A Small Nation, A Great Contribution!

In Celebration of the 40th Anniversary of the Liberation of Albania and the Victory of the People's Revolution

November 29, 1944 - November 29, 1984
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This pamphlet is dedicated to Ruth and Jack Shulman, whose friendship for the Albanian people and tireless defense of their post-liberation achievements have been instrumental in educating a new generation of working class and progressive people about the People's Socialist Republic of Albania.
Preface

This pamphlet is presented in celebration of the 40th anniversary of the liberation of Albania and the triumph of the people's revolution.

It is the result of a collective effort by organizations in the U.S. who have been working to bring the message of the Albanian experience and successes to the U.S. people, and in particular, the U.S. working class. Some of the participants in this project have visited Albania on many occasions since liberation and have seen with their own eyes the remarkable successes which are recounted in this pamphlet. Valuable resource materials were found in a variety of Albanian publications, including Portrait of Albania, The History of the Party of Labor of Albania, New Albania and Albania Today magazines, and the Constitution of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania.

This year also marks the first time that organizations in several U.S. cities will be gathering together to hold joint celebrations of the anniversary of the liberation of Albania, on November 29, 1944. We urge you to join with us in celebrating this historic occasion and in building friendship between the peoples of the U.S. and Albania.

Albania Friendship Society
of Southern California,
Los Angeles, California

Albania Information Project,
New Orleans, Louisiana

Albania Report,
New York, New York

Chicago Area Friends of Albania,
Chicago, Illinois

U.S. Marxist-Leninist Organization,
Boston, Massachusetts

Introduction

Forty years ago on November 29, 1944, the people of Albania, under the leadership of the Communist Party of Albania (now the Party of Labor), liberated their country from the Nazi occupation and the local ruling classes.

After liberation, the country stood in ruins, ravaged by the fascists. Not a single working factory was left standing, agriculture was virtually destroyed, and the people were plagued with starvation, disease, high infant mortality rates and an average life span of 38 years.

Today Albania is an independent, self-reliant, modern industrial-agrarian society. There are no exploiting classes. The great advantages of the socialist system with its planned economy, can be seen in the fact that there is no economic crisis in Albania, no unemployment and no inflation. There are also no taxes, while medical care, child care, paid vacations and paid maternity leave are provided at little or no cost to individuals. Albania has no foreign debts or credits and is free from domination by the imperialist powers. All these conditions result from the socialist system which now exists in Albania.

Today, Albania is the only socialist country in the world. It stands in firm opposition to the two super-powers -- the U.S. and U.S.S.R. -- and their preparations for imperialist war.

The lessons of how Albania achieved these remarkable successes in only 40 years have great importance to the people of the world and the United States. The imperialists and reactionaries have tried to hide the truth about Albania's liberation and the successes of the revolution because they know these victories are a tremendous inspiration and example for all oppressed people.
Outflanking the enemy deep behind their own lines, the Albanian National Liberation Army escaped destruction and undertook counter-offensive attacks against the Nazi forces.
At dawn on April 7, 1939, Italian fascist troops invaded Albania. This act brought Albania to the brink of extinction. Italy's goal was the subjugation and assimilation of the entire Albanian population and territory under its fascist flag. The Albanian nation, with the oldest indigenous population in the region, was to be destroyed. The desires and aspirations of the Albanian people who had fought empire after empire for their independence and for democracy, were to be drowned in Albanian blood.

Italy's brutal aggression against Albania was the culmination of many decades of intrigues and schemes by the Great Powers of pre-war Europe. These schemes were hatched in the early 1900s when the Ottoman Turkish Empire began to disintegrate, after occupying Albania for over 500 years. Like vultures, the Great Powers (Britain, Italy, France, Germany and Russia) competed to benefit from the Ottoman Empire's decay by dominating the newly emerging states. They sought to colonize and exploit the Balkan states, including Albania, because of their rich natural resources and strategic location. Balkan countries, such as Greece and Serbia, in alliance with one or another of these Powers, had designs of their own on Albanian land. Serbia had already annexed the Albanian region of Kosova in 1913. This success only whetted the appetite of the Serbian rulers, who wanted the northern half of remaining Albanian lands, while the Greek government laid claim to the southern half.

The conditions inside Albania in the early 1900s did not permit a strong independent state to emerge. Nonetheless in 1912 there was a general uprising; Albania declared its independence and a democratic government was formed headed by Ismail Qemali. The Qemali government was ousted by the Great Powers intrigues before the First World War. In 1920, the Albanian people defeated Italy's attempt to annex Vlora and surrounding lands. In 1924, Albania's efforts were crowned by the establishment of the democratic government of Fan Noli, which proclaimed an independent Albania and defied the annexationist aims of the Great Powers and their Balkan allies. However, the Albanian landowners and merchants, high clergy and their imperialist allies did not support a democratic government.

1. Albania at the Crossroads: Annihilation or Liberation
Within 6 months, the Noli government was overthrown by a coup, carried out by Ahmet Zog and supported by Serbian, British and Italian capital. Zog came to power as the president of the Albanian republic, but shortly proclaimed himself King.

Zog's government proceeded to sell Albanian resources, labor and territory to the highest foreign bidder in exchange for riches and political and military support. From his coup in 1924 until the mid-1930s, Zog pursued an "open door" policy with Britain and the U.S., as well as with Italy. These countries were given "favored nation" status, and permitted to export large quantities of manufactured goods to Albania while extracting natural resources at very low cost. U.S. and British corporations were granted oil and mineral concessions; the Italian capitalists invested in mines and built factories which were worked by peasants driven from their land. In order to support these concerns' needs for roads, ports, electricity and other services, the Albanian people were heavily taxed and workers in these enterprises were paid extremely low wages.

As the Depression gripping the imperialist world deepened in the mid-1930s, the U.S. and Britain were unable to maintain close economic ties with Albania. Italian capitalists took advantage of this to increase their control over Albania. King Zog signed agreements which opened Albania to economic plunder and gave the Italian government such privileges as the right to intervene militarily in Albania if it were attacked. To protect its investments and to assist Zog in quelling any resistance to its plunder of the Albanian people, Italy provided troops which were housed and fed at the expense of the Albanian population.

As World War II approached, Zog paved the way for the Italian fascist invasion of Albania. Under his direction, the national defense of Albania was stripped; increasingly, the governmental policies of Albania were dictated from Italy. On April 7th, 1939, Italy invaded Albania. The invasion and the brutal occupation which followed were the logical conclusion of the schemes of the Great Powers, the long-term designs by Italy on Albanian territory, and the pro-imperialist "open door" policy of Zog, which had robbed Albania of the ability to maintain its independence. The invasion was also a part of the plans of the fascist Axis powers to destroy the then-socialist Soviet Union and to establish world domination.

Despite tremendous obstacles, the Albanian people rose to defend their country and to fight for liberation in the face of Italian invasion. From the earliest days of the occupation, the working people, peasants and patriotic intellectuals organized a war of national liberation in Albania. This was from birth an anti-fascist war, aimed at defeating the fascist occupation and establishing a democratic, independent Albanian republic. It was, therefore, also an anti-imperialist war with the goal of achieving Albania's permanent independence from domination by any foreign power and in support of the whole coalition of anti-fascist, anti-imperialist forces and governments.

Throughout 1939 and 1940, various groups were organized to fight the threatened destruction of the Albanian nation through assimilation into Italy. This broad resistance movement was initiated and led by small communist organizations which had formed shortly before the Italian occupation and by groups of patriotic and democratic Albanians opposed to foreign domination of their country. Under this leadership, armed units of fighters were formed in the cities and carried out sabotage and attacks on Italian posts. Secondary school students and teachers demonstrated against the Italian-ization of education and the suppression of the Albanian language and culture. Workers organized strikes and sabotage in the factories. Peasants hid or destroyed grain and animals rather than have them feed the Italian occupiers.

The political views and philosophy of the Albanian communists found support among the working people and progressive intellectuals of the country from the beginning of the national liberation war. This was the case because the communists were the only organized political force in Albania actively fighting the fascist enemy. Through this fight, they were proving themselves to be outstanding leaders, able to show the people the steps and methods by which liberation could be achieved.
In order to provide the necessary leadership and centralization of the anti-fascist struggle, in the fall of 1941 the communist groups and individuals joined to form the Communist Party of Albania (the CPA, now the Party of Labor of Albania). Representing the working class of Albania, this Party took up active battle against fascist occupation from its birth, in stark contrast to all other existing political groups. No other organization existed which was engaging in a war of national liberation, nor was any other group capable of leading such a war. Led by Enver Hoxha, the CPA was the only organization to call for the nation-wide war against fascism and the formation of an independent, democratic Albanian republic.

In the face of severe repression, the CPA undertook to lead the Albanian people in the anti-fascist national liberation war. During the winter of 1941-42, men and women were recruited by this Party to form guerilla units, based on the older armed groups in the cities. New units were established in the countryside, where they fought both offensive and defensive battles against the Italian army. In addition, these units broke into grain reserves to distribute food to the peasants, who were being forced to support the fascist occupiers while starving themselves. Together, the peasants and the armed guerilla units defended villages from fascist attacks and reprisals, cared for wounded and gathered supplies. At the same time, the guerilla units integrated with the population and helped to maintain the cohesion of Albanian society by planting crops, tending livestock and helping repair war damage to fields and homes. In the course of all these activities, the CPA showed the Albanian workers, peasants and revolutionary intellectuals that the Communist Party of Albania fought to rid Albania of occupation, that they undertook these battles for and with the working people and not for some personal benefit.

At the same time, the CPA was also fighting tooth and nail to build and protect the political unity of all anti-fascist Albanians. Victory against a large, well-armed occupation force like the Italian army was possible only if every single able-bodied Albanian who was willing to fight was integrated into the struggle for freedom. Accordingly, the CPA worked with any individual regardless of religious or political differences.

In order to further the unity being produced through common battle, the CPA organized the first national conference of anti-fascist fighters at Peza in May of 1942. The Conference of Peza included representatives of communists and revolutionary patriots from every part of the country and from every fighting group. Under the political leadership of the CPA, these individuals adopted a unified basic program of struggle against the Italian occupation, with which all participants agreed. The two goals of this program were to conduct the armed struggle against occupation forces until liberation, and to establish an independent, democratic republic of Albania.

In order to achieve these goals, the Peza Conference also adopted the organizational structure of the national liberation councils. These councils acted as organs of war, through which the fighting was planned and carried out in particular regions, and civilians were organized to help the guerilla units. The councils were also the embryonic organs of political power or government. They were empowered to pass laws, adjudicate disputes, form police and self-defense units for villages, and represent towns or regions at national conferences of anti-fascist fighters. These local councils were elected, and were directed by the Provisional National Liberation General Council, the first national, elected, representative body of proven anti-fascist fighters, who directed the overall war effort and formed the nucleus of the future democratic Albanian government.

Following the Peza Conference, the liberation war made much progress, especially in the countryside. Partisan bands attacked fascist militia posts and government offices, driving the occupiers out of the villages and towns. They would then replace the puppet government with freely elected national liberation councils. The partisan units not only engaged in battles and skirmishes; they also protected the villages against reprisals, protected the people in liberated areas from thieves or spies, settled blood feuds and otherwise helped to establish a stable political and economic life for war-torn communities. From village to village the liberation battle
1.1 yuOuS, democratic political system based on the national liberation councils was formed and protected.

In response to these successes, the Italian fascists went on the offensive in the winter of 1942-43. The Italian army conducted massive retaliatory actions, burning villages and murdering villagers. Politically, the fascists sought to derail the liberation movement by uniting with the feudal landlords, the bourgeoisie and other reactionary elements, by sponsoring a group called Balli Kombetar. Balli Kombetar was specifically created to oppose the CPA's leadership of the liberation war. It's program was in collaboration with the fascist occupiers; it believed the national liberation war to be unnecessary and wrong. Because it claimed to stand for national unity, strength and independence, Balli was initially able to influence some people, particularly in the countryside. However, because its policy was not aimed at complete liberation and the establishment of a democratic Albanian republic, Balli refused to participate in armed actions against the Italian army, despite invitation from the CPA for joint actions.

In early 1943, the fascist puppet government in Albania fell. Its inability to defeat the national liberation forces and to govern Albania was reflective of the defeats fascism was suffering across Europe at the time. In February of 1943, the Red Army of the Soviet Union had defeated the Nazi Army at Stalingrad, and the tide of the second World War was turning in favor of the anti-fascist coalition.

During the early months of 1943, meetings of the Albanian national liberation councils were held to discuss how to take advantage of this improved situation. Plans for a general uprising against the Italian army were approved. In July of 1943 these meetings culminated in the formation of a General Staff which was charged with creating the Albanian National Liberation Army (ANLA) from the ranks of existing partisan units. The General Staff was placed under the command of the outstanding communist and fighter, Enver Hoxha. Under his leadership and that of the General Staff, the newly reorganized army engaged in larger and more frequent attacks on fascist targets. The formation of the General Staff reflected also the tremendous political growth and unification the Communist Party of Albania had been able to generate among the people by constant political education and involvement of the people in the democratic process of making political decisions.

The Party had also paid great attention to keeping morale in the army high. It raised the consciousness of the fighters to a high level so that they all knew what they were fighting for and had great faith in the triumph of their cause.

In addition to the military battles, the struggle was also carried out through large demonstrations against the fascist occupation, and various strikes and other battles. The partisans did tireless work to expose the fascists and local traitors and to organize cultural and educational activities among the people.

As the military and political conditions in Albania began to favor the victory of the national liberation forces, the Balli Kombetar began to show its true nature. Rather than taking up arms against the fascist occupiers who were slaughtering the Albanian people, Balli's leadership agreed to place their organization in the service of the Italian army. They guaranteed they would prevent attacks on the Italian army by national liberation forces and agreed to undertake punitive actions against the ANLA in southern Albania. A member of Balli was appointed to the fascist puppet government. These actions clearly exposed to the Albanian population that Balli supported fascism rather than the liberation of Albania.

In the early summer of 1943, representatives of the Anglo-American Mediterranean command entered Albania uninvited to investigate the status of the Albanian national liberation war. Their findings alarmed the U.S. and British governments. Instead of a disorganized, demoralized, scattered resistance movement, they found a highly organized national army, led by a vigorous communist party, supported by fledgling governmental units on the local and national levels and enjoying the complete support of the Albanian population. Later in the summer, both the U.S. and British armies established military missions inside Albania, under the watchful eye of the Albanian National Liberation Army. From the moment they set foot on Albanian soil, these missions
acted to support Italian fascism and King Zog. Their aim was to undermine the leadership of the national liberation war by the Communist Party and the Provisional General Council. They funneled money and weapons to Balli, which in turn used them against the ANLA, in support of the fascist occupiers. Britain and the U.S. demanded that the ANLA lay down its weapons, stop the national liberation war, and limit itself to supporting Allied military efforts to "liberate" Albania from outside.

Almost in unison with these Allied demands, very similar pressure was exerted on the CPA and the Provisional General Council by leading members of the Yugoslav Communist Party and its national liberation front. These leaders visited Albania during this period to express the opinion that the Albanian national liberation war was being waged entirely improperly. They too demanded that Albania abandon its independent anti-fascist liberation war, and fight primarily as an arm of the Yugoslav national liberation army. At this crucial juncture, the CPA and the Albanian people rejected all pressures to stop their national liberation war, and to unite with forces such as Balli, who had openly supported the fascist occupation of Albania. The liberation war was broadened and continued and in the late summer of 1943, Italy was unable to hold Albania any longer. Italy capitulated to the Allies and some of its troops then joined with the Albanian partisans to fight the Nazis.

The German Nazi army had been making occasional forays into northern Albania for some time, in battles against the liberation forces. In late September, 1943, they invaded Albania full scale. The Nazi occupiers were determined to decimate the Albanian national liberation movement. But the movement could not be crushed. Bloody battles occurred throughout the fall. In October, less than a month after the Nazi invasion, the ANLA shelled the Parliament building of the fascist government in Tirana.

In response, the Nazis unleashed a ferocious military effort called the Winter Campaign of 1943-44 in an all out effort to destroy the CPA and the ANLA and to force Albania into submission. They planned to reach these goals by encircling the ANLA and destroying it, while terrorizing the population into subjugation. A curfew was imposed and violators were shot on sight. The Nazis proclaimed that they would hang ten to thirty people for every German soldier killed in Albania. Thousands of communists and anti-fascist fighters were sent to concentration and labor camps inside Germany and imprisoned in Albania, where they were tortured, starved or worked to death. Anti-fascist fighters captured by the Nazis were publicly hung to deter others. The Nazis also tried to destroy the national liberation movement by coming to terms with Balli Kombetar and using it against the ANLA in military actions. In addition, the Nazis supported the formation of another collaborationist political group, Legaliteti, which played a role similar to Balli, but with less influence.

Neither severe military repression nor political ploys could silence the Albanian national liberation movement. All through the terrible winter of 1943-44, the Albanian people grew closer to the CPA and the national liberation councils because it saw them continuing to fight for independence and democracy under the most difficult conditions. Outflanking the enemy deep behind their own lines, launching surprise attacks on supply lines to fortifications, undertaking long distance marches to attack at night where and when the enemy least expected it, the ANLA escaped destruction and undertook counter-offensive attacks against the Nazis forces. In April, having defeated the German offensive, the ANLA undertook one of its own, scoring major victories at Korca, Pogradec and Berat, among other locations.

The great unity between the Albanian people and the leadership of the national liberation war provided the political basis for holding the First Anti-Fascist National Liberation Congress at Permet in May of 1944. This Congress elected the Anti-Fascist Council which was responsible for laying the groundwork for the Albanian state of people's democracy. In addition, the Permet Congress took decisions of great importance to the newly emerging Albanian state: to prevent King Zog from returning to power; to not recognize any other government set up inside or outside of Albania against the will of its people; to continue the liberation war until independence and the formation of the people's democracy. Because it sanctioned the overthrow of the old ruling classes, the Permet Congress established a government in which the control and leadership of the workers and
By the force of their own arms the Albanian people expelled the last Nazi troops and proclaimed the establishment of an independent democratic People's Republic of Albania. (ANLA troops march into Tirana, November 28, 1944).
peasants, through the Communist Party, was ensured. Finally, the Congress agreed to launch a general offensive against the German occupiers.

Factors internal and external to Albania favored a general offensive at this time. Outside of Albania the Nazis were in retreat. The Red Army of the Soviet Union was already helping to free Romania from occupation. Inside of Albania, the failure of the Nazi Winter Campaign, the growing unity of the Albanian people, and the drafting of the new structure for the Albanian government all signaled that the time for a general offensive was at hand. In June of 1944, the offensive began.

With the initiation of the general offensive, all of Albania joined in a massive effort to expel the Nazis from its territory. At the same time, some final steps were necessary to ensure that the new Albanian state would be a democratic people's republic. Accordingly, one month before liberation, a meeting of the General Council in Berat proclaimed the establishment of the Democratic Government of Albania. Its officials were elected and agreement was reached to organize the election of a Constituent Assembly that would draft a new Constitution for the democratic People's Republic of Albania. The Berat meeting formalized the national liberation councils as organs of government and adopted the "Declaration of the Rights of Citizens" ensuring basic democratic rights to all individuals.

The new leadership of the Democratic Government faced immediate serious threats to Albania's independence. In late October of 1944, ignoring the Government's rejection of Allied armed intervention in Albania, Allied troops landed in southwestern Albania with the goal of occupying the whole country. The new Government stood firm, refusing to permit these troops to remain in Albania; under the direction of the National Liberation Army, they were removed from Albanian soil. At the same time, British troops in Yugoslavia attempted to cross into Albania from the north, but were prevented by the Albanian Army and population. Rather than giving in to Anglo-U.S. pressures and influence, the new Democratic Government established diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union, recognizing in that then-socialist country a staunch ally.

Despite the threatened invasion of Albania by Allied troops and despite the vicious military blows by the retreating Nazi Army, the ANLA liberated all of Albania on November 29, 1944. By the force of their own arms, the Albanian people expelled the last Nazi troops and proclaimed the establishment of an independent, democratic people's republic of Albania. The first step in the people's revolution in Albania -- the country's liberation -- had been taken.

The Italian and German occupation of Albania from 1939 to 1944 took a great toll on the Albanian people. 7.3% of the population of 1,200,000 was killed or maimed and up to 3.9% were deported to Germany as slave labor or imprisoned in Albania during this five years. Thirty percent of all villages were destroyed. One-third of all farm animals were killed. All electric power was disrupted and all bridges had been blown up. The few factories which were not destroyed had no raw materials with which to operate.

Despite massive losses and damage, the anti-fascist national liberation war of the Albanian people had scored a decisive victory. It had expelled the fascist occupiers and established an independent Albanian government. Additionally, the national liberation war had swept away the rule of the old exploiting classes, by preventing the return of Zog or the foreign or Albanian capitalists and merchants. The new democratic government, elected by the Albanian people, was composed of tested leaders from the working class and peasantry, the same people who had made up the national liberation councils and led the partisan units, the same people who were leaders and members of the Communist Party of Albania, the political party of the Albanian working class. However, the victory of the national liberation war on November 29, 1944 was not the end of a history of struggle for independence. It was the beginning of a new history of struggle in Albania to protect the triumph of the people's revolution and to initiate the uninterrupted construction of socialism.