

## KASËM TREBESHINA, PROPHET

by

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In 1953, one of Albania's more outspoken writers warned Enver Hoxha that he was leading his country down an irreversible road to ruin. It cost him 23 years in prison. Today, he is one of a handful of survivors to have emerged from the concentration camps since the fall of the dictatorship.

Outstanding among the little-known figures of the early years of post-war Albanian literature, **Kasëm Trebeshina** was born in Berat on 8 August 1926 and studied at the *Shkolla Normale* (Normal School) in Elbasan until joining the Communist resistance movement in 1942. After the war, he studied at the Ostrovski Theatre Institute in Leningrad. A committed Communist, but by no means a conformist, Trebeshina left the Party and later the Writers Union in Tirana. Much of his work was written in the late 1940s and early 1950s, but never published.

In an extremely rare act of open dissent in Albanian intellectual life, Trebeshina sent a *pro memoria* to strongman Enver Hoxha (1908-1985) on 5 October 1953.

He warned him that his cultural policies were leading the nation down the road to disaster and alerted him to the inevitable outcome:

"... Let us take a close look at the contents of the literature of socialist realism, even the best of it. A good engineer, a bad engineer, a reformed engineer. A good peasant, a bad one, a reformed one, A good one, a bad one, a reformed one! The heroes of the moment are always Communists. They appear in the pages of books and on the stages of theatres simply to recite heroic monologues!

Let us look back into history and see how things were in the age of Louis XIV. Everything was clearly partitioned. The kings and princes had assured their roles in the best works. They appeared only in tragedies, whereas the common people, everyone who was lower than the kings and princes, had their places in comedies. They were objects of merriment, derision and insults of every kind. Are we to accept that something of this kind should take place in the twentieth century and in a society which claims to be socialist?

From the above, it is evident that socialist realism is directly linked to the ideas of French absolutism, both in theory and in practice... The Writers Union itself is organized like an order of mediaeval monks. At the head of the order is a Grand Master and everyone is obliged to hearken as long as he carries out his functions as Grand Master. Do you not realize that to distribute 'functions' and 'privileges' in this manner is mediaeval?

Let us examine your actions over the past few years. You decided in the Central Committee that Kolë Jakova was to be a great writer and everyone under you approved your decision. Critics acclaimed *Halili and Hajrija* as a great work of art! Dhimitër S. Shuteriqi then caught your attention and found your favour as head of the Writers Union, and so on.

But let me skip over this point. Writers are citizens with the very same rights as everyone else and it is not proper to have them submit to such a strange and unlawful censorship. If, for some reason you insist that there must be censorship, then let it be institutionalized and let everyone submit to its function. We would all then know to whom we must account and we would not have to be bothered by incompetent Party officials who come and impose their unwanted opinions... You must not treat the Writers Union of Albania as if it were simply the extension of a chain of other organizations set up by the Albanian Party of

Labour. The Writers Union is an organization of free individuals and not part of a feudal society in which feudal rights and obligations hold sway.

With respect to rights and obligations, I would like to give you an example of something which should have no place in our society. It is well known that my novel *Rinia e kohës sonë* (The Youth of Our Age) was written in 1948 and that another novel, *Mbarimi i një mbretërie* (The End of a Kingdom) was written in 1951. Nor should it be forgotten that the novel *Harbutët* (The Have-Nots) by Sterjo Spasse was written in 1946! So why did the Party make such a fuss and ban these early works and give Dhimitër S. Shuteriqi time in 1952 to write his worthless novel *Çlirimtarët* (The Liberators)? Why did the Party publish this novel with such a deafening noise? Why did it mobilise all its feudal knights of criticism to herald it as the first novel in the Albanian language? And not only the first novel, but a great novel of Albanian literature, although it is well known that Albanian-language novels were written in this country earlier, much earlier! Is it dignified for a whole party and all its high-level officials to involve themselves in such activities?

History has its own unwritten laws and has not given anyone the right to do whatever he wants with art. Not even Louis XIV had such a right. Activities based on a feudal structure have no place in our society and must be ended. You must bury the Dark Ages and return to the twentieth century in the name of the ideals for which a great war was fought and sacred things were sacrificed ...

I believe that the greatest destruction to take place is going to be in Albanian intellectual life. The people are going to lose confidence in the state and its leadership, and withdraw into themselves. And in order to keep them under control, the need will arise to create a brutal police state. This will be but the beginning.

You must give up the road of Louis XIV of Versailles as quickly as possible and stop suppressing opinions, even within the Party ranks. It is not a question of poor children by the roadside; it is one of the suppression of opinion which is becoming systematic and which, in the end, will give rise to a new monarchy. If things go that far, there will be terrible poverty and only the reign of unparalleled terror will enable you remain in power.

Such a regime will be even more dangerous to itself. A dampening and withdrawal of popular support will shake up the ranks of the leadership, too, which will gradually transform itself into a closed caste like a monarchy with no understanding of the historical realities of the twentieth century. At the end of this historic process you will be obliged to kill one another and the people will be smeared in blood. I believe there is still ample time to avoid such a calamity and this is why I have ventured to send you this *pro memoria*, written in such urgency...”

The Albanian dictator was not amused. Kasëm Trebeshina, the unpublished author of 18 volumes of verse, 42 plays, 22 novels and short stories, vanished from the literary scene. Trebeshina has now resurfaced to witness the fulfilment of his prophecy.

Among those who have emerged from the concentrations camps and internment since the fall of the dictatorship in 1989 are:

Lazër Radi (b. 1916), who spent 46 years in prison and internment;

Pjetër Arbnori (b. 1935), novelist, now Speaker of the Albanian parliament;

Kapllan Resuli (b. 1935), novelist, originally from Kosovo;

Jorgo Bllaci (b. 1938), poet;

Frederik Reshpja (b. 1941), poet;

Zyhdi Morava, poet, later a founding member of the first independent labour union;

Fatos Lubonja (b. 1951), son of the purged

Todi Lubonja (b. 1923);

Visar Zhiti (b. 1952), poet;

Bashkim Shehu (b. 1955), son of Enver Hoxha's right-hand man Mehmet Shehu (1913-1981);

Faslli Haliti, poet from the Myzeqe region;

Ferdinand Laholli (b. 1960), poet who fled to Germany in July 1989 after spending all his life in an interment camp at Savër near Lushnjë because his father had emigrated to the USA 15 days before his birth.

Many of them were released following a government amnesty in March 1991.

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