THE ANTI-ALBANIAN ACTIVITY OF THE REACTIONARY CLERGY

The profoundly repressive role of the reactionary clergy throughout Albania's history has placed religion and religious institutions in opposition to the vital interests of the Albanian people.


IN THE PERIOD OF THE GREAT SOCIALIST TRANSFORMATIONS, WHERE EVERYTHING WAS TRANSFORMED, FROM SOCIO-ECONOMIC RELATIONS TO IDEOLOGICAL RELATIONS, IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO PRESERVE FOR LONG INSTITUTIONS AND IDEOLOGIES THAT BELONGED TO THE OLD ORDER. SUCH A REVOLUTIONARY TRANSFORMATION WAS NOT AIMED SOLELY AT RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS, BUT AT ALL THE RELATIONS AND CONCEPTS INHERITED FROM THE OLD ORDER. ALBANIA DOES NOT NEED THE CAPITALIST-REVISIONIST MODELS OF THE COEXISTENCE OF RELIGION WITH THE BOURGEOIS OR PSEUDOSOCIALIST «CIVILISATION», OR THOSE OF PSEUDOHUMANISM. THE CAPITALIST AND REVISIONIST COUNTRIES, WILL NEVER REACH GENUINE CIVILIZATION AND HUMANISM, SINCE (AMONG OTHER THINGS) THEY RECONCILE THEMSELVES WITH SUCH AN OBSCURE, REGRESSIVE AND ANTIPOPULAR FORCE AS RELIGION AND THE REACTIONARY CLERGY.

van of the Ottomanizing policy and zealously accompanied any punitive expedition against the people and the national movement. The Moslem clergy, in order to poison national consciousness, filled the country with Turkish language schools, and at the time when efforts were being made to encourage Albanian writing and to establish an Albanian alphabet, organized a savage campaign against the patriots and those who were attending the Albanian language school, proclaiming these things as "deeds of the devil" and insisting that the Albanians should learn only Turkish and write in the Arabic alphabet. The intrigues of Shahu Islam and his followers cost the country dearly and their negative results were felt even after independence. Also assisting the Moslem clergy and the invaders were the reactionary Orthodox clergy who, under the shadow of the cross, carried out fanatical anti-national activity in favour of the Megali Idea and of the Istanbul Patriarchate. This clergy with typical medieval and obscenist features became a savage persecutor of Albanian patriotism and of everything progressive. The hated counsellors of Bishop Jakov and company recalled to the people later the grave wounds caused to them at that time by the Orthodox clergy together with the invaders, as well as the unmatched barbarities of the Greek chauvinists in the southern regions. Also to the advantage of the Ottoman occupiers and imperialists were the actions of the Roman Catholic clergy who strove to undermine the struggle for national liberation, to weaken the popular uprisings and prepare the ground, through imperialist expansion and the strengthening of their influence, for the nation to be annihilated in the future.

The Roman Catholic clergymen had a bad reputation in Albania from that time. The Albanian patriots gave them the label of "black ravens" since they were carrying out only dark deeds and were striving to darken any prospect of the nation developing and advancing.

The people opposed the satirical clerical plans and activities with their struggle for unity and the struggle for national liberation. Alongside the outstanding patriots some patriotic clergymen also contributed to this struggle, such as Papa Kristo Negovani, who sacrificed his life for Albania and fell victim to chauvinistic and clerical savagery.

After independence, the most dangerous and the most harmful activity against the Albanian people and nation was carried activity was most dangerous as it was more organized and was backed up and financed by imperialist states such as Austria-Hungary, Italy, the Vatican, etc. During the first world war when the country was occupied by the Austro-Hungarian armies, the Roman Catholic clergy proclaimed the occupiers as savours of the country. In connection with this, Gjergj Fishta wrote at that time: «With the entry of the soldiers of the Austro-Hungarian empire to Albania the day of freedom is starting to dawn for the wretched Albanian people. And with the rays of this freedom this people today have a prosperous life in which to realize their desires». The Roman Catholic clergy, after the destruction of Austria-Hungary turned towards Italian fascism and intensified their anti-national splittist activity to prepare the conditions for aggression and the liquidation of independence. Reactionary clergymen like Gjergj Fishta, Dom Lazër Shantoja, Anton Harapi, Gaspersi Thaci, Bernard Palaj, Pal Doda, and others, by their own admission, took care of "building the bridges" which were leading the country towards imperialist slavery. In their correspondence and secret meetings with Italian fascist officials, they used to say openly that a free and independent Albania was something absurd. Therefore they sought the inclusion of the country under the yoke of Italian domination. They demanded this allegedly for the good of the Albanian Catholics who were persecuted by other religions and the Zog regime, as well as for the good of the development of the country. At the beginning of the 30's Gjergj Fishta met the Italian Minister in Albania, Koch, and appealed to him for Italy to occupy the country. Koch himself testified to this: He told me: The hopes of the Catholics are pinned on Italy at this moment. Italy must be convinced that Albania cannot survive with its own forces because it lacks viability, no regime can ever be kept up without foreign support... The only viable possibility for Albania, according to the judgement of Gjergj Fishta who appeared to speak on behalf of his order, was that Albania should be placed under the mandate of Italy.

The hierarchy of the Roman Catholic clergy, the most active part of the "fifth column" in Albania, did all they could to pave the way for the fascist aggression. Gjergj Fishta and company, were shouting anathemas against the Albanian nation, which they alleged was unworthy to exist, as it was covered by the "savage", dialogue with the clergy and demanded that they deceive them no longer. They called for the closing of the religious institutions and warned the clergymen to give up their parasitic life. Violence was used only against those clergymen who were carrying out hostile activity which was punishable by law.

The liquidation of religion and of the religious institutions was a logical result not only of the operation of the objective laws of the socialist order and of the strengthening of the historical creativity of the people, but also of the entire national history of Albania. Albanian history has been full of negative and very harmful activity by the reactionary clergy against the people and the nation, and the struggle of the masses of the people and of their progressive-minded representatives against this reactionary activity. At the time when the Albanian nation was born and when great efforts were being made to consolidate it, to strengthen national consciousness and create the first independent Albanian state, the clergy wanted to perpetuate the division of the country into three religions and thus to create the possibility to have the embryo Albanian nation annihilated by foreign powers. At the beginning a very negative role was played by the Moslem clergy who were closely connected with the Ottoman invader, who fiercely opposed everything Albanian and who could not endure the mention of the names of Albania and
"Asiatic" Moslem mass, and at the same time, almost with tears in their eyes, they were asking their Rome bosses to bury this nation as soon as possible, and did not fail to prepare the coffin zealously. Among the people they used the language of Tartuffe and spread pseudonational propaganda.

The reactionary clergy still further intensified their anti-national activity, particularly when the Albanian communist movement emerged and the class struggle at home was aggravated. The Catholic review "Zani i Shën Ndout" stated in 1936 that the fight against communism was an imperative demand for Catholicism. This was said to be a demand of the nation. "The Albanian nation will stand guard, will keep its eyes open and will always be prepared to fight against communism as the worst enemy of the homeland. We shall fight against communism with words, with our pens and with deeds..."

The Catholic clergy received clearcut directives from the Vatican and the government of Rome to strengthen the fascist propaganda and increase the preparations for the occupation of the country, as a counterpoise to the revolutionary movement. The Catholic clergy became principal agents and most active collaborators of the Italian legation in Tirana. Other fascist agents vested with the cloak of Catholic missionaries and functionaries were sent to Albania. Calumnies and grave offences were aimed against the nation by such Jesuit prelates as Cordignano and Valentini, diehard agents of Italian imperialism. In 1937 the Albanian Christian-Democratic Organization was secretly created in Albania and carried out intense fascist activity. This organization, which was directed by Anton Harapi, maintained regular contacts with the Italian consul general in Shkodra, Salvatore Meioni, from whom it received instructions.

On the threshold of the occupation, the Christian-Democratic Organization instructed the Roman Catholic clergymen, wherever they were, to keep in close touch with the people and sabotage the resistance put up against the occupation. In the days when Mussolini's troops attacked Albania, the Roman Catholic clergy strove to undermine the popular resistance in the northern part of the country and welcomed the fascist troops with enthusiasm, proclaiming them liberators and saviours.

The Catholic organs noisily trumpeted that the fascist regime was precisely what Albania needed, and would allegedly ensure it freedom and progress. In the days of the occupation, the Catholic review "Hylli i Dritës" and others published a series of euphoric articles saying that "the soldiers of Rome have set foot on the land of the Illyrians to bring them joy, and that the day of April 7 marks the beginning of a new and prosperous epoch for the Albanian people."

Anton Harapi, explaining the importance of this event to the Roman Catho-
Fascist elements and counterrevolutionary organisations use churches as asylum bases for their criminal activity. In many cases churches had been transformed into ammunition dumps by reactionary priests.

In the photo: Snapshot of a part of armaments hidden in the sacristy of a Roman Catholic church in Shkodra, and three priests collaborators of a criminal organisation.

The war criminal, reactionary Pater Anton Harapi, one of the members of the quisling Regency under the Nazi occupation of the country, holding an intimate talk with the commander-in-chief of the German occupation forces.

The fascist clergy gathered in Shkodra, told them that what they did was not in vain, but from now on we must be careful to be more vigilant and to support all the actions of the Italian government and army.

At this time the fascist occupation was also welcomed by the head of the Moslem community, Bexhet Shapatli, who proclaimed fascism as the saviour of the country.

The Roman Catholic, Moslem and Orthodox hierarchies made haste to hand over the Albanian royal crown to the king of Italy, Victor Emmanuel III. They helped to consolidate this regime and to implement the fascist plan to rob the country of its status as a nation. The Roman Catholic clergy carried on intensive fascist propaganda. Lasër Shantoja excelled in this; he was always claiming that "the light in Albania has always come from Rome." At the time when the national liberation struggle of the Albanian people broke out in Albania and spread rapidly under the leadership of the Albanian Communist Party, the reactionary clergy carried out intensified activity in bringing together and organizing the forces to oppose this struggle. They strengthened the ties with the fascist regime and established relations of collaboration with the traitorous organisations of Balli Kombëtar and Legaliteti. The Roman Catholic clergy was most active at this time. Comrade Enver Hoxha has said that "when Albania was languishing under the heel of the bloody fascists, and the people were fighting for their liberation, the main Catholic clerics seized the banner of anti-Albanianism and showed themselves to be very active in the war against the Albanian people. They got important political positions with fascism and Nazism, and threw themselves with the greatest savagery into the war against the people." The Roman Catholic clergy as well as the other clergy helped the quisling governments in adopting draconian measures against the national liberation movement.

In addition to the anti-communist propaganda they conducted among the people, they strove to mobilize non-politically minded people from among the ranks of the peasants and mountaineers into the formations of the quisling governments and traitorous organizations. Concerning the collaboration of the Roman Catholic clergy with Balli Kombëtar, the Catholic clergyman Rrok Gurashi said: "We established contacts with the Balli Kombë-
tar organization and sent our representative to it because, in the first place, we had been ordered by the Pope to collaborate with any anti-communist organization and, in the second place, both sides were interested in organizing and better coordinating our forces in order to wage a great struggle until the Albanian Communist Party and the Albanian national liberation movement were completely destroyed.

Following the capitulation of fascist Italy and the occupation of the country by the German armies, the reactionary clergy immediately took the side of the new invaders. They started a frantic propaganda campaign in the press in which they sang the praises of the German occupation.

This propaganda aimed at convincing the people that the German army was not an army of occupation, that it would remain in the country only temporarily, that it would not violate the independence of the country and that it would protect the religions and would contribute to the elimination of the communist danger. The Roman Catholic clergy themselves now changed their tune and began to insult the Italian invaders whom they had praised to the skies a while before. When it became obvious that the German invaders would not remain long in Albania due to the powerful blows being dealt them on all fronts, both within and outside Albania, the Roman Catholic clergy attached themselves to the Anglo-American agents sent to the country and flirted with them, hoping that this would save them and the existing order from the catastrophe which was threatening them as a result of the great national liberation struggle led by the PLA. At the time when the national liberation struggle was raging and was wiping out the remnants of reaction, the Roman Catholic clergy, in their desperate situation, strove to mobilize the last remaining forces, to arm their partisans and to save what could be saved. But nothing came of this. The storm of the revolution was powerful, and there was no way of salvation open to reaction. In the great national liberation struggle, shoulder to shoulder with the people, patriotic clergymen like Baba Faja Mirtaneshi took part, along with other clerics, who linked their fate with that of the people and the revolution. These clergymen used their position and influence for the salvation of the country from fascist slavery so that the country should see better days. Right from the beginning they opposed the reactionary clergy and other reactionaries and after liberation they adopted a correct stand and enjoyed the esteem and respect of the people. The opposite was done by the reactionary clergymen. The latter, particularly the Roman Catholic ones, hoped to protect themselves in the future, too, and by their ability to adapt themselves to the new circumstances, to cope with the consequences of this great revolution. The Roman Catholic clergy thought that the storm which was sweeping over Albania would be something temporary. They hoped the sky would be clear again under a new fascist regime. These hopes were nourished by the Anglo-Americans. With hatred for the people's power and the new order in their hearts, and with the hope of one day seeing Anglo-American uniforms on our coasts, the Roman Catholic clergymen declared war on the new People's Republic. This war, as always, was secret and no distinction for bravery could be claimed. But, it ended not as the 'cunning fathers' were dreaming of, but according to the desires of the people, who are determined to follow their road of socialist construction and ensure independence. The revolutionary people, consistently advancing on the road of social progress, wiped out for ever the clerical rag which had mouldered in temples, as the writer Mijëni put it, and are realizing the great dream of the Albanian revolutionaries for complete social and spiritual emancipation. Now that the nation has been liberated from the peddlers of religious opium and from the Pharisees and sellers of flags, who did not hesitate to stoop to anything at the people's expense, it is easier for it to flourish and prosper.

It is clear why the Vatican and imperialist reaction are so concerned about what happened in our country; precisely because Albania, by its example, showed that the old world and the capitalist-clerical barbarity can be liquidated not through idle talk and preachings, but by deeds. The united imperialist-revisionist front found religion and the reactionary clergy a convenient Trojan horse to take the fortress from within. And when this Trojan horse was smashed to smithereens along with their plans, shouts and threats were heard, aimed against the People's Republic of Albania. But those do not intimidate our people, who are determined to continue on their road.