

Uprising in Kosovo leaves 150 dead

by Konstantin George

For the first time in 30 years, there is a state of armed insurrection in Europe, as Albanian separatists in Yugoslavia's Kosovo region clashed with the Yugoslav police and armed forces. Kosovo, with its 85% Albanian majority, borders on Albania. By March 30, over 150 persons had been killed there and at least 1,000 wounded, with clashes raging between armed Albanian insurgents and Yugoslav Army units, police, and security forces.

The escalation of the Kosovo crisis began with Albanian riots on March 23, after the Kosovo Parliament succumbed to pressure from Serbia—the most powerful of Yugoslavia's constituent republics, which dominates the armed forces, in particular—and voted to end Kosovo's post-1974 status as an autonomous region of the Serbian Republic. The launching of the armed insurrection was timed with the March 28 signing ceremony in the Yugoslav capital of Belgrade, certifying the reimposition of direct Serbian rule over the province. While strict censorship has been imposed on casualty figures, the Yugoslav media made no attempt to conceal the fact that a shooting war is raging in the region.

The Kosovo battlefield

On March 29, all the leading Yugoslav press carried a statement by the Federal Interior Ministry announcing that Kosovo "has reached the dimensions of an armed uprising." The statement continued: "The enemy forces in Kosovo have announced a further escalation of the conflict, including an armed uprising of the Albanian majority. . . . Enemy forces are connected to the Albanian emigration who have threatened terrorist attacks against Yugoslav facilities abroad."

The federal newspaper of the Yugoslav League of Communists, *Borba*, on March 29, carried a headline: "Streets Like a Battlefield," with battles "as in wartime" raging in the streets of Kosovo's major towns, the capital of Pristina and the towns of Urosevac, Prizren, and Pec. *Borba* reported, "Armed terrorists . . . firing from rooftops, balconies, and windows," were shooting, "some with rifles with telescopic sights," at police, the Army, and security forces. Gangs of Albanians "tried to storm police stations," while other groups "set fire to cars, buses, and railway cars." From the coverage in *Borba* it is clear that some of the Albanian insurgents have procured automatic rifles. One case was cited where "armed terrorists" fired automatic rifles at two Yugoslav Army helicopters, hitting them, "though they were able to land safely" at Pristina Airport.

The Interior Ministry announcement also disclosed that beginning on the night of March 28, some 10-15,000 additional troops and security forces drawn from all six republics and the autonomous Vojvodina region were sent into Kosovo, bringing the total of Army, police, and paramilitary security forces to 50-60,000.

Albania endorses the uprising

On March 29, Albania's official Communist Party newspaper, *Zeri i Popullit*, editorialized in support of the Kosovo uprising. Titled "The Tragedy of Kosovo—The Shame of Yugoslavia," the editorial called the events in Kosovo the "Albanian *Intifada*," referring to the Palestinian uprising on the West Bank and the Gaza strip. The editorial further compared the Kosovo uprising to the "struggle by black Africans" against South Africa.

The Albanian media, especially during the weeks leading up to the revolt in Kosovo, had been denouncing not simply Serbia, but Yugoslavia as a whole for "oppression of the Kosovo Albanians." With the March 29 editorial, Albania endorsed the separation of Kosovo from Yugoslavia and the formation of an Albanian state. For the first time, the term "Kosovo Albanian" has been dropped, and replaced by the term "Albanian": "No law now protects the Albanians. They are in the grip of the tanks."

By March 30, the Yugoslav federal leadership struck back, publicly accusing Albania and unnamed "foreign intelligence agencies" of being behind the uprising.

Meanwhile Moscow, beginning with the late February general strike of Kosovo Albanians, has come out in full support of Serbia's bid to eliminate Kosovo's autonomy. Throughout March, Soviet media have been filled with denunciations of "Albanian nationalism and separatism."

In Western Europe, a campaign was launched at a press conference in Brussels on March 30, by the radical ecologist movement and its offshoot, the West German-based Society for Endangered Peoples, demanding a European Community boycott of Yugoslavia, "in solidarity with the Kosovo Albanians." This campaign, coming on top of years of Western creditor wrecking of the Yugoslav economy will, together with the war raging in Kosovo, create the conditions for a Soviet adventure in the region, possibly including the formation of a Russian-Serbian pact and a Soviet military incursion to "restore order."

An intelligent Western leadership could prevent such an outcome by terminating the International Monetary Fund's austerity program for Yugoslavia and launching a true development policy for the country. Under normal circumstances, the Serbs—whose mortal enemy is Bulgaria, Moscow's staunchest Balkan puppet—would not rush into a pact with the Soviet Union. Presently, however, the laws of classical tragedy are governing, and Moscow is waiting for its opportunity to pose as a champion of Serbia and open a Russian corridor to the Adriatic.