

# The minister's secretary wore knee-high boots

and looked hard as nails.

"If you want to interview the minister you'll have to come back tomorrow," she said.

I asked her the name of the street (I had been guided there by an Albanian friend who insisted I register with the authorities). The question seemed to embarrass her.

"Marshala Tita ulica... but we're changing it."

As it was once before in Stalin's Russia, the name of the founder of the Yugoslav federation is now only invoked as an insult in Milosevic's Serbia. It was Tito who drew the line between Kosovo and the rest of Serbia that the ethnic Albanians want elevated to international status and Belgrade wants erased.

Marshal Tito street is, the secretary told me, to be re-named "Vidovdanska ulica." Vidovdan - St. Vitus Day - June 28 - the Serbian national holiday. This is the day, just over 600 years ago, when the Christian world, massed under the command of a Serbian king, fought the Turks on Kosovo field. They lost. Nevertheless, or perhaps for that very reason, 1389 remains every bit as immovable in the Serbian national consciousness as 1066 for the English.

I had taken the train over the Greek border into Macedonia (or over the Macedonian border into the "Republic of Skopje" as

**John LAURENSEN**

*Kosovo's Shadow State*



**Photo Anne Delalandre**  
*An Albanian Family, 1992*

**John LAURENSEN**

*Kosovo's Shadow State*



**Photo Anne Delalandre**

*A wall in Pristina, 1992*

the Greeks would have it). Just past the frontier, sipping a coffee which would have been "Greek" a few minutes earlier, but which was now "Turkish," I settled into a discussion with a bearded Serb name of Bratso. This was a Balkan conversation, an exchange that begins gently turning around the most anodyne of subjects, only to be sucked down into the eye of a furiously contested history. Dates, death tolls, and above all maps — ancient kingdoms and irredentist dreams scribbled on gutted cigarette packets. I kept some of the bits of paper. On one, the number 90 is circled again and again in blue biro. The Albanians now form ninety percent of Kosovo's population. Bratso nearly broke through the paper as he scored the number into the page.

Through the latter part of the 1980's, President Milosevic organised Serbian rallies right across Yugoslavia, working the crowds into a frenzy over the violence he said was being committed by Albanians against Kosovo Serbs to drive them out of the province. No attention was paid to official Serbian statistics which showed an incidence of violent crime inferior to the rest of Yugoslavia. Serbian nationalists also claim that Tito turned a blind eye to immigration from Albania. The Albanians claim to be descended from the Illyrians, who lived in Kosovo before the Slavs crossed the Carpathians and moved down into the peninsula in the sixth century. Nevertheless "Send them back" is a solution which has gained ground among Serbs. I even heard it from the mouth of an Orthodox priest. Had I stayed longer, I could have heard it from the Serbian general Arkan who, since razing Vukovar to the ground, has been re-located to the Kosovo capital Pristina.

One look around Pristina suggests a different explanation for the growing demographic dominance of the Albanians. This is a city of children. They are everywhere, playing in the streets, hawking "Partner" cigarettes. Aim a camera at them and a forest of V-for-victory signs cleaves the air. Kosovo is the poorest part of ex-Yugoslavia and has a birthrate akin to that of Ethiopia.

It is in the schools where Belgrade's push against the Kosovo Albanians has had its most dramatic effects. 400,000 children have been hit by the measures. At a primary school I visited in

Pristina, the Serbs were taught upstairs, the Albanians downstairs; the Serbs in the morning, the Albanians in the afternoon. The Serbian P.E. teacher has the key to the gym and won't let the Albanians borrow it. Printing of school books in Albanian has been halted. The Albanian teachers haven't been paid for two years.

The school's Albanian headmistress, Greta Katchinari, showed me a ledger, where all donations are meticulously entered. 10 dollars for each teacher for October from the Mother Theresa charity in the US, 30 deutschemarks per teacher from Florin Gashi, a former Kosovo TV producer, now a "gastarbeiter" in Austria.

The Serbian administration's Education Minister, Marinko Bozovic, explained to me that the primary school teachers are not paid because the Albanians refuse to apply the new Serbian "plans and programmes" — a claim which provoked a haughty snort from Ms. Katchinari. She says that, just before the wages were stopped, new pay scales were introduced whereby the Serbs were paid more than their Albanian counterparts. "They are not interested in us obeying the law, they want us beneath the law," she says.

In fact, that the Albanians are allowed to use the primary school premises passes for a concession. The province's Albanian high schools have been closed down altogether, their 6,000 teachers sacked. At Pristina University the story's the same. 750 Albanian university staff have been forced out of their jobs.

Radovan Papovic, the university's (Serbian) rector, told me it wasn't true.

"So why aren't the Albanian professors here anymore?"

"You should ask their separatist leaders."

"What about the students? The Albanians no longer come here to study..."

"I can't tell you how many Albanian students we have at the university now. It's one of our greatest achievements here that we no longer judge students by their nationality. Anyway, it's the quality that counts, not the quantity."

The Serbian side says the Albanians are operating a boycott

because nearly all subjects are now exclusively taught in "Serb." The boycott has been accepted as truth in the West. It is rejected outright by the Albanians. Gazmend Pula, President of the Kosovo Helsinki Committee, used to teach electrical engineering at the university. "Nobody resigned," he says, "this is no boycott. Dismissal forms were handed out to us as we left to go home at three o'clock. All we were asked to do was to sign a paper saying we'd received them."

To prove the point, lecturers and students have organised demonstrations where they try to enter the faculty buildings. During one such protest on October 13, Fetah Jakgjiu, a technical science professor, was arrested at the gates of the university. After being taken to the police station, he was set about the legs with truncheons, had his head hit against a toilet seat and was handcuffed to a radiator for four hours.

If the schools have been on the front line, all Kosovo's institutions have been hit. The parliament has been dissolved. Albanian factory workers have been sacked, some after refusing to sign oaths of allegiance to Belgrade. Kosovo radio and television has been emptied of its Albanian journalists. Albanian doctors have been fired from the hospitals, leaving would-be Albanian patients wary of the sort of treatment they'd get if they dared admission. All told, 103,000 Albanians, 70 percent of those working in 1990, have lost their jobs. Kosovo's Albanians can be forgiven for thinking that Serbia would prefer that they simply ceased to exist.

Ibrahim Rugova is a quietly-spoken literary critic. He wears thick spectacles and, with equal consistency, a slightly-flamboyant navy blue scarf. He was elected president by an overwhelming majority of Kosovo Albanians in elections last year. He is headquartered in Pristina's Pen Club, a squat, pale-green construction by the football stadium.

Now that Belgrade has taken away Kosovo's autonomy, Rugova says the single, overriding aim of his Democratic League is independence. But wouldn't independence just be a stepping stone to unification with Albania proper? His reply is far from a categorical no: "We are demanding an independent and neutral

Kosovo, open to both Serbia and Albania. Whether that can be a long-term solution or not depends on the degree to which we can integrate into a united Europe. Of course, every people wants to live together, but we have to take account of the political realities... unification with Albania could create problems in the region."

Rugova's policy is to avoid, at all costs, armed confrontation... to wait it out. When I turned up for the interview I was still a little shaken after having my eardrums blasted by a low-flying fighter jet. "So you've seen the Mig's?", he grins.

The response to what Rugova calls a "regime of occupation" has not been passive. The Albanians have created a shadow state. "President" Rugova is, of course, only recognised as such by the Kosovo Albanians. He has declared an independence recognised by no-one, least of all the Serbs. In his independent Kosovo, a shadow trade union movement, the BSPK, led by a politics professor, Hajrullah Gorani, represents shadow workers. College students and secondary school pupils study in shadow schools, crammed into private houses and taught by sacked teachers. The shadow state even has its own hospitals. I visited one which had just been converted from a cafeteria into a gynaecological and pediatric clinic.

The very existence of the Democratic League, its sovereign Republic of Kosovo, its president, throws out a political challenge to the Serbian authorities. But the shadow state also provides some cohesion, even a little protection, for a battered society. Protection from the authorities but also from themselves. The Kosovars are a proud people. This is one of the few corners of Europe where the vendetta still exists. The Kosovo Albanians have risen up in the past against overwhelming odds and the results have always been bloody. In 1981, student riots spread to the miners and other workers before Belgrade sent in the troops. A thousand people were killed. The Serbs have now massed imposing firepower in and around Kosovo and events elsewhere in ex-Yugoslavia leave little doubt about their willingness to use it should anything similar happen today.

But this time the catastrophe would be on a different scale.

The international community, so long happy to describe the wars of Yugoslav secession as "civil war," would be confronted with a Balkans conflict of terrifying international potential.

That war could start in Kodra e Trimave, a poor quarter in the hills above Pristina. It was already getting dark when I arrived there, stumbling along through the muddy labyrinth of ill-lit allies behind a young cigarette seller named Sheptim. When we got to his house, his father was pulling up a bucket from the well. There had been no water in the taps for weeks — no money to pay the bill. We left our shoes in a pile by the front door. Cross-legged on the living room floor, Sheptim's seemingly ever-extending family came in to meet me. His mother brought in some lemonade, made with well water of dubious cleanliness. Sheptim's sister had given up her studies in medicine after her teachers were sacked. Sheptim's father lost his job at the power station during the first big wave of sackings under Milosevic. Sheptim himself, after military service in the Yugoslav army, has never had a job to lose. Reselling packs of "Partner" he makes the dinar equivalent of three packets of cigarettes a week. He told me he'd recently been arrested at a demonstration. "For chanting 'Liberty, Equality,'" he says. He was imprisoned for two weeks where he was beaten and interrogated about the identity of the rally's organisers. As Sheptim's family told their stories, the stony eyes of the two defiant eagles of the national flag of Albania glared down from the living room wall.