of the arrogant policy of the Anglo-American imperialists. This occurred on the eve of the elections to the Constituent Assembly, in November of that year, when the recognition of our Government by the Soviet Union was announced and the USA and Great Britain seemed to be going to recognize us, too. As is known, while the recognition on the part of the Soviet Government was open and sincere, Britain and the United States of America set conditions for this. We rejected their conditions, especially that of the American government that we should recognize the agreements which Zog had made with it. Gjergj Kokoshi, Shef-

get Beja and Riza Dani came to me again to persuade me that we should not be so exacting towards these two great powers, because, as the small country we were, we needed their aid and support and, therefore, had to make them some concession. I rejected the «arguments» of these individuals, about whom the idea was crystallizing in my mind that they were agents of the British and the Americans.

Of course, seeing that neither their attempts, nor the pressures of the Anglo-Americans were yielding any results, these elements, who were gradually going over to the positions of reaction, would counteract with other means and in other forms. And, in fact, our information service had reported that these elements had been set in movement and were organizing. This organization was done, you might say, with the old material, because they had no basis among the people. They were establishing the old links with our wartime enemies, with the bankrupt intellectuals, with the aghas who had lost their land, with the expropriated bourgeois and others, and the purpose was to create their «party» and an opposition in the elections and in the People's Assembly.

As I have written above, however, through our vigilance and readiness to prevent the secret plans and plots of internal reaction and the Anglo-Americans from finding suitable soil, we destroyed the cards in their hands and, with our mature and principled stand, forced them to explode with anger and unmask themselves, as occurred with Kokoshi. Meanwhile, we pressed on vigorously with the work for the preparation of other political events which we had ahead of us.

A few days after the approval of the Law on the Elections to the Constituent Assembly, the Standing Committee of the Anti-fascist Council set the date of the elections, December 2, 1945, and appointed the central electoral commission. Thus, the election campaign began.

The Central Committee of the Party issued special instructions on the organization of the political work, propaganda and agitation by the communists about the elections of December 2, which were considered an event of historic importance for the fate of Albania. The Party orientated that the voting on December 2 should be turned into a great popular plebiscite in which the masses would clearly and openly express their opinion about the course on which our country would proceed. Through their vote, the men and women of Albania would say «No» to the bitter past of oppression and exploitation and affirm the brilliant road of socialism. At those moments the work of the Party and its levers assumed an exceptional intensity: the press, the figurative agitation, the talks, the meetings and conferences, all had the aim of explaining to the masses why they should vote and what importance their votes had for the future of the Homeland. At these meetings, rallies and conferences which were held everywhere in the context of the election campaign, the people responded to the appeal of the Party and calls burst out everywhere:

«A People's Republic! Let us vote for a People's Republic!»

The program proclaimed by the Democratic Front, which was the program of the Party for those mo-

ments, conformed to the interests and the aspirations of the people. It was a realistic, revolutionary, concrete program which ensured the economic, political and social progress of the country. No other program was proclaimed to compete with it, because there could be no program more democratic than that of the Front.

The fact that the call for a People's Republic was immediately embraced everywhere was the best answer that paralysed the desperate efforts of reaction, which did everything possible to alienate the masses from the Front and from the elections, and the people gave it with their powerful voice. The efforts and combinations of the Anglo-Americans and their agents to create some sort of political opposition party or group totally failed. They were completely discredited, nobody followed them. So true was this that even when, on the eve of the elections, some element of the bourgeoisie wanted to present his candidature outside the list of the Front, he was unable to do this, because he could not find even ten or fifteen people, let alone the twenty required by the law, to support his candidature.

The proclamation of elections to the Constituent Assembly was welcomed with enthusiasm everywhere in Albania and, as I said, in the meetings which were organized everywhere the people expressed their will to send their finest sons to the Assembly. Apart from other things, such important events in the social and political life of that period as the Congress of Trade Unions, the Congress of Youth, the proclamation of the program of the Democratic Front and so on, added to

the enthusiasm and the liveliness of the election campaign and gave it a sounder content. These events created an unprecedented atmosphere of work, enthusiasm and mobilization everywhere.

Thus, December 2, 1945, the day of the elections, was turned into one of the greatest celebrations Albania had ever known. For the first time the people had the possibility to say their word effectively, to decide on their own fate. There was not the slightest doubt about the victory of the candidates of the Democratic Front. The list of the Front found the approval of the masses everywhere, and this fact was so evident that reaction did not even attempt to organize itself and to come out with a list of its own.

As far as I remember, in all the electoral districts of Albania only one individual candidature was presented for the elections! The representatives of the overthrown classes, convinced that the people were against them, did not follow the example either of this Don Quixote, who voted for himself, or of Gjergj Kokoshi, who had demonstratively left the Front. They adhered to the program of the Front and tried to get themselves included in the lists of candidates. In fact, with the assistance of Sejfulla, who exerted great pressure for the policy of «open doors», some elements of reaction, including Sheh Karbunara, together with other disguised individuals such as Riza Dani, Shefqet Beja and one or two others, managed to get their names on the lists.

The brilliant victory which the Democratic Front scored in these elections is well-known. Here I want to record only curiosities which have stuck in my

mind from those first elections which were held in new Albania.

I think the elderly will remember it, because they voted themselves, but I don't think all the young people know about it. In the history textbooks they find plenty of analyses, figures and conclusions, all of which are necessary and indispensable, but I have the impression that they have little idea of the lively atmosphere of those years. We older people have the duty to tell them about those times and to speak, not in the language of books and newspapers, but tell them about real live events, because frequently these leave deeper impressions in the human mind than a definition or a conclusion. All of us know that although our country is the cradle of an ancient culture and art from which many masters of poetry, the arts and science have emerged, in the first years after Liberation, because of the obscurantist policy of the regimes of the past, the overwhelming majority of the population was illiterate. However, if you ask the youth of today, or even those of 35 to 40 years, how these people who did not know how to read the name of the deputy or write a name which they desired, were able to cast their votes, I believe that few of them know how this was done.

In those elections we did not have voting papers as we do today, or that enclosed booth where the voter could cross out the name of the candidate he did not like, or add that of one he did like. Each voter was given a small rubber ball stamped with the eagle, the symbol of our flag, and this he had to drop in the box which he chose. In the room where the voting was

done there were two boxes, a red one for the Front and the other for the cases when there were individual candidatures outside the Front, which the people called «the black box». The voter had to put his hand into both boxes so that no one would know in which one he had cast his vote. However, there were those who, from enthusiasm and excitement, did not keep their votes secret because, after placing their hand in the red box, they shouted:

«Long live the Party! Long live the Front! I vote for the People's Republic!»

Another curiosity was a special clause in the Law on the Elections under which the sale and use of alcoholic beverages two days before the elections and one day afterwards was prohibited!

Thus, on December 2 the young men and women and the elderly voted and so did the fighters of our National Liberation Army who, perhaps for the first time for a long period, were without their rifles, because under the law no one was allowed to go into the polling booth armed. They left their weapons with their friends outside and entered in turn to perform their right and duty as citizens. After the announcement of the results of the elections, in which the Democratic Front scored an overwhelming victory, on behalf of the Provisional Democratic Government I proposed to the Standing Committee of the Anti-fascist National Liberation Council, that we should proceed with the summoning of the session of the Constituent Assembly. The Standing Committee of the ANLC set January 10, 1946 as the day when the proceedings of the Assembly would commence.

Right up till the set day the people everywhere, at rallies, meetings and conferences, through telegrams and letters addressed to the ANLC, the Government and the Front, insistently demanded that the Assembly should proclaim Albania a People's Republic. They called on their representatives in the supreme state organ to accomplish their mission and give the people the form of the regime which they desired and a truly democratic Constitution.

«A People's Republic!», this was the only call which was heard from the great crowd which, on the morning of January 10, 1946, had filled the square in front of the building where the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly were to take place, where the Higher Institute of Arts is today. It was a fine day which went marvellously well with the festive atmosphere which prevailed over the whole capital. During the whole of the first session that day and on the following day, the people stood in front of the building and listened to what was going on in the Assembly through loudspeakers.

At 10 a.m., the time announced as the opening of the session, a profound solemn silence reigned in the hall. After the members of the Anti-fascist Council and the Government took their seats, Dr. Omer Nishani, the chairman of the Standing Committee of the ANLC, was the first to take the floor and delivered a short speech in which he declared the first session of the Assembly open and, according to the law, invited the oldest deputy to take the chair for the session. This deputy was the representative of the people of the region of Elbasan, Dr. Petraq Popa, a participant



in the National Liberation Movement, who had been elected a member of the General Council at Labinot. If I am not mistaken, Dr. Popa was the father of Bardhyl who, before he was killed during the Winter Operation, had been one of the outstanding activists of the youth of Elbasan and had later been charged with the task of political secretary of the regional committee of the Communist Youth.

After the usual procedures, such as the roll call, the appointment of a commission to verify mandates, the swearing in of the deputies, etc., it was decided that the meeting should continue on the following day, January 11, 1946, a day which will remain one of the most outstanding in the history of our people and our state.

I always remember with emotion that enthusiastic atmosphere which prevailed in the hall of the Assembly when the telegrams were read from Korça, Berat, Durrës, Pogradec and the whole of Albania, in which the people demanded the proclamation of the People's Republic. I remember as clearly as if it were today the moment when Hysni Kapo, a young man of 30 years, but with great experience as commissar, commander and leader of the Party, rose to his feet and handed the chairman of the session the motion of the delegates of Vlora, who, after expressing the will of the valiant and revolutionary people whom they represented, proposed:

«In the name of the deputies of Vlora, Albania should be proclaimed a People's Republic!»

The hall and the square in the boulevard outside echoed with the cheers of the people. The cheering in

the hall went on for several minutes and at one moment the chairman of the session called:

«I propose to put the motion of the deputies of Vlora to the vote!»

«There is no need to vote!» came repeated calls from the hall and truly it was clear that the will of the people would be done, because they themselves and their representatives had voted, rifles in hand, with bloodshed and sacrifices, for Albania to set out on the new road of freedom and progress. Nevertheless, however formal it may appear sometimes, order and procedure have to be respected, especially in such a supreme organ as the Constituent Assembly was.

The deputies voted and the official announcement was made immediately:

«The Constituent Assembly, through unanimous vote and acclamation, has proclaimed Albania a People's Republic!»

This announcement was accompanied with cheers, then spontaneously the deputies rose to their feet and sang the National Anthem. We all had to struggle hard to control our emotions, but still here and there tears could be seen on the faces of those who had passed so many tests in the war with the enemy and under the threat of death. When we emerged from the hall a «graver» test awaited the deputies. The people surged around us, kissed and embraced us and, cheering, carried some of the deputies shoulder-high. The same enthusiasm prevailed everywhere in Albania. When the news was announced, people came out in the streets, singing and dancing. Perhaps for the first time after so many years the people gave themselves completely

to rejoicing and forgot their suffering, sacrifices and the many privations. A year before, November 29, 1944 had given them freedom. Today, January 11, 1946, gave them their People's Republic, the republic of workers and peasants.

Thus, the Albanian people, under the leadership of their own Party, achieved the objective of their war. They became masters of their own fate in the Homeland freed of occupiers. No one donated these victories to them and our people had never taken anything from the hands of others, but everything had been achieved with struggle and work, with bravery and wisdom, with the rifle and the pen.

These great historic victories which now, de facto and de jure, had finally crowned a whole period of war and efforts, the great joy and enthusiasm of the people, and our determination to strengthen the People's Republic, which we had just created, and make it prosper could not but infuriate our internal and external enemies, both open and disguised. Their efforts and attempts to turn the wheel of history backwards burst out again and, in the course of these attempts, those elements of reaction like Riza Dani, Shefqet Beja and others, who had managed to be elected to the Constituent Assembly, went into action.

On the one hand, they worked under cover, plotted, strengthened their connections with reaction in Albania and abroad, with the catholic clergy, consulted with and reported to the British and American missions, secretly spread propaganda and prepared the terrain in order to bring about a situation which would

enable the two western «democracies» to intervene in Albania; on the other hand, they also operated legally in the Constituent Assembly, or the People's Assembly, and missed no opportunity to attack the laws which were adopted or to distort them according to their own interests. Riza Dani was especially active in this «opposition»; Gjergj Kokoshi had not been elected, while Shefqet Beja was more wily and cunning and did not expose himself much as a member of the «opposition»

At the first meetings of the Assembly, Riza Dani began to express his reservation and opposition. When the Presidium of the Assembly was to be elected, Kahreman Ylli, on behalf of the deputies of Berat, presented a list which was supported by all the other deputies who spoke, while Riza Dani opposed this with another list in which, together with some of our comrades, he had included his friends. Of course, the candidates who Riza preferred were not elected. But he was to go even further. For example, when the rules of the Assembly were discussed, Riza was to find the opportunity to express opposition and make demands which, through logic and arguments, were rejected. This worshipper of the old regime and, of course, also of the bourgeois parliament, wanted to make our Assembly a talk shop in which each could speak as long as he liked, without any restriction, and everything that Riza Dani and company said should be published in the press. Amongst his other poisonous proposals, he got up and said:

«I do not agree with the definition that each de-

puty should be responsible and render account to the Assembly for his work. We are not here to render account, but to make the law!»

«Then, in your opinion, to whom ought the deputy render account?» one of the comrades asked him.

«To his own honour and conscience!» declared Riza Dani and, turning to the chairman of the session, said: «I propose that the definition in the rules about the rendering of account should be put like this, 'The deputy is responsible to his own honour and conscience'.»

«That means to no one!» jeered one of the delegates.

He made many such «criticisms» and «proposais» and, although we replied calmly to his attacks, we were fully aware that Riza Dani was only a marionette for someone else. Now we knew all the strings which guided him, kept them under supervision and made ready to cut them once and for all when the balance should tip.

But the culmination of the attacks of reaction, through its mouthpiece in the Constituent Assembly, was reached during the discussion of the draft of the Constitution of our People's Republic. The Constitution, or Statute, to use the term current at that time, had been carefully prepared, and had been discussed extensively and in detail with the masses of workers and peasants, intellectuals and soldiers. The draft had been welcomed with enthusiasm and the criticisms and suggestions of the masses had been taken into account to further improve it. Thus, the final draft which was presented to the Constituent Assembly for discussion and approval was an historic document which not only

consolidated the great victories the Albanian people had achieved under the leadership of the Communist Party, but also guaranteed the defence of their interests and their further economic and political development. This draft, which was approved despite the fury of reaction, was the juridical basis of a state of people's democracy. The Constitution of the Republic put an end, once and for all, to anti-popular regimes of oppression and exploitation, to the domination of landowners, beys, merchants and politicians who sold out the interests of the Homeland for lire, dollars or pounds sterling. This was displeasing only to such gentlemen as Riza Dani and Shefqet Beja and their foreign patrons.

Thus, while all the representatives of the people in the Assembly (like the people themselves at the preliminary discussion) approved the draft with rejoicing, Riza Dani rose and made a provocative insinuation against the essence of the draft Constitution. The Assembly listened to him calmly and then gave him the reply he deserved.

«I shall speak as briefly as possible,» said the spokesman of reaction in a cynical tone, «because the Assembly does not like long speeches and words change nothing when the fact is accomplished.»

Then, he went on to attack the draft Constitution, because, according to him, it was «ideological and not national in spirit»(!).

«I am for a free democracy and want the Constitution to be inspired by that principle!» declared Riza Dani, finally expressing his own *credo*.

Of course, Riza was for a «free» bourgeois democracy so that he and his ilk would really be free to make profits, to be the élite of the nation and decide its fate according to their own interests.

In fact, his attacks represented the last gasps of the remnants of the exploiting classes, expressed their terror at the fact that the people had taken power and were led by the Communist Party. This fact terrified them, not only because of the existing situation, but especially because of the future, because they knew on what course the Party would lead the people.

The debate in the Assembly was only a fragment from the great tableau of the political struggle which had been waged over the question of what Albania would become: a country of bourgeois democracy, of bourgeois parliamentarianism, dominated by the landowners and the bourgeoisie, or a country in which the dictatorship of the proletariat, based on the alliance of the two working classes of the country, would prevail! However, Mr. Riza Dani had presented himself on the stage too late. History and the people had given their decision: Albania would proceed on the road of socialism, would be a state in which the greatest enemy of the bourgeoisie and exploitation, the dictatorship of the proletariat, would prevail and be ceaselessly strengthened.

In the Assembly, too, Riza received unanimous condemnation. All the deputies rejected his arguments and, in the name of the people, expressed their enthusiasm for the Fundamental Law of our state. Riza Dani and his associates cowered in their seats and not

only did not dare to continue their villainous efforts, but even voted for the draft Constitution!

Later, when the Constituent Assembly turned into the People's Assembly, I had a direct debate with Riza Dani. At one session of the Assembly, Riza Dani stood up and, amongst a series of objections on the decisions we were taking, directed a question to me as prime minister:

«What are we going to do with all this army that we have mobilized? I propose that the bulk of the army should be demobilized.»

I mounted the tribune and gave him a stern answer, because I saw that these elements had set out on an ominous course:

«It is just as well, Mr. Riza Dani, that you did not say that when we demobilize the partisans we should give them a cap as a gift, as the government of that time did to the heroes of the War of Vlora in 1920. No, Mr. Riza Dani, in our situation not for one minute will we demobilize the army, but, on the contrary, we will further strengthen and extend it, will arm it properly, will set up military schools and will train and educate officers. The army liberated the Homeland and will defend it from any danger. It is the most beloved weapon of the people and will remain the most powerful weapon in the hands of the people and their democratic state which they established by shedding blood. You, Mr. Dani, want us to disarm ourselves. You think that we will be so naive as to allow the enemies of the people to catch us off guard, but you are greatly mistaken. If we were to follow your advice the people would rise and condemn us, because you ought to know



that you are attacking one of the most glorious offshoots of the people.»

Riza Dani went red in the face and shook his head, while his associates tried to pretend that these words were not aimed at them, too(!). In time all of them were to come out in their true colours, were to be finally discredited and unmasked, and the people were to throw them out of the ranks of the Assembly as microbes of the old.

I remember that a little while after this, at another meeting of the People's Assembly, another associate of Dani and Kokoshi raised an issue which was long over and done with: he sought the formation of other «democratic» parties «which should exist just like the Communist Party of Albania», as he put it.

The whole Assembly rose and rejected his proposal and aims and pointed out and defended the great and decisive role of the Communist Party of Albania, which fought, liberated the people and was building socialism. At the same time, the Assembly pointed out the great role of the Front as a broad political organization, in which all political views were expressed and put into action in complete steel unity around the Party.

However, the attacks and venom of these elements, who wrongly and accidentally had managed to penetrate into the Assembly, were unable to shake the will and determination of the people and their representatives even for a moment.

The victory of December 2, 1945 in the elections, that of January 11, 1946 with the proclamation of the Republic, and a little later, the adoption of the Consti-

tution of the People's Republic of Albania,(1)put the final seal on the historic victories achieved and sanctioned the will of the people and our Communist Party about the future course and destiny of Albania.

With the proclamation of the Republic and the adoption of the Constitution, the process of the political organization of the order of people's democracy, as a state of the dictatorship of the proletariat, was completed. Now we had everything in our hands, in the hands of the Party and the people, to continue and carry further the socialist revolution, to ceaselessly perfect and democratize the state, to steel the dictatorship of the proletariat, to make the life of the people ever happier, more secure and more prosperous and to raise the honour and prestige of our People's Republic higher and higher.

### **3. An impregnable fortress**

Years and decades have passed since those unforgettable days and now our country, our People's Republic (today the People's Socialist Republic of Albania), has been ceaselessly strengthened, is prospering, and in each step radiates the joy, happiness and sec-

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1 On March 14, 1946 the Assembly adopted the Constitution of the PRA and after this the Assembly was turned into the People's Assembly as the supreme organ of state power in the PRA.

urity of a fine, new life. This is the life of people free from any oppression or exploitation, the life of brave people, patriots and talented workers who, with lofty consciousness, with vigilance, with determination and uninterrupted efforts, have completely changed the appearance of the Albania of the past.

On the ruins and the miserable cottages which we found on November 29, 1944, towns and villages, new from every stand-point, have now risen. On the small blacksmiths and coppersmiths' shops a great modern industry of all branches has been built up and ceaselessly strengthened; developed fertile fields extend over the former swamps and wasteland; the inexhaustible mental and creative forces of an entire people with schooling, culture and art have burst out over the former backwardness and ignorance. With the Party at the head, with the united forces of an entire people, our socialist Albania has become both a great work site of production and creation and an impregnable fortress of socialism.

Of course, all these things have been achieved through a great struggle, with ceaseless efforts and sacrifices in all directions.

We did not find the road on which we proceeded strewn with rose petals; the obstacles, difficulties, ignorance and backwardness of the past haunted us at every step. And as if these were not enough, at each step the internal and external class enemies, the enemies of the peoples, progress and socialism, threatened us and did everything in their power to overthrow us. Any strengthening or success of ours hurt them, therefore, in their old and modern kitchens they were to

cook up aggressions, blackmail, threats and blockades. But, vigilant and unwavering on our course, we were to foil all the plans and attempts of enemies and, through courage and cool-headedness, turn them all to dust and ashes.

From the moments when we formed our People's Republic, when we had so many difficulties and problems to solve, a great danger threatened the future and the very existence of our country. The Yugoslav Titoites brought into action all their forces and savage means of blackmail and conspiracy, even preparations for military intervention, with the aim that the People's Republic of Albania should lose its separate existence and be turned into the 7th Republic of Yugoslavia. As to how we defeated their savage aims and plans, this has long been recorded in history. We had pledged ourselves to lead Albania forward, to make it a prosperous country and a fortress, and the Party had taught us that we must never violate our decisions and pledges, must apply and defend them even at the cost of our lives. And Albania was saved.

The victory which we achieved over the plots and the interference of the Yugoslav revisionists gave us increased strength and determination to forge steadily ahead, in unity with the people, towards consolidation and new victories. We knew very well that what we had achieved was not our first and last victory. We were vigilant and prepared to face other sterner battles in defence of our Republic and Marxism-Leninism. The Anglo-American imperialists and neighbouring chauvinists, as cunning as they were aggressive and unscrupulous in their anti-Albanian

ambitions, set in motion all their networks of secret agents. They were to gather in their web all the dregs of reaction, gangs of saboteurs and criminals were to be sent in by sea, air and land to strangle our Republic, but all of them were to meet their death, thanks to the vigilance of the people and the unwavering justice of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Even later, the chorus of enemies would not give up its imperialist and chauvinist aims towards Albania, would not be brought to their senses by the ignominious defeats, but would continue to intrigue and plot to the detriment of the Albanian people. However, we were to reply to them always with the invincible strength which only the Marxist-Leninist truth and justice provides. They were to bark and howl like dogs, while our caravan forged steadily ahead, our Republic grew steadily stronger and more and more each day gained the international prestige which it deserved.

Thus, amidst encirclements and blockades, the Albanian people were to lay the foundations of socialism, strengthen the economy, improve the life of the working people, build gigantic projects, and never for one moment allow their vigilance to be blunted. At no time were our Party and people to find themselves facing situations for which they were unprepared.

So, we continued our correct course and were never dismayed or even batted an eyelid in the face of the blockades and the threats of the Khrushchevites who, in their superpower greed, wanted to turn our People's Republic into a vassal state, a part of the Russian empire! But the men had never been born who could bring the Albanians to their knees, and

even less could this occur at a time when the Albanians had an heroic Party, like our Party of Labour, at the head and were guided by a vanguard ideology, such as the Marxist-Leninist ideology. To make the peoples and genuine communists lethargic and put them to sleep, Khrushchev and company waved the withered olive-branch of «peaceful coexistence», while we replied to him and his followers by further strengthening the dictatorship of the proletariat, that sharp sword of the working class, which would descend mercilessly on the head of any internal or external enemy. When they saw that they could not divert us from our course in «indirect» ways, with their capitulationist theories, «advice» and «orientations», they operated through pressures, threats, the submarines and starvation. We told them to their faces: We would rather eat grass than submit to you or anyone else; we shall remain where we are, on the shores of the Adriatic! And truly we are here and will always be here, indomitable, convinced of the correctness of our course, proud of what we have achieved and determined to respond to any enemy or situation in the proper manner.

The 40 years of the people's state power have convinced us that no harm can come to the People's Socialist Republic of Albania so long as the people and the Party are linked together like flesh to bone. In this political and ideological unity, more unbreakable than any other unity that exists in the world, lies the explanation for and the basis of the great successes we have achieved in our peaceful constructive work; therein lies the source of the strength of our

weighty and independent word in the international arena; therein lies the explanation for our courage and bravery in defence of the truth, the Homeland, the peoples and socialism. On this unity between the Party and the people, which has its foundations of blood and gunpowder, all those who wanted to split us and sow confusion in Albania, to make it a domain of foreigners, from the Koçi Xoxes in the first years to the multiple agent of all years and all foreign patrons, Mehmet Shehu, have smashed their heads.

While building and defending our country, in clashes and difficulties we have become further tempered and strengthened and will never trample on what we have done. We shall raise the prosperity, security and reputation of our people's Socialist Republic higher and higher. Therefore, in the name of the bloodshed and toil, the sweat and privations, let us transmit to the coming generations the great message which history has taught us: we must always be vigilant, always at work and on the attack to defend the victories achieved and carry them further forward. We must allow no one, whoever he may be, to violate and negate our immortal and sacred work, the People's Socialist Republic of Albania. Let us strengthen it, shape it, beautify it and hold it high as our ideal! In this way our fortress, socialist Albania, will be strengthened and rise even more majestically from generation to generation! Let our hearts beat always with its great heart.

And the greatest guarantee for this is the unity of the people around the Party, the immortal teachings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, and our Party which was born from the bosom of the people to lead it only to victories.





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