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1997: The Albanian insurrection

Anarchist Federation

September 19, 2006

The uprising that took Albania to the brink of revolution in 1997 was not supposed to happen – the Albanians, we were told, had shaken off their Stalinist masters and were now enjoying their new found capitalist freedom.

The true picture was a little different however – millions of jobs lost, social security and pensions cut and the countries infrastructure was nearing collapse, all as a result of plans to open the country up to western investment.

The real spark for the uprising was the IMF pressure which forced the state to abolish guarantees on bank deposits, and liberalise the banking and financial sector allowing pyramid schemes offering monthly interest rates of up to 100% to become legally possible – many people deposited their life savings with these crooked schemes – the end result being that \$2 Billion (80% of GDP) was stolen by the bosses who, to make matters worse, then tried to invest this stolen money in businesses – they tried to get the people to work for their own stolen money!

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This state of affairs was met by fierce resistance by the heavily armed population. Armouries were attacked and the weapons distributed; prisoners were released; party buildings torched; police stations and courts burnt to the ground; “shik” (secret police) agents killed on sight; banks looted; presidential palaces occupied. The revolt spread from the south of the country and soon covered the whole of the country except parts of the capital, Tirana, which the “Shik” still controlled. “Two Albanias” were in existence.

The state’s institutions had literally disintegrated over the period of a few days fighting (with around 100 dead), the police were not to be seen anywhere. But this was only a first step – a situation of dual power soon developed, with towns organising their own organs of self-defence (often with deserters from the Army being particularly active) and local self-management with various forms of autonomous councils springing up nationally and taking care of the supply and circulation of essential provisions – decisions being taken at mass public assemblies.

This situation threatened the EU who feared the insurrection could spread to Greece and Macedonia. A multi-national taskforce was sent to restore order – this was fully supported by the leftist parties who rallied around a ‘government of national unity’ led by Berisha (who had only recently survived a dynamite attack) and slowly the state crept back into existence. It is important to remember though, that a state was made to disappear in a matter of days.