

UPRISING in **ALBANIA**



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UPRISING in ALBANIA

by Lynn Walsh

Preface

The original text of this pamphlet was completed on 25 March 1997 and issued as a statement of the International Secretariat of CWI, published here with minor amendments taking account of new information and more recent developments. The new Postscript was completed on 14 April, 1997.

Our aim is to provide an up-to-date analysis of the origins and course of the Albanian uprising, and especially of the extremely contradictory character of this post-Stalinist mass movement. The complex problems posed by the national question in Kosova/Kosovo, Macedonia, Greece, and throughout the Southern Balkans are, because of pressures of time and space, regrettably beyond the scope of this pamphlet, though they will most probably be high on the Balkan agenda in the near future.

I would like to thank IS comrades for their comments and suggestions on the draft; Manny for rapid, meticulous typing; Dennis for design and layout; and especially our print comrades for producing yet another publication at a time when the general election campaign of the Socialist Party, the CWI's British Section, has made massive printing demands on them.

L. W.



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Introduction

The fate of President Berisha hangs in the balance. The collapse of the fraudulent pyramid finance schemes in January, wiping out the savings of millions of Albanians, triggered a mass movement against his increasingly repressive regime. Berisha's move to crush the protest with armed force provoked a spontaneous mass uprising, with most of the population in the South and later in parts of Tirana seizing weapons from the armouries and beating back the army and security forces. The police melted away and the army cracked. By the second week

of March, most of the South, about a third of the country, was controlled by the insurgents.

Berisha was forced to form a coalition with parliamentary opposition leaders on 11 March, with the Socialist Bashkim Fino as prime minister. Promising new elections in June, the president offered an amnesty to the rebels, provided they surrendered their arms. The deadline expired on 20 March with a deadlock in the country. With some support in the North, Berisha seems to have regained partial military control in Tirana, but does not have the power to march on the South. The insurgents control the South, with massive



On the streets of the southern city of Vlora



armaments in their hands, but appear to lack sufficient common purpose or organisational co-ordination to advance on Tirana. At the same time, heavily armed gangsters and local warlords are on the rampage. Once again, tens of thousands of Albanians are trying to flee to Italy or Greece. Over 10,000 Albanian refugees arrived in Italy during the last week or so of March. The Western capitalist powers, who backed Berisha as the leader who would sweep away the old Communist (that is, Stalinist) system, are now in disarray. Britain and Germany are refusing to involve their own forces in any intervention, pushing Italy to play the main role (see Postscript).

The absolutely impoverished and cruelly oppressed workers, peasants and youth have provided the overwhelming forces in the Albanian uprising. The energy and determination with which they seized arms and took on the forces of the dictatorship will inspire workers everywhere and strike fear into all capitalist rulers. The working class, however, has not played an independent, leading political role in this movement. Lacking any class leadership and organisation, the insurgent workers, at this stage, have not been able to give the movement clear anti-capitalist aims or strategic direction. "Albanians know exactly what they don't want - Berisha - but they don't know exactly what they do want," commented one observer. (*The Independent*, 21 March)

This reflects the extreme ideological vacuum which has opened up following the collapse of Stalinism and the fragmentation and disorientation of the left internationally. In this situation, other forces have inevitably come to the fore. Senior ex-officers of the former Stalinist armed forces seem to have taken over the leadership of the committees in the Southern towns. "Some rebel leaders," according to reports, "have threatened to declare their own government in the South." (*Financial Times*, 21 March) But there is no evidence that such a government, if it could be established, would in any way offer an alternative to capitalist chaos and corrupt, bourgeois politics. In reality, the situation appears quite anarchic. The economy has

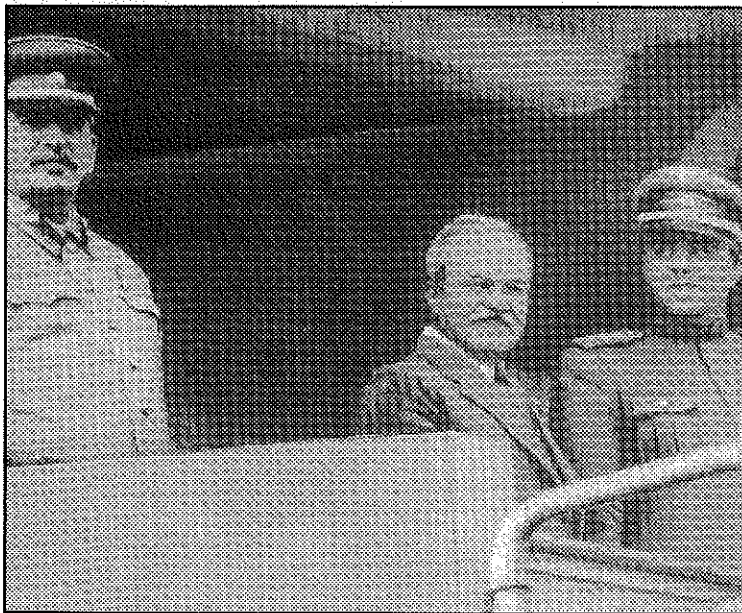
disintegrated. The limited recovery during 1996, which followed the catastrophic 90% fall in industrial production between 1990-94, has been completely wiped out. Guns are the only currency. Local warlords and Mafioso are ruthlessly competing for territory and loot.

Berisha is relying on his shaky coalition to carry him through to new elections in June. The recently freed Socialist Party leader, Fatos Nano, has said Berisha should "step aside but not down", in other words act as merely titular president pending the elections. But rebel leaders in the South have so far ignored Berisha's offer of negotiations. Bashkim Fino, the Socialist premier, cancelled his planned visit to Gjirokaster in March to negotiate with one of the main rebel leaders, general Agim Gozhita. It was only on 3 April that Fino visited Gjirokaster, for a meeting with Italian prime minister Romano Prodi, and to meet with rebel leaders, telling them that the hated Shik (secret police) had been disbanded.

Berisha has also called on the European powers to send in a multi-national peace-keeping force. The EU sent food aid and a small force of "advisors". While they fear another flood of Albanian refugees fleeing to Italy, Germany, etc, and trigger conflict in Kosovo, Macedonia, and Greece, the Council of Europe (the West European security alliance) and NATO are very wary, at this stage, of sending forces which could become embroiled in a nightmare conflict. Asked why troops were not being sent, the German Chancellor, Kohl, replied: "To put it quite bluntly, if you say we should send troops, then you would have to tell the soldiers what they would do there. And if I put this question to you, which I can't answer, then you can see my response." (*Financial Times*, 15 March) Subsequently, on 14 April a so-called Multinational Protection Force led by Italy (with about 2,500 troops), supported by France (about 1,000 troops), and with smaller contingents from Greece, Turkey, Spain and Romania, was despatched to Albania (see Postscript).

The collapse of Albanian Stalinism

From 1992 until recently, the Western capitalist powers gave every support to Berisha, turning a blind eye to his dictatorial methods and the corruption permeating his regime. The capitalist Democratic Party, led by Berisha, was an ideal political battering ram to pulverise the old state apparatus and shatter the state-controlled economy. Although profoundly shaken by the collapse of the other Stalinist regimes, especially by the bloody overthrow of Ceausescu, the leaders of the Albanian Party of Labour (the Communist Party) under Ramiz Alia clung tenaciously to power, even while they were compelled to concede some economic and political reforms. For a while, they were able to rely on the inertia of the rural population, especially in the South. Albania was the most economically backward and isolated of all the European Stalinist states. Hoxha's repressive, autarkic policies had induced an extremely claustrophobic political and cultural climate. The shattering of Stalinism appeared to be taking longer in Albania, and the Western powers were eager to accelerate the process. Berisha's Democratic Party was their vehicle.

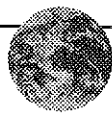


Stalin, Molotov and Hoxha in Moscow, 1947

The Stalinist transformation

In the closing stages of the second world war, Albania was liberated from the retreating Nazi forces by the mass partisan movement, led by the Albanian Communist Party. There were no Soviet forces in Albania. The social transformation, with a radical land reform, nationalisation of trade and industry, and the formation of a totalitarian state apparatus on the Stalinist model were carried through by indigenous forces. The Albanian Communist Party was supported by the Yugoslav Communist Party, but Tito's demand for Albania to be incorporated into the Yugoslav Federation led to a breach between Hoxha and Tito. When the Soviet-Yugoslav schism developed, Hoxha aligned with Stalin and received aid from the USSR. When Khrushchev launched "de-Stalinisation" and pursued rapprochement with the capitalist West and Yugoslavia, Hoxha then aligned himself with Mao Zedong and increasingly began to emulate the Maoist model. Hoxha presided over a brutally repressive totalitarian regime, almost completely isolated even from the other Stalinist states.

Given the previous economic backwardness of the country, the state-controlled development during the 1950s and 1960s of electricity, industry and mineral resources produced significant economic progress. The radical land reform, with the sharing out of the estates between the peasants, gave the regime a strong base. Between the mid-1950s and the mid-1960s, the regime raised the level of literacy, health, education, and general living standards. In the late 1950s, however, the bureaucratic collectivisation of the land into state-controlled "co-operatives" brought serious disruption of agriculture and left a legacy of food shortages later. Moreover, the bureaucratic economic command structure and the 1950s-technology of major industries meant that they became increasingly obsolete during the 1970s. The breach with China, when Beijing opened relations with US imperialism and the Yugoslav regime, resulted in the termination of Chinese aid to Albania in 1978, which led to a marked economic slowdown and mounting social problems.



Hoxha's image - hiding the reality of his brutally repressive regime

In 1990-91 Albania was still a predominantly agricultural country, with a per capita income of around \$850, that is on the same level as many African countries.

The collapse of Hoxha's regime

Hoxha maintained total personal power until his death in 1985. In 1981 he had purged his main henchman and security boss, Mehmet Shehu, who appears to have been arguing for a turn to the West for aid. On Hoxha's death, Ramiz Alia took over and made cautious moves towards decentralisation and liberalisation. Events in Eastern Europe after 1989, however, and especially the sudden, violent overthrow of Ceausescu in Rumania, compelled the APL to move towards real changes. In November 1989 the regime released some political pressures, relaxed cultural controls and promised economic reforms and higher standards.

In the Spring of 1990 there was a massive wave of strikes and demonstrations.

● Uprising in Albania

There was a deep slump in the economy and no sign of the promised prosperity. The regime used the security forces to violently disperse mass demonstrations and the Sigurimi (secret police) intensified its repressive activity against all the regime's opponents. The APL leadership promised further reforms, including bonuses for workers, greater decentralisation of economic management, and more food and consumer goods. Freedom of religion was conceded and Alia promised choice of candidates in future elections. Nevertheless, Alia still rejected the idea of a multi-party system, claiming it was not appropriate for Albania.

Mass demonstrations continued during the Summer of 1990. APL hard-liners were removed from the party leadership, but Alia's half-hearted concessions only reinforced the protest movement. Thousands began to leave the country for Italy or Greece, a flight which culminated in the mass exodus of January-March 1991. The mass protest movement against the regime intensified in December 1990, and on 11 December Alia was forced to concede the legalisation of parties for the forthcoming elections. The government ordered the removal of Stalin's statue from Tirana's main square.



Ramiz Alia - Hoxha's successor

Berisha's regime of crisis

Dr Sali Berisha, a heart specialist, was formerly a member of the Stalinist APL, and personal physician to some of the Party's top leaders. By 1990 he was championing the market and bourgeois democracy. In the last days of the old regime, Berisha emerged a prominent leader of the Democratic Party, which rapidly developed as the main opposition party to the ruling APL. Formed in December 1990, when a wave of strikes and mass demonstrations forced Hoxha's successor, Ramiz Alia, to legalise political parties, the DP was massively financed by the EU Council of Ministers (with a \$160,000 grant and \$50,000 loan) and other West European organisations.

The DP leaders promised that they would lead Albania out of the backward autarky of Hoxha's Stalinism into Europe, which, they claimed, would produce a rapid rise in living standards for the people. Berisha promised a fast-track transition to western-style democracy and to the market economy through privatisation of state industries and the collectivisation of farms. The western capitalist powers clearly saw the Democratic Party as the political battering ram to pulverise the old regime and open up Albania to 'market forces'. Western companies were eager to exploit the country's rich chromium and oil reserves and its pool of cheap labour.

1991 opened with a series of strikes of miners, dockers, and transport workers, together with massive demonstrations of students and workers demanding democratisation. Production slumped, with industrial production down 60 percent and GDP falling below the 1976 level. There were acute food shortages. The DP and other opposition parties offered to support a wage freeze and strike ban if the elections were postponed to May, to give them more time to prepare. Student strikes and demonstrations continued, and a massive crowd tore down Hoxha's statue in Tirana's Skanderberg Square. Alia's government struggled to keep a tight grip on

the government, economy and media, but had to concede reforms almost daily. They legalised the private ownership of cars and motorcycles and ended the ban on beards, previously officially regarded as an "alien manifestation".

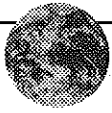
When the first parliamentary elections were held towards the end of March 1991, however, the DP failed to gain a majority, taking only 40 per cent of the popular vote. The DP won a majority in most of the towns (defeating Alia in his Tirana constituency, for instance), but the APL retained stronger support in the south, especially amongst the predominantly rural population of small farmers and agricultural labourers. In the election Alia, in an attempt to retain power, also promised democracy, privatisation, and prosperity. There was a widespread fear among the peasantry that the break-up of the collective farms demanded by Berisha would invite the return of the landlords dispossessed in 1945, and some ex-landlords were already trying to seize land.

Nano's government shattered by strikes

After the APL victory, Alia (who resigned as first secretary of the APL) was elected president by parliament, and he appointed Fatos Nano as prime minister. In several cities, however, there were mass demonstrations protesting against the defeat of the DP. In the northern city of Shkoder thousands ransacked and burned the PLA headquarters, and the town hall was trashed. Three rioters were shot dead by the police, which provoked a new wave of protests in Tirana and other cities demanding new elections and the prosecution of those responsible for the Shkoder killings.

Alia's new government initiated large-scale privatisations, and legalised commercial and financial activities by private companies. The economy continued to slide into paralysis. The flight to leave the country gathered pace again, with tens of thousands trying to escape to Italy or Greece.

Nano's government was shaken by mass demonstrations and strikes. The recently



formed umbrella group, the Union of Independent Trade Unions (UITUA), called a general strike for 16 May. They demanded 50 per cent increasing pay and pensions, a six-hour day (and no night shifts) for women, and action against those responsible for the Shkoder killings. A settlement agreed between the government and UITUA negotiators was rejected by the workers, and up to 350,000 workers (out of a workforce of about 750,000) were involved strike action at the end of May. Miners at Valias began an underground hunger strike which aroused widespread sympathy.

On 29 May tens of thousands demonstrated in Skanderbeg square, supporting the hunger-strikers and calling for the overthrow of the government. Protesters attacked police with bottles, rocks and firebombs. Alia admitted that the strikers' demands were just, but could not be met by the government. On 12 June Alia dismissed Nano's government and appointed a "government of national stability" and promised new elections in 1992. The new government, with the APL's Ylli Buifi as prime minister, for the first time included nine non-APL ministers, including seven DP ministers, with the DP's Gramoz Pashko as deputy premier. The general strike was brought to an end with concessions. Buifi began to cut back public spending, accelerate privatisation of industries

and the health service, and abolished many price controls. The government appealed to the West for international economic assistance.

It was at this time that the APL, at its 10th Congress, changed its name to the Socialist Party of Albania, with Fatos Nano as chairman. As with other former Stalinist parties in eastern Europe, the new Socialist party adopted a reformist policy, declaring itself in favour of democracy, social justice and economic reform - in other words, the market and bourgeois democracy. At the same time, there was for the first time public criticism of Hoxha's "cult of personality", while nine former politburo members were expelled from the party.

Far from stabilising the situation, however, Buifi's coalition government brought even greater turmoil. The enactment of a land privatisation law at the end of June triggered violent conflict in the countryside. Peasant families were officially granted private use of up to an acre of co-operative land, but some peasants seized land on the basis of pre-collectivisation boundaries, while others were left without any land at all. The abolition of the people's councils (local administrative bodies) resulted in complete administrative chaos. While peasants remaining the countryside hoarded their food, tens of thousands of dispossessed peasants fled to Tirana (about 30,000 during 1991) while others tried to reach Italy. Despite emergency food aid from the G-24 governments, there were acute shortages, which provoked riots in several areas, in which crowds ransacked food-processing plants, restaurants, food stores, etc. In September the DP, in alliance with the small Social Democratic and Republican Parties, and the Independent Trade Unions (UITUA), called mass rallies in Tirana, Vlore, and Shkodre, demanding an end to "Communist" control of the media, the end of "Stalinist censorship", and the sacking and trial of former "leading cadres" of the APL. In December Berisha called for the DP to break with the coalition government. He made this call while Gramoz Pashko, the DP's co-founder and deputy premier, was in London for IMF talks.



Tirana in the aftermath of the mass demonstrations of 1990

Nevertheless, seven DP ministers left the government and the DP split, with Pashko breaking away to form the Democratic Alliance.

Berisha's counter-revolution

Alia formed yet another caretaker government, which was immediately rocked by massive demonstrations called by the UITUA calling for further wage increases. The Socialist Party was no longer capable of keeping a grip on the government, and Alia called new elections for 22 March 1992.

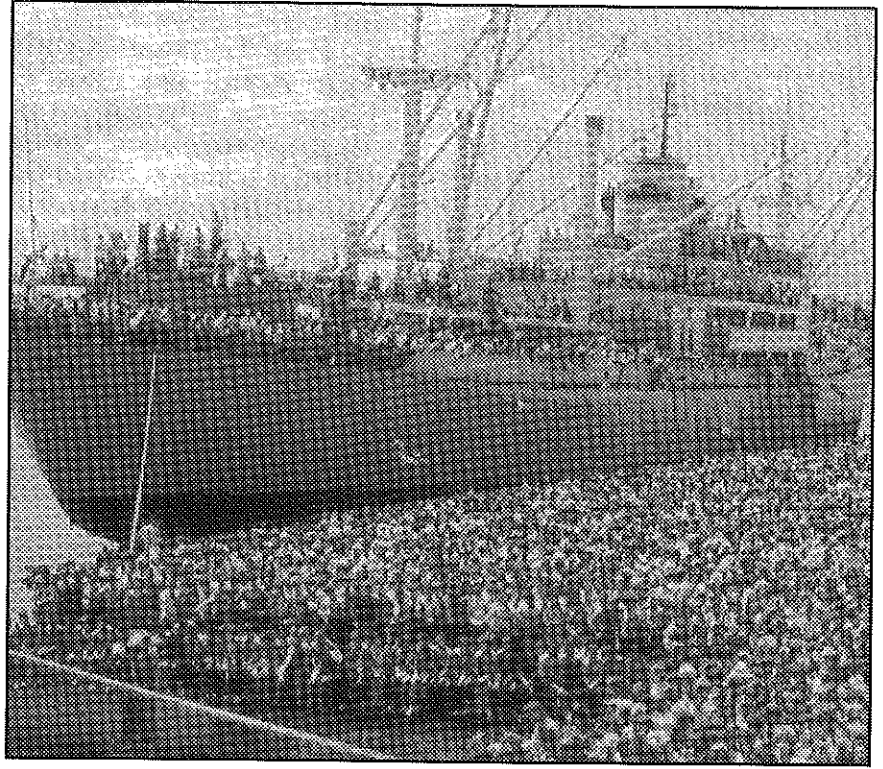
This time, the DP won a decisive electoral victory, taking 62 per cent of the vote compared with 25 per cent for the Socialist Party of Albania (the former APL). Berisha used every conceivable demagogic trick to secure a victory. Whipping up nationalism, he proclaimed that "the DP will not stop fighting until a great dream of uniting the Albanian nation comes true." A Gheg himself, Berisha highlighted the demand for unification with Kosova ('Kosovo' in Serbian), with its Gheg popu-

lation. The old Stalinist regime drew its main support from the Tosk population in the South, and did not give high priority to the issue of Kosova. Later, Berisha would tone down the call for a Greater Albania, in order to keep the support of his western sponsors. Berisha assured the people that there would be a flood of food aid and foreign investment into Albania, if only the ex-communist politicians were cleaned out of the government. He also promised that visas would be readily available for workers seeking employment in Greece, Italy, and other European countries.

As soon as he was set up in the presidential palace, Berisha exhumed the body of Hoxha from the Martyrs' Cemetery in Tirana, ordering the remains to be buried in an obscure suburban graveyard. This symbolised the counter-revolution Berisha was unleashing. He promoted the most reactionary forces in Albanian society. Emigré landlords and capitalists swarmed back to the country, especially the descendants of exiles who supported the nationalist Balli Kombetar (anti-King Zog) or the monarchist Legaliteti during the Second World War, as opposed to the Communist-



Sali Berisha's electoral victory in 1992



Albanian refugees arrive in Italy

led partisans. They could not wait to grab the factories and estates they lost 50 years earlier, and snapped up cut-price privatisation bargains at the same time. While proclaiming the need for democracy and prosperity, the returned émigrés were seeking political revenge and personal gain. There was also an invasion of missionaries and clergy, amply financed from various countries (including Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Greece, the United States, and the Vatican). Needless to say, their spiritual campaigns for the hearts and minds of the Albanian people was closely tied to earthly policies for the resurrection of the profit motive.

The dream of democratic prosperity proclaimed by Berisha did not materialise. Economy and society were disintegrating. The obsolete factories of the Hoxha era were mostly left to rot. Others were used for light industry or assembling imported components, paying workers \$3 a day. Favoured clients looted state assets and gained a stranglehold over the import-export business, in return for paying tribute to their minister-patrons in the government. The *New York Times* reported that Albania was breaking the sanctions against Serbia by supplying oil and gas to neigh-

bouring Montenegro. A large portion of the aid from western governments swelled the accounts of DP ministers, while a share was directed to the police and security forces, who were re-equipped with new vehicles, walkie-talkie radios, and new weaponry.

Agricultural production slumped with the uncontrolled seizure of state-owned co-operative land and property. While former bureaucrats and ex-landlords staked their claims, the peasants demolished co-operative buildings and seized materials, livestock and implements for their own smallholdings. Entrepreneurs and gangsters became indistinguishable. Not surprisingly, there was an escalation of social disorder and violent crime. Legions left the countryside for Tirana, squatting in makeshift shanty towns around the capital.

Thousands tried to flee the country, especially after the abolition of unemployment benefits for state workers. Many went to Italy, ending up in squalid refugee camps. Over a quarter of a million Albanians went to work in Greece, on construction sites and in the black economy, sending home \$500 million a year, which

saved many families from utter destitution. Unemployment, poverty, hunger and every kind of social hardship worsened. Popular support for the Democratic Party began to ebb away. In the local elections in August 1992, DP support fell to around 40 per cent, while the Socialist Party made gains. This prompted Berisha, the country's first elected president since Ahmed Zogu in 1925-28, to turn increasingly to authoritarian methods. Berisha arrested Alia and other ex-Stalinist leaders and threw them into jail, charged with crimes of repression and corruption. Many were later sentenced to long prison terms. Stalinist and 'Enverist' parties were banned, and under his "Genocide Act" former CP ministers were banned from taking any government office until 2000. Berisha also began the step-by-step purge of his own Democratic Party, seven of whose leaders split away to form the Democratic Alliance in November 1992. His counter-revolutionary drive to restore capitalism was conducted under the banner of liberal democracy. But in reality Berisha continued many of Hoxha's police-state methods, and also borrowed from his bonapartist predecessor Zogu,


who cut through his electoral problems by proclaiming himself King Zog I in 1928.

A new dictatorship

In 1994 Berisha put forward a new constitution. Manoeuvring to by-pass parliament, Berisha was proposing the constitutional reincarnation of a one-party state, with himself as executive president, concentrating extraordinary power into his hands. He was demanding the power to dissolve parliament and issue decrees. He proposed to chair the High Council of Justice, and wield authority over the judiciary. When even the DP-dominated parliament opposed this attempted constitutional coup, Berisha turned to the traditional tactic of bonapartists, the plebiscite. He held a referendum in November 1994 aimed at securing popular approval for his constitution. All the opposition parties opposed the referendum. The Socialist Party (with a third of the seats in parliament) and the Greek Minority Party called for a No vote. The Social Democratic Party (7 seats), the Democratic Alliance (6), and the Right-Wing Democratic Party (2) called for a boycott.



Albanian workers cross the border to Greece



Despite the fact that Berisha made full use of Albanian television, manipulated the ballot, and used the secret police to intimidate the opposition, he suffered a humiliating defeat. His constitutional proposal was rejected by 54 per cent to 42 per cent among those who voted, with an estimated 25 per cent of the electorate boycotting the election. This was an overwhelming rejection of any return to a dictatorial regime. The opposition parties called for early elections.

In spite of this set-back, Berisha continued to strengthen his personal power. Early in 1995 he ousted Eduard Selami, the DP chair and purged other party critics. Berisha's policy was that "anyone who is not for me is against me." Around this time the Democratic Party was hit by a scandal which exposed the involvement of the defence minister, Zhulali, in the sale and shipment of arms to Bosnia or Macedonia, which ended up in the hands of the Serb forces.

Berisha's purge also extended to the opposition parties. Fatos Nano, the Socialist Party chair, was imprisoned for twelve years on corruption charges. A leader of the Democratic Alliance was shot dead in a public rally by undercover police agents. Judges and prosecutors who stepped out of line were dismissed, while press journalists were sacked, beaten up, or jailed on trumped-up corruption charges. Berisha systematically strengthened the police forces and especially the Shik, the majority of whose personnel were drawn from his own northern region Tropja clan. In reality, Berisha's policy was a gradual process of introducing martial law.

Opinion polls indicated growing support for the Socialists and the Social Democrats, although a growing section of the electorate expressed hostility to all political parties and their leaders, who had totally failed to provide solutions to the growing problems of water shortages, electricity failures, soaring unemployment, acute food shortages and poverty. Yet in the first round of the new parliamentary elections in May, 1996, the Democratic Party gained a landslide victo-

ry. Even as the first-round voting was taking place the opposition parties denounced the election as a fraud and launched a boycott. Western observers, such as the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe), which had more or less ignored gross ballot-rigging and intimidation in previous elections, were still slow in denouncing the fraudulent character of the elections. Two days after the balloting, however, the police viciously attacked an opposition demonstration in Tirana's Skanderberg Square, in full view of an array of observers from the OSCE, the Council of Europe, and the European Parliament. The Western powers could no longer maintain their 'blind-eye' policy. The OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights soon reported that the government had seriously violated election procedures and that a series of incidents "severely questioned the credibility of the democratic process". The OSCE called for an all-party dialogue to prepare fresh elections.

Berisha brazenly proclaimed a "crushing victory over the Red Front". Under pressure from the western powers, however, Berisha was forced in June to hold a re-run of the ballot in several constituencies. The Socialist Party, the Social Democrats, and the Democratic Alliance continued to boycott the electoral farce, and called country-wide rallies against "the restoration of a new dictatorship in Albania". The turnout for the rallies, however, was very low, partly because of intimidation by the security forces but also because of lack of popular confidence in the effectiveness of the opposition parties. With the backing of the European Parliament, the opposition parties called for new elections within 18 months, but Berisha ruled out new elections before the 2000 deadline. The Socialist Party boycotted the reconvened parliament. Brussels put the negotiations for an association agreement between Albania and the EU on hold, while the US government refused to recognise the new parliament.

Berisha was determined to carry on as normal. Despite its criticisms of the electoral procedures, the Council of Europe urged the Socialists and their allies to drop

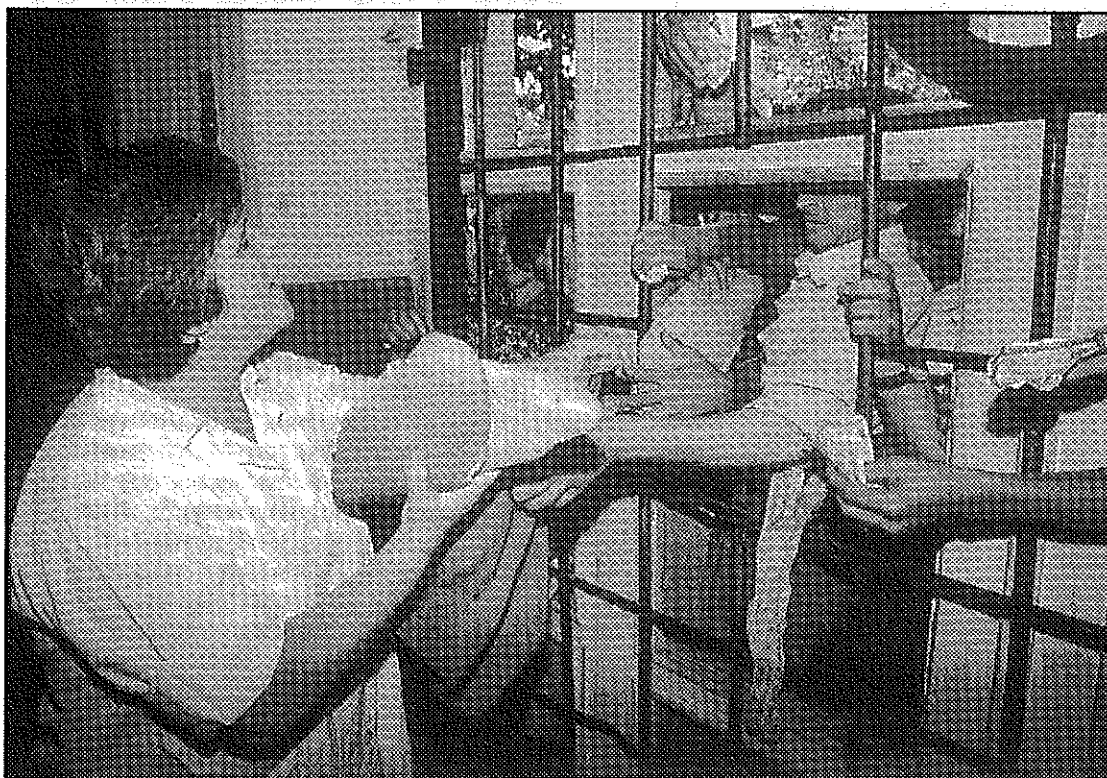
their boycott and participate in the parliament. The Council supported moves by the Socialist Party, the Social Democrats and the Democratic Alliance to establish a round table on electoral reform. The Council appeared to be reassured by Berisha's appointment of a permanent electoral commission, even though it was chaired by Nestor Teresk, who had presided over the manipulation of the May-June voting. The diplomats of EU states also urged the Socialist Party and the Social Democrats to participate in the local elections, due to be held in mid-October 1996. They still preferred the "stability" of Berisha to the possible return of the ex-Stalinists to power.

The local elections on 20 October actually strengthened the DP's political grip on the country. The DP won 58 mayoral seats and control of 267 communes (municipal councils), while the Socialist Party won four mayoral seats and 15 communes. The embassies of the major EU states quickly issued statements welcoming the "free and fair" elections. Once again, the West turned a blind eye to a multitude of irregularities, including ballot-rigging and intimidation of opposition candidates. At


that time, the biggest opposition party, the Socialists (whose chairman, Fatos Nano, was in prison) were torn by internal crisis, a factional battle between hard-liners and reformers. The second largest opposition party, the Centre Bloc, made up of the Democratic Alliance and the Social Democrats, was completely lacking in resources - or any political alternative. In any case, there were signs that a large section of the population were completely alienated from all the established political parties.

Western powers back Berisha

A major factor in the DP's decisive victory in the local elections were the pyramid investment schemes. The Democratic Party leaders sponsored the schemes, and their rapid spread and the fabulous rates of interest being paid to investors gave the illusion of economic success. The DP threatened that the pyramid schemes would collapse if they lost the election. Thousands of people had sold everything they owned to invest in one or more of the schemes, and now depended on them for their income. "A vote against the DP was a



A private bakery in Tirana, 1992 - people remain hungry



vote against their own food supply," noted one commentator.

Whatever their misgivings, the western powers were prepared to live with Berisha's regime, in spite of his corrupt drive to establish a one-party dictatorship. For his part, Berisha extracted the maximum political advantage from the backing provided by Europe. It was only when the disastrous collapse of the pyramids provoked a popular revolt that the western powers changed their tune.

Why did the western powers turn a blind eye for so long, when it had long been clear that Berisha was heading for a deep political and economic crisis? "Mr. Berisha," admitted *The Guardian's* editorial (4 March), "has been treated mildly by the European nations and the US... He has been treated indulgently because of his anti-Communist credentials." The right-wing *Wall Street Journal's* editor conceded that "Mr. Berisha's government clearly has its flaws", but "the prospective alternatives look a lot worse." The greatest danger for the Wall Street financiers is not dictatorship and corruption but "that Albanians' mistaken notion of capitalism, and subsequent disenchantment with the bill of goods they believe to be capitalism, will translate into political gains for the very forces that would lead Albania back down the road of economic depravity.. The danger is that we could see a counter-revolution from the Left." (*WSJ*, 4 March)

The other reason Berisha "escaped censure" is because, once in power, he "avoided inflaming the spirit of pan-Albanian nationalism which might easily cause insurrection in Serbian Kosovo and among the Albanian minority in Macedonia." (*Guardian*, 4 March) "Diplomats concerned with stability in this volatile Balkan region appreciate what they see as his [Berisha's] growing understanding of the need for cautious diplomacy." (*Financial Times*, 21 July 1994)

When he was campaigning for support in the 1992 elections, Berisha proclaimed: "Our brothers, living in their territories in the former Yugoslavia and wherever they are: the DPA will not stop fighting until her

great dream of uniting the Albanian nation comes true." During the war in Bosnia, however, the western powers took consolation from the fact that Berisha in power merely engaged in smuggling oil and arms to the Serbs. This was in flagrant breach of UN sanctions, but preferable to Berisha actively supporting the Kosovars. Enjoying all the advantages of western backing, Berisha quickly learned to sing the right tunes: "All we are seeking is a democratic space for Albanians wherever they are. That means democratic institutions and elections. A solution cannot be achieved by forcibly changing borders." (*Financial Times*, 21 July, 1994)

But the blind-eye policy of the capitalist powers has now rebounded on them. The crisis in Albania threatens to spill over into Greece, Macedonia, and Kosovo - fuelled by the flood of arms seized from Albania's armouries. Italy, Greece, Germany and other EU states once again face the prospect of the arrival of a mass of starving, destitute Albanians fleeing conflict and suffering at home.

The rise and fall of the pyramids

The rise and sudden collapse of the pyramid finance schemes was not an isolated phenomena, merely the work of a handful of enterprising crooks. The pyramids were the natural product of a gangster-dominated economy, which provided a growth medium for a gigantic swindle that exploited the desperation of millions of impoverished Albanians. Nor was the DP government unaware of what was going on. Berisha's ministers publicly encouraged the schemes, and siphoned off a share of the profits to finance their fraudulent election campaigns. Berisha hailed the pyramids as "swallows of capitalism". Now he insists that "the main responsibility lies with those who invested money in the schemes." (*Wall Street Journal*, 4 April)

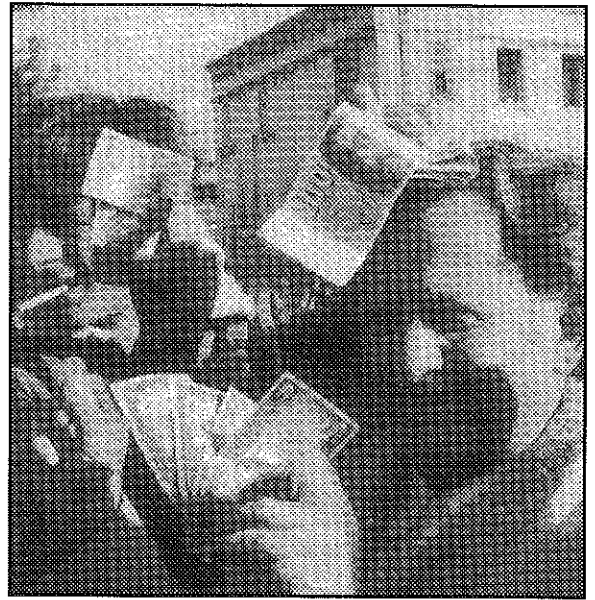
Until 1996, Albania was regarded as the IMF's "model pupil". Berisha was credited

with bringing inflation down from over 400 per cent to only six per cent, and achieving an annual growth rate of around ten per cent. "The state of contemporary Albania," commented the *Financial Times* (21 July 1994), "is a far cry from the desperate days of 1990..." They painted a picture of "well-stocked markets, busy fields, bustling streets, and new cafes" which backed up "the president's claim of sharply rising living standards after decades of hunger and poverty." Berisha showed no modesty in claiming the credit: "Shock therapy is a bitter pill, but it is a brilliant invention. We have been prepared to sacrifice popularity by pressing ahead with reforms."

According to Emma Bonino, the EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid, "European investment in Albania since 1992 totalled about \$600 million [£365 million], the most aid per capita given to any country. Less than a third went towards promoting civic institutions." (*The Guardian*, 2 April) The rest went towards bolstering up the regime's police apparatus and into the flourishing businesses of Berisha's cronies.

It was only in 1996 that the IMF and the United States government changed its line on Berisha's policies. Alarmed by the spiralling growth of the pyramid schemes, the IMF suspended its credit lines to Albania and the US government refused to recognise the parliament which emerged from the rigged elections of May-June 1996. The US began to criticise Berisha for "slipping off the democratic road," particularly complaining about the involvement of government ministers in the country's thriving international drugs trade.

Yet several European governments, particularly Italy and Germany, were still actively pushing for EU financial support for Berisha's regime. The German government has been a key diplomatic and military supporter of Berisha, aiming to build up Albania against Serbia. "German advisers from the Conrad Adenauer Institute in Bonn were key architects of the Berisha re-election strategy last year, and the German metal giant Preussag has bought up Albania's chromium mines, its key indus-



trial asset." (*The Times*, 6 March 1997) Germany also provided training for Albanian army officers.

The gangster state

There is not a shadow of a doubt that West European governments were fully informed of what was going on in Albania. Once the crisis broke, the London daily, *The Independent*, published reports based on "frustrated intelligence sources, who have been vainly warning about what is in effect a gangster state..." (14 February 1997) "Classified documents have circulated in Western capitals for the last two years citing evidence of collusion and active participation by members of the ruling Democratic Party in drugs trafficking, illegal arms trading, and, until the end of the war in Bosnia, large-scale sanctions-busting via oil sales to Serbia and Montenegro."

"Albania has turned into a repressive one-party state, where corruption is rife at all levels and a largely gangster-based economy is under the strict clientelistic control of the ruling party. Drugs barons from Kosovo... operate in Albania with impunity, and much of the transportation of heroin and other drugs across Albania, from Macedonia and Greece, en route to Italy, is believed to be organised by the Shik, the state security police..." *The Independent* gave evidence of the key role played by Shqiponja, a company



openly linked with ruling Democratic Party and involved in running arms, drugs, and other contraband. Berisha's former Interior Minister, Agron Musaraj, was forced out of his position just before the May 1996 general elections, following pressure from the US government over his involvement in the drugs trade. The Defence Minister, Safet Zhulali, was involved in smuggling arms and other contraband. Western intelligence agencies also reported on the major smuggling activity of Albania's largest company, Vefa Holdings, the biggest company involved in the pyramid schemes. Vefa Holdings has always been closely linked with Berisha's government, lavishly funding the DP's election campaigns. Its chairman, Vehbi Alinuchj, was publicly backed by Berisha's former Prime Minister, Meksi. Vefa is widely believed to be involved in arms and drugs smuggling and is under investigation in Italy for its suspected links with mafia organisations in Sicily, Calabria and Puglia. One of Italy's chief anti-mafia prosecutors, Luigi Vigna, has confirmed the involvement of Italian organised crime syndicates in Albanian pyramid schemes.

The pyramid fraud

The pyramid finance schemes provided an ideal vehicle for laundering dirty drugs money. In the absence of savings banks, the pyramid schemes found it easy to attract savings from many thousands of poor Albanians by offering irresistible interest rates ranging from 10 to 25 per cent a month. People sold their houses, their livestock and their possessions to invest in the schemes. Economic immigrants working in Greece and Italy also withdrew money from their bank accounts to transfer to the pyramid schemes. The economy of the poorest country in Europe became a gigantic lottery, with a huge proportion of the population living off their dreams of unbelievable profits and interest rates. It is estimated that at least \$1.5 billion was invested in more than ten schemes, perhaps \$2 billion. About \$800 million has been invested in various Vefa subsidiaries.

There were ten major pyramid schemes;

six of which have crashed or been closed down, with four others on the brink of bankruptcy. The first pyramids were started in 1994, and were aimed mainly at quickly attracting capital to a number of rapidly growing capitalist firms which were exploiting the retail market, especially the trade in electrical home appliances. They promised interest rates of between 80-120 per cent annually, which they claimed could be paid out of the huge profits they were making at that time. In 1995, however, the reduction of aid from the West cut the consumer market, and at the same time the introduction of new taxes on private enterprises squeezed the profits of the companies. On the verge of bankruptcy in late 1995, the pyramid schemes launched big advertising campaigns to draw in more investors. Competition developed between the hybrid pyramids (half-pyramid, half-business) and the pure pyramid schemes, with dubious 'charitable' foundations offering depositors no less than a 300 per cent interest rate. This was clearly unsustainable.

The viability of pyramid schemes - unless they have other sources of funds - depends on a continuously growing number of investors. "All the (pyramid) scheme does," commented John Kay (*Financial Times*, 14 February 1997), "is to redistribute money from those who join the club late to those who joined early, and nothing is produced, except rich pickings for those who organise it." The whole structure depends on attracting new investors fast enough to pay out the high rates of interest. Financially, several of the pyramids were bankrupt by the summer of 1996. But they continued to defy the laws of economic gravity because of support from Berisha's regime. Claiming credit for the illusory prosperity created by the schemes, the Democratic Party fought the May 1996 elections under the slogan "With us, everybody wins."

The collapse

By January 1997, however, the day of reckoning could no longer be postponed. On 15 January the first pyramid collapsed,

provoking a riot. This was the first domino to fall, and within a week or so, two or three other schemes collapsed. The bubble had burst. Tirana, Lushnja, Berat, Vlore and other cities were turned into bloody battlegrounds as demonstrators clashed with riot police. Government buildings were burned or ransacked. One of the main centres of protest was Vlore, the "pyramid capital", where most of the schemes originated.

The government attempted to head off a popular revolt by closing down some of the investment companies and freezing their capital. Some of their bosses were arrested, and about \$300 million was handed back to investors. But this was a tiny fraction of what people had lost. The storm of fury was only just beginning. The Vefa conglomerate reduced its interest rates from eight per cent to five per cent a month, and then to only three per cent, in order to protect its capital - a disastrous cut in income for thousands of poor investors in its schemes. The popular mood immediately blamed the government, which had encouraged the schemes and taken a share of the profits to buy votes in the general election.

There was clearly no way in which the government could meet the main demand of the people: repayment of their savings, which were the equivalent of about half the country's GDP. Most of the cash invested in the schemes had already disappeared, siphoned off to foreign bank accounts, or squandered on yachts, helicopters, and other millionaire luxuries. One pyramid company, Gjallica, blew a million dollars on a Miss Europa contest in Tirana. Vefa Holdings spent \$450,000 for an advert on the Eurosport TV channel, and Zhaferi spent \$400,000 for an Argentinean football star to run the local Lushnja team.

A political explosion

The financial crisis unavoidably became a political crisis. Lacking any political answers, however, Berisha responded with a military solution. He obtained from the DP-dominated parliament exceptional

powers to use military force to protect state buildings and secure communications. In reality, this was a de facto declaration of a state of emergency. Prime Minister Meksi denounced the "red gang" allegedly responsible for the violent protests. The opposition Forum for Democracy, a broad grouping of ten parties, including the Socialist Party, called for the government's resignation, a caretaker administration, and new parliamentary elections. From prison, the Socialist Party leader, Fatos Nano, issued a message: "The so-called investor's crisis is just the other side of the coin of the great election fraud of May 26". The leader of the Social Democratic Party, Skender Gjinushi, said: "The peoples' money was spent on buying votes." None of the opposition parties, however, had a clear policy on the pyramid schemes. They denounced the government, but could offer no solution to thousands demanding their money back. These small, ineffective parliamentary groupings were completely by-passed by the flood tide of mass protest.

Uprising

Angry demonstrations demanding money back from the pyramids and the resignation of Berisha led to clashes between the protesters and the police. Vicious attacks by the police and Shik thugs led to furious retaliation. The police, especially the Shik, got a taste of their own medicine, and police stations, town halls, and other public buildings were ransacked and burned by the demonstrators. In mid-February there were massive demonstrations in Vlore, Gjirokaster, Tirana and other cities. With clear political direction and a minimum of organisation, this mass movement could clearly have swept the regime away in a few days. Neither the ex-Stalinist Socialist Party nor the liberal-bourgeois opposition parties offered any clear leadership. Using sections of the army, the police, and the secret police, Berisha attempted to intensify the repression against the mass movement, which in response began to escalate into a mass, country-wide insurgency.

Berisha's attempt to "crush the red



Demonstration in Tirana, 1997

rebellion" effectively provoked a mass uprising, which has completely undermined his regime. On 3 March Berisha sacked his Prime Minister, Meksi. Far from being a retreat, this was accompanied by a declaration of a state of emergency, in reality the imposition of draconian martial law. The president ordered the parliament to re-elect him for another five-year term. Berisha purged the tops of the army, police and national guard, and put general Bashkim Gazidede, head of the hated Shik, in charge of all the security forces. For good measure, he tripled army and police pay. Berisha set out to crush mass opposition with tanks and war planes. Peaceful protests against the pyramid swindle were brutally crushed by the Shik. The day after martial law was declared, the offices of the leading opposition newspaper, *Koha Jone*, were burned out, evidently by thugs working for the Shik. But the armed forces were countered by a rapidly arming people. The uniformed police melted away. Many had lost their own savings in the pyramids' collapse, and were in no mood to defend Berisha. When military units and the Shik advanced on Southern cities to repress the protests, the people stormed the local military arsenals and defended themselves against the state forces.

18 ● **Uprising in Albania**

The collapse of Berisha's own power base was shown by the flight from the country of the president's former defence minister, Safet Zhulali. Moreover, reports that Berisha's two children and his palace hangers-on had arrived in the Italian port of Bari revealed that Berisha himself was far from confident of surviving in power.

Armed resistance in the South

On 8 March Berisha's special troops attempted to take control of Gjirokaster, hoping to use it as a base to retake other rebel strongholds, like Delvine and Sarande. The arrival of the special forces at the town's police station, reported *The Times* (10 March), "provoked hoards of Albanians to pour into the streets around the building, while other groups surrounded the local barracks, location of the arsenal stock. The situation grew rapidly out of control as it became apparent that President Berisha's men did not have the support of the police whom they then threatened with automatic weapons."

Nor was the commander of the local garrison prepared to support Berisha's forces:

"His force had been depleted by desertion over the past three weeks from more than a thousand men to about 200. A brief fusillade of shots from the soldiers over the heads of the encircling mass of townsfolk, who grew ever more belligerent to a chorus of 'Down with the dictator Berisha', exacerbated the situation. The commander ordered his men to hand their weapons to the people and the crowd flooded in, breaching the arsenal doors and seizing the weapons before rushing back to the police station, together with the defecting soldiers." (*The Times*, 10 March)

Similar events occurred in towns and villages throughout the south. In Delvine, halfway between Sarande and Gjirokaster, the population mobilised against the government tanks and troops who were sent to crush them. Armed insurgents clashed with Berisha's forces outside Delvine, while "thousands of women and children armed with Kalashnikovs and chanting slogans against president Berisha demonstrated... [They] were carrying machine guns and machine pistols and shouting 'We want democracy' and 'Down with the dictator Berisha'." (*The Times*, 6 March)

Throughout the South the military arsenals built up under Hoxha were emptied out, and insurgents seized tanks, heavy

artillery, and also took control of military airfields and submarine bases. The whole population appeared to be armed, men and women, old people and young children. "The people are arming themselves out of self-defence," commented one of the opposition party leaders, "because they are afraid of what will happen tomorrow." (*The Guardian*, 15 March)

People particularly took revenge on the Shik, notorious for their brutal methods. The prisons were emptied, and shops and warehouses were looted for food. Food and guns became the basic necessities. "The government stole from the people," said a school teacher in Durres, "and the people are stealing things back."


Berisha compromises with opposition leaders

On 9 March Berisha had talks with opposition leaders and announced there would be new elections in June. He promised an amnesty for rebels in the south, provided they handed in their arms. But by this time, however, Berisha was virtually powerless to enforce decrees. A spokesman for the opposition Democratic Forum, Blendi Gonxhja, said: "The agreement is very good. Whether it will be respected or not is different. We are very worried about whether this will be accepted in the south." (*The Times*, 10 March) In Fratar, a village in the south, an armed 14-year-old gave the answer: "Our leaders are academics from the mountains. There are 5,000 of us who will fight here." He told the journalist, "When you write do not say that we are rebels. We are the Albanian people."

The new Prime Minister appointed by Berisha was Bashkim Fino, formerly the Socialist Mayor of Gjirokaster. Fino called for talks with the rebels. He enraged the insurgents by saying that Berisha should remain in power for the time being. A leader of the opposition Democratic Alliance, Perikli Teta, a former Defence Minister, summed the situation up: "We political parties are making blah, blah, blah, but we are not really representative of the rebels." A young man wearing a balacava put the peoples' demands very



Armed rebels near the southern city of Saranda



clearly: "One - Berisha kaput! Two - money back!"

National Salvation Committee

By mid-March most of the South, about a third of the country, was in the hands of the insurgents. In many towns, committees had been set up in an attempt to organise the uprising. Many are reportedly headed by senior army officers, who have either been retired off since Alia's downfall or have defected from the Berisha's forces since the rebellion began. Around 11 March eight of the rebel town committees met in Gjirokaster and formed a "National Committee for the Salvation of the People", but the local committees do not appear to be unified bodies with clear aims and organised support. Apart from the universal demand for the removal of Berisha and the return of pyramid money, each town appears to have its own militias and its own agenda. Colonel Jsuf Gepani, a member of the Gjirokaster committee, said: "We are administering the armour under the command of the Gjirokaster committee. What we do with them is down to the people." But the armed struggle is running ahead of political and economic aims. A member of the Serande committee, Professor Ilirian Alikaj, complained that "the gangsters and criminals are taking over". He told reporters that he was not sure how many other people were on the committee, who they were, or what the committee's policy was.

Some committees have attempted to gain some control over the reckless use of arms (which has reportedly resulted in many accidents and self-inflicted injuries) and the spread of armed crime. But no one is ready to part with their newly-acquired weapons. Most people see them as a defence against the regime or a guarantee of obtaining food in the coming months. There has undoubtedly been a growth of gangsterism, with the emergence of armed gangs and local warlords whose main motive is the rapid acquisition of territorial power and profits.

The North

Events in the North of the country are

not so clear. Berisha has undoubtedly been able to draw on some support from the Ghegs, and there have been reports of armed mobilisations to defend the president. But there have also been reports of growing opposition to the regime. Earlier predictions by some Western commentators of a possible North-South, Gheg-Tosk conflict, even an ethnic civil war, have not been borne out.

Ghegs and Tosks, whose regions are traditionally divided by the Shkumbin River, are distinguished by different dialects of the Albanian language. But the source of conflict in the past lay in different social structures, traditions and political loyalties. During the wartime resistance struggle against Nazi occupation and in the period of post-war transformation, the Communist Party drew its main support for the Tosks in the South, predominantly poor peasant farmers and rural labourers on the big estates. Subsequently, Hoxha drew the top personnel of his regime from among the Tosks, undermined the northern elite, and generally favoured the South.

The Gheg region of mountainous Northern Albania - which ethnically extends into Kosova and Western Macedonia - was historically dominated by chieftains who ruled over a clan social structure. During the wartime struggles, these chieftains mainly supported right-wing nationalists and monarchist politicians. Many were hostile to the Stalinist regime, and maintained links with counter-revolutionary émigré politicians. Unlike the former Stalinist leaders, Berisha is a Gheg, and has mainly drawn his praetorian guard and political henchmen from amongst the Gheg clansmen.

There is, however, a large intermediate area between the two regions, which includes the capital, Tirana. The city now accounts for about a quarter of the country's population, and Kosk-Gheg relations have not previously been an issue.

Distrust of the North amongst southerners is undoubtedly linked to hatred for the Shik, which is largely made up of Berisha's hand-picked northerners. Yet in the 1994

referendum staged by Berisha to legitimise his new bonapartist constitution, Berisha's proposals were overwhelmingly defeated throughout the country. In the May 1996 elections, the Democratic Party lost Shkoder, the biggest city in the North. Nevertheless, Berisha probably still has strong points of support among Northerners.

"Once installed as president in 1992," reported *The Independent* (6 March), Berisha brought thousands of villagers down from the north to take up jobs in ministries and in the security forces, the police and the Shik secret police." For the first time since 1945, Berisha's regime tipped the balance of the ruling elite back in favour of the Ghegs. Moreover, many the gangster-entrepreneurs who have flourished recently come from the mafioso families of the North.

On 12 March it was reported that "in Tropje, Berisha's northern home town, insurgents had ransacked a barracks and seized weapons." (*The Guardian*) The paper speculated, "they could have been government supporters fearing an imminent rebel take-over." On 10 March, however, *The Guardian* had reported: "Officials in Shkoder, the northern region's main city, yesterday estimated that the president's popularity had declined by as much as 80 percent since the country-wide protest against the government-backed investment schemes escalated into violence in the past week. Although most of the northern highlanders were too poor to invest in the fraudulent pyramid schemes, the north is now restive about the regime's increasingly repressive nature. Mr Berisha's trebling of the size of the Shik secret police and widespread official corruption are held against him."

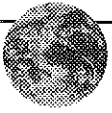
On 22 March *The Economist* reported: "The main town in the north, Shkodra, its local government of monarchists and right wingers who appear to have little of no allegiance to Tirana." *The Times* (24 March) reported, however, that Berisha has strong support among the northerners now living in the northern suburbs of Tirana. "To us he is a legend," says a retired army officer. "He cut the rope of fifty years



of Communism from around our necks." The report continues, "there are 22,000 people in these sprawling suburbs that cloak the northern outskirts of Tirana; people driven out of their homes near the Serbian border by dire poverty and a disastrous reservoir project inspired by Enver Hoxha... President Berisha's village of Tropje is in their heartland."

On 20 March a shadowy group calling itself the Committee for National Salvation issued a statement declaring that Berisha was "a factor for national, political, and social equilibrium" in the country. According to the *Financial Times* (21 March), they claimed "thousands of armed members" and would use "all its force to challenge groups paid by the historic enemies of Albania," implying that the southern committees are backed by the Greeks.

Far from achieving "equilibrium", however, Berisha has driven the country into a political gridlock. He managed by about 21 March to re-establish partial control of Tirana. The president is "holed up in his presidential palace, with tanks said to be concealed in dug-outs for its protection. What is left of his power rests on the Shik, his secret police..." (*The Economist*, 22



March) The security forces have imposed a shoot-on-sight dusk-to-dawn curfew on Tirana. Politically, Berisha is trying to maintain his position through a shaky coalition with the opposition, but he reportedly faces opposition from DP rivals who now regard him as a liability. His ultimatum to the rebels in the South expired on 20 March without any response from the rebel committees. Berisha does not have the power to send forces to the South to crush the insurrection. But although they are heavily armed and have the support of ex-Stalinist army officers, the Southern forces do not appear to have the unity or organisation needed to advance on Tirana.

Against Berisha, For ?

The movement in the South has been a spontaneous, mass insurrection against Berisha's dictatorship and the pyramid swindle. The uprising has lacked any organised form or coherent aims. The opposition parties have appeared irrelevant. "The opposition parties can do whatever they want, but the peoples' wishes are different," commented Colonel Xhevat Kocin, spokesman for the Sarande committee: "This is not a revolt connected to the opposition parties, it is a popular revolution for reasons different to their political agendas." As the population seized weapons in Elban, an industrial town near Tirana, a worker commented: "I don't think people here want any political party. We're against Berisha because he took our money." (*The Independent*, 14 March) In Bejar, near the Greek border, a worker who lost five years' earnings in the pyramid collapse, said: "Berisha is dead for us... Berisha is connected with the mafia, 100 per cent." Asked who he wanted in power, however, he replied: "I don't know. I just want a leader with a free mind, not a dictator." (*The Observer*, 9 March)

The people's agenda is far from clear. They know what they are against, but are far from clear on an alternative. There is a deep well of bitter grievances, but they are far from being formulated into anything resembling a programme of demands. The party leaders gathered in the Forum for Democracy have offered no direction:

"Their leaders in Tirana," commented the *Financial Times*, "have been careful to distance themselves from the violent uprising in the south of the country." The Forum's main demand was for an interim caretaker government of neutral technocrats to prepare fresh elections.

When Fatos Nano, the Socialist Party leader, was freed from jail, he was reported to have called for "the unification in peace of all Albanians, the return of weapons stolen in the past ten days, and support for the new government of national reconciliation." (*The Times*, 18 March) His 'statesman-like' speech was clearly aimed at the Western powers rather than the Albanian people.

As one of the prominent leaders of the former Stalinist regime until 1991, Nano no doubt fears the popular uprising as much as Berisha and other elite politicians. Nano will probably be quite willing to collaborate with Western powers in trying to re-establish law and order in Albania, provided Berisha goes and the Socialist Party leaders get a share of power and access to the new bourgeois wealth. Although previously regarded as a Stalinist hard-liner, Nano accepts the abandonment of any lip-service to Marxism and has embraced the market economy. Currently he is barred from office by Berisha's 1993 "Genocide Law", which bans anybody associated with the Stalinist government before 1991 from running for office until the year 2000. But this could easily be changed.

Western powers in disarray

Before the uprising, the Western powers were opposed to any return to power of ex-Stalinist leaders. But Berisha's regime has ended in disaster. Now the state sector of the economy has been dismantled and the old Stalinist state apparatus has gone, they may be prepared to turn to leaders like Nano, as the only effective alternative to a totally discredited Berisha. The US government has called for Berisha to go. EU powers, especially German capitalism, are prevaricating. "We do not know who is leading the uprising," said one diplomat:

"That is the most critical difficulty: nobody is sure who to talk to about restoring order."

It seems unlikely that Berisha will survive in power. But imperialism would prefer an orderly transition. They are seeking forces to work with. Most probably, they will try to establish a new government based on a coalition of the opposition parties currently involved in the Forum for Democracy. But they have yet to formulate a common policy.

The character of the Albanian uprising

How should we characterise the Albanian events? There has clearly been a spontaneous, elemental, mass uprising in progress. It is an overwhelming popular insurrection against a military-police dictatorship which tried to hide behind the banner of the "transition to democracy", and against government-sponsored swindles and organised crime, operating under the label of "the free market".

In the West capitalist politicians and the media self-righteously denounce "mob rule", the breakdown of law and order, anarchy, gangsterism, crime, and so on. Yet until recently, Western governments were enthusiastically handing out free-market Oscars to Berisha and giving his regime substantial material support. The multinational companies had no moral scruples about plundering Europe's poorest people for oil, minerals and cheap labour. While it was the collapse of the pyramids which detonated the uprising, the roots of the uprising grew out of the brutal exploitation and oppression of the Albanian workers, farmers, rural labourers, and small traders both under Stalinism and during the painful switch to the market. The primary concern of the EU governments, especially Italy, Germany, and Greece, has been to halt the exodus of desperate, hungry Albanians seeking refuge and sustenance abroad.

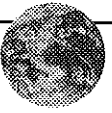
Behind the capitalists' denunciation of

the "mob", portrayed as a satanic hoard of rioters and looters, is the profound fear aroused in every ruling class by the energy, initiative and power of the masses once they begin to move especially if they are armed. Albanians hit back against Berisha's vicious security forces, especially the hated Shik, seized arms, and effectively shattered the power of a heavily armed dictatorship. Berisha's regime is suspended over an abyss. The emergent capitalists, scrambling to build up their wealth through criminal accumulation, have been given a severe battering. Capitalist rulers everywhere tremble at the thought that a great mass of working people - for so long merely passive, exploited subjects, a mere commodity - can move into action, arm themselves, and defeat the state power. For this reason, the Albanian uprising is a very significant, impressive movement, which will inspire workers internationally.

Contradictory trends

But to view these events as a revolutionary movement on the classical proletarian lines of the revolutionary movements in Russia in October 1917 or Spain in 1936-37 would be completely mistaken. It would be to ignore the real, contradictory, characteristics of the Albanian events.

Workers, young people, and poor farmers have undoubtedly made up the overwhelming majority of the insurgents. In terms of its predominant social composition, it is primarily a workers' and peasants' uprising. The proletarian and plebeian strata of the population, however, are completely lacking in organisation and any cohesive working-class consciousness. As in other former Stalinist states, workers know very well what they are against - the Berisha dictatorship which has stolen their life savings. But they do not see any alternative. Under the extremely repressive, autarkic Stalinist regime of Hoxha and Alia, the working class was denied any independent, democratic organisations, including trade unions. They were starved of information and ideas. With the disintegration of Stalinism and the transition to a primitive form of a capitalist economy, there has been a tendency towards the



social disintegration of the working class, accompanied by extreme ideological confusion and political disorientation.

The newly formed, independent trade union alliance, UITUA, which played a prominent part in the strike movement of 1990-91, for instance, demanded immediate economic improvements for workers, but supported a transition to the market and liberal-bourgeois parliamentary forms. Politically UITUA was aligned with the bourgeois Democratic Party in the mass movement against Alia's government during 1991-92. This disorientation of the workers, with an acceptance by the majority of pro-market, bourgeois-democratic ideas as an alternative to Stalinism, has not been countered, even on a small scale, by any organisation, ideas or policies corresponding to the interests of the working class. In other words, the "subjective factor", essential to the advance of a revolutionary movement, is entirely lacking. In the absence of independent class organisation and class ideas, it is not possible for working class forces to develop clear aims of its own or formulate effective strategies, at least in a short span of time. There is no evidence, at the moment, of the emergence of any committees with a democratic form, giving direction to the mobilisation of workers and other strata.

An ideological vacuum

The collapse of Stalinism has opened an enormous ideological vacuum, and not only in the former Stalinist states. The fragmentation and disorientation of the left in the advanced capitalist countries means that, at this stage, there are currently no genuine Marxist forces with sufficient influence to have any real effect on the workers' movement in the ex-Stalinist states.

It is inevitable, in this situation, that various other forces will tend to come to the fore. In the rebel committees of the southern towns high-ranking military officers (either retired or defecting from Berisha's forces) play a prominent role. During this phase, they are with the people against the dictatorship. Later, many of them will

undoubtedly be prepared, on the right political terms, to collaborate with or join a recomposed national government, probably involving some of the leaders of the Democratic Forum parties, possibly including the Socialist Party, and backed by the Western powers. Commenting on the current lawlessness, Colonel Kocin, leader of Sarande's committee, said: "Every country has its thieves. Ours happen to be armed, but they will face the law tomorrow." Even now, Kocin looks forward to the time when order will be restored, and it is not only the thieves that the currently disaffected officers will try to curb. The military leaders will try to reign in popular power and recover arms from the people, though this will probably prove very difficult.

These officers are rebels against Berisha, not revolutionaries. Some of the former regime's military caste may harbour illusion of a return to a Stalinist-type state, but in reality this is ruled out by the legacy of the collapse of the Stalinist economies and the new international relationship of forces. More likely, most of them accept the transition to the market but seek a bourgeois regime more 'acceptable' to them. In the future, most of them will work to restore a stable regime based on the market economy. Some of the officers may have personal bonapartist ambitions, particularly on a regional basis.

At the same time, a mass uprising lacking conscious, organised working-class leadership inevitably provides plenty of scope for a host of gangsters, swindlers, and black-marketeers. In Albania, there is no shortage of gangster-entrepreneurs, who have flourished since 1990. There are also brutalised, de-classed lumpen elements, thrown up by the social turmoil, who have indulged in an orgy of wanton destruction and violent criminal attacks on innocent people. There are no class-conscious, disciplined militias to keep them in check. As in Russia, the other CIS republics, Bosnia, Serbia, Croatia, and so on, armed mafia gangs are likely to flourish. Some of the ex-military officers may also be drawn into this, with the emergence of local war-lords, each attempting to establish their own local fiefdom.

However hostile they may be to a central government, these rebel 'leaders' do not have progressive aims. On the contrary, the lesson of recent years in Eastern Europe is that many of them will strive to whip up and manipulate every kind of local, ethnic, religious, or national grievance and prejudice for their own ends. When the country is awash with arms, this creates horrifying potential for conflict.

The 'Mad Max' phase of turmoil

This is not classical proletarian revolution, it is the 'Mad Max' phase of post-Stalinist turmoil. Albania's mass uprising, like some of the movements in other ex-Stalinist states, has many of the features of a proletarian revolution. But given the ideological vacuum, the Albanian movement too will be exploited by counter-revolutionary forces for bourgeois ends. Moreover, the Albanian insurgency also has features of pre-capitalist Jacqueries, peasant-plebeian uprisings and guerrilla wars against absolutist monarchic states which often combined social protest against feudal exploitation with blind revenge and banditry. True, they ultimately played an historically progressive role in speeding the destruction of the feudal order. But it was only when forces with much clearer political aims gave direction to mass movements that social and political transformation could be carried through.

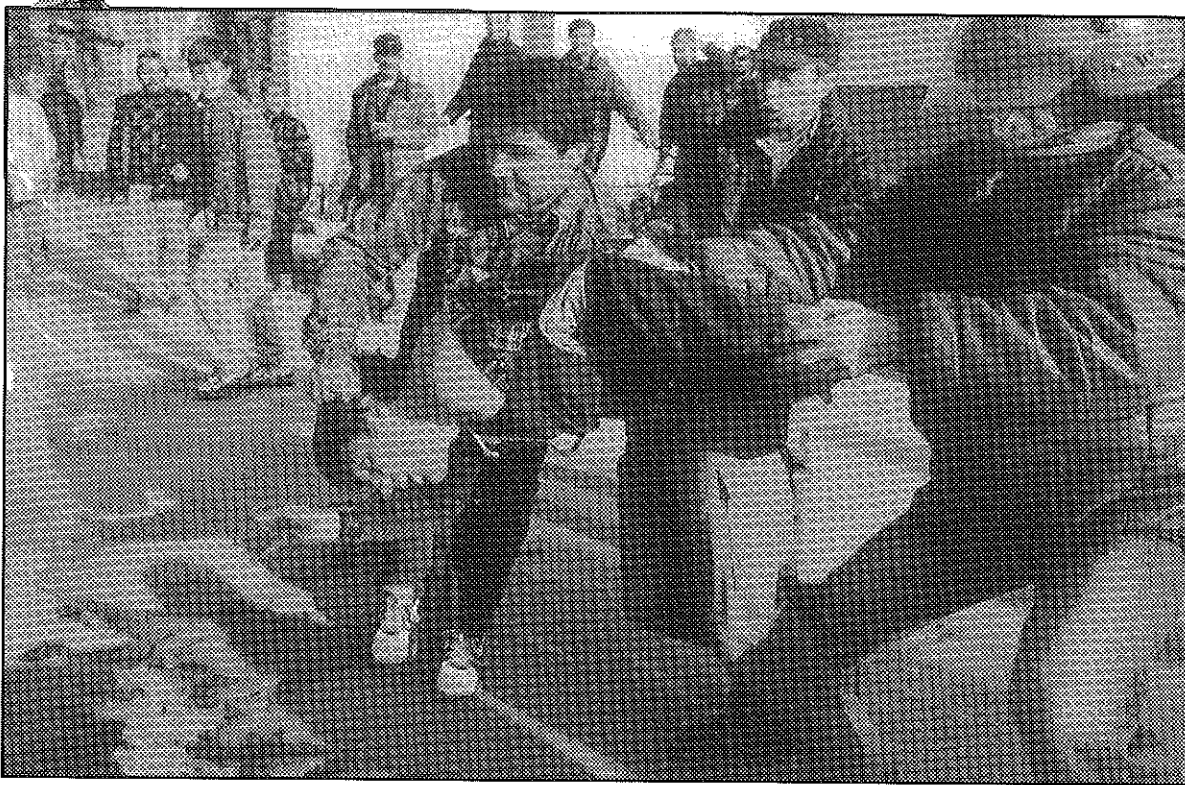
In the Balkans today, the flood of arms from Albania's arsenals raises the horrifying prospect of intensified national and ethnic conflict across the borders of Albania, Macedonia and Greece. Events in Albania could also trigger an uprising in Kosovo demanding independence from the rump, Serbia-dominated Yugoslav Federation. Refusal by Milosevic's regime to concede the right of self-determination to the Kosovars could result in a bloody conflict. Chauvinistic gangsters will undoubtedly channel weapons to right-wing nationalist organisations amongst the Albanian minorities, with predictable counter moves by Greeks, Macedonians, Serbs, and so on. Tensions are already boiling in these areas. The eruption of

another armed conflict on the scale of Bosnia would be a serious set-back for the workers of the Southern Balkans. Only a movement of the working class, with a programme of socialist opposition to capitalist consolidation and support for internationalist unity across existing borders, could cut across the present nationalistic conflicts. Unfortunately, it is wishful thinking to believe that there is such a movement under way at the moment.

Re-emergence of the working class

In time, the workers in the former Stalinist states will begin to will begin to reconstitute themselves as a social class. Through the struggles which will develop, the workers will build independent, class-struggle trade unions, new political parties, and begin to develop a consciousness of their own class interests and their potential power as a social force. This process is already developing in some of the former Stalinist states, like the Czech Republic, Poland and some of the CIS states. But it is in its early stages. There is no evidence, at the moment, that the process has begun to develop in Albania, and unfortunately it is unlikely to crystallise during the current uprising, given the absence of class-conscious socialist organisations. At this stage, the working class in Albania does not have the social coherence or independent political capacity to play a leading role in the uprising. It would require an organisation, or at least a leading layer, with clear aims and bold tactics to give the extremely diverse, spontaneous movement clear anti-capitalist, socialist aims. That is the music of the future, to which some of the more politically conscious workers and youth who are now fighting on the streets will begin to turn.

An uprising cannot be sustained indefinitely, especially without leaders and organisations that can provide clear political objectives. If Berisha attempts to use force to hold on to power, there may be another wave of insurgency. In any case, resistance to state authority, episodes of armed rebellion, and social banditry may continue for some time, especially given



Police attack demonstrators in the southern city of Vlora

the abundance of arms. But with such an anarchic movement, with many different social and political strands as well as regional differences, there is bound to be a reflux at a certain stage. Forces offering a return to stability and social peace will gain support, or at least acceptance, from layers who are devastated by the conflict.

The role of imperialism

US imperialism and the major European capitalist powers will be eager to sponsor a new party of order in Albania. What terrifies the powers is not so much the eruption of mass protest movements and social chaos, which has occurred in other former Stalinist states, but the fact that the majority of the Albanian population are now armed. Their main priorities will be to end the insurgency, prevent a new flood of Albanians to the West, and prevent the fuelling of an armed conflict around Albania's borders. Socialists totally oppose any Western military intervention, even if it is disguised as a humanitarian operation.

The imperialist powers will intervene only to safeguard their own interests. They will seek an alliance with those capitalist politicians and business elements estimat-

ed to be their most effective and reliable clients. But the US and European governments will have rapidly to send in massive food supplies and medical assistance to prevent a human disaster on a terrible scale.

At the moment, the Western powers are extremely cautious. Their policy of supporting Berisha and turning a blind eye to his corrupt, dictatorial methods, has blown up in their faces. They are hesitant to commit military forces, which could become bogged down in a bloody quagmire. Their diplomats and military advisers are no doubt sounding out various forces in the country. As yet, the US and the EU governments do not appear to have worked out or agreed on a unified approach.

Their preferred option would probably be to bring together a new coalition government, involving the leaders of the main opposition parties and possibly including some of the military representatives of the rebellion in the South. Now that the former Stalinist apparatus and state-owned industry has been smashed, the Western powers may be prepared to turn to Socialist party leaders, particularly Fatos

Nano, in order to make use of whatever authority they have left among layers of the workers and peasants. Nano accepts the transition to the market, and when he was released from jail, he called on the masses to hand in their weapons and await new elections. If a reconstructed capitalist regime could be legitimised through new elections, that would be all the better for them. But such a strategy will be extremely difficult for imperialism to carry through in the coming months. Whatever its strategy, imperialism will have to provide substantial economic resources in order to try to stabilise the country. They are going to face a huge bill as a result of investing in Berisha's political pyramid scheme.

The different forces who have established power on the ground will not easily give it up. It will be impossible, to start with, to gather in all the arms that have been seized. One opposition commentator suggested that a new government will have to buy them back. If adopted, such a policy might recover some of the arms, but much of the seized weaponry will find its way to ethnic groups or gangsters in the neighbouring states or will be sold on the international black market. Even when things in Albania quieten down, many people will simply bury their arms for future eventualities.

Some of the strategists of imperialism are warning that Albania may go the same way as Somalia, with powerful regional warlords battling it out with their heavily-armed militias, preying on the population for money and food and raining terrible destruction on the population. In Somalia, even the might of US imperialism was powerless to end the conflict. The US forces were reduced to playing off one warlord against another, and in the end were forced to pull out without securing a stable influence in the country.

But it is too early for firm predictions even about Albania's immediate future, let alone to draw conclusions about the future course of events. We have to follow events as they unfold. But one thing is clear: the advent of the capitalist market economy and the facade of parliamentary

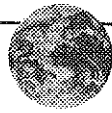
'democracy' has been a disaster for the people of Albania. Socialists everywhere will salute the heroic, armed resistance of workers and young people to gangster-exploitation and military repression. We look forward to the development of organised, class-conscious proletarian forces in Albania, as in all the former Stalinist states, which will fight for genuine socialist economies and workers' democracy.

Postscript

Berisha is still holding out in the presidential palace (14 April 1997), but with very limited real power in the country. Incredibly, Berisha blames the crisis on a conspiracy between the ex-Stalinist Socialist opposition and the Mafia to exploit discontent over the collapsed pyramid schemes in order to grab power for themselves. "We tolerated more than was necessary," he conceded to the right-wing *Wall Street Journal* (4 April), but insisted that "the main responsibility lies with those who invested money in the schemes. This is crucial for our society to realise. If we blame others for our mistakes, we will have no future. Capitalism is like that. Tomorrow there will be a stock exchange in Tirana: there will be winners and losers. We must learn about these things."

"The silent majority supports us," Berisha claims. But the reality is that governmental power, such as it is, has largely passed to the coalition headed by Bashkim Fino. On 1 April Fino made his first visit since the uprising to Gjirokaster to meet the Italian prime minister, Prodi, and "legal representatives of local power and public order". His most important discussions, however, were with the rebel leaders of the Committees of Public Salvation, which have dominated the South since early March.

According to the *Wall Street Journal* (4 April), the Socialist Party "publicly formalised its alliance (which it had hitherto denied existed) with these rebels... when it and other opposition parties drew up and



published a formal agreement between themselves and the rebel gangs. It echoed the key rebel demands for the resignation of the president and the dissolution of the elected parliament." No government could survive, however, without promising new elections which open up the possibility of removing Berisha.

Fino also announced the disbanding of the Shik secret police. Reuters news agency reported that Fino told rebel leaders that Berisha had accepted the resignations of the Shik chief, Bashkim Gazidede, and his deputy, Bujar Rama, and that the agency's funding had been stopped. "Since yesterday, there is no more Shik in Albania. We are going to build a new intelligence service, and from now, anyone who identifies himself as a Shik officer is a liar." (*The Guardian*, 2 April).

The policy of the Socialist Party leaders is to allow Berisha to retain office until new elections, when they no doubt hope to win a majority and form a Socialist Party-dominated coalition. There is no indication whatsoever that they offer any political alternative to the capitalist policies of Berisha. "I am the premier of a government of national reconciliation which belongs to all the parties and all the people of Albania," Fino announced (25 March).

When the Socialist Party leader, Fatos Nano, was released from prison on 17 March, he took a similar position. "I think Berisha should step aside, not down," Nano told a press conference. "I am inclined to shake hands with him as an Albanian citizen rather than as a president." (*Financial Times*, 18 March) Incidentally, *The Guardian* (18 March) reported that when the prisoners were released from the Tirana prison by the crowd, the law-abiding Nano waited for the prison director to release him officially. Later, Nano and fifty other inmates were formally pardoned.

The Socialist Party's tactics appear to coincide with the current policy of the western powers. Loathe to accept the removal of the president by a popular uprising, the western powers are aiming at

the legal, parliamentary replacement of Berisha through new elections. According to Andrew Gumbel, writing in *The Independent* (17 April), Berisha has "largely been kept out of the diplomatic loop". Instead "Mr Fino is the international community's point of contact, and Mr Fino's government is the institution it is working to support. The Rome government's private calculation is that the president will become more and more irrelevant, to the point where he will quietly disappear after the election." Gumbel adds, however, "Given Mr Berisha's past behaviour, that may be an optimistic outlook."

Fino's own power is strictly limited, as a recent episode demonstrated. On 5 April a group of heavily armed men barred Fino and other ministers from visiting Shkoder, the main town in the North. Gunmen intercepted Fino's party at Bushat, about 60km north of Tirana, detonating grenades and forcing them to turn back to Tirana. "Miraculously, no one was hurt," reported *The Independent* (7 April). "But the trip to Shkoda had to be called off, and the bitter conclusion drawn that even the top representatives of the government of National Unity, supposedly supported by everyone, are not free to move around the country at will. The fact that the gunmen were reported to have acted on behalf of Sali Berisha, the man who appointed Mr Fino under considerable duress three weeks ago, only added to the sense of a country in the grip of festering chaos." Any idea that the social and political forces released by the uprising can be smoothly diverted back through parliamentary channels is likely to prove illusory. The key factor is that the majority of the population are now armed.

Intervention by the western powers

One of the key objectives of the European intervention force will undoubtedly be to facilitate the disarming of the people. Their immediate aim will no doubt be to ensure the safe arrival and distribution of essential food and medical supplies. They will attempt to secure ports, roads, the Tirana airport, etc, to allow the

economy to start moving again. This is essential to stem the tide of refugees, which is Italy's prime concern. In order to secure a more stable capitalist government, however, the western powers will be forced to try to recover at least some of the arms seized from the government arsenals.

Intervention is fraught with difficulty for imperialism. While the Western powers were virtually unanimous in their support for Berisha's regime, they have mostly been very hesitant to commit themselves to intervention. The British and German governments have ruled out sending their forces. At the height of the uprising in mid-March Western governments officially ruled out sending a 'peace keeping mission'. "It would be sending troops into a vacuum," said one NATO official, who asked not to be named. (*Wall Street Journal*, 17 March) As the movement subsided, however, the European powers and the US put increasing pressure on the Italian government to take the lead in sending an intervention force. Early in April it was resolved that an Italian-led Multinational Protection Force of between 5,000 and 6,000 troops would go into Albania in mid-April, consisting of about 2,500 from Italy, 1,000 from France, with smaller contingents from Spain, Greece, Turkey, and Romania.

This is an unusual operation. Though it has the formal or tacit approval of the United Nations, Nato, the European Union, the Council of Europe, the OCSE, etc, this intervention is a coalition of countries acting outside the umbrella of any international organisation. In reality, the Italian state is bearing the main responsibility for the intervention, and this has already provoked a political crisis in Italy.

Prodi's parliamentary crisis

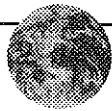
The Olive Tree 'centre-left' coalition, which Prodi heads, failed to secure a majority from its parliamentary supporters for the enabling legislation for the intervention force. The left-wing Rifondazione Comunista (PCR - Party of

Communist Refoundation), on which the Prodi government's majority depends, made it clear that it would not vote for the legislation. Prodi could only get the intervention Bill through parliament by accepting the support from the right-wing Freedom Alliance led by Berlusconi. Albania aside, this raises the possibility of Prodi reaching agreement in the next period with the Freedom Alliance in order to pass through budget cuts so far rejected because of opposition from the RC.

While the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS), the former Communist Party, supported Prodi's intervention bill, the RC rightly opposed it on the grounds that the intervention was a dangerous extension of Italy's neo-colonial role in Albania. Rifondazione argued that the intervention force would keep president Berisha in power.

Italian capitalism's neo-colonial ambitions were confirmed by an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* (8 April). "There is much to admire in Mr Prodi's determination not to see a leaderless Europe as inept before the Albanian crisis as it was in the Bosnian one. He has long wanted to carve out a larger international role for Italy and sees Albania, a country with which Italy has had long, and often turbulent, relations, as an important test for Italy's preparedness to play a leading role." This long, turbulent role includes two occupations of Albania, during the First World War and again during the Second World War, when Mussolini pacified the country in preparation for its occupation by Hitler's Nazi forces. The PRC is right to warn of the dangers of attacks on troops sent by the Italian government. There is obviously deep-rooted, historic resentment among Albanians at Italy's past imperialist occupations of the country.

There is also anger at the recent treatment of Albanian refugees in Italy, and especially at the death of more than 80 people who drowned in the Adriatic on 28 March. In that incident, a heavily overloaded motor boat (probably stolen by profiteers to ferry refugees at exorbitant rates) was rammed by an Italian warship - in the view of most Albanians, quite delib-



erately. Most of those who drowned were women and young children. Grief and anger in Albania was intensified by the vicious, chauvinistic comments of Irene Pivetti, the former speaker of the Italian parliament's lower house. Refugees coming across the Adriatic, she proclaimed, "should be thrown back in the sea". Pivetti claimed she wanted to defend the vulnerable women and children who were being used as a cover by criminals to smuggle economic migrants and drugs into Italy. Give them soup, she generously advocated, but only in Albania. If they came to Italy, they should all be sent back.

These and other comments from reactionary politicians and newspapers outraged Albanians. "I warn Italian soldiers not to come to Vlore, otherwise they will be killed," said a young woman attending a rally of about 7,000 mourning the dead. (*The Guardian*, 31 March)

In response to the PRC's objection that the Italian intervention force would prop up Berisha, Prodi's deputy foreign minister, Piero Fassino, privately assured PRC deputies that: "It's very clear that Berisha has to go. At least to us... The problem is

how to move beyond Berisha, but if we said this... Albania's government of National Unity would collapse." (*Wall Street Journal*, 9 April) Most probably, this is the real policy of the Italian government. Press reports of Fassino's remarks, however, provoked an angry reaction from Berisha, and Prodi (and Fassino himself) were compelled to repudiate any intention of toppling Berisha.

"We are not going into Albania to interfere in that country's internal affairs or get involved in promoting or protecting partisan interests," said Prodi. "We are going to distribute aid and help the Albanians to rebuild a normal life for themselves." (*The Independent*, 3 April) Such statements, as always in such circumstances, are entirely disingenuous. Capitalist states always launch such interventions primarily in order to protect their own interests and to further their economic and strategic aims. 'Humanitarian' assistance - food, medicine, restoration of communications, etc - is obviously a necessity in order to stop the flood of refugees to the West. But the real aims of the so-called Multinational Protection Force go far beyond this.



Armed Albanian rebels, Delvina near Sarande

Fassino also said that the objectives of the intervention would include providing "assistance to the Albanian government to regain control of flashpoints on its territory and to get state institutions working again". What Albanian government? In reality, this means working to install a government considered by the Western powers to be reliable and capable of securing a semblance of stability. "Regain control of flashpoints"? This clearly implies undermining the power of the rebel forces - and attempting to disarm the people.

The Protection Force may well try to barter food and medicine for weapons, which would probably reclaim some weaponry from the poorer, most defenceless sections of the population. This policy is favoured by some of the Albanian liberal bourgeois parties, which are already attempting to swap "Bread for Bullets". But such a policy is not likely to recover many armaments from warlords and gangsters. Inevitably, there is a high potential for conflict between the Protection Force and various armed sections of the Albanian population.

Even supervision of new elections by the Protection Force can hardly be considered neutral. Just as the West European powers backed Berisha until recently, they will now back their chosen political agents. Currently, they appear to have little option but to rely on the Socialist Party leaders, who are now willing instruments on Western capitalist influence, in collaboration with the smaller parliamentary cliques of liberal bourgeois politicians.

For these reasons, socialists should totally oppose military intervention by Italy, France and other capitalist powers. Despite its claimed 'humanitarian' aims, the Protection Force is intended to protect the interests of imperialism, not safeguard the interests of the Albanian people. The western capitalist states should certainly provide food, medicine and economic resources to help build Albania. Through their policy of ruthlessly exploiting the primitive market which opened up in the country after 1990 and through their unstinting support for Berisha, the capitalist powers bear a heavy responsibility for the suffering of the Albanian people. But

aid must be handed over to the Albanians, especially to the impoverished workers and peasants, who must be allowed to resolve their own problems. Western leaders argue that if aid is simply despatched to Albania it will be plundered by criminals and black marketeers. During previous UN or EU-sponsored aid operations, however, such as Bosnia or Somalia, the presence of multinational military forces did not prevent the siphoning-off of a lion's share of the aid by corrupt government officials and gangsters (often indistinguishable groups). The only outside organisations which could really help the majority of Albanians on a big scale would be workers' organisations in the West, especially the trade unions. Unfortunately, there is little or no prospect of the Labour leaders, who overwhelmingly accept the economic and foreign policies of the capitalists, of organising such international assistance.

14 April 97

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CWI/CIO pamphlet
committee for a workers international

Uprising in Albania



Berisha's regime, previously the darling of the Western capitalists, has been shattered by an uprising of the Albanian people. Enraged by the collapse of the fraudulent pyramid schemes, the impoverished, cruelly oppressed workers and peasants seized arms and fought the dictatorship. This will inspire workers everywhere and strike fear into all capitalist rulers. But lacking independent class leadership and organisation, the insurgent workers have not been able to

give the movement clear anti-capitalist aims. This reflects the ideological vacuum after the collapse of Stalinism. As in other Blakan states, warlords and gangsters have stepped in. This is a Mad Max phase of post-Stalinist turmoil, before the re-emergence of working-class forces. Now the capitalist powers are sending a Multinational Protection Force to safeguard their interests, which all socialists must oppose. The CWI analyses the roots of the uprising and the prospects for the Albanian workers.



Cover picture: Militant Albanians ride on tank at Delvine, near Sarande, Thursday March 6 1997 where thousands of rebels refused to hand over their guns unless President Sali Berisha resigns. (AP Photo - Dimitri Messinis)

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