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ALBANIA 1987

by Norberto Steinmayr

For a fortnight in July David Keating, Secretary of the North-East England Branch of the Albanian Society, and I were invited to the People's Socialist Republic of Albania by the Committee for Cultural and Friendly Relations with Foreign Countries as members of the Albanian Society's delegation.

After formalities at the Albanian border post of Hani i Hotit lasting for a few seconds -- just a stamp on our passports -- we were introduced to our interpreter, Viktor Ristani, a teacher of English at the 'Enver Hoxha' University of Tirana, and to our driver, Burham Kastrati. They were to accompany us during our stay, attentive and helpful in whatever we desired or requested. Our first request was to visit the Martyrs' Cemetery overlooking Tirana in order to pay our respects to Enver Hoxha, laying flowers and a written message in the name of the Society on his grave. Moved, we stood at the simple graveside of the man who, for almost half a century at the head of the Albanian communists, successfully led the national liberation struggle and the construction of socialism in the new Albania.

As I was visiting the country for the fourth time within relatively short periods of time, I was able to perceive the remarkable changes which have taken place even recently. Further advances and developments are evident in every sector of economic and social life. Targets in industry and agriculture have been fulfilled -- often over-fulfilled. In every town and village new dwellings have been built; the railway network has been continually extended; museums have been enlarged and new ones opened; monuments of culture have been preserved and restored; additional branches of higher education have been set up; higher-type cooperative

farms have been transformed into state farms -- indeed, it is hardly possible to enumerate everything new and different. Such a rapid development of the country and the dynamism of its people cannot but find their source and inspiration in the socialist system, in the unity of the Party of Labour of Albania with the people. This was confirmed by what we saw and experienced during our stay, as well as by a series of formal and informal meetings with people from different walks of life: workers, peasants, teachers, judges, etc.

At the offices of the Committee we had a friendly and constructive meeting with Jorgo Melica, its President, and Theofan Nishku, head of the Department dealing with Friendship Associations. After conveying to the Committee the best wishes of the Society, we briefly reported on our activities in Britain since the last Albanian Society delegation had gone to Albania in September 1985. We made certain requests, mainly on behalf of Society members, and discussed matters of mutual interest. Mr. Melica expressed high appreciation of our work in Britain and of the contribution which the Albanian Society makes to promote friendship and understanding between the British and Albanian peoples. He also emphasised the Committee's readiness to continue to provide us with information, films, books and other materials. The Albanians are as open with their friends and well-wishers as they are opposed to their enemies. Mr. Melica also ridiculed the speculations made abroad about Albania's "opening-up" to this or that bloc of states, pointing out that a principled and tested foreign policy of seeking normal, friendly relations with most other countries continues to be applied in Albania, without imposing, or having imposed, any discriminating conditions. On this basis, diplomatic relations have recently been established with additional countries, including the German Federal Republic.

An intensive diplomatic activity had characterized the summer of 1987, during which Albanian delegations had visited various countries to sign agreements and protocols on various types of exchanges. At the same time, we could see in the Dajti Hotel in Tirana government delegations and businessmen from various states. It is a fact that Albania's good relations with many countries of the world contrast with the anomalous absence of Anglo-Albanian diplomatic relations. There can be no doubt that blame for the absence of such relations, and for the retention of the Albanian gold in the Bank of England since 1945, does not lie with the Albanian government. Indeed, Albania favours the normalization of relations with Britain. On this issue the First Secretary of the Party of Labour, Ramiz Alia, recently said:

"If London shakes off the prejudices left by the cold war and is willing to proceed from a positive desire and good will to unfreeze Anglo-Albanian relations . . . it will find in Albania the readiness to talk and cooperate in a constructive spirit".

Everywhere in Albania democratic and patriotic traditions are well preserved in museums, in the houses of culture, through monuments and exhibitions, and a sense of continuity is maintained between the revolutionary past of the people and the present. The Skanderbeg Museum in Kruja and his Memorial in Lezha recall the Albanian resistance to the Turks, while the interesting archaeological sites in Durrës, Apollonia and Butrint relate to earlier times. Museums relating to the National Liberation War are to be found in almost every town and village. In Korça, for example, we had a very cordial talk with the 85-year-old Aunt Poliksen in the house where Enver Hoxha lived from 1937 to 1939, now transformed into a museum. During that difficult period, Aunt Poliksen looked after Enver

Hoxha and other Albanian patriots who were carrying out the work of spreading anti-fascist and communist ideas, and she vividly and kindly recalled those times to us. In the capital we paid more than one visit to the National Historical Museum in Skanderbeg Square, unquestionably the most comprehensive museum in the country, covering from 600,000 B.C. to the present day. Certainly, a 'must' for every visitor!

We had many meetings during our visits to the different districts. At the winery in Përmet, we discovered that Përmet is famous not only for its important Congress, convened there on 25 May 1944, but also for its red wine -- held to be the best in the country! Then, with the Xhumba family in the Greek minority village of Sofratika, we were able to find out how false and offensive are the allegations, sometimes circulated abroad, about the 'sufferings' of the Greek minority in Southern Albania.

In Rrëshen we met some of the volunteers working, during their holidays, on the new project of the Milos-Rrëshen-Klos railway line (described by David Keating in his article in this issue). Such spontaneous and direct involvement of the people for the development of the country testifies to the superiority of the truly socialist society in Albania, which has eliminated many negative phenomena such as professional crime, unemployment, inflation, drug abuse, great social inequalities, etc. This is propaganda, some may argue. Yes, but it is the propaganda of reality, visible to any foreign visitors, and not the propaganda of distortion which is such a regrettable feature of most of the British press and many other publications dealing with Albania.

Here I have mentioned just some of the many meetings we had, all of them characterized by friendliness and interest in our activities in Britain,

which are regularly reported in the Albanian newspapers. Our visit received publicity in the press, too. The day before we left, we were interviewed by Radio Tirana and by Albanian Television, and my interview was reported in the Albanian Telegraphic Agency's bulletin. Finally, at a banquet given in our honour by the Committee on our last evening, we expressed our thanks for the warm hospitality we had received.

We flew from Rinas Airport to London, determined to further acquaint the British people with the successes of socialist Albania through the activity of the Albanian Society and to continue to foster friendship and understanding between our two peoples.



In the wire works at Shkodra

ALBANIAN SOCIETY MEETINGS

The South Wales Branch organized talks on Albania illustrated with colour slides on 19 July at Brackla Community Centre, on 11 August at Couchchurch Women's Guild, and on 11 September at Cruse Widows' Club, Bridgend. The speaker was Ron Gregory.

The South Wales Branch held an Albanian folk evening on 29 August in Bridgend. The speaker was Ron Gregory.

The London & South-East England Branch organized a meeting in London on 11 October on "Anglo-American Relations with Albania: 1912-1986", The speakers were Bill Bland and Norberto Steinmayr. The latter also reported on the visit of the Society delegation to Albasnia in July.

The Midlands Branch held in Birmingham on 25 October on "Socialist Realism in the Albanian Arts", illustrated with slides and readings. The speakers included John Puntis and Barbara Pearce, and a lively discussion followed.

The London & South-East England Branch, in cooperation with the Greek and Near Eastern Music Society, presented in London on 27 November a lecture by Ian Price, illustrated with slides, recordings and films on "Albanian folk music and its instruments".



GRANDAD'S VISIT

A poem by Ndoc Papeleka

He came for a visit to our new house,
came into the room and stared at the furniture.
He looked round for something in the walls,
shaking his grey head in reproof:

"I don't see a loophole", he said.

"We don't have them now", I told him.

He sat down on the couch, which creaked
beneath his weight.

I switched on the television to surprise him:
on the screen appeared warships and bombers,
the ruins of buildings, heaps of dead . . .

"People are still killing each other!", he said.

I told him of the superpowers, of aggression;
he listened to me, frowning, rose to go.

I begged that he at least should stay the night;
he shook his grey head curtly.

Just then my son came in, sweating from play.

"This is your grandad", I explained to him;

"you bear his surname".

When grandad saw his features in the child,
the sternness of his face at once relaxed.

The little boy stared at his grandad's moustache
and went up to him with a smile:

"Do you know any stories?", he asked.

"Enough to fill the sea", the old man said.

My son took him by the hand
and led him to the couch.

They sat together until late.

the little boy forgetting he was tired,

grandad forgetting he should go;

the little boy listening to

the endless story of life,

grandad forgetting he had died.

MEMORANDUM ON KOSOVA

(The following memorandum was sent to the Secretary-General of the United Nations in September by a Kosovar youth organisation based in New York).

For six consecutive years, since the spring of 1981, over two million ethnic Albanians presently living in Yugoslavia have continued to be subjected 'to state terror, in a state where 'order' is understood to be either total submission or long jail sentences. Frequent calls on the Yugoslav government to end the pattern of cruelty and inhumanity are arrogantly rejected.

Since the first forceful occupation of Kosova in 1912-13 by the combined Serbo-Montenegrin armies, Albanians in Yugoslavia have been existing on the periphery of Slavic society, doomed to live under conditions of oppression and discrimination.

Official figures show that since the spring of 1981 more than 150,000 persons in Kosova have been questioned by the police, and more than 7,000 have been imprisoned for 'political crimes' -- 1,234 for more than 20 years. And over 50% of those executed in Yugoslavia in the ten years 1975-85 were ethnic Albanians.

It is the firm belief of ethnic Albanians that these injustices are possible because of the political status of Kosova as an appendix of the SR of Serbia, which looks upon the province as 'a Serbian affair'. This lies at the root of the political demand of the ethnic Albanians for a Socialist Republic of Kosova within the Yugoslav Federation. It is a demand for equal treatment, for the revocation of Serbia's tutelage and control.

For years the Serbian, Montenegrin and Macedonian

press has been filled with racist descriptions of Albanians as "inferior" and "lazy". Kosova is portrayed as a region where the constitution is constantly violated by Albanians, who roam the streets killing, raping and robbing Serbian citizens, desecrating Serbian monuments of culture, etc. In fact, official Yugoslav statistics reveal that Kosova has the lowest percentage of crime among the eight units of the SFR of Yugoslavia ('Rilindja', 8 June 1986, p. 6).

In Kosova there are now 250,000 unemployed, while the employed receive miserably low incomes. Hopelessness has been the real force behind the emigration of Serbs from Kosova. Serbian youth is finding better employment in the richer republics, where personal incomes are several times higher than in Kosova, an opportunity denied to young Albanians. An inquiry in 1985 found that "only two persons have left under pressure" ('Rilindja', 10 June 1987).

At present, educational policies relegate Albanian students to overcrowded schools with 3-4 shifts and only 3 hours of instruction per day, while non-Albanian students often attend schools with vacant rooms.

Since 1981 most creative Albanian scholars have either been removed physically or have exiled themselves in protest against the repressive regime. The world of the Albanian intellectual community in Yugoslavia resembles the trenches of a long war of attrition, interrupted only by announcements of arrests.

We believe that the civilized world has the right to know the truth about the situation of more than two million ethnic Albanians presently living in Yugoslavia. We also believe that the United Nations can help bring the truth into the open.

ROSE WILDER LANE

by Antonia Young

(An abridgement of a paper read by the author at Black Lambs and Grey Falcons, a conference on women travelers in the Balkans held at the University of Bradford in April 1987. Antonia Young now teaches at Colgate University, New York State).

Rose Wilder Lane was born in South Dakota in 1886. At the age of seven she joined with her parents the lines of covered wagons that were fleeing the drought-stricken Dakota plains, and travelled 650 miles to the Ozarka, where she remained until she finished school locally at the age of 17.

I first heard of Rose Wilder Lane as the infant daughter of Laura Ingalls Wilder, who will be known to many (especially those with young children) as the author of the Little House on the Prairie books (which have unfortunately gained greater fame through the romanticised TV serial of that name).

It was six years after Rose Wilder Lane's death that Laura's letters to her husband were published, describing her visit to their daughter Rose in San Francisco at the time of the World Fair in 1915. In fact, Laura Ingalls Wilder only started writing her childhood experiences at the age of 60 through the encouragement of her then successful daughter - Rose.

When Rose left home and school in Mansfield, Missouri, at the age of 17, she went to work at the Western Union in Kansas City. This was 1903, so that such a move for a young single girl was considered both unusual and dubious. With enormous energy she worked double shifts, learned to type in the evenings, and moved from promotion to promotion in different cities, reaching San Francisco in 1908. There she took up the

selling of real estate, in which she found herself the only woman with such a position and felt a great deal of antagonism directed towards her. With the outbreak of war, the real estate business folded and Rose turned to a new career - writing for the women's page of the San Francisco Bulletin -- the start of a great and prolific writing career.

She wrote for many magazines and her first book, Henry Ford's Own Story, was published in 1917. By this time she had been married and divorced and was ready for change. She therefore accepted a job offered her by the American Red Cross and Near East Relief to investigate and report on conditions in Europe and Asia for the US press in order to raise more American money for their relief work.

For her first trip outside the United States, Rose started work in the Red Cross offices in Paris. From there she travelled to Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia, Albania, Egypt, Armenia, Arabia and Persia. But it was Albania which held her lasting interest. Rose first visited Albania almost by chance and was due to move on from the refugee camp she was visiting in Scutari (now Shkodra) when another American Red Cross worker, Frances Hardy, persuaded her to join a small party which was about to embark on an expedition into the Northern Albanian mountains for the purpose of setting up three schools in this extremely undeveloped area. In other parts of Albania many schools had already been founded since 1912, with teaching in Albanian - which had frequently been forbidden prior to the Revolution of that year. It was this trip, in 1921, which inspired her book The Peaks of Shala, in the introduction to which she explains that it was intended as an attempt

" . . . to send back, by a traveller to those who stay at home, a fragment of this large, various and romantic world".

Hers is indeed a very personal narrative, lacking Edith Durham's more objective reporting.

The trip which Rose Wilder Lane, Frances Hardy and a Miss Alexander (known as "Alex") took into the Northern Albanian mountains (following so closely in the footsteps of one of Edith Durham's earlier ones) took place some years after Ismail Qemali had raised the Albanian flag of independence. The party included, in addition to the three American women, Rexh, a 12-year-old refugee child from Kosova who had walked 250 miles to Shkodra after his whole family and village had been killed by invaders; this lad took charge of the six men with packhorses. Finally, as interpreter, came Rrok Perolli (a parallel to Edith Durham's Marko Shantoja) who was Secretary to the Albanian Minister of the Interior.

Clearly, Rose Wilder Lane's story The Blue Bead is autobiographical. From this we find that she shared with Edith Durham the disapproval of the authorities over the undertaking of such an expedition as theirs among the tribes of the interior of Northern Albania.

It has fascinated me to follow the parallels between Rose's and Edith Durham's journeys. Both set out on their adventurous trips in their late thirties - Edith Durham on doctor's advice to "get right away, no matter where so long as the change is complete". Rose attributed her restlessness to the war in Europe. Both developed a tremendous love for the country, a respect for what they saw as an independent, unique, brave-spirited people. Both were fascinated by the working of the Laws of Lekë, which dictated all social behaviour, including blood-feuds.

In The Peaks of Shala we get a description of the bese (the inviolable oath of peace between tribes or families) which confirms Edith Durham's descriptions,

but disputes her contention that more modern methods of dealing with blood-feuds had evolved. Rose Wilder Lane gives plenty of evidence that little had changed in the intervening ten years.

As did Edith Durham, so also Rose Wilder Lane gives wonderful descriptions of her climbs into the Qafa e Bishkasit (one of the high passes in the mountains of Northern Albania) and of the Albanian system of telegraphing across mountains - not by shouting or singing, but by means of long, shrill, continuous high notes ending with three fired shots to indicate the end of the message. The almost constant use of shots to register welcome or farewell persisted, but such exuberance was never exhibited for the benefit of solely female company: there had to be men present when there was shooting.

As further, and perhaps consequent, parallel between Rose Wilder Lane and Edith Durham was that their involvement in the country led them later to pursue relief work in the area.

However, these travellers underwent terrific ordeals: they were, of course, unaccustomed to the local means of travel, and they found the trails (they could never be called roads, or even paths) very rough, steep and hazardous and the distances extreme (measured only by the hours or days it took for nimble Albanians to walk). The conditions were not improved by the almost constant rain which both writers describe. Rose Wilder Lane tells of sometimes fording rivers on the shoulders of men, who shifted them from shoulder to shoulder in mid-stream, like sacks of produce. Many of their mountain climbs were on extremely precarious routes. Their progress contrasts vividly with that of a native woman of Shosh, of whom Rose Wilder Lane tells:

"Up the trail came a woman from Shosh. . . On

her back, held by woven woollen straps that crossed between her breasts, was a cradle tightly covered by a thick blanket; in one hand she held a bunch of raw wool, and from the other dangled a whirling spindle. Her feet were bare and, as she came up the trail which had exhausted me, she sang softly, dextrously spinning thread from the bunch of wool. . . Her hands and feet would have been madness to a sculptor; in Paris she would have been a sensation".

These Western women had further to contend with being special guests and the bearers of news; and, as such, great feasts were prepared in their honour. But the preparation for the feasts only started upon their arrival, which was always late at night when they were already cold, wet and tired. Upon arrival, whether in private homes, monasteries or schools, they were given, as was traditional all over Albania, overwhelming hospitality. But it was hospitality which was hard to enjoy for, instead of a chance to get dry and warm and to rest, the travellers were always expected to sit in their wet clothing and sociably discuss current events while they awaited the festive meal; this usually took several hours to prepare and was often served at one or two in the morning, by which time these weary foreign visitors were too tired to get pleasure from it. It was considered impolite to show any signs of either tiredness or hunger. Furthermore, many morning journeys started around 3.30 or 4 a.m. with only a cup of black coffee for sustenance before the start of the day's trek. This conforms exactly with Durham's descriptions.

There were many aspects of Albania that especially appealed to Rose Wilder Lane, She admired the way the tribes she visited had avoided being conquered by either the Roman Empire or the Turks, even if they had been influenced by both. She also admired how they lived as a

" . . . simple communistic society, without private property or any organised government. The only law is the moral law, enforced by tradition, by custom, by consent".

Rose Wilder Lane tried unsuccessfully to explain the American system. and the theme reappears on her book The Discovery of Freedom, published some years later.

She found a strong sense of national pride amongst all the Albanians she met, and heard also of world-famous men who were of Albanian origin.

Whilst the tribes of Northern Albania claimed mostly to be Roman Catholic, many of their customs and habits were Muslim or pagan. The Bishop of Pultit observed that, while they attended mass regularly, the Church had not greatly altered the ancient customs of the people. He was tolerant of the fact that the basis of many tribal ceremonies was fire worship.

Other spiritual beings also featured in the lives of these people, who waited for signs from the orë (spirits of trees and rocks). Even the West European-educated Perolli believed in the powers of the orë, and the travellers were shown a place where orë loved to sit, where "no human person lives". Throughout The Peaks of Shala there are references to people who have been in touch with the orë, including a man from Ipek who married one and had orë children (his wife and children were never visible to other mortals, but his home was well-kept and happy).

Rose Wilder Lane found Northern Albania rich in folklore, and the tales she heard and the experiences she had during these years in Albania helped to supply her with themes for some of her many short stories for many years to come.

Rose Wilder Lane ended her first trip to Albania rather abruptly, feeling a sudden urgency to return to Paris when the physical conditions in which she had been living were making her ill. The following year she returned with a photographer friend, Annette Marquis, who took the photographs which illustrate The Peaks of Shala.

Lane's last visit to Albania was planned as a very long stay. By this time (1926) she had learned Albanian, had contacts in Albania and invited her friend, the author Helen Dore Boylston, to join her. Helen was the daughter of a physician, and herself a nurse. She had volunteered for service with a medical unit from Harvard in a field hospital in Europe (1917-18) and with a mobile unit outside Tirana (1920). Like Lane, Helen Boylston felt unsettled by the effects of the war in Europe.

And so, on 20th August 1926, these two women and their reluctant French maid, Yvonne, set off by car for Albania. The two-week journey through Italy and across from Brindisi is described from the letters and diaries of Lane and Boylston in the book Travels with Zenobia: Paris to Albania by Model T Ford, edited by William Holz. The plan was to have a villa built and to live there on the earnings of the two writers, sending material back to the United States for publication.

But life was not as idyllic as they expected, and after only one-and-a-half years they returned to America, disillusioned with their "Shangri-La".

Rose had difficulty maintaining contact with those she knew in Albania after she left, but she did manage to send Rexh (the 12-year-old of her first trip) to university in Britain, and to keep sufficiently in contact with him to learn that he returned to Albania.

Having followed Rose Wilder Lane's story from before her birth through her enormously prolific writing period, it is sad to have to relate her fanatical anti-Communist activity in the McCarthy era.

After her father's death in 1949, Lane devoted much time to her mother until the latter's death in 1957, when she became involved in turning her parents' home into a museum -- the Laura Ingalls Wilder Home Association of Mansfield, Missouri.

She died in 1968 at the age of 81 on the eve of a planned trip round the world.



Pogradec

A drawing by Foto Stamo

ALBANIA IN 1930

by J. W. Thompson

I made a visit to Albania in 1930, while serving as a Lieutenant in a British cruiser. We had received permission to call at Durazzo (or Durrës, as it is now known). When we arrived we found no harbour, just an extensive sandy beach with a small wooden jetty, so we just had to anchor and wait.

After an hour or so, a police launch came out to carry out arrival formalities, after which our Captain was handed a letter from King Zog. It contained an invitation for officers to play tennis at his palace near Tirana. A motor-coach would be waiting near the jetty to take them there next day. Well, after an early lunch, six of us dug out some tennis rackets and were taken ashore in the ship's motor cutter. We were greeted by the driver of an old coach, who told us in English that he and the coach would be at our service for the duration of our stay. We climbed in, and found it very primitive, with solid tyres and wooden laths as seats. The journey took nearly two hours, since the road, full of potholes and loose stones, was badly in need of repair.

The Palace was in an enclosure the size of two football fields, and at the far end were the main buildings, newly built of stone. We got out of the coach, and were conducted to a large cloakroom with wash-basins, etc., and then along a corridor to a hall. There we were presented to King Zog and his eight sisters; the latter mingled with our party, pressing us to take refreshment. The older sisters spoke French, Italian and a little English, so that we could understand them. They directed our attention to the grass lawns, where four tennis courts had been marked out. Play was commenced, and the ball-boys were kept busy. After some practice, play improved.

Eventually we were called in to tea, and were given the choice of whiskey served from a silver samovar, or tea from a large teapot. There was also plenty of nice food to help ourselves to. A string band was playing, to which the sisters did some figure dancing. Afterwards, we were able to dance with them for nearly two hours, interspersed with refreshments. As dusk set in, the driver came round and asked us to take our leave: he was anxious to get back to Durazzo before midnight.

Next day I was on duty, so was not able to accompany a party of shipmates who were going rock-climbing. The coach took them past a large lake to the east of Tirana, and then on to hill country. The party then climbed rocks which were, they said, six hundred feet high. They then went to a guest-house, halfway down, where they were served a meal of cold pork.

The following day I was able to go ashore till six in the evening. Landing shortly after breakfast, I arrived in Tirana mid-morning. I noted the absence of traffic -- except for a few old motor-buses, two government cars, horse-carriages and donkeys. Cobblestone pavements had been laid outside the larger buildings. One building interested me greatly: it was open at ground floor level, being enclosed here by a wire screen with a door for entrance and a circular iron stairway giving access to the two upper storeys. It was a bank! In the ground-floor enclosure were stored a host of agricultural implements. I could only imagine that these were for sale to bank customers, perhaps through loans.

Next to this was a Greek Orthodox church and several mosques -- some partly in ruins, only one in use. Also of interest was the site of the ancient 6th century Church of St. Michael, now covered beneath much earth and rubble, the product of an old volcano.

Outside the town, the habitations were very primitive. Few had glass in the windows; some had wooden blinds -- perhaps an idea left by the Venetians. The better houses were roofed with large pieces of thin, flat stone, the poorer ones with what looked like squares of clay turf with dried-up vegetation still entwined.

This is a land of Turkish fortresses, and of Greek and Roman remains. Early history tells of successive domination by Greeks, Romans, Venetians and Turks. The national costumes were still worn, especially by the girls, at holidays and saints' days, but at other times western casual clothes. Some military uniforms were to be seen. There were water pumps at street corners, with people queuing to fill large containers since water was not laid on in the houses.

What a different Albania has been left by Enver Hoxha! In the days of Zog it was impoverished, with hardly any conveniences for the people that other European countries had. Now it is not too much to say that in some directions Albania leads the world.

The oil-processing
plant at Ballsh



IMPORTANT STEP FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF FRIENDLY RELATIONS BETWEEN ALBANIA AND GREECE

(translated from the Albanian newspaper 'Zëri i
Popullit' (The People's Voice) of 30 August 1987).

Albanian public opinion learned with pleasure of the decision of the government of Greece to annul the 'state of war' with Albania which had been in force since 1940 at the time of the Italo-Greek War. This step by the government of Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou, which treated the problem seriously and realistically, corresponds to the interests and aspirations of our two friendly, fraternal peoples, which have lived and wish to live always in mutual peace and friendship.

History has made our peoples close and friendly. They have fought together against the same occupiers to defend their national freedom, independence, culture and identity. Common struggle and interests have strengthened and developed feelings of reciprocal respect and friendship. In his well-known book 'Two Friendly Peoples', Comrade Enver Hoxha has said: "We like and respect the Greek people, which nourishes the same feelings of friendship towards the Albanian people. We are sincere towards each other. Neither wishes evil to the other, but only good. These are historic links, moulded in common in blood against the same occupying forces".

The maintenance of a 'state of war' with Albania for a long period represented an abnormal state in the relations between the two countries. As far as Albania is concerned, it has declared more than once that our country has never been in a state of war with Greece and the Greek people. On the contrary, in the war against fascist Italy and Germany, they have been in the same front. The maintenance of this anachronistic law has served only those reactionary forces which have

attempted to hinder the normalization of relations between the two countries and to create discord between our two peoples and in the Balkans generally.

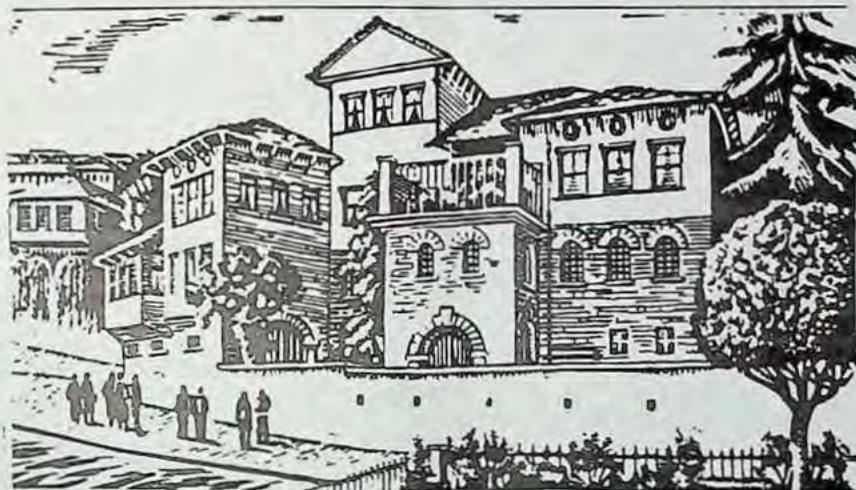
The Government of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania and the Albanian people, applying consistently the principles of the policy of good neighbourliness, has always treated and developed the question of relations with neighbouring Greece with concern and maturity. It has always shown its readiness to develop and consolidate bilateral relations in all fields of reciprocal interest on the basis of the well-known principles which regulate relations between states and has greeted every positive step taken by the Greek government in this direction, especially in recent years.

In the whole of the positive progress of relations between Albania and Greece, this act of good will on the part of the Greek government creates new conditions and a more appropriate climate to broaden them further. It serves, likewise, peace and stability in the Balkans against the attempts of the imperialist powers and international reaction to intervene in the internal affairs of our countries and hinder the development of good-neighbourly relations among them.

The positive developments in Albano-Greek relations proves that, when good will exists, by common efforts every problem can be resolved and every difficulty overcome. Differences in politico-social systems do not form any obstacle to cooperation and living in peace on the basis of the well-known principles of peaceful coexistence. A special contribution in this direction has also been the correct socialist policy pursued towards the Greek minority in Albania. The Greek minority enjoys all the rights guaranteed by the Constitution and realized in practice -- including the right to preserve and develop

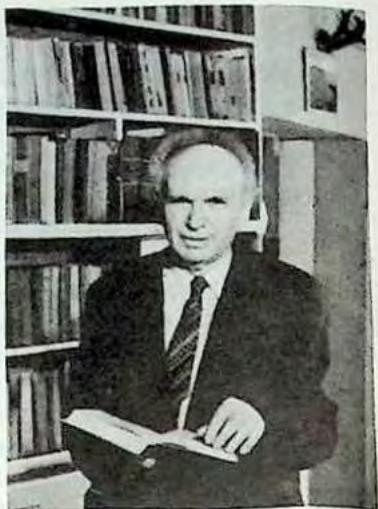
its mother tongue, its national identity, its spiritual links with its own nation, etc. Our Party has always maintained the correct attitude that the minority should serve as a factor in the strengthening of friendship and cooperation with the neighbouring people.

The annulment of the legal 'state of war' is also a confirmation of the correctness of the policy followed by the Party and state in relations with Greece, of their correct application of good neighbourliness, of their wish for the normal development of relations between our two countries. We express the belief that this action will give a new impulse to these relations in all fields. Greeting the sensible decision of the Greek government, the Albanian people reaffirms once again its deep feelings of friendship towards the fraternal Greek people and wishes that relations between our two countries are ever further strengthened and advanced.

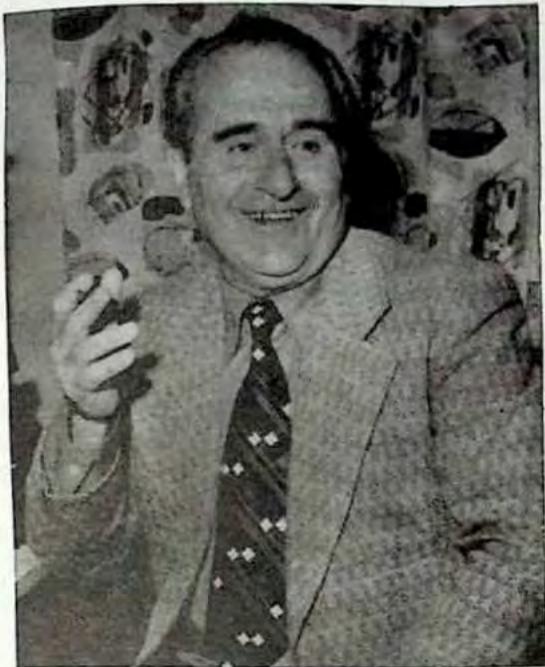


Gjirokastra

Writer Sterjo Spasse



In a Tirana pharmacy.



Composer Tish Daija



The Albanian Pavilion at the Frankfurt Book Fair

THE END OF CHILDHOOD

A short story by Elena Kadare

The door opened and our instructor came quickly in. His coat was drenched.

"Come on, girls", he said, looking at us sternly. "No more gossip! Get back to your books! Tomorrow is the decisive day -- the start of the championship". Then, without apparent reason, he stretched out an arm towards the window, just as a peal of thunder rang out. "You understand!", he added, as the vibrations of the windows-panes died away. And he wagged his finger in a gesture of reproof, as if that peal of thunder had been a divine warning of possible defeat.

We immediately ceased talking and hastened to leaf through our text-books on the theory of chess and the notes he had dictated. Two of us hastily placed a chess-board on the table and set out the pieces on the squares.

"I'll take white".

"No, let me take white. It brings me luck".

"Me too", said the other.

Taking off his overcoat, the sports master stared at us mistrustfully. To tell the truth, he had good reason to do so. We had been in the chess circle only for three months, since October. It had been then that, after making a series of mistakes, I had been asked to leave the ballet circle on the grounds that I showed a lack of interest, and had been standing, mortified, in the corridor of the House of Pioneers in the hope that the dance teacher would change her mind, when suddenly the chess teacher had passed by, nervous and morose as usual. "It's sad about the ballet", he had said when I

had told him the reason for my despondency. "but perhaps it's for the best. Why don't you join my chess circle? Once you've become interested in the game, you'll have no taste for anything else".

"Me? Chess?", I said, taken aback; "but I haven't the least idea how to play!"

"That doesn't matter", he replied, "those in the chess circle aren't masters by any means".

And so I had left the ballet circle and joined that of chess. I learned the movements of the pieces quite quickly, but when it came to combining moves according to the instructor's advice, I found myself at a loss. To be frank, our instructor was lacking in calm and his agitated manner disconcerted me and made me forget even the few theoretical ideas I had picked up.

"You play without understanding", he bellowed at me; "what on earth's the point of moving your castle there?"

I shrugged my shoulders. What was the use of theory? As if your opponent could know in advance the moves you would make! When the players pondered for a long time between moves I had the impression that they did it purely to disconcert their opponents. But the instructor clearly thought otherwise. "Every move", he said, "must have a definite aim".

One day, after the lesson, the instructor told us in delighted tones that we were going to take part in the schools championship. At first this news surprised us, but then astonishment gave way to a general euphoria. We of the fourth form were to represent our town in a real championship! It was incredible!

Our instructor chose, for the girls' team, Moza,

who had a calm and reflective nature that seemed ideal for chess; Eli, who was a strong player but had the bad habit of fidgeting in her seat; Lume, noted for her fierce obstinacy; and myself. Four girls from other parts of the town would make up the team.

What increased our pleasure at taking part in this championship was the fact that it was to take place in another town, quite far from home.

Far from home! . . . It was the first time I had ever been away without my parents. Up to then they had treated me like a child with a constant need of their care.

Now the championship occupied all our thoughts. At home I spoke about it so much that my father made jokes about it. He could not take seriously the idea that his daughter was to represent the town. I refused to take offence. He would soon see what I was capable of.

The competition was to take place during the New Year holidays. We practised feverishly during the whole month of December. During this period, wherever I found myself — at home, at school or in the street — I seemed to see in front of me knights, castles and bishops waiting for me to determine their fate.

At last the day of our departure arrived. Parents and friends came down to the coach to see us off. The chess team was quite small, the table tennis team much larger. Of course my mother could not resist cramming me with advice before we left: "Don't leave your sweater off. Eat this. Don't drink that". And as if all these instructions were not enough, her eyes filled with tears. One might have thought I was emigrating to Australia. Our instructor, gloomy as ever, wandered about without saying a word. Then someone gave a brief speech, saying that chess was not held in high enough

esteem in Albania and that it was our task to raise it to the level it deserved. As the coach finally moved off, someone shouted: "Uphold the honour of the town!"

Everyone clapped, and we waved out of the windows until the little crowd had disappeared from sight.

At last we arrived at the boarding school where we were to stay. A telegram was waiting from my parents asking if I had arrived safely.

"What a question!", said the instructor, appalled at my parents' lack of confidence.

We were settled in a dormitory with girls from other towns and quickly made friends with them, exchanging life stories. We told them of the things we liked, about our studies, about the brothers and sisters we had left at home. The noise in the dormitory was so loud that our instructor came in and told us to be quiet and go to sleep.

The next day we had to play two matches, which we lost decisively. We went out of our way to avoid our instructor. But on the second and third days the situation radically changed. Both the boys' and girls' teams won their matches. On the fourth day the tension was almost unbearable. Our instructor gave each of us in turn a pep-talk, remarkable for its mildness. On the whole, all went well. On the fifth day we gained further victories. The moment of the finals approached. We were very nervous, and slept badly. As soon as I closed my eyes, a chess-board appeared in front of me, and a hollow voice whispered "check" in my ears. Hour after hour I fought the Sicilian Defence, on which our instructor was particularly keen, and the Indian Attack.

At last morning came, and the championship came to

an end. The result could be read on our instructor's face, which beamed like a sunflower. His usual gloom had vanished as if by magic. We too were radiant. We should return home loaded with medals and certificates to hang up in the House of Pioneers as trophies of our magnificent victory. In fact, our instructor had good reason to be proud. It had been a wonderful success, marred only by the shadow of having to leave the new friends we had made.

Before our departure, we all assembled in the big playground of the school to await the arrival of our coaches. The instructors bustled around, making inventories of chess-boards and track-suits. We girls sat on the steps outside the building, noting down the addresses of our new friends and scrawling little verses in one other's autograph albums: "Travel through mountains and valleys, but do not forget the sound of my voice", "When you open the door of old age, do not forget the friend of your youth". We exchanged souvenirs and asked: "Where will you spend your holidays? At Durrës? Then we will meet again next summer. . . . Don't forget to write!".

Someone announced that the coaches had been delayed, and a loud cheer rang through the playground. The hour of parting had been put off for at least a few minutes.

Amid this general emotion we noticed that a boy we did not know had approached us, carrying a chess-board under his arm.

"My name is Genc", he said shyly; "I would like to play a friendly game with your champion. We have time; the coaches are going to be late".

A little surprised, we looked at Moza, our champion. She turned to the boy, and shook her head

impatiently. The boy, although a little taken aback by her refusal, continued: "Please give me a game", adding casually: "I am in the team from Pogradec".

I recalled now having seen the boy during the championship, and seemed to recollect that he had won the medal for boys. Eli pushed Moza forward, saying: "Go on, Moza; give him a good hiding!".

"No; I don't want to", replied Moza.

The boy turned a little pale, and replied a little haughtily: "As you wish! I must assume that you are scared!".

There was an embarrassed silence. The boy turned to go, his face tense. But just as he turned his back, I found myself saying: "I'll play you!".

A muffled murmur ran through the group of girls. The boy turned back and, after a second's hesitation, said: "Why not?"

When we had returned home, I asked myself why I had taken up his challenge. Was it because I had felt the humiliation inflicted on him by my friend to have been unfair, or simply because I resented his implication that we were scared? In fact, I beat him, but had the feeling that he had allowed me to win in order to thank me for having rescued him from embarrassment.

At last we found ourselves back in our southern town, cold and peaceful as we had left it. After the recent animated days away, everything seemed rather dull, and I looked forward to returning to school. I thought continually of that week of the championship, recalling every detail with nostalgia.

On the eve of the first day back at school, I went out to buy some exercise books. On my return I found my parents at home. I had scarcely opened the door when I noticed an unsealed envelope on the hall table. I gazed at it. Strangely -- or perhaps it was really there -- I seemed to see on my father's face an expression of guilt. I realized immediately that the letter had been addressed to me and that my father had opened it. I waited for some explanation, but neither my father nor my mother said a word. I felt my heart beating and a fierce sense of resentment. As I approached the table where the letter lay, I felt my mother's eyes following me. The letter lay on the embroidered tablecloth beside the torn envelope. Was it from Pogradec? I turned over the envelope to read the name of the sender: L. Çelini. Liliana, I thought.

I raised my head and looked at my parents. A slight smile on my father's face increased my resentment.

"Who has opened my letter?", I demanded.

My mother's eyes froze. My father's smile had vanished, but in spite of that his expression angered me.

"My letter?", I repeated; "who opened it?"

"What a question!", said my father; "I opened it, of course".

"Oh, yes!", I said, with unconcealed anger.

But why was I so angry? My father had always opened my letters. Why, this time, should I suddenly tremble with anger?

"And why?", I managed to say in a low voice. I was

about to add: "Could it be that you thought 'L' was a boy?", but confined myself to repeating: "Why?"

My father was silent for a moment, and then said severely: "What do you mean?".

"By what right?", I cried out brusquely and, without waiting for a reply, I ran quickly up to my room.

I cried for some minutes on my bed. Then I dried my tears and decided to go back downstairs. Through the open door of the living room I could see my parents seated at the table, talking. I realised that they were talking about me.

"Yes", my father was saying; "you are right; she is no longer a child".

My mother sighed.

I crept away on tiptoe and went silently back to my room. I stood for a moment motionless, leaning against the window. Outside the wind was blowing. On the roofs the chimneys gave off slender threads of smoke which rose in grey spirals into the grey sky. I pressed the tip of my nose against the glass and its coolness seemed to calm me. There was a thin veil of vapour on the glass and I drew some words with my fingers.

I was saying goodbye to childhood! How odd, I thought, that an opened envelope should suddenly mark the passage from one phase of life to another.

I felt a feeling of sadness mixed with a certain joy, the sensation of having lost one possession to find another, more precious. And, curiously, this sense of loss accentuated the rapture of the discovery.

ALBANIAN NEWS

(May - August 1987)

POLITICS

In May:

May Day was celebrated throughout Albania (1st).

Prime Minister Adil Çarçani was awarded the decoration 'Hero of Socialist Labour' (11th).

First Secretary Ramiz Alia visited Lushnja district (22nd).

The 43rd anniversary of the Congress of Përmet was commemorated in Përmet (24th).

In June:

First Secretary Ramiz Alia visited the Durrës district (8th).

The 10th Congress of the Trade Unions of Albania was held in Tirana (25-27th).

In July:

The 4th Plenum of the Central Committee of the Party of Labour of Albania convened in Tirana (9-10th).

In August:

The Greek government officially lifted the 'state of war' technically existing since October 1940 (28th) (see article in present issue).

DIPLOMACY

In May:

Diplomatic relations were established with Jordan.

In June:

Diplomatic relations were established with the Philippines.

The Swedish Ambassador, Jan Af Sillen, presented

his credentials to President Ramiz Alia.

The Albanian Ambassador to Burundi, Mehdi Shaqiri, presented his credentials to President Jean Baptiste Bagaza.

In August:

Diplomatic relations were established with Bolivia.

The Bangladeshi Ambassador, Khurshid Hamid and the Burmese Ambassador, U Hla Maung, presented their credentials to President Ramiz Alia.

The Albanian Ambassador to Iraq, Gjylani Shehu, presented his credentials to Vice-President Azis Ibrahim.

FOREIGN VISITORS

Among foreign visitors and delegations to Albania during the period under review were:

In May:

The rector of Oslo University, Prof. Inge Loning.

The Rector of Vienna Technical University, Prof. Walter Kamerling.

The President of the Austria-Albania Friendship Association, Prof. Frederik Moser.

In June:

Foreign trade union delegations to attend the 10th Congress of the TUA.

In July:

An Algerian government delegation, led by Foreign Minister Dr. Ahmed Taleb.

A delegation of the Denmark-Albania Friendship Association, led by its President Mari An Petersen.

A delegation of the Finland-Albania Friendship Association, led by its President Ari Kukkonen.

The President of the Higher People's Schools of Austria, Victor Haller.

A Greek government delegation, led by Health Minister Anastasios Anastasin.

A delegation of the Albanian Society (Britain) led by Norberto Steinmayr (see articles in present issue).

In August:

The Egyptian Minister of Culture, Fikri El Sayed Salah.

The Danish artistic group Sovazh Roze.

FOREIGN VISITS

Among Albanians and Albanian delegations going abroad during the period under review were:

In May:

A delegation, led by Health Minister Ahmet Kamberi, to the 40th session of the World Assembly on Health in Geneva.

The Permet folk group to Greece.

The ballet group of the Opera and Ballet Theatre to the International Festival of Classical Music in Ankara.

The rector of the Enver Hoxha University of Tirana, Prof. Osman Kraja, to Greece.

A delegation of the Albanian Committee of War Veterans to the 10th Congress of the International Federation of Resistance in Athens.

Albanian scholars to the 10th International Session of UNESCO on folk music.

In June:

A government delegation, led by Deputy Foreign Minister Sokrat Plaka, to Switzerland.

In July:

A government delegation, led by Deputy Prime Minister Besnik Bekteshi, to Algeria.

A government delegation, led by Deputy Foreign Trade Minister Konstandin Hoxha, to the 7th session of

the UN Conference on Trade and Development in Geneva.

The Song and Dance Ensemble of the Enver Hoxha Automobile and Tractor Combine, Tirana, to Algeria.

The "Korça" Artistic Ensemble to the 7th International Folk Festival in Samsun (Turkey).

In August:

Albanian scholars to the 14th International Congress of Linguistics in Berlin (GDR).

FOREIGN TRADE

In May:

Albania was represented at the 66th International Fair in Paris.

In June:

Albania was represented at the 55th International Fair in Barcelona (Spain).

In July:

A Joint Albanian-Algerian Committee on Economic, Scientific, Technical and Cultural Cooperation was set up.

In August:

A trade agreement for 1987-88 was signed with Egypt.

Albania was represented at "Olympilex-1987" (the World Exhibition of Olympic Philately) in Rome.

SCIENCE

In May:

The second session of the Permanent Coordinating Committee on Lessening Seismic Dangers in the Balkans was held in Tirana with the participation of foreign delegations.

CULTURE

In May:

The May Concerts were organized in Tirana.

A protocol on cultural exchanges for 1987-88 was signed with Algeria.

In June:

The 25th National Song Festival for Children was held in Shkodra.

A cultural agreement was signed between the Enver Hoxha University of Tirana and the Honari Boumédienne University of Algeria.

An agreement on cultural, scientific and technical exchanges for 1987-88 was signed with France.

In July:

An agreement on cultural, scientific and technical exchanges for 1987-88 was signed with Egypt.

The first issue of "Tirana", a local newspaper for the Tirana district, was published.

Among new books published during the period under review were:

Ramiz Alia:	"Speeches and Conversations 1986".
Vehbi Bala:	"Poems".
Aleks Buda:	"Historic Writings".
Dhimitër Dhora:	"Our Rich Fauna".
Enver Hoxha:	"Diary: 1955-85".
Enver Hoxha:	"Works, Volume 55 (June-October 1975)."
Kopi Kyçyku:	"Mustafa Kemal Atatürk".

No one from Albania has been invited to the 13th International Seminar of Albanian Language and Culture to be held this year in Prishtina (Yugoslavia).

THE ALBANIAN CINEMA

by Viktor Gjika

It was thirteen years after the Lumière brothers showed the first moving pictures in the Grand Café in the Boulevard des Capucins in Paris in 1895 that the cinema came to Albania. Despite the foreign invasions which followed, the masterpieces of world cinema such as Griffith's 'Intolerance', Chaplin's comedies and Eisenstein's 'Battleship Potemkin' quickly won the hearts of Albanian audiences.

The first genuinely Albanian film, however, was not produced until 1947, when the Cinematographic Enterprise was organized by state decree. The first films were newsreels and documentaries which reflected important political events and the constructive work for the transformation of the country. In this way our cinema screens began to speak in the national language.

When Vittorio de Sica was making 'Umberto D', the New Albania Film Studios were being established in our country, and when in 1956 Ingmar Bergman was awarded the Grand Prix of the Cannes Film Festival for his film 'Smiles of a Summer Night', Kristaq Dhamo was starting work on the first Albanian feature film 'Tana'.

Since the 1960s the New Albania Film Studios have been producing an average of 14 features, 80 documentaries and 16 cartoons a year -- figures which are by no means insignificant for a country with a population of only three million. The studios employ twenty film directors, with supporting artistic and technical staff.

We have already created traditions of our own, such as the biennial National Film Festivals, and our films have been screened at the festivals of Belgrade,

Berlin, Cairo, Locarno, Salerno, Sao Paulo, Valencia and elsewhere. Among the Albanian films well received at such festivals have been 'Poppies on the Walls' (Dhimitër Anagnosti), 'General Gramophone' (Viktor Gjika), 'Benny Walks on His Own' (Xhanfise Keko) and 'Appassionata' (Ibrahim Muça and Kristaq Mitro).

Our cinema takes a good many of its subjects from our literature, and our writers take an active part in the writing of the screenplays.

Subjects from the National Liberation War, which is one of the most glorious epics in the history of our people, occupy an important place among the themes of our feature films. Among the most acclaimed of such films have been 'Poppies on the Walls' (Dhimitër Anagnosti), 'The Man with the Gun' (Viktor Gjika) and 'The Bride and the Curfew' (Ibrahim Muça and Kristaq Mitro).

Linked particularly with the name of our tireless director Xhanfise Keka, the genre of films for children is developing well and her film 'Benny Walks on His Own' has won special recognition internationally.

In the present phase of its development, the Albanian cinema is struggling for an ever higher artistic level, against formalism and stereotyping, striving to achieve a further deepening of its realism.

The Albanian film aims to present our reality as it is, without either glossing over or exaggerating its shortcomings. It aims to describe the life and struggles of the people -- their successes and setbacks, their social problems, their efforts to build a better life. It plays an important role in educating the people in humanist and socialist principles.



Film director Viktor Gjika at work

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NEW ALBANIA, No. 2, 1987

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NEW ALBANIA, No. 3, 1987

50p.

75th anniversary of Independence; May Day in Tirana; Elbasan; kindergartens; Aleks Buda; the Shijak Higher-type Cooperative Farm; the state budget; the May Concerts; a new historical grammar; Balkan cooperation on earthquakes; Albanian cinema; museum-towns; the Great Park in Tirana; the 17 Nëntori football team.

ALBANIA TODAY, No. 3 1987

50p.

May Day in Albania; Ramiz Alia in Shkodra; mass participation in running the country; the effectiveness of production; the formation of the Albanian language; demographic policy; foreign trade; American-Soviet confrontation.

ALBANIA TODAY, No. 4, 1987.

50p.

Ramiz Alia's address to the trade union congress; science in the economy; youth in society; socialist civilization; Albanian folklore; Ramiz Alia in Lushnja and Durrës; the May Concerts.

YOUTH VOLUNTEERS IN ALBANIA

by David Keating

Albania is certainly a stimulating country to visit, and I particularly enjoyed my stay there this summer.

One of the most memorable days was when we visited the mass youth project building the railway near Rrëshen.

Volunteers are sought from young people between the ages of 18 and 26 from all walks of life and from all parts of the country. And, believe me, there is no shortage of young people keen to take part.

A thousand young people are selected each month to provide unskilled labour. They join a permanent workforce of 1,500 technicians and skilled workers. With proper guidance and training they carry out all the hard physical work, such as mixing concrete, building bridges and generally preparing the track bed. The railway line is being built to provide better communications for the Mat region and to enable the better exploitation of the minerals in that area. The countryside is very striking and the route of the line runs through some fairly mountainous terrain and has repeatedly to cross and recross the river Mat. The workforce certainly has a huge task ahead of them in constructing the railway.

However, the young people we met were by no means daunted. They were clearly proud of their achievements in the short time they had taken part, and were confident that their successors would continue the good work and finish the project ahead of schedule.

When I discussed my visit later with a government official in Tirana, he explained that the railway building programme could quite easily be undertaken by

machinery, and that they could dispense with the voluntary labour, but that this would defeat the whole object of the exercise.

Albania has a rapidly growing population. It is also a comparatively young population. The policy has therefore been to involve young people in the development of the country in order to give them a sense of pride and achievement. There is little likelihood of any of these volunteers vandalizing the railways -- or anything else for that matter. It is also an excellent way for them to get to know one another, thereby increasing the sense of national unity.

We met a group of young people in Rrëshen who had all the vitality and enthusiasm that one hopes all young people could enjoy. They eagerly told us of the work they had been doing and the fun they had working and enjoying their free time together, making many new friends and getting a better understanding of life in other parts of the country.

Then we went off to see one of the work sites where a group of girls were mixing concrete and hauling it up to fill some shuttering erected for a bridge support. I joined in for a short spell. It was certainly hard work, but they cheerfully got on with it.

The Commissar Mimoza Jazoj, who escorted us, spoke excellent English. She had volunteered to work as Commissar for the duration of the project -- some two years or so. It was a probationary period while she was being considered for party membership.

The Commandant of the youth project is Demir Osmani, assisted by Commander Davida Tryci. All three work closely in harmony, ensuring not only that the

work itself goes ahead smoothly but that the social and domestic needs of the young people are properly catered for. All three have a deep sense of commitment to the task and obviously derived great enjoyment from their work.

By now some 18,000 young people have taken part in the project and hopefully each one will have gained a sense of achievement at having done something positive in the development of their country, will have developed a better understanding of other parts of their own country, and at the same time have had some jolly good fun.

Whilst chatting with the volunteers at Rrëshen, one asked me: "Do you have mass youth projects like this in Britain?"

RADIO TIRANA

Radio Tirana broadcasts to Europe in the English language at the following times (Greenwich Mean Time):

06.30 - 07.00	31, 42 metres
18.30 - 19.00	31, 42, 215 metres
22.30 - 23.00	31, 42, 215 metres

Ismail Kadare: CHRONICLE IN STONE
(Serpent's Tail, 1987)

Reviewed by Laurie Prescott.

First published in Albanian in 1970, this fine novel has been recently translated into English and published in Britain. The author, Ismail Kadare, was born in 1936 in Gjirokastra, the city that forms the background to the novel. He has become a highly successful writer of poetry, short stories, novellas and novels. He is popular not only within Albania, but world-wide. His best works have been translated into many world languages, and in France they are best-sellers.

For Gjirokastra and its inhabitants, World War II became a microcosm of Albanian history, namely occupations by one warring army after another. The Italian, Greek and German armies took turns in trying to crush and subdue the Albanian people. This war, however, was turned into a National Liberation War by the Albanian people, who not only secured independence but also placed the country firmly on the road of the construction of socialism. Kadare lived through this period and in his book vividly describes events and everyday experiences during the war, as seen through the eyes of a child. This is an unusual conception, but readers of Kadare will be familiar with the surprising perspectives he presents. In both The Castle and The General of the Dead Army he successfully explores the psychology and inner subjective world of Albania's enemies, using this as a vehicle to illuminate the freedom-loving spirit of the Albanian people.

The interlinking of the growing boy's lively imagination with reality is sharply depicted in the book and comes over well in translation. When he first hears the expression 'occupied city', he admits: "I

couldn't see how a city could be unoccupied". After a Nazi massacre, he is introduced to the words 'White terror'. This conjures up the following thoughts: "Why do they call what's happening these days a 'white terror'? Why not green terror, or blue terror? . . . I had grown more and more afraid of the colour white. The white roses I could remember, the drapes in the main room, grandmother's nightgown, all now seemed inscribed with the word 'terror'"

The boy becomes fascinated by the building of the Italian airfield outside the city, and identifies with the largest bomber stationed there. When, under the Greek occupation, the bomber returns to blast the city, the youngster stares incredulously skywards. Later, on finding the wreckage of an Italian plane, he and a friend urinate on the remains of a wing.

Throughout the book backward social practices, such as superstition and belief in magic, are frowned on by the more progressive characters, who provide a scientific explanation both of their social basis and of their usefulness to the occupiers. The reader, becoming acquainted in some detail with the common practice of using hair clippings for black magic and chicken bones for fortune-telling, gains a deepening understanding of the enormous strides made by the Albanian people in the sociological and ideo-political fields since Liberation.

As the novel progresses, so the war affects people's lives in a more direct way. The change in the governing military merely means a different language for official proclamations, and a change in currency. The city is bombed and many youngsters leave their homes and join the partisans. One of the boy's friends assassinates the Italian commander and his younger aunt (17 years old), who has earlier been rebuked for reading newspapers -- "newspapers are for men" --

leaves for the mountains. The war becomes more savage, with the killing of collaborators and fierce reprisals from the fascists and nazis. The adults around the boy talk of 'class war', but in a confused way, as in this passage:

"'We had thought this trouble was over, but now it looks as if the worst is yet to come. Do you remember Enver, the Hoxha boy?'

'The one who went to study in the land of the Franks? How could I forget?!

'Well, they say he's the one leading the war now. He's also the one who invented this new war I was telling you about'.

'That's hard to believe', said Grandmother; 'he was such a well-behaved boy'.

'Yes, Selsixhe, very well-behaved. But they say he wears dark glasses now so he won't be recognised and that he's the one running the war'".

When the Italians retreat, four columns of partisans march on the city looking "pale and haggard, wearing outfits too big or too small". The partisans execute some of the worst collaborators and in one of the most poignant passages of the book Kadare brings out one of the tragedies of war: a young woman is shot in error, and a partisan pays for this with his life.

At the end of the book the people flee from the city in the face of the German onslaught, only to return to a scene of devastation. The city of stone is still there, however, as the setting for fresh human dramas.

Anyone who is interested in Albanian life and literature can be recommended this novel, even at the present cost of the hardback of £9. 95.

POSTPONEMENT

We regret that the meeting announced in the last issue of Albanian Life for November 29th, 1987 has had to be postponed to Sunday, January 17th, 1988 at the Bishopsgate Institute, 230, Bishopsgate, London EC2 at 3.00 p.m.

The 11th century Church of Perhonda in Berat after restoration.



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