



10. nonviolent struggle in Kosovo/a

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At a meeting of the group on Thursday 13 March, 1997, Howard Clark talked about the campaign for self-determination in Kosovo/a. Present were: Christina Arber, Tricia Allen, John Brierley, Howard Clark, Michael Randle, Carol Rank, Andrew Rigby.

Note: In August 2000, Howard published a book *Civil Resistance in Kosovo* (Pluto Press, London and Sterling, Virginia) which deals in more detail with many of the issues raised in his talk and describes and analyses subsequent events.

Presentation - [Howard Clark](#) [2]

Howard's application to the Albert Einstein Institution had been circulated in advance and formed the basis of his presentation. He identified four phases in the Kosovo/a story he would be dealing with. The issues he would be taking up were non-provocation, civil resistance and its relationship to the constructive programme, and dialogue and coexistence.

Phase I: the period 1986 to 1990, coinciding with the rise to power of Milošević and the beginnings of the post-Tito disintegration

Milošević during this period was banging the drum over Kosovo/a which has a special mythic importance for Serbs. In 1989, the six-hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, the bones -supposedly - of King Lazar, who died in the battle, were paraded around the province and ceremonially reburied to show that Kosovo/a had always been Serbian. Nothing could more dramatically illustrate the necrophiliac dimension of Serbian culture. Leading up to that, Milošević used the persistent Serbian emigration from Kosovo/a, and the grievances of those who left, to create a nationalist authoritarian politics capable of taking over from the previous communist authoritarianism.

One political commentator had divided Yugoslavia into two blocs: the Serbian bloc of Milošević, and the Slovene bloc, including Kosovo/a. Slovenia was the most liberal and Western oriented of the republics. It was there that a genuine peace movement first manifested itself, and you had a gay movement, youth counter-culture and so forth. This alternative movement in Slovenia informally allied itself with the Albanians in Kosovo/a at that time who were having various rights taken away from them, culminating in the complete loss of autonomy in the 1989-90 period. The Albanians at this time were beginning to form some of their own institutions in a non-communist way - including the establishment of the League for a Democratic Kosova. (LDK) There was also a growing demand within Kosovo/a for it to have the status of a republic, rather than being an autonomous province of Serbia.

Phase 2: The Loss of Autonomy and the Establishment of Parallel Institutions.

The final annulment of the province's autonomous status was followed by massive sackings - figures range from 120,000 to 140,000 Albanian workers sacked, representing 70-80 per cent of the Albanian workforce. The sackings provoked huge public protests among Kosovo/a Albanians, and fierce repression. The army was brought in - the first time the Yugoslav People's Army had been used against the civilian population - and tanks were used to close down the parliament. The last mass protest, on the issue of education, took place in October 1992 when it is claimed that around half-a-million people protested, roughly a quarter of the entire population of the province. After that the leadership decided that mass protests involved too many risks.

To give an example of the kind of provocation the Albanian population were subjected to, the Serbian police would go to a village in search of weapons. If they didn't find any in a house they would beat up the inhabitants because they were sure they had weapons somewhere and were hiding them. If they did find weapons they could take the



people to the police station and beat them up there. This was happening repeatedly throughout villages in Kosovo/a. Part of Howard's emotional commitment to Kosovo/a arose from an account of one such raid the day before his first visit. The village had been subjected to a dawn raid. Twenty eight people were taken from their bed and made to stand all day in the open in bare feet in a temperature of minus four degrees and then beaten up in the police station. He was greatly impressed by the fact that people told him they were determined to remain nonviolent despite that provocation, even though it was clear that among the population there was not a theory around nonviolence.

On a subsequent visit people told him of another raid in which villagers surrounded a police car and forced the police to release two people they had arrested. Howard's initial reaction was, 'wow, a victory for nonviolent action!' - but unfortunately the next day the police came back with a lot more cars and beat up many people. So it was clear that restraint had to be exercised even in responding in a basic human way when people were arrested.

It was during this second phase that parallel institutions were established. When the Albanian schools were closed down, they set up parallel schools in their homes or in any building they could use. The Albanian doctors and medical staff were sacked, and doctors instructed to use only Serbian in communicating with patients. In response the Mother Teresa medical centres were established - not connected with her movement but named after her as she is Albanian. A co-ordinating committee of political parties was also established. In 1992 in parallel elections, the LDK was elected as the government of the province, and Rugova elected as president.

Phase Three: The 'quiet' or passive phase.

During this phase the Albanians relied essentially on the parallel institutions to underpin wholesale non-cooperation, and on small businesses started by sacked people which enabled some kind of economic life to get under way. The energy of the leadership was put into trying to get international support for Kosovo/a while the parallel institutions did their best to meet people's needs. There was a widespread fear at this period that war would come to Kosovo/a as it already had done to Croatia and Bosnia.

Start of a New Phase of Activism:

Kosovo/a was emerging from this quiet period in two ways. The previous year saw the first political assassinations and bomb attacks, allegedly by Albanians though the identity of the 'Kosova Liberation Army' (KLA), which claimed responsibility for them was far from clear. This body had not issued a single political statement, but simply claimed responsibility for actions which in fact played into the hands of Milošević?. There had been a bomb explosion the previous week while Howard was in Kosovo/a which injured Albanians and occurred near an Albanian school when the children were coming out. The timing of the incidents too tended to be rather helpful to the Serb authorities.

The other way in which the situation was changing was that the leadership of the LDK was being openly challenged. Adem Demaçi had assumed leadership of the Parliamentary Party of Kosovo/a and if there were parallel elections to the official elections later this year, he would be standing as a rival candidate to Rugova for the presidency. Demaçi advocated a campaign of public protests including civil disobedience, and making common cause with the democracy movement inside Serbia. On the other hand he favoured moderating the demands of the Albanian movement. It was not clear where all this would lead to, but the one-party rule of the LDK was under challenge both from people who might favour armed struggle and from the Demaçi wing.

Issues Howard would examine in his research

a) The policy of non-provocation and enduring.

Howard was interested to look at how people had managed to restrain themselves for so long. One analysis suggested that the threat of war left the Kosovars with little room for manoeuvre. Milošević?, it was suggested, would have wanted to provoke the Albanian population and welcomed some violent response to the repression; this was so widely understood that people had the discipline to be restrained. Another analysis suggested the restraint stemmed from Albanian patriarchal culture which was able to enforce a kind of nonviolent discipline. John Alcock [a lecturer at Bradford University with a specialist knowledge of the Balkan region] in a letter to Howard



argued that traditional Albanian culture emphasised a disciplined manliness. Another factor in the situation was that LDK operated a one party system and exercised total control of the media which people in Kosovo/a had access to. It had an authoritarian structure, in many respects efficiently organised.

b) Parallel Structures v Constructive Programme

Howard had been surprised to find that the Italian researcher Alberto l'Abate, currently in Kosovo/a, referred to the parallel structures as the 'constructive programme'. Howard himself had stopped doing that because in Gandhian terminology the constructive programme was supposed to prefigure the kind of society you wanted and be a step towards building it. However, the foreign language teaching in the parallel schools covered English, German, French, Italian in that order. Serbo-Croatian, or Serbian - the language of the oppressor but also the language of the neighbour - was not taught at all. Albanian was missed off the Serbian curriculum, so now Serbian was missed out from that of the alternative schools. This was creating a generation of young people who were not able to communicate with their Serb neighbours. One young person he talked to said that the longer the parallel education system went on, the more conservative it was becoming. LDK had tried to screen out certain material from the school texts, and were insisting that only one particular comic should be distributed in schools. There was a hostility to pluralism in the LDK which was being reflected in the parallel education system.

Another problem arose from the fact that the Albanians refused to register the alternative institutions on the grounds that to do so implied recognition of the authority of the Yugoslav government. This caused severe difficulties for foreign and international agencies which wanted to cooperate with the alternative institutions - such as Oxfam and Soros - since they were obliged under the laws of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to channel all funds through a registered agency and present proper accounts for them to the authorities. It was a genuine dilemma for the Albanians. Their determination not to register the alternative institutions underlined the fact that they saw them as part of a civil resistance and non-cooperation movement rather than in terms of a constructive programme. Howard cited the experience of the person responsible for Soros' medical distribution in the region who had given some high-tech equipment to one of the few state schools teaching only Albanian pupils - a school for deaf children. They had stamped the receipt for the equipment he brought them with the words 'Republic of Kosova' - which meant it would not be accepted by the authorities when they examined how the aid had been distributed. Oxfam had similar stories to tell. There was a permanent clash between making a stand and trying to meet people's actual needs.

c) Relations with Serbs:

In Kosovo/a Albanians and Serbs had always avoided each other. It was not like in Bosnia or other parts of Yugoslavia where the different groups had got on well. One of the leading Albanian proponents of dialogue, and a supporter of making common cause with the democracy movement in Serbia, had remarked to him that in contrast to Croatia and Bosnia they had not needed a war to separate the groups. He asserted that the only basis on which Serbs and Albanians could co-exist was hatred coupled with respect. Thus there should be no illusions about ethnic harmony being on the agenda!

The Zajedno leadership had sent a message to Kosovo/a warning the Albanian leaders not to be too enthusiastic in their support as this could lead to a backlash against Zajedno. And within Kosovo/a there was a split between the leadership of the LDK and people like Demaçi who had welcomed the democracy movement. Stasha Zajovic's article in the March issue of Peace News went into this to some extent.

There had been a number of initiatives aimed at furthering Serbian-Albanian cooperation. The LDK had squashed one literacy scheme because it involved both communities, but Howard was not sure how far the leadership were simply bowing to an 'apartheid mentality' at the community level or how far they shared this mentality. For instance, the independent youth group, the Post-Pessimists, who were keen to involve Serbs, had met with quite a bit of abuse from the Albanian community. But both Rugova and Demaçi visited them and gave them a personal endorsement.

Through the Balkan Peace Team, Howard was mainly working on this issue of Albanian-Serb dialogue. His analysis led him to believe that the Albanians of Kosovo/a needed to look at the 'chain of nonviolence' in their struggle. This implied searching out Serbs of conscience who were willing to stand up. Few Serbs had been prepared to do this when the mass sackings of Albanians took place; in fact he had heard of only one university teacher who had done so - and she ended up having to leave Kosovo/a and go to Belgrade. There was also a university Dean who had insisted on publishing the work of his former Albanian colleagues as a mark of recognition. In general, however, there was little social solidarity, partly as the result of the 'apartheid mentality', partly due to intimidation after decades of authoritarian rule.



Despite the difficulties, enlisting support within the Serbian community ought, Howard believed, to be a key strategic objective of the Kosovars (Kosovo/a Albanians). The easiest place to find this support was within marginal groups. The Women in Black in Belgrade were very good and were about to resume their monthly vigil over Kosovo/a. During the pro-democracy demonstrations they carried placards about Kosovo/a and said they had not encountered the usual hostility. However, even they had problems about actually going to Kosovo/a and doing anything there. They had been planning a visit this year, with Balkan Peace Team people acting as message carriers, but the whole thing got scotched when someone told the LDK women's forum about it. The latter felt that these radical feminists were not what was wanted in Kosovo/a.

However the BPT volunteers had achieved a significant breakthrough with a peace group in Nis, a small town in between Belgrade and Prishtina. Kosovars were often taken to Nis for political trials and quite a few were imprisoned there. The new initiative was aimed at providing hospitality to prison visitors from Kosovo/a arriving to Nis. This would be quite a sensational development in that context. The Balkan Peace Team had initiated a discussion with the peace group and after two or three months the latter decided they would like a workshop to address some of the issues. A member of the Balkan Peace Team coordinating committee did a workshop with them on prejudice where the key role-play involved one of the Nis Serbs being seen with an Albanian in the street by a neighbour and having to deal with the reaction. Following the workshop, the group said they wanted to go to Prishtina, and Howard had been trying to find people there from both the Albanian and Serb communities who would like to see them. It might be six months before the project came to fruition, but ultimately there should be a place in Nis where Albanians could go for a cup of tea when they visited the prison. It was a delicate operation. If the group going to Prishtina had a bad experience, or if the first Albanians who went to Nis had a hard time, the initiative could fail.

Howard concluded with an anecdote about his time in Prishtina. He invited a Serbian conscientious objector friend, Dragan, who was studying in Prishtina to accompany him to a ballroom dancing class with Albanian Youth Action. Dragan, though a punk and someone who detests ballroom dancing, agreed to go as he knew no Albanians and this was an opportunity to meet some. Afterwards they went on to a disco, where it was immediately clear that one of the Albanians who holds an important post in the LDK youth movement was extremely tense and uncomfortable. He had not minded dropping by Dragan's flat on the way to the disco, but it was another matter for him to be seen at the disco with someone who was clearly not one of the set, and could easily be identified as a Serb. The incident underlined the point that you could not expect to see friendship between the Albanian and Serb population of Kosovo/a but at best some form of coexistence.

NARP Discussion

Aims of Miloševi? and the Albanians in Kosovo/a

Andrew asked about the respective aims of Miloševi? and the Albanians in Kosovo/a. Howard said Miloševi? was after power. Ideally he and many other Serbs would want the ethnic Albanians to leave - for Albania, or Turkey or wherever - and for Serbs to move in. The Albanians had a birthrate of around thirty per thousand, and so they were becoming an increasingly higher proportion of the population in an area Serbs regarded as sacred. Periodically the Serbs had a drive to alter the demographic structure of Kosovo/a. Conscription in Kosovo/a, for example, was not used to get Albanians to undergo military training or to fight but to pressure them into leaving the country. It amounted to a form of ethnic cleansing.

The Albanians in Kosovo/a wanted independence. Some probably wanted a Greater Albania, with Albania and Macedonia, but for the most part Albanian Kosovars who knew Albania realised that they were better off where they were. The editor of a recent collection of essays entitled *Confrontation or Coexistence* argued that the Serbs needed to recognize that demographically Kosovo/a was lost to them, and the Albanian population needed to give up any idea that they could be independent of Yugoslavia.

Howard then explained that the Albanians in Kosovo/a and those in Albania itself were the same people, spoke the same language - though a different dialect - and that family relationships often extended across the state boundary. The ethnic Albanians in Kosovo/a were non-Slavs and in Tito's Yugoslavia were never given the same rights as other national groups. They were treated as a minority rather than as a fully constituted nationality like the Serbs, Croats, Macedonians and Slovenes. Kosovo/a's autonomy was as a province of Serbia and their initial demand



was to be a republic with the same rights as the other republics, including the constitutional right to secede. During the Second World War some of the Kosovo/a Albanians had collaborated with the Italian occupiers, so in the post-war period strategic considerations also came into play.

Prospects for success of civil resistance

Asked whether he thought the strategy of passive resistance coupled with building alternative institutions could succeed, Howard said he thought the Kosovo/a Albanians had been too passive during the last phase. They had been active at the level of trying to win international support, and they were economically active in building up their own economy, and in maintaining the parallel system. Their strategy was to endure in the hope that the situation would change to their advantage. But increasingly people were becoming impatient with that, young people especially because there was little for them to do. At the parallel university, ten people often applied for every one place. In the scientific courses, there were no laboratories or equipment. The average age of the population of Kosovo/a was 24, so it was not difficult to imagine the frustration that was building up amongst the youth.

Another frustration for the young was that political structures were based very much on age. A 27 year old woman recently appointed to the board of the Council for the Defence of Human Rights told him she was the only person under 50 on the board of twelve people. The secretary of LDK youth said they still did not have a single representative on the Board of LDK even though their own age limit was 30. These kinds of frustrations were growing, and placed a time limit on the viability of the parallel structures. Moreover, Austria was the only country that recognized diplomas from the parallel schools to qualify people for university entrance. This was a political move on Austria's part because in fact the people coming out of the alternative schools were not as well educated as they could be.

Howard noted, too, that the situation had changed in the last two months. It had been on the cards earlier this year that there might be civil disobedience in the form of teachers occupying the schools; now this was totally off the agenda. Events in Albania were having an impact, though people assured him that the violence there would not spill over into Kosovo/a. But the events did have an impact on politics in Kosovo/a because President Berisha of Albania had been expressing his support for Adem Demaçi, Rugova's rival. Now Rugova was criticising Berisha. Another change in the situation was that there had been a new crackdown by the Serbian authorities following a car bomb attack on the rector of Prishtina university. It seemed, too, that Serb emigration was again on the increase. Milošević's attempt to encourage Serbs to move into Kosovo/a, including refugee Serbs from Croatia, was not succeeding. Serbs simply did not want to go there and were refusing to do so. And those who did go were sometimes involved in incidents with the local Serb population.

Parallel Institutions and the Gandhian constructive programme

Carol recalled that nonviolence theory postulated various stages in a nonviolent struggle - protest, noncooperation, civil disobedience, the building of alternative institutions - until eventually people became ungovernable. It seemed from what Howard said that the parallel institutions weren't really functioning as a constructive programme. Howard responded that the parallel institutions were not Gandhian ones. The teaching style in the alternative schools was conservative, with kids sitting in rows. The whole culture stood in need of greater pluralism, and there were now some efforts to introduce this. The magazine, *Koha* (Time), founded and edited by Veton Surroi, had been openly discussing many issues which were previously off the agenda, including the reasons girlie magazines were now so popular in Kosovo/a. Veton, who set up the Albanian service of the BBC a few years back, now had funds to start up a daily paper and was training young journalists to work for it. Another journalist on the magazine had started organising opinion polls asking basic attitude questions. These polls showed that people held a variety of views on political and social issues and that, for instance, a certain proportion didn't want any Serbs at all living in Kosovo/a. The idea that the people should have a voice was something of a novelty. The more pluralism was introduced into Albanian political structures, the more they were likely to reflect the kind of things we would want to see in a parallel society.

Andrew said that Howard seemed to be defining constructive programme in purely Gandhian terms. If the constructive programme meant building the structures for the kind of society you wanted to see, then the parallel institutions in Kosovo/a met that criteria since most of the population wanted an Albanian nationalist society. The



parallel institutions reflected the culture from which they came and their aspiration to have their own national state. Howard said the institutions were not democratic - and if you did not have a democratic structure you could not say that the people were deciding what they wanted.

Andrew responded that he could see that the alternative institutions did not constitute a constructive programme in a Gandhian sense. However, the Albanians of Kosovo/a were creating a zone of autonomy where the rule of Milošević did not run, and in that sense the parallel institutions were part of the resistance and of the positive programme. They refused to learn Serbian for the same reason that the Poles refused to learn Russian, or the Tamils refused to learn Hindi - they saw it as the language of the oppressor. He did not see why you should not use the term 'constructive programme' because you didn't approve of the political programme. Howard replied that he had stopped using the term 'constructive programme' because to him that was a Gandhian term which implied values related to nonviolence. In Kosovo/a, the programme was hierarchical and undemocratic and alienating to the youth who were its principal recipients. Moreover, the official line of LDK was that they wanted a state which would respect the rights of the Serbian minority living there, and in that respect the programme did not reflect the professed values of the Albanian opposition. The previous autonomous administration of Kosovo/a had a policy of bi-lingualism. The Serbian authorities had made Serbian the only official language, using Cyrillic script for public signs, and the Albanians had responded by not using Serbian at all.

Michael asked about how much difference it would make if a more strictly Gandhian type of constructive programme were adopted. It might perhaps be more effective at the level of linking up with sympathetic Serbs, but he was not sure how it could contribute to making Kosovo/a ungovernable. Howard said that in a situation where non-cooperation was not particularly effective - a situation where it suited Milošević to have an illiterate population or for the population to move away altogether - you had to look for different methods, and a strategy of cultivating links with potential Serb allies.

Responding to a further question on how more active resistance, including civil disobedience, might prove effective, Howard referred to the incident during the Belgrade demonstrations when the opposition leader Vuk Drasković had called for a one minute silence to commemorate the death of a teacher in Kosovo/a at the hands of the Serb police. One could imagine that if teachers occupied the schools and faced police repression this might elicit a response from the more democratically minded Serbs and from the international community and test Milošević's ability to repress the Albanian opposition.

Possibility of links with Serbs

Carol asked about the potential for alliances between Kosovo/a Albanians and the opposition in Serbia. She agreed with Howard that if you took out the element of nonviolence from the constructive programme it lost its meaning. If you were not nonviolent then you did not care about winning over the hearts of the enemy and the goal might be to create your own ethnic state and get rid of all Serbs through ethnic cleansing. Howard said you could expect more friendship between the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo/a and the Serbs in Belgrade, than between the Albanians and Serbs within Kosovo/a. The latter were cut-off and somewhat estranged even from the rest of the Serb population. The Kosovo/a Serbs had also been let down by Milošević who had done nothing to promote their interests but only used them to bolster his own power.

Howard could nevertheless envisage cooperation between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo/a at the level of problem solving and conflict resolution. Oxfam, for instance, decided to fund a library in a mixed village, and then successfully negotiated with the two communities to ensure that it was stocked with both Serbian and Albanian books. A few youth initiatives were more ambitious. The Post-Pessimists were doing a CD Rom of Serbian and Albanian roots music. Some of the Albanians who supported pluralism and wanted to build civil society had contacts with the Serbian dissidents in Belgrade. Vesna Pešić, one of the leaders of the Zajedno opposition in Belgrade, was on friendly terms with minority elements within the Albanian opposition in Kosovo/a. A number of Albanian women had also attended the Women in Black event in Vojvodina last year. However, there was some accounting to be done by the Serbs sympathetic to the claims of Kosovo/a because most of them dropped the issue during the recent war years.

Possibilities of a settlement



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Andrew said that as he understood the situation no Serb government would be willing to countenance an independent Kosovo/a. If that was the case, what kind of settlement might be possible? Howard said there were various constitutional proposals being touted around - making Kosovo/a an international protectorate, establishing a new Balkan federation, bringing Kosovo/a and Macedonia into a Yugoslav federation on an equal basis with Serbia and Montenegro, or establishing an even larger federation to include Albania; some form of 'autonomy plus'. There was also a proposal for a 'Belgian solution' for Kosovo/a, that is creating separate institutions for Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo/a just as you had separate institutions for the Flemish and Walloons in Belgium. More important, however, than constitutional arrangements was the peace process itself. If you had a genuine peace process you would come to a constitutional settlement, if only on the basis of what the Palestinian Ambassador in London termed a 'mutually unacceptable solution', that is a solution that was only palatable because the other side found it just as hard to stomach.

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