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## Special issue SERBIA and KOSOVA

# Free Albin Kurti!

**By Radoslav Pavlovic**  
**Serbian worker and trade unionist**  
**18 March 2000**

On 13 March the Nis district court in southern Serbia condemned the former Kosovar Albanian student leader, Albin Kurti, to 15 years in prison.

He was found guilty of "threatening the territorial integrity of the Republic of Former Yugoslavia" and of "criminal association with a view to hostile activity in connection with terrorism".

The deputy public prosecutor had withdrawn a more serious charge, saying: "although the accused has an extremely poor opinion of the Serbian state and recognises neither its organs nor its courts, I find that he has committed a less serious offence". (See *Danas*, 14 March 2000.)

He got 15 years for a "less serious" offence! The legal formula "in connection with terrorism" frees the court from any obligation to prove that a terrorist act was actually committed. Albin Kurti was really sentenced for his political activity in 1997, when he led peaceful demonstrations by Albanian students demanding the right to public education.

We Serbs are no longer shocked by the actions of a malicious state which we know almost as well as do its Albanian victims: a corrupt and arbitrary police state which flouts the most elementary social and political rights and protects fascist gangs, sowing war all around and preparing a civil war within Serbia itself.

During the NATO war, Slobodan Milosevic and Clinton could pretend to be chivalrous foes, quickly and unconditionally freeing spies and prisoners of war. The attacks on civilian targets continued, of course. But neither of them showed much sympathy for Albin Kurti, who did no more than organise peaceful demonstrations, or for Flora Brovina, a writer and humanitarian activist, who was sentenced to 12 years in prison last December.

**Why?** Because they refused to abandon their support for freedom for their people.

Albin Kurti was an honours student in Prishtina when he took the leadership of the Albanian students' intifada in 1997. He did it with such dignity that the Belgrade daily "Nasa Borba" awarded him the prize for tolerance on the nomination of his Serbian colleague and namesake Miroslav Hristodulo.

Then he worked for Adem Demaci as the public voice of the Kosovan Liberation Army (KLA), resigning with him when the majority opted for an alliance with imperialism in 1998. Both

of them refused to make an amalgam between the Serbian people and the regime, insisting on a dialogue and on the two peoples living together. They rejected the Rambouillet "agreement" which offered no prospect of Albanian independence but trampled Serbian independence underfoot, allowing NATO to act exactly as it liked in Serbia.

Proud and independent, he dismissed the Serbian lawyer who was appointed to defend him and stated right from the start that he only recognised the jurisdiction of his own people. He was one of the 1,500 hostages the Serbian soldiery took with them when they left Kosovo to use as bargaining counters, and whom the great international diplomats easily forgot in their cynical horse-trading with the Balkan tyrant. His only "crime" was to stay with his own people in their hour of need, just like Demaci in the cellars of Prishtina, trapped between the American bombs and the ravages of the Serbian police and para-militaries.

It is no use counting on the so-called "democratic" Serbian opposition to speak up for Milosevic's 1,500 hostages, imprisoned since June with neither a trial nor any precise charge. Expect nothing from the monarchist Vuk Draskovic, who was a minister in Milosevic's government while he was hot in pursuit of the Kosovars' "separatist terrorism", nor Kostunica, the anti-western nationalist democrat, nor Djindjic, no less pro-western and nationalist-democratic, who fled the war in Montenegro.

Place no reliance upon General Persic, former chief of the general staff, who started the Bosnian war by bombarding Mostar and who ended up as the newest recruit to democracy. Although he stated recently that it would be impossible to live together with these "savage" Albanians, he is a feted guest in western capitals.

None of them will strive for peace and friendship between Serbs and Albanians, or raise their voices for Flora Brovina and Albin Kurti who truly express the future of the Albanian people.

It is up to the democratic workers' movement in Serbia and internationally to act. Peace will only come to Kosovo once the Albanian hostages have been freed and when the workers of the two peoples build a bridge of mutual confidence

● **Freedom for Albin Kurti!**



**Albin Kurti born Prishtina 24 March 1975. Finished high school 1993 with excellent grades and started studies at the Electrical Faculty of University of Prishtina. An honours student.**

**August 1997 became a member of the presidium of the Students' Independent Union of the University of Prishtina (SIUUP) and its international officer.**

**A member of the committee which organised peaceful demonstrations for the return of the University's buildings occupied by Serb lecturers and students. Attended meetings in Washington, New York, Brussels, Copenhagen and the European parliament in Strasbourg on behalf of SIUUP.**

**August 1998 became a translator in the office of Adem Demaci, General Political Representative of UCK. Early in March 1999 quit all activities at SIUUP and in office of GRP and continued university studies.**

**During bombing, remained in Prishtina until arrested by Serbian police on 27 April 1999. 2 May 1999 transferred to Lipjan prison where he was tortured.**

**In June 1999 transferred to Pozarevac prison in Serbia and subsequently to Nis prison. Details supplied by his brother Arianit Kurti.**

**For further information visit website at: <http://www.khao.org/appkosova/appkosova-akurti>**



**Dr Flora Brovina (50), remained in Prishtina during NATO bombing. Arrested by plain-clothes Serbian police outside her apartment in Prishtina 20 April 1999.**

**Pediatrician and poet. Founder and head of the League of Albanian Women. Charged with providing food, clothing and medical supplies to Kosova Liberation Army (UCK) and planning terrorist acts. Actually provided medical service to women and children in Prishtina.**

**First held at Lipjan prison in Kosova, where new prisoners had to run gauntlet of baton-wielding guards. Former prisoners at Lipjan report regular beatings and maltreatment of prisoners.**

**10 June, two days before entry of NATO ground troops into Kosova, transferred to prison in Serbia, where she had difficulty obtaining medical treatment for weak heart. Her husband, Ajri Begu, was allowed to visit her in prison at Pozarevac, Serbia, but never unaccompanied and forced to converse in Serbian and not in their native Albanian.**

**For further information about Dr. Flora Brovina, see Human Rights Watch website at:**

**<http://www.hrw.org/press/1999/> and <http://www.freealbincurti.com/>**

**THE need for international proletarian solidarity with the workers of former Yugoslavia is greater than ever. Workers International Press has therefore devoted the entire April issue to material from Serbia and Kosova. We not only provide the clearest possible insight into the situation in the area, but also campaign to establish real links of solidarity in the work to rebuild the international movement of the working class.**

### Inside this issue

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# WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!

## Workers' International call:

# Support 'Trepca' Union

**TRADES UNIONISTS** in Western Europe and elsewhere have already responded to appeals for help by the Independent "Trepca" Miners' Union in Kosovo.

In September last year, union leader Xhafer Nuli issued an urgent appeal on behalf of the miners:

"Throughout these last years our trade union has tried to protect miners' property and assert the right of miners to return to work. For several years this protest was directed at the Milosevic regime. Now we have a problem — French KFOR troops have occupied our mines and metal processing plants and refused to allow us access ...

"Despite our protests we remain locked out. So we want to step up our protests and for this we need international solidarity and support. We are planning more protest marches and if we are not successful we are prepared, eventually, to start a hunger strike outside the mine gates".

(The "Trepca" Miners'

Union case is described in greater detail elsewhere on these pages in the interviews with Xhafer Nuli and Aziz Abrashi. For the full text of Nuli's appeal see Workers International Press No. 17, October 1999).

The issue is a simple matter of principled trade union internationalism. Let the "Trepca" workers back into the mines and metal processing plants from which Milosevic's thugs ejected them nearly ten years ago! Stop international asset-strippers from taking the complex over and squeezing it dry! Let Kosovo work to restore her shattered economy!

Workers International supports the international campaign to help the Trepca miners. We broadly agree with proposals being discussed by Ayuda Obrera in Catalonia which include:

- A tour of western European unions by "Trepca" Miners Union members and representatives of the Serb opposition trade union

Nezavisnost to familiarise workers in the west with the issue and the people involved. This would create conditions for success in the next two stages.

- A campaign to help the "Trepca" union meet its most immediate needs so it can organise its work. This would include providing (1) a 4x4 vehicle to keep in touch with the local branches in surrounding towns and villages (2) a telephone (3) a fax machine (4) a computer set up for internet use (5) a printer (6) a photocopier and (7) wages for a full-time worker.

- Building on the above two stages, co-ordinated rallies across Europe involving petitions, faxes, emails and delegations to co-incide with a fresh action by "Trepca" members to gain access to the plants and the Stari Terg mines.

Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International will work with others to make such a campaign a success.

Workers International has over the last decade

taken practical steps to defend the victims of Milosevic's war on Bosnia, initiating Workers' Aid for Bosnia, working in it with others, and pioneering the first Workers' Aid convoys into that country.

In order to restore trade union and working class solidarity across the different parts of the former Yugoslavia, Workers International members led the organisation of a successful conference of teachers' unions held in Budapest in 1997 and proposed the international conference of trade unionists later run by the Tuzla miners' union.

While fully supporting the right of Albanian Kosovars to fight for their independence, Workers International completely opposed the barbaric NATO bombing campaign against Serbia and Kosovo. It is first of all to the allies who joined us in a political bloc around these principles that we turn with an appeal now to make a success of the campaign in support of the Trepca miners.

**These interviews were carried out by Max Brym of the Munich-based "Solidarity Initiative with the Trepca Miners' Union" on 28 January 2000 in the office of the Independent Miners' Union of Mitrovica/Kosova. That day the union held a mass rally to commemorate the tenth anniversary of its foundation and the 11th anniversary of the hunger-strike against the abolition of Kosovo's autonomous status. Until 1989 Aziz Abrashi was the director of the Trepca industrial complex, and the workers once more recognise him as such. Xhafer Nuli is the president of the Mitrovica miners' union.**

Mr. Abrashi, tell us something about Trepca and about yourself.

Trepca's full name is Xehtaro-Metalurgjik-Chemical-Combine Trepca-Mitrovica. Until 1989 Trepca spanned two republics and two provinces of the former Yugoslavia. There were various factories and departments in Serbia, Montenegro, Vojvodina and Kosovo. In 1989 it employed altogether 21,500 workers in Kosovo alone.

They mined non-ferrous metals, lead, zinc, silver, gold, cadmium and others. Kishnica, Novo Berdo, Ajvali and Prishtina depended on the raw materials extracted in Trepca, and the mines in Kapaonik too. Then the ores went to two metal-refining locations. Lead was refined in Zvecan and zinc was refined in Mitrovica. The refining capacities were based on the supplies of ore. There are factories for making motor vehicle and industrial accumulators and cadmium batteries. Many factories were built in Kosovo in connection with Trepca, like the arms factory in Skenderaj and the zinc-cladding and pigment factories in Vucitern. Besides the processing plants there was also the research institute. Trepca has its own research institute to deal with the development of the combine.

Besides that there is a data-processing centre, Trepca-Commercial for trading in metals and products, the medical centre and the community canteens.

The Trepca complex was a profitable enterprise, the third largest in the world and the second largest in Europe as far as production of these metals is concerned. In 1989, after the events that followed the change in the constitution, the mine-workers locked themselves into the mines and in that way protested against the Milosevic regime and against the intention to change the constitution of Kosovo. The intention was to degrade Kosovo and make the Albanians into second-class people. The mine-workers were on strike for eight days and nights. They did come up out of the pits in the end, but they were arrested all the same. I was arrested and so was Azem Vllasi, who was president of the League of Communists in Kosovo until October 1988, and Burhan Kavaja, the director of the mine. We spent 14 months in detention. **What is the situation in Trepca and Mitrovica today? Who does the firm belong to?**

After the war was over we wanted to go back to work, but for the last 9 months UNMIK and KFOR have not let us into our factories. They say it is

## German Initiative grows

The Solidarity Initiative with the "Trepca" Miners' Union has campaigned among trade unions affiliated to the DGB, the German Trade Union Congress, for solidarity with the miners' union.

They have won support among local leaders in the main German industrial union, IG Metall, and in the public service workers' union OeTV. They have also gained support among media workers (IG Medien) and education workers (Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft GEW).

The Solidarity Initiative proposed exchange visits to Mitrovica by the DGB and individual unions in order to propagate an accurate picture of the situation in Kosovo among workers in Germany.

They called upon the many German trade union newspapers and magazines to publicise the appeals from the Trepca trade unionists among the membership.

They proposed collections in order to provide material support for the locked-out workers and their families and finally a cam-

paign to build up pressure in the political and social sphere calling for the miners to be granted access to their plants and control over them.

Trades unionist in Brazil have also responded to the Kosovar trade unionists appeals (see "Brazil solidarity with Kosovo miners", Workers International Press No. 21, February 2000). Trade union activists in Brazil have agreed to:

- to organise delegations to visit Kosovo in order to obtain first-hand information

- to distribute the Trepca miners' appeal in trade union publications and among the membership

- to organise material aid for the Trepca miners, including collecting donations

- to influence leading figures in the Brazilian unions and in society to obtain the miners' return to their plant.

Max Brym, a member of the Munich-based Solidarity Initiative, visited Kosovo recently, and provided some of the material published in this issue of Workers International Press.

## Spain

### Restoring the links between workers

"AYUDA OBRERA" (Workers' Aid) in Spain has worked hard over several years to assist workers and trade unionists in Bosnia, especially the miners in the area around Tuzla.

Ayuda Obrera, which has strong support in the two main union confederations, the Comisiones Obreras (CCOO)

and the GCT, has always been keen to promote the restoration of solidarity between workers and trade unionists in the different parts of the former Yugoslavia.

In April, a Spanish delegation was invited to attend a conference in Serbia organised by the engineering workers' section of

the independent trade union Nezavisnost. Ayuda Obrera and co-thinkers elsewhere have worked to forge international solidarity with that union.

The delegation consisted of representatives of Ayuda Obrera, the CGT and the Comisiones Obreras. However, officials at Belgrade airport prevented the

delegation from entering the country.

Workers International Press condemns this high-handed and anti-working class action by the Belgrade regime.

The delegation sent the following message to the conference before it was forced to return.

## Greetings

Greetings to the Nezavisnost engineering workers' congress, Belgrade airport, 14 April 2000

Dear comrades,

First of all, please accept our fraternal greetings on behalf of the trade unions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which we represent. We hoped to be with you physically but, even though our visas were in order, we were prevented from doing so. In our opinion that is a sign of the weakness and international isolation of the Milosevic regime. It vividly reminds us of the last days of Franco's dictatorship in Spain.

But no one can prevent relations between workers in different countries. Our unions participated in demonstrations in Spain against the NATO bombing,

against Milosevic and for the right of Kosovo to self-determination.

We proudly support the right of Serbian workers to freedom and to build your own trade unions and fight for wages and a decent life.

Just as we support Serbian workers we also support those in Kosovo, Bosnia ... and the whole of the Balkans. Because we are convinced that only international co-operation between workers can rebuild the bridges broken by the war and thus achieve a durable peace. We will persevere in this work.

A firm embrace to all,  
Alfons Blech, Diego Rejon,  
Roser Pineda,

For the unions CCOO and CGT and the NGOs Foundation for Peace and Solidarity and Workers Aid Balkans.

## Reply

As a protest and a mark of respect to the absent fraternal delegates, the congress left three prominently empty chairs. The Milosevic regime's high-handed action received a good deal of unfavourable comment on television and in the national press.

This is the reply to the fraternal greetings by Nezavisnost engineering workers' section president Milan Nikolic:

Dear colleagues and friends Alfons, Diego and Roser,

I am sorry very deep and I apologize because you had unpleasant from some bad people from my country. You know we could do nothing at all about you enter Serbia because such relation, which was towards you is absolutely same towards us.

We informed all participants on Congress, delegates and foreign participants, about that and you got many regards from all of participants of Congress.

Thank you on your regards and wishes.

Dictator is terrible, you know and we know so we will have to find some solution for that.

We finished Congress successfully although we had to in Monte Negro 10 hours with train and come back same, and we came back today afternoon, so we are very tired.

I will write you tomorrow about everything.

I will send your letter to all of participants, delegates and colleagues from abroad too. Best regards to all of you dear colleagues and I am sure we will win soon.

Milan.

**Mr. Nuli, what problems does your union face and what does it demand in relation to Trepca?**

We consider Trepca to be the property of the miners. On the one hand that represents our attitude, on the other it is just a general restatement of internationally relevant factors which say that Trepca belongs to Kosovo, that the wealth of Kosovo belongs to the Kosovars.

There are four reasons for saying this and for us considering it to be the property of the miners.

First, the miners themselves are inhabitants of Kosovo.

Secondly, fifty per cent of the mineworkers were taken on by Trepca because at least one family member had lost his life at Trepca, that is to say that the job had also been paid for in blood.

In return, that meant that the families affected never got compensation.

Thirdly, because of changes in Serbian law in 1990, which altered social property, we had to buy shares on the basis of the then current valuation. So we hold a 15 per cent share of the total value of the mine at floatation, which at the time amounted to DM510 million, representing the basic plant.

Particularly since 1990 we have unceasingly worked to protect the mine from damage and at the same time to assert our right to own Trepca by protesting against every attempt to make an arrangement with Serbia. Not

because we thought that anyone would listen to us, but to give notice that ownership of the property is disputed, and that it would not be a good idea to rely on it because tomorrow or the day after, or whenever our rights are recognised, we will not recognise any such arrangement.

From 1997 the Mytilineos company intended to profit at our expense for the reasons I have explained. Through the British organisation Workers' Aid for Kosovo we told them that it could not be done, that Trepca belongs to the mineworkers.

As time went on we told all the firms about possible conflicts between the workers here, who expect to return to their jobs, and foreign workers from abroad. They would then be responsible for any conflicts because they had been warned in advance. This information was sent to the KOPES firm from Katolica and all the relevant Polish organisations. Bulgarian workers were informed of our attitude and position through the Bulgarian embassy. An American trading company which had an arrangement right at the beginning was informed by way of the American office. We always insisted that this arrangement should cease because it was based on fraud, since Serbia was trying to get outsiders involved to make the problem more complicated.

I am convinced that an international court or any other arbitrator who had to decide who

# 'Trepca belongs to the Kosovars, to the workers'

because people have turned up in France and Serbia who claim to be the rightful owners of Trepca.

We have arguments and facts to prove that Trepca cannot belong to them. If Milosevic has taken money off them in return for Trepca, he has used this money to keep the peace in Serbia.

For example, a Mr. Rozan, someone to do with lead mining, turned up here and thought that he owned Trepca. When we asked him why the works should belong to him, he said he had bought up the silver production for the next five years in advance. You know, this place turns out a lot of silver, 100,000kg a year to be precise.

He claims he paid up front for

500,000kg of silver. I think Milosevic used the money for what he needed and gave the man a few worthless bits of paper. We told him if he had invested a single penny in Trepca he would get it back, but his deal had been with Milosevic, and that man had no right to make any arrangements to do with Trepca because Trepca belongs to the Kosovars, the workers. Legally speaking Trepca was declared social property in 1950, that is, the firm was handed over to the workers as collective property under self-management. Owners turned up from Greece who also claimed to have signed deals with Trepca worth \$540 million for import and export, so that Trepca belonged to them.

We told them: "No, Trepca doesn't belong to you, not a single dinar has been invested in Trepca; your money has disappeared in Cyprus or Belgrade or somewhere". Firms came from Serbia, too: Elektroekonomia from Serbia said: "We've got shares in Trepca"; Gemeks said it had shares in Trepca, the Investbank said the same. Actually these are all shady deals, since any change from social to private ownership took place without the agreement of the Albanians. But we make up 92 per cent of the population. Seventy per cent of the workers in the whole Trepca complex, factories and mines together, are Albanian. So we contradicted them and said there could be no



'Trepca' manager Aziz Abrashi

talk of private property here. Trepca is the workers' property and belongs to the people who work in Trepca. However, international forces, above all UNMIK, won't let us go back to work, arguing that they have to find investors first. They say once that has been done they'll see which factories can work and which can't. Luckily, two months ago, 200 workers were allowed into the Stari Terg mine. We expect another 800 workers to be let in, so that a thousand workers will be able to start up the plant. The workers they have let in now have not enough to eat, no clothing, no safety equipment, nothing.

Workers, engineers and workers' organisations have worked 60,000 hours voluntarily with their own tools and invested about DM150,000 of their own money to put the mine into working order and be able to start production.

**What is your attitude to the Serbian Trepca workers?**

We have no problem about the Serbian workers who used to work here and that we used to work with coming and working, but of course the police will arrest the ones who committed crimes against Albanians.

**What solidarity do you need from the public internationally?**

What we expect from them, from trades unions and international bodies, is to let us back into our plants as soon as possible, because the miners and the other workers in the Trepca combine do not want to live off charity and aid, they want to earn their bread in the sweat of their brow.

**There is no production in Trepca at the moment. What does that mean for Mitrovica?**

Well, Mitrovica depends very closely on Trepca. Mitrovica could not exist without Trepca. Ninety per cent of the population depended on Trepca! Ninety nine per cent local industry is not working at the moment. That is why we are

appealing to the international community, the European states, to give us help to start work, so that we can produce and not be a burden on Europe. They won't let us work in Mitrovica. The parts of Trepca in Prizren, Peje, Gjakova, Gjilan, Pristina and Kopaonik in Serbia are working, but here in Mitrovica we are kept out.

**Mr. Abrashi, what do you need to make the mine productive?**

This is the size of it: We need DM5 million for the Stari Terg mine to function. With about 800 workers paid DM1,000 Stari Terg could turn over DM20 million.

As for the Trepca combine as a whole, we need a credit of DM50 million. We have already told UNMIK, KFOR and various delegations so. The important thing is to get the best conditions for an immediate resumption of work in Stari Terg because lead and zinc ore can be produced and offered for sale on the world market immediately.

# 'Trepca property of the miners'

owns Trepca mine tomorrow or the next day would have to take these facts into account.

**In Germany we often hear that your organisation is a nationalist body. Is that true?**

That is absolutely wrong, it is not at all true. We do have contacts with people abroad, concretely with various trade unions and bodies in different countries. We do not have any contact with the official trade unions in Serbia. When the independent union was set up in Kosova we had Serbian and Montenegrin members who were forced by their regimes to leave the union, to resign, that is, they did not support us. Then our mass sacking followed.

**What relations do you have with Serbian and other workers who have worked here for some time? Can they come back?**

We have never said that Serbian workers cannot go back to their jobs or work alongside us. We don't say that and we

won't say that. Our Serbian workmates can come back to their jobs and work. Of course, only those who were not involved in crimes. Those that were involved in crimes are of course wanted by the court in the Hague and should stand trial.

**How do you envisage joint work with Serbian trade unionists in Mitrovica, Kosova and beyond?**

My friend Mick Woods, who works with us, recently asked me how I envisage solving this problem, how we can get together. My answer was this: Serbs can return to all departments and we can work together irrespective of whether they belong to a different union or no union at all. Our unions can therefore work very closely together on the level of trade union struggle. That means not fighting for national interests but for trade union questions, so that the unions can organise labour and watch out for them against the employers and the technical process managers. That

is a way to overcome this situation.

Woods had tried to talk to Serbian trade union members, but he did not succeed. Then he intended to talk to trade unions in Belgrade. I replied that we would not have any talks with the official trade unions in Belgrade. We can talk to Serbian trade unionists here and work alongside them. We can work with them now as we used to. We don't need to talk to the official unions in Belgrade nor with trade unionists from Tirana. They are not the ones we have to unite with, but the workers in Kosova. We Kosovars need to talk to each other and unite together.

**So what do you think is the biggest problem in Trepca?**

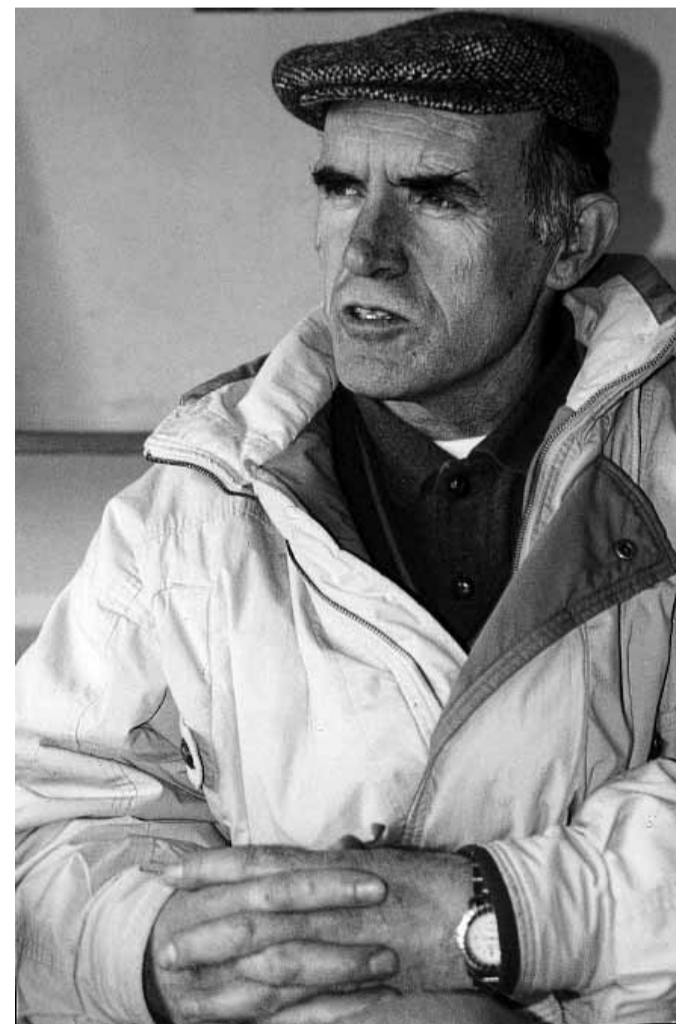
The biggest problem Trepca has at the moment is financial. We do not have recognition or a licence from UNMIK to operate the works. That permission must be given. The question of finding finance is easier to overcome. I am sure if we put out a call there

will be investors. The basic problem is the licence to operate the business so that work can start.

**Are you in a position to get production going on your own?**

We understand international standards and understand safety comes before everything. We are not new to the job, we have worked in the mines for years. Since they were set up in 1930 it has mainly been Albanian workers from this area who have worked in the mines. We know what is expected at work and the regulations. And that is why we also know that workers' safety has to be developed. But just working on safety, as we are asked to at the moment, and not producing, presents us with difficulties.

There has to be production so that we have the means for reproduction, so that in the end we can be self-sustaining by developing ourselves and progressing in the development and modernisation of the mines, by



'Trepca' Independent Miners' Union president Xhafer Nuli

working and living off our own labour power. That is why we are demanding a licence to be

able to work productively and not just keep busy doing work connected with safety.