

Andrew Pfannkuche  
Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and Digital History

*Abstract:*

Enver Hoxha (1908-1985) was an international figure whose Cold War significance extended well beyond the borders of Albania. To many Maoists around the world his 41-year rule of Albania transformed the country into “the only socialist country in Europe.” Throughout the Cold War, Radio Tirana broadcast in nineteen languages while Hoxha’s many books appeared in at least twenty-seven. But Enver Hoxha was also the leader of a small Balkan nation, which he ruled through his state positions and his role as the First Secretary of the ruling communist party, the Party of Labor of Albania (PPSh). As Albania’s unchallenged leader, Hoxha turned the country into a pariah. In our historiography, Hoxha, the leader of an underdeveloped communist state in the Balkans and Hoxha, the dogmatic Marxist ideologue seem worlds apart. But they are the same person. His 41-year rule cannot be explained without referencing his ideology while his ideology cannot be explained without referencing Albania’s place in Cold War politics.

*Keywords:*

Albania, Marxism-Leninism (Maoism), Sino-Soviet Split, atheism, Hoxhaism

*Text:*

Born in 1908 in southern Albania, Enver Hoxha was the son of well-connected Muslim Albanians. These connections made it possible for him to attend university in France before dropping out and eventually returning to Albania in 1936. Until the Italian invasion of Albania in 1939 Hoxha worked as the librarian of the French *lycée* in Korça where he had once been a student. In 1941, Hoxha, who was already participating in Albania's small communist circles, was propelled into leadership by Yugoslav communists who were sent to Albania by Josip Broz Tito to organize the new Communist Party of Albania (later renamed the Party of Labor of Albania, PPSH) and an Albanian partisan movement.



*This photo of Enver Hoxha in 1944 was taken in Odrriçan in southern Albania before the liberation of Tirana that September. It appears in Enver Hoxha, Gju me gju me Popullin (Tirana: 8 Nëntori Publishing House, 1978) and is in the public domain.*

Hoxha's intellectual development is not clear, but his experiences throughout the 1940s fundamentally shaped his worldview and provided him with a deep sense of insecurity that he projected onto the rest of Albania. After World War II, Stalin saw Albania as nothing more than a Yugoslav puppet waiting to be annexed while the United States and Great Britain began operation BGFRIEND/Valuable Project, the first campaign of regime change of the Cold War. But the most serious threat to his position came after the liberation of Albania in 1944 when the pro-Yugoslav faction of the PPSH – backed by the Yugoslav government – attempted to remove Hoxha from leadership. Hoxha was forced to admit failings and make concessions to keep his position at the top of the party. His leadership remained insecure until 1948, the year of the Tito-Stalin split. In

that split Hoxha wasted no time in siding with his idol, Stalin, and purged his pro-Yugoslav opponents along with 25% of the party's members.

Hoxha's rule was accompanied by seven major purges, the bloodiest of which coincided with changes in political patrons as the Yugoslavs were replaced by the Soviets who were, in turn, replaced by the Chinese.

This does not mean that Hoxha's ideology was little more than window dressing for his geopolitical decision making. Nor was it his personal loyalty to Stalin's legacy *in extremis*. Hoxha published prolifically – the English translations of his memoirs total 3,400 pages while his other selected works contain an additional 2,100 – and these writings were not entirely vapid propaganda and denunciations. They explain how Hoxha saw the world, Albania, and his place in both.

Enver Hoxha was an atheist. He was also an Albanian nationalist. The two are deeply linked. Albania's diverse religious landscape led one early nationalist to write that the religion of Albanians is "Albanianism." Previous regimes had tried to overcome these divisions through religious pluralism. Hoxha preferred atheism, overseeing the destruction of 740 mosques and 665 churches between 1944 and 1985 along with hundreds of other religious sites. The policy of eradication peaked between 1967 – when Hoxha announced that Albania was the world's first atheist state – and 1976 when state atheism was enshrined into the constitution. Albanian nationalism and Marxist atheism were combined, creating the most atheistic regime of the Cold War.

Hoxha's Albanian nationalism informed much of his politics. During World War II, communist partisans had signed the Mukje agreement with non-communist nationalists, agreeing that Kosovo would remain part of Albania after the war, but Hoxha's Yugoslav patrons quickly forced him to renounce that agreement. After the war, nationalism also informed his interpretation of the place of small nations in the socialist world. Hoxha bitterly wrote about how Khrushchev proposed that Albania ought to invest in citrus fruit and other specialized agriculture as part of a greater socialist division of labor, saying that "In other words [Khrushchev] wanted Albania to be turned into a fruit-growing colony which would serve the revisionist Soviet Union just as the banana republics in Latin America serve the United States...."

These words accompanied Hoxha's dramatic denunciation of Khrushchev at the 1960 International Meeting of Communist and Workers Parties. In the Sino-Soviet split Hoxha had sided with Mao, earning him international fame and the respect of many Maoists in the burgeoning New Left, ready to embrace a youthful and energetic form of communism. Radio Tirana's broadcasts served as a rallying point for Maoists on both sides of the Iron Curtain. It was operated by Maoists from across Europe who had come to Albania for the revolutionary work and colorful international characters. One example was Kazimierz Mijal, a member of the Polish Central Committee who was sidelined by reformers after the Polish October of 1956 and fled to Albania in 1959 where he established his own party as a Maoist alternative to Poland's – communist – government.

Beyond Europe, Hoxha's Albania served as a radical model to emulate. In northern Ethiopia, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) saw socialist Albania as their political alternative to the Soviet-aligned Derg they were fighting against. The TPLF's leadership maintained that position until the end of the Cold War, viewing Albania's autarkic model as the only 'true' path towards socialism. During the Araguaia Guerrilla in rural Brazil, fighters from the Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB) listened to Radio Tirana. One PCdoB member wrote that "... revolutionary

peoples cannot but applaud the words of the great Albanian leader.... The Communist Party of Brazil has a lot to learn from the Party of Labor of Albania.” The PCdoB continued to endorse Hoxha until its leadership was assassinated in 1976. That same year, the first military mission of future Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez was as part of the force suppressing guerrillas from *Bandera Roja* (Red Flag), Venezuela’s pro-Albania Maoist party.

Mao’s death in 1976 was a turning point for Hoxha, Albania, and international Maoism. As China moved towards coexistence with the capitalist world, many western Maoists became ‘pro-Albanian Maoists,’ sometimes referred to as ‘Hoxhaists.’ The accompanying Sino-Albanian split intensified Hoxha’s personal paranoia. He first purged the PPSH of “pro-Chinese elements” and brought Albania into a period of extreme autarky. Hoxha paranoia then took its most tragic form with the suicide (or murder) of his longtime deputy, Mehmet Shehu, in 1981. The denunciations of Shehu that followed form the backbone of Hoxha’s legacy in Albania. By the 1970s he was no longer involved in the day-to-day running of the country, although he maintained real power behind the scenes. While Hoxha’s death in 1985 was an significant moment in Albanian history, it did not signal a serious change in Albania. Change would wait until 1991.

Traces of Hoxha’s international legacy still exist today. The *Bandera Roja* guerrillas in Venezuela were inspired by another ‘Hoxhaist’ party in Ecuador that briefly had one of its members become environmental minister in 2003. In 2011, three members of the Worker’s Party, still calling themselves antirevisionists and Marxist-Leninists, were elected to Tunisia’s constituent assembly. Hoxha’s legacy has never been confined exclusively to Albania, nor has it disappeared.

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### *Resources:*

#### Marxists Internet Archive

The [Marxist Internet Archive](#) is a great repository for translated materials by various Marxist writers. Hoxha's collected works in English are easily accessible as well as a plethora of other authors. The archive also hosts the "[Encyclopedia of Anti-Revisionism On-Line](#)" which contains a wide verity of primary sources from all over the world that have been translated into English.

#### *MAO Projekt*

Dietmar Kesten and Jürgen Schröder's [MAO Projekt](#) also contains a great verity of German language materials printed by various extreme-Left groups in west Germany, including pro-Albanian Maoist organizations like the newspaper of the Society of the Friends of Albania.

#### Hoxha's Death

The English language announcement of Enver Hoxha's death on [Radio Tirana](#) and his [televised funeral](#) have both been preserved on YouTube. They offer students and scholars a window into the world that Hoxha helped create, both for international consumption on the radio and domestically for those few Albanians who owned a TV.