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REPORTAGE

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Albania The Habits of the Heart Tina Rosenberg

The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.

—Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

This was Albania: A man is arrested. He is sentenced—without trial, for a crime never identified—to serve 19 years in prison. He serves 25. He survives and is released.

"Don't come back now," says the guard who escorts him out. "To this hellhole?" replies the prisoner. "After giving this damned government half my life?" The guard stops. "In the name of the people," he cries, "I arrest you for agitation and propaganda against the state!" Back goes the prisoner for 10 more years.

Nowhere on earth has life changed more drastically in the last five years than in Albania. While other communist countries experienced a gradual softening of repression, especially in the late 1950s, Albania remained a paranoid, isolated, and repressed Stalinist biosphere until 1990. Indeed, a huge bronze statue of Stalin stood until December of that year on the central avenue of Tirana, Albania's capital city. Today, in the place of the statue is an outdoor cafe, where men with pitted skin wearing tattered acrylic pants, white socks, and black shoes hunch for hours over cups of sweet, gritty Turkish coffee or *raki*, a grape liquor. The 300,000 concrete bunkers built by Communist dictator Enver Hoxha after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia still dot every farm and field like giant mushrooms, but today

people live in them. Young Albanians in the army reserve had spent every third weekend in these bunkers, kneeling in the mud, their machine guns trained on some imaginary invader. I visited one that now houses a family of six. It was pristine inside, with four beds, two televisions, and dainty teacups arranged in a glass-fronted curio cabinet. Another huge bunker in the south of Albania is now home to a discotheque.

Much has changed, but nowhere on earth is the past's chokehold on a nation's throat as tight as in Albania. The old ways of doing business persist: personalist rule, subservience to the big man, political disregard of the law, corruption. Albania, a nation of 3.3 million people, situated just below Yugoslavia and above Greece, has vaulted overnight into modernity. But its modernity is selective, bearing out the unfortunate lesson that modern liberalism's allure is not its foundations of democracy, civil society, and the rule of law, but its wretched excess. Albania has coffee bars, satellite dishes, and discotheques. But the structures supporting these wonders remain Hoxha's bunkers and Stalin's plinth.

Transforming Albania

Albania's collapsed transformation from Stalinism to democracy mirrors the country's leap into the twentieth century. Before communism, Albania lived largely as it had since the 1500s; its south was traditionally feudal and its north was dominated by violent clans that lived deep in forested mountains as remote from the contemporary world as the dark side of the moon. In the

early days, blood feuds so dominated mountain life that commerce was blocked, as traders dared not enter villages controlled by opposing families. Gradually a legal code developed that limited vendettas to *koka per koke*—a head for a head, and no more. Albanians' tradition of hospitality also began in this violent world. A host took responsibility for a guest's protection and assumed the blood feud for a man killed on his land. This society based on might, vengeance, and honor lay beyond the reach of centuries of foreign occupiers, and in the north, its traces remain today.

The Ottomans invaded Albania in 1423 and stayed for the next half-millennium. In 1912, Albania won independence for the first time in history, just in time to be invaded during the First World War by Serbia, Montenegro, Austria-Hungary, Italy, Bulgaria, France, and Greece. Independent Albania survived these incursions and, during the 1920s, enjoyed the formal structures of democracy, with a parliament and political parties. In 1928, however, a 32-year-old feudal lord named Ahmed Zog declared himself King Zog and ruled until Mussolini invaded in 1939. After Italy's defeat in 1943, the Nazis replaced the Italians as an occupying force, pulling out in late 1944. In elections the following year, the Communist party, which had led the opposition to the Nazis, was the only party running. On January 10, 1946, the Albanian People's Republic was proclaimed, led by schoolteacher Enver Hoxha.

Although Hoxha owed nothing to Moscow, Albania was an obedient voice in Stalin's chorus until his death. When Khrushchev pressured him to de-Stalinize and free those imprisoned in political trials, Hoxha broke with Moscow to follow Mao. After Mao's death and the consequent Chinese liberalization, he broke with Beijing. Hoxha made his nation the world's first atheist state: priests and Islamic leaders were shot, people were imprisoned for years for wearing a crucifix or possessing a bible, and

ancient cathedrals were gutted and turned into basketball courts. He outlawed owning cars. Girls were expelled from school for the bourgeois frivolity of wearing lipstick. He abolished the Justice Ministry and the practice of law; trials consisted of a public reading of charges. Only minors, foreigners, and the mentally ill or retarded were entitled to a defense attorney.

In 1985, Hoxha died and his protégé, Ramiz Alia, took his place. Little changed in Albania under his rule, even though other communist regimes were committing once-unspeakable heresies. On December 11, 1990, well after communism had fallen in every other eastern European country, a few Albanian intellectuals met to form the Democratic party. They were communist intellectuals, as Albania had no other kind. By now Alia realized that even Albania could not continue with business as usual, and so he began to make concessions to the new party. Elections were called for March 1991. The Democratic party won in Tirana, but in the more populous countryside, where voters were more subject to intimidation and were more fearful of change, the Communist party, newly transformed into the Socialist party, won. But two Socialist-led governments proved unable to lead Albania, and another election was called for March 1992. This time the Democratic party won. Sali Berisha, a French-trained cardiologist, became president.

I first met Berisha in October 1991, when he co-chaired an election-observer delegation in Bulgaria of which I was a member. He was charming: fluent in five languages, tall, with a thick head of carefully styled hair and the distinctive straight nose and close-set eyes typical of Albania's northeast. His statements about elections and democracy seemed indistinguishable from those of his co-chairman, a Canadian member of parliament. Under communism, however, Berisha had served at a modern clinic for party elites, where Enver Hoxha was among his patients. His main job was

head of cardiology at Tirana's Hospital Number 1, where he also headed the Communist party. He presided over the expulsion of several surgeons from the party, a process usually followed by their firing and the dismissal of their children from school.

This is not the biography of a Václav Havel, but Albania did not grow Havels. Other nations' dissident intellectuals bounced in and out of jail, but while they were out they could write (for *samizdat*) and discuss ideas with like-minded thinkers in their own countries, their East Bloc neighbors, and the West. These people introduced and established the ideas of Western democracy in their countries. Albania had no such modernizing intellectual class; here intellectuals were either part of the Communist structure or were buried in the gulag.

Tirana's Western Face

I arrived in Tirana in a storm of dust. At four on an August afternoon—the hot, lazy time of siesta—the streets are always deserted. But today a cold wind pummeled the faces of the few people struggling to walk down the palm-lined Boulevard of the Martyrs of the Nation—formerly Stalin Boulevard—and we turned our backs to the gusts and covered our heads. After a few minutes the wind died, and by six in the evening, thousands had come out for the nightly *gyro* up and down the boulevard. Girls in now-permitted miniskirts and too much eyeliner looped their arms around the waists of boys with bad haircuts in Styx T-shirts. Older couples in their best clothes licked ice cream cones and chatted with friends.

Three years ago there was no ice cream for strollers to buy, nor a single stand selling chocolate or cigarettes. There were only two places in the city to get a cup of coffee. Stalinism had disintegrated, but nothing had arisen in its place; Albania fell into a terrifying vacuum. Thieves looted everything from donated rice to electrical wire. From

1991 to 1993, the Italian military fed Albania, under a program begun after thousands of Albanians stormed ferryboats crossing the Adriatic to Italy.

Stability returned with massive food aid and an International Monetary Fund austerity recipe, with the IMF serving up its usual cocktail: on the one hand, unemployment and starvation wages. Prices in Albania are comparable to those in the United States, but here the average public-sector employee makes less than \$50 a month. The countryside around Tirana has squatter cities more miserable than those on the outskirts of Managua, from which families must trudge a kilometer to the nearest well. Many families cannot even afford highly subsidized bread at 50 cents a huge loaf. On the other hand, the economic plan has brought down inflation and produced growth of nearly 10 percent in 1993—the highest growth rate in Europe by far.

Today, Tirana has a surprisingly Western face. The ministry buildings date from Mussolini's occupation; Hoxha's only prominent communist-kitsch addition is a bizarre pyramid of marble and glass, a giant flying saucer plopped down in the center of the Boulevard of the Martyrs of the Nation. Formerly the Enver Hoxha Museum, it now serves as an office building. The neighborhoods are clusters of rickety five-story apartment buildings, with stairways so precarious that I often felt I was climbing to a treehouse. Sidewalks are jammed with folding tables spread with packages of French butter cookies and Marlboros. Kiosks sell hamburgers and french fries. Travel agencies advertise bus trips to Istanbul. Horses pulling carts and donkeys straining to carry old men beating them with sticks plod on, deaf to the bullying horns of BMWs and Mercedes. Crowds gawk and point at the windows of Benetton and electronics stores filled with Sony VCRs and Phillips blowdryers. The peeling yellow apartment blocks sprout satellite dishes from every other window. When the *gyro* is done,

most people go home to watch a ripoff of "Wheel of Fortune" or an episode of "Dynasty"—dubbed into Italian and subtitled in Albanian—on state television.

The Legacy of the Past

Their shuttered past left them starving for these luscious fruits of the West, but nothing in that past prepared Albanians to plant such an orchard themselves. The rapid growth figures are misleading, as their baseline is a year of collapse in a country that, during the best of times, is as poor as Guatemala. Today, the country's lifelines are the \$330 million a year sent home by young Albanian men working illegally in Greece and Italy and an unknown sum made through smuggling oil and other products to Serbia. In fact, Europe's fastest-growing economy produces virtually nothing. Its massive Chinese-built factories are now ghostly jumbles of rusted pipe and metal, plundered by looters before they could be closed by Berisha. Today, Albania's entire industrial base consists of factories producing bricks, textiles, fertilizer, tobacco, beer, and a few other products. I saw only one factory built since 1991: a Coca-Cola bottling plant. Farmland has been privatized, but most farmers work the land with scythes, without benefit of tractors, fertilizer, or irrigation.

The reasons for Albania's plight start with millennia of poverty topped by Hoxha's isolation. The roads are what one might expect for a society that commutes by donkey cart. The telephone system does not permit even a collect call. One visiting American commercial law expert told me that a ministry lawyer asked how to ensure that her clients did not falsely blame her for bad advice. "I said write it down, keep a log, and give them a copy," said the American. "She said, 'Well, that would use a lot of paper, wouldn't it?'" Albanians lack the mentality of business, such as long-term thinking—a farmer is more likely to buy a Mercedes than

a tractor—or the concept of a contract. An American adviser to the Trade Ministry told me of her frustration in trying to persuade the then vice minister that one could not simply sign a contract with a foreign investor and then later change the terms.

And there is corruption. I heard of new yachts and \$20,000 payoffs given to dozens of privatization officials, ministers, judges, prosecutors, and deputies. But it is impossible to determine whether Albania is in fact awash in corruption or is simply awash in rumor. From firsthand sources I did learn that to set up a kiosk or coffee bar requires a \$4,000 bribe to city officials, \$6,000 if the location is choice.

The logistics of corruption favor those who deal with foreigners. "Virtually all the staff meetings at the Finance Ministry are attempts to persuade officials not to take off in the middle of the day to moonlight," says another American adviser. "Everyone does it. They set up private joint ventures with the foreigners they are working with. In many cases they have no sense that this is conflict of interest, but if they do have it, the idea is, 'I'll worry about conflict of interest when I make more than \$50 a month.'" Corruption keeps bureaucrats from closing investment deals, as they have no desire to shut off their stream of bribes.

The habits of modern capitalism do not spring naturally from communism's fall. They are acquired, and the people emerging from Hoxha's Albania are singularly ill-prepared to acquire them. But they probably will acquire them eventually, as capitalism has the great advantage of being based on self-interest. If people act for their own benefit, the market will awake and sing. Democracy, on the other hand, is not such a perpetual-motion machine. It is in everyone's long-term good, but it serves the short-term interest of only the weak. Government officials see little profit in promoting opposition. One's incentive to develop a democratic society dries up, therefore, once one acquires the power to do so.

Competing for Albania

Considering the legacy of Albania's past, perhaps the most startling aspect of its political culture today is the list of problems that are *not* found here, such as religious intolerance. Some Westerners I spoke to expressed fear that, given the intensity of Hoxha's repression of religion, its sudden legalization could lead to new repression, this time stemming from religious fervor. Their unspoken fear, of course, is of Islamic fundamentalism. Albania is about two-thirds Muslim. Berisha has affiliated Albania with the Organization of Islamic Conference. Arab governments have financed new mosques, hospitals, and orphanages.

But the overall Arab presence so far is tiny. Arab charitable projects are small and scattered and their commercial capital makes up only 2 percent of foreign investment. Islam in Albania seems to be taking the gentler path of Islam in Turkey, Bosnia, and Central Asia. I saw a few old women in black long-sleeved dresses and thick black stockings, but the only veiled woman I saw was Saudi. On the street, the most visible religion is not Islam but the Unification Church. I was stopped three times by its American canvassers, who began by asking if I spoke English. American Mormons are also common; missionaries come by the planeload from the American Midwest to build churches and compete for the Albanian soul.

For better or for worse, the winner will probably be nobody. Albanians always have worn their religion loosely; they are Muslims because their Ottoman occupiers made them so. And Hoxha's purge of religion—when people even shed names with religious connotations—was ruthlessly thorough. I asked one man in his mid-twenties his religion: "I guess I'm a Muslim," he replied. His answer was typical; many such "Muslims" do not even know if they are Sunni or Bektashi Shiite. At prayer time, only about 20 men, most old enough to have practiced Islam in their youth,

kneel on the threadbare rugs in Tirana's mosque.

"They know nothing about Islam here," said Amr Elzainy, who runs the Kuwaiti Joint Relief Committee in Tirana. "I met a little girl who was clutching a picture to her chest. I asked who it was a picture of. She told me, 'I'm a Muslim, and this is our prophet.' And it was a picture of Jesus. We would like to set up some schools here, but we have no books in Albanian and no teachers who can speak it. The schools here are still teaching Communist ideas."

Like what?

"Darwinism," he replied. "Man is descended from monkeys."

Enver Hoxha's foreign policy since the break with China consisted of paranoiac rants sprayed at whatever country peevied him at the moment. Albania is now free to make new friends. It loses little by joining the Organization of Islamic Conference. But real rewards come from the West; most Albanians fantasize that their nation will become like Italy, not Kuwait. On foreign policy, Berisha has catered to the West more than any other Balkan leader—especially on Albania's big issue: Kosovo.

Ninety percent of the people who live in the Serbian province of Kosovo are ethnic Albanians. They are treated very much like blacks in the old South Africa. Kosovo has not yet erupted into the ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and outright genocide of Bosnia, but there is the danger that once the Serbs are finished with the Muslims of Bosnia they will turn to the Muslims of Kosovo.

But despite some nationalistic blustering during his election campaign—when Berisha spoke often of a "Greater Albania"—such statements came to a halt once he became president. "We respect the borders," Berisha said in an interview with me. "We strive for democratic space for all Albanians, wherever they are. If human rights are respected, this would be a great achievement. Extremist options are desperate and unrealistic." His shift stems in part from pragma-

tism—Albania can neither absorb a flood of refugees, nor stand up to the Serb army—and in part from his desire to be close to the West: U.S. officials, appreciative of Berisha's moderation and his counsel to the Albanians in Kosovo to pipe down and avoid provoking the Serbs, have rewarded Albania with extensive aid programs, lavish praise, and warm diplomatic relations.

Casualties of the Old Mentality

Another problem notable for its absence is repression of ethnic minorities. This is largely because there are few in Albania; the largest is the Greek minority, which makes up less than 2 percent of the population. Hoxha harassed and forcibly scattered ethnic Greeks. Today, however, ethnic Greeks in Albania face far less discrimination than ethnic minorities—including Albanians—do in Greece. Their most important demand that the government has not met has been for schooling conducted in Greek, even in areas where Greeks do not form a local majority. By the region's standards, this is tame.

But events last April began to change things. On April 10, 1994, two Albanian soldiers were killed near the Greek border by unidentified attackers. An Albanian Greek extremist group claimed responsibility. The government quickly arrested five ethnic Greeks on charges of spying for the Greek secret police. Their trial, which began in August, was a legal fiasco. The evidence against them was circumstantial and thin. Two of the defendants were assigned lawyers two weeks before the trial, and one just three days before. Defense attorneys were not permitted to call all their witnesses. At the session I attended, prosecutors and judges walked in together, chatting—a normal activity, considering they share offices. It smacked of a show trial, and few were surprised when all five were convicted.

The trial of the Greeks may be an atypical manifestation of aggression against a minority group, but it is a perfectly typical example of the overriding civil and human

rights problem in Albania today. In Hoxha's Albania, every activity and person existed at the pleasure of Enver Hoxha. Today, the increasingly misnamed Democratic party seems ever-more uncomfortable with independent institutions and ever-more determined to control them. Berisha wins applause for his Western-style economic and foreign policies. But such liberalism lasts only until his domination of Albanian politics is questioned.

While its rhetoric endorses civil society, the Democratic party has wrested control of most of Albania's few nongovernmental organizations. The anti-Berisha leadership of the Association of the Politically Persecuted is now in jail for carrying out a hunger strike, and the Albanian Helsinki Committee seldom raises its voice even over clear violations of human rights. Local elections last May were marked by government fraud. Thugs riding around in cars bearing government license plates threatened election observers and beat up local officials. The day after the election, the independent group that sponsored the observers met with Berisha. As they told him what they had seen, Berisha's face turned red and he began to get angry. If the Socialists attack us, he asked Bledi Roshi, the group's president, "do you expect us to sit with our hands tied?" Roshi told Berisha that the group planned to call a press conference. "You go right ahead," said Berisha, no longer sounding like a Canadian. "But you better be careful." Later, two officers of the new special police came to see Roshi. "You'd better say that everything is fine," they warned.

The most serious casualties of the old mentality have been the justice system and the media. Albanian concepts of justice still carry strong echoes of several different pasts. The clans of Albania's northern mountains developed one of the first Indo-European legal systems, although its codes were first written down only in this century. Its mores and customs, especially those of hospitality and blood feuds, still influence Albanians

today. To combat the north's lingering preference for private justice, for example, Parliament passed a law requiring that murder be reported to the authorities.

On May 29, 1992, two brothers broke into a house and, during the course of a robbery, clubbed to death an entire family of five, including a seven-month-old baby. They were given a hasty trial and sentenced to hang, which they did in the central square of the city of Fier less than a month after the crime. Their bodies were left swinging for hours to satisfy the viewing public. Relatives of the victims asked for an audience with the president. "They wanted to continue with vengeance," Berisha told me. "I had to convince them not to keep retaliating." He persuaded the family that with the hanging complete, their blood obligations were fulfilled and there was no need to kill members of the murderers' families.

The past's more pressing impact on legal matters, however, comes from the Stalinist years. Albania's legal tradition was not weakened under Hoxha—it was literally made nonexistent. Albanians lacked even a symbolic concept of citizens' rights. Law was simply an instrument of the party.

Today, judges work in offices bare of law books, telephones, paper and pencil, and even, in some cases, electricity. Many hold trials in their chambers because there are no courtrooms. They have no way to keep informed about the myriad new laws Parliament passes.

The impoverishment of the justice system creates injustice. In many courts judges and prosecutors share offices, reinforcing the old-system idea that they are on the same side. Court records are produced by secretaries writing with fountain pens in longhand. Judges complain they cannot always read the writing, and even in the high-profile trial of the ethnic Greeks, the secretaries occasionally stopped their note taking. The law requires that defendants too poor to hire a lawyer must be given court-appointed counsel. But Albanians are unaccustomed to

demanding a lawyer, and the state has no money to pay lawyers and no mechanism to find one if a defendant does demand one.

The biggest problem, however, is Democratic party pressure. Berisha has pushed out independent-minded officials and replaced them with his loyalists, in what one American resident sardonically dubbed the "Great Albanian People's Reform." The nation's most respected (and free-thinking) professor of constitutional law was removed from the committee drafting the constitution—to be replaced by an anesthesiologist and Democratic party official whose wife is Berisha's secretary. Maksim Haxhia, Berisha's first attorney general, was forced out on trumped-up charges after she showed too much independence.

Lower-court judges are governed by the High Council of Justice, a body headed by Berisha and including the head of the High Court, the justice minister, the attorney general, and nine other members appointed by the High Court and the justice minister. (One of the nine is prosecutor Skender Breca, who in 1979 won a death sentence for two political prisoners for having written a letter that criticized Hoxha to the Communist Party Committee.)

The High Council of Justice is supposed to remove judges only for specific instances of serious misconduct, but, according to Haxhia, it removes about a judge a month for political reasons. One was sacked after authorizing a controversial adoption. Another was fired—according to the head of the High Court, for corruption—right after he acquitted a newspaper editor accused of publishing state secrets and gave a reporter accused in the same case a light sentence. The U.S. Department of State reported that a judge was fired in 1993 after dismissing charges of labor agitation against two Socialist party officials. Dismissals do not have to be widespread to have a chilling effect on judges' decisions, especially in a country where judges are accustomed to receiving "assistance" in ruling on cases from Demo-

cratic party officials. I asked one Appellate Court judge about political pressure. "No comment," she said, with a tight smile.

Nineteen former Communist and Socialist officials have been prosecuted, some on charges of questionable legality. Ramiz Alia was convicted of, among other things, holding the positions of head of state and head of a political party at the same time—even though the prohibition on this double-dipping was not passed until after Alia had left both posts. Fatos Nano, an interim Socialist prime minister who held no official position under communism, was given a 12-year sentence for embezzlement. Many in Albania believe Nano's real "crime" was his status as Berisha's main political rival.

As 80 percent of its bench has been purged, Albania desperately needs new lawyers, judges, and prosecutors. The government came up with a controversial solution: it organized a special six-month law course that began April 1, 1993. Organizers said that students would be drawn from the families of political prisoners, who had been barred from education under communism. After a predictably outraged response from students at Tirana University's law school, officials announced that the short-course graduates would only work as paralegals or assistants.

In fact, a few dozen of the graduates are now judges, prosecutors, and investigators, including the 25-year-old chief prosecutor of the city of Gyrokaster. Many of the course's nearly 500 students were relatives not of political prisoners, but of Democratic party officials. "At least 95 percent of my students already had a university degree," said one professor in the school—and it was the rare political prisoner's child who held a degree. The students took the final exams given to graduating students at law school. Every student passed. "Professors were afraid to flunk them," said Haxhia.

Opponents of the course, who characterize it as a Democratic party move to stack the legal profession with party loyalists,

compare it to a course Hoxha staged in 1975 after he had purged intellectuals from the judiciary and needed some new faces. But even that course took not six months, but two years.

Media Attacks

Until last March, Teodor Keko was a journalist at *Aleanca*, the newspaper of the Democratic Alliance—a group of former Democratic party members who broke ranks with Berisha. Since that time, however, he has spent most of his time nursing beer in the Café Europa, a slick new cafe where the walls display modern art and the sound system blares techno-pop. The reason is still apparent in the scar just over his left eye. In early March 1994, he wrote an article critical of Eduard Selami, the chairman of the Democratic party and Berisha's closest adviser. A few days later, as Keko was leaving his house with his wife to go out to dinner, two boys wearing steel knuckles beat him up—while two policemen watched. When he got out of the hospital Keko stayed at home for a month and has been retired ever since.

Keko's story illustrates various woes of the press. In the past year, about a dozen journalists have been beaten up or threatened. In January, the criminal code was amended to impose a jail sentence of up to five years for anyone who "injures the dignity" of the president or insults ministers and parliamentary deputies—even if the accusations are true. Several journalists have been jailed under these amendments and a new press law, which punishes those who publish "official secrets"—a term that is not defined—with up to a year in jail or a fine of as much as \$10,000. (In Albania, that can close a newspaper.) Government officials point out that these laws are rarely enforced and that Berisha pardoned five convicted journalists on World Press Freedom Day last May. But just as with the regulations used by the government to pressure judges, these laws

give the government a weapon it can use at any time.

Keko's tale, however, has a twist: his offending article contained not an attack on some Democratic party policy, but a sly insinuation that the handsome and unmarried Selami is gay. This is, unfortunately, typical of the Albanian press, which even its practitioners cheerfully admit is deplorable. As there is no tradition of advertising and too small a market to support it, most newspapers rely on the sponsorship of political parties. They print the speeches and press releases of their politicians, along with ad hominem attacks on their opponents. Real reporting is almost unknown. So is the concept of trying to imagine what would interest a reader.

The government seems to tolerate an opposition press because the circulation is tiny—most papers print only about 10,000 copies per issue. But virtually every Albanian with electricity keeps a television or radio on all day—and not a single private television or radio station exists. “But we do retransmit Deutsche Welle, BBC, and Voice of America, all in Albanian,” Berisha told me.

“I don't know why there is such a fuss about TV privatization,” said Keko. “State TV has been privatized. It belongs to Berisha.” The nightly news consists of an announcer reading communiqués over shots of Berisha and Selami greeting guests. I had dinner one night with Ylli Pepo, who has been producing and directing programs at the state television station for 25 years. Except for top executives, he said, there was very little turnover when the regime changed. Very little overt censorship was needed, he said. “It's self-censorship. For a lot of them, it's just what they're used to. Others are in the Democratic party, so they naturally support and protect the party line.” Even the mildest mischief is punished: Ylli told me about a journalist who was fired after reporting that farmers were allowing their cows to roam the runway at Tirana's main airport.

An American's Dilemma

During dinner Ylli invited me to be a guest on the afternoon talk show he produces. This posed a dilemma: the show would be live. The rules of Albanian hospitality require that since Ylli helped me by giving me an interview, I help him by not saying anything on his show that would get him fired. The rules of non-ugly Americanism require that after only two weeks in Albania, I refrain from issuing harsh judgments of my small, poor, and insecure host country on its national television. But I could hardly write an article deploring censorship after censoring myself. I told Ylli I didn't think I wanted to follow the rules. It was now his dilemma. He smiled and told me not to worry.

I found out why when Donald, my translator, walked me home. “Ylli told me to mistranslate you if you say something touchy,” he said. I laughed and told him that would be his decision. “Well, if you say it, I'll say it,” he said.

When we got the studio Ylli explained the show: The host, Fioralba—I think she had been Miss Albania—asks me questions in Albanian. Donald sits off-camera and whispers the subject of the question. I answer in English and Donald speaks the translation into his microphone.

This process required me to be familiar with the questions in advance. Ylli, Fioralba, Donald, and I met to choose them—and here Ylli's second job-preservation strategy kicked in. “How about that magazine you work for?” Ylli said. “We're very interested here in that.”

“Well, I'm a freelancer, really,” I said.

“A freelancer! That is fascinating! Fioralba will ask you about that!” Fioralba wrote this down. By this time Ylli, Donald, and I were doubled over with laughter. Ylli plotted out about ten questions—where are you staying? What do Americans think of Albania? I reminded myself that Albanian TV was a monopoly and could be as dull as its producers wished. Near the end of the in-

terview Ylli added some meat: Fioralba would ask what had most impressed me and then what had least impressed me. Finally, she would close the 15 minutes with a throwaway question about what I would like to do if I came back.

On camera, Fioralba and I zipped right through our agenda. When she asked what I had been most impressed with, I talked about Albania's unexpected stability and the warmth of its people. She smiled and proceeded. "She's skipping the 'least impressed' question," Donald whispered. "She cut right to what you'd like to do next time."

I took a deep breath. "I'd love to be able to come back and report that Albania enjoys the rule of law instead of political

control of its institutions by a single party," I replied. Fioralba kept smiling at me until Donald began his translation. He obviously did it right, because she cut him off. "Well, thank you, Mrs. Rosenberg," she said, still smiling. "We will be pleased to have you on the show again when you come back." My un-diplomatic behavior had whittled down my 15 minutes of Albanian fame to 14 and a half minutes. Ylli plugged the gap with Albanian TV's stock filler: rock music played over a photo of girls in bikinis at the beach, their pampered bodies and carefree expressions showing the nation just how much had changed. ●