

**WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!**

*Nasho V. Jorgaqi*

**QEMAL STAFA**  
**HIS LIFE AND STRUGGLE**



**“Qemal gave a great example to all communists and freedom fighters with his heroic struggle and death.**

**“We saw each other two days ago and made plans for the future. I find it hard to believe that Qemal is no more. It has only been six months since we met, but I realized from the very first meeting that Qemal not only had a broad cultural horizon, but that he was politically and ideologically well-trained as a communist and a man of action. He was not only an outstanding leader of the communist youth and youth in general, but also one of the most active leaders of the Party, fighting until his last breath for its strengthening and unity.**

**“Despite his youth, he had the maturity of a hardened fighter, a determined communist. He was driven by an infinite faith and love for the people and their future. He was a pure, light-hearted and optimistic communist, a genuine leader of the youth. He loved life, but he sacrificed it for a great cause that he loved even more — the freedom of his people and the liberation of the oppressed throughout the world.”**

**ENVER HOXHA**

### ***Publisher's Note***

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**QEMAL STAFA**



## PREFACE

*When the author Nasho Jorgaqi told me that he intended to write something about Qemal Stafa, I congratulated him wholeheartedly. When I noticed his perseverance in seeking information and anecdotes about this hero's life, I began to believe that his work would be an incredible one. Now that the book is finished and about to be published, I am convinced that the author's tenacity has paid off and has created a work above and beyond anything I expected.*

*Undoubtedly, writing about the life and work of Qemal Stafa is a difficult and heavy responsibility. Qemal's activities during his short life are little known to this day, although some commemorative articles have appeared from time to time about him and discussions have been organized with young people and workers on certain anniversaries or for other reasons. The author of this book took on a significant task with a lot of courage: to make the life and work of the hero known to the people from whom he originated, especially the youth to whom he belonged, and for whom he will always remain the example of a vanguard fighter.*

*I knew Qemal Stafa around the mid-'30s, when our country and people were suffering under the tyranny of Zogu. Our common ideals to bring a better future to our people and Homeland united us in a close friendship that only his death interrupted. Subsequently, his face gradually transformed within me, as with many young people, into a symbol that traced the path of truth and justice for us.*

*Qemal clearly perceived the bright future that awaited us at the end of the darkness of the regimes of the era in which he was born, grew up and worked. Certainly, it was not a dream he savoured from afar, but the dream of an active fighter who tackled difficulties and enemies to achieve victory.*

*One cannot get an accurate idea of his personality or his work without taking into account the period in which he lived and worked. To understand him today, one must carefully*

*consider his era, especially the history of the early steps of the Albanian communist movement, the history of the enormous efforts made to establish the Communist Party of Albania (now the Party of Labour of Albania) and the first months of the existence of the Party. It seems to me that one of the great merits of the author of this work, Comrade Nasho Jorgaqi, lies precisely in placing Qemal within the framework of his time and the society in which he lived. Working diligently and providing a just interpretation of events, the author has, in my opinion, achieved his goal. He presents us with a Qemal similar to the one we knew, and as he must remain in the memory of future generations.*

*Qemal Stafa lived a short life and died young. However, his brief existence was filled with intense revolutionary activity. He spent two decades on this earth like a star that burned bright, a star whose light we have not forgotten. Even today, his work fills us with admiration for its breadth and depth. We must recall that during the unshakable founding of our glorious Party and youth organization, alongside the colossal work of Comrade Enver Hoxha and other comrades, we also find the very commendable activities and contributions of Qemal Stafa.*

*This young man had a penetrating mind, a broad understanding of the world, a critical eye, a strong set of morals, a passionate heart; he was energetic and bold, good and endowed with noble sentiment. When needed, he could become fiery and passionate, but he showed restraint and wisdom when required. His clear, incisive and convincing language captivated you. Even the most ardent adversaries admitted defeat before the force of his logic, his numerous arguments and the gift he had of presenting even the most complex issues in a simple manner. He quickly abandoned his social class of origin, demonstrating courage and exemplary selflessness; he joined the proletariat, embraced its ideology and devoted himself wholeheartedly to its service until the end of his days. The dramatic upheavals of the time did not shake him at all. Neither the difficulties of war nor the tempting proposals of*



*enemies dulled his will; he fought until his last breath for the interests of the people and the Homeland, for the social liberation of the working class and all labourers. His entire life is an exemplary combination of revolutionary thought and action, of ideas and revolutionary practice.*

*The following pages are dedicated to Qemal, who drew inspiration from life and from books with extraordinary passion and tenacity, to this talented organizer, to this young man of action who distinguished himself in the leadership of the Party and youth. His life and work can and should become a great source of knowledge for all, especially for the youth. His existence offers a brilliant example of disregarding personal interests in favour of the general interest embodied in the work of the Party. For him, in all cases, only one thing mattered: to proudly raise the banner of communism, the banner of the Party. He fell with this ideal in his heart on a May day when, along with spring flowers, the people's struggle also blossomed, watered by his spilt blood, becoming a symbol of heroism for all.*

*SAMI BAHOLLI*

## INTRODUCTION

The desire of our young generations to get to know the heroes of the National Liberation War in depth is certainly noble. Naturally, history has done its part by allowing us to remember each figure's unique position in the struggle. But is that enough?

The younger generations want to know the heroes not only for the role and place they occupy in history but also as individuals, as they were in their lifetime. They want to learn how they lived, how they fought and how they died. They seek to understand their dreams and ideas, their joys and sorrows, their lives in service of the Homeland. It is evident, therefore, that the desire to know the heroes is not rooted in sentimentality or basic curiosity but something more significant and profound. The heroes, with their living examples, become an endless source of strength, allowing us to draw inspiration from their lives and contributing to the great cause of shaping the new man. From this perspective, their biographies play a crucial role in communist education, especially the education of the youth.

Qemal Stafa holds a special place among the great heroes of our revolution. His death, we know, marked the birth of a new type of heroism, communist heroism. During the years of struggle under the leadership of the Party, the name and work of Qemal Stafa have been transformed into a great symbol. Such symbols are created by history when heroes embody the best characteristics of their time, embracing the most advanced ideals of their era.

Qemal was not an isolated phenomenon, a personality separate from his conditions; he was the son of the Albanian communist movement. His struggle in the ranks of the Communist Party made him a historic personality.

Speaking of Qemal means, first and foremost, por-

traying him as an Albanian communist, one of the pioneers of socialist ideas. Nurtured by these ideas, he became one of the standard-bearers of the National Liberation War, a leader of the Party and the people, a comrade and close collaborator of Enver Hoxha. He was and still remains the leader and first hero of our youth.

There has never ceased to be writings about him from the post-war period up until today. Every year, the press has dedicated articles to him. Short memoirs have been written by his comrades, and his figure has been discussed in various essays. It is clear that there was a want for one so we began to compile his biography. In this challenging task, we were guided, primarily, by the works of Comrade Enver, Party documents and *The History of the Party of Labour of Albania*. They helped solve many problems that could arise in the biography of a prominent activist like him.

Naturally, difficulties and problems were numerous and varied. The first difficulty was the lack of high quality secondary sources related to Qemal and a shortage of specific historic studies about him. Vivid materials that detail his life and work were missing. This difficulty became even more pronounced because I did not directly know the hero. To fill this great void, it was necessary to do a lot of work to get to know his comrades and close associates, establish contact with them, and collect facts, events and all kinds of details that form the basis of this work.

The shortage of documentation was another factor that posed difficulties in our undertaking. Unfortunately, almost all personal materials, such as manuscripts, letters and notes, which would have been very helpful, disappeared during the occupation. Nowadays, our archives have only a few documents directly related to Qemal.

Additionally, we want to remind our readers that

he died very young. He had just turned 22 when he was killed. In truth, our hero did not even have a full decade of political and social life. If we assume that he began his revolutionary activity around the age of 15, we can deduce that he worked and fought for his ideals for six or seven years in total. It is specifically these years that we have delved into.

Given that this is the first major work on Qemal, we have set the task of collecting facts, sorting them, and presenting and interpreting them as justly and accurately as possible. Our work is primarily that of a researcher driven by passion for our distinguished hero.

Certainly, Qemal was a great figure. His life was intense, rich in events and profound. We are only just beginning to discover it, so there is still much to be done.

*N.J.*

# I

*“I came from a family neither poor nor rich...”*

The ancestors of the Stafa family were simple peasants who, around the beginning of the last century, descended to the city of Elbasan from the foothills of the Korab mountains. They settled on Vyshka Street, in the Azinadare neighbourhood, and never moved again. Although well established in Elbasan, the Stafa family maintained their unique connections with the land; they gained a reputation as gardeners cultivating the lands of the landlords in Elbasan.

Qemal's grandfather, Ahmet Stafa, built a small shack in Vyshka Street, where he lived for many years with his wife and only son, Hasan. Later, Hasan, Qemal's father, demolished the shack and built a new house that is still known as the Stafa residence. It follows the characteristic architecture of the region, featuring a single floor, a small entrance, a cellar and a garden in front.

The house has three rooms and a small side room with a fireplace. It is in this house that Qemal was born on March 20, 1920. He was the fourth of Hasan Stafa's five children and his third son.

Qemal came into the world in an historic year for Albania. It was a time when a thousand difficulties and obstacles stood in front of the newly-established Albanian state, which was at war with both foreign and internal enemies. The Congress of Lushnja was convened, and the war of Vlora erupted during the same year. From then on, political struggles for the establishment of state power began in Albania. It seems that Qemal inherited from this era, with its smell of gunpowder and rich in significant events, his hatred for foreign occupiers, especially the Italians who sought to smother the Albanian state in its infancy, as well as his aspirations

for progress for Albanian society.

Qemal was born in Elbasan, one of the major cities in our country, known for its long-standing patriotic and cultural traditions.

Qemal's comrades recount that he considered himself a proud native of Elbasan, and whenever the opportunity arose, he boasted about his birthplace. He saw in Elbasan the region of the ancient Skampa, the city of Kristoforidhi and the home of the first secondary school in the region. He spoke at great lengths about the locals of Elbasan, with their well-known virtues and costumes, and their distinctive and beautiful dialect.

However, despite his deep affection for his hometown, Qemal could not live there for long; he left Elbasan at a very young age. As he grew older, he could only return occasionally, despite his fervent desire to do so.

He was three years old when the Stafa family left Elbasan and settled in Shkodra, a city that became his chosen Homeland. He acknowledged this himself when he wrote in an official document: "Born in Elbasan, raised in Shkodra..."

The future hero was born and raised in a family of middle-class urbanites, or as he himself pointed out, in a family that was "neither poor nor rich." The family lived on the father's salary and the rent they received by leasing out a small inheritance from his mother.

Qemal's paternal relatives were of modest origin. Ahmet Stafa, his paternal grandfather, worked all his life as a simple gardener, renting land and working in the gardens of the wealthy in the city. He had no other fortune than his hands and a son, Hasan. He dedicated all his care to this son, whom he sent to school despite their precarious economic situation, making an extraordinary sacrifice for the time. Hasan was a good student, intelligent, wise and well-mannered. Thanks to his qualities, he always had the respect of his teachers

and the patriots in the city. With their help and his father's meagre savings, he was sent to the Turkish school in Manastir after he completed elementary school in Elbasan.

However, the poor gardener did not have the privilege of enjoying his only son for long, as he died young, leaving behind an orphan and a widow.

Despite his difficult economic situation, the young orphan ardently desired to pursue higher education. He excelled in his baccalaureate examinations and his teachers accompanied his diploma with excellent recommendations. Thanks to this and the care of these patriots, the young man managed to secure a scholarship to the Military Academy in Constantinople.

In the capital of the Ottoman Empire, during his years of study, Hasan Stafa came into contact with Albanian patriotic circles. Like many young patriots, he was concerned about the fate of his enslaved country. Therefore, he followed with deep sympathy all the efforts of the men of the National Renaissance who were fighting to free Albania from foreign domination. Moreover, being the close friend of Kemal Atatürk, a fellow student at the academy, he was inspired by the advanced ideas of the time which advocated the struggle against the savage feudal system of the sultans. These circumstances positively influenced the formation of solid morals for the future officer.

In the early years of the century, Hasan Stafa completed his studies at the Military Academy and was promoted to the rank of lieutenant. Instead of appointing the young officer in Albania, the Constantinopolitan government sent him far from his country. Thus, he served for a few years in the Ottoman army, moving from one region to another, sometimes in Manastir, sometimes in Serres and Salonica, always separated from his family and his country.

After the proclamation of the independence of Al-



Qemal's father, Hasan

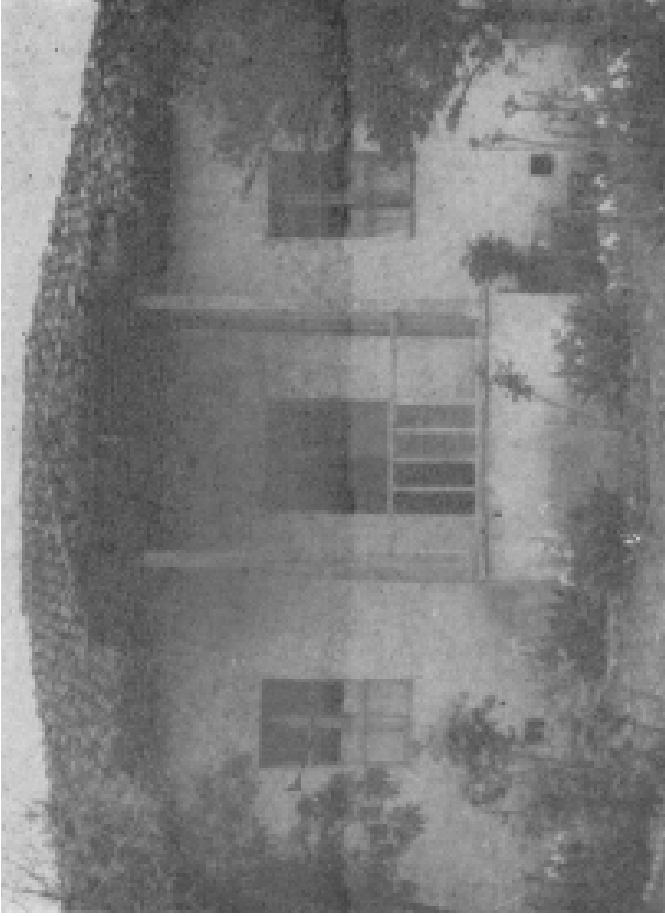




His mother, Sabrie Stafa



Qemal's nursemaid, Shaje Stafa



**The birthplace of Qemal (now a museum)**

bania, the patriotic officer returned to Elbasan and placed himself in the service of the Government of Vlora. But it was short-lived. Heavy clouds gathered over the country; the First World War broke out, Elbasan was occupied by the imperialist forces of Austria-Hungary and Hasan was isolated from his duties. During this period, he did not leave Elbasan. He had married Sabire Dylgjeri a few years earlier, whose uncles had helped the young man complete his studies. From this union, their first son, Veli, was born. To remedy his difficult economic situation, he opened a bookstore. He kept it until the end of the First World War, then he once again donned the uniform and served the new Albanian state. Commander Hasan Stafa was one of the first officers to be called upon by the government resulting from the Congress of Lushnje. Initially, he was stationed in Kruja, then in Tirana and Elbasan, assuming various functions in the army. During this period, the patriotic officer had serious disagreements with the beys and adopted a hostile attitude toward Esat Pasha Toptani and Mustafa Merlika Kruja. Wherever he worked, he earned the respect of the people as a good patriot and a man of exemplary wisdom.

When the revolution of 1924 broke out, Commander Hasan Stafa was in Shkodra, where he had settled with his family a year earlier and was serving as the director of the Recruitment Bureau. Although he did not directly participate in these events, he was on the side of the revolution. This patriot, who originated from the masses of the people and had liberal views, spiritually rallied to the forces who were fighting for an advanced Albania through his natural impulse. He was well-acquainted with the feudal Turkish state ruled by the beys and ignorant officials; he did not want this calamity to continue in his country. That is why the victory of the December 1924 counter-revolution was, for him, as for all democratic patriots, a painful blow to the progressive

forces. After this tragic event, the people had to bear the full weight of this band of oppressors and parasites, the residue of the Ottoman feudal system that had taken root in Albania for centuries. Hasan Stafa's situation became even more difficult due to, among other things, the fact that some of his friends, like Rexhep Shala and others who had commanded the army of the revolution, had sought refuge abroad following the events of the December putsch. Furthermore, he was known to have supported the June revolution. All of this, and a few other incidents, such as his refusal to toast to Ahmet Zogu, led Zogu to force him into premature retirement. The feudal lord of Mat, who had seized power with the help of foreign bayonets, was desperately trying to consolidate his power as a usurper. The premature retirement of Hasan Stafa was not a random event, especially at a time when the young Albanian state needed competent and educated leaders. It was clear that Qemal's father belonged to those military officers whose patriotic past and anti-feudal views had placed them on the side of the opposition in the difficult situation that had arisen in Albania.

People who frequented Hasan Stafa's family at that time recall the hatred he expressed toward the Zogite regime. Qemal's father was outraged by the crimes organized by Zogu to eliminate his political opponents. He frowned upon all those enslaving treaties that the king began to conclude with Italy towards the end of the 1920s. "It is not the people who benefit from these loans," he would say, "but Zogu." Qemal lived in this atmosphere from his early childhood. He began to understand that his father did not like the king, that the latter was not "a genuine patriot" as was taught in school, and that those who led the nation were bad people. Although the people had fought against foreign occupiers, they had gained nothing; on the contrary, they continued to lead a miserable life. His father's op-

positional attitude positively influenced Qemal's formation. When he entered secondary school and engaged in revolutionary activities, his father sympathetically followed his activities and did not heed any timid friend who advised him to rein in his son. On the contrary, he proudly told his close friends:

“He is going to get into politics!”

Qemal retained many memories of his father that left a lasting impression on his character. His father's personality served as the first example during the life of the future hero. Hasan Stafa was imbued with the ideals of the national revolution, especially those drawn from the works of Sami Frashëri, which he lovingly kept in his library. He was well-acquainted with the thinkers of the French Enlightenment, especially Rousseau. He knew Turkish and French and read in both languages.

Hasan Stafa was forced to spend the last years of his life in retirement, although he was still strong enough to serve his country, Zogu did not offer him any other options. Therefore, he dedicated himself entirely to the happiness of his family. He decided to stay in Shkodra so that his sons could continue their classical education. He immersed himself in reading, wrote some articles in the newspapers of the time to defend forgotten martyrs, engaged in beekeeping, and continued to care for the health and well-being of his children. His main concern was to see them stand on their own two feet, as he himself, being an orphan, had experienced the vicissitudes of life. Unfortunately, he was not able to realize what he hoped for. He was suddenly taken by a heart attack in July 1935, at the age of 57, when his children were still young and in school.

After the death of their father, the full weight of the family fell on Qemal's mother. It was a daunting task, but Sabire worked hard to overcome the difficulties and misfortunes that befell her.

Her life had some common features with that of her

husband. She, too, was from Elbasan and came from a family of merchants, the Dylgjer family. Like her husband, she became an orphan at a young age. She got married at the beginning of the century and had five children, two daughters and three sons. Hasan took her everywhere during his travels when he was an officer in the Turkish army. She had not attended school regularly, but, as she herself recounted, Aleksandër Xhuvani secretly taught her to write in Albanian. Her husband had taught her Turkish and instilled in her a love of reading. Despite their cultural differences, she lived in perfect harmony with her husband.

It was in this family that Qemal was born, in its unique conditions, and among these people that he grew up and began his education with. He spent his childhood with his siblings, pampered and surrounded by the care of his parents and his nursemaid. He did not experience the sufferings and hardships that burdened most children of his generation.

Endowed with a solid education from a young age, Hasan Stafa's third son crossed the threshold of the house and entered the world of schooling as a child endowed with great virtues.

## II

*“You should consider yourself lucky to be far from that den of devils!”*

Qemal came to Shkodra at the age of three, carrying with him some vague memories of his hometown.

Hasan Stafa’s family lived in Shkodra for 13 years.

Qemal was the youngest in the family, and his wisdom and good constitution led his father to send him to school at a very young age.

In 1925, barely five years old, Qemal went to school for the first time and started his academic life at the Saverian Academy of the Jesuit Fathers.

This academy was founded in 1874 for a very specific purpose by the infamous order of the Jesuits. The Jesuits had occupied almost an entire neighbourhood in Shkodra, surrounded by high walls with gated entrances. In the middle of this neighbourhood stood a heavy and massive building reminiscent of medieval castles, with thick walls, stairs, dark corridors and small windows resembling loopholes. All around were the church and gloomy cloisters. The joyful and sonorous laughter of children was stifled by the liturgical silence that prevailed in the vicinity.

Little Qemal deeply felt the oppressive weight of this atmosphere. His gaze was troubled by the sight of the black cassocks of his teachers with faces marked by fierce gravity. At every step, he encountered statues and images of saints, plaques with various prayers, and religious aphorisms exhorting submission and piety. This suffocating atmosphere could not suit a cheerful and independent nature like his, and, willingly or unwillingly, he reacted as a boy with a free and intelligent mind could.

The academy was a subsidized religious school directed by the Italian government (previously, like al-



most all Catholic institutions in Albania, it was directed and funded by Austria-Hungary). Except for elementary school, all of the classes were conducted in Italian.

Qemal was one of the few Muslim students attending this school. The Jesuits had developed subtle methods and means over the centuries to charm and paralyse the minds of the young. Their hypocrisy went so far as to accept children of other beliefs. Their policy was to treat them well to win their hearts.

Qemal stayed eight years in this academy, from elementary school to the eighth grade of lower secondary school. We have some documents from this distant period of his life, a few small notes and photographs that, combined with the memories of his classmates, shed some light on the Qemal of that time.

In elementary school, he was a diligent, wise and timid student, perhaps because of the environment. He was a good student, but what was especially appreciated was his exemplary conduct towards both his elders and boys of his age.

“He came to class regularly,” recounts Vasil Llazari. “He studied with great determination, was diligent in everything and serious in his studies. These were qualities that Qemal retained until his death... But his personality had not yet begun to assert itself over that of his classmates. He was, in short, an ordinary student among many others.”

At the academy, Qemal was not yet the person we came to know later. His faculties were still dormant. He was a zealous student for that time, but he remained attached to his family and the small circle of his classmates. In his free moments, he could be found at home with his brothers and sisters, always surrounded by the attentive care of his father. It is during this time that he began to take an interest in books. The family library he had was a privilege not enjoyed by his peers. Moreover, he had an unwavering companion and mentor who aid-

ed and guided him into the world of books. This was his brother, Veli, who was studying in the same academy as him in the upper classes and distinguished himself as one of the best students in the school. Veli awakened in his brother an interest in humanity and the events that unfolded around him. He shared his experience to help him learn and taught him methods for independent study.

In these circumstances, Qemal's intelligence and iron will hastened his intellectual development, which became evident later on. After completing elementary school with satisfactory results, Qemal completed three secondary school classes at the same academy. During this period, he began to change and gradually stood out from his classmates. He was no longer an ordinary student who went unnoticed. From the first year of secondary school, he distinguished himself as being consistently at the top of his class. School records, along with some small details of his life in secondary school that have been preserved, bear witness to this rapid ascent. By leafing through a small notebook from this period, one can easily notice what preoccupies and interests him most: his quest for justice and goodness. In this notebook, we find his description of the Jesuit academy: "A den of devils." He writes, among other things, with astonishing determination: "You should consider yourself lucky to be far from this den of devils!"

Certain characteristics that will later be integral to his personality began to emerge at this time. Although he studied in a religious academy where the entire system limited the students' worldview, Qemal showed a keen interest in life and people. He gradually started to distinguish between the secluded and dull life of his school and the active one that exists beyond the high walls of the Jesuit quarter. The young man's logic sharpened more and more through concrete comparisons of surrounding reality. He indirectly cared about

the fate of the people, and with his child-like mind, he sought to fight for them: “His very sensitive and upright nature,” recounts one of his classmates, “could not tolerate social injustices.”

He intuitively strived to distinguish between right and wrong in social life. This led him to take an interest in politics. Under Veli’s influence, he began to carefully study the world around him, he read valuable books and thus overcame the academic obstacles posed by the academy. He managed to learn some elementary truths about the fate of man in particular and society in general. He understood that people suffer everywhere and that there are great injustices in the world. He was moved by the difficult living conditions of the majority of the inhabitants of Shkodra and the highlanders. With the curiosity of an intelligent boy, he managed to experience and become attached to the active life beyond the walls of the Jesuits. He worked as an apprentice for a photographer during the summer vacations, hiked in the mountains and visited the families of his poor classmates. He felt that something united him to them. It is a feeling where love, pity and discontent mingle. This world is unfairly built. Why should so many people suffer? Why should his poor classmates come to school hungry and barefoot? Who is to blame? Who is responsible for the fact that hundreds of unemployed people roam the streets? Why does the number of beggars increase every day? Why do highlanders leave their villages to come to the city? These questions, and many others, occupied the young man’s mind during this period. He wanted to have answers. He wanted to know the reason for human suffering. He sought to learn the truth. Initially, he hoped to find it in the academy, in the explanations of the professors and in the books of the religious school. But he didn’t succeed. The lessons of the academy had no connection to the problems and the needs of the time. They were designed to educate

citizens who were mindlessly obedient to God and the king, people with limited horizons and no social interest. However, Qemal intelligently managed to escape this harmful influence; he assimilated what was useful in his studies and rejected everything that was false and worthless, everything that dulled the mind and substituted tales and scholastic interpretations for objective truth. Thus, it can be said that the rigorous pedagogical process of the academy helped Qemal adopt a system of critical learning and critical analysis. Naturally, it was not a formal system as taught in school. Over time, he gradually improved these skills, and remained throughout his life a voracious reader. During these years, he also laid the foundations for a good linguistic culture: he began to learn ancient Greek and Latin, which proved very useful for improving his Italian and French. The possession of foreign languages, in the backward state our country was in at that time, was an absolute necessity for any young Albanian who wished to study past the rudimentary and heavily censored Albanian curriculum. Qemal, like many of his peers from his generation, understood this reality well, and through continuous work and iron will, he succeeded in achieving his goal.

During his early secondary school years, his inclination towards the humanities, his passion for the Albanian language, literature and history became evident. Literature became his daily sustenance. Books unveiled to him the world of deep emotions, enriched his mind, and gave rise to dreams and desires previously unknown.

Despite his near-sightedness, Qemal developed the habit of being an attentive reader.

In this young student, perseverance in work and an extraordinary will to achieve the goals he had set for himself stood out. These qualities would later become one of his dominant traits. From the classroom,

he understood that everything depended on oneself, on work and on willpower. This was not just an empty assertion but a practice that was starting to become customary for him. Thus, he engaged in a daily internal struggle to acquire the qualities he needed in life. This was evident in his perseverance in wanting to toughen himself physically, as well as the serious work he did to enrich his mind with solid knowledge, either through books or through his personal experience.

Many of his peers remember Qemal from that time as a student leading a normal life and who was incredibly bright. One of his college teachers said:

“I remember few things about Qemal, but I do remember that he was very polite, respected by his teachers and loved by his classmates. What was striking about him was his exemplary behaviour, and above all, his intelligence. I remember he was one of the best students in his class...”

The moral character of this young student drew attention. Many vices of his age were foreign to him. He was almost entirely ignorant of the sequence of prejudices and superstitions with which the corrupted society of the time fed the new generation every day. He was known from that age on as an unabashed atheist. He believed neither in the existence of God nor, in general, in a supernatural force. It was not only his intelligence or logic that led him to adopt these ideas but also his family's attitude towards religion and the clergy, particularly that of his father and, above all, that of Veli, who had ironically come into contact with atheist literature from the library of the Jesuit academy.

### III

*“...It is the first step towards unity. One should not credit religion for achieving this.”*

All of the private schools in Albania were shut down in April 1933. Qemal was in the third year of his studies at that time, marking the last quarter of the school year.

The closure of the religious school filled the young man and his close friends with joy. Finally, he and his fellow students were leaving that medieval bastion that had restrained their desires and impulses for years. Now, they would be liberated from the dogmas and Jesuit discipline. They would be free from the network of servitude that weighed so heavily on their young lives.

On April 27, Qemal, who was then 13 years old, enrolled at the State Lyceum and was registered with the matriculation number 914.

It was a time when the school was buzzing, and the students were ecstatic to be reunited. All the school youth of Shkodra had gathered in the same area, an open-air courtyard, where there were not only students from the State Lyceum but also those from the Jesuit and Franciscan academies and the Italian industrial school. From now on, all these boys would study under the same roof, regardless of their beliefs, religion or the school they came from.

Qemal deeply felt this change in his young life, and he was moved by the joyful atmosphere that unity had created in the hearts of the students. He was very happy at the thought that religion would no longer meddle in school affairs. His eyes, tired of constantly seeing black cassocks, now radiated happiness at the sight of secular teachers. His imagination was excited at the idea that a few years earlier, the students of the same school had demonstrated in the main street against the enemies

of the people and Albania.\* Of course, all this left a deep impression in the mind and heart of a student who came from a religious academy. Despite the noticeable restrictions and shortcomings of the new school at that time, Qemal felt free now that he was away from the Jesuit scholastic system. It was precisely during this time that he prepared to embark on a new phase of his life.

The first school year was very short for him and the other newcomers. They only attended the last few months of the year. Despite this, this short period was useful because it allowed them to get to know each other. Qemal had a burning desire to expand the circle of society formed by the academy. New comrades were added to those from his previous social circle. Now, he not only had Shkodran comrades but also others from various regions of the country, most of whom lived in the dormitory named "Malet tona."\*\* We emphasize this moment in Qemal's life because it is when one of the characteristic traits of his nature began to manifest: his inclination to get close to others. It is remembered that in the academy, he was well-mannered but shy and mostly connected to his family, while now in the state school, he began to blossom, gradually detaching himself from the family atmosphere and showing a great desire to know the world and get closer to it.

After the summer holidays, which were much more pleasant than the previous ones, Qemal resumed his studies at the school, as a fourth year student in studying classical literature. This choice was not made hap-

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\* This refers to the demonstration organized by the students of the State Lyceum of Shkodra in 1927 when the local branch of the national bank, which was administered by Italians, raised the Italian flag instead of the Albanian flag during a celebration. The students, outraged, poured into the streets and openly expressed their hatred against fascism and the government of that time.

\*\* Our Mountains, Albanian in the original.

hazardly: he realized one of his dreams to devote himself more to these subjects which were so close to his heart.

The State Lyceum reopened its doors after the nationalization of private schools. It was a victory over obscurantism and foreign-dominated schools for all those who aspired for progress.

But this youth, gathered in the same school, was, in fact, divided. And this was due to religion. Diabolically, the clergy constantly stirred up quarrels and fostered religious fanaticism. There were serious rifts, especially between Catholics and Muslims, which often degenerated into fights. Among these boys, in their everyday lives, there was a subtle enmity accompanied by all kinds of intrigues, gossip and insults. This division was felt in all the activities of the state school. A vast organizing network of the clergy gripped the Catholic youth; many students were deceived to be zealous warriors of the church due to innumerable deceptions they were fed, allowing the Church to still hold this part of the youth under its claws. The distinction between students became even more pronounced when many Muslims came to school wearing the black fez.

Naturally, such a situation could only worsen the atmosphere of the youth and paralyse their energies.

Every day more abominable events occurred. What an offence to the conscience and national dignity, a youth divided by internal quarrels stirred up by foreign interests! In such circumstances, serious activity was out of the question. Many could not rise above religious sentiments and understand the need to unite under the sign of a common patriotic ideal.

This painful state that weighed on their frail shoulders began to concern Qemal and his other close comrades. They felt a sincere feeling mixed with the naivety and romanticism of their age but expressed in its essence the noble desire of the new generation to live



and work together for the good of the Homeland and the people.

Gradually, in the consciousness of these students supported by some patriotic and progressive teachers, the idea of fighting together to get out of this situation took shape. Students like Qemal began to think about ways to break down the wall that divided them. Religion should not have prevented young Albanians from being united.

Soon, a broad movement for the emancipation of youth, the cessation of religious discord and casting away the black fez was born in the school. It was absolutely necessary to replace this black fez, this rag from Anatolia, "this mark of oriental thinking," as Qemal called it, with the secular school cap. Students attending the same school had to set aside their beliefs and the obligations that resulted from them, lest they hinder the unity of the young generation. They were, above all, Albanians, and the Homeland expected a lot from them. Such ideas strongly influenced the mind and heart of this boy who placed himself from the beginning at the forefront of those who fought for the unity of youth.

But this struggle was not easy in the conditions of that time, especially in the particular circumstances in which Shkodra found itself. The vanguard elements of the state school encountered numerous obstacles from the beginning; from its first steps, the struggle for unity collided first with the relentless hostility of the clergy. The interests of the latter demanded that the new generation remain divided, but progressive students did not want the shadow of the past to weigh on the prospects of the young. Qemal and his comrades entered the fray. The state school turned into a fervent theatre of ideological struggles. The light of new ideas began to spread in the minds of deceived students, but the fog of religious fanaticism and obscurantism that prevented



Qemal, three years old



Qemal, six years old, between his two brothers



Qemal as a student



Qemal in 1933

the youth from coming together and getting to know each other dissipated slowly. Animated discussions and heated debates ensued among them. Each tried to find arguments to defend their point of view. The great idea of the unity of youth was opposed to religious particularism. After a fierce struggle, they managed to get rid of the black fez. This was only the first victory. The clergy acted behind the youth in the most diabolical forms. It now adopted a more subtle tactic. The Catholic Church, in particular, presented great dangers. Qemal knew it well; he knew the means and methods of struggle it used, and that knowledge helped him in his work.

The struggle for unity began over the simplest facts that arose in the relationships between the students. The replacement of the black fez with the school cap was just one aspect of the movement, but Qemal and his comrades were fighting for a spiritual rapprochement based on love for the Homeland and a progressive spirit, qualities that were to characterize the new generation.

The struggle for the unity of the Lyceum students became, for Qemal, the main goal to achieve; it became a true passion for him. He dedicated himself to it with his whole being. Every success filled him with joy, and each defeat made him more circumspect and pushed him to better assess his strengths. We have from that distant time a small note where he expresses his joy for the first victory achieved in this area:

“November 1, 1933. We, the fourth year students,” writes Qemal in his notebook, “have created a new society for the unity between peoples. This society is composed of boys of the four religions — Muslim, Catholic, Orthodox and Israelite. It is the first step towards unity. One should not credit religion for achieving this.”

This clearly demonstrates the importance that this humble student attached to such an event. It is interest-

ing to note that there are no personal or family-related entries in his diary from this period. It is therefore evident that from then on, social interests were the main focus in the life of the future hero.

He set an example at all times as a young man who not only wholeheartedly desired unity but also as a man who fought to achieve it. He started by making friends in all religions, thereby demonstrating to others that the distinction of beliefs should not erect a barrier in the way of the rapprochement of the youth. Furthermore, by forming bonds with comrades with whom he had a greater affinity of ideas and spirit, he strived to base the society of his comrades on serious interests, primarily on unity. In his relationships with them, he excluded anything petty-bourgeois and petty in general; he showed himself to be just, sincere, serious, and these qualities, added to his intelligence, perseverance in work and simplicity, made him into a young man respected and loved by his classmates and all those of his age in general.

It is true that Qemal had already distinguished himself by his breadth of vision, allowing him to see further than many of his peers. Of course, this was not solely due to his quick-wittedness and perseverance in studies but also to his upbringing, and particularly to the positive influence exerted on him by his brother Veli. Veli, with his culture and broad outlook, managed to open up new fields of action in the surrounding world for his younger brother. This explains the sound and just ideas that this young man had about fundamental questions, such as patriotism, for example. Qemal's patriotism was not in any way aligned with the narrow-minded and localistic views of some young people who acted as interpreters of the official ideology of the government and clergy or the conservative circles of the city. His patriotism, nourished by a healthy national tradition, stood in stark contrast to that of the clergy, whether

Catholic or Muslim. The so-called religious patriotism confined the love of the Homeland within the limits of the religion of Shkodra. While for some young people, the Homeland was confined to their birthplace, for Qemal, it extended across the entire territory of Albania. He loved his hometown and his chosen city equally, just as he loved other regions of the Homeland. Objectively, this sentiment meant that the youth was above all Albanian and rejected feudal and patriarchal dissensions and narrow conceptions. Naturally, his very young age did not allow him to understand these issues as clearly as we can express them today, but judging from our current position, it is evident that he often reacted judiciously to various social phenomena. His nature, imbued with a love of freedom, helped him grasp the good and bad aspects of the school environment and the city as a whole. It is precisely in this distant time of his youth that we must seek the origin of one of the most essential qualities of his future personality. From his early steps, he sensed new phenomena in life and society, and furthermore, he aligned himself with them and fought for their success.

This characteristic trait of his personality was manifested, first and foremost, in enthusiasm, in the immense joy that new things, all phenomena and events related to the future, the interests of the people, and the truth he discovered. This is also where we find his youthful romanticism, which was prevalent at the time — a vague romanticism without precise limits but one that indirectly expressed his ardent desire to see the new generation liberated from all oppression and deceit.

These ideas and inclinations, combined with the naivety of his age, drove Qemal to join the youth movement at the Lyceum and to actively participate in its early ranks without the slightest hesitation.

The struggle undertaken by the progressive youth



against religious divisions and certain backward customs caused, as mentioned earlier, a strong reaction in the clerical and conservative circles of Shkodra. The closure of private schools had already greatly angered these circles, but the spread of progressive ideas, the idea of youth unity that disregarded religious differences, seriously worried the clergy, especially the Catholics, and led them to take immediate action. The Church realized that a significant number of young people were freeing themselves from its influence, and gradually, many had started to question the precepts and concepts with which it had filled the minds of the young generation for centuries. Furthermore, the youth of the Lyceum increasingly embraced the idea of unity under the banner of a patriotic and progressive ideal.

It was in these circumstances that the conflict broke out. It was a long, complex and difficult struggle. The school's best representatives engaged in an unequal battle. Qemal was at the head of this battle from the outset.

The youth faced a tough, diabolical opponent with considerable resources at their disposal. The steeples and minarets that had stood for centuries in the city's skyline had disoriented many minds. Divisions were deep-rooted, but the young progressives who looked to the future didn't care about this all-powerful adversary.

Qemal and his comrades had to face such an enemy, and one can easily understand how difficult and complex the battle they had engaged in was, even within the walls of the school.

Qemal came from the Jesuit academy; this was a great asset in his struggle. He was familiar with the workings of the Catholic clergy. His years of study in that school had helped him assess the adversary. He knew well the meaning of hypocrisy and perfidy among the Jesuits; he understood that, for them, the end justifies the means.

Little by little, the struggle of Qemal and his comrades gained momentum. Initially, with the closure of private schools, the clergy sought to be the spokesperson for the young generation. All the clerical propaganda went into action to discredit the state school, secular public education, by spreading unscrupulous slanders and lies. Qemal witnessed this ignoble campaign, and in his soul, the first major protest against these frocked propagators awakened. Inevitably, this situation pushed the young student to take up the struggle. The enthusiasm sparked among the youth by the closure of private schools could not be reconciled with the venom that the clerical propaganda was spreading. Struggle had to be met with struggle. Qemal's free and freedom-loving nature could not tolerate the calumnies, blackmail and demagoguery of the clergy. However, this state of affairs worsened even more when the movement for the unity of the youth began. This was a significant blow to the interests of the clergy and the backward circles of the city. Faced with lies and conservative demagoguery, the fervent aspirations for the unity of the younger generation emerged, disregarding religious and regional divisions.

Advanced Lyceum school students, including Qemal, could not remain silent in the face of the deceptions and hypocrisies of clerical propaganda. They threw themselves into action to combat and expose the diabolical machinations of the priests and their lackeys, responding tit for tat to their mystifications and slanders, but it was not an easy task. This unequal battle presented them with situations and problems that were new to them. Their young age, lack of experience, limited knowledge and, above all, the hostile attitude of the ruling classes and the oppressive government apparatus posed many difficulties for these brave young people, especially since, at that time, there was no organized social force, especially in Shkodra, to come to

their aid. Despite this, Qemal and his comrades did not lose heart: they felt they were in the right, fighting for the interests of their country that had suffered so much; they knew they were representing the new generation when they fought to achieve unity and aspired to progress. This noble objective stimulated their energies, gave them courage and strength. In their minds echoed the call: "Long live unity! Long live reason!"

In the spiritual conditions of Shkodra, where the Catholic clergy dominated as master over the entire life of the city, one could not join the ranks of the progressive youth without encountering this implacable enemy of all progress.

Qemal confronted this challenge, and from the outset stood out for his decisiveness and civic courage. But practice soon proved that these qualities were insufficient. The fight was first and foremost an ideological one, requiring a great deal of preparation. Qualified opponents could not be confronted without such preparation. Religious conceptions had to be countered with solid, well-argued arguments. Although the struggle took place between students, it actually extended beyond the walls of the school.

Qemal was one of the few students to combine thorough preparation with courage and determination.

The lies of the clergy had to be exposed and the biblical fables dealt a heavy blow. It was an arduous task in the suffocating atmosphere of those days and a heavy burden for a boy of his age. But regardless of the outcome, he was determined to prove himself worthy of the struggle he had embarked upon. Despite his very young age and his limited cultural background, he courageously set to work, first and foremost studying atheist and anti-clerical literature. He came into contact with like-minded people. He gathered material from a variety of sources and set about his lengthy readings, while at the same time devoting himself to his studies, work-

ing day and night. His quick mind was capable of assimilating every idea. With the curiosity and zest of his age, he tried to find as many arguments as possible to combat his adversaries. He read the book *Science and Religion*, which had just been published in Albanian. He rummaged through newspapers and progressive magazines to enrich his knowledge of the polemics between progressive elements and the ideologues of the Catholic clergy. He acquired books in French that challenged the views of the clergy and religion, especially the works of the encyclopedists. In his brother Veli's library, he found a number of works with Masonic ideas. He read the book *What is Freemasonry?* and a few other works of that kind. Despite their very different aims, these books enabled him to discover the true face of "the great Catholic family," the speculations it indulged in at the expense of believers, its serious moral deviations and the crimes with which the whole history of Catholicism was replete.

The demands of daily struggle pushed Qemal to investigate, despite his precocity and in a necessarily general way, the complex problems of natural science, philosophy, history and sociology. Thus, to undermine the religious foundations that dealt with the origin of species, Qemal, still a young man, set out to study Darwin's ideas. To this end, he consulted men with materialistic points of view, and on his own studied a few Darwinist texts, which he obtained with great difficulty. But the ideological struggle posed new problems for the students of the Lyceum every day. Clerical ideology was penetrating every sphere, seeking to assert itself in every area of culture and life. It is easy to see the strain it put on the young minds of Qemal and his comrades to embrace this vast and complex picture. But what is most appreciable about the struggle of these courageous young people is their zeal to expose the lies and demagoguery of the clergy and their determin-

ation to fight the enemies of progress to the bitter end. Their struggle and propaganda were aimed at freeing the souls and minds of the young people from religious dogmas and idols, and they seized every opportunity to do so in their daily lives.

The Catholic clergy used all kinds of tricks to cram their ideology into the minds of the youth and compelled them to fight the enemies of the Church. They had a heavy apparatus of propaganda and misinformation working in many fields, and these bold young boys were bound to come up against them in one way or another.

In June 1934, the Catholic clergy staged a despicable incident. Its aim was to stir up the backward mass of believers against the progressive elements whose pressure had forced the government to close private schools.

This time, the farce was performed at the Church of the Brethren. What did these devious priests do? The deceived crowd of believers flocked to Parish Street. The Church of the Brethren became a place of pilgrimage day and night. What had happened? A woman praying had seen the eyes of the statue of Saint-Antoine move! Yes, she had seen them move! Within hours, the news spread like wildfire. The whole town marvelled at this "holy miracle." Clerical propaganda had done its work. The Italian consulate in Shkodra was also involved. It was time to take advantage of the incident. What was the miracle all about?

Hundreds of Church officials gave this to the people. St. Anthony had been unable to bear the injustices done to the Catholic Church and its institutions, and this had so angered the saint that he had wiggled his eyes in anger! This disturbing fact struck a chord with the faithful. They ran en masse to bring gifts to the church to "calm" the saint. The believers' revolt was bound to force the government to "correct" the "mistake" it had

made in submitting to the heretics' will to close private schools. Incidentally, this Church of the Brethren farce took place precisely when the Italian fleet, disregarding the most elementary norms, made a naval demonstration off the port of Durrës. The Vatican had indeed coordinated its plans with those of the Italian fascist government!

It was clear to Qemal and his fellow students that the "miracle" of Saint Anthony was nothing more than a typical clerical deception reminiscent of the Dark Ages. It aroused discontent and concern among the mass of students. A feeling of indignation seized many of them, while others saw their own convictions shaken. A lively controversy ensued.

Qemal took advantage of this opportunity to discredit his adversary even more fiercely. The "miracle of St. Anthony" was a powerful argument to convince the youth who still believed in clerical demagoguery. He said that in previous generations, our grandfathers and grandmothers, had been fooled by such illusions, but that it was inconceivable for those whose eyes had been opened by school and who lived in the century of the great victories of science to fall for such nonsense.

"This clerical nonsense revolted Qemal to no end," recounts Vasil Llazari. "I remember with what ardour and passion he derided these crude illusions of the clergy. In a discussion with some students who were still in the grip of religious fanaticism and believed in the 'miracle,' he told them that this wonder could not stand up to scientific methodology. He said that if we filmed 'the statue that moves its eyes' it would be easy to prove that it was nothing more than a devious trick of the clergy to create a frenzy amongst the fanatical."

Indeed, although the farce was meticulously staged, it failed to achieve its intended goal. The clergy were obliged to draw the curtain on this abject comedy. The sole outcome of this affair was a favourable opportunity

to publicly prove the correctness of the ideas of Qemal and his comrades.

The Muslim clergy were not to be outdone that year either. To awaken religious feelings, they celebrated the Night of Mevludi with particular pomp.

The struggle continued. Qemal had made it his mission to unmask religion and its ecclesiastical authorities. The 14 year-old had become a bold propagator of the truth. He spoke the truth about the church and the mosque, about the pernicious role of religion in human life and society, and set out to demonstrate with pertinent arguments that religion was an obstacle to human progress.

Qemal began to increasingly discuss the Church's diabolical manoeuvres to conceal the historical truth and its crimes over the centuries, during which it had become a terrible executioner of human thought and progress. Millions of men were held in subjection by the ecclesiastical authorities. Many of the young people who studied at Qemal's school were exposed to this danger. In his discussions, he reminded the students and others that the Church was the greatest persecutor mankind has ever known. It slaughtered millions in the name of the Cross. It sent great men of science and heroic freedom fighters to the stake. The lifestyle the clerics led in the city and in the mountains became another weapon for Qemal and his comrades, enabling them to expose the so-called "purity" of these individuals. These boys revealed what went on outside the walls of churches, convents and parishes. They spoke of the corruption and intrigue that went on behind the confessional pew.

The ideological battleground facing Qemal and his comrades was vast and bristling with obstacles. Of course, his worldview was still in its infancy, with gaps and contradictions, but that didn't stop him from attacking the idealistic concepts, biblical inaccuracies

and big lies that troubled the minds of the youth. These aberrations, dogmas and mystical fables had to be swept aside! He didn't want to involve his life, the ideals of his generation, in this nonsense. The youth had to trust in their own strength, in human reason and the victory of science. It was a veritable revolution that had been unleashed in the minds of Qemal and his comrades, a revolution against god and the obscurantist clergy.

A few years later, assessing this struggle, Qemal wrote in an official statement:\*

“The undersigned was one of those who supported this idea (the movement of the youth — *N.J.*) and worked to spread it throughout the Lyceum of Shkodra. But this spirit of progress did not appeal to the town's backward circles. A reactionary counter-movement inspired by the Catholic clergy began to take shape in certain school circles. A wave of slander and threats of all kinds was unleashed against those who supported replacing the fez with the school cap. At first, we were called godless, and later we were called atheists. And, finally, we were in the court of public opinion as communists...”

The struggle of Qemal and his comrades was often severely tested. The possibilities and means of the revolutionary students were rather limited. The struggle began spontaneously and without organized forms as a patriotic movement for youth unity, in which possible obstacles were not even considered. But these issues aside, it lost none of its importance, for our hero devoted himself from an early age to a just cause — the struggle for the unity of the youth and their spiritual liberation from mystification. It was this struggle that awakened in him an unquenchable passion to serve our

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\* This is the statement made by Qemal on July 21, 1938 before the Elbasan examining magistrate, to which we will be referring to on several later occasions.



social ideal.

The Catholic Church stood like an impregnable fortress in front of the young students. Despite this there were some daring boys, like Qemal and his classmates, who had the courage to take on this all-powerful enemy.

But, little by little, life itself made these young fighters realize that they had to look elsewhere for their principal field of action if they were to serve the interests of the people and the Homeland. Under the influence of Veli and a few other comrades steeped in revolutionary ideas, Qemal broadened his horizons to include questions of social struggle. His brother guided his mind towards other ideological battlefields. Veli said his younger brother would have the time to tackle the issue of religion later. For the moment, it was necessary to strike at the primary enemy in the political arena, and fight those who oppress the people, and at whose service the clergy and religion had placed themselves. Without aiming the struggle at them, the people could not be saved from oppression and misery.

These ideas opened up new fields of struggle for the youthful energies of Qemal and his comrades. Now they were entering a new phase: the transition from atheistic and anti-clerical ideas to social ones.

But what were those ideas?

The intrepid students set out to find them. A competition began to see who could read more.

Qemal also set to work. He mobilized all his intellectual strength, his will and the experience he had acquired during his struggle and strove to get more out of everything around him. But achieving this goal was no easy task in the politically and socially stagnant conditions of the time.

## IV

*“My happiness is just a snippet of what humanity does not yet have.”*

Qemal was not immediately drawn to communist ideas. He encountered many difficulties of all kinds along the way as he took his first steps towards a just ideal.

All of Qemal’s classmates were good students, but lessons were not their only objective. It took up part of their time, but only partially served their interests, as their attention was focussed on what was happening beyond the school walls. While still young, they began to tackle social and political problems. New ideas began to attract them. Qemal was the inspiration and soul of this group, not only because he stood out for his intelligence and good grades in class, but above all for the eagerness with which he threw himself into social activity, for his initiative and his astonishing ease in quickly grasping the whole sphere of events and ideas of the time. This trait of Qemal’s also characterized his private life.

These young people’s interest in active life, social movements, political events and new ideas didn’t just stay with them. They knew that these things could not be learned at school, which was completely detached from the real world. They had to think for themselves. After much debate, they decided to set up a joint “savings account.” With their meagre savings, they subscribed to a number of progressive publications at home and abroad.

They soon received the newspapers and magazines in question. Then, the students read as a group, or passed from person to person, publications such as

“Rilindja,”\* “Flaka,”\*\* “Illyria” and the French left-wing newspapers “Lu” and “Vu.” This enabled them to become better acquainted with intellectual movements in Albania and around the world, and to become more aware of political life and the issues of concern to mankind. As a result, it stimulated discussion and broadened the horizon of what interested the youth and brought about a further spiritual awakening amongst them.

However, they felt it was not enough. They were still far from being able to draw revolutionary ideas from their very source. They learned indirectly, through the progressive press of the time, of the state of the labour movement in other countries, of strikes and demonstrations against oppression and injustice. These young people realized that there was one country in the world where the workers ruled supreme, and that this country was the Soviet Union. There, communist ideas had triumphed. This truth dazzled Qemal and his comrades.

So where are these ideas that overthrew the rich and brought the people to power, that established justice and genuine equality between men?

These ideas were the culmination of everything they had known up to that point.

But it was very difficult to grasp these ideas in those days, especially for the younger generation. King Zogu and his apparatus had created a cordon sanitaire against communism. The clergy was constantly on the alert, warning from time to time of the “communist menace”; the ruling classes lived in constant fear of the “spectre of communism,” especially in Shkodra. Those falsifiers of history went to great lengths to hide the truth about communism.

Qemal and his comrades experienced this atmos-

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\* The Renaissance, Albanian in the original.

\*\* The Flame, Albanian in the original.

phere that stifled their ideas, but instead of becoming disoriented and losing confidence, they embraced these ideas with even greater ardour. This was hardly a simple curiosity of their age: they felt that there was a spiritual link which united their aspirations for freedom, their dreams and their desires with enlightened communist ideas. This is why they continued to search with more tenacity for the sources of these ideas.

For a while, they hoped to find them in literary works. They knew foreign languages, especially Italian, and could easily obtain such works. So they read a few works of prominent realist literature dealing with social problems. They began with classical Russian literature, which seemed closer to home. They read Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Ivan Turgenev and Anton Chekhov. Despite the humanitarian spirit of these authors and the violent attacks they made on the old world, the young students found no means of escaping the misery and age-old injustices that plagued the people in their texts. Nor could the realist writers of the West, such as Honoré de Balzac, Charles Dickens, Émile Zola or Jack London provide them with a solution to their problems. They found in these works the hatred of social oppression, the enthusiasm for reckless heroes and the feeling of being gripped by the people's suffering, which were powerfully and artistically portrayed, but they did not yet discover the men and ideas that would be in the vanguard of the oppressed in the great struggle against the oppressive social yoke. Nowhere in these works was there the genuine spirit of struggle that Qemal and his comrades instinctively felt awakened in them by communist ideas.

But then, one day, the young lyceum students came into possession of the first issue of a work that opened a new perspective on life. It was Maxim Gorky's novel *Mother*, which was then being published in serial form.

Qemal, according to his comrades, marvelled at

this fascinating work. He was both astonished and shocked to find his unexpressed feelings and ideas so admirably described. The book recounts the same hard life he knew from experience, the same oppression and poverty, the same ruthless rich men and cruel constables. What is more, he discovered something he had never encountered elsewhere, something that transported and captivated him. Nowhere in the books he had read up to that point had there been such confidence in the strength of ordinary people and workers; he had never felt so clearly that the world, as it is, must be changed, and that this change can only come about through struggle. The work was imbued with revolutionary romanticism. The spirit that guided it could not help but illuminate the young man's bold hopes and dreams.

The novel's central subject was the proletariat, the struggles and ideas for a new world. Qemal found in this work exactly what he was looking for. The novel *Mother* revealed to him what workers were capable of when they embraced communist ideas and what immense force could be generated by proletarian unity. The proletariat was the class that would bring justice and genuine equality to this ill-built world.

In Pavel Vlasov, he found the hero who embodied these ideas and whom he had been searching for so long. From then on, this character would become a source of inspiration, guiding him in the revolutionary activity he had only just begun.

The novel's hero taught Qemal how he could become a revolutionary, what ideas he should embrace, to which class he should dedicate his efforts and dreams, and how he should prepare for revolutionary struggles.

This is why the novel *Mother* became his favourite book, the manual of his revolutionary education, his bedside book. What passion he put into analysing the paragraphs that reflected his ideas and concerns!

He learned whole passages by heart, and often recited them to his comrades. Pavel Vlasov's speech to the Tsarist court was particularly appealing to him. Some time later, when he came into possession of the Italian translation of this work, he translated and distributed it to his comrades despite the fact that the novel was banned by the Zogite censors.

This work, and the revolutionary ideas it contained, brought about significant changes in Qemal's thinking. All his attention was now focussed on the workers, the apprentices and the simple craftsmen, on those people who worked day and night and bore on their shoulders the whole weight of the feudal-bourgeois system. These were the men who now embodied the aspirations, dreams and efforts of the young revolutionary. From now on, the people meant everything to him. The struggle he had embarked upon would become even more intense.

It was then that he developed a burning desire to become close with the workers, to get to know them intimately. His whole life was filled with this supreme goal, and from then on he devoted the utmost of his energy to it.

Seized by romantic revolutionary sentiments, he began by visiting the places where workers and apprentices toiled. He got into the habit of visiting workers' centres from time to time. He would visit the few factories that existed in Shkodra at the time, following the work of road-builders at close quarters. He found ways to get to know apprentices in various trades and visited working-class neighbourhoods.

Every day, the picture of oppression and misery became clearer to him. These people were oppressed and exploited without mercy. They worked 10 to 12 hours a day, and the apprentices worked up to 16 hours, getting a pitiful wage for all their labour. Their families lived in near total destitution.

And it was precisely these linchpins of everyday life, who fashioned everything society needed with their own hands, who were lacking the bare necessities!

A new sense of indignation, mixed with great admiration, seized Qemal. Pavel Vlasov taught him not only to see in these people the misery and oppression they were burdened with, but also to try to discover in them the latent strength capable of overthrowing the old world and building a new one. Initially, he observed this in the great physical strength of the workers, in their inexhaustible energies to create and build. Without them, there would be no life on earth!

But that was not the key factor to the invincible strength of the workers, the strength of the class. It was their revolutionary ideas that set their class energies in motion. Without the integration of these ideas with the life of the workers, the working class could not fulfil its historic mission.

Naturally, at his age and with the conditions he was in at the time, Qemal couldn't grasp these problems right away. As a result, in his first efforts to get close to the workers, enthusiasm took pride of place, along with his admiration for them and a passionate worship of their struggle. Nevertheless, these noble sentiments paved the way for his revolutionary thinking.

Socialist ideas were not unknown in Shkodra, where an army of workers and apprentices laboured and toiled. Their harsh lives and the echoes of the October Revolution helped to spread these concepts. Many workers from Shkodra who had emigrated to earn a living abroad, in places like Austria, Italy, Serbia and Montenegro, had made contact with the labour movements in those countries. Upon their return to their homeland, they became the propagators of these ideas. However, many of these ideas remained unclear or had undergone deviation. They were drawn from sources that had nothing to do with genuine revolutionary theory. Vari-

ous anarchist and petty-bourgeois ideas proliferated in the circles of the working class.

Genuine, solid working-class ideology had not yet penetrated into Shkodra.

All of this made it difficult to organize the workers, especially when the clergy was systematically combating revolutionary ideas.

Despite the unfavourable circumstances, a few steps forward had been taken. Shkodra's workers had been introduced to the first forms of organization; from time to time they went on strike and they began to celebrate May 1st. You could feel their discontent rumbling. They spoke of their trampled rights and the need to resist injustice and exploitation. The example of the Russian proletariat was widely known in advanced working-class circles.

Little by little, a feeling of discontent and revolt took root in the minds of the Shkodran workers. They were waiting for the ideas that would organize them and lead them into battle. The Catholic clergy's incessant anxieties and the great fuss made by its press and propaganda clearly demonstrated this state of affairs. The church was sounding the alarm about the "communist danger" threatening social order, morality, property and religion.

Students like Qemal lived in this atmosphere. They sensed that new aspirations and hopes were beginning to emerge among the workers, but they also witnessed the panic that the "spectre of communism" had sown in clerical circles and among the ruling class. Something had begun to stir in their city, albeit only yet imperceptibly. But the burning hearts of the youth were well aware of it and ideas about the truth of communism had taken hold of Shkodra too. They whispered in each other's ears, talked about it and discussed it in secret. Soon the students became aware of these ideas. Qemal and his classmates were among the first to take an inter-



est — these ideas became the main topic of discussion in their inner circle. They wanted to know more about communism, the world revolutionary movement and the Soviet Union. Everyone tried to contribute something to the conversation, but their knowledge was meagre and vague. Qemal took advantage of his brother's return from Italy to learn a little more than his comrades, but he still was unsatisfied. He wanted to know more.

Time passed, and these youths were still searching for what was missing. *Mother* had awakened hitherto unknown dreams and desires in them. Now, reading was no longer their sole objective. They wanted to come into direct contact with those who propagated communist ideas, they wanted to organize and participate in the movement these ideas had spawned. But how could this be achieved? Naturally, it was very difficult, given the heavy atmosphere in Shkodra and the persecution of those who propagated the truth. Moreover, the boys' young age, their limited political experience and their very limited means were a serious obstacle to the execution of their task. Nevertheless, their dreams and youthful boldness helped them to overcome all these obstacles and embark on the path they had long sought.

One evening, when Qemal was strolling along the main street, someone pointed out a man passing by. The man was youthful, of average height and wore white glasses. Qemal followed him with his eyes and turned back to his friend.

"Did you get a good look at him?" asked the friend. "He's a communist! He just came back from Russia."

Whoever had said these words was far from understanding the pleasure this news had aroused in Qemal's soul. Despite his reserved demeanour, joy sparkled behind the lenses of his glasses.

That same evening, the other comrades also heard the news. The next day, the whole of Qemal's friend group set out to find out more about this "strange"

man. They couldn't imagine that there was anyone in their town who had been to the Soviet Union, must surely know a lot about communism and had perhaps even seen Stalin in the flesh! What a great opportunity for them! But the government, in view of his beliefs, refused to give him a job and tried to ostracize him socially.

And what if they tried to go see him? Qemal would be the first to do so, but experience had taught him that these were delicate matters and good intentions were not enough for such affairs. Qemal and his comrades carefully considered this problem, discussed it at length and agreed to wait for the opportune moment.

It was in the autumn of 1934. One of Qemal's comrades, through one of his relatives, had made the acquaintance of Selim Shpuza, who had returned from the Soviet Union. The first communist cell in Shkodra was not long in forming. This comrade also established individual connections with Qemal. It was at this time that the young student joined the Albanian communist movement.

He was 14 at the time, but that did not stop him from devoting himself to the workers' cause. His thirst for truth, his hatred of oppression and exploitation and his ardent desire to serve a just cause led him to embrace the great ideas of communism from the depths of his being, and to devote himself to them from an early age. The beginnings of a talented propagator of communist ideas were already visible.

It is hard to find another example at this age where these ideas were understood so quickly and harmonized so organically with moral and intellectual qualities, as was the case with Qemal. He immediately grasped the very essence of revolutionary theory; he understood, if only for a moment, the need for organized struggle against oppression and exploitation, and this became the great objective of his life. It is undeniable that for

him, participation in the communist movement was a more important school than the one he was attending at the time. He made a special effort to learn and absorb the lessons of revolutionary theory. This demanded a great deal of effort, sacrifice and time. But without ever neglecting his schoolwork, he devoted himself to this new task with a passion and seriousness that aroused admiration.

As we shall see, one of the most interesting aspects of his revolutionary activity was the way he formed his communist ideas and propagated them to others, and the method he adopted to imbue himself and his comrades with the qualities of proletarian morality. His comrades tell us that he stood out not only for his boundless enthusiasm and confidence in communist ideas, but above all for the systematic work he put into understanding and applying them, and for his seriousness and determination to propagate them at the right moment. Certainly, he had nothing in common with the preacher, nor with those youths who seek to show off and boast about their knowledge. His intelligence and modesty became even more apparent when he embraced communist ideas and began to propagate them. It was at this time that one of Qemal's greatest qualities as a propagandist was revealed: his ability to communicate with people. Qemal endeavoured to get in touch with anyone, to penetrate various circles, to discuss all kinds of subjects and to turn the conversation to what best suited their ideological and political interests. Thus Qemal's well-known tact came to the fore, reflected not only in his excellent upbringing, but also in the trust and respect he showed his interlocutors, as well as in his clear argumentation of his ideas: his intelligent and wise words, now the mouthpiece of revolutionary ideas, began to carry weight. At school, he was known not only as a very good student, but also as a boy with a broad outlook and bold ideas.

Qemal understood from the outset that his task as propagator of communist ideas among the youth was not that of a preacher. Daily life presented all kinds of situations and opportunities. He knew how to take advantage of these situations to influence others. He did so with great tact, never rushing and always taking into account the person he was dealing with. In this way, ideological orientation came naturally and was organically linked to the whole conversation or discussion in progress.

The democratic movement for the unity of the youth in the Lyceum was a good basis for intensifying the struggle of the youth to claim their own rights.

At that time, the “Malet tona”<sup>\*</sup> dormitory was opened near the state lyceum in Shkodra. The boarders came from different parts of the country, especially the north. They were generally the sons of mountain folk or poor city dwellers. Qemal felt a profound admiration for them, which led to many close friendships. The dormitory was full of life, with an atmosphere that differed completely from that of the school. These youths were not influenced by the clergy. Their social origin made them feel the hardships of the people more than other students. There was general discontent among them. They were angry at the austerity and excessively harsh behaviour of the dormitory’s supervisors and administrators. Qemal and his comrades were aware of this state of affairs, and it gave them food for thought as to the role they should play. The situation was getting worse and worse, to such an extent that in February 1935 the boarders beat up two supervisors who regularly harassed them. The response inflicted on the supervisors was well organized in advance. Qemal was one of those who supported and incited the boarders to take action. The most opportune moment was chosen, those

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<sup>\*</sup> Our Mountains, Albanian in the original.

who were going to perform the operation were designated, and since it was to take place in the canteen at dinnertime, the supervisors would be taken off-guard. The action was a great success. The supervisors got what they deserved and all the boarders were delighted.

That very night, the event caused quite a stir in the town. The next morning, the local authorities rushed to the dormitory. They included the sheriff, the chief constable and the school principal. The interrogation began, pressure was applied, but all of the boarders remained silent. Worried, Qemal followed the situation from the outside. The authorities decided to expel 20 boarders. This move further exacerbated the anger of the youth. The entire "Malet tona" dormitory went on hunger strike. No one ate, no one went to class. In this situation, Qemal found a way to meet the leaders of the strike. One of them asked Qemal to sneak into the dormitory to help the strikers. Qemal and the strike leaders discussed the matter among themselves and formulated their demands. Then Qemal wrote the formal petition and sent it to the authorities. Before leaving the dormitory, he unfurled a red flag on the table and, in a solemn atmosphere, invited the comrades not to flinch from any adversity and to continue the struggle until victory was achieved.

Indeed, Qemal's comrades stood firm. A few days later, the authorities were forced to reverse their decision in the face of the firm unity of the youth.

In doing so, the boarders scored a major victory over the local authorities, demonstrating the power of unity. It was also an important step forward in the young activist's life. He came to realize that ideas only have real value when they are put at the service of revolutionary practice. This was the lesson Qemal drew from the event and he was determined to persevere in this direction in the future too.

Qemal continued his relentless search for new

sources of revolutionary literature. What he had to do to achieve this! He obtained pamphlets and other materials circulating clandestinely and read writings that taught him about the basic elements of communist theory. He came into contact with someone who supplied him with the illegal publications of the National Liberation Committee. These included the pamphlets *Shpëtimi i fshatarit*,\* *Legaliteti*\*\* and some issues of the newspaper “Liria kombëtare.”\*\*\*

He set about carefully studying and re-examining all this material. Some of it was easy and understandable, while others were difficult, containing philosophical and sociological problems that required knowledge beyond his years. But he was by no means discouraged; on the contrary, he passionately and steadfastly endeavoured to grasp the substance of the ideas and then relate them with his characteristic shrewdness to the tasks that presented themselves in his daily life.

His revolutionary activities did not prevent him from being an excellent student. On the contrary, he was at the top of his class and stood out from his classmates. His intelligence and excellent conduct attracted everyone’s attention. His teachers and classmates loved and esteemed him. His future personality was already taking shape.

“...I remember his first Albanian class,” recalls his literature teacher, Skënder Luarasi. “At the first bench in the front row, near the entrance, sat a boy of average height, with a full, round face, a little pale and wearing glasses. It was Qemal. He had a gentle expression that was further accentuated by the oval lenses of his glasses. He spoke little and listened attentively. He had restraint. During class, he would look the teacher in

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\* Peasant Salvation, Albanian in the original.

\*\* Legality, Albanian in the original.

\*\*\* National Freedom, Albanian in the original.

the eye. There was a hint of suspicion in his gaze. He was formidable when he took a dislike to a teacher. He didn't shout, but he knew how to reply sharply..."

Qemal's ideas and feelings were echoed in the works of a young writer who was beginning to appear on the horizon of Albanian literature. These were the works of Migjeni. Qemal eagerly awaited any new publication or draft by the youthful poet. His writings reflected the aspirations of his generation. The poet addressed Qemal's burning heart and shared his outlook. His motives were those of the youth who rejected the injustices of the time. Like Qemal, the poet's eyes were not on the past, but on the future.

Qemal was delighted that Migjeni was his contemporary and that he lived in the same town as he did. He was also a close relative of one of his close comrades, Vasil Trimçev. Later, the poet befriended his brother Veli.

So many times had Qemal stopped to watch him emerge from his alley into the main street. He would follow with his eyes his characteristic stride, his tall stature, his pale face and his eyes that shone with a bright sparkle. He watched him strolling through Fushë-Çelë or sitting at the Grand Café, always serious and measured, always well-groomed and tastefully dressed.

The young Qemal longed to get to know him up close. He had made several attempts to do so, and had even approached Vasil for help, but he always backed out at the last moment. This was not only due to their difference in age and situation, but also to his concern not to compromise the poet, who was frowned upon by the rulers and the prevailing social atmosphere. A relationship with the revolutionary students was bound to worsen his already precarious situation. What is more, Migjeni's cruel early onset of tuberculosis forced him to live partially isolated, and it was only natural that this reason prevented the young student from making

his acquaintance. But this gap was made good by the immense interest Qemal took in him. Vasil was a member of Migjeni's family, they lived in the same house and Qemal kept up-to-date with the poet's writings, readings and talks. Often, when Migjeni was unwell, Vasil acted as his secretary, writing down what he dictated or copying his writings. It was Vasil who later told him that Migjeni was preparing a collection of verses, and that he helped him by carefully editing them. It was also Vasil who told him about the title, which made him jump for joy: *Free Verses!* Qemal's perspicacity immediately grasped the meaning of this title: the poet was not only asking for freedom for verse, but also for freedom of thought and freedom for those who were dragging behind them the ball and chain of social and spiritual servitude.

Qemal had read some of the poet's writings even before they were published. He would take them from Vasil, copy them and recite them enthusiastically after a few days to his comrades. He was particularly fond of the poems *Children of the New Century*, *The Poem of Misery* and *The Song of the Youth*.

For his part, the poet took a very sympathetic view of the inner circle of Vasil's comrades. He knew that among them stood out Veli's younger brother, who was intelligent and daring. He also knew what the revolutionary students were up to. He gave them indirect advice and support, but always with his characteristic moderation. On the other hand, he was a great help to these young people, lending them the rare books he had in his personal library. Qemal thus had the opportunity to read some of the most powerful works of universal realist literature. He read more works by Maxim Gorky, Jack London, B. Traven and others.

Qemal was delighted with his brother Veli's friendship with Migjeni. Whenever Veli came home for the vacations, he would visit the poet regularly. Qemal later



recounted that the author of *Free Verses* had given his brother a manuscript of this work for feedback. Qemal and Migjeni were both poets of the same generation, and in some respects they had much in common, both in their work and in their short lives. The two poets' closeness undoubtedly encouraged Qemal to take up literature at a very young age, for it was then that the student began to write his first literary essays.

Qemal had been writing essays since his early secondary school years, winning praise from his teachers and classmates alike. Some were even published in the magazine "Vatra e Rinisë"\* that was published at the time.

In the upper grades, in addition to his school assignments, he enjoyed writing in his free time too. He wrote rough drafts that sometimes resembled literary creations and sometimes resembled essays. He would read them to his close friends and ask for their opinion.

"I remember," recounts Vasi Trimçev, "that in 1935 Qemal read me his first literary work. Later on, this happened regularly. We'd sit in the Public Garden, or go for a walk along the Zalli i Kirit.\*\* He was quite emotional; he never took offence to my suggestions and was very modest about his works. I can't remember the exact titles of these writings, but I can say that the subject matter was always social, that these writings were about suffering people and the misery of the time."

Nowadays, as will be discussed later, we possess only a fraction of Qemal's writings, and even less of his works from these early times. The first literary work we know of is the story *The Little Apprentice*, which he wrote in 1935 when he was in the fifth year of the Lyceum.

From the outset, the author focusses on aspects of

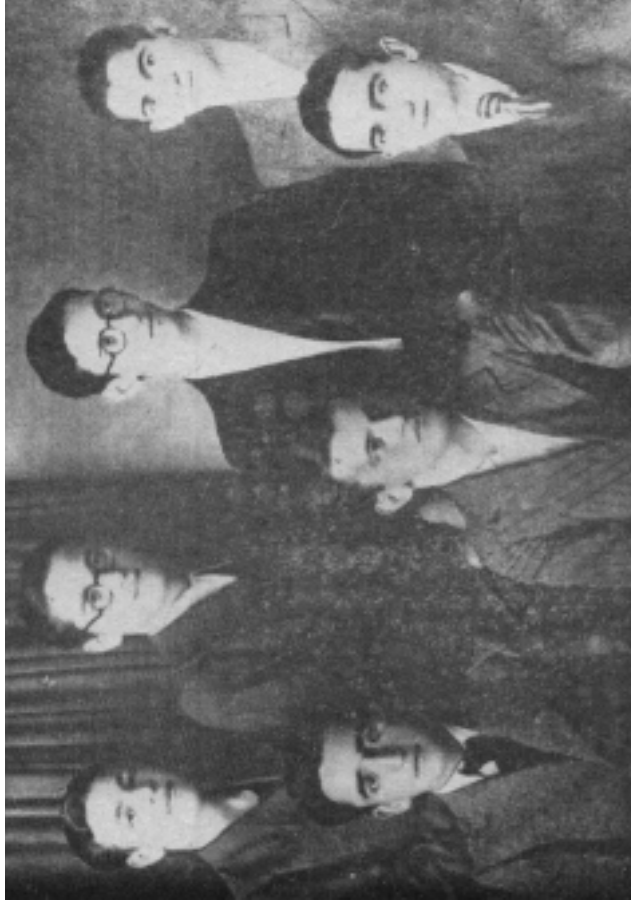
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\* The Hearth of the Youth, Albanian in the original.

\*\* Kiri Beach, Albanian in the original.



Qemal with his brothers and sisters in 1935



Qemal among a few of his comrades at the State  
Lyceum of Shkodra in 1936

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100.

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Facsimile of the manuscript *The Reproaches of Autumn*



Qemal and Xhezmi Delli on Mount Dajti (1937)

life in Shkodra, and in particular, on the back-breaking work of the apprentices and the exploitation to which they were subjected. In those days, a whole army of apprentices worked and exhausted themselves for a piece of bread in this town, whose working day, as a former apprentice recounts in his memoirs, lasted 16 hours. They left home before dawn with a small oil lamp and didn't return until late in the evening. Many of them were children, or very young boys the same age as Qemal and his comrades. This distressing situation deeply moved and appalled the young student. Every day, he heard the heart-rending stories of these apprentice children who worked themselves to the bone so as not to allow their younger brothers to starve to death. The pain he felt and the sense of revolt he was seized with at the revelation of this monstrous life inspired him to write *The Little Apprentice*.

Qemal strove to embody in his hero the fate of the hundreds of other apprentice miners who bear on their frail shoulders the full weight of life's overwhelming hardships. A child sits in front of a hovel, "resting his head on his two little fists and his elbows on his knees; there he is, plunged in deep contemplation." His father is dead, his sick mother bedridden. And now, who is going to provide for the family? This question startles him into looking for work. He goes out into the street and looks at the stores. "He stops in front of a store and goes inside. It was the shopkeeper Alush Aga. He signs on as an apprentice. The pay is low, but his needs are great!"

The young apprentice's first day at work is the main theme of this short story. After a hard day's work, he returns home exhausted and addresses his ailing mother in the following terms:

"Here, Mama, I bring you the fruit of my first effort on your behalf!"

This short story is a good start, although it was writ-

ten when the author was still very young. Sorrow and pain take pride of place. It shows that Qemal, from his very first creative steps, knew where to direct his attention. He chose the heroes of his creations from among the simple folk, those who suffer and are oppressed, which helped him to paint them with deep love. This is even more apparent when he contrasted them with the figures of the heartless bosses. In the conflict between them, he knew which side to take. Thus, but by other means, this time in the literary field, he continued the tireless struggle he had undertaken against the old world. Qemal never saw his literary beginnings as a distraction, but a weapon in the service of the revolutionary struggle.

## V

*“We Albanians, too, will tear down the old world. On its ruins, we will triumphantly hoist the red flag... We have confidence in ourselves, that is why we dare.”*

The seeds of new ideas soon bore fruit in Qemal. His ideas were transformed in a very short period of time. Although he drew on indirect and often confused sources, he succeeded, thanks to his characteristic intuition and intelligence, in grasping the fundamental principles of Marxist theory and making them his ideal. Awareness of these principles, though still in its earliest stages, would become the foundation on which all Qemal's revolutionary activity would rest.

The discussions and conversations he had at this time with his close comrades, and the ideas he expressed therein, bear witness to the speed with which he grasped revolutionary theory, and above all Marxist dialectics. Of course, we only have isolated and fragmentary recollections of this, but the most complete document, which proves his early grounding, is undoubtedly the composition: “The old world is crumbling, times are changing, new life is blossoming in its ruins.” We say composition, for it is indeed a class assignment, although this composition is in reality the manifesto of his early revolutionary conceptions.

When we read this writing, we forget that these ideas come from a 15 year-old student. And he expressed them at a time when the expression of the truth was punishable by law. What maturity of mind and courage revolutionary theory was capable of awakening in the mind and heart of this young man!

This story was written in 1935, when Qemal was in the fifth year of his time in secondary school. The subject was taken from Friedrich Schiller's well-known drama *William Tell*. The Albanian translation of this



play had been published a year earlier and had been warmly received by the youth of the day, especially those attending school. Qemal had enjoyed the drama so much that he had memorized many verses by heart. Although he was not a boarder, he participated with the residents of the dormitory in the staging of some scenes from this work and played the role of the rebellious Stauffaher.

Qemal appreciated Schiller's work for many reasons, but first and foremost for the spirit of rebellion with which it was imbued, and for the great love of freedom that manifested throughout the drama. His restless soul found in it an echo of his own feelings. The work also prompted him to draw parallels with Albanian society, with the misery and slavery in which the people languished.

Although the work was written more than a century earlier, it had a profound contemporary resonance. This is precisely what the young progressives of the time had understood and embraced. Some of Schiller's verses reflected the force and truth of revolutionary political slogans. Such were the lines the poet had the noble Attinghausen say, when, before his death, he learned that the peasants have united, without the help of the nobility, to fight tyranny:

“Your new and better liberty shall spring;  
The old is crumbling down —  
the times are changing;  
And from the ruins blooms a new life.”

It was this “powerful speech with such profound meaning” that gave Qemal the impetus to openly express his revolutionary conceptions. Disregarding Schiller's work, he addressed history, past and present, and scientifically argued for the dialectical development of society. Underpinning these thoughts was the

materialist concept, the Marxist dialectic, which sees the progress of human society as an endless struggle between the old and the new, and as a perpetual triumph of that new.

“Schiller,” he points out, “understood what the old represented. We, too, have understood...”

From this stems the whole series of important thoughts that Qemal expressed below with great civic courage. He went on to explain with equal courage what he meant by the term “the old”: “The old is everything we have inherited from the past. The current social system, the art of yesteryear, religion, the rifts between peoples — that is what the old is.”

In general, he had a clear materialistic outlook and endeavoured to treat all problems from this angle. Considering social order, art, religion, etc. as part of the superstructure, he saw them as historical phenomena that infallibly live, develop and die. From this starting point, this 15 year-old strived to envision the fabric of human society, and this convinced him that the old is inevitably destined to perish, to be replaced by the new. To prove his point, he turned, as always, to history and science:

“The desire to bring down the old has manifested itself, on occasion, in the French with their great revolution, in Galileo with his laws, in Lindbergh with his Atlantic crossing, in the Russians with the transformation of their social system...”

His political leanings became clear when, immediately after these lines, he bracketed the threatening call, “The bourgeoisie, wake up!”

Further down, he moved on to a more concrete elaboration of his revolutionary ideas when he declared that in the old society where he lived, exploitation and injustice were the order of the day, and this is due to the fact that:

“Wealth, which is the basis of all actions, is poor-

ly distributed (at any point you can realize this, capitalist!). While one owns billions, others do not have a penny. Some own large estates, while their neighbours lack bread (and I mean bread literally, bread to eat!).”

“The history of mankind right up to the present day,” states the young student, “is the history of human servitude. Regardless of its external aspects, slavery has remained basically unchanged.” In support of this allegation, he points to the example of the capitalist system, which has found subtle ways to oppress and exploit the masses of people. He explains that in short, slavery has only changed its form:

“The overseer’s whip is replaced by the banker’s pen; instead of the feudal lord who participates in sexual slavery we find the police officer who partakes in prostitution, those victims of poverty and social injustice. Not to mention the substitution of the Janissary’s yatagan with the electric chair.”

Such an analysis of the foundations of class society, the basis of exploitation and social injustice, shows that Qemal had a clear idea of the situation in Albania. What he meant indirectly was that Albanian society also rested on unjust foundations, that it, too, had in its substance an unequal division of property and, consequently, that slavery dominated.

What was to be done then? He asked himself this historical question, and found the answer in revolutionary theory:

“...It is essential to change the present division of property (an old remnant) and replace it with a new and equal distribution (which is new).”

He was convinced that it had to come to this, since he was in the presence of a great historical phenomenon that had occurred in the world:

“The Russians have been doing it for a long time now, which proves that the old can collapse.”

Immediately after this compelling argument, the

author suggested:

“We will do it too!”

This thought seems so conscious and logical after his previous statements, that Qemal’s conviction was quite legitimate, as a reality that will absolutely happen, as a natural necessity of life itself in Albania. This thought comes out even more clearly at the end when he announced with the determination of a revolutionary:

“We Albanians, too, will tear down the old world. On its ruins, we will triumphantly hoist the red flag of fraternity, culture and prosperity. We have confidence in ourselves, that is why we dare.”

These words take on a prophetic meaning if we take into account the great events that took place later, in which Qemal played an active part when he sided with the revolutionaries.

The revolutionary student’s manifesto also contained ideas on other important issues concerning the well-being of human society. Especially given the fact that he lived in Shkodra, where a stronghold of Catholicism stood, he never missed an opportunity to unmask religion and the clergy. Paraphrasing Marx, he called religion “the opium of the masses,” seeing it as a powerful means in the hands of the ruling classes to subjugate the people. Under the mask of religion, the ruling classes have committed and continue to commit countless crimes:

“How often the masses, blinded by the leaders of religion, became the slaves of a tyrant...”

And further down he says:

“Where there is a church, there is also a king.”

Qemal could say no more at the time. Wherever there was a church and a king, oppression and injustice, ignorance and poverty reigned supreme. Albanian life was a living example of this.

In addressing the problems of the development of human society, Qemal focussed on the role of art and

its social function. He made its role conditional on the needs of society and considered genuine art only that which contributes to man's struggle for progress. Today's art — by which he meant decadent bourgeois art — did not fulfil this mission. It is devoid of meaning; art without social content is merely a worthless ornament.

“Today's art, whose only quality is its attractive presentation, does not satisfy our needs. What is the point of well-crafted poetry devoid of ideas? What is the point of a painting with a picturesque landscape but no ideas?”

Qemal spoke out against bourgeois decadent art and in favour of art that contains at its core the advanced ideas of the time, art which helps men in their struggle against their enslavement.

After all we have just said, it goes without mentioning that this writing surpassed the constraints of a school composition. It is the fruit of an inner need felt by the young revolutionary to declare his ideas publicly and to propagate them by any means necessary. Composition was one of those means. He knew that his literature teacher had advanced ideas and was in the habit of reading the finest composition to the class. Wasn't this an opportunity to be seized? That is what he thought about as he wrote his assignment. Indeed, a few days later, he had the chance to speak out about his revolutionary ideas in front of his classmates. He courageously proclaimed his idea, unfurling it like a red flag, that he was a resolute enemy of the old world, and urged his generation in the name of a new ideal to take up the struggle against it.

It was an extraordinary event for the routine of this class. Until then, no student had dared to put such ideas down on paper. Naturally, he made a deep impression on all the students, but reactions varied. For most, Qemal's insights set hearts aflame, providing food for thought, and provoking enthusiastic and bold

discussion. But there were some sons of the rich and sons of civil servants in the class, to whom the idea of a new distribution of wealth was a great shock. They reacted immediately, but instead of replying openly with supporting arguments, they hurried off to talk to the school administration and other authorities.

Echoes of the event spread throughout the school. Many of the youth repeated Qemal's name with admiration. Discussions began without concealing any new ideas. Qemal became an inspirational figure. His authority grew even stronger. But this seriously worried the school administrators and others.

The day of reckoning was not far off. One day, in the middle of class, the student was called to the headmaster's office. The principal, who was aware of every detail of the affair, made a series of observations, advising him, in a measured tone, to renounce "extremist ideas dangerous to society and public order." He was in a rage, but tried to keep his cool. Qemal stood and stared into the director's eyes. No sooner had this plea, brimming with reprimands and advice, finished than he replied coldly and in a firm tone:

"Mr. Principal, I won't allow you to put a limit on my ideas. I say what I feel and what I think, and nobody has the right to impose their will on me, least of all you, Mr. Principal, who is only here to enforce discipline."

What a terrible shock for the principal! Although they were face to face, it never occurred to him that an intelligent and above all well-mannered pupil like Qemal would respond to him in such a disdainful and offensive manner!

The school administration would surely have taken action against him, but as the composition had caused a stir and public measures could make the youth even more rebellious, they were forced to conclude the incident. On this occasion, too, the relevant authorities took note of the affair, and from then on, the student

Qemal Stafa would be the object of sustained surveillance on the part of the school administration, and this would be fully vindicated by the events that followed. It was Qemal who, a few months later, prompted confidential correspondence between the Ministry of Education and the school management.

Although the principal had done his utmost to hush up the incident, the matter became widely publicized and “the danger of extremist ideas” — ideas propagated by this student — worried the upper levels of the establishment.

During this period, Qemal expressed his revolutionary ideas not just in this composition. Other compositions were written in the same spirit. We learn from the confidential correspondence between the school administration and the Ministry of Education that in the essay *The Young and the Old* he praises Lenin, going so far as to quote him by name.

The Ministry of Education sent telegram no. 180, dated March 30, 1936, to the administration of the Lyceum, requesting information on the conduct and ideas of the student Qemal Stafa, given that they had been informed that the student in question “has radical socialist ideas and that these ideas are contaminating his fellow students.”

The administration was alarmed and paid particular attention to the matter. The response sent back to the ministry bears witness to this. Among other things they state:

“They say... that he (Qemal — *N.J.*) has no religious feelings and that he discusses studies, theatre and answers questions from his friends...

“...Towards the end of the 1934-35 school year, Qemal Stafa, having interpreted and absorbed liberal sentiments, and taking advantage of the opportunity... (the opportunity being the choice to write the composition at home — *N.J.*) on the topic *The Young and the Old*,

he wanted, with his youthful imagination, to express his liberal feelings by singing the praises of Lenin... because Lenin had been able to wrest... the Russian people from their religious zealotry and superstitions, which, according to the pupil in question, created divisions within the people and put obstacles in the way of their progress.

“After reading this composition and being admonished for it, three Catholic students from his class presented themselves to the principal to complain about their classmate Qemal Stafa, stating that he had offended the Catholic religion (!!!) in an assignment...

“The principal read the composition and noted that this student had not only attacked the Catholic religion, but others as well, considering them to be meaningless, useless and harmful beliefs, especially for our country where more than three different faiths are practised.

“After this event, the student was severely reprimanded, and a school-wide notice was posted formally forbidding students to address religious and political issues, either at school or elsewhere, and stating that any offenders would be expelled from the school.

“After this episode, Qemal Stafa was regarded as irreligious and atheist by religious students and, consequently, as a communist, since atheism is synonymous here in Shkodra with Bolshevism and anarchism...

“...In fact, some students have stopped feeling religious because they have read anti-religious books and pamphlets.

“When they discuss such things (things against religion and the clergy — *N.J.*) there are students and foreigners who come to report it to us right away, so that we can take the necessary measures against them...”

The detailed report from the school management sheds light on Qemal's situation at the time. It shows the influence his revolutionary ideas had among the mass of the youth and the reaction they provoked in



Catholic circles. The report also shows that Qemal was systematically monitored and persecuted from the age of 15.

## VI

*“They\* gave freedom to our Homeland; we are going to bring progress to it. We are preparing, and we will succeed.”*

Qemal and his comrades, as members of the first communist cells, made it their duty from the outset to combine clandestine and legal activity. The means to achieve this objective among the workers were limited. There was virtually no organized political or social movement in Shkodra. The clergy and backward circles did their utmost to nip in the bud any attempt to organize progressive elements. They had tried to do the same with the youth, but the latter, by its very nature and the influence of new ideas, were slipping out of their hands. They no longer wanted to submit to the tutelage of the clerics and narrow-minded civil servants who ruled the city. Many youths could no longer link their dreams and desires to the minarets, nor to the anachronistic and archaic ideas of the official ideology. A breath of freedom circulated among them. You could sense that they were dissatisfied with the reality around them. Their confidence in the strength of the new generation was growing stronger by the day.

Qemal and his revolutionary comrades had to take this into account. That is why they did everything they could to influence one of the city’s youth centres, the “Besa Shqiptare”\*\* society of Lyceum students.

The society was founded in 1929 with the noble intention of uniting the youth of the three religions from different parts of the country, thus indirectly opposing the clerical youth organizations.

Every year, elections were held for “dignitaries” and

\* The patriots of the National Renaissance.

\*\* Albanian Oath, Albanian in the original.

new members were admitted. Qemal joined as soon as he entered high school. A small note dated November 2, 1933 verifies this. It says: "I am a member of the Besa Shqiptare."

In his first year, like all his classmates, Qemal was an assistant member of the society, and later, when he moved up to the eighth grade, he became an active member of the fine arts section. According to the meeting minutes dated November 3, 1934, which were taken after the annual meeting for the election of dignitaries, although only senior pupils were elected, Qemal was proposed as a dignitary.

Long before the new elections for Besa dignitaries for the 1935-36 school year, the communist youth organized a lengthy effort to enlighten the membership. They also did their utmost, and at the same time succeeded, in getting the school administration to rescind the regulation stipulating that only senior students could be elected as dignitaries.

The elections were approaching. Never before had the students shown such interest. Qemal and his comrades had set the youth in motion. The Besa had to be worthy of the name it bore.

"I remember the year 1935," says Nikolla Shurbani, "when we were renewing the Besa society of Shkodra. Although Qemal was very young, he was our best and most fervent propagator. He fought to have progressive elements elected to the leadership of this society, so that it would become a centre of the movement to liberate our people from the tyrannical Zogite regime."

The plenary meeting of the society to elect the new dignitaries took place on November 24, 1935. On this day, a feverish atmosphere reigned among the students. The school authorities, unlike in previous years when they were in full control, were this time faced with the pressure of the youth. The students were talking freely. They talked about the hopes they had placed in the

Besa. This society could play its part if capable people were elected to lead it. It had no use for leaders who were considered to be very good students, but who proved incapable of managing its affairs. Nor could it want those indirectly proposed by the school administration. The students themselves knew their fellow students best. Qemal was one of the students who enthusiastically explained the rights and duties of the youth, and his speech was warmly applauded by the great mass of them. The residents of the dormitory were very active; their bold speeches set the tone for the whole meeting. The work of the communist youth was bearing fruit.

Finally, after lengthy debates, new dignitaries were elected, the majority of whom were progressive elements. Among them was Qemal. The young student's unanimous election forced the leadership to accept him, despite their reservations.

This was a remarkable victory for the revolutionary students. The leadership of the Besa Shqiptare was now in their hands. The driving force behind this triumph was the youth communist Qemal Stafa.

The day after the elections, the first meeting of the new dignitaries took place. The minutes state that Qemal was appointed advisor for literary affairs of the Besa. The other comrades were entrusted with various responsibilities, although none of them occupied the position of leader — all the activity of the society was actually led by Qemal and his comrades.

Thus, the struggle of Qemal and his comrades entered a new phase. Propaganda among the masses of students took pride of place. It had to be made clear to young people, in all sorts of ways, that it was essential to unite and embrace the most advanced ideas of the time if one was to be useful to the Homeland and the people. This was a long and complicated process, which could not be carried out immediately. Qemal and his comrades were well aware of this situation, for they knew

they were dealing with an apolitical, narrow-minded masses who only thought of their own personal interests. Many of the students had little or no interest in what was going on outside of school and political issues were completely foreign to them.

The members of Besa had never before shown such an interest in political life. The years 1935-36 were full of important events. An economic crisis was raging across the world. Famine had spread like an epidemic. The starving masses roamed the streets. Even Shkodra had taken on the appalling poverty and misery suffered by the people in the poorest regions of Albania. Every day, the students saw this shocking reality with their own eyes, and the oppression and poverty could only breed discontent and rebellion. Qemal's generation witnessed the unleashing of this anger. Fier's anti-Zogite revolution, the great workers' strike in Kuçova and the energetic bread protests in Korça were events that many members of the Besa thought about at length. Their impact gave rise to a series of discussions among the youth of the Lyceum on important political issues. At every one of their meetings, these boys joined in with the general dissatisfaction, and they were fully united in this regard.

In those days, Qemal was up to the challenge. After every event, students asked questions, new aspirations arose; they voiced their discontent. His duties as a propagandist were many, and he strove not to lose his footing so as to be in a position to respond to the needs of the moment. His optimism and confidence grew when he saw that, in practice, the revolutionary ideas he had embraced served as a key to explaining events.

The young militant of new ideas embarked on an active political life. Living among the students, he shed light on events, explained their political reasons and pilloried those responsible for the sad situation. He suggested that the youth must make common cause

with those who suffer and are oppressed, and not with those exploiters who live off the suffering and labour of others. It was up to the youth to make this distinction clear.

The same was true of the forces at work around the world. The struggle that had begun in Albania was raging in other countries too. Everywhere, the oppressed were rising up against oppressors and tyrants; the flag of class struggle had been raised in every corner of the globe. But there was one country where the exploitation of man had come to an end, where man had conquered his freedom. Qemal was unstinting in his passionate praise of the first country of free workers and peasants. He saw this country as a dream for all mankind, just as he saw Lenin and Stalin as masters of truth. An irresistible urge drove him to spread to others everything he heard or read about this country and its men of socialism.

During that time, Qemal already knew what fascism truly was, what this scourge that had descended upon the lives of the Italian people represented and what danger it posed to the freedom of other nations. The countless treaties that Zogu had concluded with the fascists were nothing more than links in a chain of subjugation enslaving Albania. Our country was, for them, an undeclared colony. And it was these same enemies of the Albanian people who attacked Ethiopia and were now extending their claws into Spain, where the people had risen against the monarchy and clerical obscurantism.

Thus, the topics that interested the students were numerous. Speeches, daily propaganda, clarifications and open or indirect discussions occupied the forefront in the propaganda work of the communist youth. Qemal proved himself to be a skilled propagandist at this time. All those who knew him then remember his early maturity, wisdom and tact, his clear language and

his ease of expression.

Qemal and his comrades who led the Besa did excellent work in spreading progressive literature among the youth. As an adviser for cultural affairs in the society's leadership, Qemal applied all his efforts to steer members toward literature that dealt with major social issues. For this purpose, he placed Maxim Gorky's novel *Mother* at the top of his list. He never missed an opportunity to recommend this book to the students he knew. Often, this work served as a pretext to open political discussions that he guided toward his own ideas.

After *Mother*, which was a good book to begin with, he knew what to recommend to the members of the Besa. Thanks to Qemal and his comrades, these boys began passing around poems by Fan Noli, translations with anti-feudal and socialist ideas, such as *The Shack*, *Don Quixote*, *An Enemy of the People*, etc. Qemal became the disseminator of Migjeni's revolutionary creations among the students, recommending him as the poet of the youth.

Furthermore, he relentlessly fought against viewpoints which idealized ancient literature and deliberately emphasized Latin and Italian literature. He also fought formalist and idealist concepts surrounding art with which the clergy had filled the minds and altered the tastes of the students. He opposed all of this with great realist literature, especially Russian literature, which seemed closer to the ideals of the youth. According to him, reading realist works facilitated the younger generation's access to new ideas and helped broaden their horizons significantly.

Qemal only addressed his comrades on a specific topic after thoroughly studying and assimilating the relevant works he propagated. As a member of the Besa leadership, he felt that he had significant tasks to accomplish, and to carry them out, he had to work diligently and systematically.

Nikolla Shurbani recalls to us:

“...He never limited himself to his in-school lessons, which were only a tiny part of what interested him. Qemal read, he read continuously, systematically, with perseverance and love, the masterpieces of progressive and revolutionary writers and thinkers. He constantly broadened his cultural and political horizons...”



## VII

*“Only the youth can create a new Albanian society.”*

The youth leaders of the Besa, inspired by Qemal, could not devote themselves to propaganda alone. The growth of the society's authority and the liveliness that now reigned within it demanded forms capable of setting the masses of the youth in motion. In the absence of joint action, it was impossible to truly bring together and mobilize the youth of the Lyceum. Of course, sports activities, excursions and voluntary work to set up the school gymnasium were important, and Qemal and his comrades made the most of these opportunities.

Believing that the press and theatre had a role to play in propagating and mobilizing, these young people paid particular attention to them. With such effective methods, the Besa would be able to make its voice heard beyond the school walls too and thus have a positive influence on the life of the community.

Qemal, who read revolutionary literature, was well aware of the importance of starting a press organ for the fate of a social and political movement. To this end, at the first meeting of the new dignitaries, he proposed the publication of a literary and social review. This proposal was enthusiastically welcomed by all members. The leaders entrusted Qemal with the responsibility.

He set to work straight away. The official formalities had to be completed as quickly as possible, but it was not easy. This became clear when the decision of the dignitaries was communicated to the school administration. The indifference shown by the school administration showed that the ideas and actions embraced by the new Besa dignitaries were not to their liking. However, this did not prevent them from applying to the Shkodran prefectural office to publish the magazine on behalf of the society. At the same time, they ap-

plied to the Ministry of Public Education “for the organ to go to print free of charge.” They also corresponded with the “Nikaj,” “Luarasi” and “Stamles” publishing houses to establish the necessary conditions for publication. They also appealed to members of the Besa to collaborate in the magazine they were preparing.

Qemal organized an editorial meeting. At his suggestion, the magazine was christened as *Shkëndija*.<sup>\*</sup> The allusion of this name is very clear. *Shkëndija*, according to an ex-member of the editorial staff, was the Albanian translation of the title of Lenin’s newspaper *Iskra*. The communist youth wanted to bring to life the Leninist motto: “From the spark will come the flame.” Qemal said so himself at the first meeting of the editorial board, when the principles and criteria which would guide the magazine’s work were defined. He would expound these same ideas at greater length in the cover article he would later write for the magazine.

The plan for the first issue of *Shkëndija* was drawn up. It was decided that there would be serious articles and a large number of contributors. Qemal took charge of writing the lead article and a literary sketch. In this way, they would be ready while awaiting official authorization. It seemed that the prefecture’s reply would be long in coming, so the Besa directors set to work organizing the theatre. Publishing the magazine required financial resources, which had to be met in case the Ministry of Public Education didn’t approve the request to print it free of charge.

Efforts to publish the *Shkëndija* magazine continued to encounter numerous obstacles. In his reply, the Minister of Education did not approve the students’ request to have it published free of charge. Despite this refusal, Qemal and his comrades did not lose heart. They planned to use the proceeds from their theatrical per-

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\* The Spark, Albanian in the original.

formances to publish the magazine.

With their financial means secured, they contacted the publishing house to sign the contract. This was in March 1936. But the prefectural office had still not responded to their request.

All the material for the first issue was ready to go to press. Qemal wrote the feature article “Our Objective” and the story *Light Shining Through the Cracks*.

These two writings stood out from the rest.

“Our Objective” was not only the magazine’s cover story, but also the ideological credo guiding the Besa. This time, Qemal was publicly proclaiming the aspirations of the new generation, the historic tasks incumbent on our youth to set the old backward society in motion. He boldly pointed out, at the very beginning of the article, that the youth of all countries “in a period of transition from one social state to another... from one economic system to another...” had “played a very important role in guiding... the people towards a long-awaited new life...” With these words, he implied that sooner or later Albanian society was also destined to find itself in the presence of “a period of transition” from one social system to another. Therefore, revolutionary circumstances in which the youth were to be called upon to play their historic role were bound to arise. Qemal recalls “the heroic students of the French Revolution who contributed so much through their work to the formation of collective consciousness and the organization of new ways of life...”

This is the path that the Albanian youth also wanted to follow, and this is what *Shkëndija* wanted to take into account in its work as “an integral part of a generation eager to emerge from the darkness and see the light of day.”

Qemal firmly believed this, because those who published *Shkëndija* were “sons of the people” and, as such, knew their needs and were “no strangers to their vital

problems.”

That is why the Besa’s organ was primarily concerned with problems relating to the people’s destiny. Naturally, the ideas that inspired Qemal led him to go far beyond the scope that could be fulfilled by an organ like *Shkëndija*.

Qemal openly declared that it was absolutely essential for the youth to voice their opinions, and to participate in the solution of key problems, because “only the youth can create a new Albanian society.” On the other hand, he said that “this should not stop us from respecting the grey hairs of the elderly. We think they need a rest.”

Further down, this spokesman for the revolutionary youth courageously listed the reasons why it was up to the youth to take on the responsibility of organizing the new Albania.

Firstly, Qemal declared, young people “have no connection with the past, only they are in a position to consider issues from a present-day point of view,” then he adds, “only they, using their youthful energies, can do systematic work, because they are stripped of all that is bygone.”

Therefore, the youth must not stand idly by, they must organize themselves in advance, and *Shkëndija*, which was the interpreter of the desires and ideas of the members of the Besa, must devote all its efforts to achieving this goal. By this, Qemal meant that *Shkëndija* would not simply be a literary and cultural journal, but an organ that would boldly engage in social and political struggle. Guided by these ideas, it would also become a literary and artistic forum for Besa supporters. Its editor-in-chief stressed that the magazine would not publish any old article. Its columns would feature healthy, realistic productions that were always “in tune with the reality of Albanian life,” that had the impetus of youth, “that exude the sacred vigour of youth” and

that were, above all, creations capable of bringing out “the full responsibility of the youth towards future generations.”

In his conclusion, Qemal expressed his determination by writing that *Shkëndija*, “this new magazine, this new organ, of a *new* group,\* will persevere in its mission despite the obstacles it will encounter.”

In addition to the cover article “Our Objective,” Qemal wrote the literary story *Light Shining Through the Cracks* for this first issue. It was conceived in the spirit of his progressive ideas. This time, his hero became a prisoner, one condemned by the rulers. The way he presented this figure, the ideas he expressed and the sympathy he showed him, reveals once again the spiritual ties that bound Qemal to the people who struggled, regardless of the suffering and persecution to which they were subjected. Reading this account, we realize that, from the outset, its author was fully aware of the trials awaiting him as he embarked on the path of revolution. Despite the romantic colours with which he painted his character, Qemal gave him as an example to the youth to show them how they should behave in the face of adversity.

Although they had not yet received an answer to their request, the first issue of the magazine was ready. They sent a copy to the prefectural office for approval. But this delay was not good news, as was confirmed when the Inspectorate of Public Education at the prefecture, after reading the articles, communicated its refusal of the Besa’s request through the high school management. It was stated that “the religious feelings of the people were being violated and that political issues were being raised that were none of the pupils’ business.” Qemal and his comrades tried to intervene in other ways, but to no avail. Now the situation had

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\* Emphasis added by the original author.

changed too. In autumn 1935, when they submitted their request to publish the magazine, a so-called “liberal” government had come to power, and was obliged to make a few minor concessions to the progressive press in order to save the ruling classes from political crisis. But a few months later, at the beginning of 1936, Zogu took decisive steps to suppress all sources of resistance and revolutionary ideas. Thus, like the little “freedom” granted for a brief period to the progressive press, the hopes of the youth leaders of the Besa to publish their organ also vanished. Even the last two theatrical performances were banned, after which the Besa came to the attention of the local and national authorities and were placed under their control.

As official documents show, the prefecture’s local police force and the school’s administration appointed a number of special people, both students and teachers, to keep a close eye on the society’s activities. Qemal Stafa was targeted first and foremost.

A document from the Ministry of the Interior stated: “Furthermore, the Ministry of the Interior is alarmed by this situation, as it appears from the information we hold that Qemal Stafa visited Tirana some time ago to take part in a sports event where he spoke out against the actions of the state, thus indirectly pronouncing himself in favour of communism.”

From the correspondence exchanged, it appears that the same ministry had instructed the Shkodra and Tirana prefectures to investigate Qemal Stafa’s behaviour. But these two bodies, to avoid trouble, apparently tried to pass the buck and categorically deny that the aforementioned Qemal Stafa made such comments in their town.

The authorities’ deep concern about the situation of the Shkodra Lyceum’s youth proved that the Besa was no longer simply a cultural and sports society. The organized work of communist youth, led by Qemal, had

transformed it into a hotbed of revolutionary ideas.

New ideas were awakening young students from their slumber. The future of society would depend on their work and struggle. It was those great ideas which were destined to take root in the Lyceum.

All historical credit goes to Qemal, who was its first driving force.

## VIII

*“Mercilessly break the false shackles hidden in a corner deep within yourself... Their salutary destruction and the all-sweeping flame will restore your strength.”*

On the morning of May 1, 1936, a group of workers and students set off marching outside the town. Separately at first, then together, the youth group crossed the Mesi Bridge and headed for the village of Habibaj.

They wore their festive clothes and red ties, marching through the fields, drunk with springtime beauty and freedom. It was May 1st, the holiday of the proletariat, the festival of their ideals.

When they reached the village, they sat down on the green meadow beside the road. The weather was splendid. They all seemed excited, especially Qemal, who had always dreamed of one day freely bringing together the workers and students.

Suddenly, the merry talk ceased. Someone raised his glass and exclaimed in a deep voice:

“A toast for the celebration of the proletariat, comrades!”

The youths raised their glasses and looked at each other radiantly. New songs swelled in their chests. Every one of them was thinking of the future. After a moment’s silence, the workers and students joined in a revolutionary chorus. The blossoming plain resounded with youthful voices.

Qemal stood up, and after a short pause, took the floor. He spoke of the importance of the Workers’ Day, of the struggle that the proletariat had waged everywhere against the bourgeoisie, of the new world free of oppression and exploitation that it would build. He expressed himself with ease and clarity, his words were full of conscious determination and his eyes sparkled



with faith in the ideal of the proletariat.

The festivities lasted almost until nightfall. The whole plain resounded with the songs “All is Red from East to West” and “Workers, Oh Workers.” Their conversations revolved around the struggle and triumph of their common ideas. Before returning home, they took a photograph to commemorate that memorable day. Later, as they passed through the village, they chatted long and amiably with the peasants. They took an interest in their lives, sympathized with their plight and talked to them about things they had no idea about. The young man with the glasses and round face was the most talkative. These boys filled the peasants with admiration. They were so different from the youth who used to come to those parts on excursions!

It wasn't until nightfall that the group of communist youth headed home. They had just celebrated the day of the proletariat for the first time in their lives — they had just celebrated May Day!

Qemal never forgot this day and was so touched by it that he always remembered it with great nostalgia. From then on, he made a habit of celebrating May 1st every year, wherever he was and whatever the circumstances. It had a profound meaning in his life: from then on, he had dedicated himself wholeheartedly to the sacred cause of the working class. There was no greater celebration for him.

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Hitherto we have barely touched on the formation of Qemal's personality as a revolutionary. This question is the most important aspect of his life and of particular interest to scholars.

If we want to know the reasons and factors which determined the formation of the young revolutionary, we have to go back to the beginnings of his life, where the seeds of a future militant communist were sowed.

How did this development process come about?

Qemal was not born into a working-class family. His social status was also not working class. Even when he reached the age of maturity, he neither lived nor worked in proletarian environments. He was, and remained, an intellectual. Yet these circumstances did not in the least prevent him from becoming a genuine revolutionary.

The healthy upbringing he had received in his family, his intelligence and freedom-loving nature, together with the unceasing influence exerted on him by his brother Veli, helped him to perceive the full weight of life around him, and to react in one way or another to express his discontent. In the interest of honesty, we must recognize that it was first and foremost the concrete social circumstances which prepared the young Qemal. His arrival at the State Lyceum, the struggle for the unity of the youth in which he and his comrades engaged, and the clashes he had with the clergy and ecclesiastical ideology gave him his first training while awakening his interest in social and political problems. It was only later that he began to search for his ideal, for the ideas that would nourish it, for that social force on which he had to rely. It was not easy, of course, to find this within the walls of the school, nor among his classmates, nor in the textbooks. He found it elsewhere, among the workers, in the ideology of that class. It was here that the process of forming the revolutionary Qemal, his communist conceptions and qualities, began. From the outset, he embraced this ideology with all his being, and it couldn't have been otherwise when his sympathies were with the oppressed and while he harboured an implacable hatred of the rich and domineering. But, gradually, communism did not stop at the above sentiments alone. The needs he felt at every step of his daily struggle, and above all his work at the helm of the Besa, pushed him to study theory diligent-

ly. This young man showed extraordinary perseverance and enthusiasm, never diminishing his efforts to acquire new concepts. Naturally, in the circumstances of the time, this was not easy. But his mind and heart became so closely attached to revolutionary ideas that they soon became his main objective in life. From now on, everything — his thoughts, his dreams and his efforts — would be geared to this ultimate goal. Thus was born his unquenchable passion to understand the ideas of communism by all means and spread them to others. Oh what he did to procure revolutionary literature and expand his knowledge of communism!

If kept to oneself, such knowledge is like a worthless ornament. A genuine revolutionary must spread it wherever he finds himself. From a very young age, Qemal set the example of a gifted propagandist who knew how to instill communist ideas in others in all sorts of ways. He called these ideas “rays of light” in the darkness of Albanian life, and later wrote:

“Those who have understood a wisp of truth, who have seen a ray of light, must make it their duty, an historic duty, to spread it to all the winds.”

For Qemal, communism was not simply a system of enlightened ideas which he had to propagate. His keen intuition and practical experience soon made him realize that revolutionary theory was the ideology of the working class, and that you could not understand that ideology unless you loved and respected the proletariat. That is why he strove to know, love and honour the proletarian class from his very first steps in the communist movement. He had learned from books that great armies of proletarians were fighting all over the world. There was no such proletariat in Albania. The Albanian working class was insignificant, disorganized, oppressed and poor. It was precisely here that the young revolutionary’s greatness of spirit lay. Although they were in this state, he got to know them and appreci-

ate their strength and beauty, devoting his whole life to them.

Despite his youth and the fact that he was still a student, Qemal overcame this handicap. Inspired by revolutionary ideas, and thanks to his sociable nature and enterprising spirit, he entered working-class circles and forged close ties with them. It is astonishing what harmony of thought and feeling he found there. His ideas and visions of the working class were now taking shape. The workers' miserable lives and hard work did not prevent him from seeing in them their wonderful qualities. They had greatness and purity of soul, they were just and courageous, sincere and straightforward.

Qemal now saw the proletariat as part of his family. He was continually found in the company of carpenters, boilermakers, tailors, workers and apprentices who lived solely from the fruits of their manual labour. From then on, this friendship became an inner need, an integral part of his revolutionary life. We recall his friendship with the worker Vaso Kadia. He found in him the character of the Albanian worker, the strength of character and simplicity of the hard-working man. This young student's love for the workers was no false pretence, but natural and pure. He strove to be diligent, for he knew that without cultivating his relations with the workers, becoming spiritually attached to them and enriching his knowledge through them, he would not be able to grasp communist theory. This deep, sincere feeling, mingled with the romanticism of the time, went so far that he would gladly pour water for Vaso Kadia to wash himself when he came home from work.

Ramiz Xhabija also recounted Qemal's feelings when he wrote:

“The poor, the workers and the simple folk were his most intimate comrades; he frequented them as a comrade, an intimate friend and a brother.”

His greatest dream was to become a militant for the

communist cause. But he also understood that this goal could only be achieved first and foremost through revolutionary struggle; the study of Marxist theory alone was not enough. Genuine revolutionaries were bound up in revolutionary battles. When Qemal joined the struggle, the situation in Albania was not yet ripe for such activities. But Marxist theory taught him that this day would inevitably come. He tried to prepare himself, mind, soul and body for that glorious day.

The revolutionary struggle was long and difficult. It demanded boldness and perseverance, wisdom and patience. These qualities were not lacking in Qemal, but he did not yet possess them to the extent required of a conscious revolutionary. He intuitively understood that revolution is not to be played with like a game, but is a continuous, arduous and sacrificial process, requiring the mobilization of all human moral and spiritual forces.

This was the seriousness that characterized his revolutionary activity. Whenever it was a question of achieving his goal, he astonished his comrades with his diligence and wisdom. He wanted to be precise and leave nothing to chance. He, who was so sociable and friendly with people in general, was very reserved and secretive when it came to his revolutionary tasks. In this respect, he was precociously mature. He was a true conspirator, and this quality imposed itself on all those with whom he had to deal.

Skënder Luarasi recounts:

“One day I gave him two illegal pamphlets, publications by the National Liberation Committee and a few copies of the newspaper *Liria Kombëtare*.\* He put them away carefully, and without waiting for any inevitable advice, told me in a suggestive tone:

“Remember, you didn’t give me anything!”

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\* National Freedom, Albanian in the original.

Since that point, Qemal saw himself as a revolutionary, striving with all his being to create a state of mind in which loyalty to principle and purity of ideal predominated. He understood early on that it is the duty of every genuine revolutionary to fight stubbornly against foreign influences, against all kinds of pressure exerted by the class enemy, against egoism and narrow self-interest. The revolutionary can never forget that his life, ideas and feelings belong to the class, to the revolution. We discover this inner view in one of his notes, where he says, among other things:

“My heart began to beat rapidly. It said to me in a monotone but determined voice:

““Young man! You’ve never believed as firmly as you do now in the ideal of your life, but you have not yet detached yourself from bourgeois pettiness. Mercilessly break the false shackles hidden in a corner deep inside yourself, burn the images you’ve kept in the shadows of your degenerate conscience.

““Their salutary destruction and the all-sweeping flame will restore your strength...”

“So spoke my heart last night in the silence of darkness...”

“This is what he ordered me to do and I obeyed him.”

Qemal also exercised his physical strength with a great deal of willpower and patience, so that in the future he would be able to face the difficult life of a revolutionary.

As a child, he was rather frail, which prevented him from doing physical exercise on a regular basis. But as he grew up, and especially after he had taken on his major tasks, he attached great importance to his physical development and devoted a great deal of time to sports. He played soccer, did gymnastic exercises, swam, went for long walks or bicycle rides, all to strengthen his body. In addition, to prove his stamina, he imposed all

kinds of hardships on himself: he spent nights without sleep or food, subjected himself to suffering and tried to stay away from pleasures that demanded a loss of energy and diverted his mind from revolutionary interests. This is not to say that he did not enjoy life, or that he deliberately repressed it. His self-imposed exercises had nothing in common with the austerity of ascetics, as some pseudo-revolutionaries would like to interpret a communist's way of life.

Qemal loved life. He saw his own, genuine life among human beings. He was sociable and became interested in others at first sight. He had a pleasant sense of humour and long-lasting feelings. His emotional life was rich, with a wide range of interests in people and things.

Qemal was the perfect example of a student who knew how to combine his revolutionary activity with his schoolwork. His name still ranks among the most brilliant students of Albania. He distinguished himself not only in the humanities, which he took so much to heart, but also in the sciences, which he considered useful for his general education. The very good marks he obtained during his three years at the Shkodra National Lyceum are proof of this. We find an interesting and significant fact in his class record: his worst grade was in philosophy, and the only reason his grade was so low was because he had a "breach of discipline" due to Qemal contradicting his philosophy teacher, who then ordered him out of the class.

These two facts give us a clear picture of this young revolutionary's mindset; he, who knew and embraced communist ideas, and could not agree, even formally, with the idealist fables preached by his philosophy teacher. The reason Qemal spoke out openly against this man was that he knew that the teacher was a provocateur of the Zogite police.

Qemal's emerging personality cannot be understood

without considering his artistic inclinations and nature. His close relatives tell us that he inherited his father's spirit, masculine personality and wisdom, and that he received his mother's love of music, art and beauty in general. So, in addition to the former qualities, he also demonstrated the latter qualities at a very young age.

His revolutionary spirit and tender feelings, his rebellious spirit and the serenity of someone who appreciated the beauty of life and the arts, all overlapped.

Qemal could only conceive of beauty if it embodied the ideals of the revolutionary struggle, which would condition all his aesthetic conceptions and tastes. Freedom and beauty had their source in the same great idea. And it was revolutionary thinking and practice that gave him the insight and depth of judgement to appreciate aesthetic phenomena at their true worth. These qualities, which began to emerge at his time in the Lyceum of Shkodra, would later become one of Qemal's defining characteristics.

This young man was deeply aware of the fascinating beauty of Albanian nature. Many a time did he pause before the marvellous landscape surrounding his town! Walks in the countryside had become his custom. He was particularly fond of the Tepë Hills, the Mesi Bridge and the Bardhaj hillsides, from where he would gaze for hours on end in delight at Lake Buna, the plains and mountains, and the beauty of the city itself. Such splendid views at sunrise and sunset would leave an indelible mark on him. Presumably, the emotions that the beauty of nature aroused in him also highlighted the ugliness of the misery that prevailed everywhere. So he was not a passive observer of nature. From then on, everything would revolve around his conceptions and social interests.

Qemal explained more extensively and clearly what his character would become in his literary works. Although nature attracted him greatly, all his attention



was focussed on the people and the problems of contemporary society. These themes became the subject of his first works. Fellow artists tell us that even then, he was a keen observer of human psychology, discerning the thoughts and feelings behind the words, gestures and faces of his interlocutors. He was drawn to everything that concerned simple people. That is why his youth was full of impressions and vivid emotions. These feelings led to the blossoming of his literary talent and the desire to write.

Qemal never saw literature as a distraction, but as a means of expressing new ideas, an instrument of struggle. Revolutionary writers, first and foremost Maxim Gorky, set an example for him. Migjeni in particular had a direct influence on him also. The poet's works gave Qemal his first push to create his own literary works. It is easy to see the spiritual and ideological affinity between him and his mentor in his work of this period. The choice of subjects and heroes, the dialectical spirit, some elements of style and, in general, the stylistic flair brought the young writer very close to his elder. Later, Qemal's talent would find its own way, and in his later works he would express more advanced ideas than his predecessor, but there is no doubt that he took his first steps as a talented emulator of Migjeni. Naturally, not as an epigone, but with an individuality that his premature death prevented from fully developing.

In 1936, Qemal wrote the well-known story *The Reproaches of Autumn* in the same spirit. An attentive reader will easily discover the individual character of this 16 year-old author. The story is first and foremost striking for the simplicity and freshness of its characters' perceptions, and for its almost child-like sincerity. By depicting the fate of an old roasted chestnut merchant in simple but expressive scenes, with well-arranged details that convey compassion and protest, the author openly sided with the oppressed and expressed his anger at the

social injustice of the time. In this respect, he followed in the footsteps of progressive literature. The misery of simple folk was one of the main themes of the generation of the 1930s. But this theme, from his pen, was presented to us with certain peculiarities that appear from his vivid emotions and realistic conception of life, as well as from the way he narrated and the confidence he had in himself. *The Reproaches of Autumn* was his first serious literary success. This was confirmed when the story was published a year later in the magazine *Bota e Re* under the pseudonym “Brutus.”

This publication attracted attention for two reasons: firstly, because the author began his first literary contribution in the most advanced literary organ legally published in Albania at the time, and secondly, because he had chosen the name “Brutus” as his pseudonym, which was no coincidence. The young student was indirectly expressing his aspiration to become a fighter against tyranny and oppression.

His revolutionary activities, his studies and the difficult conditions he faced meant that Qemal was unable to devote himself entirely to literature, but he never gave it up. In his future works, his talent, nourished by the passion of the revolutionary struggle, would acquire ever greater maturity, and his ideological and artistic range would expand.

Literary talent was only one side of Qemal’s artistic nature. He was also drawn to the other arts. He tried his hand at drawing from time to time, not without success. He loved painting and sculpting, and wanted to enrich his knowledge of the history of these arts.

He loved the theatre and never missed a show. He took to the stage himself and those who saw him perform tell us that he was very talented. His performances kept audiences on the edge of their seats and he knew hundreds of verses by heart, thanks to his good memory.

His choice of reading material is further proof of his discerning taste. He had a passion for literary works, but he did not simply read any book. He chose everything he read with criteria and taste. Moreover, for him, reading was a process of individual work. He usually read with a pencil in hand and paid great attention. For this reason, he could fully comprehend the content and ideas contained in the book and then pass judgement on it. While at school, he read hundreds of volumes. Unlike many boys his age, he left his classmates with the impression of a reader who not only knew how to enjoy works, but who also had a refined artistic taste.

Qemal appreciated music above all else, and although he had no particular talent for it, he remained a fervent admirer of the art to the end of his days.

During the years he spent in Shkodra, he received his musical training, learning to play the violin at a young age. A private teacher gave him his first lessons, then he continued on his own, working with perseverance and passion. When he went to secondary school, he joined the school orchestra, which enabled him to take part in all the concerts.

Qemal displayed a number of well-known characteristics right from his school days: cleanliness, orderliness, simplicity and thriftiness. His presentation was always simple, that of a tidy, clean youth, as were his books, notebooks and personal belongings. He never smoked or drank, even as a man. As one of his classmates from that time told us, "everything about him developed harmoniously: he always had clear ideas, led a healthy life and had a sense of order."

## IX

*“The future smiles promisingly. Life holds out its arms and beckons.”*

Qemal left Shkodra in July 1936 and moved to Tirana with his family.

The previous year, his father had died suddenly of heart disease. This death was a terrible blow for the Stafas, but here too Qemal set an example for the youth by burying his father without any religious ceremony.

This loss caused him great pain, not only because he became an orphan as a teenager, but also because he was very attached to his father, perhaps more so than other children. His father had always been a very affectionate, sensible and progressive family man. What is more, Qemal had always indirectly felt his gentle protection along the path he had embarked upon.

Hasan Stafa's death left the family in a very difficult situation. All the children attended school. Earnings were meagre. Apart from his retirement pension, the father had left no inheritance. His next of kin lived far away. It was now difficult for them to continue living in the town, especially as the father had long since advised them to leave Shkodra in case of misfortune and move to Tirana to be with their extended family.

So, after living there for 12 years, circumstances forced the family to leave Shkodra for the time being.

Qemal felt pained as Shkodra had become his second hometown. It was here that he spent his childhood and took his first steps in life.

In Tirana, his family spent the first few months in the house of a friend of the father. Later, the Stafa family moved to a house belonging to their maternal uncle on “Glafko” Street (now Him Kolli Street).

Qemal was now a resident of Tirana. He had never been able to spend a great deal of time in the capital

before; he usually only visited during the summer vacations for a few days to spend some time with relatives, or with sports and art groups from the Lyceum. From then on, he would live there for good. He saw this as a great change in his life. Capital cities always play a major role in the activity of political and social movements, in the lives of men dedicated to an ideal. These were the hopes of the young revolutionary. Tirana was undoubtedly a bigger battlefield than his provincial hometown.

For the first few months, Qemal felt the absence of the company he had left behind in Shkodra profoundly. It was his summer vacation. Schools were closed. He spent his days reading, walking around town and visiting relatives. He found it strange to be without friends for the first time and he eagerly awaited the start of the new school year.

Qemal resumed his studies during the 1936-37 school year. He quickly adapted to the new atmosphere he found. This was not only due to his sociable nature, good education and tact towards others, but also to the good reputation he had built up as an excellent student, an intelligent and serious boy, but above all as a progressive youth activist.

“The New Spirit” extracurricular student society had existed at the Lyceum since 1930 and was subject to rigorous control by the management, as the Royal Palace took a direct interest in the situation of the youth there. Attempts had been made to give the society an official outlook, to instill in it a Zogite and fascist spirit, but this was no easy task. The progressive youth resisted. In the previous year’s elections, before Qemal’s arrival, a relentless struggle had been waged between the opposing parties, and in the end, the progressive youth had won the day. Xhezmi Delli was elected secretary of the society.

But the struggle within the society continued un-

abated. Young people refused to remain under the control of the management team or follow the regime's official policy. They wanted to be independent in the organization of their extracurricular activities. It was in this atmosphere that Qemal found "The New Spirit," and the situation became clear in the new elections held in autumn 1936.

Qemal was now an experienced activist in the Albanian youth movement. The struggle to win his legitimate rights had made him aware of the role played by societies and the forms of youth organization in propagating revolutionary ideas.

The plenary meeting of students to elect the board of directors of "The New Spirit" gave rise to violent clashes of opinion. The young progressives openly declared their opposition to those who wanted to muzzle the school youth. The extensive intervention of outsiders at the meeting met with even fiercer resistance from the youth. Professor Gaqo Gogo's blunt manner in particular provoked widespread discontent, as he was known to all as a spy for the Royal Palace. He insisted on electing individuals the management had appointed in advance to the leadership of the society.

Many of the youth refused. Xhezmi was among those who put up a stubborn resistance against their adversaries. He knew the situation well and enjoyed the sympathy of the great masses of the youth.

Qemal was attending a plenary meeting of "The New Spirit" society for the first time, but he knew from experience what was going to happen and had prepared himself. His presence attracted the attention of many young people who had heard of him. At first he listened, then he stood up and spoke. He spoke of the rights of youth, of the independence they should enjoy, and explained with clear arguments that no one had the right to interfere in the affairs of youth, given that the students were concentrating all their efforts on benefiting

the Homeland.

“You, Professor,” he addressed Gaqo Gogo directly, “did not come here to help us, but to get in our way. This is an extracurricular youth society and we intend to organize ourselves according to our own interests.”

This bold and logically rigorous address made a great impression, after which the debate became even more heated. The youth opposition became even more pronounced. Gaqo Gogo found himself in a difficult position. The situation he wanted to create neutralized itself. Qemal, Xhezmi and other comrades drew the youth behind them, their tactics succeeding, and this was clearly felt in the elections. The masses of youth did not elect the candidates put forward by the management to “The New Spirit,” but rather those they chose themselves.

Qemal was also among those elected, even though he was still new to the school. He was given the responsibility to manage the literary section of “The New Spirit.” He achieved the goal he had set himself when he came to the Lyceum of Tirana. But as he soon found out, given the circumstances, it was very difficult for the society to function in the way he had envisaged. Official circles did not forgive the youth for their behaviour during the leadership elections. The opposition they showed at this meeting was a warning to them. That is why, immediately after the elections, they put up countless obstacles to all kinds of independent activities. Threats and blackmail were rife. The school management pushed its impertinence so far as to cancel the elections for the new management and Qemal, as he himself confirmed in a statement, “was accused of being a communist even though there were no documents to support this.”

The Spanish Civil War, in which the Republican forces were fighting the fascists, gave him the opportunity to work in a very subtle way. Qemal would first

arouse the students' interest in political issues, then take advantage of the opportunity to get to know the students' points of view, and then influence them with his own ideas. He would ask a simple question: "Who are you with? The Republicans or Franco?" The students would voice their opinions, discuss and ask for clarification. Qemal listened calmly, and depending on the situation, talked as naturally as possible, propagating the progressive viewpoint without ever arousing suspicion about his intentions. This was a new form of propaganda that he inaugurated at the Lyceum of Tirana.

In the school, heated debates broke out between different circles: he was able to differentiate, through the ensuing clash of viewpoints, who were the supporters of the two forces fighting in Spain. This enabled him to test the ground, to sound out the opinions of young people, and then to make positive propaganda. In this way, he told the whole truth about the events in Spain, explained the character of the civil war and the social forces at play, exalted the role of the communists and unmasked fascism as an enemy of freedom and the people.

Qemal's propaganda activities went beyond merely commenting or providing accurate explanations of political events of the time; he aimed higher. Any political conversation was seized upon to spread revolutionary ideas. He transitioned from current issues to fundamental ideological, philosophical and social problems. He posed questions such as: "Is a society with oppressor classes just? Is it normal for some to possess millions while the majority lacks the essentials? What do revolutions bring to nations? What does the universal workers' movement represent? In which country is a classless society being built?" and more.

These questions piqued the interest of the youth and, as always, in such cases he acted with tact and finesse.



He engaged in conversations like any other participant, sharing his opinion while shedding light on the topic with relevant arguments and iron-clad logic. Those who heard him speak recount that he had a broad worldview and boundless confidence in the opinions he defended. He spoke slowly but confidently, was convincing and exhibited extraordinary composure for someone of his age. His language was captivating and often suggestive.

Qemal used other methods in his propaganda. He frequently turned to progressive books and the press. He borrowed and lent books, newspapers and magazines that directed the youth towards issues helping them emerge from political lethargy. Once again, Maxim Gorky's novel *Mother* played an effective role. It was the first book he recommended to students. Reading and discussing this work often served as a pretext for ideological and political discussions. These rightful exhortations guided many young people towards realist literature, allowing them to spiritually connect with writers who courageously addressed the significant problems of the time. In addition to foreign authors, he also promoted the works of Migjeni and Fan Noli, where the youth found the expression of their aspirations and concerns to a considerable extent.

The results of this activity did not take long to manifest. Revolutionary thinking opened up new horizons for a portion of the students. Minds became animated. Qemal was surrounded by young people who quickly embraced revolutionary ideas, and they became his main supporters in his future activities.

The ideological struggle among the students continued. Qemal and his comrades quickly realized that mere propaganda in the schoolyard or occasional street discussions were insufficient to attract the broader masses of the youth. Spreading revolutionary ideas required adopting other forms. With this in mind, he attached particular importance to organizing excur-

sions with young people. The first excursion took place in the spring of 1937. Qemal carefully prepared for it in advance; he discussed with a group of young people who had embraced his ideas and they left the city on May 1st to head to the countryside. Among them were Ali Demi, Xhezmi Delli, Themo Vasi and others. They stopped at Ura e Brarit. The choice of this day was not a coincidence. Like the previous year, Qemal wanted to make May Day a political action. And that is precisely what happened. The youth sang revolutionary and patriotic songs, and Qemal even taught them a Russian revolutionary song. Then, he took the floor. He spoke about the significance of May 1st, but he mainly focussed on the evolution of human society and classes, connecting all of it to the current situation in Albania. It was the first time he addressed a large audience, openly expressing his revolutionary ideas. The topic he developed that day would remain unforgettable in the minds of the students.

Afterward, the group started climbing Mount Dajti. The ascent was challenging, especially after a tiring excursion, but Qemal deemed it excellent practice for those who wanted to become genuine revolutionaries. He led the way, setting an example of perseverance and endurance while disregarding all difficulties. Behind him came Ali, Themo, Xhezmi and the others. They were all filled with a boiling enthusiasm Qemal had ignited in them.

The photograph of their arrival at the summit of Dajti has been preserved. In the foreground, you see Qemal and Xhezmi, hand in hand, with Themo at their side.

The celebration of May 1st by this group was Qemal's first major political action.

## X

*"I love all men, but I adore the poor."*

The Tirana political propaganda among the students was only a part of Qemal's revolutionary activity. This city, being the most important in the country, created new possibilities and perspectives for the struggle, despite the numerous challenges it presented. The communist movement was in its early stages there, and revolutionary elements were trying to get to know each other and unite their forces. It was evident that advanced workers were eager to embrace ideas that would enable them to organize in the fight against oppression and exploitation. Qemal was somewhat aware of this situation before settling in the capital. During that time, revolutionaries who worked in Tirana would often visit Shkodra. Vasil Shanto was one of them. He regularly visited his relatives in Shkodra, and although Qemal did not know him personally, he had heard much about him as a communist. Upon his departure for Tirana, he was given a letter of recommendation to directly make his acquaintance. The circumstances of their first meeting are unknown, but we know that in the fall of 1936, two or three months after leaving Shkodra, Qemal, through Vasil's introduction, managed to join the communist movement operating in the capital. His acquaintance with this revolutionary worker would play a primary role in the youth communist's life. Their deep friendship as militants dates precisely from this time, lasting until their deaths, and remains one of the most beautiful aspects of the history of the Albanian revolutionary movement. We emphasize this fact because Vasil was a simple worker and Qemal was a young intellectual. However, neither their different backgrounds nor their age difference (Vasil was eight years older) prevented them from getting to know each other well and form-

ing a close friendship. The reason for this was that at the core of their friendship lived the communist ideal, an unwavering will to fight to the end in service of the cause of the proletariat in Albania.

In many ways, it seemed like they complemented each other.

Qemal saw in his comrade the embodiment of his ideal: the Albanian proletarian who had embraced the communist truth. He was overjoyed to have found the worker he knew from books, the man who worked tirelessly yet still found time for revolutionary activities and deepening his knowledge of communism.

For a long time, such a figure had lived in his enlightened imagination, animated by revolutionary romanticism. He found in Vasil those virtues of the advanced worker that he had not encountered in his classmates: the instincts of his class, confidence in the cause of the proletariat, strong self-discipline and courage, as well as the qualities of an organizer and the talent of a conspirator. He also admired his physical side, his strong build and large hands, even though the hard work he did had made him tubercular.

Vasil, for his part, appreciated Qemal as an intellectual of a new type, an intelligent and courageous student who had immersed himself in revolutionary theory and who was striving in every way possible to contribute to the triumph of communism in Albania. This is what prompted the revolutionary worker to form an un-failing friendship with him from the outset.

“I met a very intelligent comrade who knows theory.” It was with these words that Vasil first introduced Qemal to his inner circle in the autumn of 1936. He would always appreciate this side of his young comrade’s personality, by which he meant his theoretical knowledge, his ability to get to the bottom of Marxist-Leninist principles and interpret them, his culture and exposure to books and, in general, to everything

that concerned human progress. He also discovered Qemal's genuine love and respect for workers, and his wisdom and sincere simplicity in dealing with them. Throughout his life, the young intellectual devoted himself entirely to the class that was leading the struggle to establish a new world.

So it is easy to understand the kind of influence they exerted on each other, and the strength that animated their militant friendship!

During the prevailing mentality at the time, a close friendship between an intellectual and a worker was unthinkable. But that did not stop them from always being together, discussing everything, trusting each other and forming a brotherly friendship. Their revolutionary outlook lifted them above the petty prejudices of the time, and in this respect their friendship became one of the defining features of our future society.

Qemal and Vasil lived in the same neighbourhood and, what is more, they were neighbours, so they saw each other all the time. But their favourite meeting place was the kiln of Papa Petrushi, Vasil's father. All their revolutionary activity during this period is linked to this unforgettable base.

Later, they bought a typewriter to type theoretical material with. Qemal would translate Marxist literature, pamphlets and articles intended for the theoretical preparation of the communist youth. The kiln would witness the birth and spread of many ideas, which they would put into practice with extraordinary boldness.

Vasil often went to listen to Radio Moscow at Qemal's house. The boys' room at the Stafa family home was filled with a festive atmosphere on special days such as May 1 and November 7. The two comrades could barely contain their emotion. Their hearts beat wildly, and their eyes sparkled with pleasure. They heard the sounds of *The Internationale*, the voices of triumphant communism, and their confidence in the

cause they were fighting for grew stronger and stronger. These were moments of almost delirious joy.

Vasil's company enabled Qemal to forge ties with the capital's working-class population.

Qemal soon came to understand the plight of the workers when he entered their midst. He got to know their problems, the difficulties and obstacles they faced. In Tirana, the workers didn't have to face a devious, organized enemy as their counterparts in Shkodra had to do with the Catholic clergy, but here government control was very strict. Vasil and the other communists had to be on their guard to organize the workers and spread new ideas among them. The capital had two workers' organizations at the time: the Tailors' Society and the Typographers' Society, but neither served the interests of the workers, as the owners were also involved. The bosses exploited these organizations and turned them to their own advantage.

"What do these unions that are run by the owners actually amount to?" Vasil would tell them. "Who are the workers going to fight against when the bosses call the shots?" These irrefutable reflections circulated by word of mouth among the workers. Many of them understood that such unions were in a dead-end situation. Naturally, Qemal also agreed. It was essential for workers to have their own professional groups. This was the embryo of workers' organization. Qemal was well aware of this, which is why he and Vasil gave their full support to the carpenters' idea of forming an independent trade union, in opposition to all other opportunist unions. Qemal, Vasil and the workers struggled doggedly for almost a year to achieve this goal. But before officially approaching the government, the carpenters began by drafting their constitution. Qemal took an active part in drafting it; he and Vasil fought hard to ensure that the union was built on a solid class foundation and that no bosses were accepted into its ranks. And

this is what happened. After much pressure and delay, the Ministry of Justice gave its approval in late 1937, without changing anything the workers had demanded.

It was a victory for the workers, but also for communists like Qemal and Vasil.

The help Qemal gave the carpenters in these circumstances linked him even more closely to them, to their problems and concerns. He won the love and respect of many of the workers.

Qemal gave Vasil a good hand in forming cells. He joined the same cell as Vasil and did everything in his power to ensure its smooth running. His theoretical grounding, his constant reading of books, his knowledge of foreign languages and his skills as a translator all helped the workers enormously. He drew Marxist literature from all possible sources, read it, explained it to the comrades, translated what was useful and distributed it with Vasil. The demands of the communist movement in the capital gave even greater weight to Qemal's role as a propagator of communist ideas. He did his utmost to fulfil this mission.

But he did not want to confine himself to the theoretical sphere; he was determined to launch himself into revolutionary action. Vasil strove to set up communist cells and gather as many sympathizers around him as possible. This was also what other organized workers were doing. Following their example, Qemal also set about forming local cells.

Naturally, he was going to start with the advanced students.

## XI

*“...Those who have seen a ray of light must make it their duty, their historic duty, to spread it...”*

Qemal fought to spread among the students the spirit and ideology that prevailed among the workers. His school life had become a perpetual battle of ideas. Of course, the propagation of new ideas was not without its clashes with official ideology. Students' lively discussions on political and philosophical issues, on history and economics, on literature and aesthetics, prove that the students were fighting on a broad front. Students of the Lyceum, inspired by Qemal and his comrades, spoke out first and foremost against fascist ideology, highlighting the danger it posed to freedom and progress. There were even young people who openly polemicized against professors, especially the philosophy professor, who lost himself in idealist and reactionary notions. The hatred of the advanced students was directed above all at those elements who displayed fascist tendencies or who wanted to keep youth under government tutelage. The young students made no secret of their animosity when they rejected their opponents' tendentious interpretations of current political events.

Now everything that happened beyond the walls of the school had repercussions for the schoolchildren. There was a growing interest in political life. At the Lyceum, Qemal had taken charge of the situation. He became known as an inspirer of free thought and an enemy of obscurantism, a bold defender of the rights of the youth. His good reputation and popularity began to worry the school administration. Moreover, his revolutionary activity attracted the attention of informers, so by the end of 1936 he was under constant surveillance. But it was near impossible for his enemies to glean any incriminating information from him. As always, Qemal



was on guard, and knew how to act with tact and circumspection, avoiding anything that might compromise him, behaving differently depending on the person and the circumstances. Nevertheless, he was the first to be targeted if there was any trouble at school. This became clear in February 1937 when the school records were burned and he was among those arrested and charged. This is what he had to say to the investigating judge about this incident: "When the registers of the Lyceum of Tirana were burned down, the management suspected me. Later, when the culprit was discovered, they realized that a pupil with good marks and a conduct that no teacher disapproves of has no need to lose track of his hard work in the school records."

This incident discredited the school management and the police, who were unfairly targeting a student like Qemal. It won him even greater sympathy from his fellow students.

Soon, typewritten anti-Zogite leaflets were falling into the hands of the students. The youth were able to secretly read parodic verses from Fan Noli's poem "The Song of Salep-Sultan." Some literary stories with an anti-fascist tone were also passed around. Qemal and his comrades were the propagators.

The effects were soon felt. A feeling of hostility towards Zogu and fascism spread among the students. This gave a new impetus to political discussions. People now spoke out more boldly against the injustices of the time and talked openly about the tasks facing the younger generation. This atmosphere suited Qemal. He was able to take advantage of this period to put a few young people up to the test by entrusting them with various tasks and to move on to a new stage of organizing revolutionary work at the school.

After the distribution of anti-Zogite leaflets following a successful political campaign, Qemal set up the first communist cell at the Lyceum of Tirana with a

group of tried and trusted youth. He first recruited his close comrades, Ali Demi and Themo Vasi.

The first meeting took place in Themo Vasi's guest room. He lived in a small Tirana house in a cul-de-sac near the "National" cinema (now "17 Nëndori"\*), which for a long time served as a base for the Albanian communist movement.

At this meeting, Qemal explained to the comrades that the revolutionary movement required the unity of the youth and their organization into communist cells which would serve as a school for their ideological training. Once organized, the youth would undertake common tasks and be prepared to make sacrifices. He also told them about the importance of secrecy, as a *sine qua non* for safeguarding the cell. However, despite his insistence on this point, he urged them to propagate revolutionary ideas and to swell their ranks with comrades who were worthy to join. He assigned to each of them the tasks incumbent upon them in their respective environments and he read theoretical material on some basic elements of communism, commenting on them before the comrades.

After this first meeting, the Lyceum students' cell met regularly every month, always in Themo's room. The communist youth reported on their activities and exchanged ideas. Themo, for example, reported on his work with the workers who had come from the countryside to earn a living in Tirana. As for Ali, he had taken it upon himself to organize the day-to-day political activities at the Lyceum.

The person in charge of the cell listened attentively to his comrades with great ease and friendliness, and was always ready to help them with his experience and erudition.

Qemal used the pamphlets *Economic Development*,

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\* 17 November, Albanian in the original.

*Value and Surplus Value* and other writings to teach his comrades the first elements of Marxist political economy on the different phases of human society, productive forces and relations of production. Later, for the communist education of the cell, he also used works such as *What is Communism?* and *Two Camps* by Joseph Stalin, fragments of Marx's work *The Civil War in France*, *The Comintern Program against Fascism* and *The Soviet Constitution*, as well as material from emigrant newspapers such as *The People* and *Sazani*, which were published in France by Albanian communists.

On his initiative, the communist youth of the Lyceum, who were intelligent and well-prepared, began to translate Marxist works into Albanian, such as Lenin's *Karl Marx, Bourgeois Education and Proletarian Education*, etc. These works circulated among the students and served to propagate Marxist ideas among them.

Qemal's efforts to set up communist cells did not stop at the Lyceum. Qemal also worked to penetrate other schools in the capital.

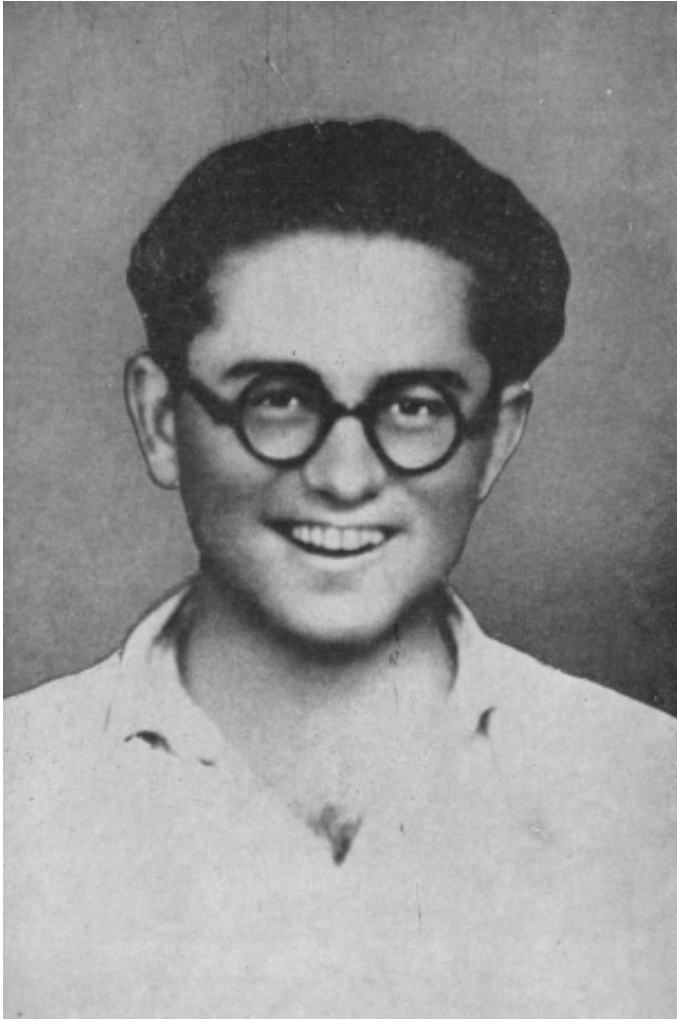
Moreover, by appreciating the role played by women in the revolutionary struggle, he also managed to make connections in the Women's Institute. He got to know some of the girls, talked to them, found out about the situation at the Institute and distributed revolutionary pamphlets.

In 1937, Qemal's revolutionary activity extended to other towns as well. He maintained close links with his comrades in Shkodra. Well aware of the needs and problems of the communist movement in that town, he never spared his help whenever the need arose and became their main supporter in the capital, especially when it came to providing them with theoretical literature.

Qemal travelled to Elbasan in the early months of 1937. He wanted to take a close look at the situation of the young people in the town and how to organize them



Vasil Shanto



Qemal at the Elbasan prison (August 1938)





Veli Stafa (1937)

into the communist movement. As he had expected, he found that the young people were dissatisfied with the regime and wanted to join the revolutionary movement. These boys were looking for new ideas and Qemal's arrival made their plan for an organization a reality.

In November of the same year, he met Sami Baholli in Tirana. On this occasion, he spoke to him at length about revolutionary activity and forms of struggle, as well as providing him with clandestine literature.

Qemal was in constant contact with the comrades of the Elbasan cell, sometimes by word of mouth and sometimes by written correspondence. As usual, he would devote all his energy and his undivided attention to aid in revolutionary work. He would give them instructions and advice, but he would also criticize them very forcefully for their mistakes and nonchalance.

"Is it acceptable to break one's freely given word?" he wrote in a letter to one of the members of the cell: "Can we neglect to improve ourselves and educate those for which we are responsible?"

"Those who have understood a shred of truth and those who have seen a ray of light must make it their duty, their historic duty, to spread it, to disseminate it everywhere..."

It is difficult to trace the many unseen contacts that Qemal had in Tirana with revolutionary circles. He had close ties with Hamid Shijaku, one of the talented organizers of the capital's youth arts and sports societies, and helped him with advice and ideas. He also got to know some of the progressive writers of the time who were working in Tirana. He chatted with them, exchanged books and showed them his literary creations.

Meanwhile, Qemal's talent was developing rapidly. The many works he wrote and published in 1937 are clear proof of this. He was keen to collaborate with progressive publications, but the government had banned them by that time. The publication of the magazine



*A.B.C.*, edited by Asim Vokshi, had been banned the previous year, and *Bota e re* ceased publication after the publication of *The Reproaches of Autumn*.

In these circumstances, there was not a single progressive publication where Qemal could have his writings published. In April 1937, the newspaper *Shtypi*\* appeared. This publication had a primarily commercial purpose. Communists, men of letters and journalists known for their advanced ideas took advantage of the opportunity to express themselves. Qemal was one of them.

“Qemal answered our call straight away,” recalls Petro Marko, one of the freelance editors of *Shtypi*. “He brought us stories and literary drafts. I remember that we liked them, and we published them without making the slightest correction...”

Qemal wrote stories, profiles and literary sketches exclusively for this newspaper. This kind of narrative prose was quite common at the time among progressive authors. Following their example, and especially the example set by Migjeni, he wrote a whole series of works in pictorial and concise language, sometimes attributing an allegorical meaning to his ideas. In them, he raised current problems and set out bold conceptions. He aimed to present his readers with virile figures who did not shy away from difficulties. Such, for example, is the sailor he describes in *Impression of Azure*, a man hardened by the tribulations of a hard life, who has unshakable confidence in his own strength and refuses the mercy and alms of others.

“I listen to him with curiosity and love, but without compassion,” Qemal writes of the sailor. “He asks for no pity. As soon as he sees a hint of emotion on my face, he laughs and starts singing aloud the songs of the seas.

“I hear through his mouth thousands of other voices

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\* The Press, Albanian in the original.

of men who lead the same life as his...”

In some of his stories, Qemal uncovers repulsive aspects of Albanian life and paints a portrait of some of the people of the time. In *The Salutory Scriptures*, he introduces us to a hodja, a minister of the Muslim faith, who, in full view of the authorities, exploits the ignorant people in the middle of the Tirana marketplace.

“The hodja,” he writes, “nods, lowers his qeleshe over his thick eyebrows and nonchalantly dips his quill in the black ink.

“Then he slowly scrawled the magic letters. Nobody understood...

“The mass of peasants and some city dwellers were amazed.

“The murmurs multiplied, the hodja continued to write.”

In the literary stories *The Indigence* and *The Song of the Slum*, the young writer speaks out against the laws and customs of the time, which turned Albanian women into veritable slaves. At first, he paints a scene typical of the period in realistic colours: a village aga, the ruthless enemy of women, makes his way on horseback and his wife painfully follows him on foot. The author suggests through an antithesis at the end of the story, when he speaks of “new horizons” and the “colourful world,” to suggest that the salvation of Albanian women depends on the future, and connects it to the ideas for which he and his comrades are fighting.

The second story is about a poverty-stricken girl who falls victim to her parents’ fanaticism. She weeps over her poor life within the four walls of the hovel. The author openly sides with the young girl and condemns fanaticism.

In the story *After the Storm*, Qemal paints a brief but significant portrait of his comrade Themo Vasi. The son of a poor peasant family, he studies courageously and at great sacrifice, always far from his elderly par-

ents who are waiting for him in “a desolate house in a remote village.” But he stands firm: “The future smiles promisingly at him. Life holds out its arms and invites him in.”

Qemal published other works as well, sketches and drafts of *He Left Me*, *Rays of Autumn*, *Both*, and so on. They are all signed with the pseudonym Brutus or the initials Q.S. and S.A.S.

He continued to contribute to *Shtypi* until the autumn of 1937, when he ceased to appear in its pages. He left the paper because the progressive journalists working there had quit writing. Some had quit out of fear and others had volunteered to go to Spain. Zogu took steps to curb any effort that might serve to awaken the people.

Qemal was constantly working on his revolutionary activities. His mind and soul were always alert. The communist movement had found a talented pioneer.

## XII

*“This is the fate of our intelligentsia, the fate that awaits us too!”*

Qemal was preparing for his baccalaureate exams in 1938. The difficult tests that awaited him demanded a lot of work, but as always he was able to combine his schoolwork with revolutionary activity. He did all his homework regularly, came to class prepared, got excellent marks and thus maintained his reputation as a brilliant student. At the same time, however, the future undergraduate continued his revolutionary activity; he ran cells, translated Marxist literature, worked with sympathizers and met workers.

During this period, Qemal devoted himself to the study of important theoretical works. His precociousness of mind, the ideological preparation he had acquired during the preceding years and the needs of revolutionary practice led him to throw himself zealously into the study of the basic questions of Marxist philosophy, political economy, history and ethics. His brother Veli was a great help. Every time he went home for the holidays, he smuggled Marxist books from Italy. His comrades also smuggled him books from abroad. One of them, Skënder Çaçi, sent him a biography of Lenin from Italy. From then on he began to study some of the major works of Marxist-Leninist theory, parts of Karl Marx’s *Capital*, Fredrich Engels’ *Anti-Dühring*, Vladimir Lenin’s *The State and Revolution*, Joseph Stalin’s *The Foundations of Leninism*, and so on. He also read articles and analyses of current problems in the communist movement in the periodical *La Commune*,\*

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\* The theoretical organ of several minor communist groups from across Belgium, published in Brussels during the 1930s.

as well as other newspapers and pamphlets, which he managed to obtain through various channels.

The materials and documents that could shed light on Qemal's theoretical studies are few and far between. His library, so rich in this kind of literature, could not withstand the storm of prosecution and persecution of the time. There are, however, a few volumes that bear witness to what we have just said and to his general interest in intellectual life. We can cite *The Leipzig Trial*, *The History of Materialism*, *The History of the New Times*, works of world realist literature, books of a sociological and psychological nature, and even musical literature, the scores of great composers such as Strauss, Rossini, Bellini, etc., all of which are available to us.

Qemal was gifted with a great ease for studying problems of all kinds, for delving into and understanding them. This was one of his most striking features as an intellectual. He was nothing like a man in a study, or one who superficially reads a lot of books just to satisfy his curiosity. For him, study was not a separate process, but a conscious task that he subordinated to the needs of revolutionary practice.

The propagation of communist ideas in the deplorable atmosphere of that time, with its jumble of currents and ideas, required serious groundwork in all areas. Qemal took this into account. That is why he used his intelligence and willpower to turn study into a systematic process. Apart from him, many others began to study Marxist theory at that time, but Qemal distinguished himself from them by his ease of absorbing ideas quickly, by his penetration into their most useful depths, and by the bridge he was able to create between theory and practice. Marxist theory became embedded in him; everything would henceforth be seen through this lens. This is one of his great merits as a propagator and agitator of communism. He never lost himself in futile theories and did not rehash Marxist phrases as

some others did; on the contrary, from that moment on he fought to put theory in the driving seat so that he would be in a position to judge phenomena, events and people objectively.

Moreover, in his work as a propagandist, we can see that he had already understood Lenin's great idea that the communist cannot do without people, that his work is linked first and foremost to them and only to them.

Qemal had a sociable nature, but his revolutionary duties developed this inclination even further. The company of men was as indispensable to him as the air he breathed; he loved and respected them, studied them and fought with them. He could not conceive of his existence without living and collaborating closely with them.

When Qemal was preparing for his baccalaureate exam, a discussion arose among certain communists as to whether or not there was class struggle in Albania. The debate arose in the wake of the intensification of this struggle in France. At that time, the working class there had issued categorical strike orders and were demonstrating en masse. On the basis of these events, some comrades thought that the class struggle did not exist in Albania because the people neither went on strike nor demonstrated. Qemal replied with his characteristic wisdom that this struggle was indeed taking place in our country, and that it had even penetrated everywhere, but we could not yet see it. "We are still school-boys," he said, "and we know nothing about life. So we don't know the forms it takes in our country. Of course, demonstrations and strikes are one of the forms, but there are others too that we need to take a closer look at." And one fine day, when he was walking along Kavaja Street with two of his comrades, he noticed that a pavement worker was quarrelling with the foreman and was about to hit him on the head with a stone, but some passers-by nearby intervened. The other workers were

ready to come to their comrade's aid. The students approached the scene of the incident and learned that the worker had rebelled because the foreman had not paid him his wages and his children were short of bread.

This scene touched them deeply, and on their way to school Qemal asked them:

“Well, what do you think? What would the other workers have done if their comrade had hit the foreman?”

The students could see the spirit of revenge in the workers' eyes. The incident was another lesson for them.

In the spring of 1938, Qemal went on numerous excursions outside the city with groups of communist youth and sympathizers.

One day, the group of high school students was returning from a walk in Petrela. On the way back, Qemal drew the attention of his classmates to a rather distressing scene: a peasant on a donkey was heading towards them; his wife, carrying his belongings, was following on foot.

The young men stopped to watch the scene attentively. Qemal asked:

“What do you think, comrades? Is this just what happens in the countryside? That the man rides a donkey and the woman walks on foot? How can we remedy this injustice?”

In the meantime, the peasant and the woman approached. After tactfully stopping the farmer, Qemal greeted him and asked him at length about farming. A short conversation ensued. When the farmer was about to leave, Qemal said to him in a friendly tone:

“Tell me frankly, old father, is it right that this woman who's carrying the load is walking on foot, and you're riding on your donkey?”

Although he was very surprised by this question, the peasant was not troubled. He tried to justify himself by invoking the customs of the country. Qemal then

addressed the woman with the intention of involving her in the conversation, but she remained silent and did not unclench her teeth. Then one of the young men, shocked by the woman's stubborn silence and the peasant's cocksure attitude, shouted out:

"Do you know that you can be imprisoned for doing such a thing?"

"Bon voyage, old father," suddenly intervened Qemal. All eyes turned to him. After waving them goodbye, the farmer set off again, still mounted on his donkey, with the woman following behind.

"Did you notice how he defended himself?" observed Qemal when they were alone. "She was silent. These are the customs and prejudices that ancient society has ingrained in the minds of ignorant people. In this case we have made two mistakes: firstly, we must understand that these customs and prejudices can be abolished not by coercion, but by conviction, by an education that only the new society can provide; secondly, by talking about prison, we have led this woman to believe that her salvation will come from the police of Zogu."

No one replied. They shared the opinion of their comrade who knew how to teach them even in the street.

One day, in a cell, a discussion broke out between the comrades. One of them exclaimed:

"If the bosses force the workers to work up to twelve hours a day, encourage them to leave and work for someone else!"

"It seems to me," explained Qemal, "that this is not the right way to go. All bosses are the same. The only way out for the workers is to wage an all-out struggle against them. The workers have to make them understand this!"

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In Qemal's school record booklet, when he was in



the eighth year (the last year of secondary school), we find the following note from the teacher in charge of his class: "Very good pupil who deserves praise." This assessment was confirmed once again in the baccalaureate examinations he took in the summer of 1938, when he ranked among the best.

His greatest desire was to continue his higher education. But the family's financial situation did not allow him to do so. So he applied to the Ministry of Education for a grant to study law. But his application was turned down for no good reason, despite the excellent results he had achieved in his exams. If we study the documents from that time, we can see that this refusal was due to the intervention of the Ministry of the Interior. The Department of National Education, in a secret document dated July 8, 1938 and signed by the Commander General of the Constabulary, was informed that Qemal Stafa "appears on the list held by this authority of persons who harbour communist sentiments; this boy is persisting on the same course..."

A few days later, Qemal was arrested by the Ministry of the Interior and accused, according to his deposition on July 21, 1938 before the investigating judge, "of being a communist, as described by the official information."

Before his arrest, the police had imprisoned a group of young people with communist ideas in Elbasan, some of whom had been organized by him. The detainees also included a number of young people from Korça. We do not yet know the details of his arrest, but we do know that he was sent to Elbasan prison, where he was subjected to the most severe interrogation. But Qemal bravely and wisely confronted all the traps set by the king's officers. He denied everything he was accused of and defended himself so well that he completely confused the judges, who had no conclusive evidence. On the other hand, when confronted with comrades who

were going through their first trial, he gave them courage with his fearless behaviour. His resistance to the enemy of the class served as an example to them.

Qemal took advantage of his stay in Elbasan prison to comfort his comrades and indirectly instill his ideas in the minds of the other inmates and even some complacent guards. He won the esteem of all with his frank and optimistic nature, his wisdom and his simplicity. We found a photograph of Qemal smiling between armed guards. This is a living document we have from that time which shows his good spirits in Elbasan prison.

At the end of the investigation, he was released due to a lack of evidence, and was returned to Tirana. It was a great joy for his family and comrades, but also a success in his fight against the enemies of the people. His prestige grew among the youth. Other trials and new tasks still awaited him. The struggle continued.

His release coincided with a major setback in his life. His economic situation had worsened. He had been refused a grant to continue his studies. He looked for a job in the civil service, but again found the door closed. Like so many young people finishing their studies, he risked being left without a job.

“One day,” recounts Zija Këlliçi, “we found ourselves face to face.” He lamented the plight of many pupils who, after finishing their time at school, were wandering the streets of Tirana because they couldn’t find work.

“This is the fate of our intelligentsia,” he exclaimed, “the fate that awaits us too!”

Under these circumstances, on the recommendation of the group, he joined the Luarasi printing works as a private secretary. The communists were very interested in the organization and management of typographers. Ali Kelmendi had already taken the first steps in this direction a few years earlier. At the beginning of

1937, the typographers had founded their union, which was also recognized by the government.

When Qemal entered the printing works, the workers gave him a very warm welcome and immediately regarded him as one of their own. From the very first day he entered the workshops and shook hands with everyone. From then on, before setting to work himself, he got into the habit of meeting the workers, chatting with them, studying their work processes and helping them. He used to say that he loved the smell of typography, ink and molten lead.

For as long as he worked there, he worked for the unity and organization of the typographers on a firmer basis. Their union should not simply be a professional association whose sole object was to defend the economic interests of the workers, but it had to fight to transform itself into a fighting force capable of resolving political questions. To achieve this, the workers had to absorb communist ideas as quickly as possible. Qemal worked actively to form their political consciousness.

“The king,” he told the workers, “by law gets a thousand French gold coins a month. With one gold coin you can buy a cow. You also know that the peasant has to slave like a negro all his life to get one. But there is more. The queen receives half of what his majesty earns and each of the princesses a quarter. If you add it all up, you can see that the entire royal family gobbles up the equivalent of 2,500 head of cattle every month. You see, comrades, the king takes from the fruits of your labour when you and your families lack the bare necessities.”

Qemal’s activity among the typographers attracted the attention of the spies who followed him step by step. The owner of the printing works soon gave him notice to leave.

The workers protested when they heard the news. The police also had something to do with his dismissal. So the workers decided to make him an honorary mem-

ber and president of the typographers' union.

## XIII

*“And those who have always led a cosy life wanted to get in our way.”*

Veli returned from abroad when Qemal was out of work. He had just finished his medical studies in Bologna, Italy and was returning to his family after a long absence. His return filled the whole family with joy, but especially Qemal, with whom their relationship went far beyond fraternal ties. Above all, they were comrades with the same ideals, and now that they were standing alongside each other, they could work and fight together.

Qemal never failed to benefit from his brother's erudition. Their meeting during the summer holidays left a deep imprint on the younger brother's life and activities.

But his brother fell seriously ill. Towards the end of September, they both left for Golnik, a climatic town in Yugoslavia known at the time for its tuberculosis sanatorium.

Qemal described the situation in these words in a letter he sent to his mother:

“We arrived in Golnik yesterday morning at half past nine. The journey was easy, as the sea was calm and the Austrian train quite comfortable. We spent the night in a boarding house.

“Today at midday we went to see the director of the sanatorium. He received us very cordially and visited Veli before any of the other patients.

“The disease is in its early stages. I saw it myself on the X-ray. The professor diagnosed him with a pneumothorax and admitted him to hospital. Now he is bedridden in a clean, comfortable room...

“The secretary didn't believe that he was a doctor when she saw his date of birth. So he had to show her

his medical degree.

“I’ll stay here as long as I need to, but I hope it won’t be for long. There are about 30 Albanians in this establishment who came here quite ill and are now wandering around without taking the slightest care of themselves...”

Qemal spent about a month in Golnik. He hardly left his brother’s bedside, but this did not prevent him from taking advantage of his stay in the city to get to know foreign revolutionary elements and to acquire Marxist literature. He took part in political and theoretical discussions, learned a lot of new things and about various forms of propaganda activity.

Veli was delighted to see how well-prepared and mature his brother was; he felt his absence deeply when he left him. Moreover, the disease was progressing rapidly. Being a doctor himself and of an extremely sensitive nature, he could see the sad prospect that awaited him.

The efforts of the specialists in Golnik brought only a slight improvement. His state of health continued to give cause for concern. He decided to go to Paris for treatment. This time, he set off alone, making a long and exhausting journey across Europe alarmed by the events of the autumn of 1938. After many ups and downs, he managed to get himself admitted to a people’s sanatorium on the outskirts of Paris.

In Albania, his friends and family were consumed with worry. But, more than the others, Qemal felt the weight of this pain with all his being. The life of his brother and comrade was in danger.

He was thinking of going to see him, he wanted to be close to him, to give him courage and comfort him. The trip to Paris would also be useful for other reasons. He was planning to enroll at a university and continue his studies through correspondence courses. But the trip abroad would also be beneficial to revolutionary work. Vasil and the other comrades in the group ad-

vised him not to miss this opportunity; they even entrusted him with a mission.

Qemal set sail for Italy at the beginning of December. We learn from a postcard he sent to his family on December 9 that he arrived in Florence and enrolled, as he himself wrote, “at a beautiful university in the city in the Faculty of Law.”

Choosing this particular field fulfilled an old dream of his, as well as Veli’s desire, that his future profession would allow him to participate in political and social life.

He did not stay long in Florence, despite the attraction of the artistic beauties and curiosities of this museum-city. No sooner had he been enrolled than he set off for Paris the very next day.

It was the first time the 18 year-old had undertaken such a long trip abroad. Naturally, this affected him somewhat. He was impatiently waiting to see his brother again, to arrive in Paris as soon as possible.

This great metropolis had always captured his imagination from childhood onwards; it made a deep impression on him on that December day when he set foot there for the first time. His cousin Fejzo Sejdini came to meet him at one of the capital’s main railway stations and that same evening they both left for the Malmaison sanatorium in Villiers-sur-Marne, where Veli was hospitalized. This sanatorium was located on the outskirts of Paris, in a picturesque village.

The reunion of the two brothers was as emotional as it could have been. The younger brother was upset by Veli’s state of health. The illness had taken a turn for the worse. Veli was well aware of this and his only concern at the moment was to avoid infecting his brother. Despite his great desire to have him near him, he did everything he could to shorten the time they could spend together. These were dramatic days for these two brothers who loved each other so much.

Qemal moved to the village hotel to be closer to the patient. At the bottom of the building was a café where dozens of people gathered. It was the busiest place in the village. During his stay at the hotel, Qemal often went there. His sociable nature was confirmed even in this foreign land. There too, he could not stay away from men. He entered their company and engaged in all sorts of conversations and discussions with them. Naturally, his favourite subject was always politics. So he set about spreading communist ideas, talking about the struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie and the danger that fascism represented for the world. As he was also well aware of the political situation in France, he could not help pointing out the hypocritical manoeuvres of the French bourgeoisie and the betrayal of the socialists and all the bourgeois parties towards the Spanish Republicans by abandoning their country to the whim of the fascist bayonets.

The village mayor, an enraged right-wing socialist, got wind of Qemal's political discussions and immediately ordered his expulsion from the village as an undesirable person. Qemal listened cool-headedly to the mayor's emphatic command. He realized that the enemies of revolutionary ideas were the same everywhere.

Qemal stayed in Paris, visiting his brother every day. He took advantage of his free time to get to know life in this great city, and to meet the people there.

In those days, the political atmosphere in the French capital was electrified by the major events leading up to the Second World War. Paris was abuzz with the great demonstrations of the Popular Front. The proletariat forcefully condemned the diabolical manoeuvres of the bourgeoisie, which was betraying the interests of the nation. The danger of fascism was on everyone's lips. Qemal experienced this atmosphere himself. He saw the political demonstrations with his own eyes, met various people and visited some of the major districts of Paris.



His cousin was a great help. Thanks to him, Qemal was able to enter various intellectual and youth circles. His cousin reports that he left everyone he met with the impression of a serious, intelligent and cultured person. They were surprised by his precocious maturity of mind, the strength of his arguments, his preparedness and his fluency in French. Even in an atmosphere like Paris, he could not stop himself from being a propagandist. It was in his nature to spread communist ideas everywhere. Life had no purpose for him unless he talked about political and ideological issues, or about questions concerning society and the struggle of the ordinary people against injustice.

Thus, after a bitter polemic in a café with an enemy of communist ideas, and although the latter in no way associated or agreed with many of his ideas, he was obliged to admit at the end of the discussion that he had the greatest respect for the unshakeable confidence that his opponent placed in his convictions and for his perfect knowledge of the philosophical systems to which he was able to oppose Marxist philosophy.

In accordance with his group's instructions, he went to the headquarters of the Central Committee of the French Communist Party to find Gabriel Péri, who was then a member of the Central Committee and head of the international section of *L'Humanité*.

Péri received him warmly and listened attentively to the Albanian communist. According to the instructions he had received, Qemal wanted to inform his correspondent of the activity of the Communist Group of Shkodra and to make official contact with the Comintern through the intermediary of the French Communist Party. He also wanted to know the opinion of the FCP on the activities of the National Liberation Committee in France.

He visited the CC of the FCP with the firm conviction that he was fulfilling a revolutionary task, but leav-

ing aside the official purpose, the meeting with Gabriel Péri left a deep impression on him. And what a significant coincidence when, three or four years later, the two communists suffered the same fate! Through their heroic deaths, they both became the standard-bearers of anti-fascist resistance, one in Albania and the other in France.

Despite very limited time available, Qemal made the most of it to learn about the history and working life of the French capital. The city of the Bastille and the Commune, of the Louvre and the Eiffel Tower, this city of great social contrasts, of luxurious and miserable neighbourhoods, stretched out before his eyes in all its splendour. He would carry this wonderful memory with him forever. But his mind and soul remained attached to his Homeland, comrades and family. He thought of them with nostalgia and wished he could be among them as soon as possible. His letters bear witness to this. Especially the one he wrote to his nurse-maid, his second mother, as he called her, in which he says, among other things:

“Today I have decided to write to you. Unfortunately, and through no fault of your own, you are going to ask a private secretary to read my letter to you. I would have loved you to read this yourself, as you are a great lady, but you did not have the opportunity to learn how to read.

“Frankly, I think of you often, especially when I’m alone, and I can’t forget that I grew up in your care. I imagine what you must have suffered when I was very small and did things that seem childish to me now. And to think that of all the people in our house at the moment, you were the one who suffered the most for me and that I never had the chance to express my gratitude to you.

“You will tell me that I am equally indebted to others. I answer you: not as much as I owe you...

“I would have loved to write to you at length and tell you all sorts of things, but my minutes are limited...”

Staying in Paris meant expenses and his financial situation did not allow him to stay as long as he would have liked. It was very hard for him to part with Veli. His brother’s serious condition would remain a gaping wound in his heart. His pallid face followed him all the way back to Albania. It was the last time they would see each other. That same day, towards the end of December, when he left Paris Veli wrote to his mother: “Today Qemal left me. He gave me a great deal of joy...”

Qemal returned home via Italy.

“I arrived in Florence extremely tired,” he wrote in a postcard to his family on December 31. “I wish you a Happy New Year, happier than the last. I’m resting a bit and I’m on my way.”

He spent New Year’s Eve with Albanian students. Most of his time in the city was spent visiting the famous centres of the Italian Renaissance. He visited museums, galleries, libraries and theatres, and bought forbidden books from second-hand booksellers. He also obtained the texts he needed to prepare for his university exams, and left an excellent impression everywhere and on everyone.

Crossing Italy on his way home, Qemal saw with his own eyes the militarization of life in the towns and villages he passed through. Fascist Italy was preparing to launch new wars of piracy. His mind was inevitably focussed at that moment of fate awaiting his Homeland, which the king and the ruling classes had tied to fascist Italy by a series of treaties, thus preparing the shackles of its enslavement.

During his trip, he met a socialist in the manner of Léon Blum. This man was going to Algeria to “help” the people of that country to develop their culture because they were “very backward.”

The shameful attitude of this lackey of the French

bourgeoisie revolted Qemal to the core and he did not hesitate to make his feelings known openly.

“The Algerian people don’t need ‘apostles’ of culture. Instead of helping them in their struggle against the foreign occupiers and exploiters, you are putting obstacles in their way. You have become a defender and propagator of French colonialism.”

His main concern when he arrived in Durrës was his suitcase full of books. But here, too, he was clever. On the boat, he intentionally befriended the family of a Zogite official.

When he disembarked, he switched suitcases with them because their luggage was not subject to police inspection. As a result, the forbidden literature he was carrying went unnoticed.

It was mid-January 1939.

## XIV

*“Do you know, Mr. Officer, what freedom means, the freedom we communists love more than anything else in the world?”*

As soon as he returned to Albania, Qemal found himself in a very difficult situation: the Zogite police had begun mass arrests of communists. In a matter of days, dozens were incarcerated. Vasil Shanto suffered the same fate towards the end of December. Events had unfolded unexpectedly and instantaneously.

On January 14, the press published a royal decree appointing the new members of the Special Tribunal for Political Crimes.

The Ministry of the Interior ordered Qemal's arrest on January 15, but this order was not immediately carried out. For several days, spies followed him closely. The police monitored his movements, his meetings and everything he did. Qemal understood that he was being spied on and was prepared for anything.

His arrest took place on the night of January 24. The constables surrounded the house and, after knocking loudly on the door, they entered. Qemal received them with great composure and silence. But deep in his soul, he felt sorry for his mother, who was already so distressed by Veli's serious illness. However, nothing transpired on his face, not the slightest repentance, no weakness.

The constables meticulously inspected the boys' bedroom, the other rooms and the whole house. But to no avail. Qemal had taken precautions in good time, leaving nothing that could compromise him.

Handcuffed and led back by a long line of tormentors, the prisoner was led straight to the offices of the police marshal, which were located at the beginning of Dibra Street. They escorted him off into a small room.

It was bitterly cold, a harsh winter that year.

Qemal would have to go through tough tests again, but he felt strong enough to withstand anything. He had prepared himself mentally and physically in advance.

The torture chamber adjoined his room. He became aware of this at dawn when the sound of prisoners being beaten came to his ears. It was psychological pressure, but he did not let it bother him. He did not sleep a wink all night and in the morning he was ushered into the room. In front of him stood officer Stavri Jaho,\* a warrant officer in charge of torture, and three constables.

Qemal had scarcely entered when the torturer, without saying a word, rushed at Qemal, struck him with his fists, knocked him down and forcibly bound his hands. After giving him a few more blows, one of the constables, on the torturer's orders, threw a bucket of ice-cold water over him. This was the beginning of the torture, but also the beginning of his resistance. As Kristo Themelko reports, the methods employed by the king's officers were medieval and brutal. Nothing stopped them, only the outcome mattered to them.

The methods of torture used on Qemal were the cruellest. At first, he was stubbornly silent in the face of questions and suffering, which put his enemies in a frenzy. Every means were used to make him talk. They threw him to the ground, kicked him with their heavy studded shoes, tied his legs with the straps of their rifles and pierced his swollen feet with the points of their bayonets. But this was still not enough, it seemed, to break down his resolve. Then they placed small double-edged knives between his toes and crushed his fingernails with a large stick. Each new torment was accompanied by the same savage cry: "Speak, speak!" But Qemal didn't

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\* Stavri Jaho was killed during the National Liberation War as an enemy of the people. The elimination was carried out by Nazmi Rushiti, one of Qemal's comrades.

answer, he gritted his teeth, and you could read in his eyes all the hatred he harboured against them. Drops of blood beaded down onto his body; his lips were purple and his face was covered with sores.

The officer bombarded him with questions and threats, insisting that he turn in his comrades, that he reveal the tasks he had been assigned, as well as reveal their bases, techniques and literature. In addition, he wanted to know what he had done abroad, the names of those he had met, his conversations with them and the subversive books he had brought back from there.

This torture continued for an entire week.

It was a week of horrible suffering. He had to stay in the cold, totally isolated from life and from people. But he proved himself a worthy Albanian communist. His enemies never detected the slightest sign of weakness from him; on the contrary, the more they terrorized him and unleashed their venom, the stronger his resolve became.

Occasionally, after repeated torture sessions, he would come to his senses and, regardless of the consequences, hurl bitter barbs at them. This was hardly the fruit of a spontaneous outburst or a thoughtless fit of anger, but a well-considered response that stunned and disoriented his enemies.

“Yes, I am a communist,” he told the torturer, “and I recognize that there are many more. I do not know any of them, and even if I did, I would not report them.”

“...Do you know, Mr. Officer, what freedom means, the freedom we communists love more than anything else in the world? Do you know what exploitation means? Have you ever seen the workers coming home from work in the evening with sacks on their backs? Talk to any of them and they will tell you they don't have anything to eat after their back-breaking work. But you don't have time to waste with these people, you've got better things to do, the cafés and tables of the 'Kursaal'

and the 'Bella Venezia' are waiting for you, while we communists are fighting for these men who work and are exploited for 12 and 15 hours a day. We fight so that they don't have to slave away for a piece of cornbread, and so that their families don't starve. We fight, I tell you frankly, Mr. Officer, for these people to take the power you hold into their own hands, to do away with exploitation and to bring genuine freedom..."

The torturer regarded these ideas, expressed in the presence of the guards, as propaganda; he nevertheless tried to keep his cool and recorded them as evidence of his guilt.

Qemal found a way to shout his ideas loud and clear, even in these difficult circumstances.

"You're beating me," he said one day to a simple guard who was carrying out the orders of his superiors, "but if you knew why I'm fighting, you would turn your baton against your leaders. Don't forget, though, that one day the people will have their way and you will have to answer for these abuses. Now, if you have the strength, keep on striking."

The prestige he already enjoyed was further enhanced by his stubborn resistance to torture, by the acerbic, biting responses he hurled at the torturers and by his replies in confrontations with guards. Even the officers were astonished when they talked amongst themselves. His uncompromising attitude towards his ideals was soon known by the common people. Workers and students whispered his name into each other's ears. Prisoners looked to him as an inspiration and as someone who lifts their spirits.

After seven days and nights of hellish suffering in the torture chambers and holding-cells of the police station, Qemal was transferred to an old prison. Here, all the political prisoners accused of being communists had been assembled in three large rooms. There were 73, all (with a few exceptions) members of the Com-



munist Group of Shkodra. The whole organization was thus uncovered, except for the Tirana cells, which had been saved thanks to the firm attitude of Qemal and Vasil, who did not expose any of their comrades. Qemal was shocked to see this state of affairs, but he was also astonished, for he could not have imagined that the betrayal was so great that most of the Group's comrades had fallen into the hands of the Zogite police. He could now see with his own eyes the full extent of this treachery; a heavy weight was placed on his heart, but he understood that he had to keep his cool, analyse the reasons that had led to this situation and find the culprits who had reduced the organization to this state.

At the Tirana prison, Qemal and Vasil concentrated on organizing their comrades and preparing them for the tough trials ahead. They had amassed a large number of communists, most of whom were meeting for the first time.

Qemal, who had been horribly tortured and still bore wounds on his body, who was terribly thin but optimistic and determined, aroused the admiration of all the inmates. Vasil Llazi told us:

“Although he was still covered in wounds and his face had taken on a bad colour, his nerves held firm and his confidence remained unshaken...

“...In the evenings, comrades would gather in groups to sing and dance. Qemal was among them, singing Shkodran songs with Shkodrans, Elbanian songs with Elbanians and Tosk songs with Tosks.”

Qemal and Vasil were at the head of all the prison activities, organizing educational work. At a communist meeting, they were elected to the head of the directing council. A collective association was created in the prison. Communists pooled the food and money at their disposal and divided it among themselves in equal shares. Such unity was unheard of in Albanian prison life.

Communists like Qemal strove to turn prison into a school where all the comrades, without exception, could be educated and tempered. They looked for ways to do this, adopted measures and selected ideological, political and cultural topics to study.

“Qemal,” recounts one eyewitness, “took charge of the development of education in general subjects of a cultural and artistic nature. He showed extraordinary zeal and determination in our conversations and the decisions we made.”

Qemal took an active part in all the important discussions between the communists. The problems that preoccupied them were many, but given the historical moment, they sensed the imminent fascist danger that threatened their country was the most urgent. So, when the inmates were discussing this subject one morning, a comrade asked:

“What should we do if fascist Italy attacks Albania?”

There was a great silence, but suddenly Qemal cried out:

“We must resist, however small we may be, and in the event that Zogu does the same, we will join him.”

This prospect gave rise to heated discussion. How was it possible that the communists so appallingly tortured by Zogu’s men should be fighting alongside him against fascism! But, after much debate and clarification from Qemal, most were convinced that the only Marxist attitude to adopt in this case was the one advocated by Qemal.

In prison, divergences had arisen between the communists. The new situation, and the fact that during torture many of them informed on one another, made them increasingly distant from each other. A host of problems and complicated tasks awaited Qemal and Vasil. To overcome them, they needed wisdom, courage and determination.

## XV

*“Only Bolshevism can save the toiling masses who are being oppressed.”*

The first session of the special tribunal against the communists opened on the morning of February 4, 1939 in the main auditorium of Tirana City Hall.

By order of the Royal Palace, every measure had been taken to ensure that the trial would be carefully orchestrated to achieve the desired objective. The whole apparatus of oppression was set in motion. By special decree of the king, the body of magistrates was appointed from among trusted officers. The press received orders and instructions to publicize the judgment as widely as possible. It was the first public trial to be organized against the Albanian communist movement.

Seventy-three defendants appeared before the special tribunal for political crimes. They were all members of communist groups, representing different professions, workers, craftsmen, students, journalists and so on.

On the days of the hearings, City Hall was surrounded by cordons of police and spies. People were forbidden access to the hall, even close relatives of the accused. The audience was made up of high-ranking officials, officers, representatives of official opinion and members of the regime.

The court opened with the reading of the indictment by the examining magistrate and a statement by the political prosecutor.

Qemal was one of the main defendants: he came ninth in the order of them.

The general indictment specifies that Qemal and the others “are accused of having organized societies on the territory of the Kingdom of Albania with the aim

of establishing by force the dictatorship of one social class over the other classes, and that they have propagated in writing, orally, directly or indirectly communist ideas and theories which run counter to the existing state of affairs and laws in force...”

The interrogation began with Zef Mala and Niko Xoxi. They spoke for hours, trying to convince the judges and prosecutor that they were not in favour of social revolution in Albania, and that they had never wanted to endanger the ruling regime. They were simply indulging, they declared, and without the slightest ill intent, in “theoretical and philosophical studies.” In their interminable, flatly obsequious confessions, they reiterated all that they had admitted previously; they also laid bare what they knew about the group’s activity, the literature consulted, and the technique and means employed. Their alleged intention to use the courtroom as a platform for propaganda was nothing more than a manoeuvre, for their defence conveyed nothing but demagoguery, fear and submission.

The next day, even the official press noted with some astonishment that Zef Mala and Niko Xoxi “had made truthful confessions.”

Then it was Vasil Shanto’s turn. What a contrast between his dignified, energetic attitude and that of his submissive, defeatist comrades! Vasil informed the royal court about who the Albanian worker was and what horizons communist ideas opened up for his class.

He declared:

“...I am convinced that communism must absolutely exist in Albania, and I have acquired this conviction because of the suffering of the working class. I would even add, Mr. Speaker, that 90 per cent of the bread in our country is currently contaminated with tubercular bacilli, because the boys who work in the ovens never get a break and toil day and night, dozing off on flour sacks and sometimes on the floor. They are malnour-

ished and poorly paid. I know what I'm talking about because I'm a worker myself. That is why I've decided to spread the word. I don't know if anything will change in the near future because it doesn't depend on us, but on the workers and peasants who are suffering..."

Vasil, who took up the cause of his class and blamed the despots for the plight of the people, struck a blow in front of his judges. This speech electrified everyone and it was in such an atmosphere that Qemal appeared in the dock. His presence, as well as his dialogue with the judiciary and the prosecutor, was one of the highlights of the entire trial.

Qemal and Vasil had already divided up their roles in prison. In his harangue, Qemal took advantage of this public platform to unmask the feudal-bourgeois order that oppressed the people and made them suffer; he also indicated the way out of this painful situation. The example of Pavel Vlasov, the hero of *Mother*, his favourite book, was a great help to him in those moments of struggle, as was the unyielding behaviour of Georgi Dimitrov at the Reichstag Fire Trial. Like them, Qemal went from being the accused to the accuser.

With his right hand raised and his confident, deep voice, Qemal did not defend himself, but rather he forcefully made an accusation against the social order, the exploiting classes and the oppressive apparatus that weighed so heavily on the shoulders of the people. He courageously revealed the root causes of social injustice and made clear the great discontent rumbling among the workers and peasants. He defended them on behalf of the Albanian communists and declared loudly and with the utmost conviction that the country's future was closely bound up with the triumph of communist ideas.

Qemal openly proclaimed from the rostrum, with righteous pride, that he was "a convinced and avowed communist, and that only Bolshevism can save the toil-

ing masses who today are oppressed.”\*

Qemal’s fierce accusations against the social order and his open proclamation that communist ideas would save Albania exploded like a bomb in the courtroom. The stunned judges couldn’t believe their ears, and the prosecutor kept his response very brief.

A lively debate ensued between the communist activist and the political prosecutor, which turned into an ideological duel that ended in Qemal’s moral victory. All the prosecutor’s efforts to counter his opponent’s arguments and clear ideas seemed weak and preposterous. The prosecutor preached to the choir when, running out of valid arguments, he continued to accuse him of having links with the communist Vasil Shanto and of having engaged in unauthorized propaganda. Qemal openly accepted, on his own initiative, that he was a communist, and that the ideas he and his comrades espoused would liberate the masses of workers. The prosecutor was forced to back down in the face of this reasoning and resolve, and even appealed to the authority vested in him by the law.

The next day, the official press, which had attended the trial, formulated its opinion with a circumspect phrase:

“The defendant Qemal Stafa, a law student, declared that he is a communist and accepted all the charges against him.”

In his lengthy indictment, the prosecutor focussed on the “extremist ideas” expressed by Qemal during the trial, correlating these ideas with Qemal Stafa’s close friendship with Vasil Shanto. The only citation in the speech was taken from Qemal’s own words.

The zealous defender of the laws of the “Kingdom of Albania” tried to polemicize against certain ideas of

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\* Unfortunately, in the surviving summary of the proceedings, Qemal’s diatribe is described very briefly.

the communist, but to no avail. His arguments were far removed from Albanian reality. Here is what he had to say:

“Mr. Chairman, Messrs. Judges!

“We, and the entire audience here present, must take into account what Qemal Stafa has proclaimed loudly before you, that he is ‘a convinced and avowed communist,’ who believes ‘that only Bolshevism can save the toiling masses who today are oppressed.’ What are these working masses, your honours, who are oppressed in our country according to the opinion of the accused Qemal Stafa? It seems that the accused in question knows very little about our current situation, or else he has forgotten it, or perhaps he is even pretending to have forgotten it, for in the Kingdom of Albania there are laws which are in force which are rigorously enforced and which provide appreciable help to the peasant, the worker and the other legitimate social classes.”

After his contradictory and sophist arguments, the prosecutor asked, among other things, for a 15 year sentence for Qemal Stafa.

After the prosecutor’s closing speech, it was time for the defence to speak. Qemal did not want a lawyer, but the court appointed one for him.

His lawyer, intent on inspiring the pity of the judges, defended him by declaring that his client was one of those enthusiastic youths whose pernicious reading had kept him away from the actual realities of life.

“The ideas that have troubled the minds of these boys,” he continued, referring to ancient Greek literature, “resemble the sirens of the Odyssey who lured people with their beautiful voices in order to engulf them...”

Qemal waited with a smile on his face for the end of this appeal, then stood up and exclaimed:

“We, Mr. Judges, are not only communists by mere

sentiment, but by conviction and action...”

The lawyer, who had not expected such an outburst, and who was not, it seemed, well versed in politics, resumed, aghast, shrugging his shoulders:

“It is astonishing! Just think, I wanted to defend him, and he gets up to destroy with his own mouth what I had so carefully prepared. Too bad for you, my boy!”

The special tribunal delivered its verdict on the afternoon of February 11. The communists were accused of serious offences against the social and economic order. Qemal was ranked among those bearing the greatest responsibility, as he and his comrades had organized communist associations, propagated subversive ideas and translated banned pamphlets.

Qemal, Vasil Shanto, Myzafer Asqeri, Emin Duraku, etc., as the verdict stated in one interminable sentence, “were the inspirations of all their comrades, and their activity... in favour of the ideas they cultivated, proved more effective than those of others... and they still continue to be firmly committed to this belief.”

In view of these facts, Qemal was sentenced to six years’ imprisonment, but according to the Penal Code, as he had not yet reached the age of 18, the sentence was commuted to three years. Fifty-six others were sentenced to various lengths of imprisonment.

Immediately after the sentence was pronounced, the condemned communists sang *The Internationale*. It was the first time in Albania that *The Internationale* had been sung in a public place. Qemal sang along with his comrades, feeling in his heart the strength and grandeur of communist ideas.

Despite shouts and repeated orders to keep quiet, the communists, huddled together, left the hall and made their way down the stairs of the City Hall, still singing.

The people gathered in Skanderbeg Square awaited their sons; with smiling faces and looks of sympathy,



they approved of their behaviour.

Handcuffed, the condemned men climbed into the carriages and made their way through the crowd singing. Revolutionary songs echoed behind them.

On the evening of the same day, Qemal wrote to his mother from prison:

“Don’t worry for me Tabi,\* for one day the prison walls will crumble...”

After these harsh ordeals in which communist unity had been so forcefully demonstrated, Qemal, deeply impressed, began writing the poem “To My Comrade in Captivity” from prison. It was dedicated to Vasil Shanto, who he was constantly associated with throughout the trial. Vasil had been sentenced more harshly than any of the others. This fact, combined with the militant friendship that united them, inspired Qemal to write these verses, which we unfortunately only possess in part. Despite this omission, the work is still a powerful expression of the two comrades’ class hatred of the old world. It is a living testimony to their spiritual bonds, which were based on the interests of the proletariat and the revolution.

Among other things, the poet writes:

“Born on the threshold of an embattled world  
By the unquenchable thirst for money,  
Raised in an inspired society  
Of broken dreams, of frozen hearts,  
We, youths thirsting for the dawn,  
Drove away the fresh dew of consoling justice  
For the oppressed sons of misery,  
The torturing chain bound your young wrists  
And mine. But the fire in your heart,  
Your youthful cause that nurtured the ideas  
Of broken dreams of frozen hearts,  
The abjection of the rich could not extinguish it

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\* This is what Qemal called his mother.

In sterile complaints,  
For up there, triumphant horizons await us..."

## XVI

*“Fear not for the flag  
which our mother embroidered in misery,  
soaked in your tears,  
for it will never be trampled underfoot;  
proud, it will always flutter beside me.”*

On the evening of February 25, the group of imprisoned communists accompanied by the adjutant-major of the Tirana prefectural police arrived at Mbreshtan, a village on the outskirts of Berat. Condemned to hard labour, the prisoners were taken there to build a drivable road from scratch.

The 56 prisoners were crammed into an ordinary village house. Some of them were housed in two insalubrious rooms on the second floor, others in the hall and still others in the stable where the master of the house had housed his cattle before their arrival. This house, home to a peasant family, had now been transformed into a prison where Qemal and his comrades had to live in extremely harsh conditions. The courtyard, too, was very small. The inmates were surrounded by a barrier of police officers and had no access to the outside world, being only allowed access to a 30 square metre space to move around in during their breaks.

They got up before dawn every day to go to work under escort. The place they had to go to was a long way from their penitentiary. Some of them followed the road over a rugged, rocky slope, while others walked a few kilometres further to reach the Palikësht village where the quarry was located.

The work was brutal. They had to toil for 8 to 10 hours a day, struggling against the stone with primitive means and in freezing cold. This was the first time the Zogite government had put forced labour into practice for political prisoners and it began with the commun-

ists.

Qemal was still feeling the effects of his torture. He hadn't quite recovered, but he was as lively and optimistic as ever.

On the very first day of work, he addressed the foreman with these words:

“What are you going to pay us for this?”

When he heard how he would be paid next to nothing, he immediately threw down his pickaxe and exclaimed:

“We don't work for nothing!”

After him, the others did the same. That day, everyone crossed their arms. It was an act of rebellion that embarrassed the authorities.

Thereafter, Qemal was always on the side of those who protested against the poor living conditions and treatment of prisoners. This is why he was considered the most dangerous of the communist group. His boldness and his interventions in defence of his comrades' rights pitted him against their torturers on a daily basis. Every time the authorities came to inspect him, they inevitably came up against Qemal's courageous attitude.

On one occasion, they were inspected by the Prefect of Berat, who had been directly entrusted with this task by the Royal Palace.

The prefect, puffed up and accompanied by his entourage, exclaimed contemptuously as he approached the group where Qemal was working:

“Work, you pigs. This is what you asked for!”

There was a moment of silence, but it didn't last long. Qemal's biting voice suddenly replied:

“Mr. Prefect, we communists make it a point of honour to work, to make ourselves useful to the people. We have worked and will continue to do so all our lives, while you and your kind lead the idle lives of parasites and oppressors.”

These words deeply wounded the reeve; he threatened Qemal that he was going to take him away and punish him, but the youth communist was unperturbed and stared straight into the eyes of his arrogant adversary.

Vasil and the other comrades surrounded the Prefect and came to Qemal's aid.

"If you want, Mr. Prefect, you can always try to take him with you!"

But as the gentleman was well aware of the trouble the communists had caused the government, he felt uncomfortable and returned to his quarters with his entire retinue behind him.

Life and work for the communists in Mbreshtan was extremely hard, but they held firm. They were very different from those defeatists who gave up. They were animated by an unshakeable confidence in the future, noble feelings of unity and a steel-like determination to forge ahead.

In Mbreshtan, the communists led an entirely collective life. The communities they had created in Tirana prison remained the basis of their internal organization. They pooled everything together and then shared it equally. Political, ideological and cultural training courses continued unabated. Qemal gave talks on politics, history and art. These were of great interest to everyone, as he would treat the issues raised from a Marxist-Leninist point of view, illustrating them masterfully with vivid, concrete examples. Among his comrades, he was the most active and articulate in all political, philosophical and historical conversations.

These interviews usually took place at night after a hard day's work. Communists often sacrificed hours of sleep. Eager to learn, they listened with great interest to these talks, especially those of the comrades who were best prepared. Qemal was one of them. What he said carried weight and always served to educate the

comrades.

At Mbreshtan, Qemal spent his time working, studying and conversing with his fellow students. Besides some reading books, he brought his university textbooks with him and regularly devoted part of his free time to studying German. What he wouldn't do to help those who didn't have enough education! He gathered them together and gave them elementary lessons on the sciences.

When the opportunity arose, he chatted with the guards as well. "This task falls to me," he would say, "because some of them are simple people who you have to work with to open their eyes." He even had the audacity to open such discussions with the prison warden.

"When we climbed the prison stairs one evening," recalls Ramiz Xhabia, "behind us came the warden, a man named Zef. Qemal was wearing a heavy overcoat with a martingale. The martingale was lying on the floor and when he stopped to pick it up, he came face to face with the warden. A lively discussion ensued. Qemal spared no words to make him understand that his position demeaned him, that he had placed himself at the service of the oppression and enslavement of the people, and that he was betraying and trampling underfoot the noble traditions of the highlanders and the masses. The warden, an intelligent jailer, defended himself like a devil, sometimes resorting to trickery, sometimes using threats, and finally exclaiming: 'Oh, Jesus! You preach better than the priest in church for your ideals. I've got to get away from you because I'm in danger of sharing your fate!'"

Towards the end of March, Qemal was informed that he was being transferred to Tirana prison. At first, he did not understand the reason for this transfer, but his comrades learned about it and shared in the profound sorrow that befell him. On March 18, his brother Veli had passed away at the age of 25 at the sanatorium

in the outskirts of Paris. Shortly before his death, he had left his final wishes:

“I die in the light of the great universal idea, and I wish for all those who loved me in life to embrace it.”

On March 30, as stated in official correspondence, Qemal was taken under escort to Tirana and transferred to the old prison. Alone in a separate cell and completely isolated from the other inmates, he had to endure the great pain caused by the death of his brother. It was a very painful time for a young man of his age, a misfortune that struck him at a difficult time, but he didn't give in to despair.

On April 1, Veli's body was brought to Tirana. Some family friends, taking advantage of the tense situation of those days, pleaded with the authorities for Qemal to be allowed to pay his last respects to his brother.

The next day, under guard of the police, Qemal went home. The grief-stricken house, the stirring lamentations, deeply upset him, but he tried to control himself. First, he asked that his brother's body be covered with a red cloth. Then, holding back his tears, he embraced his mother and said, “Oh, Tabi, he was my friend, he was a communist!”

The police officers stood behind him, waiting to see if he kept to his prescribed time. And Qemal, after paying his last respects to the deceased and waving goodbye to his family with clenched jaws, left his house to return to the cell.

All alone, in the painful solitude of his cell, he struggled with himself to contain the pain caused by this great loss, yet he found the strength he needed to overcome it. He thought of life, of the struggle ahead, of his comrades and his ideals. All this lifted his spirits, gave him confidence and filled him with optimism. The poem “In My Brother's Shadow” he wrote during these hours perfectly reflected his state of mind. In his isolation, between the four walls of the cell, Veli's shad-

ow appeared before him. His thoughts turned to their life together, but instead of shedding tears and allowing himself to grieve, he painted a portrait of his revolutionary brother. This death served as a pretext to evoke the greatest moments of a fighter's life. In writing for Veli, the poet addressed himself more to his ideal comrade than to his brother; both had condemned "this debasing century of illusory glitter" and had never lent an ear to those who said: "Your efforts, youth, are wasted." Both had always gone forward to achieve a greater goal:

"We continued  
climbing steep rocks  
to achieve victory one day.  
What a misfortune, comrade,  
this path has exhausted you!

We believed,  
hand in hand,  
in a youthful enthusiasm  
to assail life;  
but, alas! death has taken you  
and we couldn't go on fighting together!..."

The death of his comrade and brother did not bring him down; on the contrary, Qemal rallied the ranks of the fighters for the new world and solemnly pledged his support:

"Alone,  
I'll go back there again,  
or the fight you couldn't finish,  
awaits us among the steep rocks.  
Fear not for the flag  
which our mother embroidered in misery,  
soaked with your tears,  
for it will never be trampled underfoot;  
proud, it will always float beside me."



## XVII

*“Everything that has happened is the consequence of that betrayal.”*

It was the dramatic week of April 1939. The fascist attack on Albania was expected any day. The situation in the country was extremely tense.

Qemal was languishing in his cell at the time. He was upset and appalled by everything that was happening.

When his brother Alaudin went to see him, Qemal expressed his desire to get out of prison as soon as possible to fight the aggressors. Then, with a grim expression on his face, he told him of the sad fate awaiting the Albanian people:

“With the arrival of fascism,” he said, “an even harsher regime of oppression awaits our people, and new difficulties will present themselves to the progressives of our country. The book *Ten Years of Fascist Oppression in Italy* is a perfect illustration of this. Fascism has brought so much suffering to our people! Now, all that suffering will fully fall on us. Zogu’s officers are ignorant, they haven’t yet learned how to fight us properly, meanwhile the fascists are well-trained, they use diabolical methods against the communists and patriots. A great struggle awaits our people...”

Qemal watched anxiously as events unfolded beyond the prison walls. During those days, the people of Tirana had organized demonstrations in the streets of the capital. Their echoes were ringing in the lonely prisoner’s tattered heart. His closest comrades, Ali Demi, Hamid Shijaku and Themo Vasi, were at the forefront of the demonstrations. Everywhere, people were calling for weapons to defend their Homeland. A feeling of hatred and revolt had seized the people against the fascist aggressors and the leaders who had shamefully

deceived them.

Preoccupied, Qemal thought about the tasks incumbent on him as a son of the people. He thought about what he had to do in the situation he found himself in. He studied his options, made his plans and tried to make contact with comrades outside.

In a letter he secretly sent to Ali Demi, he wrote:

“I’ve heard that Italy is going to attack Albania. I shudder with horror at the thought of being in their prison. Surely, the Sultan\* will try to save his skin. Let me know what you’re going to do. I am with you.”

On April 5, some of the Lyceum’s communists, led by Ali Demi, organized a meeting to discuss the possibility of breaking Qemal out of prison. In these difficult times, they deeply felt the absence of their youth leader.

But Qemal was not sitting still; he was thinking about what he could do with the situation he found himself in. An atmosphere of uncertainty reigned among the prisoners. He managed to leave the solitude of his cell and mingle with the others. He was the only political prisoner among those who were there for common crimes, victims of the social order, the injustices and baseness of the times. Qemal understood this state of affairs perfectly, which is why he spoke to them from the heart. He didn’t hesitate to work with each of them separately and even to speak before them all to make them aware of the grave situation that had arisen in the country, of the betrayal of those in power and the misfortunes that fascism engendered. Inflamed by their love of their country, the prisoners spoke feverishly to express their own feelings and ideas in their simple words.

On April 6, a group of communist students demanded the release of the communists, as well as Qemal. That same day, Qemal called the prisoners together

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\* Reference is to King Ahmet Zogu.

and, without paying any attention to the guards, invited them to go and fight in defence of the Homeland. As he spoke, the skies over Tirana were covered with planes. This didn't stop them from showing their eagerness to sign up as volunteers. They were ready to follow Qemal. This courageous young man had set their hearts on fire. He went to the front of the prisoners and asked the guards to open the doors. Beside him stood two peasants from Peza, who were a great help to him in these delicate moments. The guards didn't respond. Suddenly, there was a deep silence. Qemal renewed his call, which was taken up in chorus by all the inmates. The guards started to get confused; they looked dazedly at their weapons and didn't know how to answer. Qemal made one last call, and without waiting for a reply, one of the prisoners rushed to the prison gates. A guard raised his weapon but the two peasants from Peza quickly overpowered him. Meanwhile, the bulk of the crowd, inspired by Qemal's example, relentlessly attacked the iron gates, broke through the walls and, ignoring the dangers, overcame every obstacle. The guards retreated, weapons drawn. The prisoners, with Qemal at the head, came out into the street. They shouted and embraced, overjoyed to feel free at last.

Night was falling. The escapees scattered, running in all directions. Qemal, followed by the two peasants and a few others, turned onto Durrës Street to return home. He forgot for a moment that the Italian military attaché's residence was just around the corner. The guards on duty were alarmed by the noise, the shouting and trampling of the crowd. They mistook them for seditionists who wanted to attack the fascist attaché, and without a further thought, fired on them. This was the Zogite police's last act of treason against the people! The king, instead of sending his people to fight to defend the country, left them there to protect the fascists, those who had prepared the occupation of Albania.

And what a sad irony to see the officers' weapons aimed at escapees running to defend the Homeland! A bullet hit Qemal in the shoulder. He immediately changed direction and decided not to go home, but to go to the house of Ramazan Xhepa, a small qeleshe maker who was a friend of his father's, and who lived nearby on Prison Street. Seeing that Qemal was wounded, the peasants of Peza immediately ran to his aid. The three of them raced to the house of Father Ramazan, who was shocked to see Qemal appear on his doorstep, his clothes bloody, but Ramazan was happy to see him freed at such a critical time. Everyone in the house did their utmost to help the wounded man, who was not at all worried. His face showed no signs of fear.

He spent the night talking to the owner and the two peasants about the latest events, which were unfolding at breakneck speed. Even though he was wounded, he wanted to join those who were going to receive the attackers, weapons in hand, the very next day.

The escapees learned the latest news. Father Ramazan, an old anti-Zogite, told them how the king had sabotaged the country's defence and taken the state treasury with him, fleeing like a dog in an unknown direction. A week-long appeal for weaponry had gone unanswered. The people had been betrayed.

"It was to be expected," exclaimed Qemal after Father Ramazan had finished speaking. "Zogu had already sold the country to the fascists a long time ago, and everything that happens is the consequence of that betrayal."

That April night seemed endless. A general anguish gripped them by the throat. Qemal was deep in thought by the fireplace.

Dawn was breaking. The sad day of April 7 was dawning. The fascist monster extended its claws over a betrayed Albania. It attacked from everywhere, by sea, air and land. Thousands of soldiers commanded by

experienced generals and admirals, cruisers and submarines, special units equipped with the most modern weapons and a host of aircraft escorting them, rushed towards Qemal's Homeland. April 7 marked the beginning of the fascist occupation.

Wounded, Qemal stayed put at Father Ramazan's house. It was there that he learned of the events that followed. He remained silent and more sombre than ever. His host looked at him and understood the deep anxiety that consumed the young man.

Father Ramazan remembers well what Qemal said to him when he heard the sound of fascist tanks passing down Durrës Street on the morning of April 8.

"Listen, Father Ramazan, we'll fight fascism and we won't rest until we've exterminated it, and Zogu knows we won't let him come back here!"

With these words, Qemal ended his first day under the fascist yoke. He was feeling quite sick from the wound received by the police officers protecting the life of the Italian military attaché.

In the evening, his mother came to see him. It was a touching encounter after all the misfortunes that had befallen the family. His mother had now turned all her love over to him. She was deeply saddened by Veli's death and worried about her youngest son's injury. During the night, she brought in the doctor who treated him regularly thereafter.

She wanted to take him home in the state he was in, but the situation was still very uncertain. There was no telling what might happen. Qemal was a known communist. What is more, he had escaped from prison. So he had to remain hidden until the situation became clearer.

He spent most of April at Father Ramazan's house. He read continuously, chatted with his host, played with the children and sometimes went to lie down in the grass-covered garden, where he lost himself in medita-

tion.

Qemal knew everything that was going on in our fascist-occupied country. The latter had unleashed a vast campaign of demagogy. After tanks and cannons, it was the turn of airplanes to bring the fascist bigwigs. Count Ciano, Zogu's godfather, opened the line-up, followed by Achille Starace, Secretary of the Fascist Party, along with the notorious S. Gili and Z. Benini. Fascism's former agent in Albania, Giovanni Giro, was also quick to get involved. A whole cloud of organizers and propagators of demagogy descended on our country to form the fascist party on the spot. Interestingly, these were the same people who had gone to Abyssinia in 1936 to organize propaganda of the occupier. The campaign began with a large military parade in Skanderbeg Square, where the fascists wanted to demonstrate their strength. Even more repugnant events followed. They were all hatched in Rome. Traitors, beys and merchants, civil servants and lifelong spies were found to convene an assembly that would formalize the "union" of the two countries and form a collaborationist government. Fascist newspapers began to appear, full of dithyrambic praise for the King-Emperor and Mussolini, and articles distorting history by fabricating our ancestors' romance with Rome. They called for calm and obedience, but threats and blackmail also featured prominently.

"All this," said Qemal during those days, "is a tragic game being played at the expense of a little people betrayed and cowardly abandoned by the king and the sold-out rulers."

After the amnesty decree, when he was sure he was in no danger, Qemal returned home. Now he could go out freely. He wanted to see Vasil again as soon as possible, but Vasil had taken refuge in Yugoslavia.

After a long odyssey, Vasil returned from exile. Qemal had been waiting impatiently for this moment.

His comrade had suffered a great deal; he had traipsed through foreign territory, walking day and night, hungry and tired, exposing himself to countless dangers. Despite this, he would not have regretted all these sacrifices if he had been able to fight against fascism.

“You, at least, received a wound, old chap!” he said frustratedly to Qemal when they met again. “And we went all the way to Yugoslavia, and those dirty dogs stopped us from organizing and arming ourselves!”

## XVIII

*“For the people, this extraordinary mass capable of working wonders... are infallible on one point: they know the people who deceive them, they judge them and condemn them. They love those who work frankly for them with all their hearts and they are ready to die for them.”*

Qemal and Vasil began by bringing together the Regional Committee of the Tirana group. All the comrades on the Committee had been in prison. For several months, the cells had been without leaders. The organization had suffered a severe blow. In this new situation, the task was to regroup forces, establish links with communists and activate the cells. Every communist had to make it clear to the people that fascism was the worst enemy of freedom. The mask of fascist demagogy had to be torn off.

Qemal resumed his revolutionary activity in the first months of the occupation. He immediately got in touch with the cells that depended on him and shed light on the situation. Naturally, the situation was very grave, but the people would soon rally their forces and, under the aegis of the communists, find the means and the path to armed struggle. Young people had to be at the forefront, and must not let themselves be lured by the mirages of fascism, which had brought with it not only soldiers and weapons, but also hundreds of propaganda specialists, created dozens of so-called cultural and sports organizations, filled the market with cheap and pornographic books, and spread foreign songs. All this, together with the sideshows, brothels and fascios that had sprung up everywhere like mushrooms, were nothing more than screens hiding the talons that the fascists had sunk into the bowels of Albanian territory. Their aim was to spiritually disarm the people and de-



generate the youth. Only by creating such a network, they believed, could they truly occupy the country.

Qemal devoted most of his time to revolutionary activity. He continued to instruct and lead the comrades. He met Vasil every day and the two of them talked face to face, exchanged ideas, and, experiencing the same frustrations, shared the same sorrows. Vasil showed the highest qualities of a communist organizer in his new situation. Brave and determined, he put himself tirelessly and valiantly into action as always. With a fellow worker like him, Qemal felt even stronger and looked forward with optimism to the struggle ahead.

During those months, he formulated certain ideas in writing and composed a number of works. Unfortunately, we don't possess all the material he produced during this period. His house was repeatedly raided by the fascist whirlwind and most of his papers have disappeared. All that remains are a few rare compositions and it is easy to understand what prompted him to write about patriotic themes in the early months of the occupation. This time, the main character is Skanderbeg. The great commander is portrayed in the midst of people's struggles and not as an isolated phenomenon; he is "the son of social, economic and spiritual conditions," "...he embodies to the highest degree the aspirations of the social environment in which he was born."

Qemal writes:

"The importance of a great man and the value of an historical figure do not lie in the fact that they do not resemble other human beings. It is precisely the opposite that makes them great. They were people who experienced their joys and their sorrows, their misfortunes and their happiness, like all those who are no longer of this world."

In his opinion, Skanderbeg's qualities as a strategist can be summed up in three points: an accurate understanding of the Ottoman army, a deep knowledge of the

abilities and the psychology of the Albanian fighters, and finally his organizational skills. On this subject, he states:

“Skanderbeg was a prince with strong ties to the mountains of Albania. This was important to him, as he got to know the land in great detail... He didn’t cloister himself in maharajah palaces but lived with the people, among the brave peasants and workers of our beloved Albania...”

The author expressed a profound idea when he wrote: “Who would not give his life alongside a prince like him, who lived and suffered for his people? For the people, this extraordinary mass capable of working wonders... are infallible on one point: they know the people who deceive them, they judge them and condemn them. They love those who work frankly for them with all their hearts and are ready to die for them.”

Qemal’s look back at a glorious era such as Skanderbeg’s is no accident. He evoked it for a specific purpose, studied it and analysed it, linking it to tasks of the day, to the struggle against the fascist occupiers.

He refused to publish what he wrote during this period. He read it to his close comrades, especially Vasil, and then filed it away in his personal collection. He declined all invitations to collaborate made to him by the fascist press through its intermediaries. He had disdain for men of letters who wrote for the occupying forces. “During these times,” he said, “every patriotic intellectual must keep the purity of his name intact and beware of the pitfalls of fascist demagogy.”

The fascists did everything in their power to compromise Qemal for political advantage. Giovanni Giro’s alluring attempts to offer him a job failed, as did those of another person who wanted to lure him to his side by telling him they were compatriots. Then they found a former pupil of the Lyceum of Shkodra, a fellow student of Qemal. He was Lazër Radi, one of their agents. He

had preserved a few literary stories written by Qemal, including *Light Shining Through the Cracks*. Lazër Radi arbitrarily published it in the newspaper *Fashizmi*. Qemal was outraged, for he clearly understood their deceitful intentions. Only they could use such tricks to abuse an author's most basic rights.

Qemal immediately sent a letter of protest to the newspaper's management, urging that it be made public that the story in question had been published without his authorization. He also wrote another letter to Lazër Radi, in the tact dictated by his situation and the circumstances of the moment. He wrote:

"To my astonishment, a few days ago I saw in the newspaper *Fashizmi* that the story *Light Shining Through the Cracks* bore my signature.

"You are well aware that the most elementary rules of publication and the first principles of Albanian dignity in no way allow the use of another's name\* and writing without the consent of the person concerned. No one else but you had this story, so I am writing you this letter to advise you to make a statement to the effect that you acted of your own accord, without my authorization. If you do not, all the responsibility will fall on you.

"I insist that I will never allow actions to be committed in my name without my knowledge..."

Lazër Radi knew Qemal's character well and expected his reaction, but for him the ends justified the means. All it took was for him to turn a deaf ear and for the newspaper to remain silent to achieve its desired goal. Moreover, the fascists were preparing to publish more of Qemal's works. Vasil learned that a notebook of his comrade's essays was in the drawer of an editor of *Fashizmi*. Without telling Qemal, he took it upon himself to get hold of it. He knew some of the typographers

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\* Underlined by the author.

who worked at the printing works where the paper went to press. He went to tell one of them. It was a matter of saving the honour of one of his best comrades, whatever the cost. The typographer, Mehmet Ushelenc, took it upon himself to carry out the task.

Mehmet Ushelenc recounts: “At the time, the offices of the newspaper *Fashizmi* were in the same building as the printing works. According to the plan I had drawn up with Vasil, I went to work that afternoon and waited until midnight for the editors to leave for their final touches. As soon as the typesetters had left too, I snuck under one of their tables and stayed there for two or three hours, waiting for the mechanics to finish their work. Then I gently opened the desk where the notebook was, switched on the light and approached the table. The drawer was locked. I tried to open it, but it was impossible. So I took a screwdriver and, with great effort, managed to dismantle it. I found a few files which I hastily leafed through and finally saw a green-covered notebook with Qemal’s name written on it. I jumped for joy as if I had discovered a treasure. I had saved the honour of our comrade, the one who had done so much for us workers. Nothing that concerned us was to remain in enemy hands. I took the notebook, secured it under my shirt and carefully closed the drawer before leaving.

“The next day, I handed it to Vasil. He leapt on me and gave me a big hug, congratulating my efforts.

“Qemal is going to be so happy!” he said.

Indeed, he was delighted to recover his stolen notebook, but the devotion and courage of this simple worker touched him to the core. That is the spirit of the Albanian worker! This is what the so-called communists did not want to understand, inventing all kinds of theories to show that there was no real working class in Albania and that revolutionary action couldn’t be taken until one had been created.

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Qemal had enrolled at Florence Law School the previous year.

Indirect information tells us that he had to leave for Italy towards the end of September 1939. The fascists made things very difficult for him. They wanted to stop him because of his communist past, but they issued his passport anyway for lack of new evidence.

Enemy documents show that the fascist police had placed Qemal under their surveillance early on. He was followed and detained in an organized and systematic way. Almost all the occupiers' government apparatuses took an interest in his case. Starting with the royal lieutenancy, the permanent police advisor to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, the Central Police Directorate and all the way to Tirana's questure\*, as well as the Carabinieri Command and the prefectural governments, all were concerned about the communist Qemal Stafa. But that didn't seem to be enough. There was also the attention paid to him by Italy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior, as well as the secret police in Rome and Florence. All these institutions were in constant correspondence with each other, requesting information, issuing orders and making threats. The communist student Qemal Stafa was the target. The enemy's invisible network extended wherever he went and worked.

The fascists were already preparing to take action against him in the third month of the occupation. Surprisingly, the enemy's first document came from Florence. On June 23, 1939, the prefecture of that city requested, via the Italian Ministry of the Interior, that

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\* Questures in fascist Italy were offices whose task was to maintain stability in a designated region via political repression. Their affairs were managed by a Qesator, an officer selected for his personal devotion to fascism — NEPH.

the Royal Lieutenancy of Tirana arrest Qemal Stafa for the duration of the war “on account of his very bad political record.”

This request remained unanswered for the time being. It seems that the fascists in Tirana had bigger fish to fry. It wasn't until September that the Tirana quaestor's office listed Qemal as a suspect, but took no action against him. However, Tirana's Italian Quaestor B. Scaminacci was incensed when he saw Qemal's authorization to study in Italy. In red pencil, he nervously marked the paper: “And to think that we allow such an element to go and study!”

The fascists did not yet have a firm grip on the situation in Albania. Qemal and his comrades did their utmost to take advantage of this state of affairs, especially by shuttling between Italy and Albania. Naturally, this game was fraught with difficulty and danger. It lasted from September 1939 to June 1941, when Qemal returned home for good.

## XIX

*"Fascism is our common enemy."*

Qemal's first address in Florence has been preserved. It was: "Via Ricasoli 61, Presso degli Espositi."

The law student moved into a modest boarding house and thus began his university life.

Many other Albanians had enrolled at various faculties in those days. Qemal knew some of them, but he had never seen the majority. All these young people formed a large group with whom he worked for a long time.

He soon became involved with the Albanian academic community in Florence. He carefully studied their composition, prevailing opinions, tendencies and preoccupations, and finally decided on the forms of work and tactics to be adopted.

As always, to achieve his goal, the communist comrades studying in Florence were set in motion. He directed their activity.

Qemal's struggle to rally the students to anti-fascist ideals took many forms. Qemal knew how to awaken national pride in them, and make them understand that the enslaved Homeland had placed its hopes first and foremost in its youth.

The propaganda work of Qemal and his comrades paved the way for concrete activities. Although the organized struggle against fascism had not yet begun, Qemal was already thinking of setting students in motion by throwing them into various actions. To this end, he organized a fundraising campaign among university students for the Albanian internees on the desert island of Ventotene. Shortly afterwards, he became one of the initiators of the aid drive for Albanian volunteers from Spain, who had been locked up in concentration camps in France by the fascists.

For him, these actions were not simply campaigns to help comrades, but an act of anti-fascist unity. These activities enabled him to get to know and test the men without whom the coming struggle was inconceivable. It also prepared them for even more important tasks.

From the very first days of his arrival in Florence, the newcomer was able to showcase his talents as a propagator of communist truth in academic circles. Even there, he couldn't resist indulging this noble passion. His mind and heart were constantly nourished by proletarian ideology. Revolutionary theory guided him everywhere. Although he found himself in foreign territory, the Albanian communist, as a revolutionary, could not conceive of existence without having links with the workers and their struggle. From the very first months of his arrival in Italy, he took an active interest in the struggle of the proletariat and in the organization of anti-fascist resistance. Fascism had annihilated all revolutionary proletarian organizations. The situation of the Italian workers had worsened. Militarism had increased exploitation, poverty and unemployment. Qemal understood that these were difficult, complicated and dangerous times, but that did not stop him from seeking contact with the organized workers.

"Qemal often went to the working-class neighbourhood on the other side of the Arno," notes Jorgji Adhami. "He would take us with him to show us the poor living conditions of the Italian proletariat and the anti-fascist slogans written on the walls. He would tell us about the resistance of this neighbourhood against fascism and say that some time before the fascists didn't dare set foot there, but later took action and their vicious revenge."

The owner of Qemal's boarding house was a former railway worker. The Albanian student won the worker's heart with his simplicity and sociable nature. They became fast friends. The worker was a good man, but not



very effusive — life had taken its toll on him, it seemed. He usually returned home in the evening, tired and thoughtful. Qemal studied him attentively, especially at first; he wanted to understand the anguish that was gnawing at him. The dark shadow of fascism had spread over the lives of simple people.

The owner talked to him about many things, but never about politics. Indirectly, he sometimes expressed his great regret for the fascist occupation of Albania. Qemal sensed that he must have had some trouble in his life, and despite his desire to question him, he didn't want to put him on the spot.

Qemal decided to spend New Year's Eve in 1940 with his host's family along with two other Albanian comrades. The worker didn't know how to express his joy at the honour bestowed on him by his foreign guest. The three *boute-en-train*\* immediately created a joyous atmosphere. They chatted, joked and made toasts. The evening passed very pleasantly. It reached its climax when the guests began to sing revolutionary songs in low voices. Qemal already knew them. The host mingled his voice with those of his young friends, and his face flooded with tears. He sang with all his soul, especially when they sang "Bandiera Rossa."\*\* Finally, he could not hold back any longer — he stood up and put his arm around Qemal's neck, and that is how he finished his song to the end. Then he said, in a voice trembling with emotion:

"We used to sing these songs too... Thank you, comrades!"

It was the first time he had addressed the students as *comrades*. And, after a short pause, he continued:

"Then... but not now... Nowadays, it's all over for

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\* Jolly fellows — NEPH.

\*\* "Bandiera Rossa" is a revolutionary song beloved by the Italian proletariat.

us... fascism has shattered our hopes... Back then, I too was organized... Yes, yes, I admit it sincerely, I never told you, Comrade Stafa!”

Qemal had turned to face him completely and was looking at him through his glasses with compassion and a smile.

When he had finished speaking, Qemal said:

“I always thought something happened to you. And yet, I imagine that deep down you are still the same person you used to be... The struggle has its ups and downs... Revolution takes a long road of zigzags. One of our great leaders once said that genuine revolutionaries benefit more from defeat than from victory. Fascism is our common enemy. It oppresses you and it oppresses us. So let us unite our forces and fight on the same front to victory!”

From now on, for the railway worker Qemal would no longer be the polite student from the modest boarding house, but a comrade in struggle to whom he would pour out his heart, and with whom he would exchange all kinds of ideas. Thanks to him, he regained confidence in the victory of the class.

On the surface, Qemal was a simple law student, but in reality he led a militant life. He devoted most of his time to revolutionary tasks. He hardly ever attended university classes. His duty constantly called him to other activities. He knew all the addresses of students in Florence and beyond. That is why he travelled from town to town, spreading propaganda and organizing comrades. He arranged meetings with the group’s communists, gave them instructions, clarified the situation, set tasks, gave them confidence in the struggle that was beginning, advised them to guard against provocations by fascist secret agents and to redouble their vigilance. He entrusted them with certain missions that might seem minor now, but were of great importance then. Above all, he aimed to launch the comrades into action,

give them confidence in their own strength and gradually harden them. Throughout his stay in Italy, he never gave up on these overwhelming tasks for a moment.

However, paradoxical as it may seem, Qemal studied and received excellent marks in his exams, so that in January 1940 he sat both his first and second year exams in record time, achieving the highest grade.

## XX

*“And they wanted to catch you in their nets. With a sneer, they put on all sorts of masks to conceal their diabolical baseness.”*

It is likely that Qemal came to Albania several times during the 1940 spring vacations. The organization of the struggle that was being prepared required these trips.

Enemy documents refer to this indirectly. Fascist surveillance and persecution now extended to several organizations. Qemal's activity with the students was already making itself felt. Great discontent now reigned among those studying in Italy. The authorities were worried. The fascists had caught wind and were getting restless. The higher authorities in Albania and Italy attached particular importance to this.

In April 1940, the Royal Lieutenancy in Tirana was informed that “the Albanian student Qemal Stafa from the Royal University of Florence, who arrived a few days ago... has become the initiator, among his comrades in this city, of a communist nucleus which is in complete opposition to the regime.”

The members of this group avoided socializing with their colleagues who displayed Italophile sentiments and avoided those who patronize at the Paszkowski café, where all students intending to join the GUF\* gathered.

The royal lieutenancy ordered the permanent police advisor to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers to censor Qemal Stafa's correspondence and “keep a close eye on him.”

From that point on, all of Albania's questures had been instructed to exercise strict control over Qemal,

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\* Youth Fascist Union.

and the Tirana questure informs us in a notice dated May 18 that it had placed “under maximum surveillance the aforementioned person.”

Accustomed to the pursuits of his enemies, he knew how to overcome all the obstacles and traps set for him; he manoeuvred skilfully, avoiding everything that seemed dubious and never leaving a trace in his wake, but at no time did he suspend his revolutionary activity.

On May 14, 1940, he applied to the Ministry of Education for a passport to continue his studies in Italy. He pretended to be unaware of the charges against him, but was warned by his fellow students. Despite this, he ignored them. Qemal, a seasoned revolutionary, was now used to a life full of danger and hardship.

Towards the end of May, he left for Italy, and as soon as he had passed his exams for the summer term, he returned to Albania. For economic reasons, but above all to disguise his revolutionary activity, he joined a trading house in Tirana. The months of vacation he spent there came in very handy.

He saw at close hand the insatiable thirst for gold of merchants who thought only of enriching themselves without the slightest concern for the fate of the country. What is more, by working in this firm that wholesaled office supplies, he managed to secure large quantities of paper, wax paper, typewriter ribbons and other materials for anti-fascist propaganda. He also bought a mimeograph.

During these months, Qemal had the joy of seeing the first steps of the anti-fascist movement in Albania. The masses and the youth, in defiance of the threats and consequences that could follow, took to the streets to openly express their hatred of the occupiers. November 28 became a day of resistance everywhere. In the squares and streets of Tirana, the slogans were shouted out loud: “Down with fascism,” “Long live free Albania,” “Long live the flag with the double-headed eagle.”

The patriotic songs “For the Homeland” and “O brave fighters!” resounded once again. The communists were at the forefront of these demonstrations. Among them were Qemal and his fellow workers.

On the same day in Korça, the revolutionary professor Enver Hoxha organized and led their anti-fascist demonstration. In Shkodra, Qemal’s comrades, Emin Duraku, Nazmi Rushiti, Tom Kola and others engaged in violent clashes with the fascists while leading demonstrators.

Everywhere, the hatred of the people was focussed on the occupiers, forcing them to give categorical orders not to “celebrate” April 7, the first anniversary of the fascist occupation.

All these new developments made him very happy. The situation in Albania offered him great hope for the future. Little by little, the people were pulling themselves together. These were the first signs of the storm that was to come later.

Qemal was a tireless propagandist during his stay in the country. He spoke everywhere about the need to organize the anti-fascist movement. First he discussed it with his comrades, then he raised the issue in other circles as well, but this time adopting a different language. He talked to patriots, met progressive intellectuals and convinced more and more young people.

At the same time, he exchanged ideas with communists, urging the comrades to join the masses so as not to be noticed by the fascists, raising current problems, and at the same time writing leaflets bearing the Communist Party of Albania’s seal (PKSh), which he and Vasil spread throughout the capital. His words lifted spirits and restored confidence; everywhere he stressed the need to fight fascism. In the situation at the time, such activity was not within any one group’s power. It required Qemal’s wisdom and maturity of mind, his revolutionary experience and preparation, his ability

to penetrate every circle, all the more so as the Party had not yet been created and the forms of organized struggle had not yet been defined. This state of affairs made the work of communist pioneers like Qemal, who struggled day and night to light the spark that would ignite the National Liberation Movement, all the more difficult.

The facts show that Qemal was by this time a trained revolutionary with a concrete vision of the future struggle. Communist ideas had instilled in him precise materialist conceptions of society and social phenomena, of revolutionary struggles and movements. However, it was up to all Albanian communists to define the paths to follow and follow them with concrete action. Qemal understood this. No revolutionary goal could be achieved without communist unity. He had seen first hand the quarrels that had broken out within the Albanian communist movement and, like all communists, he felt the imperative need to rise above these differences. They had to be ironed out before unity could be achieved. But how could this be achieved? On what basis? What paths should be followed to achieve unity?

Qemal knew from experience that the leadership was at the root of these differences. They had led the mass of communists down a dead-end. On the other hand, he observed a strong desire for unity among ordinary communists. Their day-to-day struggle drove them to think seriously about the unity of their movement and to put aside vain quarrels and fruitless debates.

Qemal was dismayed by the plight of the Albanian communist movement. Efforts to bring the communists closer together had failed and in fact had only served to further inflame the groups' internal quarrels. The path had not yet been found. Among its leaders, subjectivism, megalomania and careerism reigned supreme.

At that time, Qemal was constantly raising the question of unity with his comrades, and first and foremost

with Vasil. Vasil was one of the group's representatives tasked to resolve this issue. But such an investigation was not easy in those days. The unprincipled struggle in which the communists were engaged in and unproductive debates often led to a loss of composure and objectivity. Qemal was fighting for a courageous break with existing prejudices, sectarianism and narrow self-interest. It was important not to look back to past quarrels, but forward to the future. The communists had more reason to unite than to remain divided. Let us unite in the name of common interests! The people were waiting for leaders who would guide them in their great struggle. It was time to stop being fooled by the politicians of the classes that opposed them. Let the communists, united in a vanguard party, finally lead the people in their struggle! It was from this historical perspective that Qemal viewed the situation.

The allegorical sketch "Ego" he wrote in the summer of 1940 best reflects his inner struggle. We don't know to whom all the hatred he expresses is directed, but it is certain that the author is addressing those he once considered to have integrity, but who were later unmasked. He also speaks out against the ego, which is the main obstacle to rallying men to revolution, and he does so first and foremost against himself. Among other things, he wrote:

"One day, the Truth appeared in your life.

"I looked at her with the optimism of a 15 year-old and observed her attentively with the zeal of my age.

"I saw her and adored her.

"You promised to serve her obediently, to obey her and to defend her by force. But disguised faces tried to lure you to them, sneering at the sight of your adolescence. They laughed at the purity of your new ideal...

"With a sneer, they put on all sorts of masks to conceal their diabolical baseness."

During the summer of 1940, Qemal was subjected



to even more severe surveillance. In July, the Royal Lieutenancy responded to a note from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which contained a proposal from the Prefecture of Florence to detain Qemal for the duration of the war. In the same month, the Quaestor of Tirana, B. Scaminacci, informed the Central Police Headquarters that Qemal Stafa was with his family in Tirana. The fascists were informed that he was meeting communist baker Vasil Shanto. On September 20, the permanent police advisor informed the royal lieutenancy in detail about Qemal's revolutionary activity in Albania. The first accusation that he was "the initiator among his colleagues at the University of Florence of a communist nucleus which is in flagrant opposition to the regime" was brought up again.

Qemal severely condemned Italy's cowardly attack on Greece as another aggressive act by the fascists against the freedom and territory of a small people. Like all other Albanian communists, he took this opportunity to even more forcefully unmask the true face of fascism as the enemy of people's freedom. Together with Vasil, he wrote slogans on the walls of Tirana in support of the Greek people's just war: "Down with the Italo-Greek war," "Down with fascism," "To arms!," etc.

In the wake of this latest aggression, the situation in Albania grew more complicated by the day. To keep control, the occupiers took ever stricter measures against their adversaries, particularly against the communists. Qemal's conditions worsened. The difficulties he encountered in obtaining his passport are clear proof of this. With great difficulty, he managed to return to Florence. Immediately after his departure, the Royal Lieutenant's Office sent a note to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, requesting that the Ministry use its authority to keep a close watch on him.

As soon as he arrived in Florence, ostensibly for his

third year of studies, he resumed his revolutionary activities.

To escape the vigilance of his persecutors, he often changed his boarding house. Despite this, he was ordered to report to the Questure every fortnight. The owners of the boarding houses had trouble when they housed him, as the police were always on the lookout for the known student Stafa.

He organized and led a number of political actions during his third year at university. The aim was to boycott and sabotage fascism's diabolical attempts to bring university youth into its sphere of interests. To this end, during the Italo-Greek war, the fascists had embarked on a political campaign to win the approval of public opinion, especially that of young people. They dispatched their demagogic representatives everywhere. The new aggression had given rise to widespread discontent.

Precisely then, the inspector from Italy's Ministry of Education, a certain Baldacci, came to Florence, who had the Albanian students under his authority. Qemal was told in advance that Baldacci would organize a meeting with the students to "clarify" the political situation and ask for their acquiescence in the fascist aggression.

The meeting took place in one of the university halls. Everything had been prepared with the utmost care. In the meantime, Qemal had suggested the idea of sabotaging the fascist emissary's mission at all costs. He had spoken to the communists and patriotic students, and drawn up the plan for a boycott with them.

The fascist agent spent hours singing the praises of the "new order" and the transcendent "victories" of Roman arms over the Greeks, dwelt on the "advantageous union of the destinies of our peoples" and lost himself in dithyrambic praise of the great empire that was renewing the glory of Rome. Qemal and many

others listened mockingly to the eulogistic fables of the fascist demagogue. And finally, he asked the young Albanian students in Florence to send a telegram to the King's Lieutenant General in Tirana, expressing their desire to fight at the front.

There was absolute silence in the room. The students stared into each other's eyes. For a moment, their attention focussed on Qemal. What were they going to do?

With characteristic composure, he whispered in his neighbour's ear:

"Ask him whose names would be endorsing the telegram."

The Albanian student stood up and repeated the question aloud.

The room was suddenly filled with noise.

"Whomever you want, gentlemen!" replied Baldacci from the rostrum.

Heated discussions broke out among the students. The communists set to work.

After all this pandemonium, someone stood up and suggested that the telegram be sent on behalf of all the Albanian students in Florence.

Qemal's face darkened. He said to the comrades beside him:

"No, not that... It's better if it is signed by those who want it..."

One of the comrades who knew about the boycott plan stood up and proposed in all seriousness:

"I think, Mr. Inspector, that everyone should sign it on their own accord with a pen."

Voices chorused in his ears. Baldacci nodded with great satisfaction, which showed that his mission was on the right track.

"All right, gentlemen, all right!"

"Silence, silence!" shouted everyone in the room. These were the voices of Qemal and his comrades.

It was decided that after the discussion, the students would take turns signing it.

The noisy crowd spilled into the university square for a short break. Qemal held an impromptu meeting with his comrades without wasting a minute. It was essential to make the most of these decisive moments. Not one of them was to sign the telegram!

Qemal stood in front of the door to the room and didn't move. This gesture was eloquent enough for most of the students, but some didn't understand it right away. In their naivety, they thought they were going to go back in, but as soon as they met Qemal's gaze, they looked down and retraced their steps.

Then one by one they left and the square was deserted. Only one of them, a coward and an egotist who feared that the fascists would take away his scholarship, tried to enter the room. But Qemal, standing in front of the door, called out harshly:

“Where are you going?”

“I'm just going to get my hat...”

“You go ahead...” ordered Qemal to his companion standing beside him. Then he turned back to the student:

“Can't you see the others?” he said. “You should be ashamed of yourself...”

So the organizers of the meeting were left alone in the room, and by the time they got around to finishing the telegram, the Albanian students had all left. The fascists had failed. The telegram could not be sent without any signatures.

The students didn't forget this episode. They had played a good trick on the fascists.

## XXI

*“Tell me, please, what does this landscape represent?”*

In Florence, the Faculty of Law was close to the Faculty of Political Science. The two faculties often engaged in joint activities. Political science courses were frequented, by their very nature, by disreputable students. Some were convinced fascists, the scions of the privileged classes.

A few days earlier, it had been announced that a final-year political science student was to give a “scientific” lecture on Soviet “imperialism.” It was to take place in the large hall shared by both faculties.

Qemal decided to go as soon as he could. He was accompanied by two or three comrades and they all took their seats together in the packed pews. The subject was purely political, which is why it attracted so many people. Professors and even some official authorities came to the conference to give it even greater prominence.

In a solemn atmosphere, the professors, dressed in their traditional gowns, ascended to a darkened rostrum. Then the Vice-Rector opened the session and gave the floor to the speaker.

His aim was to discredit the first state of free workers and peasants as much as possible and to label the Soviet Union as an imperialist country seeking new markets beyond its borders. And to give more truth to this idea, the speaker tried to equate the Soviet Union with the bourgeois states, even comparing it with Great Britain and Italy, which, having achieved national unity, had also wanted to extend their domination elsewhere, supposedly for simple economic reasons. The same was true, he said with his fascist logic, of the Soviet Union, which, having united different peoples into a single

state, was now seeking to occupy other countries.

After this grandiloquent speech, the audience was allowed to speak and express their opinions. Qemal had listened attentively and taken copious notes.

Students and professors took turns at the pulpit. Everyone repeated the same message. No one was to deviate an inch from the official interpretation. As a result, many of the speeches became monotonous and uninteresting. The hall became increasingly indifferent, and so much chatting was made that the vice-rector was obliged to impose silence. But suddenly everything changed when Qemal took the podium. He was known to many students as an intelligent and courageous boy, and as soon as he took the floor, he electrified his audience. What is more, he knew Italian so well that he could hardly have been mistaken for a foreigner. He immediately got to the heart of the matter, gradually dismantling the speaker's "arguments" with a boldness that astonished everyone. The Albanian student's ideological point of view was the antithesis of those who had preceded him on the podium. The strength of his argument, the clarity of his ideas, gripped the assembly.

Qemal convincingly demonstrated the difference between a socialist and capitalist state. He analysed, with reference to history and political economy, the development of Great Britain and Italy, which had led to imperialist occupations, while the basis on which the socialist state is founded, he said, in no way allows such actions at the expense of other peoples. He hadn't yet finished his lesson when the teachers started talking in each other's ears. Then the vice-rector cried out, with difficulty containing his anger:

"Enough of this! What you're saying reeks of Marxism..."

Qemal pretended not to hear and continued to speak in the same enthusiastic tone. Then the vice-rector, out of impatience, rang his bell and ordered:

“I forbid you to continue, Mr. Stafa.”

“May I express my point of view?” asked Qemal.

“I will not allow it,” replied the other rector, throwing fuel onto the fire.

Qemal nodded sarcastically and returned to his seat. Voices in the room called for him to continue, but the vice-rector objected and declared the session closed. The “scientific” conference was over.

In the hallways and on the staircases, crowds of students, known and unknown, came to shake his hand. Some congratulated him on his courage, others said they agreed with his ideas.

Jorgji Adhami, who was present, recounts:

“Qemal’s courageous speech went over like a bombshell. It was discussed for several days in a row at both faculties. An assistant at the law faculty told me: ‘I have idealist ideas, but I understood from Stafa’s words that communism is a scientific ideology with a future, because it is rooted in the minds of the majority of people.’”

Right from the start, Qemal tried to make contact with Italian anti-fascist underground organizations. Naturally, this was very difficult to achieve. Fascism had annihilated all that remained of bourgeois democracy. The organized anti-fascist movement operated in total secrecy. Nevertheless, Qemal did not lose hope, and worked with perseverance and confidence to establish links with this movement. We are not yet in a position to list all the connections he may have had, but we do know that he made contact with the Italian Communist Party and with certain underground anti-fascist organizations. Even on foreign soil, Qemal sought to forge links with the workers, especially with the organized proletariat of the major industrial centres. Xhezmi Delli, a classmate from the Lyceum who was interned on the island of Ventotene at the time, had connections with certain Italian communists. He used an ingenious

technique to help Qemal make regular contact with the Italian anti-fascist movement. Through his mother, he sent him the means by which he could secure these links. It was a half-postcard depicting a truncated landscape and bearing the address: Via dei Neri, no. 25 Rossi Firenze. Qemal jumped for joy. He was also delighted by the help he received from Xhezmi, who had been a member of the Communist Group of Korça. The fight against fascism united the groups' best communists.

With this truncated postcard in hand, Qemal set off in search of the address in question. It was a street he had passed many times before, but this time he was going there on a delicate mission. As he walked, he looked carefully at the store numbers until he finally came upon the one he was looking for. There was a dressmaking firm whose sign bore the name Rossi, the store's owner. He entered but suddenly felt uneasy: in front of him appeared three or four saleswomen behind counters and at the far end stood the owner in a glass cage. Nevertheless, he drew the postcard from his pocket as if nothing had happened and held it in his hand. But it didn't attract anyone's attention. Then he realized he'd made a mistake, and after standing there for a moment, he went outside. On the street, he realized that stores had two kinds of numbers, one with blue digits on a white plate for the main entrance, as in the case of the clothing store, and another with red digits on a (smaller) white plate for the side doors. He then decided that "No. 25 Rossi" also meant "No. 25 Red" and set off in search of this address by following the red numbers.

He continued on his way and suddenly found himself in front of the storefront of a cobbler bearing the red No. 25. Qemal would later recount this event in an amusing anecdote. He went in, ostensibly to have his shoes repaired, and then addressed the man, pulling the postcard from his pocket:

"Tell me, please, what does this landscape repre-



sent?”

The cobbler raised his head in astonishment and looked closely at the stranger; he left his hammer behind and opened a small drawer.

“This landscape makes no sense as it is, but if we bring it closer to the other half (which he took out of the drawer) then everything changes.”

Then the two anti-fascists shook hands and began to talk openly. The cobbler was the first step in his relationship with the Italian antifascists. A few days later, through him, Qemal met an organized worker from Florence’s large mechanical factory, and from then on he worked closely with them.

However, Qemal was still under constant surveillance. His propaganda among students, his talks in the faculty seminars and his constant travels from one town to another aroused the suspicions of the interested bodies even more. We even learn from an acknowledgement from the Royal Lieutenant’s office to the Central Police Directorate that he had been arrested in January 1941 for communist activity and brought before the Special Tribunal in Rome, but that he was released after investigation for lack of conclusive evidence.

As soon as the Central Police Directorate was informed of his latest actions, it ordered all the questures in the Kingdom of Albania to find and apprehend “Qemal Stafa, for whom the Ministry of the Interior possesses evidence of the utmost importance.”

The questures, especially those in Elbasan and Shkodra, set out to find him, but their efforts came to nothing. He was nowhere to be found. It should not be forgotten that this was at a time when Qemal was in Italy with a temporary passport regularly issued by the government of Italy. It goes without saying that only a great level of incompetence and panic that had gripped the occupiers and traitors in Albania could have led to such a serious misunderstanding.

In 1941, Qemal's revolutionary activity intensified further, and so did the enemy's pursuits. Correspondence and reports about him continued unabated. In spite of this, he continued the struggle, but his guard was up. Spies were on his tail, trying to uncover something, and the police even ordered his arrest, but were unable to execute it legally. For the time being, they confined themselves to a few preventive measures. So when Mussolini came to Florence, to this "quiet" city, and especially when he went there to meet Hitler, Qemal was temporarily imprisoned as someone who might disturb public order. The detention lasted as long as the fascist leaders remained in the city.

Qemal regarded the days he spent in prison as a second university. There he found hundreds of anti-fascists who quickly got to know and befriend each other, chatting and exchanging experiences. Qemal attracted attention as one of the youngest among them and as an Albanian communist. His quiet, sociable nature, his maturity of mind and broad outlook, which were evident in many cases, as well as his courage and determination, won the admiration of the imprisoned anti-fascists.

"When I see you, my dear comrade, I regain my strength," an octogenarian anti-fascist told him in prison each time he saw him, and without fail he would hug his comrade in struggle.

Qemal emerged from prison even stronger and more determined than ever. He resumed his revolutionary activities enthusiastically, as if nothing had happened and absolutely convinced of the righteousness of his cause. He would never forget that time and kept a wooden fork he had fashioned himself in the prison as a souvenir.

After passing his winter exams with excellent marks, Qemal returned to Albania as usual to spend his vacations. Enemy documents tell us that he flew there on March 29 and returned to Italy by the same route on

May 6. He spent the whole of April and the first few days of May in his Homeland.

In Albania, the struggle to lay the foundations of organized resistance continued. All the fascists' attempts to win the sympathy of the Albanians were failing. Neither demagogy nor force had any effect. Hundreds of Albanian soldiers deserted the Greek front. The occupiers took measures against them. They locked them up en masse in concentration camps. One was even established at Shijak. As soon as Qemal returned from Italy, he did not hesitate to break into the camp and spread the word about the fight against the occupiers. He distributed leaflets, chatted with the prisoners and explained the situation to them with great patience and courage. He also donned an Italian uniform and went out among the enemy soldiers, spreading propaganda in their language, often even in their jargon. He was particularly active with those stationed in Ndroq. He spread leaflets in Italian among the ordinary soldiers, urging them to repudiate fascism's unjust war and desert. He succeeded in winning some of them over to his cause, inspiring them to fight against fascism and buying them weapons.

Qemal's mind was constantly focussed on the organized struggle, which could not be carried out without the support of the masses and the requisite resources. He knew that the people harboured a fierce hatred of the occupiers. At around this time, the anti-fascist resistance had taken on new impetus, and as always, the communists were at the forefront. They worked tirelessly to organize the struggle. As before, unity was the order of the day, but the communists were still separated into factions. Efforts by the leadership to coordinate activities had not produced the desired results. The leaders had stirred up ugly quarrels among the communists, whereas the daily struggle was pushing them to think seriously about unity.

Qemal kept a close eye on the struggle that was raging within the Albanian communist movement. It would be necessary if it were founded on principle, but it often degenerated into endless quarrels, which annoyed Qemal to the utmost because he thought that the division of the communists played into the hands of fascism and delayed the organization of the armed struggle.

The line that would turn the communists into a united, organized vanguard corps had to be found as quickly as possible. This was the dream and sacred goal of all revolutionary communists.

Vasil lived in this atmosphere. As Qemal was often absent because of his studies, he brought him up to date on the situation in every detail whenever they got together. An active centre of the Korça Group had been set up in Tirana, under the leadership of the communist militant Enver Hoxha. Vasil had met him on several occasions. From the outset, Qemal had pinned great hopes on the role of this revolutionary hotbed in achieving genuine unity among Albanian communists. He fully embraced most of the ideas of the eminent Korça militant. He considered them realistic and practical, theoretically sound and devoid of empty theories and sterile intellectualism. They were the fruit of a full understanding of concrete historical conditions. They were based on the great idea of creating the Party as quickly as possible, adopting the Leninist tactic of separating away from every weak element and forging communist unity on a Marxist-Leninist basis, thus forming a party of a new type. Enver Hoxha's first call was for communists to take action, organize demonstrations, carry out attacks and acts of sabotage. Unity should be cemented in the heat of the struggle against fascism, not around a table, as narrow-minded leaders often advocated. Qemal found in this idea the vitality and spirit of mobilization needed to make communist unity pos-

sible. For the first time, the Albanian communist movement saw the prospects that would pave the way for the creation of the Party.

In those days, the Korça Group's centre in Tirana had led the first communists underground. The "Flora" boutique, where Enver Hoxha worked, had become the main base for organizing all kinds of actions. The fight against fascism was entering a more active phase.

## XXII

*“Communists are not ascetics.”*

Qemal went to Italy for the last time at the beginning of May 1941. Ostensibly, he was going there to sit the exams for the summer session, but in reality, the trip was prompted by the tasks of organizing the struggle.

When it was announced that Vasil Laçi, a worker, had attempted to assassinate Emperor Victor Emmanuel, Qemal was having lunch with some comrades in a restaurant. As soon as the radio broadcast the news, the fascists ordered everyone to stand up. Qemal refused outright, and what is more, he disturbed the silence with a loud laugh. By doing so, he was approving his brave compatriot's deed.

The enemy's correspondences about him continued. Confidential notes were exchanged between the Central Police Directorate and the Ministry of the Interior, emphasizing the danger posed by the communist Qemal Stafa. In addition, the border posts took new measures against him, listing him in the Italian border register\* as a person who needed to be carefully monitored.

The comrades who lived with him during this period revealed many interesting aspects of his private life. We will try to shed light on some of them.

Qemal led the simple, wholesome life of a genuine revolutionary during his time as a student in Italy. He lived poor, enduring great hardship. His family was not in a position to help him further. In these difficult circumstances, comrades provided for him, but naturally he only accepted it sparingly. He had great dignity and never let himself go. He was prepared to spend the harsh Central Italian winter without a coat, so as not to impose further sacrifices on his family.

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\* Rubaicum — NEPH.

Among other things, he wrote to his mother: “If you can, send me 500 lire, as it is very cold here and I need to buy a coat. I’m only asking on condition that you can do so comfortably.”

Revolutionary tasks and economic difficulties never prevented him from studying systematically and in depth. Those who knew this aspect of his personality tell us that he was methodical and knew how to make the best use of his time, without getting lost in secondary considerations. His goals and interests were well-defined and this led him to get to the heart of the matter, studying the most important issues. He also critically analysed the subjects he studied for exams, retaining only what was most useful to him. He had a whole method of working: he underlined, took notes and jotted down ideas in the margins of books. For him, studying had become an intricate and lively process.

Even though he was near-sighted, he read very quickly and absorbed the material right away.

“Despite his young age,” Sami Baholli explained, “Qemal was a true intellectual. He had absolutely nothing in common with those false scholars who only possess a limited amount of open-mindedness, and who resemble a store without an inventory. His serious studies were entirely devoted to the service of society...”

During his university studies, he spent a good deal of time in libraries. He went there to look for books he couldn’t find elsewhere or in his own country. He was a passionate seeker of books of value, above all the classic works of Marxism-Leninism. It was quite an odyssey to obtain such works under the fascist regime. But Qemal had extensive experience in finding “forbidden” books. And so, with great effort, he succeeded in uncovering certain sources. With the help of an anti-fascist professor, he was able to obtain permission to remove works from the university library belonging to the forbidden collection. He also ran from bookshop

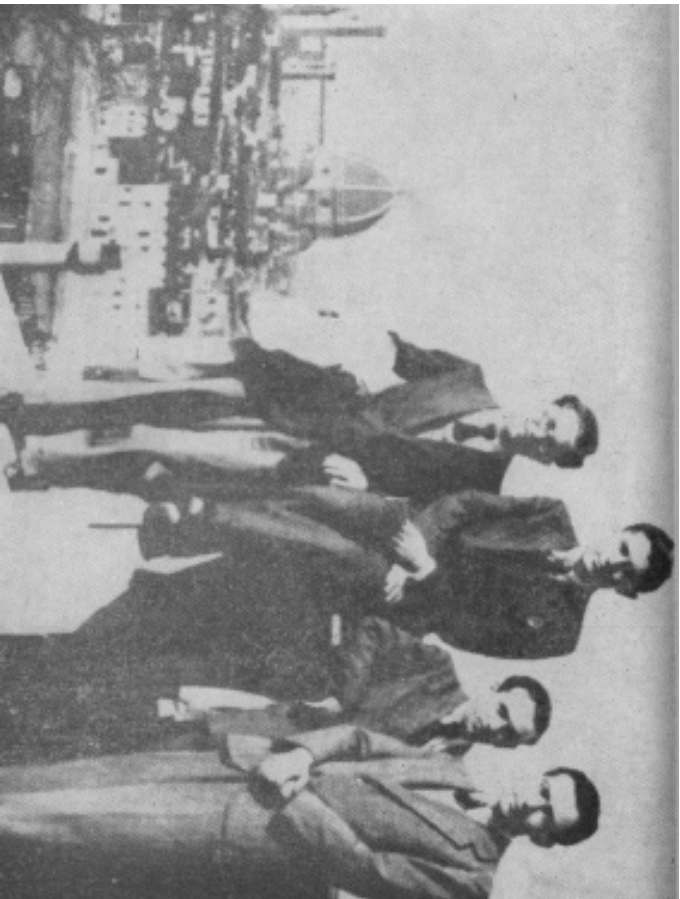


Qemal and Sami Baholli (Italy 1940)





Qemal Stafa's passport



Gemal in Florence. Themo Vasi on his left (1941)



Qemal in 1941

to bookshop to find similar books. But he often had to make great sacrifices to buy them. Nevertheless, each time he acquired a valuable work, he was seized with an indescribable joy.

“I will never forget,” says Sami Baholli, “the sparkle in his eyes as we emerged from the cellar of an old bookshop with a pile of forbidden books under our arms.”

His association with Italian workers also enabled him to acquire precious books. He kept as a sacred object a copy of Karl Marx’s *Capital*, given to him as a token of friendship by a worker at the Florence mechanical factory.

In addition to his studies, Qemal passionately translated Marxist works, which he sent to Albania to raise the ideological level of the Group’s comrades. We know that he sent them Marx’s *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, excerpts from *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, *The State and Revolution*, and so on.

Despite his many tasks and serious preoccupations, literature and art always remained the dear friends he needed to nourish his spirit. His great love for simple people, for justice, for freedom, his militant spirit for the people’s struggle, his hatred of the old world, his solid culture and above all the infinite horizon opened up by his communist ideals, created in him an organic and natural link between his spiritual life and the immense universe of genuine art. He was himself gifted with an artist’s nature; he felt and savoured beauty deeply. He sensed beauty in life, nature, people and above all in works of art.

“During our walks,” recounts Nikolla Shurbani, “we felt that Qemal was quite fascinated by cultural and artistic monuments. His passionate language and profound explanations always drew our attention to these works...”

Jordan Misja, who was studying art in Florence at the time, was his inseparable comrade during these visits.

Music, however, remained his favourite art. As already mentioned, he had been involved in it from an early age, learning to play the violin and acquiring a solid musical background. Beethoven and Mozart remained his favourite and most familiar composers. Living in Florence, he became even more attached to this art.

Florence enjoyed a very active musical scene. The annual "Florentine May" festival of selected symphonic and operatic music was held at the "Teatro Comunale." Famous orchestras and conductors from all over the world came to give concerts. Qemal was among their listeners who followed almost the entire festival program. For him, these were days of celebration and deep emotion. Music had a strong hold on him. He was so sensitive to it that he would get lost in his thinking when listening to it, as he himself confessed.

"The Florentine May music festival," says Sami Baholli, "was another opportunity to unite us even more.

"...He often told me after a concert that he was in ecstasy during the performances..."

Despite the deep emotions that music aroused in him, he suffered from the fact that this great art had not yet penetrated the souls of the masses. "Everyone must feel the beauty and power of music," he used to say. "Art will only reach its goal when it is tasted and understood by all the people. This historic task," he insisted, "cannot be carried out by the old world, by the privileged classes, but by the new society for which the communists are fighting."

However, despite the circumstances at the time, this in no way prevented him from working with great patience to bring his comrades into the world of the arts

so that they could understand painting and sculpture, feel music and make artistic literature a spiritual necessity for them. He was ecstatic and considered it a victory every time he saw a comrade make progress in this field.

When he once met some communist youth girls from Rome, he asked them, among other things, which galleries they had visited and concerts they had attended. At first, they bowed their heads and remained silent, but then they told him that certain “well-informed” “comrades” had told them that communists shouldn’t go to the opera or galleries, and that art wasn’t for them.

This kind of reasoning, with which he was familiar, irritated him to no end.

“That is totally nonsense,” he exclaimed. “Communists are not ascetics. They have feelings and a great spiritual need to know the arts but, of course, not just any art.. You absolutely must go to the opera and see solid, realistic works dealing with important social issues. Then you can discuss them among yourselves and analyse them on the basis of our ideology. Take a look at the works of Giuseppe Verdi, for example, and visit museums and galleries. Be sure to study the striking contrasts that capitalism has created in this great city. On the one hand, you’ll find the squalid quarters of the working class, and on the other, the luxurious displays of the wealthy. The dividing line is clear. Have you ever seen Via Veneto, the street most frequented by the Italian aristocracy? Please go there when you can. You can be sure that we will form and strengthen our communist outlook in the heat of action and study, but also by getting to know life up close, by educating ourselves and enjoying genuine art!”

Qemal sat his final exams at the beginning of June, and without missing a beat left Florence for Albania. In a note that the Quaestorship of Florence addressed to the Ministry of the Interior in Tirana, it was stated that

the law student Qemal Stafa had changed his address frequently as of late and that he had disappeared after his exams.

Indeed, by overcoming the barbs of the fascists and their countless obstacles, Qemal had returned to Tirana on June 18. He now knew that he would never leave his country again.

Thus the preparatory phase of his struggle had come to an end. A new period had begun, the most glorious of his short life.

## XXIII

*“We cannot achieve our goals on our own. We have to be united and have all the people beside us. We all need to talk about the struggle...”*

Qemal could not stay at home for long. The pursuit of him intensified. He was being followed and his house watched. After his departure from Italy, the final reports were immediately sent to Tirana. He realized that his legal situation was more precarious than ever, forcing him to limit his movements and constantly be on his guard.

On the morning of June 22, Themo Vasi stormed into his home. Without even greeting him, he said in a flustered tone:

“Qemal, fascist Germany attacked the Soviet Union this morning!”

The two communists discussed this important event at length. Before parting, Qemal said pensively: “I’m leaving right away to tell the comrades.”

The next day, Qemal went completely underground. For the first few days, he stayed in a base on Sinan Street, adjacent to Bami.\* There, he wrote a long pamphlet on the fascist aggression against the Soviet Union. He severely condemned that cowardly act, denouncing the true face of fascism as the most bitter enemy of peoples, freedom and progress. The leaflet also highlighted the important role played by the entry of the Soviet Union into the anti-fascist struggle for the fate of the people enslaved by fascism. Once again, it expressed the Albanian people’s hatred of fascist aggression.

Qemal never cloistered himself in his base. His duties called for him to go out into town from time to time. He usually rode his bicycle, dressed as a bus driver,

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\* Bami Street is now known as Qemal Stafa Street.



without glasses (despite his severe nearsightedness) and with a revolver in his pocket. He had taken this weapon with him, inherited from his father when he had left home. He was always on his guard when on the move, as he was well aware of the dangers to which he was exposed and never lost his cool even in the most difficult of circumstances.

At the beginning of July, the fascist police burst into Qemal's house. A whole pack of agents and spies poured in, turning the house upside down. But it was all in vain. They couldn't find anything incriminating as Qemal had taken his precautions in good time. Before leaving, they arrested his brother, Alaudin, and threatened the whole family.

That evening, Qemal was informed of what had happened at home. His former nursemaid, the only one in the family who knew his secrets, came to see him in the house on the other side of town. With all the love and pride of a mother, she told him every detail of the story.

Qemal listened in awe and didn't know how to calm this good woman, who was on edge and constantly casting worried and bewildered glances around her. She was certainly surprised to see "the boy" dressed differently than usual, with his revolver and grenades. She was also worried that he was locked up in a strange house, hiding from the authorities.

Qemal had always loved and respected this simple woman with a heart of gold, who understood him better than anyone else in the family. He deeply admired her when, during difficult days, she gave herself body and soul to the cause he was fighting for. He used to enjoy comparing her to Gorky's character Pelageya Nilovna, but that was just a sentimental comparison at the time. Now that the struggle was fully underway and she was supporting it with all her being in its revolutionary activity, he enjoyed calling her the Albanian Mother Pelageya among his close comrades.

Before leaving, he asked her to call Father Ramazan, the hat-maker who had taken him in on the night of April 6, to come and see him.

The next evening, the old man came to find him at the base of Sinan Street.

Qemal knew he was a patriot and a good friend of Myslim Peza. After some banter, he got down to business.

“This is what it’s all about, Father Ramazan. We, the youth, want to fight fascism. Father Myslim is fighting it on his own and he’s doing very well. But it would be desirable for us to unite. Go and tell him that for me. Also tell him I would like to see him.”

Father Ramazan left straight away. Qemal and Myslim met towards the end of July at the house of a supporter of the movement. Qemal went dressed in the uniform of the fascist questure. Father Myslim was waiting for him. They shook hands as if they had known each other for years. Father Myslim was very fond of the communists and Qemal considered him an almost legendary figure.

They understood each other immediately. Qemal calmly explained his ideas and plans, and Father Myslim was ready to welcome him to the underground at any time.

“The meeting with Qemal took place at midday the next day,” Myslim Peza recounts. “We embraced like old friends. I will never forget that night. We talked at length until lunchtime the next day about everything that was on our minds. I remember Qemal saying to me: ‘We can’t achieve our goal alone. We must be united and have all the people with us. We all have to talk about the struggle and the Soviet Union.’ After this meeting, we had to leave for Peza. The journey was difficult because we had weapons and ammunition. Qemal found us a carriage that took us safely to our destination.”

Three days later, Father Myslim dispatched a peasant from Peza to pick him up. This was one of the Pezans with whom he had escaped from prison on the evening of April 6. They immediately recognized each other and embraced. The Pezan had come in a carriage and had brought peasant clothes.

In the afternoon, dressed as a peasant from Peza, with his hoqueton, baggy pants, a wide red belt that took up his whole waist and a white hat on his head, Qemal left Tirana in a carriage. After passing through the checkpoint at the city gates, they headed straight for Peza, stopping at the Çausht village. There, Qemal met Father Myslim's resistance fighters for the first time. He was moved to see that this handful of free men were only a few kilometres from the occupied capital. He was also struck by the courage and optimism of these fighters.

Father Myslim and his guerrillas received the communist from Tirana with great enthusiasm. The arrival of the communists was always a landmark event for them. They opened the eyes of the insurgent peasants. A few days before Qemal's arrival, Enver Hoxha had also paid them a visit. The meeting took place in the forest of Pezë e Vogël.\* His fiery language had set the hearts of these bold fighters ablaze. Qemal had heard about it from Vasil. The same goal drove genuine communists to follow the same paths! Vasil, too, had visited Father Myslim's fighters on several occasions. He knew them well, which helped Qemal, as his comrade, to bond with them very quickly. But it wasn't long before he gained the affection and esteem of the whole unit, especially its commander.

Qemal immediately threw himself into political propaganda with the fighters. He gave them a few simple talks in which he enlightened them on the situation and

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\* Little Peza, Albanian in the original.

told them about the prospects for the fight against fascism. The facts he expanded on were concrete and convincing. He cited, among other things, the first anti-fascist actions led by the communists, the Soviet Union's entry into the war and the victories on the Greek front. The guerrillas and peasants of Peza listened attentively. His language was intelligible and clear, and he had a great gift for elocution. His sociable nature enabled him to talk to people about anything.

The agitator would also occasionally touch on a few simple ideological subjects in the one-on-one conversations he would have with resistance fighters. He would draw their attention to questions concerning the class struggle, the future society and the lives of communists.

Qemal attached great importance to political propaganda during his stay in Peza.

"You have to be politically enlightened," he often told the fighters. "When you are politically literate, then you will fight better. You will know why you took up arms. Besides, you cannot enlighten the peasants if you're not enlightened enough yourselves!"

He wanted these men to be not only elite fighters, but also agitators in the fight against fascism.

That first time around, Qemal spent 25 days in Peza. The partisans wouldn't let him go.

"No," said Father Myslim, when he learned that he wanted to leave. "They won't let you leave here!"

But Qemal had no other choice. He changed into a mechanic's overalls and returned to Tirana the very next day. He took with him Father Myslim's little boy, who had been wounded in the fighting and needed treatment.

The memory of Peza remained engraved in his mind; he thought of it constantly throughout the time he stayed in Tirana. In his mind, this place was for the moment a free oasis in fascist-occupied Albania, but the day was near, he said, when such oases would cover

the whole territory of the Homeland.

Having completed the tasks that had called him to Tirana, he returned to Peza without missing a beat. The freedom fighters welcomed him with open arms. They now considered him an active member of the unit and he too felt at home among his comrades.

Qemal had returned with new plans and ideas. He was thinking of taking the educational work he had already begun even further. The resistance fighters were largely peasants, simple folk from the fields and sheep-folds. Most of them were illiterate and uneducated, but it was they who took up arms in the very first days to defend the Homeland. The communists had to open their eyes and help them in every way possible to open up new perspectives. To this end, he organized a literacy course, which he ran himself for several days at a time. The fighters followed him with great zeal and this was due to the diligent work and passion of their instructor. He had brought books, notebooks and pencils from Tirana. His teaching method was such that his warrior students quickly understood what he was teaching them and he proved to be patient and tireless. Thinking that he could leave, he prepared two “teachers” to replace him in his absence.

The course soon produced its first results. Thanks to their enthusiasm and tenacity, the fighters were able to learn to read and write in record time, to the delight of their “teacher.” Kajo Karafili was one of the most zealous “pupils.”

In this way, Qemal became the promoter of a fine tradition that would later spread on a large scale throughout the National Liberation Army.

“...One fine day, Comrade Qemal Stafa came to the Peza guerrilla unit,” recounts Sali Verdha. “He clarified many questions with the comrades and leaders of the unit. The latter later became agitators and excellent propagators in the villages of the Peza area. Mean-

while, the propagators began to read even more books and the illiterate made significant progress...”

Qemal shuttled back and forth between Tirana and Peza several times during the summer and autumn of that year. He devoted himself above all to political propaganda and was, as always, a talented agitator. This meant that he not only knew how to manoeuvre in his own milieu, with students and urban youth, with intellectuals and educated workers, but also with peasants. He spoke their language, identified with them, and then, with his characteristic ability, raised them to the height of those ideas that enlightened their minds and mobilized them in the fight against fascism.

But Qemal did not confine himself to political propaganda in Peza. He was constantly preoccupied with the organization of the armed struggle. He thought about the forms it should take and how to find the necessary weapons, and naturally discussed all this with his comrades. The war could not be won without the participation of all the people, he told Father Myslim and the unit’s cadres. Enver Hoxha had already expressed the same ideas to them. The communists were very discerning and far-sighted.

“He was always on the move,” recounts Myslim Peza. “‘We absolutely must unite and organize,’ he kept repeating to us... Qemal did a tremendous job without ever getting tired. He even taught the youths the song ‘Partisans are the first to line up under Lenin’s banner.’”

“I remember one night when we were returning to Maknor via Pezë e Vogël, where Qemal had been conversing with the Italian soldiers stationed there. His eyesight was very poor at night and he fell down at a certain spot. He badly hurt himself and I felt very sorry for him. I leaned over him to see, but he paid no attention to his injury.

“Along the way, a comrade told us that an Italian

soldier wanted to meet him. He was about to go off on his own, but we wouldn't let him. He went, accompanied by two comrades.

“His presence in the unit was a great help. Qemal helped us to get organized, learn the methods of propaganda among the common people and create strong bonds among us. ‘We must never give the enemy a moment's rest,’ he used to tell us. Unfortunately, those days passed quickly. We would have liked to have him with us always.”

The soldiers of Peza remember those distant days when Qemal lived and fought with them. They have forgotten nothing about him, not even the smallest details.

“All we can say about him, our little brother, is that he loved the people,” recounts a Pezan fighter. “He had extraordinary charm and you were captivated as soon as you got to know him!”

They remember that he always kept books in his pockets, and whenever he had a free moment, he would start reading anywhere. He did this mostly in the afternoon during the summer heat, or in the evening by the light of a small oil lamp when he was alone. The fighters would stare at him in amazement, but nobody bothered him. Ymer Kurti, one of those brave men who later fell heroically on the field of honour, would sometimes approach him. Ymer would compose verses and show them to Qemal, who found them beautiful. He would correct them in places and then recite them to the others. This people's poet had a particular fondness for satire. He ridiculed fascism, unmasked the traitors and sometimes joked with a comrade who had been a little nervous during the course of events. But in order not to offend anyone, he would also take a dig at himself for a mistake he had made in some battle or another. Qemal would take some of these poems with him to Tirana and read them to his comrades with the greatest pleasure.

With his maturity of mind and characteristic in-

sight, Qemal was well aware of the divisions within the Albanian communist movement. The facts proved more and more that the line proposed by the Communist Group of Korça and enunciated by its militant Enver Hoxha coincided entirely with the ideas and desires of all the communists. Only the open and resolute struggle against fascism could bring about the reconciliation and union of them. The prejudices and “theories” propagated by “leaders,” the mad fancies, sectarianism and regionalism only hindered and delayed the rapprochement and amalgamation of the groups into a single vanguard unit. Qemal was convinced that these considerations were not enough to unite the communists. The basis of unity had to be communist ideas, loyalty to the cause, the fight against fascism and a common hatred of the occupiers. Qemal had already proved on several occasions that he knew how to rise above dissensions and divergences, examining the situation from the perspective of the future.

Assessing the situation objectively and carefully, Qemal concluded that there was reason to be optimistic about the future of the communist movement. Unity was not far off. Time had shed light on certain issues that endless discussions needlessly confused. The fight against the common enemy had smoothed out some of the artificial obstacles erected by the leadership. Meanwhile, the position of Qemal and Vasil had gradually strengthened. They had gained authority, and it was they who actually directed the activity of the Shkodra Group’s communists. Gradually, the struggle had pushed the old leaders out of leadership. As a result, the entire weight of the Group’s affairs now fell on their shoulders. Being diametrically opposed to the leadership, they felt the heavy responsibility of uniting the Albanian communist movement. In those circumstances, the platform presented by Enver Hoxha was the only line leading to a genuine unity of revolutionary forces.



Throughout the summer and up to the first days of November, Vasil was in constant contact with Enver Hoxha. They talked to each other and discussed problems of concern to the communists. Vasil saw in him a resolute militant who fought with all his being for the creation of the Party. His wisdom, the profundity of his thoughts, his absolute respect for principles and his revolutionary courage, theoretical preparation and practical sense, further convinced Vasil that the communists had found in their efforts to create the Party the militant who would guide them. That is why they immediately listened to him and found the path that led to common action on a solid basis. Qemal was aware of this relationship and did his utmost to strengthen it further. Vasil spoke to him increasingly often and enthusiastically about the professor. Given the circumstances of the time, and despite his great desire, Qemal was unable to make a direct connection with Enver Hoxha. At the time, the struggle for unity was being waged on several fronts and he had been assigned other tasks.

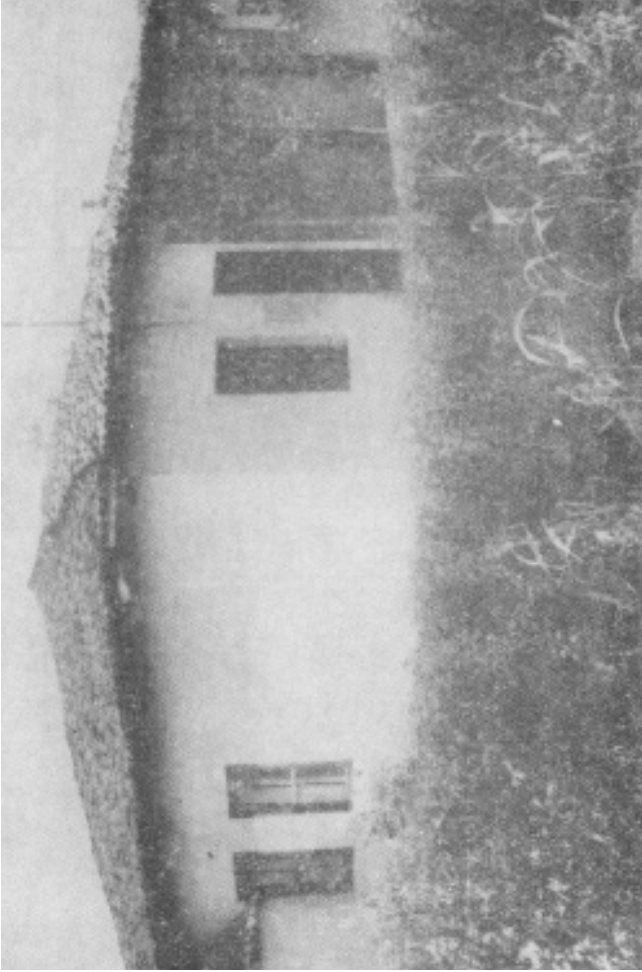
In August, an agreement was finally reached between the two main groups to collaborate and undertake joint actions against fascism. Only through struggle and arms could the unity of the Albanian communists be cemented. Qemal devoted himself entirely to the success of this revolutionary tactic.

But new difficulties arose. The "Youth" Group and the "Zjarri" Group were reluctant to accept and implement the line of unity through the struggle against fascism. Although this delayed the merging of the groups somewhat, their common struggle against the negative views and behaviour of these two groups brought the members of all the groups even closer together. The struggle within the communist movement, in which Qemal played an active part, was finally differentiating the forces and elements involved.

Qemal now clearly saw who was the real driving



Comrade Enver Hoxha in the early '40s



The house where the Albanian Communist Youth organization was founded



Comrade Enver Hoxha in disguise, photographed by  
Qemal Stafa



Qemal's violin

force behind the founding of the Communist Party of Albania. That is why he called on all his strength to support Enver Hoxha in this great historic task.

## XXIV

*“We too are discovering the path of our existence and salvation...”*

Qemal didn't stay long at the clandestine base on Bami Street. He moved into the house of Asim Vokshi's family. This little house in the Kodra e Kuqe\* district, set in the middle of a garden, didn't attract much attention. Vasil and Ali Demi had lived there before in hiding, but when Qemal arrived, they moved elsewhere.

The first time he came, all he had with him was his revolver and two grenades, but later he brought a whole stack of books and notebooks, and even his violin.

Qemal didn't go out all day. In his spare time, he would often tell his aunt stories and jokes, but he was usually very busy. He would read or write on a small table, think while pacing his room and sometimes even sing in a low voice or play the violin when his comrades came to see him. The little room resounded with strange sounds!

This usually happened during the day, because when night came, he would grab his flashlight and head outside.

His movements and revolutionary activity always took place at night. He went to secret meetings, organized interviews and talked about major current events. His disguise was never the same. He now had the experience of a professional revolutionary and knew best the laws of clandestinity. Vasil had taught him a lot of tricks.

Qemal spent sleepless nights at work. He talked and discussed with comrades, patriots and youth. All these people had to be put into action and launched into the struggle to liberate the country. He spared no effort to

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\* Red Hill, Albanian in the original.

achieve this goal.

At dawn, his eyes reddened by insomnia and his late-night thoughts, he would slip in among the people going to work and return home as if nothing had happened.

People of all kinds who had connections with Qemal used to make secret visits to this base. Qemal had important talks with comrades from his group and from other groups too. Young revolutionaries would come to him for advice and instructions. Communist unity and the extension of the anti-fascist struggle needed the guidance of this militant. He was now one of the revolutionary cadres entrusted by history to lead the emerging revolutionary movement.

In early autumn, meetings became more frequent at the Red Hill base. At this time, Qemal had long talks with representatives of the Communist Group of Korça and the Youth Group. These talks took place during the night, extended into the morning and sometimes into the day. For hours on end, Qemal would explain his point of view and that of his group to the others with all his usual seriousness and wisdom. Above all, he would have passionate debates with the representatives of the "Youth" Group. His talks with Sadik Premtja, one of the leaders of this group, degenerated into heated discussions, in which Qemal attempted to make him understand the need to unite on a solid basis and invoked all kinds of irrefutable arguments to reject erroneous views alien to revolutionary theory and practice.

During talks at Red Hill and elsewhere, he was pleased to note that the question of communist unity was moving in the right direction. The implementation of the policy followed by the CGK centre in Tirana was bearing fruit, which convinced them, once again, of the soundness of this line. The more time passed, the more he became convinced that the struggle for unity was led by Enver Hoxha, a militant with a broad vision.



Life itself was proving the full validity of their revolutionary views. The daily struggle of the communists against fascism brought the day of long-awaited unity ever closer. Qemal fought with an open heart and all his being to put into practice the agreement on joint actions. This was the revolutionary line leading to unity and the creation of the Party.

The October 28 demonstration gave new impetus to communist unity. The inspiration and driving force behind this historic action was Enver Hoxha. He organized and led it himself, setting an example of the creative application of revolutionary ideas.

Qemal, who was living clandestinely, was unable to take part in the demonstration, but he did his utmost to ensure that the communists and youth he led were there to sabotage the fascists' celebration. Although he was in the base on the Red Hill all of his thoughts were with the action on the boulevard. The echo of the people's fury reached him. He could hear the loud cries of comrades and the patriotic songs echoing down the main thoroughfare. Occasionally, he had the impression that the demonstrators were coming right up to his house at the end of the boulevard and he thought he heard voices he knew. Then he would rejoice in this shared victory...

A few hours later, when the demonstration had ended successfully, the comrades came to tell him in detail what had happened. He told them with great joy:

"Aren't we strong when we're united? That's a good thing. It is by fighting and spilling our blood together that we will put an end to our quarrels."

Above all, the comrades spoke with great admiration of Enver Hoxha, who had led the demonstration and had come to blows with a senior fascist officer.

The demonstration was undoubtedly an immense victory over the fascists, but above all it was a victory for the revolutionary line over the opportunists and those who sowed discord, paving the way for the union

of communists into an organized party.

The success of this great action unleashed enthusiasm, boosted confidence and brought the communists even closer together. Qemal understood that strict adherence to the revolutionary line would further consolidate the unity of the healthy forces. As a militant communist in the vanguard, he himself made a valuable contribution. He propagated everywhere the idea of the urgent need for unity as an historical necessity without which the people's struggle could not be organized. All past hopes were now justified. It was obvious that quarrels and sterile discussions would soon be relegated to the past. The people were waiting for their leaders. The blood that the communists had shed in demonstrations and actions called for unity. The enemies were becoming ever more formidable, and they were taking even more severe measures.

Confident and hopeful, Qemal said:

“We too are discovering the path of our existence and salvation. We have studied history and the sciences, so that they can enlighten us in the darkness in which we find ourselves.”

He sensed that great events were afoot. It was time for the Albanian communists to make their move.

Meanwhile, the fascists became even more relentless in their pursuit of him. They were constantly on the lookout, determined to get their hands on him at all costs, as one of the main organizers of people's demonstrations, especially those involving the youth.

Enemy documents from September 1941 tell us that the fascist police were constantly on his trail and decided to convict him even before arresting him.

But these efforts came to nothing. The militant knew how to avoid the traps set by the fascists. The spies and organizations tasked with pursuing him always failed miserably.

However, Qemal did not stop halfway and, braving

all dangers, he continued resolutely along the path he had embarked upon. He had taken it upon himself to carry out a great historic mission.

## XXV

*“...for triumphant horizons await us...”*

Qemal had some unforgettable moments in late October and early November. In those days, an agreement was reached to convene a meeting of representatives of the communist groups. Preparations began...

The CGK centre in Tirana had now become the focal point around which real Albanian communists gravitated. Enver Hoxha was in charge of organizing this historic meeting. Qemal and Vasil became his main collaborators. They gave him their full support and took an active part in preparing the meeting. Vasil was in close contact with Enver Hoxha. He had left Peza to come to Tirana. Those were days of intense work and high hopes. Meetings were held and decisive organizational measures were taken on the spot. There was no time for discussion. The procedure and agenda were soon agreed. Each group had its own tasks to fulfil. Qemal was one of those appointed to represent the Communist Group of Shkodra. He was well aware of the historic importance of his mission and set to work straight away. He had to report on his Group's activities, but this was no easy task. His task was delicate and complicated. It involved heavy responsibilities and demanded a great deal of composure and objectivity.

Qemal's first task was to assess the activity of his group's communists and their contribution to the fight against fascism. Then, rising above the narrow-mindedness of the groups and looking at the situation from a revolutionary perspective, he was to courageously analyse the mistakes made and the extraneous viewpoints that had infiltrated it, and finally reject outright the pseudo-Marxist chatter and sterile intellectualism that had, in the past, predominated in the group. He had to become the spokesman for all communists who longed

to build the Party on solid foundations.

On the other hand, well aware of the erroneous views of the “Youth” Group, he foresaw a debate of principles, without which the aim of the meeting could not be achieved. He therefore had to be well prepared if the revolutionary line was to triumph.

The venue also had to be secured. Qemal and Vasil took care of this. Their group had a few houses at their disposal which they used for their clandestine activities.

For the whole of the first fortnight of November, Qemal didn't return to Red Hill. No one at home knew where he was, but it was assumed that important business had detained him, as it always did when he was late in returning. But this time his absence was more protracted than usual.

In fact, he moved from one base to another during the first days of November, and on the afternoon of the eighth of the same month, he disguised himself and threaded his way through alleyways to reach the district to the right of Dibra Street, near the civil hospital, in a small house located among the low-rise houses of this poor district and far from the main street.

According to the instructions received, the representatives came one by one and via different streets. Qemal was among the first to arrive.

Before the Meeting of Communist Groups opened, he had the great pleasure of meeting Enver Hoxha. He had been looking forward to this meeting for a long time. That is why they met like old friends. Despite the fact that they did not know each other directly, their shared ideas and efforts had created a spiritual bond between them that characterizes relations between eminent militants. It is true that Qemal was a student and much younger than the professor, but this in no way prevented them from understanding and appreciating each other. The professor had always spoken of the youth with love and great confidence. He found

in Qemal some of the best qualities in a man. What is more, he had asked about his preparation and training, and knew of his past as a youth activist. For his part, long before this meeting, Qemal had shown great respect and genuine esteem for the professor, for his maturity of mind and qualities that set him apart from the others. He expressed these feelings at that first meeting, but especially later, in the course of their work together.

The bonds forged between Qemal and Enver Hoxha from the very first meeting were not the result of chance, nor were they dictated by sentimental reasons. They were deeply rooted in the sacred cause of communism, in solid Marxist conceptions and in the noble aspiration to create the vanguard detachment of the Albanian working class as soon as possible. Qemal had found in him a comrade, a leader.

At dusk that autumn day, all the representatives were there. The door was closed and certain comrades were instructed to keep an eye on the surrounding area.

The groups' delegates entered the room that had been set up for the conference and took their places around a simple table. The room was lit by a kerosene lamp on the fireplace and the windows were covered with blankets.

The communists opened their national conference and got straight down to work. It was the first enlarged, organized meeting charged with the task of resolving problems of great historical importance.

Qemal sensed the heavy responsibility of the moment, but he was also convinced that the unity of sound forces would give new impetus to the communist cause.

And this became clear when, late that night, after several hours of discussion, the representatives agreed to merge the groups and create the Communist Party of Albania. This decision laid the foundations for a task unprecedented in the centuries-old history of our people, and Qemal's contribution was invaluable.

Following this historic decision, the conference continued uninterrupted for several days. The delegates never left the house. They worked day and night by lamplight. A great tension of spirit reigned among them. They barely had time to eat and took turns resting fully clothed on the floor.

Lively discussions ensued between the participants on the most important questions of revolutionary theory and practice, given the particular conditions of our country. There was a real duel of points of view. Differences had to be ironed out, only the good aspects created by the groups retained, and everything extraneous and erroneous rejected. The Party had to be built on solid foundations!

Representatives reported on their group's activities, practised criticism and self-criticism, and expressed their views on various issues. The lively, principled discussions created a fiery atmosphere through which new ideas emerged from a fierce struggle.

Qemal took an active part in all the crucial points of discussion. He proved to be a well-prepared communist, subtle and mature in debates on theoretical and practical problems, and equally objective and cool-headed in denouncing the errors and shortcomings that had manifested themselves in his group's activity. He was quick to grasp and realize the fair criticisms levelled at the group he represented. A thoughtful communist like him could never accept the tainted views of the old leadership. Revolutionary theory and his long practical experience as a revolutionary had taught him not to associate himself with them, but to fight liberalism and sectarianism, the mentality of coteries, rotten conspiracies, intellectualism and the mania for authority by all manner of means. His extraordinary sense of direction, pushing him towards sound ideas and the revolutionary core of any problem, united him with Enver Hoxha from the outset. He fought by his side until his last breath to

put Marxist-Leninist principles at the heart of the new party. This was particularly evident in the principled debate with the leaders of the “Youth” Group, Anastas Lula and Sadik Premtja. In this debate, which took up the lion’s share of the discussions, Enver Hoxha and Qemal rejected Trotskyite and anarchist theses and put forward the genuine revolutionary line. With his solid arguments in defence of this line, Qemal demonstrated his profound theoretical knowledge, bringing to the discussion his experience as an activist in the communist movement and demonstrating, on the basis of Albanian reality, the falsity of the theses put forward by his opponents. For Qemal, the anti-Marxist views of Anastas Lula and Sadik Premtja blocked the prospects for revolutionary activity in Albania. But he knew through the lessons of Marx and Lenin, and life had also proved it to him, that although the Albanian working class was small and our peasantry backward, they were nevertheless the forces that would achieve the great objectives of the party that was being created.

Enver Hoxha’s profound Marxist analysis of the views held by the leaders of the “Youth” Group and Qemal’s principled struggle against them finally forced them to withdraw. But in reality, this was a mere tactical manoeuvre, as time would later confirm.

This great victory over common ideological opponents and the common views they expressed on many issues during the conference gave rise to a militant friendship between Enver Hoxha and Qemal that grew stronger over time.

At the end of the representatives’ meeting, elections were held. Qemal was one of seven members elected to the Provisional Central Committee of the Communist Party of Albania. He was the youngest of them all, as well as the youngest of all the group representatives.

On November 14, before the closing of the Meeting of Communist Groups, everyone rose to their feet



and sang *The Internationale*. The immense joy of the communists at this solemn moment could only be expressed in the magnificent sounds of this immortal hymn. Never before had Qemal's deep voice trembled with such emotion.

The Communist Party was born. A new era was opening up in Albanian history. In the light of communist ideas, Qemal saw the future towards which the Party would now guide us!

## XXVI

*“From now on, the Party is in charge!”*

Qemal took up his new duties immediately after the closing of the Meeting of Communist Groups.

The Party Central Committee entrusted Enver Hoxha and Qemal with drafting the CPA's first appeal to the Albanian people as well as the resolution of the group meeting. After the departure of the other participants, these two militants stayed behind and worked together to prepare the historic documents. Curiously, these men, who had only just met, got along immediately and were able to harmonize their ideas in the interests of the common cause. Even before this, Qemal had shown his trust and deep respect for Enver Hoxha, but these feelings were particularly evident following their first collaboration. He immediately sensed Comrade Enver's strong personality and understood his preparation and the extraordinary qualities with which he was gifted. In the course of their collaboration, he was able to see for himself Enver's clear Marxist ideas, his thorough knowledge of the history and life of the Albanian people, his political acumen and, above all, his unshakeable confidence and determination in the sacred cause of communism. For his part, Qemal proved a worthy collaborator and comrade, in whom Enver Hoxha discovered many of the qualities of a trained and dedicated militant. From then on, he became the person closest to Comrade Enver in the gigantic efforts to found the Party and organize the armed struggle.

Three days later, the Central Committee of the Party met for the first time. It approved the appeal and resolution. Both documents publicly proclaimed the founding of the Communist Party of Albania.

Great tasks now awaited the Provisional Central

Committee. The Party had to be set up on the basis of revolutionary organization covering the whole country, its means of command had to be created and, above all, the youth had to be attracted and organized.

The Central Committee put Qemal in charge of organizing the struggle of the youth. It was a task of the utmost importance and perhaps the most delicate at the time. But in promoting him to such a responsibility, the Party had not so much in mind his young age but rather his gifts and maturity of mind, his qualities as an organizer and the vast experience he had acquired as a leader of the youth movement. Qemal warmly welcomed the confidence shown in him by the Party. He threw himself wholeheartedly into the struggle to implement his program.

After an absence of several days, Qemal returned to his base on the Red Hill. As soon as the people at home saw him, they immediately read on his face the immense joy that the creation of the Party had brought him. He looked rejuvenated, he couldn't stand still, his eyes sparkled behind his glasses, he talked incessantly about the great event and hummed revolutionary melodies.

In the evenings, he would unhook his violin from the wall and play it quietly. Perhaps only music could express his wonderful mood in those days. He communicated his joy to others too. Hearts filled with hope and strength. Asim's aunt in particular was ecstatic. We had founded the Party!

These were days of delirious enthusiasm, but also overloaded with work. Qemal had never conceived of existence without revolutionary activity, but now he felt that nothing could hold him back. Under the wing of the Party, one could achieve anything!

"Qemal was one of the most active comrades in the Central Committee," recalls Ramadan Çitaku. "He worked wholeheartedly, with passion and enthusiasm,

and performed to the best of his ability whatever task was assigned to him...”

Qemal’s main task was to establish the organization of communist youth. The Party had made it its duty to organize the vanguard who would lead the new generation in the fight against fascism. Youth participation was to have a major influence on the fate of the National Liberation Movement. That is why they set to work immediately after the founding of the Party to convene a conference of youth leaders. More than any other comrade, the burden of preparing and organizing this meeting fell on Qemal. He was well acquainted with the young people who had distinguished themselves in youth leadership. His base on the Red Hill was chosen as the venue for the conference. It was in this house that he was to welcome the comrades, and so he took an early interest in arranging every detail. He saw to it that the house was well secured, with guerrillas guarding it, and he took care of the delegates’ accommodation for the duration of the work. In spite of everything, he worked hard to prepare the report he would present to the Conference. The Central Committee and Comrade Enver had given the necessary direction.

Time was short and the tasks were many, but this did not detract from Qemal’s optimism. His efforts and those of all the communists were now merging into one great organized force. “From now on, the Party is in charge!” he often said in those days.

On the evening of November 22, youth “delegates” began arriving one by one at the Red Hill underground base. The instructions were given: three knocks on the door, two in a row and one delayed. Then the door opened, and a comrade in charge of this task directed the arrivals to the chimney room. This room was furnished as was the custom, with low sofas on either side and a tin stove opposite the entrance.

Qemal was a member of the family, so he had to

do the honours as the head of the house. As soon as a delegate entered, he stood up first, greeted him and invited him to take his seat. There were several knocks on the courtyard door that evening, until all the youth comrades, boys and girls, had arrived. The small room was packed to the rafters. Faces beamed. Everyone felt the joy of this historic meeting. That night, Comrade Enver Hoxha had also come as a delegate of the Party Central Committee.

No one slept a wink all night. People chatted, told stories and made jokes. Conversation turned to the big event of the day, the formation of the Party. Anecdotes about the fascists were rife. People spoke in hushed tones, struggling to contain their joy. The atmosphere in the room was cheerful and full of optimism.

The “delegates” had dinner, chatting and laughing. They had tea and bread. Sleep was out of the question. They took turns dozing in each other’s arms. At the far end of the room, they had left their hats on a table, and on top of them, revolvers and grenades.

Even before dawn, everyone was up and about. Preparations for the meeting got underway immediately. The room was emptied, and the personal belongings, couches and stove were brought out. Two tables were set up in a row in the middle, with chairs and stools all around. Qemal was active, directing the others.

The 20 delegates took their places around the tables. At the head was the Central Committee delegate, Comrade Enver Hoxha, and at his side, Qemal. It was the first time that youths from different groups had come together for a common purpose around the same table. This unity in the ranks of youth was the work of the Party. From now on, it would take them under its wing and lead them in the struggle for national and social liberation.

“Everyone was happy and very moved,” recounts Nexhmije Hoxha, “because we were meeting for the

first time. We shook hands. Some may have known each other for a long time, they probably lived in the same neighbourhood, studied at the same school or had demonstrated together, but they pretended to have never seen each other and didn't let on that they were organized. Communist group discipline demanded it. That night, the Party buried this rotten consensus once and for all, and replaced it with a healthy consensus that manifested itself in the heroic attitude of communists and anti-fascists in the face of the enemies, fascist executioners and traitors."

Comrade Enver himself had come to organize and lead the youth along the path mapped out by the Party. He brought to the youth representatives the wise word of the Party and testified to the absolute confidence he had placed in the new generation. He spoke to them of his political line and of the objectives of the struggle from which derive the great tasks incumbent on youth. Comrade Enver informed the Conference of the Central Committee's decision to create the Youth Organization, which was to become a vanguard detachment of all young Albanians. He also expressed his conviction that the youth would fully justify the confidence of the Party.

Qemal reported on the situation of the Albanian youth and the tasks facing them. After giving a clear picture of the situation at home and abroad, he dwelt on the urgent need to organize the armed struggle against fascism. He spoke of the immense importance that the founding of the Party had for the people and the youth, and highlighted the role played by the Soviet Union in the anti-fascist war. "The tactic of blitzkrieg will fail miserably," he said. "Victory will belong to the Red Army."

Qemal then turned to the tasks that the situation demanded of the youth. "Only organized, Party-led youth can liberate the enslaved Homeland," he insisted. "Fas-

cism is using all kinds of tricks to corrupt our youth and is endeavouring to influence them by diabolical means and procedures. We must fight firmly and courageously against this danger.” The youth had to follow the lessons of the Party, had to be educated and trained according to its ideology, had to reject the views of opportunists who wanted to spare them by leaving them out of the revolutionary struggle and actions which supposedly endangered their existence. The historic moment demanded that the Albanian youth become the standard-bearers of the efforts to save the country, setting an example and leading all Albanian anti-fascist youth.

Qemal’s report was listened to very attentively. This was not only due to his ease of elocution and comprehensible language, but above all to the fact that he was able to make a Marxist analysis of the situation, based on the lessons of the Party, to solve the complex problems of the day clearly and with solid arguments, as well as to present the situation realistically.

“We understood from that day on,” recounts Tasi Mitrushu, one of the participants in that meeting, “that Qemal was the very soul and essence of our heroic, vivacious youth...”

This first meeting didn’t end that day; it went on all night and didn’t finish its work until the following morning. The youth leaders discussed their ideas at length, debated the role of youth in the struggle the Party was organizing, exchanged ideas on the forms of work and the means to be adopted, and expressed their confidence and revolutionary enthusiasm. For them, the ideas of the Communist Party of Albania were now a torch to light up their struggle. Qemal was one of those who carried this torch high.

At this meeting, too, Qemal and Comrade Enver shared the same views, opposing the extraneous aspects of the coteries that were evident in some of the debates.

The excellent understanding between the two militants and the respect they showed each other was a very good omen at a time when the Party was still in its infancy. It proved that they had a very strong bond. Qemal showed that he was far removed from any such coterie spirit and firmly committed to implementing the Party line.

The meeting elected the Central Committee of the Albanian Communist Youth by secret ballot. It was formed by the young people most devoted to the cause, by early fighters and talented youth organizers such as Nako Spiru, Misto Mame, Nexhmije Xhuglini (Hoxha) and others. Qemal had the great honour of being elected the first political secretary of the Albanian Communist Youth. The historic responsibility with which he was entrusted was no accident. He had distinguished himself as one of the most active youth activists, with a wealth of experience and a particular ability to lead the youth struggle. He was now one of the leaders of the communist youth.

He placed himself at the head of the young revolutionary guard at a time when the Communist Party of Albania was uplifting the people and opening up vast horizons to the youth for an organized struggle with precise objectives. It was with such confidence and perspectives that Qemal set about his new tasks. He would express this confidence, along with his fellow comrades, in the fiery salutations the meeting addressed to the Central Committee of the Party at its close.

At dawn, the “delegates” left the house. Qemal stayed behind with the other elected comrades. He presided over the first meeting of the Central Committee of the Albanian Communist Youth, and thus began work on the immense tasks ahead.



## XXVII

*“We absolutely must have workers in the youth leadership because they are more decisive, although they do not yet have the necessary education...”*

The election of the Central Committee of the Albanian Communist Youth was only the first step towards the creation of a militant youth organization. Immediately after this event, intense activity was undertaken to organize it along Party lines. Qemal was at the head of this mission. The Communist youth organization was to spread throughout the country and penetrate the mass of working-class, peasant and school youth. But this meant departing from the old principles that guided youth cells in the days of small communist groups. The new organization would be based on Party ideology, inspired by the principles of the working-class vanguard. It would have revolutionary discipline and be made up of dedicated, brave and determined young people. The people had no shortage, but the problem was how to attract and organize them. The Party entrusted Qemal and his comrades with this difficult task. A long road, bristling with obstacles and difficulties, lay ahead for the youth leader. Erroneous views inherited from the communist groups existed among the youth. There were organizational problems to be solved. The leaders of the “Youth” Group, who were only superficially in favour of unity, were reluctant to give up their youth cells and still kept their funds as well as their political works secret. Opportunist ideas continued to circulate among the youth, and here and there one could sense the psychosis of fear and the lack of confidence in the strengths of the younger generation. The idea that it was premature to launch the youth into action, that it would supposedly cause the loss of comrades, that the people were afraid of them and that the enemy was be-

coming crueler, still lived on in people's minds. This was a defeatist psychology based on the opportunism of hidden factional elements operating within and outside the Party. That is why Qemal, in addition to his work to set up the organization, stubbornly fought to get young people to cease all their connections with factions, get rid of extraneous ideas and stick to the revolutionary line of the Party. He worked patiently with certain youths to remove the romantic and sentimental confidence they continued to have in some leaders who passed themselves off as born leaders full of "virtues," but who were nothing more than cowards and opportunists.

In addition, the functionaries tried to provoke dissatisfaction among students who had been members of the cells and were not yet organized after the formation of the Party. Qemal wisely guided the youth and kept them close to him.

The christening of the revolutionary youth organization was not going to be done with ceremony, but in the heat of action, confronting the fascists. This was the line drawn by the Party, and Qemal worked to ensure that the new organization did not become closed in on itself and confined to sterile discussions and conversations. The discontent rumbling among young people had to gush out and spread like lava in demonstrations of revolutionary action. Action was the way forward for Albania's communist youth.

Qemal devoted his body and soul to this task right from the start.

Just a few days after the end of the Conference, the Central Committee of the Albanian Communist Youth decided to organize a major anti-fascist demonstration in Tirana. It was to take place on November 28. Although Qemal lived in hiding and the enemy pursued him relentlessly, he was one of the main organizers. In the capital's youth circles, everything bore the imprint

of his activity and influence. All the organized anti-fascist youth were to take to the streets. A great deal of activity went into preparing the demonstration. The fascists got wind of the danger indirectly and immediately took drastic measures. They reinforced their guards, stepped up controls and set their entire spy network in motion.

But the youth did not let these measures intimidate them. They boldly took to the streets and squares of Tirana in an organized manner. Young people from Shkodra, Elbasan and Korça also arrived to the aid of their comrades from the capital. Endless columns of demonstrators filled the main boulevard. Naturally, Qemal was not present, but he was in constant communication with them. The youth bravely demonstrated in the face of the fascists and traitors, shouting their love for their Homeland with slogans in favour of armed struggle as well as revolutionary songs. An endless cordon of guards lined both sides of the boulevard. The fascists had brought in the military cavalry to reinforce the riot police and militiamen. But the demonstrators didn't care. And so, for the youth, National Day was transformed into a day of patriotism when they once again expressed their hatred of the enemy and their determination not to accept occupation, terror and fascist demagogy.

The first youth action was crowned with success. For Qemal, it was a victory for the revolutionary line of the Party in the struggle of the youth and the best response they could give to the coteries who were using all kinds of tricks to keep the younger generation away from concrete action.

The Central Committee of the Albanian Communist Youth and its political secretary now had another very important task ahead of them. They had to get the regional committees up and running. These were to be set up in the major regions of the country, naturally

starting with Tirana. Qemal was directly responsible for organizing the capital's youth. He knew the atmosphere well, his links with many young people were of great help to him and above all he benefited from the immense support of the Central Committee and Comrade Enver.

A week after the founding of the Albanian Communist Youth, a meeting was called to elect the Tirana Regional Committee. Its importance was such that Comrade Enver Hoxha came to attend in person. Before giving his report on the situation and the tasks of youth, Qemal introduced Comrade Enver to the communist youth as the representative of the Party.

At the end of its proceedings, the meeting appointed Qemal as political secretary of the Regional Youth Committee for Tirana and the worker Misto Mame as organizational secretary.

A new period of intense activity and heavy responsibility began for Qemal. He shifted from individual work with young people to work with the masses of youth and people. He was constantly absorbed by a host of complex problems and issues.

He was preoccupied with every aspect of youth activity and struggle. He knew how to get to the heart of an issue right from the outset, which in turn helped him to carry out his tasks successfully. Of course, the Party is first and foremost the party of the working class, which is why, when organizing communist youth, he attached particular importance to young workers, to educating them and raising their intellectual standing. He sought to set in motion their unexpressed energies, to instill in them confidence in the historic mission that belonged to them and to raise them to the level of the tasks awaiting them, that of leadership. To achieve this goal, Qemal set about working systematically with the young workers. With great patience and perseverance, he set about overcoming their shyness and lack of con-

fidence, ridding them of those subjective shortcomings that were holding them back.

“In December 1941,” recounts Qirjako Deçka, “at the meeting of the Tirana Regional Party Committee, the composition of the capital’s communist youth leadership was on the agenda. The discussion was heated. Two lines collided. Comrade Enver’s Leninist line, in favour of electing young workers to the leadership, and the intellectualist and rotten line of certain camouflaged bourgeois elements who insisted that ‘educated’ and ‘well-known’ people should be put at the head of the Committee.”

Qemal supported the revolutionary line with all his might, and when Comrade Enver proposed the worker Misto Mame, he immediately joined in and exclaimed:

“We absolutely must have workers in the youth leadership because they are more decisive, although they do not yet have the necessary education. They are in a position to fill this gap with their class sense and revolutionary courage. They will educate themselves later. That day will come.”

As secretary of the Tirana Communist Youth Organization, Misto Mame became Qemal’s closest collaborator. Qemal was delighted, for Misto brought with him the mentality and psychology of his class, the determination and courage, the practicality and realism of his proletarian background. At first, however, Qemal had to work with his comrade to broaden his theoretical horizons and remove his shyness and excessive modesty. He encouraged him to courageously enter academic circles and play his role as a leader. He gave him theoretical literature, explained the complicated problems he sometimes encountered in his studies and encouraged him to speak at large meetings. Misto soon became a skilful leader who enjoyed the sympathy of the youth. Qemal saw this as the success of the Party in raising the workers to positions of leadership.

As a Party activist, Qemal made it his duty to take care of the workers, educate them and bring them up to the necessary standards. He acted with other young workers as he did with Misto, especially those who were taking their first steps in the youth movement. Dozens of them benefited from Qemal's enlightenment and comradely spirit in their revolutionary beginnings.

As always, action was at the forefront of his working methods. It was the most effective way of getting young people involved, getting to know them and getting them trained. There was plenty of room for action. Demonstrations, bombings, sabotage, leafleting and other actions were only some of the ways in which young people were launched into the fight against fascism.

He wanted young people everywhere to boycott the actions of fascism, to abandon the societies, artistic and sporting circles organized by it to deceive the youth. They had to fight fascist art and sports, as well as sabotage the occupier's performances and meetings. He often repeated in those days: "Let us teach young people revolutionary songs, let us organize excursions, sports clubs, theatrical groups, let us draw them into revolutionary life."

Qemal attached particular importance to songs. He was well aware of the role they played at certain moments in a people's history. In the heavy atmosphere that reigned in our country at the time, songs set hearts aflame and mobilized the youth in the struggle. That is why he asked young people not to sing the songs of the occupiers, but rather sing patriotic and revolutionary songs that suited their state of mind and historical tasks. He himself worked hard to popularize these songs among the youth. He did so with great passion and seriousness. "Songs give even more strength to the rebellious spirit of the young," he often said in those oppressive days. He adapted the revolutionary song "The Youth Guard" from French, which reads in part:

“No one should be short of bread  
We don’t want to sweat for others...”

He taught it to others and spread it rapidly. The song was sung by hundreds and thousands of young people at demonstrations, underground meetings and rallies, and “The Youth Guard” entered the hearts of the youth.

Qemal was a zealous propagator of revolutionary songs. This task was very important to him. He would often invite young people to his underground base and play these tunes on the violin or sing them himself to teach others. What is more, he spread them wherever he went. With great perseverance, he popularized them in Peza. Thanks to him, almost all the fighters in this unit learned to sing. Above all, he spread *The Internationale*, “All is Red from East to West,” “Plaines, oh Plainses,” “The Proletarian Barricades,” “ Oh Workers, Oh Workers” and more.

The Red Hill house remained his main underground base. It was from here that he first directed all the youth organization work. There he held meetings, held talks, took and gave instructions and drew up leaflets. His liaison was the plumber Vançi Bajraktari. He went everywhere, bringing comrades to the base to talk to the youth leader and establishing contacts with various people.

Throughout this time, Qemal was overwhelmed with work. Those who saw him often couldn’t figure out when he rested. Day and night, and often even without having anything to eat, he was at work. He never complained and took no care of himself. Only his tasks for the youth organization occupied his mind. He had never worked with such enthusiasm and strain of mind as he did now. The Party had opened up infinite horizons for him.

Those who lived with him speak of his orderliness and seriousness in carrying out the tasks assigned to him. He always focussed on the essentials and knew how best to combine wisdom with courage, creativity with precision. In all his activities, seriousness and the responsibility dictated by the historical moment, enthusiasm and revolutionary discipline were in perfect harmony. That is why the comrades rightly nicknamed him "The Order." Indeed, he was order personified, but not for form's sake or out of pedantry.

The orderliness of Qemal's life was one of the manifestations of his balanced nature and communist outlook. You could see it everywhere, in his outward appearance, in the care he took with his everyday clothes and above all in his meticulousness in carrying out his tasks in the best and most timely manner.

What is more, he had acquired the good habit of demanding of himself first what he demanded of others. He wanted order, cleanliness and simplicity wherever he went and wherever he was. When he entered a base and saw disorder, he was quick to put things in their place without attracting anyone's attention, and if he knew the master of the house intimately, he would point it out to him with great tact. Many of his classmates remember well that he always carried his gun, book and pen, but also his toothbrush.

This trait of Qemal's was closely linked to his solid Marxist outlook on life. A sense of order, seriousness and punctuality at work and in life were qualities that characterized the moral figure of the revolutionary communist. They were in stark contrast to the anarchist ideas preached and cultivated by the leaders of the "Youth" Group. The latter advised young people to lead a disorderly life, to dress badly, not to shave, not to get a haircut and to be disordered within their families (and even to steal!). They demanded that their members abandon school and disdain culture. By doing



so, the anarchist leaders believed young people would be brought closer to the lives of proletarians and would be more likely to embrace their ideas.

All of this revolted Qemal to the core. Such nonsense, he argued, had nothing to do with communism; it was totally alien to its ethos. He severely criticized young people who allowed themselves to be influenced in any way by these ideas. He blamed comrades who no longer read because supposedly “revolutionaries had no use for culture.” He also attacked all those who went even further by abandoning their studies on the pretext that “today’s school is bourgeois and worthless.” Qemal never missed an opportunity to advise the comrades to read continuously, go to school regularly and study hard, because the tasks assigned by the Party could not be carried out without a good intellectual education. Only in exceptional cases, and when the organization deemed it appropriate, could one drop out of school.

During this period, the fight against anarchist manifestations in the life of the youth became an integral part of all the activity Qemal led to establish the organization on a solid footing.

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The Red Hill base was not only a centre where Qemal held important meetings and discussions, but also a place of work. He was intensely active in the service of the National Liberation Movement. There he wrote leaflets and appeals to young people, drafted instructions and bulletins for the lower echelons, translated several chapters of the History of the CPSU(B) and kept up long correspondences with comrades.

How often did the comrades find him in a corner of the room, bent over a simple table, writing and thinking for hours on end. On this table he drew up a whole series of leaflets in which he called on the Albanian youth not to be deceived by the diabolical manoeuvres

of fascism, but to think about the fate of the enslaved Homeland and to swell the ranks of the freedom fighters. Vançi would then take these manuscripts, written in large, legible letters, to the Party printing house to be mimeographed.

Qemal's talent now found a vast field in which to place itself at the service of the people's struggle. At one time, he dreamed of this. Now his writings were no longer destined to be read only by his literature teacher or a newspaper editor, but by the great masses of youth, by an entire people painfully bearing the fascist yoke. Admittedly, this was a heavy responsibility, but the lessons of the Party were now guiding him in his tasks, guiding him on what to say, where to attack and what to ask for. That is why he wrote his leaflets with such ease. He put all his revolutionary enthusiasm into them, extolling his love of freedom and setting the tone for the fiery atmosphere of the time. Many of his writings have disappeared, and we have only a fraction of them in our possession. Nevertheless, they are living documents of the leader of the youth's ebullient activity during this period.

Although living clandestinely, Qemal took every opportunity to serve the interests of the struggle. Immediately after the founding of the Party, he sent letters by various means to comrades abroad. He announced the great news and set them concrete tasks. He especially addressed comrades who were studying in Italy. He asked them to return home as soon as possible, and to bring with them medicines, surgical instruments and printing equipment, as these items were in short supply in Albania and difficult to find.

Qemal regularly listened to the radio at his clandestine base on Red Hill, especially the Italian and French broadcasts from Radio Moscow. Thanks to the little Russian he knew, he listened with deep emotion to Stalin's speeches transmitted by radiotelegraphy. The

Albanian communists linked their struggle to the Red Army's victories. Stalin's speeches gave them heart and taught them valuable lessons.

Qemal had set up a small photographic laboratory in a small storeroom in the house where he lived. The experience of his childhood, when he worked as an apprentice for a photographer in Shkodra, came in very handy. He photographed comrades living in hiding to prepare the false documents needed to overcome the obstacles set up by the enemy. He had also photographed Comrade Enver for his false identity card. This photo, showing Comrade Enver in hiding with a mustache and glasses, is still preserved in the museum today.

## XXVIII

*“Basically, we are asking the people for help.”*

Qemal remained in Tirana throughout November and December. In those days, the Central Committee of the Party met frequently, almost every week. The Party was in full formation. Countless issues required urgent resolution. Comrades would go down to the base, organize the work and then report back to the Central Committee, which would assign them new tasks.

During this period, Qemal stayed close to Comrade Enver and worked closely with him. Duty called both leaders to Tirana. Comrade Enver directed the activity of the Central Committee, all the work for the establishment of the Party and the organization of the struggle, and Qemal was at the head of everything to do with the organization of Communist Youth. It was a close relationship between the two militants. When the need arose, they would travel together, exposing themselves to a host of dangers as they boldly crossed fascist checkpoints. Often, they shared the same underground base. They discussed and exchanged ideas on organizing the people's struggle and strengthening the Party, on the dangers and obstacles that could come from the fascists and hidden enemies. Qemal would report to him from time to time on his activities, taking instructions and listening attentively to his advice. Within the limits allowed by secrecy, he worked to popularize the figure of Comrade Enver among the Party cadres and youth, always expressing his regard and deep respect for him.

Towards the end of 1941, under the guidance of the Central Committee of the Party, Qemal took the initiative of organizing another major action with the aim of activating as many communist youth as possible. At the end of December, at a meeting with a number of youth leaders, he proposed opening a fundraising campaign

to help the youth communists. Naturally, this campaign was to be a primarily political action.

“We have to immerse ourselves within the masses of people,” Qemal said at a meeting. “We have to immerse ourselves especially wherever there are young people because if we remain isolated and live solely amongst our own, we will never achieve the great objectives the Party has charged us with.”

At this meeting, the youth leader criticized certain erroneous trends, inherited from the influence of the coteries, which had spread among the youth.

“Indeed, some young people in those days used to whisper among themselves that asking for help made them look like beggars.

“No,” Qemal said firmly. “We are not going to beg. First and foremost, we will propagandize, we will talk about the need to organize the fight against fascism and we will popularize our Party. The people will understand and help us. The question of financial aid must not preoccupy us. Basically, we are asking the people for help. Without them, we can do nothing!”

After assigning tasks to each of them, he advised the comrades to go first and foremost into working-class circles, among the young workers. He gave Misto Mame special responsibility for this. He asked the others to work with students and some of the girls to work with young housewives.

In the distribution of work, Qemal formed mixed gender groups. His aim was to combat the fanaticism that existed among young people at the time. But some people objected, arguing that such an approach would degenerate the work. The young people would fall in love and gossip would run amok. Then Qemal spoke up.

“We are comrades in the struggle,” he exclaimed. “There must be a confidence between us that comes from the great ideals of the Party. Any doubts that may exist are no more than a residue of bourgeois influ-

ence and fanaticism, a legacy of feudal ideology. Come closer, comrades, and without fear you will see that all will be well. The ideas of the Party will triumph over petty-bourgeois prejudices and petty feelings!”

He was so convincing and so sure of himself that the few camouflaged elements whose masks were later removed by the struggle were unable to retort.

The action began the very next day. The communist youth, confident after Qemal’s speech, spread out among the people. They went to centres where large masses of young people were gathered, to factories, schools, dormitories and homes. It was a difficult and dangerous task at the time, but these young people propagated the ideas of the Party and formed themselves into genuine revolutionaries in the process.

What Qemal had foreseen happened. The people welcomed them with open arms and the youth listened with admiration. Ordinary people contributed generously and the young people bonded even more closely. The action was a great success.

This was precisely when the fascists had brought to power a new quisling government, presided over by the traitor Mustafa Kruja. The task of this puppet government was to quell the National Liberation War, whose protagonist was the Communist Party. Exceptional measures, relentless prosecutions, unbridled terror and demagoguery began. And all this to exterminate the Communist Party, which had only just been founded, and above all, to get their hands on its leaders.

Qemal was one of those “dangerous people” the fascists had known for a long time. Their official correspondence about him had never been more frequent than during this period. If we now take a look at these acts, we can easily see the uncertainty and confusion that reigned in the occupying apparatus. Notes followed one another, contradicting each other, stern orders were given, threats were made, but the result remained

the same. The fascists had their work cut out for them! They couldn't pinpoint exactly where this person was, whether in Italy or Albania(!), although everyone was involved, starting with the prefectures, the Central Police Directorate and right up to the Royal Lieutenant's Office, not to mention senior officials from Italy's Foreign and Interior Ministries.

In early November, the questure of Rome requested information about Qemal from Tirana. The permanent police advisor, G. Travaglio, urgently sent them the requested information. Around the same time, the royal lieutenant also wanted quick information on him. The Italian Ministry of the Interior, in turn, ordered the arrest of the communist Qemal Stafa and his transfer to the questure of Rome's headquarters. Extensive correspondence was exchanged to execute this order. All the organs were set in motion: the political bureau of the puppet government's Ministry of the Interior, the Central Police Directorate, as well as the questures of the local prefectures. The orders from the higher authorities were clear: arrest the individual, thoroughly search his house and promptly torture him for information. The questures of Tirana, Shkodra, Elbasan and Gjirokastra were put in a difficult position. They were neither able to carry out this task nor provide any useful information. So they passed the responsibility back and forth, responding to their superiors that, according to their information, the communist Qemal was in such and such prefecture. Finally, they promised to continue their investigations. To make it worse, the questures of Shkodra and Elbasan wanted to make it appear in their response that Qemal was still studying in Florence, even though he had returned to Albania six months ago! The Central Police Directorate, only superficially, was finally forced to send an urgent and secret report to the royal lieutenant, informing them that "the arrest order for Qemal Stafa has been given, but despite continuous

searches, he was not found either at his residence... in this city (Tirana — *N.J.*) or in Elbasan, his birthplace. (This order is transmitted to all the ministry's questures, but the result remains unfavourable)."

And it just so happens that Qemal was working in the middle of Tirana the whole time the enemies were going through all that trouble. What is more, he didn't stay cooped up at home, but led the active life of a professional revolutionary, constantly at the forefront of his duties and living with the people and youth from time to time, ignoring the many dangers threatening him from all sides. In all situations, he maintained his composure, courage and skill.

Many times, in carrying out the tasks entrusted to him by the Party, have these qualities have enabled him to escape extremely difficult situations and traps set by the fascists!

On one occasion, the Central Committee of the Party was convened. All the comrades were present. Only Qemal was missing. It was extraordinary for him. Everyone knew how punctual he was. One had to expect the worst, as the fascists had lately been taking increasingly heavy-handed measures against the communists. Time passed and Qemal was still nowhere to be seen. The comrades began to worry, especially when they were told that Qemal had been arrested. The news shocked them. How could this be? Under what circumstances had the fascists captured him?

In this heavy atmosphere, when the anxious and stunned comrades were discussing the affair, Qemal's laughing face suddenly appeared in the doorway. They couldn't believe their eyes.

"Have you been arrested?" asked one of them.

"Yes," smiled Qemal, and he took his seat.

"But how did you get released?"

"They took me to the questure and put me under arrest... I began to protest loudly. Willy-nilly, they came



to question me, at length in fact, but I always answered, protesting indignantly that I was innocent... So they were forced to release me.”

Then Qemal told the comrades the details of the affair. Ramadan Çitaku, who was present, said:

“That day, to disguise himself, Qemal wore shorts and a white shirt. He also carried a harmonica in his shirt pocket. The people at the questure, despite their malice, paid no attention to the boy in shorts and harmonica, who protested incessantly, and set him free. Qemal recounted this event as a funny story. We laughed out loud. All our anxiety suddenly turned to joy...”

His composure and ability to extricate himself from difficult situations saved him on several occasions when he was living clandestinely.

One evening, he decided to linger a while on his way to a base. On the way, he was surprised by the curfew. Suddenly, he came face to face with a patrol of Italian riflemen. They apprehended him. Qemal was dressed in overalls, but he was armed. For the moment, he could neither use his weapon nor run away. So he spoke to them in Italian, in the Neapolitan dialect. He told them he was an Italian worker who had just arrived in this foreign country, and that he didn't yet know the rules of the road. He spoke with the assurance and composure that characterized him in situations like these. The riflemen really took him for one of their compatriots and let him go after asking him a few vague questions. They even showed him the route he had to take to avoid encountering other patrols!

But Qemal could not always avoid using his gun during his clandestine life. One evening, as night fell, he and a comrade were hurrying towards the end of the boulevard. A fascist patrol spotted them and stopped them. Naturally, they didn't stop, but drew their weapons and fired at the enemy. The patrol was not expecting this and hesitated for a moment. The two com-

rades took advantage of the situation to disappear into an alley in the poor district at the end of the boulevard. The agents lost their nerve, firing back and sounding the alarm, but the strangers were nowhere to be found. That night, Qemal slept in another underground base.

Encounters with fascist patrols sometimes became so dangerous that his life hung by a thread.

One winter afternoon, Qemal and a comrade cycled down “Hoxha Tahsin” Street. He was wearing a quaestor’s raincoat and a felt hat. He was leaving an illegal meeting and returning to his base on the Red Hill. At the bottom of the street, they were recognized by the militiamen. Qemal realized this and asked his comrade to turn immediately onto Bami Street. The militiamen sounded the alarm. They whistled and shouted for them to stop. There was a great commotion, but the bicycles disappeared in the meantime. The militiamen, however, did not give up, and a fight began near the Red Hill. The fascists were firing. Qemal and his comrade responded to the fire. At one point, he abandoned his bicycle and entered an alley. The militiamen kept firing. Qemal now had not a single bullet left in his revolver. All he had left was his grenade. He saw that only one of them was running after him. The others had scattered here and there. He wanted to throw his bomb at him, but the militiaman was so close that he risked injuring himself. Despite this, he removed the device from his pocket and pulled the fuse. He held it in his hand and continued running. Suddenly, he changed tactics. He knew that the militiaman chasing him was Albanian, so he called on another weapon: the psychological weapon, the power of his word.

“You’re not Albanian,” he shouted at him as he ran. “You’ve betrayed your Homeland. Shame on you for wanting to kill those fighting for Albania’s freedom!”

These words disarmed the militiaman, who was a duped highlander, as would later become clear. He

stopped in his tracks and stopped pursuing. Qemal quickened his pace and entered the last alley. Directly opposite was the door to his base. He nudged it with his shoulder and entered the courtyard. As soon as Asim's aunt heard the gunshots, she anxiously ran to the side of the door, and when Qemal entered, she immediately ran to his aid. He was out of breath and exhausted. As soon as he got home, he tied up the primed bomb in his hand with a rag to prevent it from exploding.

The aunt took him by the arm and asked him to lie down on the couch to rest, but he told her in a couple of words about the situation and that he wanted to leave as soon as possible. Regardless of what had transpired, an unknown militiaman could not be trusted. That is why, even though he was very tired, he hurriedly gathered up all his documents, armed himself and climbed over the back wall of the house. Leaping over wall after wall, he reached the far end of the neighbourhood and spent the night in another base.

An hour later, the fascists surrounded the house, but they did so quietly. The next day, the house was caught in a formidable police stranglehold and subjected to a very rigorous inspection. Every nook and cranny was searched, and the whole house was turned upside down. Before leaving, the militiamen took the lady of the house with them to the questure.

A few days later, the militiaman who had pursued him and spotted the house Qemal had entered went to one of the family members and asked him to arrange a meeting with this "communist who had stung him with the truth."

When this was reported to Qemal, he smiled and said:

"Tell him there's no need for us to meet if he's understood his mistake... In any case, if he's a patriot, he'll find his own way to serve our enslaved Homeland."

After this event, Qemal was forced to leave his base

on the Red Hill. He visited there less and less frequently. Despite this, the house remained the most important base for his revolutionary activity in Tirana during his clandestine life.

## XXIX

*“Let us live the future now, comrades!”*

After the Red Hill event, Qemal moved his main base to 66 Shën Gjergji Street, now Ali Demi Street. This was Ali Demi's house, one of the most important centres of communist underground activity in the capital and home to leading Party cadres. It was here that Qemal took up residence and worked for days and nights on end with Comrade Enver. He held meetings and talks, writing numerous leaflets. He would often return to this house with an immense sense of joy and come away rejuvenated.

By decision of the Central Committee, “Party Week” was organized from January 19 to 26. The aim was not simply to raise funds, but to popularize the Party as the leader of the anti-fascist war, and to carry out political work to enlighten the masses and attract honest nationalists\* to the National Liberation Movement.

Thanks to his maturity of mind and experience, Qemal's activity during this period was intense and fruitful. In addition to his work with the youth, he held many talks with all kinds of nationalists in the capital. The Party considered this area to be delicate and complex. Qemal's task was to bring these influential people into the anti-fascist front the Party was creating and to marginalize the hidden enemies for the time being. These meetings in themselves, especially with some of them, presented unexpected difficulties and dangers. But this did not prevent him from going to these meetings and representing the Party with all due dignity. Often, he was all alone in stormy discussions and de-

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\* That is what patriots without a party were called at the time.

bates. He struggled against those pseudo-patriots who were in reality hidden enemies of the people and the anti-fascist war, he fought against the narrow ideas of certain nationalists on patriotism and against conservative views on the organization of the struggle. He had to continually clash with these narrow-minded conceptions to ensure the triumph of the Communist Party of Albania's line.

With them, Qemal spoke with the authority with which the Party had invested him. He tried with great poise and patience to make them understand clearly the aims and path of the war and the political line of the Party. Without compromising, he often came to an agreement with them and connected them to the interests of the National Liberation Movement.

During these meetings, Qemal made a deep impression with his precocious maturity, his ease of speech, and the courage and wisdom he displayed in all circumstances. His personality directly enhanced the authority of the new party.

On the recommendation of Comrade Enver, Qemal gave a series of talks on January 20 and 21 in memory of Lenin to mark the 18th anniversary of his death. They took place in Tirana before a large audience of communist youth and patriotic youth leaders. These were the first mass meetings where Qemal spoke. He spoke at length about Lenin's life and immense work, relating his ideas to the current tasks of the Albanian communists. He said that Lenin was not a superhuman, nor an extraordinary hero, but a great revolutionary who led the struggle of the Russian proletariat by relying on science, and that in this respect he is the mentor of all communists.

The talks, which usually lasted two or three hours, were followed with great interest by the listeners. His style was fluent and simple. He never kept notes in front of him. He would illustrate his speeches with concrete

examples, avoiding excessive theorizing and rhetorical flourishes.

The Communist Party of Albania was barely three months old and the occupying forces were beginning to feel their influence in the country more and more. The people's rage was growing everywhere. Anti-fascist actions multiplied. Demonstrations grew in number. The fascists were fed up with life in Albania. Their demagogy had no hold on anyone. The terror had no effect. Organized war against the occupiers was the order of the day. The communists worked day and night.

So the fascists resorted to other stratagems. They thought of bringing "fifth column" elements into the Party. Experienced fascist cadres wanted to take advantage of the fact that the Party was still in its infancy. They had experience in this field and, despite difficulties, found a renegade like Ludovik Nikaj to bring into the Party with the aim of undermining it from within. He was aided in this by subversive elements operating secretly within the Party.

But this renegade, although he was aiming high and despite the important tasks his bosses had given him, couldn't hide his game for long. Towards the end of January, the vigilance of the communists tore off his mask and he revealed his true colours. His hostile activity had serious consequences. The fascists were able to uncover the base where the books and archives of the Party were kept, as well as a number of bases housing leading comrades.

He also revealed the house of a worker from Tirana on Bami Street. Qemal sometimes stayed there. He and Comrade Enver were there the day the fascists discovered the house and came to search it. The two militants were writing a Party leaflet. It was midday. The enemies had begun to surround them when a comrade rushed into the room to warn them of the danger they were in. A whole horde of fascists were tightening their grip and

some were already rattling the main door of the house. Comrade Enver and Qemal hastily gathered up their equipment and, weapons in hand, left through the back door without losing their nerve. After passing several walls and hedges, they reached another base where they were out of danger.

Such events further strengthened the bond between Qemal and Comrade Enver.

Qemal never stopped working, despite the dangers of underground life. It was in occupied Tirana that he now engaged in his revolutionary activity. Neither the countless fascist patrols, nor the vast network of spies, nor the police checkpoints, could stop his drive and determination to see his tasks through to the end. He could be found wherever the interests of the Party demanded.

At the end of January, on the recommendation of the Central Committee, Qemal was given the task of setting up the communist youth organization outside Tirana. Now, the whole of Albania became the arena for his activity. Indeed, for the last three months of his life, he crisscrossed the enslaved country from north to south, from Shkodra to Saranda, doing a colossal amount of work to organize the struggle undertaken by the Party.

Always disguised, sometimes as a fascist officer, other times as a finance clerk or as a simple worker, with false papers, his revolver and grenades in his pockets, he went wherever his duty called him, passing through police barricades under the noses of spies and putting his life in danger every time. He carried the word of the Party everywhere, spreading the great idea of organizing the struggle, instilling confidence in victory, and organizing communists and youth. Inspired by the wise spirit of the Party, he deployed the most energetic efforts.

Qemal decided to go to Shkodra first. The road was



dangerous, but he dressed as an Italian soldier and took the passenger bus.

The comrades there gave him a very warm welcome. He, too, came with deep emotion to the town where he had first embarked on his revolutionary path. The reactionaries liked to think of Shkodra as a “cold zone,” devoid of revolutionary threats, but Qemal knew that it was a volcano bubbling up inside. Demonstrations, actions, sabotage and strikes from time to time proved this to the fascists. Qemal’s comrades, the organized workers and the revolutionary students of the Lyceum, were at the head of this struggle.

Qemal spent almost two weeks in Shkodra. Right from the start, he settled into Perlat Rexhep’s house in the Perash district, which served as his clandestine base. It was surrounded by high walls and continuous gardens.

Perlat never left his side during his stay at the base. He gave him detailed information on the situation, arranged meetings with him and accompanied him on all his trips around town.

Qemal’s first task was to set up a Regional Communist Youth Committee in Shkodra. No sooner had he arrived than he set to work making preparations, and on February 7 he organized the meeting to elect the Committee. It took place in the present-day “Partisan” district, where the house of Xheladin Fishta, who later became a martyr for the people’s cause, was located. A group of young revolutionaries were present. Esat Gjyli opened the meeting and introduced Qemal as the delegate of the Central Committee of the Party.

That night, Qemal had to assume most of the workload. He was used to this by now, as the youth organization was taking its first steps, and it naturally fell to him to speak up and enlighten the youth.

“Now, comrades, it is time for organized work,” Qemal said, drawing a small notebook from his pock-

et as he often did. "The Party is going to bring all the people into the struggle. The youth is called upon to play an important role. They are patriotic, courageous and freedom-loving... The trick is to organize them, attach them to our Party and steer their struggle in the right direction."

At this and other meetings he subsequently organized with workers' and school-going youths, Qemal not only informed his audience about the situation, but also dwelt on problems concerning youth organization. He showed what a youth communist could and should be. Knowing the atmosphere in Shkodra inside out, he drew attention to the reactionary role of the Catholic clergy, that instrument of fascism. He also emphasized the importance of getting young people involved in concrete action by organizing demonstrations, actions, sabotage and leafleting. Qemal stated that young people should boycott the fascist arts and sports clubs en masse. He also recommended strengthening links between working-class and school-going youth, both of whom were inspired by the same ideals. The communist youth and other youths should imbibe the lessons and new ideas of the Party, as well as spread revolutionary songs among the masses.

A major anti-fascist demonstration was organized in Shkodra during Qemal's stay there. It took place on February 22. Measures had been taken in advance. The Regional Committee set the communists in motion, an important action for the youth of Shkodra too.

As a seasoned cadre, Qemal was eager to make his contributions. He even wanted to take part in the demonstration himself since he was not well-known in Shkodra, but his comrades prevented him from doing so, especially Vaso Kadija. Finally, he resigned himself and followed Vaso's actions from their clandestine base.

The demonstration began at the "Rozafat" cinema, where a conference was being held on the agenda of

Mustafa Kruja's puppet government. The speaker was greeted with whistles and the stamping of feet. Then came the slogans "Down with the traitors" and "Get out of here, fascist occupiers." Before long, the room emptied. Workers, students, apprentices and others took to the streets, singing revolutionary songs and chanting anti-fascist slogans. Meanwhile, hundreds of armed soldiers were stationed throughout the area. When the demonstration reached its peak, the fighting began. The news reached Qemal immediately. The fascists pounced on the unarmed demonstrators in the street alongside the "Luigj Gurakuqi" park. Despite the imbalance of power, the communist worker Vaso Kadija jumped at the fascists' throats. His blood soon covered the ground. The demonstration became fiery. Revolted, the people did not back down. That February day, the whole city was invaded by a wave of anti-fascist hatred.

Vaso's death touched Qemal deeply. He had lost not only a valuable collaborator, but also an old comrade, a worker from whom he had learned a great deal in his early days of revolutionary struggle. However, he was convinced that victory could not be achieved without the shedding of the blood of the best comrades.

Qemal left an indelible impression on Shkodra during the two weeks he stayed there, winning the hearts of everyone he met. His personality was evident wherever he went. His experience and broad outlook made him one of the most prominent cadres. His political maturity and intelligence, his culture and the force of his words, as well as his modesty and humour, remained unforgettable in the minds of all who knew him during this period.

Qemal took a photograph in Shkodra with a group of his comrades in the struggle. Among them were Perlat Rexhep, Vaso Kadija, Branko Kadija and Ramiz Xhabia. This might have been his final photograph. It

will remain a lovely memory for us, as his face shows the optimism and confidence that inspired him in those days, even though it was still early in the anti-fascist war. He has a smile on his lips and his eyes shine with a bright joy for “the triumphant horizons that await us,” as he once wrote.

He then returned to Tirana, dressed as an infantry soldier. Urgent tasks awaited him. The organization of the youth vanguard posed new problems every day, demanding a solution. He continued to work tirelessly and enthusiastically, relying primarily on young workers but not forgetting the students who were fighting alongside them in the forefront of demonstrations. He even took an interest in other strata of youth who seemed to be “asleep,” but who, with a little perseverance, could become an active force. Qemal asked everyone, especially the youth, to work with young housewives. “It is true that by and large they are uneducated and unfamiliar with the world,” thought Qemal, “but by spreading the ideas of the Party among them, by explaining concrete subjects to them in a simple way, they will come out of their lethargy and get involved in the anti-fascist movement.”

“Our anti-fascist war,” proclaimed the youth leader, “was launched not only to liberate our countrymen from fascist enslavement, but also our mothers and sisters from the reactionary fanatics and fanaticism.”

In the rotten atmosphere that fascism had created in Albania, the problems of youth education were of the utmost concern to Qemal. He fought with all his might to keep the youth free from all harmful influences. The youth had to be imbued with the ideas of war against the occupiers and with the ideology of the Party. Revolutionary romanticism for the future had to be nurtured. This goal could not be achieved without cultivating in the youth of the vanguard Party the characteristic qualities of a communist, such as love for the people and

hatred for the enemies of the Homeland, self-sacrifice and purity of conscience, courage and loyalty to the cause. Qemal often said: "Let us live the future now, comrades!" By this, Qemal meant cultivating right now, in the heat of the action, qualities that socialist society creates in men. In this respect, the communist youth were to be the cradle of the future Albanian society.

Qemal often enjoyed talking about the future. The problems of the future attracted and excited him. But for him, these were not wild dreams, but a real vision dictated by the conviction that a new era was opening up in the centuries-old history of our people with the creation of the Communist Party of Albania.

"One day Qemal Stafa said to me: 'Will that day come when we see our pioneers happy, having their own schools and playgrounds? Will we see them grow up healthy, all sadness disappearing from their hearts?' That day has come... Unfortunately, our dear comrade Qemal Stafa could not see it, but he was killed with the full conviction that this day would come because that is what the Party had decided..."\*

This faith in the future explains the peace of mind that characterized his clandestine life. He lived intensely in these unsettling and dangerous times, but this didn't disturb his state of mind, and the balance that boundless confidence creates in a genuine revolutionary. He never flinched or faltered in the face of any situation, however serious. Fear was unknown to him. His major tasks and the subsequent pursuit of the enemy in no way prevented him from reading regularly every day. He kept up his old passion for the violin, playing it from time to time; he even took up his pencil to draw in his spare time. And after that, he would still be the one presiding over clandestine meetings, debating with hidden enemies, discussing philosophical issues and

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\* See Appendix, pp. 314-315 of this book.

joking around with amusing stories. Then, revolver in hand and pockets full of grenades, he would travel the length and breadth of Albania, ready to clash with the fascists at a moment's notice.

Whether in Tirana or Shkodra, Elbasan or Vlora, Fier or Gjirokastra, Qemal carried the Party's ideas of mobilization everywhere. He awakened the spirit of struggle in the hearts of the youth and handed them the blueprint of what they had to do.

Thanks to these wonderful qualities, he won the love and respect of the masses of the youth and successfully carried out all the tasks entrusted to him by the Party.

### XXX

*"It is a great thing, to be a genuine communist..."*

Peza was one of the first hotbeds of freedom, which is why it continually attracted Qemal. After the founding of the Party, his old ties with Father Myslim's partisans grew even closer. Now there was even a Party branch in their unit. Vasil was the unit's political commissar.

Qemal and Comrade Enver went to Peza more than once. At first, they went in disguise on bicycles, but later, when the fascists took even stricter measures, they set off on foot, taking paths in the hills and across fields to avoid the roads.

Meetings with the partisans and their commander, Father Myslim, took place at Little Peza, Maknor, Muçalla and Damjana. The fighters welcomed the Party activists with open arms and tried to make the most of their presence. Comrade Enver and Qemal did a great deal of political work with the communists and masses of partisans.

At every meeting and discussion, they shed light on the Party line, discussed the situation and solved the problems of the struggle and partisan life. They advised the communists everywhere to set an example, strengthen their ties with the people, work to raise themselves to a higher level and reinforce the unity of their ranks. Qemal also spoke at meetings of the unit's communist group. He supported the Party leader's ideas and the advice he gave to the communists and their supporters.

Both had long talks with Father Myslim. The commander would report on the work accomplished and consult with them on various problems. Comrade Enver and Qemal listened attentively, questioned him and gave their opinions. The Party looked after Peza's unit. It helped by sending men and equipment when needed.

The days Qemal spent in Peza with Comrade Enver were rejuvenating. He learned many new things. He knew how to take advantage of Enver's working methods and his communist approach to solving problems.

Qemal felt completely at home in Peza — his greatest pleasure was to stay with the fighters. He would never forget their masculine faces, and he was enthralled by their determination and confidence in victory. He enjoyed listening to the stories of their battles and the events of Peza, their conversations and the jokes they would make.

That is why he felt so sorry every time he had to leave and promised to come back at the first opportunity.

Indeed, he often visited during the last two months of 1941, as well as in January and February 1942. From March onwards, however, he visited less frequently, and later on in the year, despite his strong desire to do so, he was so busy with work that he was unable to return.

Qemal hardly spent a full day in Tirana during March. The Party sent him on several missions to a number of cities.

He began with Elbasan. The Regional Communist Youth Committee had not yet been set up there and he went to see how the youth struggle was organized. He had a few meetings and discussions. He was particularly interested in the revolutionary activity of the "normalites." By this time, the Normal School\* had become a hotbed of anti-fascist ideas.

"You could tell from his leadership that he was a comrade with a sense of responsibility," recounts Shëfqet Peçi about the meeting he had with him in Elbasan. "First of all, he started asking me questions

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\* In the 20th century, Normal Schools were institutions where teachers in training would be educated in the standards of pedagogy — NEPH.



about the dormitory at the Elbasan Normal School, about the students and so on. He wanted to know every detail and I deduced that he had surely been asked to look into the matter of the students.

“I told him that the students at the Normal School felt deeply the misfortunes afflicting the country, and were ready to abandon their lessons and leave the school at the first signal from the Party. I added that things had started well, even very well. However, a few days earlier, SIM agents had arrested a pupil at our dormitory. Although he wasn’t organized, they tortured him in prison. He didn’t open his mouth and behaved admirably in front of his torturers...

“‘Very well,’ said Qemal, ‘but this example must be made known to all the students. Let them know about this boy’s behaviour and let them learn about the enemy’s methods of spying on students and trying to sow discord between them.’

Qemal advised me to tell the students that the Party was organizing resistance against the fascist occupiers and that guerillas had begun to rise up in the villages and elsewhere...”

This trip to Elbasan was his last to his birthplace. He spent only a few days there.

Now another long and difficult journey awaited Qemal. After Elbasan, he was entrusted with a mission in southern Albania.

He found an atmosphere of patriotic enthusiasm in Vlora. The City of the Flag was reviving the tradition of 1920... Here too, the Party had called on everyone to join the anti-fascist war. The bold actions that took place every day and the mobilization of the youth were proof of this. The new generation hated fascism and they were not shy about showing it openly. Many youths were waiting to be organized, prepared and led. Qemal had come to do just that.

In the first days he was there, he met Comrade

Hysni Kapo, one of the leaders of the Party, and the two of them organized a meeting to set up the Regional Communist Youth Committee.

It was held at the home of the well-known revolutionary Halim Xhelo. As always, Qemal's speech addressed the problems of the anti-fascist war, the situation in general, and forms of youth organization and work. He immediately created a warm and friendly atmosphere. His way of expressing himself, his clarity, assurance and simplicity aroused the admiration of the youth. He commanded respect and won their hearts so quickly that they felt they were in the presence of an old friend.

Qemal didn't stop there. He also spoke at other meetings with working-class and school-going youth.

"I remember," recalls Kristo Papajani, "that the youth meeting took place at a comrade's house on Hospital Street in the Karabash district. Between 20 and 25 of us attended. I can still picture him in front of me, a little portly, with his round face, glasses, black coat and hat.

"He had a gift for connecting with people straight away. As soon as he entered the room where we were gathered, he greeted us with a smile and jokingly asked if we were in a safe place, and if there was a way out in case of danger. When a comrade replied in the affirmative, he exclaimed: 'Very good!' Then he wanted to know if we had any weapons with us. Some had pistols and grenades. He nodded and exclaimed: 'Have them at the ready!'

"Our first interaction with him immediately endeared him to us. We began to talk freely, without embarrassment. Naturally, this was due to the merits of Qemal as a propagandist.

"After that, he got to the heart of the matter. I remember that at the end of his speech, he asked for any questions. This unprecedented approach brought us

and the youth leader much closer together.”

After Vlora, Qemal set off towards Gjirokastra. It was his first visit to this ancient city. He regretted having to visit it clandestinely. But that didn't stop him from feeling the warm hospitality of the Gjirokastrans. The ideal of struggle had created fraternal bonds everywhere. He found a host of young comrades, both boys and girls. Most of them had already taken part in their first anti-fascist actions.

The youths convened to elect the Regional Communist Youth Committee met in the Dunavat district, in a small house on the slopes of Mali i Gjerë.\* The meeting took place on March 22.

“We were excited when the delegate from the Central Committee arrived,” recounts Nurije Çiço (Bozo). “We didn't know his name, but we had heard he was from Tirana and was an important comrade. He greeted us in a deep, booming voice: ‘Death to fascism!’ ‘Freedom to the people!’ we responded, a little confused. We waited for him to speak.”

“The demands of our struggle,” said the delegate, “demands that we remain anonymous. But without fail, the day will come when we will not need to. Let us be convinced of that. The more relentless our struggle, the sooner that day will come...”

Such introductions served to bring him closer to his audience. He sensed the desires and concerns of the masses of people listening to him, and it was only when he had found the key to penetrate their heart that he began to tackle the major issues of the day. As a result, his speeches became lively, concrete and comprehensible. Qemal left the same impression at the other meetings he organized in Gjirokastra. The youth were all ears before this delegate.

““In other words, are you all communists?”

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\* The Broad Mountain, Albanian in the original.

questioned Qemal, in a meeting with the youth of the Lyceum of Gjirokastra,” recalls Qamil Buxheli. “We didn’t know what to answer. If we said ‘yes,’ we feared we’d look like braggarts. Qazim Poli rescued us by declaring: ‘We strive to be.’

“‘That’s right,’ exclaimed the delegate. ‘We all do. It is a great thing, a very great thing, to be a genuine communist...’“

In Saranda, Qemal passed himself off as a fur trader. In those days, it was very difficult to get to a small town because of the countless dangers involved, but the leader of youth didn’t shy away from obstacles. He bravely entered Saranda and spent a few days working there.

There he dealt with youth organization, particularly Party matters. He spoke at the meeting with the communists of their cell, where he told them about the political situation and other important issues recommended by the Central Committee of the Party. He complimented the Saranda communists for relying first and foremost on the workers and dockworkers, for the Party, he insisted, was first and foremost a vanguard unit of the working class. He also told the comrades about the ways and means of work to be adopted by the Central Committee to strengthen links with villagers, patriots of integrity and soldiers. He also criticized and condemned certain errors and mistaken views inherited from the unhealthy spirit of the groups which had manifested themselves in the activity of the communists. The Party could not associate itself with the concept of establishing soviets that had spread among some of the comrades, nor with sectarianism or misguided conspiratorialism. The Party militant gave considerable help to the comrades of Saranda.

From there, Qemal went to Delvina. He only stayed for a day, met a few of the cell’s communists, but was unable to hold a meeting, as spies, it seems, sniffed out

his arrival and the fascists were preparing to get their hands on him. It took his courage and skill, as well as the vigilance of the comrades of Delvina, to keep him out of harm's way.

Before returning to Tirana, Qemal spent the first few days of April in Fier, where he enquired about the situation of the youth and the activities of the communists. He didn't stay long, but returned a few days later to set up their Communist Youth Organization. He also spoke at a large youth meeting held in the hills of Shkoze.

"Qemal's patience and demeanour made a great impression on me," Hysen Emiri explains. "He would correct or contradict you so tactfully that what he said seemed to be your idea too.

"I remember that throughout his stay in Fier, he didn't sleep more than three or four hours at night. He worked, read and wrote incessantly.

"He was always ready to help you with anything. I was writing poetry at the time, and I showed him some of my poems. He read them carefully and gave me some excellent advice. He told me: 'Our verses must be inspired by the revolutionary spirit of the workers, they must be simple and powerful.' I also noticed that he knew the rules of versification very well.

"I learned from him that for the first time a clandestine literary magazine for young people was soon to appear."

Qemal returned to Tirana after a long and dangerous journey and presented a report on his work.

In those days, preparations were being finalized for the First Conference of the Activists of the Communist Party of Albania. This meeting also involved new tasks for the youth leader.

## XXXI

*“We must overcome all our obstacles with Bolshevik patience.”*

The First Conference of the Activists of the Communist Party of Albania began its work on April 8 at the former underground base of the Red Hill, but was forced to move elsewhere because of fascist persecution. The meeting was chaired by Comrade Enver Hoxha.

“Comrade Enver,” describes Spiro Bakalli, a participant in the Conference, “warmly greeted everyone present... He wore white glasses and a moustache so as not to be recognized, as he had gone into hiding at that time.

“The room had tables laid end to end and benches all around. Everyone sat down to listen attentively to Comrade Enver’s report...”

The new assembly of Albanian communists took stock of the activity of the Party during the first six months of its existence. Comrade Enver gave a profound Marxist analysis of the situation of the Party and presented its tasks, including those of the youth.

Qemal devoted special attention to the struggle and problems facing the youth. He spoke of the early successes achieved both in the organization of communist youth as a vanguard unit and in the daily struggle of young people against fascism. He expressed the optimism of the young revolutionary forces and their promise to follow the path laid out by the Party. On the other hand, referring to Comrade Enver’s analysis of the situation, the youth leader courageously pointed out the weaknesses and shortcomings of the revolutionary youth movement.

The old method of organizing groups and pronounced sectarianism still prevented young people from uniting and organizing properly. Qemal outlined

the concrete ways and means of uniting the great mass of young people in the cities and villages, boys and girls, in the fight against fascism. This would be achieved first and foremost, he said, by unmasking the enemy's false ideals to the very end and by helping young people to rise to the level demanded by historical circumstances.

On the morning of April 12, The Conference's work was interrupted. On that day, the fascists organized a large rally in Skanderbeg Square to hear Mustafa Kruja's speech in Rome on the third anniversary of the so-called handover of Skanderbeg's crown to the King of Italy, broadcast over the radio. The occupiers had taken every measure to make the meeting a success, but the Party had taken even more effective measures to sabotage it.

At Comrade Enver's suggestion, some of the participants of the Conference, though mostly underground, ran to Skanderbeg Square to foil the fascists' plans. Qemal was one of them. This was his last visit to the capital's main square.

The square was teeming with people. The fascist authorities appeared on the balcony of the town hall, but the work of the communists soon bore fruit. Gradually, the square began to empty. There was a great commotion. The fascists panicked. They couldn't understand what was happening right under their noses. Qemal, dressed as a questure officer, saw for the last time with his own eyes the overwhelming attraction of the ideas of the Party. The rally had failed miserably!

Following this action, the Conference reconvened. At the end of its work, the assembly of communists took important decisions concerning the strengthening of the Party and the subsequent organization of the National Liberation War.

A few days later, Qemal sent a bulletin on behalf of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Albania to all the lower committees, informing them of

the major tasks assigned to youth by the Conference. It crystallized the organizational forms of the youth vanguard unit for the first time and gave precise instructions on how to work to build up and strengthen the ranks of the organization.

“There are elements outside the organization who are eager to work,” the bulletin said. “We must get to know them and reach out to the masses of youth. We need to recruit the correct elements and accelerate our recruitment to a Bolshevik pace...”

The Central Committee of the Communist Youth of Albania saw the expansion of the organization’s ranks by young workers as a task of prime importance when it asked:

“To attract the workers by pointing out the reasons for their suffering, the struggle they must wage to improve their living conditions, and the need to close ranks around the party of the working class, the Communist Party. Let us not demand the theoretical preparation of them, for life itself will necessarily direct them towards Marxist theory and education. Young workers are the backbone of our Party. We must overcome all our obstacles with Bolshevik patience.”

The publication of an underground youth organ was becoming increasingly important in the fight against fascism. Qemal was well aware of the role played by the press in organizing the revolutionary movement. He had always dreamed of being able to publish a youth magazine or newspaper. When he was a student, his efforts in this direction had been annihilated by the obscurantist establishment. But times had changed. A revolutionary situation had arisen. The Party was organizing the war and rallying the youth, which now had to have its own organ of struggle. And Qemal believed that, in the new historical circumstances, the organ in question would not be a mere spark, as he had once imagined under the regime of ignorance, but a torch that



would light the way to freedom.

The idea of publishing such a periodical had been on his mind for a long time. He had talked about it at meetings and in conversations with comrades, but other more important tasks had prevented him from realizing this dream.

Towards the end of April, Qemal took on the task personally. He had experience in this field. Firstly, he was a man of letters himself, and secondly, he knew progressive literary circles and all the workings of the press. He brought together youth leaders and well-read revolutionaries to edit the magazine. On April 29, he convened the first editorial meeting in the home of a Tirana worker. At his suggestion, the magazine was christened “Kushtrimi i Lirisë.”\* He explained to the comrades the aim and character of this publication, which was to strengthen the unity of the youth in the struggle against fascism, and to create an independent, progressive Albania. The magazine would unite all intellectual elements who wanted to fight against the occupier.

At this meeting, the plan for the first issue was agreed upon and each of the comrades was entrusted with their respective tasks. The meeting was short-lived, but positive and fruitful.

Later that day, duty called the youth leader elsewhere. He set off in the hope of reuniting in ten days’ time with the editorial team of the youth organ he had founded. But, in fact, this was the first and last meeting he had with them.

Nevertheless, Qemal continued to take an active interest in the magazine. He entrusted Misto Mame with the task of procuring the technical equipment without which the magazine could not be published. Misto and his guerrilla comrades carried out this task to the best

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\* The Call to Freedom, Albanian in the original.

of their ability. They managed to smuggle out of the Ministry of Public Works a roneograph, a typewriter and all the other essentials. Then Misto, who had a talent for drawing, expressed his desire to design the magazine's cover himself. Qemal agreed and a few days later even approved his comrade's design. The cover depicted a freedom fighter breaking the shackles of fascist servitude with his powerful fists.

His efforts were beginning to bear fruit. The material was accumulating daily and the technical equipment was secured. These circumstances made him optimistic, and he thought he would soon be able to put "Kushtrimi i Lirisë" to the press. Little did he know, however, that his death would delay the publication of the magazine for which he had worked so hard by several months.

## XXXII

*“The Albanian does not fear death, provided he dies with honour, valiantly and for the Homeland.”*

In the spring of 1942, Qemal was able to see with his own eyes the new impetuses of the National Liberation Movement. The Albanian people responded with armed resistance in response to the call of the Communist Party. Political demonstrations were followed by battles. Guerrillas sprang into action. The full weight of people’s vengeance fell on the fascists and traitors. The smoke and flames of sabotage covered the sky. Fascist offices, military installations and arsenals were set on fire. The first fully-fledged partisan units gradually began to form in the liberated mountains.

All this seriously shook the occupiers to their core. The situation was more perilous than ever — the fascists sounded the alarm and took increasingly brutal measures. Mustafa Kruja’s puppet government, posing as a “hardline” government, was given the task of crushing the people’s resistance. A frenzied offensive and demagogy on a massive scale was launched. The quisling prime minister “paternally” appealed to the youth to turn away from the “erroneous” path to ensure the nation’s “tranquility” within “the framework of the Roman Empire.” But this appeal could not conceal the barbarity of the fascists. Thousands of militiamen and spies, a whole army of police officers and riflemen, were arrayed against the discontented people. A state of emergency was declared throughout the country and the most elementary freedoms were suppressed. A national curfew was declared.

And that was not all. The diabolical enemy also used other weapons to break the will of the people’s war. Fifth columnists, provocateurs and hidden spies did their utmost to undermine the National Liberation

War from within. First and foremost, they aimed to annihilate the new party that inspired and led the people's resistance. This was done primarily in Tirana, where the main activity of the Party was concentrated, and where its top cadres and most important bases were located. With their fascist logic, the traitors thought that by suppressing the movement's leaders, they would destroy all their opposition. That is why they did everything in their power to find out who was behind the "unrest."

In April and May, the fascists stepped up their pursuits and raids in Tirana. Only the scum of Albanian society ran to their aid.

As early as the beginning of the year, the provocateur Ludovik Nikaj had already revealed some of the clandestine bases of the Tirana Regional Committee and had provided important information to the enemy. Trotskyite members of the "Zjarri" Group had become mere spies for fascism. On the other hand, undercover elements within the Party were seriously endangering the vanguard of the National Liberation Movement. The fascist police were constantly receiving the names of comrades and addresses of bases. The Party was aware of these tip-offs.

Indeed, the fascists were quick to attack the movement's cadres and bases, determined to get their hands on all Party militants. Mass arrests, searches and prosecutions were in full swing. A difficult situation was momentarily created. Some bases were in danger. There was no doubt that all this was due primarily to surreptitious hostile activity.

Faced with such a situation, the Party took urgent measures. New bases were immediately created, travel that might compromise the comrades was restricted, vigilance was redoubled and even greater importance was attached to the fight against factions.

This state of affairs also weighed heavily on Qemal.

But he had prepared for it in advance. He often said that their struggle would get more and more difficult, and that fascism would use any means to bring them down! The situation confirmed this, but it didn't stop this seasoned militant from continuing to struggle with the same determination. Despite the low blows dealt by fascism, the Party still stood firm. The Central Committee and Comrade Enver continued to lead the people's struggle. One of the many mothers who opened their doors to these sons of the people fighting against fascism told us: "Once, when Qemal was at home, he came to me by the fire after a late-night meeting and said, with a smile on his face: 'How are you, little mother? Are you tired? Why aren't you sleeping?' My face was disheveled, which is probably why he spoke to me so affectionately. I replied: 'No, my child, I'm not tired, but may death take us old women! We don't care about life without you! You've embarked on a path full of hazards, how are you going to get out of it?' 'Oh, little mother, you've lost your courage this evening,' he exclaimed, cajoling me. 'We shall overcome without fail, for we fight for what is right. Can we stand idly by? What would you do if a stranger came and forced his way into your home? Against our will, the enemy has settled in our homes. Can we stand for it? We must drive him out of our homes and our country with our weapons. A great divide has opened up. We must fill it with our bodies so that other comrades can pass through and win their victory.'"

Around this time, at the beginning of May, Qemal was tasked by the Central Committee to go on a mission to Vlora. He was to travel with "his" car disguised as a "rich man's son." He received instructions the day before departure and equipped himself with false papers. Then he went to find the Regional Committee's financial officer. She gave him the money for the trip, but Qemal jokingly exclaimed:

“That is not much! How can a daddy’s boy travel with so little?”

He always kept his sense of humour, his smile and his optimism, even in the most difficult situations. “The life of a revolutionary,” he often repeated, “has no meaning without difficulties and dangers.”

On the evening of May 4, Qemal went to 66 Shën Gjergji Street, where the usual meeting of the Central Youth Committee and the Regional Youth Committee for the city of Tirana was to be held. No one was missing. Everyone was gathered in a room overlooking the street. As was his custom, he chatted with the comrades before the meeting opened, joking and telling a few amusing stories that mocked fascism. Everyone was laughing and merry. Then it was time to sit down and get to work under the dim light of a kerosene lamp. They dealt with the problem of youth organization and the forms of work to be adopted to extend the struggle. Naturally, during those few months, the question of organization took precedence. The demands of the struggle were becoming ever more urgent. The vanguard of the youth had to establish itself on a solid footing. It needed an organization appropriate to face the great tasks ahead. Qemal spoke at length on this subject that night. He insisted on the need to create nuclei of workers who would form the basis of all the mass activity demanded by the Party. By outlining the path ahead for the youth of Albania, he strengthened the confidence of the young militants. His convincing language gave full force to the great ideas of the Party.

Suddenly, unusual noises interrupted his speech. Footsteps were heard in the street, then barking. All eyes turned to him. His face showed no signs of concern.

“A fascist patrol!” he said.

One of the comrades extinguished the lamp and total darkness fell on the room.

“That night,” recalls Nexhmije Hoxha, “the patrols passed more often than usual. At the sound of their heavy boots, the neighbourhood’s restless dogs barked. We had to stop work several times, fearing that they would stop in front of the house. Once the danger had passed, and the night had lulled even these monsters of cruelty to sleep, Qemal began to joke again following the meeting, which ended at dawn. It was as if he wanted to erase the strong emotions we had experienced. Then he went to the window, drew the curtains and said: ‘Well, it is beginning to get light, the night is well and truly over. But it is not our day yet. When it does come,’ he laughed, with his usual enthusiasm, ‘we will all be out on the boulevard, singing and shouting until the morning. The gentry will say, “Who are these fools?!” No one will mind. We will give in to the enthusiasm of our repressed hearts!’“

The meeting lasted until morning. That day, he had to leave for Vlora. That is why he left early, even though he had to be on his way in the early afternoon. His light spring-blue suit gave him the appearance of a well-to-do young man. He walked through the streets of Tirana at his usual pace and without his glasses. The weather was splendid. The sun was shining brightly. A light breeze mixed with the scent of flowers caressed his face. Certainly, Qemal’s poetic soul was certainly deeply aware of nature’s joyous renewal, but his brow darkened at the thought of the country’s dire situation.

He was on his way to a new task on this beautiful spring day. He had never felt so strong and so full of energy. His heart overflowed with optimism and confidence. The Party, like a sun, had galvanized his vital forces.

At two o’clock in the afternoon, Qemal’s “personal” car was waiting for him on Durrës Street in front of the power station. While waiting for his departure, he was told to spend a few hours at another base.



Qemal's last photograph (Shkodra, February 1942)





Qemal Stafa's shirt riddled with bullets from the fascists



Comrade Enver Hoxha at the ceremony for the transfer of Qemal Stafa's ashes (1948)



The bust of Qemal Stafa in one of the capital's squares  
(by the distinguished sculptor Janaq Paço)

The young man in the blue suit passed through a few alleyways in the Bami district and came out onto Dibra Street. He then turned left down Zajmi Street.

On the right-hand side of this street, which at that time headed towards the outskirts of the city, was a small house. It had two rooms separated by a narrow hallway and had only been used as a base by the clandestine comrades for five or six days. It was one of the houses that had been rented out after the discovery of the old bases. But its security was still insufficiently verified. What is more, it was located opposite the Italian army's artillery barracks, in an open area where the naked eye could see all the way from the front windows to the upper part of Dibra Street.

Its occupant, posing as the owner, would enter and leave occasionally to stock up on supplies.

Qemal visited the base for the first time. There he found a comrade from the Central Committee and three young girls.\* The comrade was there to organize a meeting with the guerrillas a few hours later. And that same afternoon, another meeting was to be held with important Party cadres. There was no reason for the girls to be there, and in the difficult situation that had arisen, their reckless actions and behaviour undoubtedly helped to expose the base.

Qemal had a long and dangerous journey ahead of him. He had been up all night and wanted to rest. He put his revolver and the two grenades on the table and stretched out on the bed. Unfortunately, the girls prevented him from sleeping and he was obliged to keep them company out of good manners. But one of them was hungry, and every now and then lifted the curtains on the window overlooking the street. They were waiting for the "owner of the house" to come and bring the

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\* Two of them were the fiancées of the provocateurs Ludovik Nikaj and Zef Ndoja.

food.

Lunchtime was approaching and the man was late.

What had happened? For reasons that remain unclear, the fascist police had captured him and learned the address of the base!

Plain-clothed police officers ran down the street to check the location of the house. The spies set to work. The discovery of certain clandestine bases had emboldened the fascists as of late. For the time being, at least, the “fifth column” was collaborating with predatory elements from the inside.

It was a little after noon when suddenly a questure car appeared at the corner of Zajmi Street. Handcuffed, “the owner of the house” got out, escorted by a line of police officers. Shortly afterwards, a truck full of militiamen also arrived in a hurry. Qemal and his comrade followed all these movements from the windows. They realized right away that the situation was serious. The fascists, backed by the traitors, were advancing towards the clandestine base.

Qemal hastily armed himself without taking his eyes off the window. He put the grenades in his pockets and kept his revolver in his hand. His comrade did the same. As for the girls, they ran and panicked around the house. In the street, the commotion was getting louder and louder. Now they could clearly distinguish the sound of voices. They had to act quickly. As always, Qemal knew how to keep his composure even in the last moments of his life. He took care to remove anything that could compromise his comrades. In this moment, he wasn't thinking about himself, but about the dangers that threatened the lives of others.

Up ahead, on the road, new reinforcements were concentrated. Militia cars, riflemen on horseback and an armoured vehicle, nearly two hundred people were preparing to storm the site. All these measures had been taken with the expectation of finding a large group

of outlaws, particularly the leaders of the anti-fascist movement. The discovery, three days earlier, of the technical facilities of the Party and the book depository of the Central Committee had given them renewed courage, and they were confident of their success.

It was around 1 p.m. when the fascists began to approach the house. Qemal and his comrade had decided to break through the encirclement, weapons in hand. Only combat could decide their salvation. The law of the Party was sacred: communists do not surrender!

Gathered in the square in front of the house, the enemies were calling on the communists to surrender. Revolver in hand, Qemal and his comrade went out into the hallway. They had locked the front door and the windows. Now it was a question of breaking the encirclement at its most fragile point. Their silence led the besiegers to believe that they intended to surrender without a fight. The two comrades took advantage of this moment of uncertainty to act. At the end of the small hallway, a wooden door opened behind the house. Apparently, the house was not totally surrounded by them. The door wasn't solid, and with a good shove of the shoulder, they broke it open. The way seemed clear, but soon the fascists were firing at them from the street. Qemal threw his first grenade. They responded with several volleys. Another grenade flew over the attackers.

Suddenly, there was absolute silence. It seemed as if the fascists were retreating, but they entrenched themselves on the other side of the street. In those few seconds, the two besieged men moved a few paces away from the house, and while Qemal's comrade jumped into the ditch to the right of the house, Qemal remained in the open, fighting to protect his comrade's retreat. Even in these tragic moments, he demonstrated self-sacrifice and communist unity. After tossing his second grenade, he ran into the lush garden and out into open fields.

A bullet hit him in the leg as soon as he took his first steps. Despite this, he continued to fight, responding with his revolver to the heavy fire of his adversary. The terrain was flat and bare. He couldn't defend himself. But those who saw him tell us that the hero was trying to break the encirclement with his small handgun, and that he was still running in front of the enemy. To help him, his comrade fired from his entrenchment, but this was of little use. Almost all the rounds in his gun had been used up. He now used it only when absolutely necessary. The attackers were coming at him furiously from all sides. More kept coming, as if the existing numbers were not enough. The crackling of weapons alarmed the fascist officers. A truck loaded with officers from the questure rushed in from Bami Street and stopped close to the house.

Qemal was still heading for the river. His leg wound left a long trail of blood behind him. He now had only two bullets left. Ahead lay a green plain, the shore and the meandering river. His aim was to move beyond this, which would put him out of danger. But just where he wasn't expecting it, the black helmets of a carabinieri unit appeared on the horizon. Danger was imminent. The encirclement was now total.

The fascists still hoped to capture him alive. They invited him to surrender, but Qemal replied with the last bullets he had left. Then they rushed at him savagely and he was caught in the enemy's crossfire.

Once, as a child, he had written in a composition:

"The Albanian does not fear death, provided he dies with honour, valiantly and for the Homeland."

Qemal was dying the death he had dreamed of. His last gaze went to the mountains and plains of his Homeland, to Tirana, which he loved so much, when a bullet hit him in the chest. He collapsed slowly, and while the earth resounded with the heavy footsteps of the enemy, although mortally wounded, he said his last farewells to

his Homeland, his Party and his comrades!

The fascists only had the courage to approach him when he collapsed and stopped moving. Many of them didn't know who he was or what his name was, but they did know that a communist had been killed, and only communists are capable of such a bold death. It was Qemal's heaviest blow to his enemies!

"We approached when we saw that he was dead... His hair in front of his sweat-covered forehead and a soft smile brightening his face,' a militiaman told his colleagues that same evening in a café in the capital. They were there pouring glass after glass, and I was there drowning my sorrows in alcohol."

With these words, Haki Stërmilli recalls this moment in his wartime memoirs.

The encirclement and battle had lasted nearly an hour. A whole pack of enemies, including carabinieri, militiamen and others, had fought against him alone. The fascists made fools of themselves in the process. They realized this and, in revenge, on their way home threw Qemal's body onto a miserable cart and drove it through the streets to frighten the revolting people.

But in fact, it was they who were afraid of Qemal, even after his death. Terrified of the people's anger, they buried him a few days later in secret, taking all the necessary precautions. Despite these measures, only a few hours after the burial, an unknown hand placed spring flowers and a red ribbon on his still-fresh grave, bearing the words: "Death to fascism! Freedom to the people!"

"The day Qemal was killed," a comrade recounts, "Comrade Enver was in a house at the end of Durrës Street, near the old power station."

When I went to see him, I found him very moved. He was pacing around the room, smoking nonstop. At one point, he said: "We have lost Qemal. It is a huge loss for the Party and the youth. War has its ups and downs. We can all suffer the same fate. Qemal gave a



great example to all communists and freedom fighters with his heroic struggle and death.

“We saw each other two days ago and made plans for the future. I find it hard to believe that Qemal is no more. It has only been six months since we met, but I realized from the very first meeting that Qemal not only had a broad cultural horizon, but that he was politically and ideologically well-trained as a communist and a man of action. He was not only an outstanding leader of the communist youth and youth in general, but also one of the most active leaders of the Party, fighting until his last breath for its strengthening and unity.

“Despite his youth, he had the maturity of a hardened fighter, a determined communist. He was driven by an infinite faith and love for the people and their future. He was a pure, light-hearted and optimistic communist, a genuine leader of the youth. He loved life, but he sacrificed it for a great cause that he loved even more — the freedom of his people and the liberation of the oppressed throughout the world.

“The enemy is cruel and we must fight him mercilessly. Great efforts lie ahead.”

Comrade Enver then spoke of the tasks ahead and of youth organization.

“When Qemal was killed,” recalls Shefqet Musaraj, “I was living on Him Kolli Street, where his family also lived. I could see with my own eyes the deep impression his death made on the people. His house became a place of pilgrimage. People came and went. Among the arrivals were spies, too, but they were ignored. I went there and found that these visits were not dictated by propriety. The visitors could hardly hold back their tears, and instead of the usual words of condolence, they saluted with the slogan ‘Death to Fascism!’, expressing their hatred for the enemy, and went on and on with pride praising Qemal’s heroism, as well as the Party which had created such heroes.”

## XXXIII

*"[He] became and remains one of the greatest figures for the present and future generations of the Albanian people."*

*(From a decree issued by the Anti-Fascist National Liberation Council, 1945)*

Qemal's heroic death resounded throughout Albania like a siren sounding the call to arms.

The Central Committee of the Party called a special meeting and decided to announce this irreparable loss in the form of a leaflet. The comrades spent the whole night writing and printing this leaflet, which was distributed everywhere on May 6. It addressed the Party and the people with these words:

### **Comrade Qemal Stafa Has Fallen as a Martyr**

You have always been  
Ready to sacrifice life;  
For your ideals  
You have fallen as a martyr.  
Now accompanied by death, we bring you  
To your final resting place;  
Under the red flag  
We are going to be free once again!

Qemal Stafa, a comrade worthy of high praise, fell in heroic combat, as befits a communist.

The struggle he began as a young man was never interrupted until the very last moments of his life. For the last two years, he escaped the clutches of the blood-thirsty fascists who wanted to lock him up and make him rot in a dark prison. He fought relentlessly in the harsh conditions of clandestinity to drive the cruel occupiers out of his country and lead the Albanian people

to freedom. Comrade Qemal proved that he was ready to sacrifice his life for the freedom of his Homeland. Indeed, he did so, pouring out his blood on our soil and nurturing it for the new generation.

Qemal and his comrades found themselves surrounded in a house in Tirana by the infamous agents of the barbaric fascists. He hurried his companions out through one side of the house and stayed behind to help them leave as quickly as possible. When the assailants were close by, holding a grenade in one hand and a revolver in the other, he opened fire on them. Two of the assailants were killed and two others seriously wounded. Breaking through the encirclement, he got out and fled, fighting off other pursuers. But, in an unequal battle, a traitor's bullet struck this brave and fearless man. Gradually his wounds cooled, he lost his strength and fell.

When he saw that he was being approached, Comrade Qemal summoned the last of his strength and shouted at the top of his lungs:

“Long live free and democratic Albania!

Long live communism and Comrade Stalin!

Death to the fascist savages!”

Immediately after these words left his mouth the bloodthirsty assassins thrust bayonets into his throat.

Qemal Stafa died a hero. He fell fighting like so many other brave-hearted communists, like Koçi Bako, Kadija, Shijaku and Noku. He died bravely and his comrades will carry the flag for which he gave his life ever higher. We will continue his struggle to the end, until the blood shed by our martyrs is fully avenged, until the fascist savages are exterminated, and until the day we establish a free, democratic and people's Albania.

Read this, propagate it, don't give in to the enemy!

That same day, the Central Committee of the Communist Youth of Albania, deeply moved, informed the country's youth of the death of its leader on the field of honor.

“Qemal! — the Albanian people are proud to have raised sons like you in their bosom. You called us to arms, to the struggle for freedom... The Albanian people and our youth, who wept for you yesterday and bent over your grave with pain, will avenge you without fail tomorrow.”

Other leaflets were also launched by regional Party and youth committees in every single region of the country.

The heroic death of the youth leader, one of the Communist Party of Albania's most eminent militants, caused quite a stir. It is hard to find another such case in the history of our revolution. His death was unprecedented, marking the birth of a new heroism embodied in the great ideals of the Communist Party. They had decided to liberate the enslaved Homeland and were prepared to make all manner of sacrifices to do so. Qemal was the first to set a great example.

His death in battle against the enemies of the Homeland aroused a general and hitherto unknown anger. To tell the truth, the fascists had not expected it at all. They had no idea that their abominable crime would openly unleash the unbridled rage of the people. Even the Quaestor of Tirana made no mention of anything special in his report to the Royal Lieutenancy on May 5. According to him, the affair was completely normal. It seems that the report was sent immediately after the event, when the impression it made on the people was not yet known. For, a few days later, when the fascist information network gathered their initial information, the enemies clearly realized that the death of the com-

munist Qemal Stafa had created an unexpected and embarrassing situation. They were frightened and obliged to take severe measures to avert the consequences.\*

On May 13, the Central Police Headquarters sent an urgent, secret telegram through the Ministry of the Interior to all the questures in the Kingdom. It read:

“It is to be expected that they will try to avenge their comrade and commander Qemal Stafa, and to show their dissatisfaction with the uncovering of the organization. They will probably try to carry out terrorist acts against command offices and high-ranking people in the state administration, especially the police, in the very near future. I therefore recommend redoubling our vigilance to protect the offices in question and the leading figures of the government. I invite all quaestors and civil servants to be ready to repress the above-mentioned acts immediately.”

For several days in a row, the people’s anger was felt in every corner of the country. The occupiers were worried. In factories and schools, in prisons and underground, wherever they could be found, young people saluted with their fists raised beside their foreheads and closed ranks under the banner of the Communist Party.

Local communist youth activists from the capital and other major cities were summoned to honour Qemal’s memory. The young people swore an oath to follow his path faithfully.

“Groups of boys and girls would meet in hovels and chat late into the night under a dim light,” recounts a witness from that era. “These were the meetings of local communist youth activists. One of them would read the leaflet of the Party and the others would listen

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\* An unsuccessful attempt was made on Ludovik Nikaj’s life when he was working with the questure of Shkodra. He then left for Italy to escape the vengeance of the people. Nevertheless, the traitor was brought back to Albania immediately after Liberation and was executed.

attentively. At the end, they stood up. You can see the hatred for the enemy and the thirst for revenge in their eyes. Fists were raised. Then someone cried out: 'Let us swear, comrades, that we will avenge him, that we will fight at the cost of any sacrifice in order to bring about the triumph of the ideas for which Qemal gave his life.' 'We swear we will!' replied the others unanimously."

"I was with Alqi Kondi," recounts Jovan Adami, "when Misto Mame came to tell us of Qemal Stafa's heroic death. Alqi couldn't utter a single word and his face darkened. As for me, I was prostrate and my eyes filled with tears.

"'Now we have to make sure we fill the great void left by the loss of Qemal,' said Alqi..."

The fighters were stunned when the couriers brought the sad news to Peza.

"Everyone was thrown into a deep depression," recalls Myslim Peza. "We had such a predilection for him that many peasants and I pointed out to the Party that it was wrong to leave him in the city, and that we could keep him here, in Peza. But Qemal went where the Party called him, where the people's cause demanded."

"It is men like these that Albania needs," said Reshit Çollaku, the proud commander of the Mokra guerrillas, when he heard of Qemal's death, "These men do not have to die. But, once dead, they become a symbol of struggle." "When you shoot at the enemy, think of Qemal," Reshit advised his followers before going into battle.

In Tirana, many stores pulled down their blinds on the evening of May 5 as a sign of mourning. Dark-faced youths ran in defiance of fear from store to store, announcing that the fascists had killed Qemal Stafa.

May 6 was secretly proclaimed a day of mourning at Tirana's Lyceum. Classes were suspended. The students gathered in the courtyard kept their heads down. One of them stood up and spoke of Qemal's work. He

invited his classmates to avenge his memory. With great courage, the school's youth openly mourned the loss of their leader. And all this was done in full view of the school's vice-principal, a certain Vanini. He immediately alerted the carabinieri and the Questure, and the school was soon surrounded. The fascists interrogated many of the students, but no one spoke up.

Commemorative meetings were held in Korça, Vlora, Shkodra, Gjirokastra, Elbasan, Fier and elsewhere. Everywhere, his example lit up the path of struggle on which the youth were embarking like a torch.

From the outset, the people and youth composed verses and songs about their hero. Literary sketches and plays were written. Qemal's life and death became a source of inspiration and a lesson for all those fighting the enemy.

The day after the tragic event, the worker Gaqo Tro-la wrote the lyrics of a song that immediately spread among the masses of people and youth.

"In those days I was a blacksmith at the power station," recounts the author of the song. "Although illiterate, I wrote verses in my head. I had written a lot of them about the misfortunes of migrant work. As soon as Qemal was killed, Kozma Nushi came to tell me the sad news. He said to me: 'Write a poem for Qemal.' I replied: 'You do not need to ask me. It is there, all ready,' and I showed him what I had written from my heart. I went to the forge and sat down by the anvil. I was all alone. The sun's rays were streaming in through the open door. I stared at them, absorbed in my thoughts. The poetry came effortlessly, spontaneously from my wounded heart. When I recited it to Kozma, he liked it and wrote it down carefully. I was astonished and very touched to hear my verses a few days later in a song sung in honour of Qemal at a clandestine meeting...

"It said:

“In the heart of the capital  
Close to the hospital  
Qemal has fallen  
The brave partisan.  
He was pursued  
By the vile rats.  
He fought bravely  
With his revolver,  
Had he a rifle  
He would have held out!  
Grieve women of Albania,  
His grieving mother  
On his grave cries out:  
“Get up, Qemal,  
Your mother begs you.  
I received a letter  
Yesterday from the partisans;  
Now we ask you  
My beloved child!  
You should fight  
The enemy again!”  
“Dying, I cannot  
Mother, get up;  
The cursed Italians,  
Wounded me to my death  
The blood I shed  
Avenge it, my friends!  
My last salute  
To the people of Albania!  
Be brave  
My dear old mother!””

Although the Albanian youth was unable to accompany Qemal to his final resting place, they paid tribute to their first hero with deep sorrow by composing the song for his funeral:

“By the fascist henchmen  
Our Qemal was killed,  
He sacrificed his life for the people





The commemorative stela erected on the site where Qemal fell as a hero

Fighting without ever ceasing.”

An anonymous poet links the death of the youth leader to the new world for which he gave his life:

“The new order will soon be established  
Without exploiters here below;  
A statue to you we will erect  
As a martyr to freedom you fell.”

The first issue of “Kushtrimi i Lirisë,” published in August, was dedicated to Qemal. “To the man who always dreamed of publishing a youth organ,” it began. “He wrote the first issue with an iron will, but the bullets of the traitors prevented it from appearing.”

“Further down, the feature article at the top of the magazine says: “Before ending this article, we invite all our dear readers to commemorate the memory of those who have sacrificed their lives for culture and progress, those who have died to give freedom to Albania and all humanity. Our comrade Qemal Stafa, who loved this magazine more than any other, who named it and set its program, fell as a martyr on May 5, 1942 for the freedom of the Albanian people.

“Let us honour his memory!”

Gjik Kuqali published the literary account “Three Times” in the underground press, where he wrote, among other things:

“I have only seen him three times. I knew and understood him. He came from the people and was our comrade. More tried and tested than us, he knew life as someone who had suffered for many years...

“He lived among us, worked with us, directed us and prepared us, kindled our hearts and loved us as we loved him.

“Always cordial, intelligent, wise, simple,

hard-working and tireless.

“I only saw him three times... He was of medium height and a stout build. On his round face were two eyes with eyelids weighed down by insomnia. He wore glasses. His forehead was broad and his hair thick.

“I knew him. His iron will and unfailing courage were in perfect harmony with his kind heart. Always very sociable, he got on admirably with farmers, workers and students.

“I understood him. He fought for the youth and did it consciously. He was showing us the way because he was one of us. He fought with us and we fight for him, which we will do to the end.”

The fascists had to pay dearly for this crime with their blood. That is why his death stirred up an even more intense spirit of vengeance among the people. It marked the beginning of a new revolutionary impetus in the National Liberation Movement. Partisans charged furiously at the enemy. Our towns and countryside resounded with the bold actions of our guerrillas. Enemy camps went up in flames. Hundreds of new fighters courageously embarked on the path mapped out by the Party. In a very short time, Qemal became an icon of the movement. With his heroic death, he left behind a beam of light that would pave the way to freedom. Following in Qemal's footsteps, Misto Mame and Mihal Duri, Vojo Kushi, Perlat, Branko, Jordan and so many others succumbed in the name of this beam of light, laying the foundations of socialist Albania.

But Qemal remained forever the first communist of the newly-formed Party, the one to whom the honour and glory of the Homeland fell, the one to open the endless series of those who fought and fell with the ideal of the new world in their hearts.

Our contemporary history, forged by the Communist Party, has made Qemal a great symbol for his illus-

trious figure, embodying with extraordinary harmony some of the best characteristics of a glorious revolutionary.

“This tireless leader and worker set a shining example of heroism and self-sacrifice during the National Liberation War, becoming and remaining one of the greatest figures for the present and future generations of the Albanian people.”

With these words, on July 9, 1945, the leadership of the Anti-Fascist National Liberation Council proclaimed Qemal Stafa a Hero of the People.

By decree of the Central Committee of the Party of Labour of Albania and the Council of Ministers, May 5, the day of Qemal’s death, was declared the Day of the Martyrs.

## APPENDIX

### COMMANDER OF THE PIONEERS

*“[Qemal] did not let go of the rifle in his hand even when his holy body, torn apart by the bullets of the fascists, lay lifeless in the riverbed outside Tirana. He fought and died for the people, for the Homeland, for you.”*

*(Speech delivered by Comrade Enver Hoxha at the reception organized in honour of the distinguished pioneers during the school year 1946-47)*

**July 4, 1947**

My comrades and I in the government are very pleased to welcome you, the pioneers who have come from all parts of Albania, to see you and rejoice together tonight. Surely, you are a little tired from the journey, but the joy we feel will alleviate your fatigue a bit, and I also invite you to stay here in Tirana for a few days, to visit and see many things that will delight you.

I am very happy and for another reason, because I am facing the best pioneers of Albania, those who have excelled in school. I congratulate you for having done your duty well, you have made your parents as well as me happy. We hope and advise you to work even harder so that next year you will excel even more, because this is one of your most important duties, and this way you will become even more valuable to the Homeland.

The government, along with the local authorities and your parents, will assist you and work with all their might so that you, I mean all the pioneers of Albania, lack nothing and your life becomes happier day by day. The schools next year will be more numerous and more

beautiful, your notebooks and books will be prettier, and with these schools and books, you will teach thousands of other pioneers. Students all over Albania have performed well in their studies this year. This gives us great hope for the future of our country, this is our path, how Albania will progress. You fully deserve your vacations, so you should enjoy them. Some of the pioneers, those who have excelled the most, those whose parents have been killed for the Homeland, will go to the summer camps organized by the government, while others will go to camps organized by local authorities, and for those who will not have the good fortune to go to these camps, local authorities and the youth organization will organize games and picnics so that all the pioneers enjoy their vacations. You know how much we desire to organize summer camps for all the pioneers of Albania. But you also understand that our country is still poor. We are working for the country to become richer and we will soon reach the day when the pioneers lack nothing.

Many of you are coming to Tirana for the first time. You have seen big houses and wide streets here, but I will advise you to see our country, our mountains, our cities, our Tirana, with a different eye and feel what you see in your heart. For example, Tirana is not just the capital where the government sits, but something else, especially because six years ago in the city of Tirana, in the darkest times of Albania's history, our Party was formed, the heroic Communist Party of Albania. This Party taught us to fight to the death for the liberation of the Homeland and the people. The Party organized the great uprising, organized and led the war, liberated Albania and today is building the Homeland. The Party taught the whole people how to fight heroically for the liberation of the country, so our people and pioneers love the Party as their soul and cherish it as the apple of their eye.

In every street of Tirana you will go, every wall and every window you will see, they were fortresses and battlefields where the people of the Party fought the fascists and traitors. In the streets of Tirana and throughout Albania, such great heroism has been shown by our people. Your young minds cannot imagine, but your pure hearts deeply feel it. In the gardens of the "Brigades" palace, where we are gathered tonight, unprecedented heroism has been shown by our partisans. Of course, many of you here with me have lost loved ones in the war. Many of your fathers or brothers were killed in these gardens while bombarding the German fascists. But they fought and died for Albania to live, and you, their sons and daughters, and we, their comrades and all of Albania, are proud of them and admire them.

The youth comrades should go to honour and lay flowers on your great leader, Qemal Stafa. The enemy had only seen Qemal's chest, and he with his chest forward attacked until the time of his death. He did not let go of the rifle in his hand even when his holy body, torn apart by the bullets of the fascists, lay lifeless in the riverbed outside Tirana. He fought and died for the people, for the Homeland, for you.

The youth comrades should take you to see the house where Vojo Kushi fought. Vojo Kushi was brave, a great hero, and such men are rarely born. There were only three of them, and of these, only Vojo Kushi was healthy. His comrade Sadik Stavaleci had tuberculosis, Xhoxhi Martini was wounded all over his body, but all three had hearts of steel. These heroes fought for six hours against hundreds of enemies, against tanks and machine guns. Do you know what Vojo did when the bullets and bombs ran out? He attacked the tank with his chest forward. He fought and died for the people, for the Homeland, for you.

In every street of Tirana you will go, you will see the deeds of those who organized the fight against fascism,

you will see and follow the footsteps of the brave workers Misto Mame, Vasil Shanto, Mihal Duri, the People's Hero Kajo Karafili and hundreds of others. Cherish their names dearly in your minds and hold their precious memory in your pure hearts, because such great people only find their place in pure hearts. The youth comrades should take you to see inside and outside the city of Tirana, showing you the places where the heroic partisans of the 1st Division attacked the Germans day and night, and also where in these attacks the pioneers took part.

But why were the partisans so brave? I can tell you. Because that is how the Party taught them to be. It said: "Fight to the death for the freedom of Albania, the freedom of the people and genuine democracy." And because these desires of the Party were the desires of the people, the partisans fulfilled their duty to the end.

But why did the partisans fight and die with songs on their lips, not as if they were heading towards their death, but as if they were going to a wedding? They fought while singing because they were convinced that with their struggle and sacrifice they would secure for you a happy life. And they did secure it for you. They fulfilled their duty. Now it remains for us, the entire Albanian people, from me to you children, to continue their great work. Our martyrs instructed us: "Love your Homeland with all your heart, defend it and build it, without even once considering whether to pay the ultimate sacrifice." Just as our heroes gave everything for Albania and our people, so must we.

This is their testament, and we will fulfil it. The sacrifices of our martyrs should be an example for us. With this example and the memory of the heroes of our anti-fascist war in our hearts, we must move forward and learn as much as possible.

One day Qemal Stafa said to me: "Will that day come when we see our pioneers happy, having their



own schools and playgrounds? Will we see them grow up healthy, all sadness disappearing from their hearts?" That day has come, and we are building this happy life for you. Unfortunately, our dear comrade Qemal Stafa could not see it, but he was killed with the full conviction that this day would come because that is what the Party had decided.

In Tirana, you will see many other beautiful things: theatres, cinemas, etc. You will see how the schools are organized. Go visit the factories, where workers, your brothers, labour heroically day and night. Go see the youth railway, the magnificent work of your elder brothers. After a few days, you will go to the demonstration of your pioneer comrades in Tirana. But you will also see something else, you are my guests until July 10 and on that day you will see one of the most splendid works of our Party and people in Tirana — you will the parade of our heroic army (*here, the enthusiasm of the pioneers was at its peak, they clapped and cheered "Long live our army!" "The army is the guarantee!"*). You, dear children, are absolutely right. Yes, the army is the guarantee, it is what protects the rights of our people, it is what protects the Homeland from every danger, it is what protects your happy life, so you are absolutely right and you must love the army with all your hearts.

Tonight we will see the pioneers of Tirana perform, as they have prepared a beautiful show. Congratulations to the pioneers of Tirana! However, I am convinced that you, from the other cities, are not at all inferior to them. I regret not having seen you play because I haven't come to your cities, but here I give you my word that I will soon come to every city and see who puts on the best show. Do not be upset that tonight I will praise those in Tirana — praises are for tonight because we must encourage those who play better, but I will give a final opinion on this matter when I see you too.

When you go back to your homes, give your parents

and all your pioneer comrades my many, many thanks.

Long live all of you, the pioneers of Albania, the entire young generation of our country!

Long live the Albanian people!





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