Version 0.1 Draft-edition

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The Red Pashas

1.

At midnight did the Politburo gather,
What's new at the northern border?
What's up at the southern border?
The sky is clouded, snowy winter.

Is the old ruling class on the move,
Is disaster in the making?
Have the heads of foreign missions
Been sending telegrams of alarm?

No, it's quiet at the borders,
No alarm comes from the missions,
Under the dictatorship of the proletariat
The once great castes will spend winter with bowed heads.

And production is normal, and the days
Pass routinely in December...
Why then unexpectedly
At midnight did the Politburo gather?

2.

States are not destroyed from the rooftops
Though the water seeps in somewhere,
They're destroyed from their foundations,
Socialist states are subject
To this principle, too.

Everything may seem fine at the top,
Socialist competition, song-singing,
Posters and our heroes of socialist labour,
On the First of May in the local paper.

Telegrams of congratulation, sunshine
At public meetings and in the verse of young writers,
But, down below,
Yes, in the foundations,
A black tumour grows slowly.

For our foes we have cannons, hymns and dances,

Let the foreign missions send the message,
With what do we fight bureaucracy?
Cannons are of no use,
And there are no consuls for spreading such news.

3.

Midst notes and phone calls, correspondence,
The scenes are always filled
To the hilt with those friendly smiles,
Bureaucrats are a different matter.

Not with Pelican ink they're covered,
That fine, eccentric bunch, ha, ha,
No, they are evil,
I see them with their hands
Bathed in blood up to the elbows.

I see them digging deeply
At the foundations of the revolution.
What are they doing?
Why are they overturning, throwing left and right,
The bodies of our socialist martyrs?

But take a look,
It appears they are washing the bodies,
They are trying swiftly to efface the bloodstains from the foundations,
And with the blood, efface what they have left behind themselves:
All our ideals and principles.
How are they to efface these traces of blood?
Oh, they know how easy it then is
To alter the course of the revolution, the dictatorship
Of the proletariat
In its essence.

Thus, they have fallen to their knees,
Ever scrubbing, washing the blood away,
But what has happened now?
Why have they halted
At that barren garden, at that empty yard?

Here is where the overthrown caste was buried,
The pashas, beys, and noble families,
They attack, turn the bodies over and begin
Without delay to strip them bare.

The bloodstained robes of the former rulers
They don quickly, with orders and medals.
Sporting these on their shoulders, in the night,
They set off towards morning like a cloudburst.

4.

And morning came,

Pale and frozen,
Under their cloaks with the orders and crowns,
They go off to work, to their ministries and offices,
Indeed, even to the Central Committee.

The Red Pashas, beys with party membership cards,
Baron-secretaries, petroleum mafia, all lined up,
A sombre procession, to the chanting of liturgy,
They bear the revolution's coffin to the grave...

5.

But externally, the scene looked different,
Smiles and the clenching of fists at public meetings,
Things went easily with Uncle Kamberi and the old men,
With words like "Enver," "the Party," "Self-criticism."

So it was during the daytime,
But at night
They returned to the foundations,
But the revolution was not like Rozafa's Castle,
Which rose in the daytime and crumbled at night.

6.

Enver Hoxha with his eagle eye
Was the first to have doubts about them.
He then descended to the foundations
Of the state, as in the great ballads of old.

He bore a red torch in his hand,
The very earth quivered,
The light of the fire fell upon them,
And he saw them effacing the blood of our martyrs
As they were dividing up the cloaks.

"What, you are here?"
They rose to their feet.
"Oh, Comrade Enver, hmm, long may you live!"
But he looked askance
With pain in each strand of his hair,
And roared like a mountain in winter.

He was not Christ, to drive them from power
With a whip and a club.
He raised the working class
To make Communism thrive.

7.

Just as once partisan patrols,
Teams of worker-supervisors now spread out:
"Let the ministries not be seized by cannon fire
Tomorrow,

Today we will take them under our control."

The dictatorship of the working class is not found simply in poetry
Or on the birthday of a veteran lathe worker.
Are you for socialism?
Then run and queue up,
Proclaim everywhere and above all
The control of the working class.

Fight bureaucracy day and night,
Keep the old ruling class underfoot
If you do not want the firing squad
To line them up against the wall tomorrow
On the Main Boulevard.

8.

Days passed.
The storm of events
Continued furiously for years and seasons,
Plenary sessions of the Party gathered, like
The revolution's soldiers
In a storm.

The working class marches with the party on epoch-making days
The people swarm behind the working class,
And should the Politburo again
Gather at noon or at midnight
They are at the ready.

[Pashallarët e Kuq, translated by Robert Elsie. This poem, modest from a literary point of view, was written ca. January 1974, half a year after the Fourth Plenary Session of the Central Committee (June 1973), which had caused considerable panic in intellectual circles in Albania. It was originally to have been published in the literary newspaper Drita (The Light) in 1975, but was banned at the last moment, and Kadare was severely taken to task for having written it. Long regarded as lost, "The Red Pashas," also known as "Meeting of the Politburo at Noon," has been the subject of much controversy and interpretation. Indeed a whole book was written about it, Zhdukja e Pashallarëve të kuq të Kadaresë: anketim për një krim letrar (The Disappearance of Kadare's The Red Pashas: Inquiry into a Literary Crime), Tirana 2002, by Maks Velo. In March 2002, the poem was finally discovered in a Tirana archive and is translated here for the first time]