

Yugoslavia: The Spectre of Balkanization

No amount of anti-communist propaganda can obscure the fact that, since 1945, Yugoslavia has by and large been governed with the consent of its peoples. Equally, no amount of official piety can hide the fact that the League of Communists (LCY) has held power *only* by virtue of such confidence as it has commanded in the working class and the country's constituent nations. In February 1989, an unprecedented general strike of Albanian workers in the province of Kosovo confirmed this fact in the most dramatic way possible. Since the previous November, the consolidation of an openly and indeed triumphantly nationalist leadership in Serbia had led to the banning of all public meetings and demonstrations in Kosovo. The workers therefore retreated to their strongholds—the factories and mines—in a last-ditch attempt to defend national and democratic rights. A creeping general strike of industry was by February to culminate in a near complete shutdown of the province's economic life. The vanguard was constituted by the miners of the Trepča mining–industrial complex with its headquarters in Titova Mitro-

vica. A historic centre of working-class activity in Kosovo, formerly owned by British capital, Trepča supplied some of the earliest members of the pre-war Communist Party. Trepča miners were also among the first to join the wartime anti-fascist resistance. Now, in the third week of February 1989, 1,300 zinc and lead miners occupied their pits 3,300 feet underground, some of them on hunger strike, for eight days. Their demands were quite simple. They called for the resignation of three provincial officials imposed on them that month at the insistence of the Serbian party.¹ They asked that any constitutional limitation of Kosovo's autonomy—something which Belgrade had been pressing for—should be subject to democratic debate. Their third and most important demand was that the Albanian population should cease being treated as second-class citizens and a second-class nation in their own country. Not since the end of the war had Yugoslavia witnessed such a powerful workers' action in defence of key gains of the revolution. The issues were crystal clear, splitting the whole country into two well-defined camps and marking a watershed in its post-war history. Ranged on the side of the workers were all those forces, within and outside the League of Communists, who stand for a democratic Yugoslavia, based on full national equality. Confronting them were the forces of bureaucratic reaction, in alliance with national chauvinism, fully prepared to use violence against the working class.

The General Strike

The miners' determination and solidarity were awesome. They told journalists that they were determined to 'come out in coffins' unless their demands were met.² With them was Beqir Maliqi, the mine's chief engineer, who—though old and by the sixth day gravely ill—refused to come up. The furnacemen, also on strike, spoke of committing collective suicide if Trepča was stormed. Below the ground, a strict guard was maintained over two tonnes of dynamite, to prevent any desperate action. The sick were sent up, suffering from respiratory and stomach problems (eyes, it seems, also suffered), to be treated by doctors and either returned immediately down or—if gravely ill—transferred to a hospital in Prishtina, the provincial capital. By the end of the strike, a hundred and eighty miners had ended there, some of them in intensive care.

Overground there was an equally tight discipline, maintained by miners wearing red armbands. Children and women waited patiently at the entrance of the pit, anxious for news. A Zagreb television crew went to visit one miner's family. They found a mother with nine children, occupying a self-made structure without windowpanes to protect them from the harsh February winds, huddled around a wood fire: despite the fact that Kosovo produces a substantial proportion of Yugoslavia's electricity, the family lived in darkness. In November 1987, the average wage in Trepča was \$55 a month, barely enough to keep a family from starvation. During the strike, moreover, many of the strikers refused their wages. This family had not even a radio to stay in touch with developments at the mine.

Elsewhere in the province, everything was at a standstill. Only the elec-

¹ One of these, the new party leader Rahman Morina, was also—tellingly—the province's police chief.

² *The Guardian*, London, 25 February 1989.

tricity workers were press-ganged back to work. Students and school-children were also on strike. Even privately owned shops had their doors firmly shut. The markets were empty. Yet there was no organizing committee to direct the course of events, to collect and centralize the demands, to speak on behalf of the general strike. Despite this, the people spoke with one voice, demanding national justice and democracy.

The first to send a message of support were the miners of Slovenia. The Yugoslav party leadership, meanwhile, split on how to proceed. The Slovenian party supported an appeal by the republic's Socialist Alliance that Albanian human and national rights should be respected. A similar statement was issued by the Croatian Trade Union Alliance, and the Croatian party soon followed suit. The Serbian party, on the other hand, was set against all compromise, and could count on the support of party organizations in Vojvodina, Montenegro and Macedonia. The Bosnian party maintained a prudent silence. The collective state presidency, for its part, talked of using 'all constitutional means at our disposal' to secure law and order in the province: by the time the strike reached its high point, fresh paramilitary forces had been sent in and armoured personnel carriers appeared on the outskirts of the main towns, followed by tanks and low-flying jet fighters. One might have been back in 1981, when (following mass demonstrations demanding republican status for Kosovo, which the Federal authorities dubbed an attempt at 'counter-revolution') the province was placed under a state of emergency, then an unprecedented measure in post-war Yugoslavia.³

The weakness of the Federal party leadership was most starkly exposed by its handling of the Kosovo strike and its aftermath. On 28 February the miners appeared to have won, with the resignation of the three hated officials. They left the pits (though the strike continued elsewhere). The following day, however, under the pressure of a party-led nationalist mass mobilization in Belgrade, their resignations were 'suspended'. By this time, it was clear that the stakes were much higher than the fate of the three men, and involved the survival of democratic gains in Yugoslavia as a whole. Under the pressure of Serbian hardliners, the LCY presidency, meeting that day, not only reaffirmed its support for the constitutional changes sought by Serbia, but also called for a ban on all new political organizations in the country. Slobodan Milošević, the Serbian party boss, promised the assembled populace 'in the name of Serbia' that the organizers of the general strike would be arrested and punished. The first arrests were made on 2 March, and on 5 March it was announced that hundreds of workers faced criminal charges, as did even shopkeepers who had closed in sympathy with the strike. Kosovo is already under *de-facto* military rule. At the same time Slovenia, where the process of democratization has gone furthest, is being singled out as an object of particular hatred. What is to guarantee that the practice of constitutional changes made under military duress will not be extended to the rest of the country?

'The situation is growing worse by the day and the full responsibility for

³ For an extensive discussion of these events, and of their historical background, see Michele Lee, 'Kosovo between Yugoslavia and Albania', *New Left Review* 140, July–August 1983.

it rests with the League of Communists which—instead of offering new ideas and initiatives—has become the main brake on all positive change. The complete lack of perspective in our society prevents my continuing my membership, since I do not believe that the League of Communists is capable of taking our society out of the crisis in which it finds itself. We can no longer speak of it as the vanguard', wrote a Croat Communist recently in his letter of resignation.⁴

'The Central Committee of the League of Communists has reached the bottom line of its incompetence and powerlessness, and if it had had any moral dignity it would simply have dissolved itself, transferring its power to a parliament', commented the most influential Croatian weekly, after the CC plenum in January–February 1989.⁵ And three weeks later, during the miners' underground strike: 'The leadership's indifference to the miners' plight has finally cost socialist government the last remnants of its already badly dented class legitimacy.'⁶

For his part, Milan Kučan, the Slovene party leader, has written: 'The key question today is: what kind of Yugoslavia? A Yugoslavia that was not socialist and democratic would not be possible.'⁷ At the January–February plenum he declared: 'What is happening in the country today, and especially within the League of Communists, is simply the disintegration of Yugoslavia: its silent—and in parts of the LC conscious, or at least tolerated—transformation into another kind of Yugoslavia. Slovene Communists refuse to take any part in such activity.'⁸ Thus workers, party activists and top leaders concur: what is at stake is the legitimacy of the present political order.

Contours of the Crisis

The specifically political manifestations of the current crisis can be dated with some accuracy from the demonstrations in Kosovo in the spring of 1981. This poorest region of Yugoslavia, at the centre of an unresolved national problem, registered the coming earthquake like a seismograph. By 1985, the leadership itself acknowledged that the country was facing an economic crisis, with a 5.5 per cent decline in the social product since 1979. A \$20 billion foreign debt was disclosed, inflation soared (by the end of 1988 it was to pass 250 per cent), and gross fixed investment was cut sharply back. In this situation, the political consensus within the LCY—and the intricate system of checks and balances which it had hitherto underpinned—simply collapsed. The economic crisis was expressed increasingly as a political crisis, indeed as a challenge to the whole socialist project.

The crisis did not affect all social layers equally. For social differentiation in Yugoslavia was by now quite dramatic—comparable to that in major

⁴ Published in *Nedjeljna Dalmacija*, Split, 22 January 1989.

⁵ Jelena Lovrić, *Danas*, Zagreb, 7 February 1989.

⁶ Lovrić, *Danas*, 28 February 1989.

⁷ Milan Kučan answers Janez Janša in *Delo*, Ljubljana, 5 November 1988; for a summary of the exchange, see *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, vol. 10, no. 3.

⁸ *Oslobodjenje*, Sarajevo, 5 February 1989.

Table One: Regional Differentiation in Yugoslavia

	<i>Population</i> ('000s)	<i>Per capita</i> <i>social product</i>	<i>Output per worker</i> <i>in social sector</i>	<i>Net personal income</i> ('000 dinars)	<i>Job-seekers as %</i> <i>of workforce in social sector</i>
Slovenia	1,871	179	145	3140	1.7
Croatia	4,437	117	106	2208	7.7
Vojvodina	1,977	133	103	1885	15.2
Bosnia & Herzegovina	4,155	80	85	1736	23.9
Serbia*	5,574	94	93	1846	17.7
Montenegro	604	80	90	1522	24.5
Kosovo	1,760	36	69	1418	55.9
Macedonia	1,954	75	75	1399	27.0
Yugoslavia	22,334	100	100	2045	16.2

* Without Kosovo and Vojvodina

Source: Compiled from Tables 10.1, 10.2 and 10.3 in Harold Lydall, *Yugoslavia in Crisis*, Oxford 1989.

capitalist countries, according to Pero Jurković, professor of economics at the University of Zagreb.⁹ The crisis hit the working class with special severity as industrial growth stopped or went into reverse, large-scale unemployment emerged, and personal consumption fell by 7.7 per cent between 1979 and 1985. Insecurity has grown with the party's increasing commitment to radical liberalization of the economy—a policy which will have devastating consequences for the vast majority of workers, particularly in the underdeveloped south, without offering any clear social safeguards.¹⁰ The Federal government, which has had no trouble in recruiting 160 of the country's most eminent economists into its commission for economic reform, has at the same time utterly failed in its attempt to establish a parallel commission for social welfare. The Federation, republics and local communes are instead trying to outwit each other at the game of who should pay the bill. Nobody is willing to take responsibility for the coming storm, least of all the leading party. The unprecedented resignation of the government under trade-union pressure in the last days of 1988 was just one sign of the strength of current turbulence.

In addition, given the huge disparities of regional development, social differentiation has taken the form also of national inequality. This can be clearly seen from Table One.

The internal balance within the Federation has also changed in a dramatic fashion. In 1987, the three southernmost Federal units—Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro—announced that they were bankrupt. Bosnia–Herzegovina too entered a period of political turmoil—following the collapse of its huge agro-industrial complex 'Agrokomerc'.¹¹ This shifted the power of decision-making into the hands of Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and Vojvodina, and finally—after the takeover of Vojvodina by Serbia in 1988 (see below)—concentrated it in the hands of the former three. Simultaneously, the self-confidence of 'the vanguard party of the vanguard class', already badly dented, now finally evaporated, destroying in the process what remained of the authority of the Federal party centre. With workers resorting to mass strike action, the whole party–class alliance started to come apart. A powerful sense of malaise meanwhile engulfed the intelligentsia, favouring rightwing and nationalist currents.

The crisis strengthened the ever-present tendency of the republican and provincial parties to entrench themselves in local national constituencies. The outcome, however, varied considerably, given the wide economic disparities and differing national traditions. Slovenia—despite some setbacks¹²—underwent an extensive political democratization, with a host of political parties and organizations emerging by the beginning of 1989: despite the very real differences that exist among them, they share with the ruling party a commitment to national sovereignty and further democratization. By this time Croatia too had developed a fledgling

⁹ *Start*, Zagreb, 10 December 1988.

¹⁰ The party leaderships of Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia, though deeply divided on key political issues, share nevertheless this economic orientation. In a recent speech to the republican assembly, for example, Milošević stated that market was the essence of democracy.

¹¹ Miha Kovač, 'The Slovene Spring', *New Left Review* 171, September–October 1988.

¹² *Ibid.*

alternative political scene, although here—for ethnic and historic reasons—differences between a local–national and a Yugoslav orientation were more sharply posed. In Macedonia, on the other hand, the economic collapse encouraged the local leadership to steer working-class despair into nationalist channels, directed against the substantial (21 per cent) Albanian minority.¹³

It was in Serbia, however, that the turn to the nation took its most intense form. The formal primacy of class politics was abandoned in favour of national consolidation with the accession of Slobodan Milošević to unchallenged power in the League of Communists of Serbia at the end of 1987, after a sharp inner-party struggle. This shift within Yugoslavia's largest republic, which further altered the political balance in the country and now threatens its federal constitution, is the principal concern of this article.

Serbia: Constitutional Revisionists

The Socialist Republic of Serbia is formally the state of the Serb nation. Yet, as will be clear from the accompanying map, it does not embrace all Serbs, a significant proportion of whom live interspersed with Croats in Croatia and with Moslems and Croats in Bosnia–Herzegovina. This has invested the Serb national question with a contradictory role in Yugoslavia. National dispersion makes the Serbs especially sensitive to any weakening of Yugoslav unity, while any mobilization of them on a nationalist basis directly threatens Yugoslavia's federal structure. The Serb national question is made more complicated by the fact that the republic of Serbia contains also the vast majority of Yugoslavia's national minorities, which is why after the war (unlike the other republics) it was not constituted as a unitary state. Apart from Serbia proper, it contains two provinces: the Socialist Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (53 per cent Serb) in the north and the Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo (almost 90 per cent Albanian) in the south.

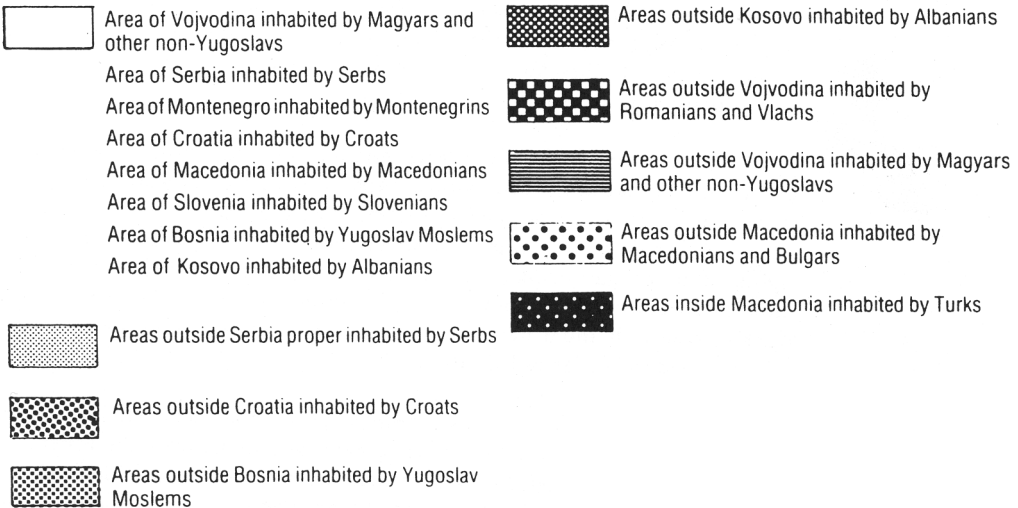
The Communist party saw the federal constitution of the post-war state as an instrument not only of individual national equality but also of Yugoslavia's unity. The Serbs (and the same could be said for Croats or Albanians) could not be united in a single republic without infringing the rights of other nationalities, so that the republics—though based on individual nationalities—had to remain ethnically mixed. The national rights of the individual nations were to be guaranteed as much by the country's federal order as by its unity.

Following the centralism of the postwar years, the 1974 constitution granted to the republics and provinces greater autonomy from the Federal centre, and to the provinces also greater independence from Belgrade. From a national and democratic point of view, this was an enormous step forward for Kosovo in particular. Self-government replaced the almost permanent state of emergency to which the Albanian population had been subject for most of the post-war period (1945–66), while the new

¹³ Darko Hudelist, *Start*, Zagreb, April 1988, gives an extraordinary portrayal of the popular mood in Macedonia, among both ethnic communities.



The Ethnic Heterogeneity of Yugoslavia's Republics and Autonomous Provinces



Source: Reproduced, with some modifications, from Gavriel D. Ra'anani, *Yugoslavia after Tito*, Westview Press 1977.

policy of national equality opened the door for its integration into the Yugoslav political community. Government by consent in Kosovo was also a condition of greater democracy in Serbia and elsewhere in Yugoslavia, since it diminished the power of the apparatus of repression (headed until 1966 by interior minister Alexander Ranković) which had been most resistant to the political and economic reforms of the 1960s—of which the 1974 constitution was precisely the outcome. What is more, the provinces now became constitutive elements of the Federation, with direct and equitable representation in all its party and state bodies. Implicit in this reform was the view that Yugoslavia could not be regarded as an exclusively South Slav state.

The reforms, however, contained a fundamental contradiction which was to qualify this advance. In the absence of any substantial extension of popular or inner-party democracy, political power remained concentrated in the hands of the republican and provincial leaderships, making party politics a permanent hostage to state-led nationalism. This was not an inevitable outcome, so long as the new, post-Ranković generation of liberals were in power in Serbia.¹⁴ But the purge of them in their turn in 1972, coming so soon after the removal of Ranković's administration, initiated a fragmentation of political power in Serbia. An older generation of second-ranking party leaders now came to the centre of the stage, many of whom tended to see the 1974 constitution not only as deepening the division of the Serb nation, but also as weakening Serbia's (republican) statehood. The reform gave the provinces a veto on all issues that affected them, so that the Belgrade leadership was no longer in full control over republican affairs. The presence of the provinces as independent actors at the Federal level also reduced the power and prestige of the Serbian leadership in Yugoslavia as a whole. In the mid 1970s a working commission of the Serbian party, under the guidance of Dragoslav Marković,¹⁵ gathered arguments against this enhanced provincial autonomy in what became known as the Blue Book. This sought the return to Belgrade control of the provinces' judiciary, police (including state security service), territorial defence and economic policy. Given that acceptance of these aims would certainly have involved a new bout of repression in Kosovo—and inevitably also rehabilitation of the Ranković administration and its admirers—the document received a hostile reception from the Federal leadership. The Blue Book was never publicly discussed, but the very fact of its existence allowed the issue of provincial autonomy to smoulder beneath the surface of Serbian politics until the 1980s, when it would acquire a new and potent charge.¹⁶

¹⁴ The best known were Marko Nikezić and Latinka Perović. The term 'liberal' is customarily used to describe these reformers. Given their role in the suppression of the student movement in the late sixties, their democratic inclinations should not be overestimated.

¹⁵ Marković was a wartime partisan leader and one of the most influential Serbian politicians in the second half of the 1970s. In 1980 he was the head of the Federal Party.

¹⁶ Dragoslav Marković, *Život i politika 1967–76*, Belgrade 1987. It was the principle of equality of the South Slav nations with the national minorities that Marković in particular found difficult to accept, although in the end he submitted himself to party discipline and, it seems, also accepted the argument. In 1988 Marković publicly dissociated himself from the current Serbian leadership and was reviled as traitor to the nation in the Belgrade press.

By 1980, however, a new generation of political leaders had emerged in Serbia, grouped around Ivan Stambolić, which was successful in reunifying the republic's fractious politics. Stambolić was head of the Serbian government in 1980–82; head of the Belgrade party (with 230,000 members the largest in the country) in 1982–84; president of the Serbian party in 1984–86. In 1986 he became president of the republic of Serbia. His handpicked collaborators followed in his footsteps: Slobodan Milošević replaced him at the end of the Belgrade party in 1984, and as party chief in 1986;¹⁷ Dragiša Pavlović, another Stambolić protégé, took Milošević's place in Belgrade in the same year.¹⁸

By temperament a centralizer,¹⁹ Stambolić was a pragmatic politician who relied on his control of key posts (and, increasingly, the press) in his efforts to provide the republic with a new role in the Federation and to rally a motley group of liberals and conservatives around the quest for constitutional revision. Marković's earlier failure had exposed the sensitivity of other republics on the issue of the constitution, so Stambolić moved slowly and cautiously to win the agreement of the Federation. If, during his time in office, nationalists were allowed access to the media, this was more to put pressure on the Federation than out of any agreement with their views. For the Serbian party was faced with a seemingly insuperable barrier, in that constitutional changes had to be sanctioned by all three assemblies—in the two provinces as well as the republic as a whole—but approval from Vojvodina and Kosovo was not forthcoming. The provinces' stand was supported by the Federal party leadership, which was concerned about the implied reduction in the rights of the national minorities—most particularly the Albanians—and did not wish to see any alteration of the national balance within the Federation, since the consequences of this would be incalculable.

Stambolić at the same time sought support from a younger generation of Albanian leaders—like Azem Vllasi.²⁰ These, he hoped, might accept a new compromise in the constitutional field, if Belgrade in turn backed

¹⁷ Stambolić came from a peasant family—his father and uncle joined the partisans in 1941. (The uncle, Petar Stambolić, occupied the highest positions in Serbia and Yugoslavia in the late 1970s.) Initially a youth activist, he became a factory worker by choice and studied law as an extra-mural student at Belgrade University, where he met Slobodan Milošević—an Orthodox priest's son. Stambolić soon became manager of his enterprise, and brought in Milošević as his deputy.

¹⁸ Pavlović, who comes from a family of intellectuals, acquired degrees in engineering and economics at the University of Kragujevac, and finally a doctorate in politics at Belgrade University. As an intellectual with a propensity for hard work and an austere lifestyle, he was not much liked by the party apparatus.

¹⁹ For example, Stambolić wished to strengthen presidential power by having republican presidents elected by popular referenda, but this met with resistance even in his home state.

²⁰ Vllasi headed the Socialist Youth Alliance of Yugoslavia in the last years of Tito's life. After a long spell in the Federal centre, he returned to Kosovo to head the local Socialist Alliance. Among the first in Kosovo to call the Albanian 1981 demonstrations a 'counter-revolution', he became Kosovo party leader in 1986, at the head of a younger team, following a party purge. Two years later, however, after a vociferous campaign in the Belgrade press, he was replaced in 1988 by Kacusha Jashari. In February 1989, he was removed from the CC LCY. Today he sits in a Prishtina prison, charged with himself fomenting 'counter-revolution'.

their efforts to secure a modernization of Kosovo's political structures demanded by the enormous advance the province had made during the previous decade of self-government. However, by the time Stambolić had consolidated his position, the country had entered its current deep crisis, which strengthened conservative forces throughout Yugoslavia clamouring for an outright repression of critical voices from whatever quarter. In Croatia, under Stipe Šušar's leadership, the party in 1984 produced a White Book on the Yugoslav intelligentsia which was clearly more of a blacklist. In Serbia, there was an attempt in the same year to organize a political show trial.²¹ In Slovenia, army courts were used in 1988 against uncomfortable critics. All these attempts, however, were rebuffed. Only through an alliance with nationalists could the party hardliners hope to prevail. Such an alliance was to emerge precisely in Serbia, where the issue of constitutional changes, integrating national and state concerns, allowed the emergence of a powerful rightwing bloc using the potent symbol of Kosovo to legitimize its political platform.

The Anti-Albanian Campaign

Kosovo was once the geographical centre of a short-lived mediaeval Serbian Empire, whose fragments were finally destroyed in 1389 by Ottoman armies. A collective memory of the battle survived in local folksongs, and the Orthodox Church—for its own reasons—invested this defeat of a secular power with a mystical dimension. In the mid 19th century, the Kosovo myth became an instrument of nation-building for the emergent Serbian principality. It was also used to justify territorial expansion to the south, aiming ultimately at Salonica, and served to mobilize the Serb peasantry for successive wars culminating in the Balkan Wars of 1912–13. Since by this time Kosovo was predominantly Albanian-inhabited, the myth also acquired racial overtones. It became a symbol of the nation at war, a central point of reference for Serb nationalists.²² After the 1981 Albanian demonstrations, these began to complain ever more vociferously that Kosovo was becoming a purely Albanian province; that the 'cradle of the Serb nation' was becoming alienated from it. The Kosovo leadership was duly accused of encouraging Serb (and Montenegrin) emigration from the province, and the Albanian nation held to be guilty of ethnic genocide.

There is no doubt that Slavs have been emigrating from the region, but equally clearly the reasons have been mainly economic. (Already by 1970 Kosovo's unemployment reached fifty per cent of the working population, and Albanians have been leaving as well.) But Kosovo Slavs had been affected also by cultural–political factors. The rapid Albanization of the provincial administration from 1966 on was achieved by the use of

²¹ Milan Nikolić, a well-known socialist and a 1968 student leader who was one of the defendants in the now famous trial of the Belgrade Six, warned in his last defence speech of the growing danger of Stalinism in Yugoslavia and argued passionately the cause of socialism and democracy. *New Left Review* 150, March–April 1985.

²² For Chetniks, Kosovo was 'the holy place of all Serbs'. More recently, at a meeting of the Association of Serb Writers, called for the purpose of severing all relations with the Association of Writers of Slovenia, its head, a well-known nationalist Matija Becković, stated that Kosovo would be Serb even if not a single Serb lived there.

national quotas, which reduced job opportunities for Slavs in the state sector where they had hitherto been privileged. In addition, thanks to the high birth-rate of the Albanians, their ethnic preponderance increased steadily, transforming linguistic, educational and cultural conditions in the new democratic period. An all-Yugoslav programme of investment directed mainly at Serb-inhabited communes—in order to prevent emigration—was agreed in 1987, although it was strictly unconstitutional. But this did little to change the desperate economic state of the province, and emigration (of both nationalities) continued. Worst of all, the Federal party leadership made a cardinal mistake: it described the 1981 Albanian demonstrations for republican status as an attempt at ‘counter-revolution’, led by Albanian separatists. This allowed Serb nationalists to cover themselves in the robes of the revolution’s guardians.

At the end of 1986, a newly formed Kosovo Committee of Serbs and Montenegrins began to send delegations to Belgrade and to organize mass protest meetings in the province itself, complaining of ‘genocide’ and demanding a wholesale purge of Albanian leaders and the introduction of military rule in Kosovo.²³ A powerful coalition emerged in Serbia in the late 1980s, comprising retired policemen, revanchist migrants from the province (the 1966 fall of Ranković had led to an exodus of Serb administrative cadres, creating a potential ‘irredentist’ constituency), the Kosovo Committee, right-wing nationalists among the traditional intelligentsia, ‘disillusioned’ leftists, a wing of the Orthodox Church and sections of the party and state bureaucracy. The coalition entered public life with a now notorious petition—in which the then party and state leadership was accused of high treason.²⁴ As a result, by the end of 1986 Stambolić’s policy of seeking constitutional revision through consensus came unstuck in Serbia as much as in Kosovo.

The nationalists strove to present Kosovo as a lawless society, run by extreme nationalists and irredentists bent on ‘forceful assimilation and expulsion of the non-Albanian population’.²⁵ The official media joined in, sparing no methods. One of the most shameful was to invent daily stories about the rape of Serb women—despite all official statistics showing the absurdity of such racist fables. Another was to claim that the high Albanian birthrate was part of a nationalist plot and should be countered by discriminatory state measures. This hysterical campaign was effective. By 1987 Kosovo had become—in violation of both the letter and the spirit

²³ These visits created a tense emotional charge in the capital. ‘From the first visits of Kosovo Serbs and Montenegrins to Belgrade, reality began to be dangerously mixed with imagination and myth. Emotionally, people started to feel as if they themselves were living in Kosovo.’ Dragiša Pavlović, *Olako obećana brzina*, Ljubljana-Zagreb 1988, p. 90. This book is the most systematic critique of resurgent Serbian nationalism to have appeared to date. It belongs to the best traditions of that Serbian socialism which has provided such a central component of Yugoslav revolutionary thought.

²⁴ This petition, signed by two hundred eminent Belgrade intellectuals, is published in *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, vol. 9, no. 2, July–October 1987, together with a debate between Michele Lee and Mihailo Marković et al.

²⁵ Zagorka Golubović, Mihailo Marković and Ljubomir Tadić in *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, *ibid.*, July–October 1987. In a style worthy of Vishinsky, the authors claim that Albanians are in their majority ‘irredentists’ and that their aim is to set up an independent (!) ‘bourgeois society governed by a pro-fascist right-wing regime’.

of the constitution—a legal zone *sui generis*. Factories started to be built in Kosovo for Serbs only, Albanian families were evicted from Serb villages, sale of Serb-owned land to Albanians was prohibited, rape declared a political crime. Albanians were heavily sentenced for minor and frequently invented misdemeanors. A campaign of vilification was launched in the Belgrade press against those Albanian leaders (most notoriously Fadil Hoxha, member of the party since before the war, partisan general and member of the Federal state presidency) who had fought hard to win greater autonomy for Kosovo in the constitutional debates of 1966–73. Racial slurs in the media were tolerated. This anti-Albanian campaign in Serbia in turn encouraged the leadership of Macedonia to begin a policy of (unconstitutionally) restricting educational opportunities for Albanian children, limiting welfare benefits, at times even destroying Albanian houses, and generally discriminating against this part of the republic's population.

Not surprisingly, relations between the Kosovo and Serbian leaderships grew distinctly cool. The anti-Albanian campaign in Serbia was mounting so fast that the implications of any surrender of provincial autonomy for the preservation of basic national rights became quite stark. The newly emergent critical intelligentsia, which just like their counterparts in the rest of Yugoslavia chafed at bureaucratic rule, and the working class, which suffered still more from the high-handedness of the local Albanian bureaucracy, were inevitably drawn behind the latter into a struggle for defence of national rights. The process of democratization in Kosovo came to an abrupt end, under the mounting pressure from Serbia. The Albanian nation closed ranks.

Stambolić, who had made tactical accommodations to the Serbian nationalists, now discovered that they were emerging as a political force out of party control and were legitimizing a view of the history of Serbia and Yugoslavia which was not just anti-communist but viscerally reactionary. Under their pressure Serbia was moving in the direction of an open confrontation with the Federation. Serbian nationalists were joining forces with party hardliners, and indeed with all those who did not like growing political liberties.

The Split

Two clearly defined poles—one more liberal, the other nationalist-conservative—led respectively by Stambolić and Milošević, thus emerged in the Serbian party in early 1987.²⁶ Although the main line of differentiation was the attitude to growing Serb nationalism, the fundamental divide was really over the character and role of the party. The liberals were against party arbitration in the ideological field; they argued that a concept of party unity which outlawed the articulation of different opinions during formulation of the party line, on pain of expulsion, was contrary to party statutes. Milošević, on the other hand, pushed for a top-down monolithic party in complete control of the state and, increasingly, also one with a national vocation. Vigorous support for this orientation came from the party *aktiv* in the University of Belgrade, which had been

²⁶ An account of this split is to be found in Pavlović, op. cit.

captured by hardliners.²⁷ What was to cement Milošević's victory, however—against a background of economic crisis, working-class unrest and nationalist agitation—was the growing sense of insecurity throughout the Serbian party apparatus: the appeal to unity behind a strong leader proved irresistible for the majority of top and middle-rank cadres.

By 1987 the cause of inner-party democracy and the struggle against nationalism could no longer be differentiated. Milošević now began systematically to break collective discipline, refusing to speak against Serb nationalism at consecutive party plenums. Faced with the mounting nationalist counter-revolution, the liberals demanded that the party should go onto the offensive. The struggle between the two wings emerged into the open in April 1987; by September, at the 8th central committee plenum, the liberals had been thoroughly defeated. Pavlović and Stambolić were voted off the party presidency, removed from the central committee and finally expelled from the party together with their supporters and co-thinkers. Their departure marks also the date of the Serbian party's open endorsement of nationalism.²⁸

This brutal purge, together with the nationalist overtones of the televised 8th plenum debate, shocked the country. That the victory had not come easily, however, was proved by the viciousness of the subsequent campaign against the defeated party faction, and by the scale of the purge of key party and state organs. Particular attention was paid to the media. In a manner that combined the techniques of traditional Stalinism and the Western gutter press, all real and potential critics were characterized as 'anti-people'—that is, anti-Serb—and 'anti-party'. At the same time, a prompt expression of *total* loyalty to the new leadership—including the obligatory attack on its opponents—was made a condition of political survival and/or continued employment. After Kosovo, democracy was also snuffed out in Serbia.

In his letter of resignation from the central committee, Pavlović warned that 'the public denunciation and humiliation of people because, at a single meeting and on a single issue, they had a different position from the majority opens the way to a monolithic, Stalinist type of party, and the infallibility of the party leadership'.²⁹ Milošević—as the infallible leader of a monolithic Serbian party—is today able to disperse an emotional mass of hundreds of thousands (as he did in Belgrade on 28 February 1989) with a single sentence promising the arrest of counter-revolutionaries.

²⁷ Indeed, the liberals lost the first public duel fought over *Student*, the journal of Belgrade University undergraduates. In April 1987, *Student* carried a text arguing the existence of a Stalinist group in the University party *aktiv*, naming several of Milošević's close supporters. The *aktiv* replied by launching a public denunciation of *Student* as 'anti-Tito'. Pavlović, the head of the Belgrade party, and Branislav Milošević, then minister of culture, came in to defend *Student*. The University *aktiv*, supported by *Politika*, under Slobodan Milošević's control, responded by extending the anti-Tito charge to them both.

²⁸ Pavlović recounts how, on joining the party in 1963, he had to state that he was not religious. 'It took another quarter of a century', he writes, 'for me to have to state that Serbdom was not my religion either—but this time round I was on the way to being expelled from the Central Committee, from the Belgrade party committee and from the League of Communists of Serbia itself.'

²⁹ Op. cit., p. 36.

The Resurgence of Reaction

The ideological basis of Milošević's victory was a coalescence of state-led nationalism and a neo-Stalinist concept of the party and its role in society. Their fusion into a coherent political project was made possible by the drive to restore the unity of the republican state—now reinterpreted as the state exclusively of the Serb nation. Belgrade's traditional hegemony over Serbia's cultural and political life gave its intelligentsia a decisive role in Milošević's rise to power, while the Serbian conservatives used the growing power of nationalism to deliver a mortal blow to their liberal opponents in the party.

There is no space here to survey the origins and progress of the momentous shift to the right that took place in Belgrade intellectual life in the course of the 1980s. In Serbia—and not only there—integration of the various trends of artistic and political thought increasingly took place on a uni-national plane, leading to different and indeed conflicting views of Yugoslavia's past and future. Yet it was in Serbia, above all, that the scope of intellectual critique changed dramatically, in that it reached beyond the usual complaints about the suppression of political and artistic liberties to challenge the party's entire historic legitimacy—and, in the process, also the revolution itself. This rightwing challenge, articulated above all in the language of virulent nationalism, returned to pre-war traditions.³⁰ Indeed, one of its ingredients was an effort to rehabilitate the Chetniks, as defenders of the nation against its 'historic' enemies—counterposing their 'prudent' wartime conduct to the alleged unnecessary sacrifice of Serb lives by the Communists.³¹ The history of pre-war Yugoslavia was rewritten in a manner designed to evoke sympathy for Serbian bourgeois politicians, especially in their military or state-building roles. Almost imperceptibly, a revision of the past merged with a reinterpretation of contemporary Yugoslavia, its character and problems, to produce a whole new world-view radically different from, and hostile to, the post-war political consensus.

While the Writers' Association of Serbia became at this time a bastion of populist nationalism, at times coloured with religious bigotry, nationalism in its state-centred form took root in the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, which in 1986 produced a document called the Memorandum. Involving the efforts of some of the best-known Serbian intellectuals, it represented the most sustained and coherent piece of revisionism of anti-communist orientation to appear legally in Yugoslavia in the post-war period.³²

³⁰ Its central aspiration is to re-establish the political hegemony Serbia enjoyed in prewar Yugoslavia, before its cancellation by the revolution.

³¹ A typical example of the genre is Dragoljub Živojinović and Dejan Lučić, *Barbarizam u ime Krista*, Belgrade 1988. This book accuses the Vatican, the Comintern and the CPY of a joint historic conspiracy ('clerocommunism'), including genocide, against the Serb nation.

³² This judgement, fully shared by the present author, is argued out by Pavlović, *op. cit.*, pp. 280–92. Extracts from the document were published in *Večernje Novosti*, Belgrade, 24–25 September 1986.

The Memorandum argued that, after the Liberation, an 'alien' (ie., federated) model of Yugoslavia was imposed on the Serb nation. The main culprit was the CPY, which had blindly followed the Comintern's anti-Serb 'policy of revanchism including genocide' during the war and, by endorsing the federal structure, exposed the Serbs after the war to discrimination. The second culprit was the Slovenes and Croats (represented by the Slovene Edvard Kardelj and the Croat Josip Broz Tito), who 'created a social and economic order in accordance with their needs and interests' that was fundamentally inimical to the Serbs. The 1974 constitution then deprived the Serbs of the right to their own (integral) state. The third culprit was domestic quislings: 'the hardened opportunism of generations of Serb politicians after the war'.³³

The situation in Kosovo, the Memorandum stated, was 'Serbia's biggest defeat since 1804' (the date of the first Serb uprising against the Ottoman state). 'In 1981 a war—a truly special, open and total war—was declared against the Serb nation . . . with active and open support of certain political centres in the country: a war far more devastating than that coming from across the border.' In this war, the Serb nation remained alone: the LCY avoided 'a real showdown with the neo-fascist aggression', while the leadership in Serbia 'seem[ed] unwilling to respond to this open war in the only appropriate manner: a resolute defence of the nation and its territory.'

But if the Communists had deserted the nation, why did it not rise to defend itself? This was because the nation was the victim of a cruel ideological trick perpetrated by the LCY, with its endorsement of the Comintern thesis that the Serbs had oppressed other nations in pre-war Yugoslavia. The resulting 'guilt complex' or 'state of depression in the Serb nation' was 'fateful for its spirit and morale'. Its intellectual and spiritual leaders must carry out 'a total re-examination of all social relations', beginning with 'a total re-examination of the constitution', in order to restore the 'vitality' of the nation. A resurrection of its democratic past was also required: 'Because of the narrow-mindedness and lack of objectivity of official historiography, the democratic tradition which bourgeois Serbia fought for and won in the 19th century has remained until now completely overshadowed by the Serb socialist and workers' movement.'³⁴

The Memorandum's xenophobic nationalism and Chetnik echoes would earlier have elicited a swift condemnation from the Serbian party. This time, however, the counter-attack was never mounted, since the leadership was split over how to deal with domestic nationalism. Stambolić, president of the republic, and Pavlović, head of the Belgrade party,

³³ Similar views were held by the wartime Chetniks and Royal government-in-exile, who insisted that the federal conception of the future state was directed against Serb national interests. See memorandum by Constantin Fotić, Yugoslav Royalist ambassador to the United States, submitted to the founding conference of the United Nations. *Danas*, Zagreb, 28 February 1989.

³⁴ Pavlović condemned the *Memorandum* for seeing Yugoslavia as an extended Serbia or, alternatively, placing Serbia outside Yugoslavia altogether. The document, he wrote, is the product of 'a primitive, anachronistic and sick Serb consciousness, ignorant and intolerant of Serb diversity. Its understanding of national equality betrays a bureaucratic mentality—it is a moral negation of any true democracy in Yugoslavia.' *Op. cit.*, p. 331.

condemned the Memorandum in public soon after its publication. But although the Serbian party presidency and central committee also formally condemned it, this fact was—at Milošević's insistence—kept secret from the public. The silence of the highest political authority, naturally, spoke louder than words. For not only did it suggest tacit support, it also inhibited public discussion of the Memorandum at the time when it was most needed.

Nationalism Triumphant

The battle which the Serbian liberals joined in 1987 was by this time being fought throughout Yugoslavia. In 1986, Milan Kučan—after a period of work in Federal organs—returned to take over the party leadership in Slovenia. Kučan knew well that a powerful conservative bloc was emerging within the party, ready to play the card of social insecurity to block the necessary economic and political reforms; that the ruling party's decline in numbers and prestige limited, in any case, its ability to go it alone; and that, therefore, an alliance with progressive forces outside the party was imperative. But whereas the political mood in Slovenia (and, to a lesser extent, in Croatia) supported such a course, the unresolved constitutional problem favoured the nationalists and party hardliners in Serbia. The latter openly argued that enemies of the system were to be found in the highest political positions—on the editorial boards of student and youth magazines; in the republican Assembly; in the League of Communists and its central committee; even in the party presidency—at the same time that the nationalist intelligentsia accused the party liberals of being 'soft' on Kosovo. By playing the Kosovo card, Milošević was able to place himself at the head of the emergent nationalist-conservative coalition, crush the liberal opposition and—by forging 'unity' within the party—satisfy also the morbid fear of the central apparatus that the party was losing control over political life in the republic. From now on, all criticism of the party leadership was presented as an attack on Serb national interests.

It was with his speech of 27 April 1987 at Kosovo Polje—the organizing centre of Serb and Montenegrin nationalists in Kosovo—that Milošević broke collective party discipline in the most spectacular fashion and inaugurated his bid for power in the League of Communists of Serbia. In his address to the assembled Slavs, he spoke of the injustice and humiliation they were suffering; of their ancestral land; of the proud warrior spirit of their forefathers; of their duty to their descendants. The speech was aimed at the people's emotions: listening to the speech, Pavlović saw 'an idea turned into a dogma, the Kosovo myth becoming a reality'. Milošević spoke like a general addressing his troops before a decisive battle. 'It was here that the orientation towards war-like measures for the solution of the Serb and Montenegrin problems in Kosovo started', Pavlović writes.³⁵

³⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 312. Pavlović adds: 'If I experienced the speech in this manner, then I can only imagine how this recall of the "fighting spirit" of the Serb and Montenegrin nations must have been experienced by Albanians. After all, Albanians also have ancestors and could also recall their "fighting spirit". They also have a collective consciousness, they also are a warrior nation with their own heroes and a fighting tradition.'

Milošević endorsed the view that the Serb nation was at war, and offered the nationalists the support of the party. He thereby, in effect, removed Kosovo Serbs (and Montenegrins) from the jurisdiction of the provincial authorities, tearing up in the process the existing constitution. The head of the League of Communists of Serbia was speaking not on behalf of the party (which, of course, includes also Albanians and other non-Serbs), not on behalf of the republic's (ethnically heterogeneous) working class, but on behalf of the Serb nation—anywhere in Yugoslavia. In a direct challenge to the fundamental principle of the Yugoslav federation, he was thus endorsing the bourgeois nationalism recently re-formulated by the Memorandum: 'The establishment of the full national and cultural integrity of the Serb nation, irrespective of the republic and province in which it finds itself, is its historic and democratic right.' The leadership of Croatia, this implied, legitimately represented only Croats, that of Slovenia only Slovenes, and so on. In Kosovo Polje, Milošević conjured up the spectre of Yugoslavia's Balkanization.

On his return from Kosovo Polje, the party president—now acclaimed as national *vožd*—called a meeting of the party executive. His report was delivered in a manner designed to create an emotional impact within this body—for Milošević was seeking *post facto* authorization for his speech. 'What we are discussing here can no longer be called politics—it is a question of our fatherland.' It was important that the party base should understand this: 'It is when we begin to speak at party meetings in this manner that the party will be able to take things into its hands.' And he reminded the meeting that he was not only president of the Central Committee but also the head of security and territorial forces in the republic.³⁶

The Serbian party now found itself in the embarrassing position of being openly hailed by people whom not long before it had customarily denounced as hardened nationalists. Yet Serbia has an old socialist tradition: when Milošević addressed party members and the nation with the words: 'Only determination and belief in the future could have transformed the defeat of a nation such as happened at Kosovo into a brilliant clasp linking all future generations of Serbs—an eternal symbol of its national essence', a hundred years earlier the Serb socialist Svetozar Marković had already given the answer: 'Serbia does not depend on the revival of the dead, on rotten material, for erecting the foundation of its future. Other ideals must be provided for its future.' And when the party leader went to address meeting after meeting to press the message that recentralization of the republican state was Serbia's 'historic task', and the Belgrade press wrote about 'the third Serbian uprising', he was answered by another Serb socialist, Dimitrije Tucović, who in 1912 had denounced the bourgeois war-mongers preparing for the Balkan Wars: 'The historic task of Serbia is a big lie.'

³⁶ Pavlović, op. cit., p. 318. In April of 1986 Stambolić had given quite a different speech at Kosovo Polje: 'Do not allow yourself to be provoked either by the [Albanian] irredentists or by Serb nationalists. People like that are the greatest enemies of our country. They do not act because they like you—they are playing their own game. They wish to divide and rule. The Serb nationalists in Belgrade are not working so as to make life better for you. Their motto is: the worse off you are, the better it is for their nationalist aims.' *Danas*, 8 November 1988.

The resurgence of Serb nationalism was instilling fear not just in the rest of Yugoslavia but also in the head of the Belgrade party, who during that spring and summer watched the media's assiduous fostering of an image of Albanians as dangerous, primitive and anti-Yugoslav.³⁷ They spoke of the Albanian people in the language of blood, rape and murder, while passing in silence over the welling violence of Serb nationalist meetings in Kosovo, with their slogans: 'Kill Fadil [Hoxha]!', 'An eye for an eye!', 'Brothers do not be afraid; the time has come for a final showdown!', 'The Serb nation has always shed blood for its freedom!', 'Let us go, brothers and sisters, to attack Kosovo!'. The media were doctoring facts, inciting to revenge, publishing with approval pictures of raised fists and of Serbs arming themselves in Kosovo 'for defence of their homes'. The Serb population was being moulded into an angry mass, 'aiming for a national catharsis that can only end in tragedy'. As Pavlović was to write about the principal Belgrade daily *Politika*, it was 'dynamite under Serbia'.

This had very practical consequences, since it was creating a security problem in the capital city. Pavlović told the Belgrade party that its task was to fight not irredentism in Kosovo but Serb nationalism at home. He complained at meetings of the party presidency that at Serb nationalist rallies the word 'comrade' was replaced by 'brother' and 'working class' by 'nation'. The press, radio and television were increasingly becoming an instrument of the power struggle within the party leadership. Pavlović warned that the forces of the Ranković era were being rehabilitated; and that, in effect, 'Tito, Kardelj and the policy of the LCY were being put on trial'. Milošević was sowing the illusion that the Kosovo problem was a matter of subjective determination, while the nationalists saw its solution in terms of national confrontation. Their continual rallies (both in Kosovo and in Belgrade) were increasingly dangerous: 'A political climate is being prepared in Belgrade that seeks a state of emergency, a firm hand in Kosovo.' Yet 'without the participation of the Albanian masses there can be no real or lasting results. And how can we win and mobilize them if we continually sow doubt in their Yugoslav patriotism?' Pavlović denounced the press for talking about Kosovo 'in words reeking of lead and gunpowder, revenge and revanchism, the renewal of the suicidal Vidovdan [Kosovo] myth.' And, on an ominous note, he added: 'If a nation adopts the right to be angry, how can it deny the same to another? A confrontation of two nations leads to a war. Instead of redirecting anger towards a rational understanding of problems and their solutions, the appeal to anger serves to strengthen the authority of the speaker.'

Neo-Stalinism

The conflict within the Serbian party was not just about Kosovo, but also about 'the place and role of the party in overcoming the crisis, and in the struggle against nationalist counter-revolution. Kosovo was intentionally being substituted for something deeper and more serious.' When he heard Milošević remind the party presidency that he, as head of the Serbian party, was also in charge of the republic's territorial army, Pavlović

³⁷ Indeed, non-Yugoslav: claiming that 400,000 immigrants from Albania settled in Kosovo during and after the war, the nationalists have been demanding in effect a large-scale expulsion of Yugoslav Albanians from Yugoslavia.

realized that the split in the party was inevitable. 'After these words, our ways parted: I began to run away from the tragedy, while he started to run towards it. An angry mass disposes of a tremendous striking power. And who will be its target?' Ultimately the federation, since 'the drive to unite the Serbs into a single state would inevitably bring them into conflict with other nations in Yugoslavia'.

At the height of the inner-party struggle, in September 1987, Pavlović urgently called a press conference to denounce the nationalist paroxysm in Serbia.³⁸ He was armed with the Federal state presidency's recommendation that the Serbian central committee, and especially the Belgrade party, should 'paralyse the nationalist and anti-Albanian activities of the bourgeois Right and all other anti-socialist forces present in the Writers' Association, certain sections of the Academy and other associations, publishing houses, institutions and public forums.' The Federal state presidency had further demanded 'a sharp differentiation' in order to 'prevent publishing and editorial policy being used to spread anti-Albanian sentiments'. Pavlović stated that those who did not struggle against Serb nationalism were in the business of fanning nationalist hatred. Those who did so were 'defending the honour of the Serb nation, of their profession and of socialist Yugoslavia'. Pavlović warned his audience that in Serbia—as elsewhere—the nation was made up of at least two camps, and that party members should state clearly which one they belonged to. In a scarcely veiled reference to Milošević, he criticized those who 'irresponsibly promise speed' in solving the Kosovo problem. This speech was promptly denounced by the Belgrade dailies as 'anti-party' and 'anti-Serb'. At a hurriedly convened meeting of the Serbian party presidency, Milošević accused Stambolić and Pavlović of bringing disunity into the Serbian party, and called for 'differentiation' on the issue of support for 'the party line' in relation to Kosovo. At this fateful meeting, which started the process of his political demise, Pavlović argued that 'nationalism is the final instrument, the last defence of dogmatism. In my opinion, the key problem lies in the unwillingness to confront Serb nationalism.'³⁹

For most of 1987 a momentous battle was being waged between liberals and hardliners for the soul of the Serbian party. It was a battle between 'democracy and authoritarianism, self-management and bureaucratic etatism, national equality and nationalism, federation and unitarism, freedom and fear'.⁴⁰ The liberals were defeated in the end not by force of argument, but by a party machinery based on Stalinist conceptions of unity and democratic centralism. When Milošević called at the September 1987 plenum for Pavlović's removal, he won by emphasizing the need for party unity. Without it, he claimed, no problem—including notably that of Kosovo—could be tackled. It was the unchallengeable power of the executive over the central committee that ensured him the overwhelming majority on the latter body. In his letter of resignation from the central committee, Pavlović wrote: 'The machine of democratic centralism—that

³⁸ A shortened version of his speech is in *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, vol. 9, no. 3, November 1987–February 1988.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

is, of centralism—grinds down, in the name of a single, self-confident, egocentric and imposed opinion, those who are sincerely convinced as well as those who are not; breaks down the wise and the honest along with the careerists and lackeys; levels the sceptics with the gullible, naive and uninformed. It transforms them all into subjugated individuals.⁴¹

Pavlović's letter of resignation was the swansong of opposition to resurgent Stalinism in the Serbian party. It echoes with resonances of the Soviet opposition's struggle against Stalin himself. In a situation where the authority of the party or party leader replaces internal dialogue, where instruction from above substitutes for the initiative of party members, 'does this not lead to a situation in which the party is reduced to one individual who speaks eternal truth? Following the "top down" principle, the CC is today being asked to give full support to the line of the 8th plenum, that is, to Milošević. Since when do the views of one man represent the sum total of the party's position on Kosovo? The impression is given that he is the only one in the leadership who wants to—and can—solve the Kosovo problem and that, therefore, he is able also to solve quickly all other social problems. Those who do not agree are being purged and purges are being treated as the supreme example of democratic centralism in action—but what will happen when it turns out that purges only postpone the necessary solutions?'⁴²

In his book, Pavlović recalls Trotsky's early warning against an authoritarian understanding of democratic centralism, and contrasts the conceptions of Lenin or Trotsky with that of Stalin. Lenin woke up too late to the danger which Stalin represented for the Soviet party, possibly because 'under Lenin's control, democratic centralism was an instrument of the revolution's achievements. But in Stalin's hands it became a kind of private guillotine cutting off the heads of all those who thought differently.' Pavlović thus calls for the legitimization of differences within the party and the right of tendencies to exist within it. And, indeed, only a concept of democratic centralism in which the tension between 'democratic' and 'centralism' was maintained could offer a real future to the LCY.

Whereas, in Kosovo Polje, Milošević offered himself as a liberator of the Serb nation, Pavlović argued that liberty cannot be treated as an exclusively national category. 'I have never fought for Serbs to be freed, but for them to be free in relation to one another.' For otherwise they are faced with the far greater problem of having to free themselves from their liberator. 'It is here that Slobodan and myself differ. Only socialist democracy can unite and stabilize Yugoslavia, and only a democratic Serbia can be a strong factor of Yugoslav cohesion. Any other Serbia can attract only fear and suspicion.'⁴³ If nationalism can be defeated only from within the

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 223–9. Pavlović admits his own responsibility for helping to create an authoritarian atmosphere in the party and republic by not speaking up earlier. Before his expulsion, he was offered a good job if he would resign; but he refused and thus became an object of universal bureaucratic hate in his own republic. Unemployable in Serbia, he finally moved to Slovenia, proving that a Yugoslav can live in exile in his own country.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 223–9.

nation, and if the League of Communists of Serbia—which has the monopoly of political power—has abandoned internationalism, then who is going to lead the struggle against nationalist counter-revolution in Serbia? Pavlović sought the answer once more in the Serbian socialist tradition: ‘With the same energy with which we are ready to protest against the foreign tyrant, let us also protest against the tyrants at home, those whose alleged love of the people allows them to be the greatest reactionaries and whose patriotism does not prevent them from being the greatest black marketeers.’ A bureaucracy aligned to nationalism can be defeated only by a re-statement of the Yugoslav socialist project, based on the power of the working class. For this Serb, Yugoslav and Communist, no call to arms to defend national rights within socialist Yugoslavia was legitimate: such a call could justifiably be issued only to defend the socialist foundation of the Yugoslav federal state.

A Nation at War

Having crushed the opposition in the Serbian party, the Milošević faction now turned to the business of unifying the nation, in order to prepare for a final onslaught on the two barriers to constitutional revision: the leaderships of Vojvodina and Kosovo, and the Federal party leadership itself. Serbia, which only a few years earlier had been a lively centre of activity and debate, suddenly succumbed to a numbing ‘unity’. The capital of Yugoslavia became the headquarters of an embattled Serb nation. The media were used, as in wartime, to attack the enemy; punish traitors; report on the situation at the front (drawn against practically all other republics⁴⁴ and the two provinces); raise the national spirit; recall past victories; commemorate the wounded and dead in past battles going back to the 14th century. The message was that of a heroic nation, surrounded by perfidious enemies. The military prowess of the defunct bourgeoisie was honoured by erecting statues of its generals. Serbian peasant dress, especially hats, became a sudden fashion. This orgy of national self-pity and exhilaration was—and is—at times interrupted only by reports of marching workers, coming from Serbia and beyond to Belgrade to protest against low wages or the real or threatened bankruptcy of their enterprises and to demand the resignation of managers and functionaries.

An extremely important role in this orchestrated process of national homogenization has been played by mass rallies in solidarity with Serbs and Montenegrins in Kosovo. Ostensibly spontaneous, they have been carefully organized and financed by the party–state machine.⁴⁵ During 1988 such rallies—tens of thousands strong—took place in practically every major city or village in Serbia. At these—as well as at party plenums, republican assembly sessions, trade-union conferences and meetings of the party base; in universities, factories and schools; at suitable state occasions—one message was constantly hammered home: the Serb

⁴⁴ With the exception of Macedonia: the Macedonian party’s anti-Albanian policy has made it the Serbian leadership’s natural ally, despite the fact that Serb nationalism also has an anti-Macedonian edge. (Macedonia was once included in the mediaeval Serbian empire, and Macedonians were classified as ‘South Serbs’ in pre-war Yugoslavia.)

⁴⁵ As a result, and this must be stressed, these rallies never led to violence.

nation is fragmented because its state is divided into three pieces. Milošević spoke of the historic hour: 'Serbia will be united or it will not exist.' The Belgrade press wrote about 'the third Serbian uprising'.

The disinclination of the Serbian party to submit itself to the Federal party's authority simultaneously grew. National mobilization in Serbia and the aggressive tone of its press resulted in rising tensions throughout the country, and in the summer of 1988 the Federal party Presidency demanded of Belgrade that nationalist demonstrations be stopped. The republican leadership refused. Its representatives simply declined to attend meetings of the Presidency until its demands were met. The frequency of the rallies if anything increased throughout the autumn, their mood growing more militant. Slogans demanding arms and the criminal prosecution of other Yugoslav leaders (in the case of Albanian leaders also their execution) became frequent. No party or state leader—be they from another republic or province or from the Federation, and irrespective of his or her status—who appeared not to harbour 100 per cent support for the 'new course' in Serbia was exempt from the hate campaign.⁴⁶

Nationalist rallies now spread into Vojvodina and Montenegro, demanding the local leaderships' resignation. These rallies were by now seriously destabilizing the country, opening the possibility that—in a repetition of the Polish 1981—the army might have to take over. In October, Yugoslav State President Raif Dizdarević warned—without mentioning the culprit by name—that the country might have to be placed under a state of emergency. Faced with the readiness of the Serbian leadership to use the card of civil war to settle inner-party differences (what the Bolshevik party's left wing described as 'Bonapartism' during its struggle with Stalin), the Federal party finally gave its assent to Serbia's recentralization, and thereby to a significant reduction in the hard-won national rights of the two million Albanians. This policy of appeasement was, however, rejected by the Serbian party, which now simply informed the Federation that the internal affairs of the republic of Serbia were its *exclusive* prerogative. In early October the *party* leadership of the province of Vojvodina was overthrown by a carefully planned and orchestrated mass action. It was replaced by Milošević's appointees, ready to enact the desired constitutional changes.

The Federal party leadership took the next fatal step by legitimizing *post facto* this undemocratic and illegal method of changing not just the republic's constitution, but also the character of the Yugoslav federation.⁴⁷ What is more, in accepting the Vojvodina party leaders' resignations, it

⁴⁶ In a recent interview Dušan Dragosavac, a former partisan and member of the political leadership in Croatia, who had been targeted in this way, summed up the situation as follows: 'This is nothing but an anti-communist strategy, the creation of hatred among the nationalities, the creation of discord in the League of Communists. It is a permanent witch-hunt, anti-statutory and lawless.' *Danas*, 13 December 1988. Dragosavac's 'crime' lies in his open hostility to nationalism—compounded by the fact that he is ethnically a Serb.

⁴⁷ It must have known what was going to happen, for—breaking with normal practice—it failed to send any representative to the meeting of the Vojvodina party committee scheduled for the day of the resignations, thus leaving it to face the demonstrators' wrath alone.

also broke its own party statutes.⁴⁸ The Vojvodina putsch was organized by local power groups, not all of whom were party members. By sanctioning their act, the Federal party allowed alien bodies to intervene in its internal life, to the point of removing topmost party leaders. Where this practice could lead was illustrated dramatically only a day after the Vojvodina events, when a demonstration of angry Montenegrin workers in Titograd was exploited as the backdrop to a determined attempt to replace the local republican leadership with Milošević's men. The possibility that Yugoslavia's whole Federal structure might collapse now prompted the Slovenian, Croatian and Bosnian leaders to act. Under their pressure, the Federal party leadership condemned the Titograd demonstrations and gave the local party the green light for a show of force—in another sorry precedent. The Montenegrin leadership, however, survived for only two more months: in January 1989 it was finally overthrown by an organized mass action, leaving Montenegro in a state of political chaos and its relations with the Federation in Milošević's hands.

Milošević was now ready to round on the Federal party leadership itself. The Belgrade press launched a well-rehearsed campaign, demanding the resignation of the Federal party presidency and its current head Stipe Šušvar. The televised 17th Plenum of the CC LCY—held on 17–20 October 1988—exposed the open breach to the gaze of the whole country. In an unprecedented move, the Federal party presidency asked the CC for a vote of confidence: when the vote was counted, Dušan Ckrebčić, a close collaborator of Milošević, alone had been voted down.⁴⁹ Milošević then refused to accept the vote, and the Belgrade press denounced the all-Yugoslav Central Committee as an 'unprincipled alliance' directed against Serbia! A month after the plenum, the Serbian leadership organized a 350,000-strong public meeting in Belgrade, at which the 'fighting spirit of the Serbian nation' was once again hailed, other Yugoslav leaders attacked and a 'united' (as opposed to federal) Yugoslavia proclaimed. 'No force can now stop Serbia's unification!' screamed the front-page headlines.⁵⁰ They were not counting with the Albanian working-class.

Wedding without Meat

On 17 November 1988, the day before the Belgrade rally, a meeting of the Provincial Committee of the League of Communists of Kosovo was to be convened in Prishtina to discuss the resignations of Kaqusha Jashari and Azem Vllasi, respectively the current party President and her immediate predecessor, which had been arranged as part of the deal on the constitution between the Federal and Serbian leaderships. That morning, miners from the Trepča 'Stari Trg' mine, after completing the night shift, emerged from the 38 degrees Celsius of their pit into the freezing dawn, joined forces with the day shift and began the seventy-kilometre march to Prishtina. They were the vanguard of what turned out to be the largest

⁴⁸ The impression was given that it was not worth defending an unpopular leadership. Why then did the party not argue in favour of new elections, in accordance with its statutes?

⁴⁹ This rare recourse to democracy proved that a considerable number of Serbian members must have voted against him in the secret ballot.

⁵⁰ *Politika*, Belgrade, 20 November 1988.

Albanian demonstration since the war: half-a-million participants over the next five days.

Journalists met them half-way. ‘They were wearing their shabby miners’ outfits and looked quite exhausted. The front row carried a picture of Tito, two miners’ flags, the party flag, Yugoslav, Albanian and Turkish flags. Their slogans: “Tito–Party!”; “Jashari–Vllasi!”; “Tito–Kardelj!”⁵¹; “We will not surrender our cadres!”’. A correspondent from the daily *Borba*, one of the rare journalists able to speak the Albanian language (only three out of thirty Yugoslav journalists then accredited to Prishtina were in possession of this essential tool of their trade!), asked a miner if they were going to Prishtina to complain about their wages. ‘Everybody gathered around to listen. The miner answered that this was a day for politics, not for tears. The journalist said that politics was a dangerous business—the “specials” were ahead and there might be trouble. The grim-faced man responded angrily: “Journalist, have you ever seen a wedding without meat?”’.⁵²

Once in Prishtina, the miners were joined by other workers, then by students and youth, followed by secondary and primary school children—eighty per cent of the participants were below the age of twenty—and soon also by the older generation, coming from all parts of Kosovo (as well as western Macedonia). The aims of this highly disciplined protest were to express their rejection of the proposed changes in the constitution of the Republic of Serbia; to prevent, in that context, the enforced resignation of the two provincial leaders.⁵³ This defence of national rights was phrased in the immaculate language of democracy. In interviews freely given, the miners made it clear that if the province’s status was to be changed, if its leadership was to be purged, then this must be done in an open, democratic debate and not imposed by force. The workers said what the Federal party should have said—but did not. In those freezing November days and nights, the marching workers, students and children acted as a true socialist vanguard. That November Yugoslavia was celebrating the 45th anniversary of the revolutionary state’s foundation and the Albanian workers paid it homage in the best possible manner: by defending one of its fundamental achievements.

Although the Provincial Committee acknowledged the resignations (no vote was taken, the outcome having been determined elsewhere) and the miners thus failed to achieve their formal aims, they did give advance warning that they were prepared to organize a general strike if the proposed changes were carried out. After the demonstration, the Serbian party predictably described the Prishtina events as the latest example of an escalating ‘counter-revolution’. The Federal party came very close to agreeing with them.⁵⁴ The Kosovo leadership, however, argued that they were ‘in line with the 17th party plenum’.

⁵¹ The late Edvard Kardelj, one of Tito’s closest collaborators, was the chief architect of the 1974 constitution.

⁵² *NIN*, Belgrade, 10 November 1988.

⁵³ The workers were particularly angry at the charge made a few days earlier by the president of the Serbian Trade Union Alliance that ‘counter-revolution’ was deeply embedded in the Kosovo party and state organs and at Prishtina University, but above all in the Albanian working class!

⁵⁴ Its Presidency did in fact endorse this view, without consultation with the CC—breaking the party statutes in the process.

The intensifying battle within the country's leadership meanwhile went through another futile round at the 20th plenum of the central committee of the LCY. By now it was quite clear that the party was split from top to bottom into two opposed coalitions. The plenum was nevertheless united in confirming once again its support for Serbia's constitutional demands: Albanian national rights were treated as small coin in a much vaster exchange. Azem Vllasi was removed from the central committee and three highly disliked officials placed in charge of the Kosovo party. Their sole task was to ram the required constitutional changes through the Kosovo assembly. The Albanian working class responded by organizing a general strike. The federal state answered with military force and mass arrests. The stakes were getting higher at each round, and they concern not just Kosovo but Yugoslavia as a whole.

Whither Yugoslavia?

In Kosovo, the Yugoslav leadership is faced with two options: the democratic one, which means recognizing the legitimate aspirations of the Albanian population, or permanent military occupation, which will lead to democracy being extinguished throughout Yugoslavia. This is the central message of the Ljubljana Declaration of 1 March 1989 against the state of emergency in Kosovo. Supported by all political and social organizations in Slovenia as well as the Helsinki Federation groups in Zagreb and Belgrade, the Declaration has been signed by a million people in Slovenia—out of a total population of two million!⁵⁵

Balkanization of Yugoslavia has never been inscribed either in its multinational composition or in its federal structure. The unity of the country rests on a recognition of its ethnic plurality. However, the rise of state-led nationalism in Serbia is threatening to break Yugoslavia into a force-field of warring nationalities, pushing the country back into the past. Since the current party leadership in Serbia can survive only by constant invention of enemies, any suppression of Yugoslav democracy will be carried out in the name of a South Slav 'national' unity. But which people's rights can ever be safeguarded by the denial of similar rights to another? How could the federal structure survive such a triumph of Yugoslav unitarism?⁵⁶ Any suppression of democracy will likewise be carried out in the name of party unity. The balance between the hardliners and their opponents has shifted in favour of the former and, at the extraordinary party congress due in December 1989, they will try to impose a Stalinist monolithicity on the rest of the LCY. However, far from uniting it, this would lead only to the party's disintegration—to a mass exodus of its members. Since Yugoslavia is a party state, moreover, this would cripple all state institutions, making military intervention ultimately inevitable.

The two coalitions within the party are well aware of what is at stake. Yet, with the partial exception of Kučan in Slovenia, nobody in power has

⁵⁵ *Delo*, Ljubljana, 2 March 1989.

⁵⁶ In a prescient passage Pavlović wrote: 'It is not the aggressive character of Albanian nationalism, nor the appearance of Serb revanchism, nor indeed the emergence of separatist Serb nationalism, that is potentially the most dangerous form of nationalism in Yugoslavia today. It is Serb chauvinist *unitarism*' (my italics). *Op. cit.*, p. 335.

addressed these fateful questions openly and directly. The democratic camp has been muted and ineffective, reluctant from the start to confront Milošević. The Croatian and Slovenian party leaders have failed to protest at the illegal methods of changing the country's constitution, at the Stalinist methods used to remove Milošević's opponents in the Serbian party, at his constant infringement of party statutes, at the Serbian party's condoning of ever more frequent calls to violence against party and state officials or even whole nations.⁵⁷ While the current leaders in Serbia have trampled the party's statutes and the country's constitution underfoot, their Croatian and Slovenian counterparts have responded by backing Serbia's constitutional demands without expressing the least doubt as to their democratic nature—albeit protesting when the inevitably undemocratic enforcement of them has led to workers being victimized. Like Belgrade, they too apparently reckoned without the Albanian workers' determination—which has, indeed, been most inconvenient for their politics of appeasement. Their passivity has derived from a fundamental delusion that the political field in Yugoslavia can be isolated into so many watertight (republican) compartments. Federal bodies, meanwhile, have been used to give the semblance of unity to an increasingly divided party, thus making more difficult an all-Yugoslav counter-offensive against the mounting reaction.

Clearly, the formulation of an alternative to Milošević must rupture the facade of so-called democratic centralism. Readiness to break the collective discipline of the League of Communists has become the hallmark of the Serbian party under Milošević. Why then is the other side so scrupulous in its adherence to collective decisions? Kučan has already talked of the right of minorities in the party to hold different views. But are such minorities to be constituted only on a single-republic basis? Has not this concept led Slovene and other members of the LCY central committee repeatedly to vote for measures in Kosovo that had no support in the Albanian population?⁵⁸ The current crisis has manifestly led to strong internal differentiation within the LCY, and the time has come to recognize this openly. The debate on a comprehensive political reform is already under way in Yugoslavia: central to it will be democratization of the internal life of the LCY, which can have a meaning only if it includes recognition of the right of tendencies to cross republican and provincial borders.

The Ljubljana Declaration emphasizes the need for Yugoslavia to become a 'legal state': that is, a state that respects human rights and recognizes political differences as legitimate. It calls for affirmation of the political, economic and cultural autonomy and equality of all nationalities living in Yugoslavia. It demands that legal institutions and existing laws be altered only by democratic means, with the full agreement of all those concerned.

⁵⁷ The arrests of Azem Vllasi, the managers of the Trepča metallurgical complex, the managers of the Elektrokosovo power plant, the provincial president of the Socialist Youth Alliance and other political and economic leaders of the province on trumped up charges are without precedent in post-war Yugoslavia.

⁵⁸ To break with this practice would require rejection of the official line that counter-revolution is taking place in Kosovo and lead to a sober and principled re-examination of the status of the Albanian nation in Yugoslavia, of the kind attempted by Branko Horvat in *Kosovsko pitanje*, Zagreb 1988.

In this it must command the whole-hearted support of all socialist and democratic forces. Democracy in Yugoslavia, though, cannot be contained within the terms of nationhood and citizenship. Only a democracy that is socialist in character can preserve and build on the gains of the revolution, withstanding nationalism within and capitalist rapacity without. The *common* interests of the Yugoslav working class have been the foundation of the postwar state, and the only guarantee of national equality within it.

Why, therefore, should anyone assume that Milošević represents the interests of Serbia's workers? Why should one assume that the nationalist gamble in Serbia has paid off in its intention to divert class dissatisfaction into more obedient channels? In Serbia, as elsewhere in Yugoslavia, the working class is in fact engaged in increasingly coordinated strike action. The number of strikes is rising, the number of participants is growing, the actions last longer and are better organized. Although they above all seek economic justice, political demands too are increasingly being articulated. 'We are entering the period of organized class struggle. The working class is beginning to build up its own cadre, which does not belong to the bureaucracy, speaks the workers' language and learns quickly from the experience of other workers.'⁵⁹ Will it not also learn from the recent action of the Kosovo workers?

Of course, when—in Serbia today as much as in Romania, or in the Soviet Union under Stalin—there is no democratic possibility for the expression of political views different from official ones, gauging political consciousness accurately is impossible. We may be pretty sure that the Ceaușescu regime is highly unpopular among Romanian workers; or that Stalin's in the period between, say, 1927 and 1935 enjoyed a not negligible degree of working-class support in parts of the country; or that some Chinese workers were enthused by the Cultural Revolution, while others were repelled. But these are all hypotheses and socialists have to judge the regimes in question by quite other criteria. There seems little doubt, from the tenor of the rallies organized by the Serbian party in the last two years, that many workers have indeed been mobilized behind the nationalist banner. And many workers in Vojvodina and Montenegro have certainly been ready, for their own reasons, to demonstrate against their local bureaucrats—thus serving Milošević's very different ends. But what does this prove?

The incidence of strikes in Serbia shows that the Serb nation is by no means as homogeneous as the nationalists claim and that, unlike in Stalin's Soviet Union or Ceaușescu's Romania, there are still social constraints on the authoritarian project of the central party leader. After all, it is against Serbian workers that Milošević's strong state must eventually be used, after the Albanian workers or Slovene democrats who should be their best allies against neo-Stalinism have been crushed. Milošević, it is true, has sometimes struck a demagogically anti-bureaucratic note—but only to incite the replacement of one group of leaders by another, more compliant. The essential logic of his project is the construction in Yugoslavia of a bureaucratic dictatorship under a single leader.

⁵⁹ Mladen Zuvela, member of the Croatian party leadership, *NIN*, Belgrade, 25 December 1989.

There are some signs that the liberal wings of the party and the intelligentsia are finally making efforts to come together on an all-Yugoslav basis to resist the neo-Stalinist resurgence.⁶⁰ Nationalist mobilization divides the Serbian working class from workers and progressive forces in other parts of the country, leaving them to confront alone the growing social misery⁶¹ and the enhanced power of the local bureaucracy. Yugoslavia's leaders, though bitterly divided on many issues, share a commitment to a market economy that will above all hit workers in the underdeveloped south. Whereas a democratically planned economy is not achievable within the existing socio-political order, it is equally evident that without a Federal plan to check the destructive effects of the market the national and class compact that gave birth to the postwar state will simply collapse. Such a Federal plan is a condition of Yugoslav unity—no successful challenge to bureaucratic-nationalist reaction can be mounted unless it speaks on behalf of Yugoslavia as a whole.

The imposition of an undemocratic constitution on the Albanian population in March 1989 could, in the end, be effected only by a recourse to force which—despite the eventual coerced acquiescence of the provincial assembly—denies all legitimacy to the act, while simultaneously threatening the national and democratic rights of all Yugoslavs. Albanian workers and intellectuals have done all they could to avoid violence and bloodshed—the former by sticking to peaceful methods of struggle, the latter by their last-minute desperate appeals to reason and justice.⁶² Responsibility for the loss of at least twenty-nine lives within days of this act thus rests exclusively with the federal leadership. Equally, the edict issued to Albanian workers to return to work on pain of dismissal and imprisonment recalls Reaganite methods of dealing with recalcitrant workers; it represents a direct attack on the all-Yugoslav working class, which is soon to be called upon to bear the burden of the restructuring of the economy. The legitimacy of the post-war state, however, was built at once upon national equality and working-class sovereignty: no programme of recovery can avoid addressing itself to both national and class constituencies. The existing institutions are proving increasingly incapable of expressing and resolving the contradictions of the established order. The battle has already been joined for their transformation; its outcome will be determined by the strength of the contending social forces and their allies, both within and outside Yugoslavia's borders.

⁶⁰ This growing body ranges from people like Koča Popović—a leading partisan general and poet once Yugoslavia's Foreign Minister, who has publicly condemned nationalism and anti-Albanian revanchism in Serbia—to the recently formed Association for a Yugoslav Democratic Initiative, which has called for Kosovo's status to be determined by a referendum of its inhabitants.

⁶¹ It is estimated that 58 per cent of workers in Serbia proper do not earn enough to satisfy their basic needs. *NIN*, Belgrade, 25 December 1988.

⁶² For the appeal, signed by 215 Kosovo intellectuals, see *Borba*, 23 February 1989.

