

WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!

DIMITRIJE TUCOVIĆ

**SERBIA AND
ALBANIA**

**A CONTRIBUTION TO
THE CRITIQUE OF THE
CONQUERING POLICY
OF THE SERBIAN
BOURGEOISIE**

Publisher's Note

This edition of *Serbia and Albania: A Contribution to the Critique of the Conquering Policy of the Serbian Bourgeoisie* has been republished from the Kultura edition, Beograd-Zagreb 1946.

THE NOVEMBER 8TH PUBLISHING HOUSE
TORONTO 2024

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This book by Dimitrije Tucović is proof that Serbia has always had people and movements who knew how to defend and safeguard its honour and true interests from the reactionary ruling circles, whenever they sought to mobilize the masses to serve their interests, whether at the expense of other nations or at the expense of the Serbian people itself. Tucović's book is a historical testimony of inestimable importance, confirming that the conscience of the Serbian people was not dead, even at a time when all ruling classes and parties, intoxicated by quick and relatively easy victories over Turkey, unanimously approved the expansionist policy of Pašić's government, poisoning the masses with chauvinism and hatred towards the small Albanian nation, which was just beginning its fight to establish its own national state.

Tucović's book — at a time when the euphoria of victory and excitement of conquests had gripped the entire ruling class, both the bourgeois parties and a significant part of the petty-bourgeois parties — played an enormous role. Even if it didn't mobilize the masses for a struggle (since it was published after the withdrawal of the so-called Coastal Corps from Albania), it nonetheless gathered the most progressive people against the first

open attempts at imperialist policy by Pašić's government. Arising from the working people, it defended and safeguarded the honour, glory and proud revolutionary past of Serbia, which had fought for liberation, against all those who tried to tarnish that honour and legacy in front of the Albanian people and progressive humanity.

It is not crucial how well-known the book was or how much it managed to mobilize the masses, since that depended on the strength of the workers' movement. What is crucial is that it appeared and expressed, through Tucović as the leader of proletarian and working Serbia, the true aspirations of the Serbian people who not only did not want but could not accept the oppression of other nations in its name. The book showed the world that the Serbian people, especially its most progressive section, did not agree with the expansionist policy of "its" government and "its" bourgeoisie. Proletarian, working Serbia did not yet have the strength to lead the entire nation in the fight against this policy, nor were the conditions ready for this, but with full legitimacy on behalf of the people, through Dimitrije Tucović and this work, it rose against the imperialist expedition, advocating for the freedom of the subjugated people.

It is all the more unfortunate that this book is almost entirely forgotten today, especially among younger generations. Many causes contributed to this. It is no surprise that the Serbian bourgeois parties — radicals, democrats and others — did everything to throw this significant and momentous work into oblivion. Nor is it surprising that social-democracy, by betraying Marxism and aligning itself with the bourgeoisie, betraying the

working class and betraying the people, remained silent about Tucović's work, as if it were a mortal sin committed against the ruling class and its imperialist policies. The social-democrats turned Tucović into a fetish, an icon conveniently displayed in bureaucratic offices to deceive the workers, while at the same time stripping Tucović of everything he really stood for — his fight against the imperialist, hegemonic policy of "his" bourgeoisie, his struggle for the equality of nations, and his assertion of the irreconcilability of the interests of workers and capitalists, of the masses and the ruling classes, both in peace and war.

It is not surprising that even the communists — under the conditions of difficult illegal struggle and without their own publishing houses, although recognizing the full significance of this persecuted and banned work — were unable to reissue it and familiarize broader layers of society with it, or to help them see that the battle they were waging, as this war particularly confirmed, was in fact a continuation (under changed conditions and with far more ideological preparedness and clarity regarding the national question) of the struggle waged by the noble and great son of the Serbian people, Dimitrije Tucović.

The reappearance of Tucović's book today after more than thirty years has a special significance. It strengthens the brotherhood between the peoples of Yugoslavia and the Albanian people in their fight against imperialism, showing that even in the days when the military, under orders from Pašić's government and the military cliques, slaughtered the Albanian people and deepened the rift between them and the Serbian people, the

most progressive and far-sighted individuals in Serbia did not reconcile themselves to such policies. Tucović embodies the spirit of freedom and struggle, a spirit that has never slumbered in the Serbian nation, not even back then — especially since the First Uprising — and which, in these years, in the form of the communists, has risen up across the Balkans, forging a brotherhood against the foreign Italian-German conquerors, and today against the intrigues of the imperialist cliques of England and America.

Tucović's book was not a random occurrence. It emerged from the Serbian people's struggle for national survival at a time when the entire world was gripped by the fever of preparations for an imperialist war, and the masses in Europe, particularly the petty-bourgeoisie, were intoxicated and inflamed by chauvinist propaganda. At that time, the Serbian people had two paths they could follow: the path led by the bourgeoisie — conquering foreign territories and subjugating other peoples with the support of "friendly" imperialist Great Powers, fighting with other states over the spoils taken from Turkey; or the path proposed by Tucović — brotherhood and unity among the Balkan peoples (based on full equality and the struggle against the imperialist Great Powers, as well as the "domestic" imperialist governments tied to them).

Naturally, there were few people who thought like Tucović, who believed the fault in the Serbian-Bulgarian war of 1913 laid in their "own" government, and saw Serbia's access to the sea as the imperialist policy of their "own" bourgeoisie. But the path they advocated was the only possible and

correct one for the people. Only in this way could the Balkan peoples be saved from mutual slaughter for the sake of "domestic" monarchies and bourgeoisies tied to foreign imperialism. Looking at the Balkan problems in this way, Tucović was simultaneously further developing the ideas of Svetozar Marković in his famous work Serbia in the East, and especially, in regard to relations with the Albanians, he built upon the thinking and action of Marko Miljanov, the great Montenegrin hero and relentless fighter against Turkish feudalism. Svetozar Marković was a revolutionary democrat with very strong socialist leanings, and Marko Miljanov expressed the interests and struggles of the oppressed peasantry (both "Orthodox" and Albanian), while Tucović, without losing touch with the people's past and history, aimed to express the stance of the modern proletariat.

Svetozar Marković approached the question of national liberation from the standpoint of consistent revolutionary democracy, opposing the monarchy and bureaucracy at a time when there was no modern proletariat in Serbia. Marko Miljanov, like the heroes of the First Uprising, viewed that struggle as a realization of the centuries-old aspirations of the peasantry oppressed by aghas and beys, as a realization of popular (essentially peasant) justice and freedom, against both the Turks and domestic rulers who had already begun to care more for themselves and their dignitaries than for the suffering people.

Tucović, looking forward toward socialism and the brotherhood of nations in the context of imperialism and the existence of the modern proletariat, expressed the tendencies of the unfinished

peasant revolts, the ideas of peasant democracy and national freedom. Marković's ideas were those of the unfinished bourgeois-democratic revolution, Miljanov expressed the aspirations of the peasantry, while Tucović, through the proletarian movement, expressed the aspirations of the working class in addressing the national question during the era of imperialism.

But it would be a mistake to think that Tucović saw all these problems correctly. Tucović was undoubtedly the most intelligent and consistent figure of Serbian social-democracy. However, it must be remembered that Serbian social-democracy developed in the shadow of and under the ideological guidance of Austrian and German social-democracy. The leaders and theorists of Austrian and German social-democracy — Bauer, Kautsky, Hilferding and others — consciously spread opportunist illusions within the workers' movement. Tucović worked selflessly and honourably for the cause of the working class and the working masses in general; he could even be said to have initiated the workers' movement in Serbia. He did not consciously spread the opportunist ideas of the leaders of the Second International, knowing them to be revisionist, but he undoubtedly believed in many of them himself. However, in terms of history, what matters is not just the fact that he held illusions, but what kind of illusions they were and what he saw correctly — this is the essence of his idealist views.

Tucović's most significant work is undoubtedly Serbia and Albania. In this work, although to a lesser extent than in his other writings, all his weaknesses and illusions are reflected, but more

than in any other of his works — indeed, in the entire body of work of Serbian social-democracy before and during the war of 1914-18 — the positive aspects of his views are visible, in which he went much further than any social-democrat in Europe except for the Bolsheviks. In some respects, he came closest to the Bolsheviks and to Lenin and Stalin's teachings on the national question.

Tucović had no understanding of Bolshevism or Lenin's work. He saw Lenin's entire struggle to build a proletarian party and establish its ideological foundations merely as a "regrettable" split in Russian social-democracy, expressing satisfaction when Lenin, the "old splitter," "was left in the minority" (for instance, in the so-called August Bloc). Not only did Tucović not know about the deep ideological differences involved in the internal struggles of the Russian workers' movement, but he was also unaware of the most basic facts about the work, strength and positions of the Bolsheviks. In private conversations, he called Dragiša Lapčević, a notorious opportunist and revisionist, a "radical in social-democracy," and yet, in accordance with the teachings of the leaders of the Second International — "for the sake of party unity" — he sat with him in the same forums. Tucović did not understand — and this is confirmed by this book — the class essence of the then-bourgeois (democratic!) state and its apparatus of force (the army). He did not clearly grasp the path of revolutionary development under the conditions of the imperialist epoch, and therefore did not fully comprehend the essence of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism. He did not entirely grasp the profound emancipatory signifi-

cance of the Albanian uprisings or the great importance of figures like Marko Miljanov (whom he reduced to a medieval criterion). In his fight against "his" bourgeoisie in the imperialist, plundering war, he did not reach concrete conclusions about the essence of the bourgeoisie and "his" imperialist government in such a war. At a time when Comrade Stalin, in his famous work *Marxism and the National Question*, had already exposed Otto Bauer, the most renowned theorist on the national question in the Second International, Tucović was still enthused and captivated by those same ideas.

And yet, despite these facts, it would be wrong to underestimate the significance of Tucović's book. Tucović was taken in by Bauer, but his book, only in its external form, its general phrasing and some general propositions, has connections to Bauer's writings and "theories" on the national question. In substance, on the fundamental issues and in its concrete treatment of the national question, Tucović fundamentally differs from Bauer and from all the "theories" of the leaders of the Second International. He far from aligned with the teachings of Lenin and Stalin, but he also far from aligned with the "teachings" of the Second International.

What is basic in Bauer and the Second International's "teachings" on the national question? The leaders of the Second International believed that:

1. The imperialists, even when they invade colonies and semi-colonies by fire and the sword, still promote the progress of these countries by spreading capitalist relations and breaking down patri-

archal (feudal) systems.

2. They advocate for the oppressed peoples' right to cultural autonomy but not the right to self-determination up to secession, claiming that larger states are more progressive and have greater potential for development than smaller states.

3. In imperialist, plundering wars, they argue that the workers should not work for the defeat of "their" government, but rather appeal for peace and try to "reason" with the militarists and warring factions.

It is not difficult to see that this policy serves the interests of the most reactionary and aggressive imperialist elites. In the struggle of colonial peoples, what matters is not which class leads the struggle or in whose name, but whether the struggle objectively weakens the imperialists, the greatest enemies of the working class. Stalin emphasized that, for example, the absolutist monarch of Afghanistan, who fought against the British imperialists, was objectively more progressive than the British socialists (Labour Party members) who supported the imperialist policies of their government. Even though the subjugation of colonies introduces more advanced social relations (capitalism instead of feudalism), such subjugation is not progressive because it strengthens the positions of the bourgeoisie of the conquering country in its struggle against "its" proletariat and halts the free development of the oppressed nation. Reducing the rights of oppressed peoples to cultural autonomy and proclaiming the greater progressiveness of large states as an absolute principle essentially justifies the subjugation of other nations and the existence of multinational states dominated by one

hegemonic nation (Bauer's theory of the progressiveness of Austria-Hungary's existence). If the secession of an oppressed nation weakens imperialism, weakens the greatest imperialist group of the ruling nation, the proletariat will not oppose it but will instead help bring about the secession. At the same time, the proletariat of the oppressed nation must work against "its" bourgeoisie, which spreads chauvinism and seeks to drive a wedge between "its" proletariat, "its" people, and the proletariat and people of the ruling nation. In every case, the fight for cultural autonomy essentially strengthens the position of the imperialists of the ruling nation by preserving the "unity" of the "great" state, by disconnecting the struggle of the oppressed nation from the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat of the ruling nation, and by convincing the masses to be loyal to the state and submissive to the imperialists — the propagandists of great-state ideas — through the myth of the progressiveness of every large state. Lastly, it denies the progressive character of the revolutionary national struggle of the oppressed peoples. In short, the proletariat of the ruling nation must consistently defend the principle of self-determination up to secession, not merely the right to cultural autonomy.

The question arises — what was Tucović's stance on these issues?

1. Tucović clearly and unequivocally pointed out that Pašić's government, with its invasion of Albania in November 1912, brought nothing progressive to the Albanian people but instead hindered their development and struggle to create a free state, helping Italy and Austria-Hungary, the imperialist powers, entrench themselves in Albania

by suppressing the actions of Pašić's government.

2. In contrast to Bauer, Tucović did not emphasize the slogan of cultural autonomy but the right of the Albanian people to an independent state and free internal development.

3. Tucović strongly opposed the imperialist policies of the Serbian government, recognizing that they only deepened the oppression of the Serbian people. He rejected any support for such a government and its policies, and welcomed its defeat.

Thus, in this book, Tucović, by standing against the imperialist policies of "his" government and "his" bourgeoisie and by defending the right of the Albanian people to self-determination, acted honourably and unequivocally, defending socialism and internationalism, and protecting a small, underdeveloped nation from "his" bourgeoisie — something that the opportunist, pro-imperialist theorists of the Second International never attempted. Tucović undoubtedly adhered to Marx, but the new imperialist epoch required a new elaboration and formulation of the national question, which he did not accomplish, nor was he capable of doing so. Lenin and Stalin carried out this task, developing the national question almost from the ground up, in a new way and in new conditions. However, unlike the leaders of the Second International, Tucović did not betray Marx, nor did he replace Marx's internationalism with social-chauvinism. Tucović's main weakness was not, as it was for the leaders of the Second International, in revising and altering Marx, but in his inability to fully grasp the new epoch and the necessity of further elaborating Marxist theory

on the national question in changed conditions. Unlike the leaders of the Second International, Tucović advocated for the brotherhood and equality of the Balkan peoples, both developed and underdeveloped, in the fight against the imperialist Great Powers. He was the only one who, at the head of the most progressive section of the Serbian people, raised his voice on behalf of the people against the plundering, imperialist policies of the bourgeois (Pašić's) government, for the freedom of the Albanian people, for their right to unhindered development, and for the brotherhood of the Serbian and Albanian peoples.

At the very dawn of the imperialist policies of the Serbian bourgeoisie, Tucović met these policies with fire. Amidst the victorious, chauvinist intoxication of that time, he rose as the vigilant conscience of the people. Even if he did not have enough organized and conscious forces behind him to ignite the struggle, and even if he was unable to see all the conditions or apply every method to it, he nonetheless fulfilled his duty honourably and initiated this struggle, despite its shortcomings and weaknesses.

The new movement that emerged and developed after him eventually found the correct road to realize, under new conditions, the ideals for which he fought. The Communist Party of Yugoslavia — by organizing the masses to drive out the occupiers from our country, supported by the Soviet Union — and the new socialist state created under the leadership of Lenin and Stalin, achieved both the brotherhood and cooperation of the Yugoslav peoples. It laid the foundation for fraternal cooperation with the other Balkan

peoples, particularly the Albanians and Bulgarians, with whom the same reactionary cliques, against whom Tucović had risen, sought to create enmity between the Serbian people and the other peoples of Yugoslavia.

It is all the more heartening for today's fighters for the unity of the Balkan peoples against the foreign oppressors to see that, even at a time when the chauvinist and imperialist policies of the reactionary cliques were beginning to poison relations with fraternal and neighbouring peoples, the progressive spirit and conscience of their people were not dormant, but were warning about the consequences and calling for a struggle for the brotherhood and equality of peoples. They can see that the thread of progressive development and the fight for progress has never been broken, not even for a moment, and that this struggle today can help — and already is helping — in realizing the great, age-old ideals of the greatest minds of the Balkans — the solidarity and unity of the Balkan peoples in the fight against the oppressors.

This book by Dimitrije Tucović confirms this fact better than anything else, and in that lies, among other things, its great significance, which is why we cherish it and are proud of it.

PREFACE

We have taken up the Albanian question here more out of practical necessity than theoretical interest. The Albanian policy of our government has ended in a defeat that has cost us great sacrifices. Even greater sacrifices await us in the future. The imperialist policy of the Serbian government towards the Albanian people has created such conditions on Serbia's southwestern border that peace and normalcy are unlikely in the near future. At the same time, Albania has been pushed by this policy into the arms of the two great powers most interested in the Western Balkans, and any strengthening of influence by any capitalist state on the Balkan Peninsula poses a serious danger to Serbia and the normal development of all Balkan nations.

However, in order to respond to this practical goal, we had to examine the situation in Albania. This was even more necessary because, first, our press, in a damaging competition to support a poorly informed and poorly executed policy, has for months and years spread biased opinions about the Albanian people, and second, the government itself has attempted to justify its imperialist policy in Albania with such opinions.

More information about the conditions and conflicts of interest in this part of the Balkans should lead to a more accurate understanding of the situation in Albania and the creation of better relations between the Serbian and Albanian peoples. In particular, more informa-

tion is needed by the proletariat, which bears the primary responsibility to firmly oppose the imperialist policies of the bourgeoisie and ruling circles and to demonstrate, through this relevant practical issue, how healthy and beneficial the work of Balkan social-democracy is in fostering friendship, alliance and full unity among all Balkan peoples.

If this booklet serves as a contribution to that historical task of the Balkan social-democratic parties, our modest expectations will have been fulfilled.

January 1, 1914
Belgrade

D.T.

I. FROM THE LIFE OF THE ALBANIANS

1. Homeland and Expansion

The homeland of the Albanians is primarily a network of gigantic mountains that separate the fertile valleys of Old Serbia and Macedonia from the Adriatic Sea. This land descends to the coast from Shkodra in the north down to the Greek settlements in the south, but this relatively long coastal strip is not only narrow but also swampy and malarial. The most favourable living conditions are provided by the intermittently widened fertile valleys of the Drin, Mat, Seman, Shkumbin and Devoll rivers. However, the area of mountainous gorges with small river ports and plains is still the true homeland of the Albanian tribes, which stubbornly preserve relations and ways of life from ancient origins.

Through this mountainous terrain once passed very important routes of the civilized world, especially in the south, the Via Egnatia: Durrës, Elbasan, Struga, Ohrid, Bitola, and further towards Salonika and Constantinople, and in the north, the Via di Zenta, the Zeta road, which broke through from Shkodra along the Drin Valley to Prizren and then led into the interior of the Balkan Peninsula. Traces of the once significant economic and cultural movements that flowed along these routes and their branches are preserved to this day in mostly ruined fortifications and still-standing monumental bridges; Albania

is full of them. But today, these roads are deserted. Along small, overgrown paths, some of which are difficult to pass, barely a trace remains. And farther from them, to the right and left, reigns such a primitiveness of life that it seems as if the influences of the former cultural movements stopped at the first ridges of karst through which these routes struggled to pass. Just a few years ago, a traveller in Northern Albania wrote in his notes that he fired shots from his revolver to "announce to the distant world that a European foot had stepped for the first time on the peak of Kunora and that for the first time a European had seen the Lura lakes." It is as if we hear the joyful voice of an explorer of Central Africa.

The fate of these areas is inseparably linked with the fate of the Adriatic Sea. As long as the Adriatic Sea, as we will see later, served as a major channel for the entire vast traffic between the West and the East, the Adriatic coast was very active in economic terms. The traces of this economic and commercial life can be seen in the Albanian coastal towns as well as in some old mining sites. The diversion of commercial traffic from the Mediterranean Sea to the Atlantic Ocean, which we discuss in more detail in the third chapter, affected the entire Balkan Peninsula, including Albania. Over time, the ports of the Adriatic Sea lost their old importance for global traffic with Constantinople and the East, and as a result, the transverse routes through Albania declined, while internal traffic on the peninsula began, due to numerous political and

economic changes, to gravitate increasingly toward Salonika to the south and Central Europe to the north. Even the trade of towns along the Drin, from Korça to Peja, once supplied exclusively through Durrës, Kruja and Shkodra, now turns towards Skopje, Bitola and Salonika.

Thus, the natural isolation of the Albanian homeland has been reinforced by almost absolute cultural and communicational exclusion, and Turkey, otherwise rigid in enforcing and securing transportation, was only too happy to wash its hands of these tribes, leaving them to fend for themselves, plunder, and mutual extermination.

The tribes multiplied, despite the ravages of blood feuds, but in the mountains and ravines, with their ancient ways of working, there was never enough bread. From this hardship, the Albanians sought a way out, and as always in the history of migrations, they moved where nature provided more resources for life, towards the fertile valleys of Old Serbia and Macedonia. This was also the direction in which new traffic routes led, for today the towns on this side of the Drin, supplied with goods through Skopje, Bitola and Salonika, have become markets even for those Albanian tribes living deep within Albania.

Much has been written about this penetration of the Albanians to the east, as it greatly concerned Serbian settlements in the north-western regions of Turkey. This is still today a major tool used by chauvinist press outlets to incite hatred among the Serbian people to-

wards the "wild" Albanians, concealing the brutal atrocities that the Serbian army committed against them. How many tears have been shed over the fact that historic Kosova has been overrun by Albanians. They passed even further, surrounding the old Serbian border, and in large numbers were found in the newly liberated districts, only to be forcibly expelled from them, thereby strengthening the Albanian belt around the border. They descended into Macedonia, deeply permeated the Tetova basin, and reached the Vardar; from the northwest, they encircled Skopje.

We cannot delve here into the question of how much the thinning of the Serbian element in these regions is a direct result of the Albanian advance and how much is due to the general, established migration of the Serbian people from the south to the north. The settlement of Šumadija undoubtedly came about through the depopulation of the southwestern regions. It is historically established that the Serbian population from these regions retreated en masse with Austrian troops whenever they had to halt their advances southward and withdraw in the 17th and 18th centuries. After all, where did the Serbs in Old Vojvodina come from, and who moved them and for what reason? If all these and many other factors were taken into account, the *blood revenge* that today's Serbian ruling circles are preaching and *executing* against the Albanians would not seem any more justified than the one that so appalled Balkanicus (Stojan Protić) and Dr. Vladan (Djordjević). More-

over, if it were true that the Serbian element was simply pushed out by the Albanian element, would it not be the first time in history that the invasion of some better-organized tribes or those with other advantages displaced a people from their hearths? Did not the Slavic tribes displace the indigenous inhabitants of these lands by means that history does not regard kindly? And after all, did not the Turks displace both them and other conquered peoples, yet despite this, official Serbia now regards them as its greatest allies in the newly acquired territories?

The Albanians spread to the east at the expense of the Slavs, that much is true. But investigating the causes of this Albanian penetration gives even less justification for a vengeful stance towards them. First of all, how did the Albanians conquer these areas: *by displacement or assimilation*? In what field were they stronger? It is obvious that they had no conditions for assimilation, as they culturally lagged behind all their neighbours, even the Montenegrins. Professor Cvijić found only 140 fully Albanianized households in Kosova! Therefore, the Albanians settled in places that others had abandoned either willingly or forcibly, from which the original inhabitants had been driven or pushed out. This abandonment was undoubtedly caused by the unbearable proximity of primitive, plundering, unruly Albanian tribes, or even their direct pressure. Insecure with their property, unprotected in their lives, hindered in their freedom of work and management of the fruits of their labour,

the old inhabitants had to leave their homes.

On the other hand, frequent migrations are a feature of life in Turkey in general, not just in the border areas near the Albanians. *And the cause of such easy and frequent migrations lies in the feudal system of agriculture.* Just as the pastoral lifestyle of the Albanians was the basis for their mobility and nomadic habits, so too the feudal land ownership system was the main reason why the original inhabitants were so inclined to migrate. They were not tied to their hearths by *property*, the strongest bond known to society. Therefore, examining this issue must lead us to the conclusion: that the violence of the “wild” Albanians is in every respect an insufficient reason to explain the process of Albanian domination and penetration to the east, *but that this process occurred based on an economic system that remained the real foundation of life in Turkey up to the present day.*

To the extent that other causes contributed, such as a sense of insecurity and brute force, they were rooted in the system of governance in Turkey, in the general anarchy of administration and the lack of protection for the common folk. The Turkish regime turned a blind eye when Albanians committed brutal violence against Christians, just as it ruthlessly crushed them whenever their actions harmed the ruling regime’s interests. The Albanians were not the only tribe with which the Turkish regime dealt as it saw fit. The Kurds, neighbours of the Armenians, were treated similarly.

By penetrating to the east, the Albanian element not only mixed extensively with Serbian settlements but almost completely dominated certain areas, such as Metohija and Peja, where, just a few centuries ago, the political and ecclesiastical centre of the Serbian people under Turkish rule was located. The most beautiful monuments of Serbian medieval culture are today surrounded almost exclusively by the Albanian population. This mixture of living people and ancient monuments, which gave so much work to the Conference of London in delimiting Albania from Serbia, arose from the intersection of two currents of cultural and national movement: the first, older one, during the trade relations of the medieval Serbian state with the Adriatic Sea, spurred the penetration of the Serbian people towards the coast, and the dead monuments of this movement are scattered throughout Northern Albania; the second, more recent one, resulted from the retreat of the Serbian people northeastward, deeper into the interior and closer to the northern border. Step by step, the Albanian element followed this retreat.

In the first period, the political and cultural superiority of the Serbian people prevailed; in the second period, the cultural backwardness and isolation of the Albanian people, in which tribal organization retained its full strength, prevailed. Turkey not only did nothing to bring the Albanians out of isolation and introduce them into communal life through cultural measures, but in the very essence of its system of governance, it carried all the

conditions for preserving Albanian primitiveness, just as it hindered development in every other respect. Now that the Turkish regime no longer exists, it is all the more necessary to emphasize this, because the ruling circles of the Balkan states, as successors to Turkish power, have already begun to follow the barbaric principle rather than the scientific one: *that changing institutions and living conditions also changes people*, opting instead for the brutal principle that even Turkey did not use on such a scale: *that graves and gallows are a better teacher than new institutions*.

2. Tribal Organization and Blood Feuds

The eastward penetration of the Albanians is of great historical significance. It determined the fate of the Serbian people throughout the region on the southern border of former Serbia. It created the well-known Albanian belt, which very likely could have been one of the reasons why our national revolution in 1804 did not advance further south and which, in any case, later prevented the influence of free Serbia from reaching the oppressed Slavic masses in Turkey.

However, this Albanian expansion to the east leads us to question the strength of their tribal social organization. Namely, it indirectly suggests that the tribal organization among the Albanians is *declining* and is *no longer able to meet their needs*.

In Northern Albania, the social life of the Albanians is still carried out within the bounds of tribes, of which, according to Father

Mihačević, there are twenty-seven.* It is true that due to migration and the movement of the population from these mountains, the tribes have often been *territorially dispersed*, but *blood kinship* is still felt even after this. For example, the Krasniqi can be found in the vicinity of Prizren, in Kosova, Ostrožub, the Gjakova district, Peja and Berane, Malesia and other areas.** Although the Krasniqi in all these regions maintain their tribal name and kinship and although all these dispersed parts of one tribe consider themselves as belonging to the *same tribe* or, in Albanian, *kushëriri* (cousins), it is only natural that the distance from their original tribal base weakens their tribal allegiance, gradually extinguishing the traditions and old ways of life. If these settlers arrive in areas where other cultural influences are strong or where state law prevails, such as in the Vardar Valley, their tribal kinship, ways of life, blood feuds, etc., quickly give way to general law and a new way of life. When a stranger travels through these regions, it is difficult to notice any difference in the way of working, the cultivation of the land, and the management of households between these Albanian settlers and the local Slavic inhabitants.

Among the tribes that have remained on their ancestral hearths, whether entirely or in large part, tribal organization still represents a powerful social force. In certain tribes, one

* See Father Lovro Mihačević, *Across Albania: Impressions from the Journey*, pp. 21-24.

** See "About the Arnauts," Letter from M.Č., *Borba*, 1912, No. 15.

can still find today tribal elders who, with the help of a few older and respected men, manage the general affairs of the tribe. There is still a tribal system of judicial authority, whether in the form of the *pleqnia* (council of elders), a group of twelve chosen from case to case to resolve major disputes, or in the form of courts of *honourable men* or specially *selected judges*. For the selection of these tribal officials, as well as for other tribal matters, there are *public assemblies* whose decisions are absolutely binding. But the most characteristic manifestation of tribal *life* among the Albanians is still the *blood feud*, which, as Engels aptly said, is only a civilized form of our modern death penalty. "For his security, an individual relied on the protection of the tribe, and he could do so; whoever wronged him wronged the entire tribe. From this, from the blood ties of the tribe, arose the obligation of blood vengeance, which was unconditionally recognized among the Iroquois. If a member of a foreign tribe killed a tribesman, the entire tribe of the slain was obligated to take blood vengeance. First, reconciliation is attempted; the killer's tribe holds a council and offers terms of reconciliation to the slain man's tribe, usually offering expressions of regret and valuable gifts. If accepted, the matter is settled. Otherwise, the wronged tribe appoints one or more avengers, who are obligated to hunt down and kill the murderer."*

* See Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, p. 78.

On blood feuds among the Albanians, Mi-

No matter how one views the current authority of these tribal institutions over their members and the present vitality of old tribal traditions, *it is undeniable that tribes still regard each other as certain independent political entities*. Many natural and social causes — the nature of the terrain, settlement patterns, scarcity of land, migration, etc. — have influenced these kinship-based communities to combine in various ways with regional communities bound by significant local interests, such as

hačević writes: “A blood feud must not be forgotten; it must, whether one wants it or not, be avenged... The killer, to protect himself from the blood feud for at least a while, must leave his home and move to another village. But the relatives of the slain have the right to kill not only the killer himself but any man from his house and his kin, and even then the duty to kill the murderer remains. *And since revenge begets revenge, blood upon blood piles up, and they kill each other to the point where entire families are left without a male head and thus perish. The feud can last five, ten, twenty or even more than fifty years.* A blood feud can be avoided through payment or forgiveness. Representatives from both sides, twelve or more, gather in the house of the killer to discuss the matter. If an agreement is reached, the killer is brought in with his eyes and hands bound, and the offended party is called upon to forgive him by untying his eyes and hands as a sign of pardon. Another method of reconciliation is as follows: the killer, accompanied by two or three friends, goes to the house of the offended party, kneels before him with hands tied and begs for forgiveness. As a sign of forgiveness, the offended person unties his hands and invites him inside as a guest.” (*Across Albania*, pp. 103-105.)

the *banners* and *krene* (communal organizations). But despite all these connections and interests, one principle still holds: *what lies outside the tribe is foreign*. Within these tribal boundaries, the Albanians find the most secure protection, as the entire tribe still stands for every tribesman.

However, although the tribes in Northern Albania still represent distinct “states” that guard their boundaries as sacred, and although blood vengeance is still practised, it must be acknowledged *that the economic foundation of tribal life among the Albanians has long since vanished*. First of all, the land is no longer common tribal property. A division of the land has been carried out, though it has not yet been fully completed. Only forests (and not always), pastures, water sources and similar resources remain as communal property; all other arable land is owned by family *cooperatives*, which are highly developed in Northern Albania. An example of such a cooperative is the “undivided family” of Jaka Matin from Mirdita, described by Marko Miljanov,* which “consists of about one hundred members, including around sixty armed soldiers.” Households with five, ten, fifteen or twenty adult men are very common, even typical, among the Albanians.

Regardless of the size of these cooperatives, with the division of land, tribal organization has lost its basis for internal unity and harmony. Individual families were able to seize

* See *The Life and Customs of the Albanians*, p. 47.

a larger and better portion of tribal land at the expense of others. And since — what is especially important for the disintegration of tribal organizations — the monetary economy has more or less penetrated everywhere, stronger and wealthier cooperatives were able to increase their wealth by acquiring land through plunder, theft, trade, and all other means facilitated by the monetary economy and the production of goods.

Just as the true foundation of internal tribal unity was shattered by the transition of land from tribal to cooperative ownership and the development of the monetary economy, so too did the scarcity of land and the pressure in the craggy mountains of Northern Albania burden the tribes with a constant struggle over land and tribal territories. At the height of its development, tribal organization assumed very undeveloped production and very sparse settlement over a vast area. As long as the tribe had enough unoccupied land available, which could simply be taken and cultivated as its members grew, disputes and fights over land were unnecessary, and the scarcity of land did not draw the tribe into constant conflicts with neighbouring tribes. Likewise, private cooperative ownership of land did not pose such a threat to the unity of the tribal organization. In this respect, the tribal organization among the Albanians has lost its real foundation.

How can this be explained? Tribal organization has lost its economic basis, yet it persists. How is this possible?

Such phenomena are not unusual in the history of human society. The organization of society and forms of communal life follow economic changes as a consequence of them, never the other way around. And how this process of adaptation of social life to the forms of labour and production will unfold and at what speed depends on many other historical factors.

In this regard, two characteristics are very significant for the Albanian tribes: first, their current homeland is an exclusively rocky, mountainous and infertile region in Northern Albania; second, this region, due to its natural isolation and exclusion from transportation, is perhaps the most isolated piece of land in Europe. It is on this land that the tribes have survived and, with their growing numbers, have squeezed one another, feeling the severe shortage of land even more intensely as the best parts of the land within the tribal borders have been seized by prominent individuals, a few *beys* (lords), and wealthy cooperatives. Meanwhile, the surrounding areas, both along the coast and to the south and from the fertile fields of Macedonia and Old Serbia to the east, *were occupied* by large estates whose boundaries were protected with the full authority of powerful *beys* and state authorities. Therefore, within the boundaries of the tribe, individuals no longer had a secure existence as they once did, and every attempt to find sustenance by expanding tribal territories led to sharp conflicts with neighbouring tribes and state authorities. The only result of

such attempts was an increase in the number of quarrels and enemies.

In this hardship, as in a kind of cage, a new life developed within and between the tribes. Above all, there was absolute distrust of everyone. All travellers in Albania report how jealously these highlanders guard the integrity of their territory and how much suspicion and mistrust they show toward any stranger, fearing that he has come to take something from their mountains! The struggle over borders and pastures began to rage. Blood feuds with all the neighbours ensued. Trapped from all sides, plunder became the only salvation for these highlanders. *Plunder became their main source of livelihood*, and ambushes, the extortion of travellers and merchants, cattle theft, accompanied by killings and reprisals for killings, and well-organized raids toward the coast or into the fertile areas to the east, became their regular occupation. All this reminds us of the situation in which the Greek tribes found themselves during the decline of their tribal organization, and about which Engels said: "The old tribal warfare, transformed into systematic brigandage on land and sea for the capture of cattle, slaves and treasure; in short, wealth was valued and respected as the greatest good, and the old tribal organization was exploited to justify violent plunder of wealth."

What now sustains the tribal organization? Since private land ownership and the production of goods have prevailed, the members of the tribe have been led to see their own

welfare only in their private households, the common tribal interest has narrowed and the internal unity of the tribe has disintegrated. *From that moment on, the tribes have presented themselves as unified entities only in relation to foreign tribes and to neighbouring communities with which they are in constant hostility and conflict.* Tribal organization no longer rests on internal unity but on the constant threat from outside and the perpetual tension and struggle on all sides — a struggle that is indeed a fight for survival.

But behind this tribal community and the current blood feuds, completely different living conditions are hidden. If, during the height of tribal life, the tribal community provided a secure and equal life for all its members, to-day each member enjoys as much security and comfort as his wealth allows. If the struggle with foreign tribes was once in the equal interest of all members, today it is primarily in the interest of those whose existence within the tribe is secure, who have herds for pasture and land for cultivation. If this struggle was once fought to protect and preserve tribal land, today it is primarily fought because of the lack of land. If blood vengeance was once a *means* of protecting the common tribal interest, today it arises as a *consequence* of constant friction caused by overcrowding and the lack of conditions for life, as a result of the absence of a common tribal interest, and as a result of two great evils: anarchy and poverty. As a folk song says: "They eat grass, and fight with us." Hence, blood vengeance has in many

cases ceased to be a public *tribal* affair and has taken on the most dangerous *anarchic* form of everyone against everyone. There are people who, because of blood debts, spend their lives in towers bristling with gun slits, and there are families in which not a single adult male head is present.

In this miserable state of these highlanders, Turkey kept watch! To protect the fertile coastal and eastern regions from their plundering, it stationed military garrisons at the exits of the gorges, preventing any passage and blocking access to the markets. The overall picture is now as follows: *every individual is imprisoned in his tower by blood vengeance, every tribe is imprisoned by the hostility of neighbour-ing tribes, and all together, the whole of Northern Albania is one vast prison, at whose gates Turkish soldiers stand guard.*

3. Economic Conditions

The Albanians are primarily an agricultural people, with livestock farming being their predominant occupation. They sustain themselves by cultivating the land, but especially by raising livestock.

There is a significant difference, both in terms of productivity and the sophistication of tools and methods of work, between the isolated tribes of Northern Albania and the fertile regions that the Albanians colonized, or those in the South, along the coast, and around the rivers Drin, Seman, Devoll, Shkumbin and Mat in their lower courses. This boundary coincides with the line of the *çiftlik* system. The

çiftliks (large agricultural estates) have spread across all areas that have sufficient natural conditions for profitable agricultural work. They extend right up to the exits of Northern Albanian gorges and passes, and beyond these borders, they are very rare, and where they exist, they are typically owned by tribal leaders, wealthier individuals or Catholic churches and metropolitan authorities.

Under the pressure of tribal traditions and the unbearable burden of tribal warfare and blood feuds, agricultural work has mostly remained bound to old, customary forms and methods, which are at a very primitive level. Travelling through Albania, I frequently saw wooden ploughs that merely scratch the surface, and one can pass through entire regions without seeing any crops other than maize. It seems there is no knowledge here about the benefits of crop rotation. When asked why they don't sow other grains besides maize and whether other grains can grow, they respond that this is simply the way they have always done it.

The primary wealth of these people once lay in livestock. The livestock is of very poor quality. Goats appear to be the most common domesticated animal among these highlanders. The small, shaggy, wild-looking cattle that roam in herds through the Albanian hills seem like the first descendants of the extinct aurochs, the ancestor of our domesticated cattle! But with the division of land, the penetration of the monetary economy and general insecurity, livestock numbers are dwindling

by the day. Livestock has become the main commodity for trade; the Albanian appears at the market with his animals. By selling livestock, he obtains the money needed to buy grain, pay interest and settle blood debts. And since the rocky terrain of Northern Albania cannot provide nearly enough grain for sustenance, money has become essential for survival. These highlanders have relied primarily on livestock and plunder to fend off starvation.

In addition to public insecurity and general impoverishment, the greatest blow to livestock farming came from the closure of access to the coast and the flatter, warmer regions. The *bey* system, having seized all the good land, left these highlanders to fight each other tribe against tribe over every gorge, every mountain and every crag, even if it wasn't worth a hundred pennies. The system increasingly blocked their access to pastureland. And since the livestock wealth of these areas, rich in pastures but poor in meadows, depended on the seasonal movement of livestock from the mountains to the coast and warmer regions, as the Koutsovlachs of Pindos and Macedonia do, *the political and economic entrapment of these tribes in their rocky mountains has ruined livestock farming, their main source of material survival.*

The great need for money on the one hand, and the drying up of sources to obtain it on the other, led to the development of a terrifying *usury system*. According to the accounts of many travellers, interest rates range between

40 and 60 per cent. Towns have become the centres of this money trade, enslaving the surrounding areas with heavy interest rates, so these poor souls constantly carry the fruits of their labour to the towns, only to return empty-handed.

The misery that has taken root in these "nests of freedom" has been vividly depicted by their best-known chronicler, Marko Miljanov. Describing the life of the Kuči, a Montenegrin tribe closely related to the Albanian tribes and at the same level of culture and conditions, Marko Miljanov writes:

"What land and homes they had in Nahija and Zeta, the Turks took over. They closed the markets on them. Everyone around the Kuči went to war with them, whether they prayed or crossed themselves. And so they spared no one around them: they looted, plundered and burned everyone, and everyone did the same to them. They were squeezed by every kind of hardship.

"So when their greatest torment from hunger came in the winter, when there was no green grass to help them, they counted the cabbages in their storage to see if they could survive until spring, and if they couldn't make it with cabbage, they dug up the roots of various plants (wild onions, bulbs, snowdrops), or they peeled the bark off trees. They mostly made bread from pine bark, hornbeam bark and elm bark. Beech bark was no good, but they scraped

the layer beneath it and ate it.”*

It is completely understandable why the surrounding people did not leave the starving Kuči in peace to enjoy their “freedom.” The Kuči depended on plunder and therefore hated peace and normal conditions, in which their source of life would dry up. Miljanov says of this:

“Pressed by the torments of hunger, the Kuči desired battle, and even when no one provoked them, they would seek out a skirmish, just to plunder... But as much as they harmed others, others harmed them just as much, and so they were squeezed, until even the enemies pressed them so tightly that they had no place left in their mountains and were forced to summer in Zhijevo and Labednica, where people forgot their own misery, watching how animals suffered from hunger and thirst.”

The misery of these tribes corresponds to the dreadful underdevelopment of their cultural needs and the generally low level of life. Living among the Albanians, Marko Miljanov was surprised not so much by the poverty in which these people lived but by the ease with which they endured it. And as the proud warrior, perhaps the last representative of medieval knights, could not grasp that the misery of life did not leave a mark on the souls or demeanour of these people simply because their needs were undeveloped, he was

* See Vojvoda Marko Miljanov, *The Tribe of Kuči in Folk Stories and Songs*, pp. 105-106.

enchanted by this phenomenon and called it “heroic poverty.” If you happen to meet a poor shepherd boy, “something between a human and a devil,” Miljanov recounts, you must marvel at “how pleased he is with himself that he wouldn’t trade places with an emperor, nor step aside if he met one on the road.”*

And when the state came to collect taxes from *their* serfs, they could hardly expect any other response than the one they regularly received. Women would tell their husbands, “Die *rather than submit to taxes*, or give us the rifles, and leave the rest to us!” And when the Young Turks tried to break these highlanders’ necks with taxes and military levies, a folk song was sung in the area of Gjakova during the Albanian uprising of 1908:

“Be merciful, the hardship is great,
Soften the unfortunate Albanian fate!
The richest has only a piece of land,
Four sheep, four goats — that’s all the
richest has.
From the rocks, they barely get any food,
Seven houses share one animal.
Through blizzards and snow, they carry
their load
Naked and hungry, without rest.
A rifle by their side, with only salt and
bread,
Death always looming over their heads!”

In other parts of Albania, as we have al-

* See Vojvoda Marko Miljanov, *The Life and Customs of the Albanians*, p. 15.

ready pointed out, economic conditions are much different. In these areas, the Albanians do not enjoy the mountain freedom and do not proudly carry their rifles like the highlanders of Northern Albania, but neither do they suffer from permanent hunger. As tenant farmers on *bey* estates, they have regular work, and through contact with the neighbouring Slavic population, they have learned to take up *fish-ing*. A significant number of Albanians work in menial jobs, usually as porters and sawyers in the towns of the Balkan states, and from some regions, such as the area around Prizren, many have begun to emigrate to America in large numbers. All of this has made it so that often there is no noticeable difference in the way of farming or cultural life between the Albanians in these regions and their Slavic or other neighbours.

However, economically, these areas differ from Northern Albania mainly due to the *bey* system. This original sin of Turkey, it seems, has hit Albania the hardest. Travelling through Central Albania, you see on one side houses perched on the very rocks like swallows' nests, and people living in crags and ravines where even goats would hesitate to wander. On the other side, in the fertile valleys of the Seman, Devoll and Shkumbin rivers, entire plains are overrun with thorn bushes, harder to pass through than a line of enemy soldiers, and where wild boar and other animals reign supreme. Settlements are very rare. Scattered villages usually consist of a dozen or so wretched tenant houses, which are a

stark contrast to the proud stone towers of the Northern regions. When I entered a village in Çiragi, between the Devoll and Shkumbin rivers, to see how the people lived, I found myself in something resembling caves for bats: the walls made of thorn, with a mountain looming over the village, no windows, and in the middle of the day, I had to light a candle to see where I was. Furniture and any semblance of order were nonexistent. Compared to these holes, the tenant houses of Macedonia, which otherwise reflect all the burdens and oppressiveness of the *bey* system, appear like palaces. And the appearance of the people who live in these houses matches the houses themselves. In terms of their physical deformities and the dull, vacant expressions on their faces, they are the exact opposite of the proud, sharp-featured highlanders of the North. Nowhere else in Macedonia did I get such a horrific picture of how far the *bey* system could degrade its serfs.

It seems that these areas are an *eldorado* of *bey* exploitation. Many feudal lords own dozens of villages, and the greatest feudal landowner in the world, Abdul Hamid, had over a hundred villages in this area. They expanded the boundaries of their estates as they pleased because they encountered no resistance, and they obtained the necessary labour from the mountains, where highlanders fled either from blood feuds or hunger. Whatever land could be cultivated without any improvements was put to use, and in the vast plains under the thickets, their herds grazed, even though with min-

imal effort these lands could be turned into granaries. A vivid picture of the destructive impact of *bey* feudalism.

4. The Character of the People and Spiritual Life

Albanians are without a doubt the only people in Europe where tribal organization still persists — this is the first form of human community after the family. Anyone who looks at this historically can see clearly that we are dealing with a people who, among all the peoples of the Balkans, are at the lowest level of development and are separated from the rest of the civilized world by entire centuries of rapid progress and significant social transformations.

However, primitive life and a low level of development are not indicators of the *capacity* for cultural life and development in general, as is often claimed in the political literature of imperialist bourgeoisie. For, if some peoples, *owing to favourable historical circumstances*, have made faster progress than others, leading human civilization while others remain in a primitive state, this does not give defenders of imperialist capitalist policies the right to regard these backward, weaker, defenceless peoples as *inferior races*, devoid of cultural potential, and to declare them eternal minors in need of their “cultural” tutelage. This distorted, reactionary defence of capitalist imperialism ignores the fact that all civilized peoples have passed through phases of tribal social organization and primitive conditions.

And this fact should not be lost on the representatives of imperialist bourgeoisie among the Balkan peoples, who themselves have not entirely shed the visible marks of recent tribal organization. That Montenegrin tribes have not advanced far beyond Albanian ones was well observed by Marko Miljanov, the best connoisseur of both, who advised every Serb: "Know that dealing with Albanians is not as difficult as it seems to you, for *you are not so far from them, nor they from you.*"

Yet, despite this, Balkanicus and Dr. Vladan each wrote an entire book with the clear intention of denigrating this poor Albanian people and proving their inability to lead a cultured and national life.* The emergence of such works deserves more attention than the works themselves. In capitalist states, this kind of literature has been around as long as imperialist capitalist policies. When the interests of capitalist classes dictated that European states begin a policy of colonial conquest, the literary market began to be flooded with writings similar to those of Balkanicus and Dr. Vladan. In Austria-Hungary, this type of literature grew after the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, filled with the same arguments that Balkanicus and Dr. Vladan began to introduce here. True, these arguments blatantly spit in the face of the *law of development*, which bourgeois science had unconditionally

* Stojan Protić (under the pseudonym Balkanicus), *The Albanian Problem, Serbia and Austria-Hungary*, p. 111. Dr. Vladan Djordjević: *The Arnauts and the Great Powers*, p. 188.

believed in and on which it based its struggle with the nobility and the church. But isn't imperialist colonial policy also a shameless trampling of all national ideals of independence, liberation and unification? The appearance of these writings marks an era in our literature, just as the Serbian army's campaign in Albania marks an era in Serbia's politics.

The bourgeoisie is beginning to strip away the veil from the Serbian people, who have long seen themselves as a downtrodden nation that relies only on the power of national *development*. The views of Balkanicus and Dr. Vladan correspond to the obsolete and long-overthrown caste spirit in which the nobility and clergy once defended their privileges, claiming they were spiritually superior to the people and therefore destined to rule over them. In its fight against privilege, the bourgeoisie once argued that the nobility and clergy were more spiritually developed not because they were naturally more gifted or chosen by God, but because they had better opportunities for intellectual work, and that those opportunities should be extended to the rest of the people so they too could develop spiritually. Today, the bourgeoisie denies the proletariat equal political rights based on the same discredited "theories" once applied by the nobility against them and against which the bourgeoisie sent its strongest people.

When the bourgeoisie treats its "brothers," the working class and the impoverished masses of its own nation, this way, what else can we expect from its representatives when

they speak about the Albanians? To prove that this people, as a race, has no sense of cultural or independent life, they portray everything primitive about them *not as a reflection of the historical stage they are at*, through which all peoples have passed, *but as proof of their racial unsuitability for cultural development*. A cursory historical look at human development shows that blood vengeance was once a form of public punishment and was *universally* practised among peoples at the stage of tribal life — and even persisted for some time after — but this has been used against the Albanians as evidence of some innate savagery in these tribes. When Dr. Vladan emphasizes this point, calling them “tailed people,” wouldn’t an Albanian be justified in reminding him that not long ago, Dalmatian women would keep their husbands’ bloody clothes and, showing them to their sons, swear them to blood vengeance?

With the same intent, Balkanicus scours every possible conversational lexicon to find the most negative descriptions of the Albanian character. Various writers and travellers depict Albanians at one moment as men who will die to keep their word, and at another as men who shoot people with a gun they borrowed just to look at. From the life of the Shala tribe, one untouched highland tribe, Miljanov shares two characteristic examples. A Shala man, led to the gallows, was stopped by the vizier at the moment a grimacing gypsy stood behind him with a raised *yatagan* (sabre), and the vizier asked him, “Bravely now, have you ever endured such torment?” The Al-

banian replied, "Twice, friends came to my house, and I had no bread to give them, and they had to go without supper; that was harder for me than this today, for this will soon pass, but that will never pass."* On another occasion, the vizier of Shkodra asked one of his servants, also a Shala man, to betray his fellow countrymen. When all other methods failed, the vizier tortured him and brought his mother, hoping she would persuade her son to give in to the vizier's wishes. The mother said: "Koljo! Koljo! Keep your honour and dignity! Don't worry about the two ounces of blood the vizier will spill!"** On the other hand, the well-known Austrian consul Prohaska, based on personal experiences in Luma, portrays the Albanians as the most treacherous people. Faced with such contradictory opinions, Balkanicus had no trouble deciding, as he had already made up his mind *in advance*. Choosing between Marko Miljanov and Prohaska, he chose Prohaska. He failed to see that these contradictory opinions about the Albanian character are precisely evidence *that their social life is in a transitional phase*: the tribes are losing their old powerful influence, and new relations have not yet formed. This Marxist view of things is not unknown to Balkanicus; he has, on occasion, tried to give us a lesson based on it. But such a view is not suitable for justifying the reactionary policies of the bour-

* See Marko Miljanov, *The Life and Customs of the Albanians*, p. 10.

** *Ibid.*, p. 32.

geoisie, and in this case, it would reveal the secret of the relative *historical* value of these tribes' character traits and their dependence on the stage of social life.

Moving within the narrow circle of the tribe, the Albanians have developed those character traits that stand out the most among them: *besa* (pledge of honour), brotherhood, hospitality, pride and honour. Something similar was found by Morgan among the Native American tribes, noting that "everyone acknowledges an indomitable sense of independence and personal dignity in their demeanour." Like the Native Americans, the Albanians' character traits are the product of the simplicity of tribal life. From all researchers, we know that these people live contentedly with the bare minimum of material and spiritual culture, and since their standards of life are as modest as their entire environment is narrow, even a poor shepherd boy can be celebrated as a hero, the pride and glory of the tribe, and elevated to the highest level of honour and fame by folk tradition. The less developed the social environment, the more prominently every individual stands out. Every movement they make, every deed they perform is followed and remembered, whether it be welcoming a guest, avenging a friend or singing while waiting for a Turkish *yatagan* to cut off their head. And just as folk tradition elevates them to the heavens for anything it likes, it also strictly and relentlessly condemns them if they fail to live up to expectations. This is the force that holds the com-

munity together.

However, just as these character traits were born from the tribal community, they are also lost with it. With the penetration of the monetary economy, the development of commodity production and the scramble for land, the tribe loses its strong influence over the actions and thoughts of individuals, and simple moral virtues begin to be replaced by new moral concepts. Friedrich Engels aptly said: "The power of these primitive communities had to be destroyed — it has been destroyed. But it has been destroyed by influences that appear to us in advance as degradation, as a fall into sin from the simple moral heights of the old clan society. The new, civilized, class society was sanctified by the lowest instincts: simple greed, lust for enjoyment, dirty vanity, selfish seizure of communal property; the non-class society was undermined and overthrown by the worst means: theft, violence, deception, betrayal."* The extent to which the old social organization has been replaced by the new determines the extent of this "fall into sin," and to that extent, the simple virtues of tribal morality have disappeared. Since this

* See Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family*, p. 92.

Marko Miljanov recounts this characteristic case regarding the Montenegrin tribe of Kuči. When, on one occasion, the vizier of Shkodra sent money to bribe the Kuči, someone asked Ola Pranova, "Will you betray the Drekalovići, Uncle Ole?" — "No, by my soul." "Well, will you take the money (the bribe)?" — "I will, by my soul."

development has reached different stages in various parts of Albania, travellers and experts have differing opinions on the character of the Albanians. This difference is thus a result of the changes that moral values undergo with the breakdown of tribal organization. Therefore, both those who saw one thing and those who saw another may be right; both Marko Miljanov and Prohaska may be right. But neither has the right to portray the Albanians as a particularly admirable race or, based on those observations, deny them the right to be part of the civilized world.

As with moral concepts and personal virtues, the entire spiritual life of the Albanians bears the imprint of tribal organization and the narrow boundaries of the *zhupa* (clan territory). Balkanicus also paid attention to their folk poetry. Every folk poetry operates within the boundaries of a people's experience, and the experience of the Albanians, like that of all other tribes, is limited by the narrow scope of tribal life. It expresses the feelings, desires and aspirations of people whose spiritual life cannot rise above the environment in which they live. We don't have any collections of Albanian folk songs to confirm this, but we do have a collection of songs from the Kuči tribe, which confirms even more — namely, that Montenegrin tribal poetry is no different in character. For example, the Kuči gather in a tavern and, like all heroes, drink wine and make plans for their great feat! One of them says:

“Do you know, Ivan, it wasn’t long ago,
When the Kelmendi attacked us on Kom,
They cut down Radović Grb,
And plundered our white sheep,
And we didn’t avenge them with a rifle...”

Ivan decides on revenge and finds two nephews, two Memedčevićs, and says to them:

“By God, my two young nephews,
*Have you been driving Kelmendi sheep and
shepherds?*
How will we strike them?”

To this, the nephews reply:

“We have been driving the white sheep,
We could strike them,
But Cijevna is dangerous at night,
Let alone driving sheep away from them.”

No one should think this is the content of just one song; no, throughout the entire *collection*, the most cherished feats sung about involve sheep theft! This only shows that these tribes have spent centuries in mutual struggle over every mountain, every gorge, every sheep. Will Balkanicus, based on this, also deny Montenegrin tribes the ability to live in an independent state? In contrast, our folk poetry has nothing in common with these spiritual products of lifelong shepherds because it is the product of a people whose life was not limited by tribal exclusivity or filled with plundering struggles for survival. More-

over, it is rooted in a broad historical foundation, borne of the memory of a once-powerful state life.

Every intellectual product of the Albanians had to struggle against the narrow tribal and local boundaries. It was difficult to transfer it beyond these boundaries because there was no cultural reciprocity between the various tribes and *zhupas*. But even here, Balkanicus takes the argument to the extreme by claiming that the Albanians have no knowledge of their most prominent historical figure, Skanderbeg, that they have forgotten him, and that there isn't a single song about him. I didn't specifically search for such songs, yet in just a few days of staying in Elbasan, I learned of one characteristic song about Skanderbeg, which begins like this:

“Where are you going, you heroic captain?
From the war, from the Balkan mountains.
Do you know him, you heroic captain,
The Albanian king, Skanderbeg, of great
name?
I know him well, I fought with him.
He is a great hero, he died for Albania;
He devoured enemies, took them down,
Only when he lay in the grave were they
free.”

Balkanicus's zeal in belittling the Albanian people as a race goes so far as to attribute Skanderbeg's historical role to his *Serbian mother*, Vojsava! And to what curious contradictions such long-outdated theories lead, let

this example show. One of the most respected representatives of Serbian historical scholarship, Mr. Jovan Tomić, in his book about the Albanians, states that part of the *Albanian* tribe Kelmendi settled in our Rudnik and *produced several prominent figures during the national revolution of 1804*. We don't know exactly whom Mr. Tomić is referring to, but many investigations suggest that the leader of that revolution, the founder of the Karadjordjević dynasty, Karadjordje Petrović, was of Albanian origin!

II. THE AUTONOMY OF ALBANIA

1. The Emergence of the Movement for Autonomy

Turkish rule in the Balkans emerged from *military* victories and was later maintained primarily through a *feudal* system. As a result, the entire state structure of the Ottoman Empire was predominantly *military-feudal* in character. Despite various reform movements and attempts, Turkey has retained this character to this day. It reflects its military, conquest-based origins and shows its feudal interior through its methods of governance, administrative divisions, military organization, taxation system, educational system, religious authority, and nearly all other public institutions and functions.

As an outward, visible expression of this order, by the late 18th and early 19th centuries, we see in Turkey a whole series of *autonomous regions and privileges* that, from a broader historical perspective, were nothing more than a consequence of the feudal state system. Just as, in the feudal economic system, *çiftliks* (land estates) lined up next to each other, bordered one another, but each operated as a completely separate unit within the economic framework, forming a state within a state, so too did the feudal state system consist of an aggregation of separate regions, not an organic whole. These regions were connected to the Turkish state by purely *mechanical*

military-administrative ties, represented by a *pasha* at the head of each region, a garrison or local guards in the towns, a *spahi* (landholder), and a *kadi* (judge). If any of these functions were removed, or if, for any reason, they couldn't be implemented, you would already have an autonomous region that lived its own independent life and only remembered its connection to Turkey by paying a certain amount of taxes and fulfilling a military obligation.

By the late 18th century, the Balkan Peninsula was full of such autonomous regions.* However, the most significant autonomous privileges were found in the mountainous areas stretching from Montenegro, through Northern and Central Albania, Pindos, Olympus, to Mount Athos. In this poor and inaccessible mountain belt, which separates the Adriatic from the fertile valleys of Old Serbia and Macedonia, many places and tribes had enjoyed extensive autonomous rights for centuries. Even at the height of its power, Turkey never managed to subject them to direct rule and instead settled for the simple acknowledgement of its authority and obligations in the form of tribute or military service, or both.

The autonomous privileges of Albanian and Montenegrin tribes in the mountains of Northern Albania reduced their connection with the state almost exclusively to the obligation of providing military assistance. Not

* See Stojan Novaković, *The Ottoman Empire Before the Serbian Uprising, 1800-1804*, Serbian Literary Cooperative, book 94.

only had the tribes preserved full autonomy in their internal tribal life, including their courts and customary laws, but as visible signs of their independence from the state and tribal autonomy, *they enjoyed the right for tribal elders to govern in place of Turkish authorities and the right to pay no taxes*. The desire of these tribes to govern themselves and pay nothing must be clear and natural to everyone. However, the reason they managed to maintain this position was likely due to the enormous imbalance between the costs of keeping these tribes in submission and the potential benefits of doing so.

The Albanian tribes maintained such relations with the Turkish state well into the 19th century, and for the first few decades of that century. Even today, there remains a memory in Albania of that era of independence, when each tribe lived freely under its own tribal leader, paid no taxes, and the only obligation to the state was military service, with a certain number of soldiers serving under the banner of their tribe.

This view of the earlier relationship between the Albanian tribes and Turkey is crucial for understanding the later movements for autonomy. Just as no movement operates outside of its history, the Albanian movements and aspirations for autonomy were rooted in these historical autonomous relationships, borrowing their demands from them and seeing them as their ideal. At the time of all the autonomy movements, this ideal hovered before the eyes of the Northern Albanian tribes and the masses.

When Turkey, in its attempts to prevent the empire's continued decline, began implementing stricter centralization in governance, it no longer allowed the Albanian tribes to live under their old privileges in their mountains like a state within a state. Instead of their tribal elders, Turkey began appointing its own officials; instead of tribal courts, it imposed its own judges, and it demanded both taxes and recruits. Conflict was inevitable, and these highlanders fought to the death to preserve their tribal autonomy.

The movement for autonomy reached its peak with the organization of the Albanian League, which was founded in 1878. While the Turkish delegate at the Congress of Berlin, Mehmed Ali Pasha, was complaining about the privileges and special rights of the Albanian tribes, representatives from all of Albania were holding a general assembly in Prizren. They elected a central committee and, at a public gathering on June 5, demanded: "4) That the League strive with all its might *to restore to the Albanians the autonomy taken from them more than a hundred years ago*, meaning *no more officials should be sent from Constantinople*, and the Sultan and the Porte should no longer appoint them, but *they should be elected by the Albanians themselves*. 5) *That the Sultan no longer demand taxes or recruits from them.*"* As can be seen, the demands of the Albanian League aligned with the autonomous privileges of the earlier period.

* See Dr. Jovan Hadži-Vasiljević, *The Albanian League*, p. 42.

It is not difficult to see that the fight against paying taxes was primarily in the interest of wealthy cooperatives, *beys* and tribal elders. Similarly, tribal autonomy was of particular significance only to those elements whose existence within the tribe was secure. However, in this struggle, these elements enjoyed full support from the tribal masses — the impoverished and hungry majority — which constituted the main strength of all Albanian movements. These masses sought tribal autonomy, partly because they were influenced by patriarchal loyalty to the influential elements within the tribe, and partly because they saw external influence and the destruction of their tribal organization as the cause of their poverty and the hardships of life that had arisen with the penetration of the monetary economy.

But from the very first meeting of the League of Prizren in 1878, a fundamental difference in understanding Albania's autonomy emerged between the representatives of the North and those of the South. While the representatives of the primitive Northern Albanian tribes were satisfied with the restoration of their former tribal privileges, the representatives of the South demanded a fully independent Albania, refusing to recognize the Sultan's authority in any form. This difference persisted at nearly all subsequent meetings of the League, where, as we will see, the more socially developed Central and Southern Albania acted as a guarantee that the movement for Albanian autonomy would not be buried

under the reactionary aspirations of the primitive tribes of the North.

The victory of the more progressive South came unexpectedly and quickly. After two years, in 1880, at a three-day meeting in Shkodra of Albanian representatives, both Muslim and Catholic, the following demands were accepted:

“We beg the merciful Sultan: 1) To grant us *internal* autonomy, which would encompass all Albanian lands; 2) That the High Porte *confirm the prince we elect*, with hereditary rights; 3) That it determine the amount of *tribute we are willing to pay* each year to our ruler; 4) That it specify the number of *auxiliary troops* we will gladly provide to the Sultan in case Turkey goes to war with foreign powers; 5) That in exchange for this, all *Ottoman troops be removed from the cities* and fortresses of our homeland; 6) That our relations with the Porte be maintained through an Albanian representative in Constantinople; 7) That all Ottoman officials who are not of our nationality be *replaced by native officials*, whom the prince will appoint.”*

Following this congress, action was taken immediately, and within one or two months, all of Northern Albania, including major towns such as Shkodra, Prizren, Gjakova, Peja and Prishtina had been cleared of Turk-

* See *Ibid.*, p. 101.

ish authorities and military garrisons. *Albania had experienced a general revolutionary upheaval.*

The demands from the Shkodra congress are significant also because they completely align with the demands that were put forward a century earlier during the process of creating the independent principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, Serbia, and other Balkan states. Moreover, they are more radical than the demands of the Serbian national movement for autonomy in 1793 and 1804, and in all major points, they coincide with the Serbian demands presented at the assembly in Kragujevac on January 1 of the critical year 1813. When we present this to Serbian writers and politicians who prefer to maintain the illusion of Albanian inferiority as a means of justifying official policy, we do not lose sight of the significant differences between the two national movements. Our national movement for liberation from Turkish rule had a *revolutionary* character, as it was driven by the broad peasant masses of the Serbian people, who were in sharp class *opposition* to the Turkish *spahis* as both political and economic rulers. However, the leaders of the Albanian movement for autonomy were prominent individuals from the upper classes, more spiritually developed compatriots from Italy, Constantinople and the South. The economic divide between the *beys* and their serfs could not, in this case — as in Bosnia — fuel a national movement, because these *beys* were usually Islamized Albanians.

Although, at the time of the formation

of the Albanian League, there were expectations of joint action between the Albanians and Christians, events quickly made this impossible. An Italian-Albanian committee, formed in Milan in 1876, promised to "call upon the brave brothers in Macedonia, Epirus and Albania to join hands with the South Slavs against their common oppressor. Meanwhile, we send fraternal greetings and praise to the magnanimous Slavic people." But soon after, the Albanians found themselves caught between a rock and a hard place, between Turkey, whose yoke they were fighting against, and the Balkan states, which threatened to impose a new yoke. Serbia mistreated and expelled Albanian settlers from the four newly-acquired districts, Montenegro pushed from the north into the heart of the Northern Albanian tribes, and Greece sought certain territories in the South. Founded to resist Turkish rule, the Albanian League immediately had to fight on two fronts: against neighbouring states that were attacking the Albanian tribes and against the Turkish government, which was suppressing them. The struggle to defend against the neighbouring states greatly contributed to the rapid expansion of the League, but it also opened the door for the authorities in Constantinople to exploit it for their disputes with the Christian states. Once these disputes with the Balkan states were resolved, with Europe's mediation, the Porte brutally and treacherously crushed the League, but this led to a period of national hatred and hostility between Albanians and

Christians in Turkey.

2. North and South: Ghegs and Tosks

The political differences between the representatives of the North and South — between the Ghegs and Tosks — reflect the economic and social development differences between Northern and Southern Albania. The divergence in understanding the means and goals of the autonomy movement is merely an expression of the broader distinction in thinking and aspirations between the representatives of the *tribal* system and those of a social *class*.

A nation is not only a natural but also a cultural community, as Otto Bauer clearly stated.* For different tribes, even if of the same origin, to come closer to each other, to become spiritually and politically united, as we see in *one* nation, they must live under the influence of a *common* cultural life. The less developed this shared life is, the greater the tribal isolation and exclusivity, and the weaker the tendencies that should fuse these tribes into a single national entity. Moreover, if each tribe and region lives its own separate life without interaction or mutual influence, not only is there no equalization or approximation between them, but the opposite happens: each tribe becomes more specialized and further removed from the others on its narrow base.

In studying the Slavic settlements in Macedonia, Professor Cvijić observed very notice-

* See Otto Bauer, *The Nationality Question and Social-Democracy*, p. 20.

able traces of specialization and divergence in development from valley to valley and region to region. How strong, then, must this law of specialization have been among the Albanian tribes, who lived almost entirely outside of any shared cultural community? The powerful influence of this law is evident at every turn. Only extreme tribal isolation could create as many dialects as there are tribes, and Tosks from the South and Ghegs from the North can barely understand each other. The fragmentation of life into tribal and regional districts formed the basis for today's religious divisions among the Albanian population. These religious divisions correspond to political fragmentation, where foreign political influences have acted on each tribe and region differently. Thus, *differences in language, religion, political aspirations and influences reflect the tribal isolation and lack of interaction in Albanian life.*

But does this justify those who, based on this state of affairs, deny the Albanians any ability to achieve different results in the future?

First, we must clear away one "scientific" *lie* that has been imposed on us in many ways since the Serbian army's campaign in Albania, even though it has long been discarded in science. *Serious people today do not determine the elements that make a nation or the factors that define the conditions for a shared state life by measuring skulls and studying races; these factors are determined by history and sociology.* We must look into the life of this people and analyse their social relations and institutions!

Then we will see the obstacles to forming an autonomous Albania, but we will also see that life does not stop at Albania's borders and that history has not yet said its final word on the Albanians.

We have already pointed out how the representatives of the primitive Northern Albanian tribes have entirely different ideas about the autonomy movement than the merchants and *bey*s from the South. While the opponents of the Albanians see this difference as yet another sign of the weakness of the whole movement, we, on the contrary, see in it how the idea of autonomy is maturing — how the views that belong to the future are being separated from reactionary, primitive forms of the past, and how the movement is beginning to move beyond the narrow confines of tribal needs and understandings. For a Shala, Gashi or Krasniqi from the North, the issue of tribal autonomy appears to be the only and most significant issue, as their entire life still revolves within the boundaries of the tribe. But for a *bey*, grain or livestock trader, or their educated youth from the South, this is no solution. While the representatives of the primitive tribes from the North feel that each of them is *self-sufficient* and see the movement as merely a means of enforcing tribal autonomy and securing their own economies, the *bey*s from the South have already begun to feel like a *class*, seeing the movement as a means of spreading their class rule over all of Albania. The Northern Albanian tribes see the autonomy movement as an effort to restore old

tribal privileges; they are fervent supporters of outdated privileges just as tribal organization itself is outdated. But since these aspirations are incompatible with modern social development and impossible in a modern state, they are *reactionary* and doomed to fail.

However, the difference between the North and South is not only in their understanding of autonomy but also in their attitude and actions toward autonomy. While the highlanders of the North are mobile, always ready for rebellion, the Tosks of the South are more like the "theorists" of the Albanian autonomy movement. The highlanders of the North, the Ghegs, are almost constantly under arms, placing their trust in the power of weapons, and they believe that gaining the right to bear arms is equivalent to gaining all other rights. The Southerners, however, have moved beyond the stage where the tribe is synonymous with the world, and the rifle is the greatest legacy. Their wealthier classes, particularly traders and *bey*s, refuse to send recruits to the Porte but would like *their own* army. They reject officials from Constantinople but want *their own* officials. Rejecting Turkish rule, they do not wish to return to the old state of tribal isolation and anarchy but seek the organization of an autonomous Albania, where Turkish rule would be replaced by their class rule. Southern and Central Albania are thus the true bearers of the modern movement for Albanian autonomy. From these Southern regions, the *Vendée* of Albanian nationalism, came the first demands for an Albanian alphabet and

schools. While tribal leaders in the North still measure their power by the number of armed men they have, the Tosks in the South are opening schools, publishing newspapers and printing books in the Albanian language.

After the suppression of the League in 1881, the Porte was much harsher on the Albanians from the Southern regions than from the Northern ones, exiling over 1,000 families to Asia Minor. Even then, the rulers in Constantinople realized that the South posed a greater threat to them — and rightly so.* While the Northern Albanian tribes were in constant conflict with the Porte, often raising entire revolts to change an official, in Southern and Central Albania, the process of national consolidation was quietly taking place. According to information I received in Elbasan before the Balkan events, several Albanian newspapers were being published in these regions, including *Tomori* (named after Mount Tomor) in Elbasan, *Bashkimi* (Unity) in Bitola, *Korça* in Korça and *Xhimi* (Awakening) in Ioannina. Around one hundred Albanian schools were opened, including a teacher's school in Elbasan with 200 students. The books were written in Albanian using the Latin alphabet.

In Albania, as in Macedonia, religion plays such a powerful role that *even political groupings are formed based on religion*. The distinct religious parties are the *Muslim, Orthodox and Catholic parties*. The first has the slo-

* See Dr. Jovan Hadži-Vasiljević, *The Albanian League*, p. 125.

gan: "If you are Muslim, stay with Turkey." The second reflects Greek influence. And the third aligns with Austria and Italy. But the *national* party, which aims to prepare the Albanian people for a national revolution, has the best prospects. Seeking supporters among Albanians of all faiths, it fights against religious exclusivity, which is still so strong that during the occupation by the Serbian army, villages of one faith showed little sympathy for those of another, and sometimes even engaged in full-scale religious wars. In this struggle, several songs have emerged, including these characteristic verses:

"Down with the prison, down with the ignorance,
That our enemies exploit:
Some in the church, others in the mosque
We are brothers, they cannot divide us."

Or:

"You Albanians, divided into twenty sects,
They want to deceive you.
One says, 'I am of this faith,' another of that,
One says 'I am a Turk,' another 'a Latin,'*
Some call themselves Slavs, others Greeks,
Yet you are all brothers, oh poor people."

* In Albania, even now, Muslim Albanians are called nothing other than Turks, just as Catholics are called Latins. In fact, they often refer to themselves in this way.

All of this reminds us of the period Europe went through in the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries, and fine portrayals of *Eastern revolutions* by Bauer* came to mind as we inquired about this movement in Elbasan. While seeking contact with representatives of this movement, we encountered assertive *beys*, wealthy merchants and representatives of the Albanian-origin Turkish bureaucracy, who, under Abdul Hamid, had risen to positions of influence, even reaching the rank of *pasha*, and now represent a kind of Albanian aristocracy to whom the Young Turks gave enough time to concern themselves with “national” matters. They maintained ties with their numerous colleagues in Constantinople and abroad — a world that was sometimes in favour with the Sultan and at other times imprisoned by him. The most recognized representative of this group was the president of the provisional government, Ismail Qemali. The educated youth of these ranks drink wine, criticize the teachings of Muhammad, fight against unbearable religious restrictions by founding new sects and, against political insignificance, they advocate for an autonomous Albania. Hence, the most widespread and organized religious group in Albania, the so-called *bektashis*, is also the most decisive bearer of Albanian nationalism.

In the face of this movement in the South, the Young Turks initially showed tolerance.

* Otto Bauer, “Eastern Revolutions,” *Borba*, a bi-monthly publication of social-democracy, Year III, Book 5, p. 23.

But as the movement increasingly took on a national character, the Young Turks became increasingly open and uncompromising in their opposition. During this period, there were also the bloody military expeditions to Northern Albania, aimed at finally subduing the Northern Albanian tribes to the yoke of Turkish state authority — expeditions that sparked a series of Albanian uprisings.

The historical significance of these uprisings and the bloody battles in the North for the issue we are discussing here was that they *re-established the connection between the North and the South, between the Ghegs and Tosks*. The Southerners began to recognize the valuable *material* and physical strength represented by the Northern tribes, and they worked to bring them into the service of the common movement, with the leadership *headed* in the South. The masses that advanced across Old Serbia and entered Skopje once again came from the Northern tribes, but this time they were connected to the representatives of the movement in the South, who had already begun to exploit factional divisions in the Turkish parliament to push for their political demands. The agreement between the two groups was now facilitated by the regions east of the Northern Albanian mountains, whose inhabitants had emigrated from their original tribal base and broken free from the tribal framework that still binds their brothers who remained in the tribal homeland. Their contact with Slavic neighbours had made these inhabitants more capable of understanding the Albanian move-

ment from a broader national perspective.

This was the state of the movement in Albania when the armies of the Balkan states crossed into Turkish territory.

3. Future Prospects

The independent Albanian movement was interrupted by the Balkan events, and due to the expansionist appetites of the Balkan states, Albania became a frontier outpost of two major European powers — Austria-Hungary and Italy. The future of Albania, following the Conference of London, became a matter for Europe. However, whatever decision the Conference of London might enact, the establishment of an autonomous Albania will signify a *political* revolution for the Albanian people, under whose influence old relationships and ways of life will undergo rapid and drastic changes.

We will not attempt to predict the fate of this new so-called state. It will undoubtedly face greater challenges than the long and painful birth struggles it has already endured. It will have to contend with both *the past* and *the future*. The past has left it a legacy of tribal primitiveness and exclusivity in the North, an oppressive feudal system in the South, ignorance among the general populace, religious fragmentation and fanaticism, political disunity, a lack of communication between tribes and regions, and the absence of a common centre to give direction to life. To these internal disorganizations of Albanian life, future foreign "friends" will add no less disorganiz-

ing influences — lessons learned from the experience of other Balkan states.

In the struggle against these internal and external challenges, *the masses* should be the inexhaustible source of new strength and resources. However, it is precisely the masses who remain unseen, hidden under the patriarchal authority of tribal leaders and the exploitative rule of feudal lords. In past events and movements, they participated only as *tools* in the hands of authoritative tribal dynasts or the *bey* caste. They have not yet become part of the movement, just as they are not yet members of an Albanian nation. They are merely members of tribes or serfs of feudal lords. The nation currently being formed among the Albanians is a nation of a single caste, and national consciousness corresponds to the social position of the *beys* and their educated offspring.

For the question of Albania to stop being exclusively a concern of a caste and a few individuals, and to become a concern of the broader masses, Albania must create its own nation — its own citizens. This can only be achieved through the same path that all nations followed during their formation, namely: by raising the masses to a cultural community, enabling their participation in public life and promoting mutual communication. Beyond bringing the tribes into a shared national life, this also requires the abolition of the feudal system of land ownership and the liberation of the peasants.

But this is precisely what today's Alban-

ian patriots have no intention of doing. They do not consider the masses. The *bey* caste and its carefree offspring speak of the masses as a dark, unconscious entity. In Elbasan, one intelligent *bey* firmly told me, when asked about the possibility of a constitution and parliament, that such things were not suitable for Albania, and that something resembling the *boyar* system of Romania would be more appropriate! By holding up Romania as an example for an issue where a different model was clearly needed, this *bey* and supporter of the national movement in Elbasan revealed that he could not speak of a political regime without thinking of the *bey* system!

The bearer of progressive views on political and economic issues could only be the bourgeois element, but in Albania's primitiveness, this element is still very underdeveloped. In Albanian towns, the population consists mostly of *poor people*, with a few *beys*, *traders* and *small artisans*. The *beys* are still the main representatives of wealth and prestige. They spend their time frivolously, adopting the habits of places influenced by European culture. A town dominated by the towering mansions of the *aghas* and *beys*, rising above the modest rooftops of artisans and traders, cannot be a driver of national culture and political progress, as the towns of today's developed nations once were. Only with the stronger growth of a modern economy will Albanian towns become true bearers of progress.

These are just a few remarks on the social conditions among the Albanians. Our goal is

not to present them in full but to point out that Albania, even as backward and primitive as it is, is not outside the world or history, and the movements and struggles within it are neither a rebellion of "savages" against "civilization," as some portray them, nor the result of foreign agents' manipulations, as others suggest. These movements and struggles are conditioned by general changes in social relations and living conditions in Albania, similar to those that gave rise to similar struggles in other nations. If the forms and goals of these struggles are still very underdeveloped, does that mean that the "Albanian" wants, deserves or can have nothing more than what he has now? Can anyone claim that a feudal serf does not desire freedom from bondage and the right to enjoy the fruits of his own labour? Following the withdrawal of Serbian troops, significant internal conflicts arose in Central Albania. These were not, as our press reported, expressions of tribal and religious intolerance but rather the revolt of feudal serfs (*çifçis*) against the attempts of *aghas* and *beys* to restore the feudal obligations accumulated during the occupation.

This is the material that will shape autonomous Albania. Those who see in Albanian "blood" an inherently anti-state, anti-civilizational and anti-social element cannot tell us anything about its suitability for independent statehood. We must instead consider the Albanians as members of tribes and social classes, as masters and serfs, as fighters for autonomy, and as labourers in the fields, because

today's science no longer disputes that the suitability of a people for statehood should be assessed based on its historical development, social structure, cultural advancement, and social and political aspirations, not on the race to which it belongs.

Moreover, we are compelled to follow the development and fate of this new member of the Balkan states. This is not due to any concern for the future of autonomous Albania — those concerns, thanks to the expansionist policies of Serbia, Montenegro and Greece, have unfortunately passed to the stronger powers, Austria-Hungary and Italy — but because of considerations for our own future. The *external* dangers facing Albania, as well as those facing all small states caught between more powerful neighbours, are much more serious than the *internal* ones. While it will not be easy to overcome tribal and religious differences and create a state organization out of such a disorganized society, it is not impossible — just as it was not impossible to overcome the autonomous aspirations of *knežinas* (small princedoms) when organizing the new Serbian state. Albania will find it far more difficult to resist the dangers posed by the conditions under which it was established and must now develop.

Perhaps no other country in the world has been infiltrated by so many foreign agents as Albania. Relying on weaker neighbouring or stronger distant states, these agents have worked for years, through schools, churches, consulates, trade relations and other institu-

tions to prepare the ground for foreign influence. What is happening in Albania today can only be understood in connection with these influences. Don't the current political factions in Albania, as we have already seen, primarily reflect the influence of various foreign propaganda efforts? The struggle for dominance among these foreign influences not only fuels rivalries over who will become the new ruler but also, when combined with religious and tribal divisions, intensifies the separatist desires of wealthy *beys*, tribal chiefs or prominent figures. These influences are undoubtedly the greatest obstacle to stabilizing internal conditions, and autonomous Albania can only emerge through a struggle against them.

This struggle, which accompanied the founding of all the Balkan states, is especially challenging for the Albanian people because their first attempt at statehood bears severe shortcomings from the outset.

Through their expansionist policies, Serbia, Greece and Montenegro failed to divide Albania but succeeded in reducing and dismembering it. Formally, Albania gained autonomy, but this autonomy is *crippled* — a form without substance, a right without the essential conditions for its realization. It is an autonomy over a swampy coastline and barren regions, cut off from the fertile areas to the east and south. The Conference of London was harsher on Albania than the Conference of Berlin was on Serbia. Its decisions have undoubtedly harmed the Albanian people the most. However, those who benefited most

were not the Balkan states but the interested capitalist and landowning circles of the Great Powers, Austria-Hungary and Italy. First, the hostile stance of the Balkan states pushed Albania into the hands of these powers. Second, Albania will be a more reliable tool for them precisely because it is weaker and less capable of independent existence.

As Albania's weakness grows, so too will its *economic dependence* on foreign countries. All the attempts by its rulers to strengthen the country to defend itself from external threats will lead, as was the case in other Balkan states, to deeper enslavement by European capitalism. Given Albania's political instability, this enslavement will not come through state debts but through direct *colonial exploitation*. A well-informed German newspaper wrote a few weeks ago:

“The *feverish speculation* continues in Albania as before. Not a day passes without new hunters for concessions to establish banks, build railways, install electrical systems, and buy forests and mines. In the country's interest, it is fortunate that they are now almost entirely unsuccessful, as it has been decided to wait for more stable conditions before granting any concessions, and already signed contracts are being strictly reviewed and, if contrary to the state's interests, cancelled. It is hoped that even the sale of the Mirdita forest by the major Milanese merchant, much talked about recently, will fall through, as most

of it involves areas where the seller, Prenk Bib Doda Pasha, has a very questionable claim based on a piece of paper obtained in Constantinople, while several municipalities can show older claims to these forests. *All these speculative attempts at exploiting the current situation usually come from outside*, which speaks well of the country. But alongside these speculative ventures, many serious business forces have begun *preparing for the economic conquest of the country* and are familiarizing themselves with the projects the future government will soon have to undertake. They will later be in a more favourable position to present the government with well-considered and thoroughly evaluated proposals. *In any case, it must be emphasized that whoever does not want to be late must familiarize themselves with the current situation.*" (Kölnische Zeitung, December 21, 1913).

Thus, the European capitalist classes are being openly invited to the colonial conquest of Albania. What European capitalism is preparing there today will, in fact, become the real foundation of the future state. And when Serbian landowning circles rejoice at every new disturbance and internal conflict, seeing it as a means to implement their plans, they fail to recognize that the most powerful force on the Adriatic coast, European capitalism, is beginning to take root, and only it "will not be late."

III. STRUGGLES OVER THE ADRIATIC SEA

1. The Adriatic Sea and the Struggles in the East

To understand why the poorest and most destitute region on the Balkan Peninsula produced the most intense conflicts with Europe during the Balkan events, we must first emphasize that *the struggle is not over the barren Albanian mountains but over control of the Adriatic coast that belongs to Albania*. This struggle is not only a significant chapter in the history of the Serbian people, but it is also deeply intertwined with the long, ongoing global contest over the East and its rich resources, in which all European powers have participated and displayed their strength.

Just as the Adriatic Sea is merely an extension of the Mediterranean, the battles for control over the Adriatic shores are a continuation of the broader contest for dominance and influence in the Mediterranean. These struggles emerged quite early. The East had long attracted the attention of European nations, and early on, there was lively trade between the East and West. The shortest, cheapest, and at the time, the only known trade route was through the Mediterranean Sea. This sea was the sole connection between the two worlds, and the struggle for dominance over it was a battle for the fabled wealth of the East.

It was precisely where this sea cuts deepest into the European continent, on the Italian

shores of the Adriatic, that the first centres of European trade with the East emerged as early as the Middle Ages. These were the Italian cities, initially Venice from the 9th century, which, by the 11th century, was joined by *Genoa and Pisa*. These cities developed extensive trade relations with all the richest Mediterranean countries of the time — Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor and the Balkan Peninsula. Their trading agents, spread throughout the Levant and Asia, pushed aside Greek and Arab merchants, relegating them to the role of intermediaries, and took over all trade with the East themselves.* In their struggle for supremacy in the Mediterranean against their rivals, Genoa, Pisa and later *Florence*, Venice relied primarily on its control over the Adriatic shores, which it defended both from its maritime competitors and from Hungarian incursions on land. By the mid-14th century, the “Queen of the Adriatic” emerged victorious from these struggles and ruled the Mediterranean without challenge for a century.

The first blow to the commercial dominance of the Italian city-states in the East came from the conquests of the Turks. However, the Italian cities managed to negotiate with the Ottoman Empire, just as they had previously used their colossal wealth to buy off Serbian medieval nobility and secure the Adriatic coast. The decisive blow to the commercial dominance of the Italian cities in the East, however, came *from the shift of global trade from*

* See P. Herre, *The Struggle for Domination in the Mediterranean*, p. 64 onwards.

the Mediterranean to the Atlantic Ocean. In 1498, the Portuguese succeeded in discovering a sea route to India by rounding Africa. This great discovery, which revolutionized the world's economic and trade relations, changed the direction of the most important global trade route, and as a consequence, the monopolistic privileges of the Italian cities in Eastern trade collapsed. Soon after, their prominent role as intermediaries in world trade vanished. "By the mid-16th century," P. Here wrote, "there were hardly any Venetian merchants left in Constantinople, and returning from the Golden Horn, an envoy reported that in two years, there had not been as much trade conducted as there used to be in two weeks."* The wealth of the East, particularly India, began to flow westward via new sea routes, and as the Portuguese severed Arab connections with India, the Italian cities lost their only trading intermediary with the interior of Asia. The Mediterranean ceased to be the bridge between the East and West, and with this global shift, the Italian city-states lost their world significance. Lisbon replaced Venice and Genoa as the centre of trade.

Although the Mediterranean lost its global significance with the shift in world trade routes, the struggles for dominance over it did not end. The Mediterranean countries on all three continents — Europe, Africa and Asia — represented far too valuable an object for capitalist exploitation and critical choke

* See *Ibid.*, p. 95.

points for political conquerors for the young European capitalist states to remain indifferent. The struggle continued, with the difference that instead of small city-states, powerful nations now entered the scene, backed by the material guarantee of their imperial ambitions — millions of taxpayers and hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of armed soldiers. In a bloody war, *England* seized Gibraltar, the gateway to the Mediterranean from the west, in 1704; since 1880, it has held Malta, a key station between the eastern and western Mediterranean; and at the Congress of Berlin, it secured Cyprus, which controls access to the Suez Canal. Since 1882, England has also controlled Egypt. *France*, England's most serious rival, undertook dramatic expeditions to establish its dominance in the East. Since 1830, it gradually entrenched itself as the ruler of Algeria, Tunisia, and later Morocco. *Russia*, meanwhile, persistently pushed to capture Constantinople and the straits, "the key to the house," which would allow it access from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. This access was blocked by the Treaty of the Straits in 1841, which was reaffirmed by the Treaty of Paris, and to this day, all Russian attempts to overturn it have failed.

Two major technical achievements — the opening of the Suez Canal and the establishment of railway connections between Central Europe and the East — began to restore the Mediterranean's importance as the best link between Europe and Asia. The Suez Canal provided a new sea route to the East, much

shorter than the one around Africa, and the grand plans for railway connections between Europe and the East through the Near East cut deeply into the economic interests of the states involved, threatening to alter the balance of political power and influence in Asia. The Baghdad Railway, for instance, around which German and British influences now clash, has rightly been called "the axis around which Europe's political life revolves today." Any change in the East poses a threat to already established holdings, and with this, European imperialist interest in every, even the smallest, change in this part of the world grows.

2. Austria-Hungary and Italy

While trade with the East was concentrated in the Italian city-states, the Adriatic Sea served as a major natural channel into which global commerce flowed and through which great wealth passed. With the decline of these cities' dominance in European trade with the East, the Adriatic began to be bypassed by global traffic.

However, if the Adriatic Sea lost its former role in world trade, it gained increasing importance for two major states along its shores — Austria-Hungary and Italy. For these two powers, the Adriatic was no longer just a maritime route for international trade, but the foundation of their naval strength, which, in this age of imperial colonialism and conflicts over economic interests, defined the power and influence of capitalist states. Therefore,

any change along the Adriatic coast deeply affected the political plans of the capitalist elites of both nations.

Such changes could favour either a third party or one of these two states. Accordingly, the relationship between Austria-Hungary and Italy was *two-faced*: in the morning, they united against any force threatening to weaken their shared position, while by afternoon, they fiercely competed against one another like two wary rivals. Mutual distrust — defining their “friendship” and alliance within the Triple Alliance — especially characterized their Balkan policies, turning Albania into a constant battleground. While the diplomats of both countries exchanged assurances of “full agreement” and “mutual trust,” their agents in Albania fought daily over every school, diocese, village and exploitation site.

Austria-Hungary held the advantage of being a state that had solidified its influence on the Adriatic coast long before Italy emerged as a major power. When Austria-Hungary established itself on the Dalmatian coast, Italy was still fragmented and under foreign domination. Austria-Hungary controlled much of the Italian territories during the first half of the previous century, positioning itself as the rightful heir to the Italian city-states. During this period, it developed the cities of Trieste and Fiume (modern-day Rijeka). Austria-Hungary saw itself as the legitimate successor to the Ottoman territories in the western half of the Balkan Peninsula. In agreements with Russia regarding the partition of the Otto-

man Empire, Austria-Hungary was to receive Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Albania. Later, when two new major nation-states — Germany and Italy — formed in the second half of the 19th century, Austria-Hungary, cut off from its connections with northern and western Europe, was pushed toward the Balkans, where Bismarck famously directed its focus on the lands “from the eastern border of the Romanian people to the Bay of Kotor.”

The first result of this new Austrian policy was the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, achieved through a secret agreement with Russia. This occupation was Austria-Hungary’s greatest practical success in the Balkans to date, coming at a time when Italy’s ambitions were still focussed on Africa. After France’s final seizure of Tunisia in 1884, Italy sought compensation in Abyssinia, but ten years of military effort and financial exhaustion ended in a devastating defeat in 1896. Italy, attempting to carry out grand imperialist policies funded by the blood-soaked earnings of its emigrant workers in America, was thus forced to seek compensation on the shores of the Adriatic Sea. Its dynastic alliance with Montenegro symbolized a new colonial agenda.

From that point onward, rapid industrialization greatly advanced in both Austria-Hungary and Italy. If, during the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the liberal intelligentsia — professors and lawyers who led the national majority in the Austrian parliament — considered the mandate of the Congress

of Berlin as a “costly and fateful adventure,” now the full power of the state was increasingly placed in the service of capital and its efforts to expand and monopolize markets for its goods and territories for investment.

“International politics in general,” wrote the *Presse* in 1908, “is increasingly becoming a matter of trade and economic policy, and the major questions concerning cabinets and nations arise primarily from economic roots. While other capitalist states pursue their economic systems through the conquest of overseas colonies, Austria-Hungary has focussed its attention on the Balkans.” To the Austrian landowning elite, the Balkan Peninsula was naturally positioned to be a colony of Austria-Hungary. The port city of Salonika, which Rorbach called the “absolute goal of Austrian Balkan policy,”* was increasingly viewed as the monarchy’s southern gateway. The landowning circles of Vienna and Budapest became more sensitive to any changes in the territories along the route to Salonika, growing impatient to preempt any unfavourable developments in the Balkans. This goal shaped Austria-Hungary’s stance in the protracted, fruitless European diplomatic efforts to reform Macedonia, influenced its policies toward Serbia and drove its railway projects, which sparked outcry and protests, leading to a series of new counter-railway initiatives.

Diplomatic history will reveal how Italy responded to its “ally’s” ambitions. Yet the

* See Dr. Paul Rohrbach, *Germany Among the World Powers*, pp. 235-236.

extent of Italy's relentless efforts to establish colonial dominance over the Adriatic coast of the Balkans is evident in its successes in Montenegro. In this small country of 250,000 impoverished people, Italy secured the construction of the port in Bar, the Bar-Virpazar railway, control of shipping on Lake Shkodra and the tobacco monopoly. The once invincible heroes of Montenegro, who had withstood the might of the Ottoman Empire, succumbed to the power of capital. Today, many Montenegrins labour in American mines for the benefit of Italian capitalist companies and their loyal Cetinje associates.

In the competition between Austria-Hungary and Italy for colonial conquest in the Balkans, Albania became the primary battleground where their interests clashed most directly. Both countries engaged in fierce propaganda efforts to undermine each other. To avoid jeopardizing their "allied" relations — tied to other important interests — diplomacy managed to mitigate tensions by dividing their spheres of influence, with Austria-Hungary concentrating its efforts in Northern Albania and Italy focussing on the South. The major capitalist predators had reached yet another agreement to stifle small nations and divide their lands. When Count Berchtold's proposal to create an autonomous region from the Bosnian border to Salonika failed before the First Balkan War, effectively eliminating the "political strait" between Serbia and Montenegro and closing the only free land route to the south, the path to Salonika no longer

ran through Mitrovica but through Durrës. The creation of an autonomous Albania now served not only the interest of both powers in preventing any third party from gaining access to the Adriatic but also as a "window" for continuing their old Balkan policies. Given these longstanding imperial ambitions, it was natural that both Austria-Hungary and Italy fully supported the establishment of Albania.

3. The Adriatic Sea and the Balkans

The great struggles of European powers in the East have been at the core of the "Eastern Question" for several centuries. Since the Balkan Peninsula has been drawn into the scope of these conflicts and the imperial ambitions of the interested states, the fluctuating phases of these struggles are inextricably intertwined with the fate of the Balkan peoples. Not only did Ottoman rule in Europe, as the French philosopher Montesquieu observed over 150 years ago, rest on the rivalries of these competing powers, but the gradual withdrawal of that rule, the emergence of independent Balkan states and the redrawing of borders have all been influenced, step by step, by the ambitions and plans of the great powers.

This understanding has become quite widespread on the Balkan Peninsula today, yet less attention is given to the impact of trade between the West and East on the development of the Balkan nations.

Until recent times, the Adriatic Sea served as the backbone of economic and commercial life in the Balkans. Along its eastern shores

were several key points that connected the peninsula with the rest of the world. During the golden age of the Italian city-states, when the Adriatic acted as a vast natural channel for the enormous trade flows between East and West, these centres became the natural stopping points for international commerce, drawing the attention of the feudal lords of medieval Balkan states, especially Serbia. From these centres, vital trade routes extended into the peninsula's rugged interior, allowing goods to flow in both directions. Medieval feudal lords exported surplus goods from their estates and imported the luxurious products of the East, which fired the imagination of local poets. This exchange took place in the coastal trading centres.

Among these centres, Dubrovnik, Kotor and Bar stood out in the northern part of the coast, while Shkodra (Scutari), Durrës and Vlora (Valona) were prominent in the south. The works of Jireček and Cvijić reveal that a significant trade route ran from Dubrovnik over Mount Čemerno to the Drin River, Užice, Čačak and further inland, with one branch extending to Pljevlja, Novi Pazar, and through Toplica to Niš. The southern routes were more favourable, with three main ones: the northern route from Shkodra via the White Drin River to Prizren and Kosova; the central route, the famous Via Egnatia, from Durrës as the main road to Constantinople; and the southern route, from Vlora through Devoll to Macedonia and Thessaly.

Where trade and economic ties led, pol-

itical ambitions followed. Historical research has not sufficiently recognized the significant influence that trade connections between the Adriatic Sea and the Balkan Peninsula had on medieval Serbian history. However, even to the layperson, it seems clear *that the Adriatic Sea was not just the gravitational point for Serbian trade but also for its political life*. This influence explains why the most vibrant political activity of the Serbian people in the Middle Ages took place in regions along the Adriatic, which were on the western periphery of Serbia's ethnic boundaries. As Serbian aspirations moved toward the Adriatic, these boundaries also naturally shifted.

Despite all efforts, Serbian medieval rulers failed to secure a foothold on the Adriatic, facing resistance from stronger rivals such as the Italian city-states and the Hungarians, and later the French, Italians and Austrians. In the Middle Ages, the Zahumlje coast served as Serbia's main outlet to the sea. However, this outlet was lost at the beginning of the 14th century in conflicts with the Bosnian bans, who were vassals to northern neighbours, and Serbia never managed to reclaim it.

With the shift of global trade routes from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, the Adriatic Sea lost its role in global commerce. Nevertheless, trade along its Balkan shores did not cease. The old routes remained in use, sustained by the wealth and relatively developed medieval culture of the Balkan lands. However, as a result of this shift in global commerce, the trading centres on the Adriatic

coast increasingly became *local* hubs, serving primarily the Balkan regions. Up until recent times, caravans from the interior of the peninsula regularly travelled to Dubrovnik, Kotor, Bar, Shkodra and Durrës.

However, what neither the Ottoman conquest nor the decline of the Italian city-states could accomplish, the new transportation and political changes did. The trading centres on the Adriatic faced serious competition from the north and south. With the economic rise of Central Europe, Serbian cultural life shifted northward, focussing on the markets of Central Europe. The economic foundation of the northern Balkan countries was no longer the Adriatic Sea but the Sava and Danube rivers, a shift that played a significant role in the emergence of the Serbian uprising. With the construction of railways connecting Central Europe to Salonika and Constantinople, the flow of goods across the Balkan Peninsula no longer moved transversely from the interior to the Adriatic coast but longitudinally, from the interior toward Salonika in the south and Budapest and beyond in the north. Political changes, particularly the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the crisscrossing of political borders, further accelerated this shift, causing the old trade routes to fall into disuse and the coastal centres to lose almost all their connections to the peninsula.

For our present discussion, this shift in trade routes also moved the political centre of Serbian life northward. Serbia's trade connections with the Adriatic were severed, except

for the narrow coastal strip of Montenegro. With this break, the cultural influence and national penetration into coastal areas were also cut off. Instead, the reverse process occurred: the Serbian element retreated northeastward, deeper into the interior and closer to its northern border, leaving behind old Serbian monuments in regions now inhabited predominantly by the Albanians.

As trade in the western half of the Balkan Peninsula shifted decisively along a north-south axis, Serbia became economically dependent on Austria-Hungary. For several decades, Serbia was, in effect, an economic appendage to Austria-Hungary's economic sphere, its southernmost province. In Serbia's foreign trade, which consisted of exporting agricultural products and importing manufactured goods, Austria-Hungary represented the entire world. Yet no matter how closely this relationship tied Serbia's economy to that of its northern neighbour, it inevitably led to conflict, a natural consequence of capitalist development. During the customs war that lasted until just before the Balkan War, both sides held new demands. Austria-Hungary, seeking to eliminate the competition posed by Serbian livestock to its agrarian sector while securing preferential treatment for its industry in Serbia, faced Serbia, which aimed to ensure agricultural exports and simultaneously protect its domestic industry. Conflict was inevitable.

The political significance of this conflict lies in how the Serbian bourgeoisie managed

to revive the dream of access to the Adriatic Sea and instill it in the masses. Achieving this goal became the central objective of Serbia's entire policy. For the bourgeois regime, a free outlet to the sea represented more than just a *trade* issue; it was the lifeblood upon which the entire economic and financial system of the bourgeoisie, foreign credit and the survival of the regime depended. After Milovanović's proposal for a "corridor to the sea" failed during the annexation crisis, feverish efforts were made to secure the Adriatic railway. Following victories in Kumanovo and Bitola, when the Ottoman Empire was pushed out of the region controlling the routes to both seas, the Adriatic and the Aegean, Serbia's access to the sea was halfway achieved.

How did the government of Serbia understand the execution of that task?

IV. ALBANIA AND SERBIA

1. The Conquering Ambitions of Our Bourgeoisie

Austria-Hungary and Italy advocate for the autonomy of Albania in *their own* interests, not in the interest of the Albanian people! This is the second fundamental idea put forth by Balkanicus and Dr. Vladan, and to support this claim, they provide hundreds of citations from all kinds of books and newspapers! Even the press of social-democracy has not been left out of this massive bibliography!

However, if these gentlemen had been somewhat closer to the ideas of social-democracy, they would not have found themselves in the absurd position of fighting against the imperialist policies of Austria-Hungary and Italy while simultaneously recommending and defending the imperialist policies of Serbia. Their perspective is depressingly simple: Albania is to be conquered, so if that's its fate, it's better that the conqueror be Serbia rather than these two great powers. We are not opposed to the conquest of Albania, Balkanicus and Dr. Vladan declare, but we only demand that the conqueror of Albania be none other than us. In other words: we protest against imperialist policies in the *name* of imperialist policies; the right we deny to others, we claim for ourselves in the same breath, on the same issue. And how many powerful arguments are presented to defend Serbia's right to this!

Balkanicus says:

“Why this exception and privilege for the Albanians that they cannot and must not, in any part, come under the rule of the Serbs? Isn’t the Serbian nation divided into several administrations and state governments? Just look at Austria-Hungary: there are Serbs under one administration in Bosnia and Herzegovina, under another in Hungary, under a third in Croatia, under a fourth in Dalmatia.

“When part of the Turks can remain under Bulgarian and Serbian rule, Mr. Dervish Hima will have to concede that the same can happen with the Albanians. Especially considering that they have always been under foreign rule and that in those areas they now wish to take from the Serbs and beg from Europe with the help of their interested protectors, they are either long-standing *foreign invaders* or are bloodily and geographically mixed with the Serbs, as for example, in the vicinity of Shkodra and along the Montenegrin border.”*

And to convince us of how radical and final this solution would be, ensuring that Europe would never be troubled again, Dr. Vladan quotes the following from *Charles Loiseau*:

“Europe should seize this opportunity with the utmost readiness and divide

* Balkanicus, *The Albanian Problem, Serbia, and Austria-Hungary*, p. 62, 64.

these undisciplined people between Serbia, Greece and Montenegro. *The Albanians, abandoned by Constantinople, which has always pampered them, and forced within the bounds of reason, would quickly reconcile with their fate.* In any case, their adaptation to the new situation would concern only them and their new masters. *The Albanian question, divided into several parts and reduced in size, would cease to disturb Europe.*”*

Yes, in Albania, Austria-Hungary and Italy are pursuing imperialist policies — that is a fact. But do Balkanicus and Dr. Vladan think anyone would believe otherwise? Are they to expect Austria-Hungary, which is built entirely on the denial of *national* principles, or Italy, which in our time is suppressing another nation across the Mediterranean, to truly defend the principle of national self-determination? In this age of imperialist politics, such slogans are just as ill-suited to these two capitalist states as Russia’s former slogan of “liberating the Christians” in Turkey once was to Tsarist Russia, the worst executioner of freedom in its own land and neighbouring territories. Such political lies no longer resonate as well with the Balkan peoples, who have gained ample experience in realizing that every entanglement with one or another “protector” has cost them all the heavier sacrifices the more they surrendered to them in their boundless desire

* *Ibid.*, p. 160. Italics are ours.

for liberation from Turkish rule. The same is known to all those in Albania who are working for the autonomy of their country. One of the most influential people in Elbasan, later elected as the governor of the town, did not hesitate to answer my question quite clearly and openly: Austria-Hungary insists that Shkodra remain part of Albania because it must continue to serve as a final northern stronghold against the advance of Serbia and Montenegro into its sphere of influence, just as Italy is advocating for Southern Albania to prevent anyone else from gaining a foothold on the other side of the Otranto Channel. The unwavering stance of Austria-Hungary and Italy in favour of Albanian autonomy is about preserving the last piece of land from which they can protect themselves from the danger of others gaining access to the Adriatic Sea and from which they can influence the course of events in the Balkans. Austria-Hungary wants a "lebensfähige Albanie" ("a viable Albania") precisely when it sees before it the danger that Serbia might become viable. The aim of this policy is as clear as day. *They want, at all costs, a new, non-viable pygmy on the Balkans, so that another pygmy, struggling to break free from its chains, does not become viable.* This is the old method of *creating weak, non-viable entities* condemned to depend on the skirts of European diplomacy, whether this method appears under the false label of "national principles" or "political balance."

However, while Balkanicus and Dr. Vladan, by emphasizing the imperialist ambi-

tions of Austria-Hungary and Italy in Albania, have said nothing new — nothing that isn't already widely known — they have, in advocating for Serbia's right to conquer Albania, faithfully expressed a *new* political course for Serbia. *By exposing the imperialist policies of these two states, they have successfully revealed the "national" policies of Serbia and the "liberation" policies of the Serbian bourgeoisie.* Because if Austria's concerns for the rights of Balkan nationalities are a grotesque mockery of the national principle, then Serbia's claims to conquer Albania are a brutal trampling of that principle. By proclaiming such policies, the Serbian bourgeoisie has, for the first time, removed from the Serbian people the veil of an oppressed nation fighting for its liberation. And within our own bourgeoisie, the memories of past youthful ideals of freedom, equality and fraternity have vanished, along with the ability to appreciate the aspirations of other peoples for freedom. They bow under the pressure of the northern neighbour, cling to the coattails of Russian diplomacy, borrow their governing methods from foreign capitalist companies, but have adopted the ideology of exploiters and owners who imagine themselves at the head of a hungry army, ruling over millions of oppressed subjects, dreaming of grandeur, puffing out their chests, appealing only to force, while crushing those weaker than themselves, even as they face the threat of being crushed by stronger powers. The fact that this shift in the policies of our bourgeoisie has occurred before the Serbian people

have even achieved national unity, and that the political division and subjugation of their own people is now used to justify their appetites for subjugating other peoples, is simply evidence that the capitalist system of profit and the militarist-bureaucratic state systems of today provoke the same appetites in the small and large representatives of the current social order, both domestically and abroad, in internal and external policies alike.

This new course in the policies of the Serbian bourgeoisie is of more than theoretical significance to social-democracy. It is not merely confirmation of our position *that the national ideals of the ruling classes are a lie behind which they hide their desire to exploit the people at home and enslave foreign peoples*. The national liberation and unification that the capitalist bourgeoisie demands for its own people is denied to other peoples. From their class perspective, this is natural and understandable: when my own people are under my *class* rule, why are you “wild” Albanians resisting entering into an already established system of obedience according to all the rules of the modern state! The external policies of the ruling classes are simply an extension of their internal policies. And just as the proletariat in any country represents a social class that cannot fight for its liberation from class bondage without liberating the entire society, so too can social-democracy not advocate for the freedom of its own people without advocating for the national freedom of all other peoples. This is one of the essential differences between the perspec-

tive of social-democracy and that of bourgeois parties on the national question.

However, the great *practical* importance of this issue must interest us all the more, as the consequences of this imperialist striving by our ruling class represent an inexhaustible source not only of new crimes against the Albanian population but also of constant dangers to the peace and security of our people, resulting in endless burdens and sacrifices. Serbia has been thrown into the dangerous whirlpool of imperialist ambitions, with all the foreseen and unforeseen obstacles and currents, a vortex in which the nation's strength will be drained in futile efforts to reach the coast. Each new obstacle will require greater and greater efforts, and the sacrifices, increasingly unbearable for the masses, will be justified by pointing to the sacrifices already made. The imperialist intrusion into Albania has led to the Albanian people's resentment toward Serbia and to uprisings, which demand new financial and military efforts. The insecurity along Serbia's new western border has arisen as a result of the imperialist policies toward the Albanian people, and it presents a continual justification for the army's constant state of readiness. For the same reasons, we have come into conflict with stronger contenders for Albania, and in the fervour of building a great Adriatic state by subjugating foreign peoples, the ruling class preaches of some great future reckoning with them. The country's indebtedness, new state burdens, militarism and other parasitic institutions will demand even greater

sacrifices from the people, as they are materially suffocated and economically exhausted by the perpetual insecurity, the threat of war and frequent mobilizations.

Thus, events once set in motion will, by the inherent logic of the situation, push our exhausted little country from crisis to crisis, from danger to danger, while all bourgeois organs of public opinion will strive to ensure that the true cause of these misfortunes is forgotten, and the blame shifted onto someone else. Therefore, social-democracy, as a resolute opponent of the imperialist policies that are the root cause of all these troubles, cannot allow the moment to go unmarked when our ruling class laid its hands on foreign land and freedom, when the former heralds of national liberation raised the banner of national enslavement, and when the interests of capital swallowed the interests of the nation. It must constantly highlight the inseparable causal link between the imperialist policies of the bourgeoisie and the heavy consequences and sacrifices, with no end in sight — the link between the theories of Balkanicus and Dr. Vladan and the practice of Isa Boletini.

2. The Drive to the Sea

The enthusiasm with which the bourgeois public received the first news of the Albanian detachment's arrival on the Adriatic Sea stemmed from the belief that the long-sought goal, which had been on the horizon for the past decade not only for the government and bourgeois groups but also for the broader

public, had finally been achieved. Serbia had reached the sea — and how! What it had intended to achieve with the Adriatic railway, it now accomplished over its own territory; Serbia was now the master of its own access to the world!

Serbia's desire for free access to the sea has usually been linked to the obstacles Austria-Hungary has placed or could place on Serbian exports. Serbia is still predominantly an agricultural country. Of its total exports, which amounted to 98,388,028 dinars in 1910, raw materials accounted for just under 64 per cent and processed goods for 36 per cent. Except for 1,691,819 dinars of unprocessed mining products and 10,320,817 dinars of processed mining and a few hundred thousand in industrial products, 88 per cent of its remaining exports consisted of agricultural and livestock products, mainly in their most basic processed forms. Therefore, Serbia's entire export trade relies on rural farms, where smallholdings still prevail, and this export trade is key to Serbia's ability to meet its debt obligations.

As a result, ensuring the continuation of exports became a shared concern for two vastly different worlds: *the ruling bourgeoisie and the peasant masses*. For the bourgeoisie that runs the state, securing exports meant securing tax revenues and the gold needed to pay interest on the national debt. Any disruption in export trade would strike at the most vulnerable part of any government because it would threaten the essential resources needed to maintain

power. But the disruption of export trade also struck at the most vulnerable part of the peasant masses, as it led to falling prices for agricultural products within the country. And the more farmers are forced to sell their produce at lower prices, the more of their harvest they must bring to market to meet their monetary needs, leaving less for their families' needs. Thus, any drop in prices means greater hunger at home, more debt on the farm and fewer livestock in the barn for the masses.

When Austria-Hungary, under pressure from its agrarian lobby, began closing the northern route to Serbian export trade, it not only alarmed the ruling bourgeoisie but also hit the most sensitive side of the peasant masses. Nationalist thinking began to take on an increasingly *economic tone*, with the idea of freeing Serbia from economic dependence on Austria-Hungary and securing free access to the sea. On this issue, the ruling bourgeoisie succeeded in rallying the broad peasant masses around its nationalist policies. And for this significant achievement in consolidating its class rule, it had Austria-Hungary's agrarian and landowning classes to thank.

However, the desire for free access to the sea was not driven solely by the need to secure the export of agricultural products. The necessity of ensuring exports and the obstacles posed by Austria-Hungary had made the peasant masses, as the most numerous voting and military element in the country, keenly interested in the question of access to the sea. But this desire became irresistible as

capitalist production increasingly took hold in Serbia. *In the expansion of territory and access to the sea, the ruling bourgeoisie saw the fulfilment of its class policy, rooted in the industrialization of the country and the development of capitalist production.* But the feverish, almost reckless determination with which this goal was pursued — playing high stakes, “all or nothing” — can only be fully understood when one realizes *that the entire economic and financial system of the bourgeoisie, upon which its rule was based, depended on it. This was the only way out of a situation that was becoming more critical by the day.*

Serbia is a typical example of a small agrarian country with primitive tools and methods of production, yet one deeply entangled with foreign capitalism. The abnormal development of these capitalist ties in small, backward agrarian countries is evident in the fact that capitalism does not conquer them through workshops and factories, from the bottom up, via economic life, but rather through ministries and offices, from the top down, via state management rather than private enterprise. The large national debt abroad came before any efforts were made to develop the productive forces that would ease the burden of debt obligations. The machine for killing (the military) arrived in the country long before the machine for working (industry).

As a result of this abnormal, reversed development, state budgets grew regardless of the increase in the country's productive strength, and even more than the state budgets, the national debt grew. Between 1880 and 1910, the

state budget grew from 20 to 120 million, or by 475 per cent, while the country's debt grew from 32 to 735 million, or by 2,197 per cent. The national debt grew five times faster than the state budget. But this colossal figure for the national debt *alone* does not fully convey the weight of the debt burden. To truly grasp the severity of Serbia's economic ties to foreign capitalism, one must remember that the entire increase in the state budget was consumed by unproductive expenditures on debt and the military. Similarly, most of the state loans, by far the majority, were used to cover budget deficits and extraordinary military expenses.

What sustained this wasteful system of governance? To pay interest on loans, Serbia relied on gold from the export of agricultural products. Since the late 1880s, its trade balance has been positive, meaning it received more gold for its exports than it spent on imports. However, the surplus gold from this positive trade balance was insufficient to cover the outflow of gold for debt repayments. As a result, despite the active trade balance, Serbia's international payment balance remained consistently negative. Over the last thirty years, Serbia has consistently had to export more gold than it received from its exports. From 1891 to 1900, the deficit was 49,354,772 dinars; from 1901 to 1910, it was 71,153,924 dinars. To sustain this bankrupt system of governance, Serbia kept falling into more and more debt, postponing bankruptcy and shifting the burdens of its current policies

onto future generations.

But how long could this go on? Although exports were growing under the pressure of state obligations, this growth did not reflect an increase in the country's productive strength. On the contrary, the increase in exports was a consequence of the rising state burdens, not of economic development or the country's strengthening. It was a result of the *depletion* that was squeezing every individual producer, forcing them to sell not only their family's food but also the means of production to raise the money for taxes. It was exhausting the entire country's economic strength because the funds needed to strengthen the economy were being syphoned off by foreign usurers. The faster growth of exports compared to imports did not reflect a faster growth of the country's economic strength than the development of the people's cultural needs, but rather an artificial increase in exports at the expense of the people's ability to meet their own needs.

But as the people became increasingly unable to meet their own consumption needs, they also became less reliable as taxpayers. The ruling bourgeoisie began to realize that even the most scandalous system of indirect taxes, which did not fail to burden any basic necessity of life, could not provide a secure source of state revenue if the masses' purchasing power weakened or developed more slowly than the state's needs. Improving the tax collection apparatus could not compensate for the loss caused by the depletion of the general reservoir of state revenue — the depletion of

the country's economic power. Once again, the accuracy of the principle is demonstrated: the economic strength of a country is the only true foundation of secure state revenue and good financial health. But where is that economic strength? Is it in the ruined smallholder farms? The land is exhausted, crop yields are lower than in Russia and livestock farming is in decline. Small agricultural enterprises can no longer meet the modest needs of families, let alone fill the state's coffers. State budgets are growing at an incomprehensibly rapid pace, driven by rising debt obligations and the costs of maintaining the bourgeois system of rule, while faith in the growth of agricultural exports begins to justifiably wane.

In this hopeless situation, the ruling bourgeoisie is throwing all its resources, which the state grants it, into the *artificial promotion of industry*. The system of indirect taxes is now being supplemented by a system of "protective" tariffs. Serbia is surrounded by an impenetrable tariff wall, under the protection of which capital, completely freed from any concerns about foreign competition, enjoys the privilege of an unchallenged monopoly on the domestic market, with the exclusive right to exploitation. In implementing this policy, the government regulates the fierce competition between foreign and domestic capital, but ultimately the system of "protective" tariffs prevails, as it serves the interests of the bourgeoisie as both the ruling class and the exploiter of capital. This system, on the one hand, secures extra profits for the capitalist class, and on the

other hand, by artificially attracting capital into the country, it allows more money to flow through the hands of producers and consumers, which the government will conveniently take back through indirect taxes. By bringing foreign capital into the country, the circulation of money increases, and the masses spend more, even if they do not eat more. But as a result, the sums of extra profits for the capitalist class and indirect taxes for the state grow, as does the exploitation of the proletariat and the broader masses. The extent of this exploitation is reflected in the abnormally large difference between nominal and real wages — between the size of wages in money and the amount of goods that can be bought with them.

It is easy to see that this system of promoting domestic production has degenerated into a system of economic depletion of the country. High prices for all goods reduce the *people's purchasing power*, which is the first condition for healthy economic growth, and the monopolistic privileges kill any motivation for *technical improvement of work*, without which it is impossible to imagine the strengthening of a country's economic power. However, these observations fall outside the scope of this work. Instead, it is crucial to highlight *that the economic and financial system we have briefly outlined is the foundation of both the economic existence and the political dominance of the bourgeoisie in Serbia.*

Given this economic and financial condition and the constant concern of every government, it is easy to understand why Serbia

is so desperate to break through its old borders and reach the sea, *no matter* the cost or the great dangers involved. As a country's industrial development advances, the bourgeoisie pushes governments to expand markets and areas for exploitation. The imperialist policies of conquest and colonization, which have divided Europe into two armed camps today, reflect the capitalist classes' drive to secure profits and monopolies on exploitation. Whenever we point to this *economic* cause behind today's feverish armament races, clashes of interests and imperialist colonial policies, the defenders of these policies in Serbia challenge us: "Where is this developed industry in Serbia? Where is this capitalist class pushing to conquer foreign lands?" We acknowledge that capitalist industry in Serbia is not nearly as developed as the appetite for territorial expansion and access to the sea by enslaving foreign peoples is among the ruling bourgeoisie. However, the government in Serbia is all the more zealous in fulfilling the desires of all property-owning classes and castes for territorial expansion and the subjugation of foreign peoples, insofar as it serves the needs of the economic and financial system on which it stands, which is the pillar of its power. The preservation of this system is the number one priority on the agenda of every government. It sustains the tower of millions in the state budget, it provides the means to support militarism and other unproductive institutions, it allows the government to meet its debt obligations abroad and it supports credit for new

borrowing.

Even if the capitalist bourgeoisie in Serbia and other Balkan states is not yet sufficiently developed to exert decisive influence on state policy, in our country it has a powerful ally in the state itself, whose need for survival drives it to territorial expansion at any cost. This is why the irresistible expansionist ambitions of the Balkan states have become an irresistible necessity for their governments — the only way out of the dire situation in which their economic and financial systems have brought them, standing on the verge of bankruptcy. For the bourgeoisie in Serbia, access to the sea does not primarily mean the country's economic emancipation, as is often and widely claimed — for the entire economic and financial policy of the ruling bourgeoisie amounts to a continuous alienation of the right to freely control the country's economic resources and the subjugation of the people to debt slavery to secure the funds needed to maintain power — but rather, above all, the emancipation of the economic and financial system on which its rule is based. Access to the sea is the only way to free the system of “protective” tariffs from dependence on foreign countries, so that no concessions have to be made to anyone. Thus, even though the capitalist bourgeoisie may not yet be mature enough to exert decisive influence on the direction of state policy, every government is compelled not to shy away from the sacrifices that the drive to the sea may entail — not just for free trade with the world but for the surviv-

al of its rule. This is why one of our nationalist activists and patriotic writers said with rare sincerity: "*A war that does not guarantee free access to the world market for Serbian goods cannot be called a war of liberation!*"

Thus, the Albanian policy of the Serbian government embodies the adventurism of a desperate person who, without any prospects for success and without a clear goal, squanders precious strength in an attempt to avoid the bankruptcy that threatens their entire economic and political course.

3. The Defeat of the Attempt at Conquest

The surge of the masses, which had been fuelled for years by the policy of "economic emancipation" and reached its peak from the customs war to the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was cleverly exploited by the bourgeoisie during the Balkan Wars. For even the wildest ventures, the ruling class could count on human resources whose readiness to make sacrifices exceeded the demands of military discipline. Drunk on the intoxicating feeling that they controlled the armed nation, the bourgeoisie pushed the people's strength beyond all reasonable limits and committed the most reckless abuses. The climax of these abuses was the attempt to secure access to the sea *through the conquest of Albania*.

Serbia had two natural routes to the sea. The first, through Montenegro to Bar, traversed areas that belonged to two Serbian states and were populated almost exclusively by *Serbs*. The second, down the Vardar Val-

ley to Salonika, followed the natural transport artery that was destined to be the main route for the Balkans' economic connection to the world. As for the second route, as we will see later, the bourgeoisie of the Balkan states was incapable of overcoming separatist tendencies and turning Salonika, whose location is perfectly suited by nature, into a global gateway for all three states. Instead, the Serbian and Bulgarian elites plunged their peoples into the Bregalnica catastrophe, ensuring that Salonika remained under exclusive Greek control — although the Greeks needed it the least and would use it the least. The Serbian bourgeoisie wasn't even strong enough to overcome the dynastic exclusivity between Serbia and Montenegro and unite the two regions of the same people into a single state entity, which would have allowed access to the much-desired sea over straightforward territory. Instead, borders were drawn between two brotherly lands, and there are barely ten people on either side who understand or approve of this. The royal guards, who will now guard these borders, stand as witnesses to the bourgeoisie's inability to achieve national unity.

Instead of seeking access to the sea through these natural routes, which required a systematic and resolute fight against separatist tendencies, the government based its agreements with allies on separatism. By doing so, the bourgeoisie closed both natural paths to the sea for itself. Abandoning these routes, it embarked on a journey to the sea through the rugged Albanian mountains — a

route that passes through regions populated by a compact foreign element, one of the most resistant groups in former European Turkey. This area was also deeply entangled in the colonial schemes of two major European powers. The complete defeat of this policy midway through has provided us with costly lessons about the strength of Austro-Italian influence. Now, no one even considers the sacrifices that would be necessary to conquer and subdue the Albanian people.

To begin with, the Adriatic Sea as a *means* of connecting Serbia to the world has significant drawbacks.

1. The Adriatic Sea has lost its former commercial importance. Its ports are no longer hubs of global trade, as they were centuries ago, and they are no longer centres of trade for Balkan countries. Major global trade routes through the Mediterranean no longer converge in the Adriatic but, bypassing it, intersect in Salonika, which has become not only the key point for Balkan trade but also for Central European trade with the East. Should Serbian trade be directed toward a port in the Adriatic, it would again be constrained by the shipping companies and markets dominated by Austria-Hungary and Italy.

2. Even if the Adriatic Sea fully met Serbia's trade needs, trade routes cannot be determined arbitrarily or independently of global traffic patterns. As Professor Cvijić has extensively shown, the natural route today leads to Salonika. This port is the exit point for the Vardar-Morava communication artery, which,

with the rise of Central Europe and its growing economic power toward the Asian East, has gained great European importance. It has drawn to itself all the trade from the regions of both present and former Serbia. In earlier times, trade from former Serbia flowed north, and from Old Serbia and Macedonia, it flowed south. With these regions now united into a single state, trade would continue to flow in both directions, provided they are equally facilitated. However, the north-south route cannot be artificially turned into an east-west route, no matter how much political aspirations may desire it. All artificial measures taken to achieve this, such as railway policies, demand extraordinary sacrifices and place a burden on the economy similar to that of strategic railroads. And if the Serbian government, stumbling through Albania, has failed to secure free access for our trade through Salonika, then the fratricidal war has been not only a crime against the Serbian people but also a crime on behalf of *others*.

3. Access to the Adriatic Sea, as a safety valve in case of abnormal relations with the north and south, would disproportionately strain Serbia's economic resources with enormous sacrifices. First, building a proper port would be extremely difficult. The best expert on the Balkans, Professor Cvijić, says, "In the area occupied by the Serbian army, there is only one decent bay, and that is Durrës. Even though it is filled with sand, making it only 6-10 metres deep, and is exposed to southern and southwestern winds, it could be made into

a good commercial port, *though at great expense*.”* Without substantial technical work, the other bays on that coast cannot be used as ports.

However, the costs of building the port and laying the railway pale in comparison to the incalculable sacrifices needed to secure that route. Whether Serbia gains just a railway or a wider strip of land, keeping the Albanian population in subjugation would require sacrifices no prudent trader would accept. The wider the strip of land, the greater the sacrifices. To maintain control over all of Northern Albania, Serbia would need to station large military garrisons and undoubtedly shed blood yearly to “restore” order. Transporting Serbian exports to the Adriatic Sea would require military protection, escalating militarism, constant mobilizations and harsh colonial wars. Conquest is a bottomless pit. Algeria cost France more than the war indemnity it paid Germany in 1871. The South African colonies cost Germany over a billion marks and brought nothing in return. Entrenched in Albania, Serbia would soon find it easier to match other colonial powers in their atrocities toward conquered peoples than in bearing the sacrifices forced upon them by resistance. If Serbia cannot make a single step toward strengthening its economy without taking two steps toward wasting resources on unproductive goals, then it can expect a time when its

* See Jovan Cvijić, *Serbia's Access to the Adriatic Sea*, Journal of the Serbian Geographical Society, Year II, Vol. 2, p. 198.

main export will be people — and they won't be leaving through Albania, but through Europe.

Thus, access to the Adriatic Sea through the conquest of Albania represents an *economic* absurdity for Serbia. But the subjugation of the Albanian people as a means of accessing the sea has also proven to be a *political* absurdity. In a policy of conquest, where decisions are not based on “greater rights” or “greater needs” but solely on greater strength, the game was lost for Serbia from the start. In Albania, Serbia encountered two major powers that already wielded more influence there than even Turkey. It doesn't matter that Albania itself isn't worth the sacrifices that Austria-Hungary and Italy have invested in it, because they are not doing it for Albania but for the influence that controlling Albania provides over the Adriatic and the Balkans. Whether the government of Mr. Pašić correctly assessed the resistance it would face from these two powers or overestimated the support of its “friends” is of interest, but for our purposes, it pales in comparison to the fact *that Serbia's conquest methods and ambitions, with its puny strength, unwittingly worked to resolve the Albanian Question in favour of those who support their appetites with far stronger means.*

In an era of large-scale imperialist politics, the expansionist policies of a small, economically underdeveloped Serbia, which should have focussed on cooperation rather than suffocating the small nations around it, has proven to be both an economic and polit-

ical absurdity — a contradiction in terms, an impossible policy.

The dream of access to the Adriatic Sea through the conquest of Albania belongs to the past, but its shadow will darken the skies over the Serbian people for a long time. Serbia wanted both access to the sea and its own colony but ended up without access to the sea, and from its imagined colony, it created a blood enemy. It sought to push foreign influence out of Albania but instead succeeded in cementing it further. Through its imperialist venture, Serbia sought a radical, final solution to secure its control of the Adriatic coast, but it only ensured that foreign control was solidified. Serbia's drive for the sea yielded the opposite results because it was pursued by the wrong means: *what could only have been achieved through an agreement and with the friendly cooperation of a liberated Albanian people was instead pursued against them*. The ambitions for access to the sea through imperialist means have been thoroughly defeated.

4. The Military Occupation of Albania

The military occupation of Albania by the Serbian government was carried out with as little foresight and understanding of the circumstances as one would use when going on a casual stroll. The absence of military and political precautions, which were clearly necessary, made this serious military and political action resemble a leisurely "spacer," or as the Germans would say, a "lustreise" (pleasure trip). However, this "stroll" will remain in

Serbian history as the bloodiest monument to a year of war under the bourgeois regime and the best testament to their disregard for human lives.

Someone admiringly compared the Serbian troops' march to the Adriatic Sea with Napoleon's crossing of the Alps. As far as the soldiers were concerned, they did indeed overcome immense obstacles in an admirable manner. But when it came to their military and political leaders, they acted with reckless abandon, piling folly upon folly, senselessly sacrificing men. This horrifying series of sacrifices stretched from the start of the march until their return.

A correspondent for the Zagreb-based *Obzor*, D. Mašić, described the march of the Drina Division as follows:

“On the seventh day of this miserable journey, the Serbian army suffered heavy losses. The supply columns had not arrived for three days. There was no food for either men or horses. Continuous *marching in the rain and cold, without sleep or food, had broken the soldiers to the point where they could barely stand.* Every moment, horses slipped, tumbling down cliffs with their loads or ammunition. The men carried the ammunition on their own backs, *only to collapse from the weight and exhaustion.* It seemed that if this continued for just one more day, none would emerge alive from these desolate mountain regions. Yet they trudged on in silence. *All day long, in un-*

bearable and constant rain, the army didn't march so much as it dragged itself along in broken columns, leaving behind the weak, the sick and the dead."

The suffering of the Šumadija Division, which marched from Prizren through Orosh, was no less severe. One officer wrote about the hunger in their column:

*"As much of a delicacy as bread was at that time, I could only get half a loaf — offered to me by a soldier who paid four dinars for it. The next day, it sold for five or six dinars, and one cavalryman paid eight dinars for a small loaf and a piece of bacon. Later, when bread ran out, the price of maize skyrocketed. The small mountain maize, about 12-15 cm long, sold for a grosh (one coin) per piece on the last day. These high prices give only a faint idea of the hunger and suffering we endured."**

If the officers endured such hardships, one can only imagine the suffering of the poor soldiers who, throughout the long war, had not received a single cent from anywhere. From the very beginning, the coastal detachment of the Serbian army left a trail marked by frequent graves of soldiers who died from hunger, exhaustion and freezing cold, without coats

* We refer readers to the valuable notes of Comrade Kosta Novaković, which began appearing on January 1 in *Borba* under the title "Four Months in Central Albania."

or tents to shelter them from the elements. Whose sacrifices were these? Facing Serbian troops, weakened in numbers and physically exhausted to the point of being incapable of serious combat with organized Albanian tribes, the tribes themselves maintained the dignity of neutral but independent observers. They granted assurances of their peaceful intentions, allowing the starving, barefoot and bone-weary Serbian troops to pass. Prenk Bib Doda, a tribal leader, allowed the troops to pass on the condition that they did not harm the Mirdita tribe, and the commanders were careful not to provoke the hornet's nest of the Malisors.

This stance by the Albanian tribes was based on the belief, fed by Vienna and Rome, that Albania's autonomy was guaranteed and that the Serbian troops would eventually have to retreat. Napoleon was allowed to cross the Alps because it was known he would have to return.

Most of the Serbian soldiers in Albania perished from disease, primarily dysentery and exhaustion, *which naturally resulted from hunger and inadequate supplies*. These were the sufferings of men sent on a fool's errand, with their commanders showing no concern for their basic needs. Their commanders, who did not hesitate to let soldiers die from hunger and exhaustion, lacked even a trace of the spirit of that Russian commander who, crossing the Alps, restored the loyalty of his starving army by preparing a grave for himself. Throughout the entire march, hunger and exhaustion

alternated with beatings and revolver shots.

The disregard for the lives of these men can be illustrated by this example: by order of the commander, small detachments of soldiers were left as relay stations along a hundred-kilometre stretch of the route. The insanity of this order, even from a purely military standpoint, was clear, as was the fate of these abandoned men, who found themselves amidst a sea of agitated Albanians, enraged by the atrocities committed by the Serbian army in the eastern regions. This anger consumed these unfortunate men. Nothing was ever heard from certain stations, and their families still search for them in vain through newspaper ads. The torching of villages and the massacre of Albanian civilians was no compensation for the senseless losses.

The chain of folly and sacrifice that ultimately swallowed the coastal detachment seemed endless. As the size of the task far exceeded the strength of the detachment, small groups of Drina reservists were thrown into forward positions at *Dajç*, where they suffered their first fatalities in skirmishes with the Shkodra garrison. Without tents and stuck in a rocky area where there wasn't a single twig to make a fire, they froze while on watch. After the first serious attack by the well-rested Shkodra troops, the Drina soldiers were forced to retreat, leaving behind bodies that were later collected and buried by Šumadija reinforcements.

The *Brdica slaughterhouse* was the pinnacle of this reckless waste of lives and pointless

military bravado. The defences of Shkodra were of the most modern type, with trenches hidden underground and made of concrete. Even the best binoculars couldn't reveal them from the outside, and once the battle began, it was impossible to tell where the fire was coming from. Several rows of different obstacles, including traps that could be flooded and barbed wire connected to iron poles set in concrete, blocked the path of attackers. The fortifications were defended not only by rifle fire from concealed trenches but also by numerous artillery pieces, particularly large-calibre city guns.

Even a basic military mind would understand that such fortifications could not be taken with bare hands, aided only by a few mountain batteries and *no field artillery*. Yet the attack was ordered, and on January 26, one of the most reckless and costly defeats in the entire Serbian-Turkish War was inflicted upon the Serbian people. The news of the terrible losses leaked accidentally through Montenegro to Belgrade, and *Štampa* was not wrong when it described the disaster at Brdica with these words:

“There was no regard for human lives there. *Human lives have lost their value and are worth no more than pumpkins.*”

A few days later, in an article titled “A Crime,” an anonymous expert (likely an officer) wrote:

“Every day, new horrific details emerge about the brutal slaughter of our coastal detachment at Brdica. The government continues to shroud this bloody tragedy in secrecy and avoids publishing the list of casualties our army suffered in this mad endeavour. But after our report from Murqan, public outrage over *this crime against the Serbian army* has reached such a level that no more cover-ups will suffice. *Nearly 1,300 Serbian soldiers and 39 officers were senselessly slaughtered at Brdica.* Someone must be held accountable for this useless massacre.”

The exact figures for losses at Brdica have not been published, but the number of Serbian casualties is significantly higher than stated above, while Montenegrin losses were several times greater. Thousands of men were thrown into death as if they were made of mud, as if they would never be needed by anyone again. Instead of providing information in response to the above accusations, the government organ *Samouprava* replied that “just before dawn on January 26, the commander of the coastal detachment received a direct order from the Montenegrin High Command to carry out an attack on Brdica.” The attack was ordered immediately, and according to the government’s newspaper, it is to be credited for the fact that one of the Brdanjola positions fell into Montenegrin hands! Accordingly, the commander of the coastal detachment either *knowingly* sent several thousand of his men to their deaths for

a dubious success on the Montenegrin front, or he sacrificed those lives out of respect for the prominent figure of the Montenegrin troops' chief commander. The fact that the entire operation was driven by reasons unrelated to the basic principles of warfare is evident in the way a single column, isolated and without support on either side, fell into the trap and was decimated. Thus, before the strong fortifications of Shkodra, a *bloody military spectacle* unfolded to satisfy the monarchical vanity of a kleptomaniac who buried his wretched little land beneath those very walls.

One month later, another disaster *struck in the port of San Giovanni di Medua*. Troops, transported from Salonika by sea to reinforce the siege of Shkodra, spent an entire day on ships in the harbour, waiting for someone to disembark them. They were caught unawares by the Turkish cruiser *Hamidiye*. The Brdica massacre had not increased the caution needed in such dangerous situations. At Brdica, the order to retreat wasn't delivered in time, and in Medua, *Hamidiye* didn't announce its arrival.

No effort was made to save the soldiers. As Major Radoje Janković vividly described in a *Piedmont* article, "*Neither the ship's captain nor the crew cared about saving the soldiers*. Discipline crumbled under the pressure of personal danger, and chaos took over. *No lifeboats were lowered.*" The soldiers were left at the mercy of the *Hamidiye*, which unleashed its artillery on the ship Vervenjotis, full of soldiers. Major Janković described that desperate moment in

vivid terms:

“The roar of the cannons had an almost magical effect on everyone. In an instant, the tragedy of that day became clear. Soldiers, with their gear on their backs, threw themselves from several metres high into the water. The wounded sought shelter to bandage their wounds. The injuries were terrible, caused by shards of steel. Others slid down ropes, ten at a time. One rope snapped! All the fury of the *Hamidiye* was unleashed on the *Vervenjotis*.”

In that desperate moment, when there wasn't a single officer to offer advice or share the soldiers' fate, two soldiers, one sergeant and one corporal, without epaulets, turned two small mountain guns and, in an effort to save their comrades, took on the massive artillery of a warship. The *Hamidiye* withdrew, leaving behind utter devastation.

“Floating around the ship were coats, backpacks, broken rifle stocks and belts — traces of the catastrophe. Shajkača caps bobbed on the water, swaying like seaweed. *The unfortunate victims, scattered here and there, their bullet pouches emptied, sank and swayed, touching the sandy bottom like underwater plants. The pale hands of the drowned waved in the current. Some still clutched their rifles in a death grip. The waves tossed others about. Amidst the floating debris were a pair of new shepherd's flutes. Here and*

there, a head bobbed. The waves tousled their hair, revealing a parting...

“The handsome young men from Podrimlje were carried by the water like fallen leaves. For the first time since the war began, their strength had failed them. The heroes of Zebrnjak, Abdi Pasha and Bakrno Gumno lay defeated. On each face, an unspoken wish. Their fiancées waited for them; their fruit trees were budding, but their eyes were dead.”

God knows how much further this string of madness and sacrifice would have gone had Shkodra not surrendered and Albania's fate been taken up by Europe. The Serbian government would have continued sending new troops from the Macedonian front to fill the places of those consumed by the snowy passes of Albania, hunger, disease, the Shkodra mud and the Adriatic Sea. Entire divisions were sent to Albania, and who knows what would have happened if the Albanians hadn't calmly awaited Europe's decision. Even the “wild” Albanian tribes understood the decisive significance of Europe's resolution better than the Serbian government. Anticipating the moment when they would escort Serbian troops out, the Albanians knew how to avoid unnecessary losses far better than the government, which was under the ominous influence of Russian intervention.

Thus, after half a year of hunger, suffering, decay and reckless waste of lives, the pitiful remnants of the coastal detachment were sent

back, leaving behind over 5,000 soldier graves and deep hatred among the local population as their only legacy.

5. Colonial Wars

The military occupation of Albania was bound to provoke fierce resistance from the highland Albanian tribes — a reality that apparently only the Pašić government failed to foresee. The government forgot that the Ottoman Empire had long been a promised land for these highlanders, with strong religious ties binding them to the Muslim world. Despite these ties, the Ottomans had struggled for a long time to maintain control over these rugged regions. Rebellions became a regular occurrence, and one of the most decisive blows to the Young Turk regime came from these areas. Keeping the Albanians under submission was a daunting task for the Ottoman Empire, even though it had vast reserves of manpower in Anatolia, which it could deploy against the rebels in Europe — just as these rebels were sometimes deployed against Christians.

The Serbian government, however, did not concern itself with these issues. It not only disregarded the natural resistance of the Albanian tribes but also provoked it by labelling the Albanian population, following the example of all colonizers, as a people who could *only* be subdued by brute force. Following its unexpected military successes against the Ottoman Empire, the government — along with the entire Serbian bourgeoisie — succumbed

to an idolatrous belief in the power of arms as the *only* radical and decisive solution. It sent its army toward the coast without any political directives, occupying large parts of Albanian territory without giving strict orders on how the army should behave toward the proud Albanian tribes. This negligence gave rise to a constant war on the border, with numerous casualties on both sides.

The leaders of the bourgeois policies never considered how many lives could have been saved by managing the army's behaviour toward the subjugated population and by recognizing the Albanian tribes' relentless desire not to have their already difficult living conditions further restricted or their ways of life insulted.

As soon as the troops, left to their own devices without clear political oversight, came into contact with the Albanian population, they committed atrocities that drove the Albanian people into a desperate struggle for survival. Thus began a series of *colonial wars*, with occasional interruptions, that have continued from the moment the Serbian army crossed the Ottoman border until today, with no end in sight.

The bourgeois press, blind and deaf to the brutal colonial extermination practices of the military, raised a hellish outcry against "Albanian savagery." This cry grew louder as the government became increasingly powerless to withstand the pressure from its powerful rivals in Albania. But even the wildest and most uncivilized African tribes had never greeted

European intruders by kissing their white hands. It was even less likely that the Albanians — who had harboured certain political aspirations for which they had sacrificed so much over the last decade — would submit to foreign domination. Anyone who wasn't prepared for a war of extermination should have taken these aspirations into account.

The Albanian rebellion of September, which forced Serbia to mobilize nearly three divisions, is a classic example of how colonial wars are provoked. The Serbian army's occupation stretched from the east to the very gates of the gorges and mountain passes, separating farmers from their fields, livestock from pastures, villages from mills, buyers and sellers from markets, and entire mountain communities from their economic centres and grain stores. The Albanians were unable to access their land on the other side of the occupied territory. All the sources of livelihood were cut off. In desperation and hunger, the people first begged for permission to access the markets, but when even that was denied, they chose to die by bullets rather than starve.

This rebellion may have been influenced by various local and foreign agents, as the government eagerly suggested, but the groundwork for such influence was laid by Prime Minister Pašić's administration, which alienated the Albanian population by using precisely those methods that could have been employed to ease their suffering and win them over.

The military regime not only halted eco-

conomic activity and severed regular sources of income, but it also *plundered* the population's entire supply of food for both people and livestock. Under the medieval system of provisioning troops, the soldiers' hunger was eased at the expense of the local populace's starvation. This system of troop provisioning filled the pockets of many military and civilian officials who entered these regions fully aware of the power of money. It did not alleviate the burden of war costs for the Serbian people but instead added the even greater burden of suppressing uprisings.

The government legalized and institutionalized this plunder through the imposition of *contribution taxes*, which military and civilian authorities collected in the newly occupied territories. To illustrate the outrageousness of these taxes, consider a few examples: 117 dinars were levied on 100 kilograms of alcohol, 54.65 dinars on gasoline, 17.60 on salt, 30 on sugar, 20 on beer, 20 on oil and 100 on coffee. *All the staples most consumed by the common people, without which they could not survive, were taxed heavily.* These taxes weighed heavily on the plundered and destitute locals, as well as on the poor conscripted soldiers who occasionally drank coffee, bought gasoline for their guards or purchased a bit of sugar to sweeten their stale and mouldy bread. As they were sent to their deaths in the name of a better future for exploitation, the bourgeoisie followed them with its well-known apparatus of indirect taxes. To ensure that these taxes didn't confuse the unfamiliar traders in the

new territories, and to help them navigate the system, the receipts issued by the Supreme Command stated, "The importer is authorized to transfer the contribution tax paid on this merchandise to the consumer."*

Under normal circumstances, such a significant increase in the cost of living would have created an intolerable situation. But in these conditions — where regular income sources had dried up, cash had been looted and the population had been "disarmed" of its money — the contribution taxes drove people to the brink of survival. When one considers the situation — that nobody was held accountable for the lives of the Albanians, that the army imposed its will on their primitive lifestyle with brute force, that all sources of livelihood were cut off, leaving people and livestock without food, and that both the rich and poor alike were subjected to plunder — one can clearly see *how uprisings are born*. And this is to say nothing of the terrible scenes of poverty and hunger that played out in Shkodra and other places of refuge for the displaced Albanian population.

* *In their disregard*, the authorities have gone so far as to charge these taxes based on gross weight, including the weight of the container! For example, a crate of 50 bottles of beer weighs 120 kg: the tax is charged on that weight, even though the beer itself weighs only 35 kg. The same applies to gas, spirits, etc. With spirits, for example, the containers are usually iron, but consumers pay the tax not just on the spirits but also on the iron they never see. *Thus, these taxes are doubled or tripled.*

When the rebellion broke out, the government declared through the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs that the Albanians would be "severely punished." The bourgeois press called for their extermination without mercy, and the army carried it out. The Albanian villages, from which the people had fled in time, were reduced to ashes. These villages served as barbaric crematoria where hundreds of women and children were burned alive. While the Albanian insurgents disarmed and released captured Serbian officers and soldiers, the Serbian military spared neither their children, women, nor the sick. A faithful depiction of these atrocities was provided in reports from Albania published in *Radničke Novine* (Workers' News), in articles titled "*Blood Vengeance of the Soldiers*" and "*Montenegrin Fury*." Once again, it was confirmed *that even the most primitive rebellions of tribal people are always more humane than the practices of standing armies deployed by modern states to suppress such uprisings.*

The Serbian bourgeoisie has now opened its own register of colonial killings and atrocities, and it is now prepared to join the ranks of the bourgeois elites of England, the Netherlands, France, Germany, Italy and Russia.

6. The Results of the Expansionist Policy

One of the bourgeois opposition groups in the Parliament rightly pointed out that, in foreign policy during the Balkan events, the war government of the Radical Party faced no principled opposition, except from the

Social-Democrats. The consensus among the bourgeois groups in foreign policy was achieved, although the Radicals made greater sacrifices than their opponents. If *securing the Balkans for the Balkan peoples through mutual agreement* was indeed the guiding principle of the Radical Party's Balkan policy before these events, it is undeniable that, over the course of these events, they aligned more with their opponents than the opponents aligned with them. In any case, the foreign policy of the Radical government was an expression of the entire bourgeoisie, and Mr. Pašić was the most suitable figure to lead its "realistic" policy.

In his Albanian policy, as in other cases, Mr. Pašić liked to leave us in uncertainty about what exactly he wanted. In diplomatic work, he was, above all, the leader of a party that emerged from the hesitant and ambiguous petty-bourgeoisie which, driven by events, sought to compensate for its lack of political vision and determination with agility and minor cunning. During the great events in the Balkans, this indecision increasingly gripped the cabinets of the Balkan states as the disparity between great ambitions and limited means grew. Mr. Pašić's diplomatic skill was evident in his ability to both want and not want something at the same time. This policy of wanting and not wanting allowed the government to leave the door open to withdraw from any serious actions, pretending that these were mere "attempts" that were never meant to be taken seriously — attempts that the Serbian people paid dearly for.

In such attempts and gropings, Serbia squandered some of its most critical historical moments, moments that demanded a firm commitment to decisions based on a realistic assessment of the overall situation in the Balkans and the actual positions of the Balkan peoples.

What is that situation, and what solutions does it require?

The Balkan Peninsula is a mix of nations with intertwined historical memories. Various parts of the peninsula, each with its own distinct historical identity, have become intertwined and lie across each other's natural routes of cultural and economic exchange with the world. This is especially true for its central regions, Old Serbia and Macedonia, which form the main part of the Turkish legacy in the Balkan states. Thus, when Turkish rule was ousted from these areas by the efforts of the local populations, the bourgeoisie of the Balkan states stepped forward with handfuls of plans to divide the newly-acquired territories based on historical and national rights, economic needs, and political necessity. But here lies the problem: partitioning these territories is impossible without violating the national principle, threatening state survival or infringing on real economic interests and imagined historical rights.

Salonika, for example, is a natural gateway to the Balkans and is essential for everyone, yet it is singular and indivisible. The transportation and economic axis of the Balkans, without which Salonika would not be what it is, is

undoubtedly the Vardar Valley, which is also indivisible. Likewise, the borders of medieval empires often shifted and overlapped, creating irreconcilable historical claims among the Balkan states. Who can definitively determine where the Serbian and Bulgarian nations begin and end? How can the Macedonian Slavs be united into one national community without subjugating the Greeks and other peoples? How can the Greeks in Thrace be united into one national state without subjugating the Turks and cutting off Bulgaria's connection to Bulgarians near Salonika and as far as Kastoria?

These are just a few hints at the myriad real and imagined questions, true and false interests, that emerged after the collapse of Turkish rule. These issues could only have been favourably resolved *by creating a new union*. Once the Turkish rule was dismantled, these questions could only have been resolved peacefully and favourably in a *new, higher form of unity*. This was the only path that reliably led to rapprochement, freedom, strength and overall progress in the Balkans — avoiding war altogether.

The union of the Balkan peoples would have been the solution to the complex Balkan question, providing the most favourable conditions for the peaceful and successful development of all Balkan nations. Only by creating a new union in place of the collapsed Turkish rule could long-lost national freedom have been preserved, preventing it from being drowned in a bloody scramble for the newly

acquired territories — a scramble that posed the greatest threat to the freedom of the Balkan peoples. This freedom was suffocated by the acquisitive scramble for conquered lands before it could even be born, historically confirming the social-democrats' view *that national liberation of the Balkan peoples was impossible without unifying the entire Balkans into a general union*. Such a union would also have liberated all the peoples and regions of the Balkan Peninsula from mutual restrictions and blockades imposed by frequent borders, granting everyone free access to the sea. The Balkans would have become *one* vast economic region where modern economic life could flourish, and each part of that region would benefit from guaranteed freedom of movement, access to economic resources and faster economic development overall. *True economic emancipation of the Balkan peoples lies in the economic union of the Balkans*. With political unity and economic progress, the Balkan peoples would have been capable of resisting the imperialist ambitions of capitalist European powers.

If there is any political reality in the Balkans, it is the necessity of a union among the Balkan peoples. The conviction of this necessity arises from observing the real situation in the Balkans as if from an open book, which so clearly outlines our future. *Only a policy that recognizes this idea as its guiding principle is truly realistic for the Balkan states*.

Serbia's expansionist venture into Albania, as part of the broader Balkan drama, most starkly deviated from the principle of Balkan

unity, and it did so at the cost of a humiliating defeat. This episode, which occurred outside the complex historical, ethnographic and political relations that envelop the conflicts in Macedonia, most clearly exposes the tendencies of the bourgeoisie's Balkan policy. It laid bare the intolerance of the ruling classes toward other peoples, their expansionist ambitions and the bourgeoisie's readiness to implement these ambitions through the most brutal crimes, previously seen only in overseas colonies.

Abandoning the principle of Balkan unity when signing the agreement on joint action against Turkey led us to futilely exhaust ourselves in the perilous mountains of Albania. Expelled from Albania, we were cast onto the Bregalnica River to slaughter each other barbarously and senselessly. One mistake followed another, one defeat led to another. Thus, Mr. Pašić's "realistic" policy was sealed by two very real defeats: in Albania and at Bregalnica. When the Albanian adventure is justified by the severance from Salonika and the Bregalnica disaster by the expulsion from Albania, it must be emphasized that *both calamities have the same cause: the expansionist ambitions of the Balkan bourgeoisie and ruling cliques, and their inability to prioritize the principle of unity over their own narrow separatist interests.*

Serbia's expansionist stance toward the Albanian people provided yet another lesson about the great danger that any conflict between the Balkan peoples represents for all

involved. At the same time, it demonstrated how the bourgeoisie's policies sow hatred between nations.

Today, it has become highly risky to advocate for cooperation with the Albanians. In its destructive race to justify a flawed policy, the bourgeois press has built an entire edifice of false and biased opinions about the Albanians, while Serbia's aggressive policies, with their barbaric methods, have undoubtedly filled the Albanian people with deep hatred toward us. But it was not always like this. Under Ottoman rule, as Marko Miljanov's accounts reveal, the Serbian and Albanian tribes lived in close relations. They shared many common social traits, expressed through shared customs, traditions and memories, as well as through many joint actions against the Ottoman authorities. Often, there was even blood kinship between them. According to Miljanov's records, the tribes of Kuči, Belopavlići, Hoti, Piperi and Klimenti did not always represent two hostile camps, Albanian and Montenegrin; rather, they often stood on the same side against a common enemy. The memory of these close relations lived on among the Albanian people, as evidenced by a statement recorded by Dositej Obradović during his travels in Albania: "We were once of the same kin and tribe with the Serbs."

Many factors and events since then have contributed to replacing the good neighbourly relations and sense of kinship with intolerance and enmity. Chief among these were the policies of division carried out by Constantin-

ople and the behaviour of Serbia and Montenegro toward the Albanian population during the wars with Turkey.

If anyone had the conditions for cooperation with the Albanians, it was Montenegro and Serbia. Not only were their settlements intermingled and neighbouring tribes closely related, but their mutual interests also pointed to an agreement and friendly relations. Just as the road to the Adriatic passes through simple Albanian territory, the Albanians' connections to the interior of the peninsula lead through Serbian borders. Just as we need the sea, they need the land even more. If our concerns for export link us to the Albanians, their concerns for food link them to us. If these two sides cannot come to an understanding, they will continue to suffocate and oppress each other.

However, all the chances for a policy of agreement and friendship were shattered in this instance far more by Serbia's aggressive gestures than by the Albanians' primitive nature. Serbia did not enter Albania as a brother but as a *conqueror*. Moreover, it did not even enter as a *politician* but as a *crude soldier*. Behind the harsh military practice, no politician could be seen. In fact, the political mindset consisted only of a single command: Go and conquer! Either subdue or perish! With a policy that did not consider *people, tribes, nations* or the natural desire for Albania to gain its independence, Serbia lost all contact with representatives of the Albanian people, pushing them into deep hatred toward every-

thing Serbian. If the Albanian people had not previously represented a national unity driven by a common idea, today, tragically, that unity has emerged in a widespread *national* revolt against the barbaric behaviour of their neighbours: Serbia, Greece and Montenegro. This revolt is a significant step in the national awakening of the Albanians.

Relying solely on the military, which had no understanding of these issues, the Serbian government, intoxicated with expansionist lust and blinded by foreign influence, failed to use its six-month rule in Northern Albania for any act that could have left a positive legacy or eased tensions. It failed to do so even in the final hours when the question of Albania's autonomy was already ripe. The masses longed for liberation from their miserable serfdom, but only Napoleon's *revolutionary* army had the vision for such transformative actions. Educated circles did not hide their unwavering support for the idea of Albanian autonomy from the Serbian garrisons, but what any English conservative *politician* could have grasped was far beyond the understanding of the Serbian radicals. They pushed toward the sea by force. Serbia entered Albania as an enemy, and it left as an enemy.

The deep-seated enmity of the Albanian people toward Serbia is the first tangible result of the Serbian government's Albanian policy. The second, and even more dangerous result, is the entrenchment of two major powers — Austria-Hungary and Italy — in Albania, a situation that provides further proof that any

conflict between the Balkan peoples benefits only their common enemies. The expansionist stance of Serbia, Greece and Montenegro did not prevent the creation of an autonomous Albania, but it pushed this youngest Balkan state to surrender itself to the mercy of Austria-Hungary and Italy before it even fully emerged. This fact poses a great danger to the peace and free development of Serbia. It is clear that the danger does not lie in the mere existence of an autonomous Albania but in the fact that it was created in opposition to the expansionist ambitions of its neighbouring Balkan states. It was seized from these states by Austria-Hungary and Italy, binding it closely to these two powers. Where friendship was necessary for both sides, fierce enmity now prevails, while friendly ties are being forged between two parties — one of which is destined to be the other's victim.

Both of these tangible results of Serbia's expansionist policy toward the Albanian people — hatred and the entrenchment of Austria-Hungary and Italy — have had significant consequences for Serbia's finances and economic development. But most of all, these results have been felt by the tens of thousands of soldiers sacrificed in the Albanian mountains. These soldiers were cast to the borders to stem the tide of resentment provoked by the expansionist policies of the ruling classes, tasked with defending the country from the dangers into which it had been dragged. The chains that the bourgeoisie sought to place on the Albanian people have tightened around

the freedom of their own nation.

While the expansionist campaign in Albania may be justified by false theories of the Albanians' supposed inability for national development, the bitter and very real consequences of that campaign have exposed to the entire nation the bourgeoisie's incapacity for pursuing policies in the national interest. What results will come from the efforts of those fighting for Albania's autonomy is a separate question to be answered by the future. But the complete and costly failure of the bourgeoisie's expansionist policy in resisting Albanian autonomy stands before us as an accomplished fact, ringing with the fine irony of history against the theory of Albanian "incompetence."

Since the chain of dangers and sacrifices for Serbian freedom and the future of Serbia has not ended with the defeat of the expansionist policy, it is necessary to face the truth and, despite prejudices, admit that the struggle the Albanian people are now waging is a natural, inevitable historical struggle for a different political life — *one unlike that under the Ottoman Empire and unlike the one being imposed by their brutal neighbours, Serbia, Greece and Montenegro*. The free Serbian people must recognize and respect this struggle for the freedom of the Albanians, just as much for the freedom of their own, and deny any government the means to pursue an expansionist policy.

As representatives of the proletariat, who have never been lackeys of the ruling class's

expansionist ambitions, the social-democrats are duty-bound to follow the bourgeoisie's extermination policy toward the Albanians step by step, condemning it as barbarism carried out under the false pretence of "higher culture." They must denounce it as a class policy of the bourgeoisie, which harms the proletariat's class interests, as an anti-national expansionist policy that endangers the peace and freedom of the country, and as one that significantly worsens the position of the people. Against this policy, the social-democrats champion their own slogan: *the political and economic union of all the peoples of the Balkans — including the Albanians — based on full democracy and complete equality.*



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