

## INTERVIEW WITH BURHAN KAVAJA

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Duration: 163 minutes

Present:

1. Burhan Kavaja (Speaker)
2. Anita Susuri (Interviewer)
3. Korab Krasniqi (Interviewer)
4. Renea Begolli (Camera)

*Transcription notation symbols of non-verbal communication:*

*() – emotional communication*

*{}* – the speaker explains something using gestures.

*Other transcription conventions:*

*[ ]* – addition to the text to facilitate comprehension

*Footnotes are editorial additions to provide information on localities, names or expressions.*

## Part One

**Anita Susuri:** If you can introduce yourself and tell something about your origin.

**Burhan Kavaja:** My name is Burhan Kavaja, I was born on May 9, 1943. Officially I'm registered on May 20 because my father was late to register me and they told him, "You are very late, we have to fine you." He said, "Then register him on May 20." My parents were Hajrullah and Xhevahire. Hajrullah was a craftsman, a tailor, who had his own shop for 65 years. Actually, when we wanted him to stay home, to not work, he said, "I can't not open my shop even if you give me gold." He was a hard worker, zealous, and very honest. My mother was a housewife who raised four sons and three daughters. One of her daughters, Shivizati, died at 21 years old. The rest of us were educated, clean, we are thankful to our mother Xhevahire. Three of my brothers and one of my sisters are still alive.

It is very interesting because the movements of the Kavaja family were from Kavaja to Prizren, Topxhiu, Qerkaxhiu, then when they went to Gjakova, they were called Kovaçi, when they came in '42, '43 in Prishtina they were called Mustafa, the name of my grandfather. After they insisted on officially writing them as Mustafić, my father decided to write Kavaja based on his origin. In 1951, the surname on the official page of Yugoslavia was changed from Mustafa to Kavaja. We've had this name ever since. As a graduate engineer, I have worked in many countries, later I will also present the history of my work. Primary education ...

**Anita Susuri:** We'll talk about your education later, I want to talk about your parents more. Where did your father have his shop?

**Burhan Kavaja:** My father had a shop in Mitrovica, near the Mitrovica market, for a very long time. As I said, he had the shop for 65 years, even when he couldn't work, he went there. Recently, the last 15-16 years of his life, he traveled from Prishtina, after me and all my brothers moved from Mitrovica to Prishtina, he lived with my third brother, Ramadan. He had a harmonious life, a life which his visions were what contributed to that harmony. He never insisted for us to be neighbors, on the contrary, he asked each of us to be in four corners of the city, not to be near.

But, that wasn't a reason for us to not eat breakfast together every Sunday. Since we're Muslims, we spent Eid together each year when my parents were alive. But, on Sundays it felt like a wedding because we each had our family, each had our obligations, sometimes we had more income from a dry cleaner our family had in Mitrovica, we would split the income in four ways. And that enabled us to have a solid life, without obstacles. But, our education had obstacles.

I finished primary and high school in Mitrovica, then the Technical High School was opened, I continued there. I was the number-one student at the Technical High School, but not the first one to graduate, I graduated later. However, it enabled me to be a student at the University of Belgrade in Belgrade, where I graduated six months ahead of schedule. There was a problem with the diploma and I needed a special permit because I didn't need to register for the ninth semester to graduate. However, everything was arranged and I graduated in Belgrade with excellent grades.

I finished the third-degree school in Zagreb, I had prepared for my Ph.D... it's interesting, I want to tell you, I didn't do my thesis defense. Because I had prepared a special field of safety technique at the Labor Institute which was in Nis. Before defending my thesis, they conditioned me to give them a project somewhere around twelve thousand marks, money for the Institute. I was the general director in Hani i Elezit at that time, at the cement factory, and it seemed absurd to me to give them twelve thousand euros for a project, because before that, we had established the Labor Institute in Obiliq. And I was one of the people who had contributed to the establishment of that Institute and to give them twelve thousand euros, it seemed absurd to me, even though they canceled my doctorate and since then I didn't receive a doctorate. However, this was not a reason not to continue other educational, scientific, and engineering activities. I would like to tell you a little about my work history.

**Anita Susuri:** Before we continue to work history...

**Burhan Kavaja:** Yes.

**Anita Susuri:** I want to ask you because it's important, you were born in '43, so during the Second World War, do you have childhood memories, what was it like after the war ended? What was the environment you grew up in like, where you played or went to school? Because it was a hard and overwhelming war, what kind of consequences did it have where you lived? In your family?

**Burhan Kavaja:** Yes, yes, since I was a child basically born during the war, because the war was still going on. I remember because my father at that time... he told because I was one year old, I don't remember, he carried his sewing machine to Zhabar, a village near Mitrovica, and he worked there until Mitrovica was liberated, on November 23, '44. My whole childhood was connected to my parents' activities (smiles). As a child I would go help my father every day, I remember as a five-six year old I would step in a wooden crate to help my father iron the clothes he had sewn. So, I didn't have a childhood with games, with playfulness.

The only special amusement at that time were the so-called *tačkicat*, which were coupons which were given for food, in those coupons there were also coupons for chocolates. That was my fun, the best food during childhood. Often, when my father didn't have much work, we slept without eating dinner. However, since we were many children, we would think of that as a kind of harmony, joy and (laughs) when there was nothing to eat, we would still lift our spirits up and spend the night easily.

I started school at five years old. Back then, there was the cooking school, I remember I had a teacher who... I will never forget her. She was Enis Presheva's sister, who taught me in the first grade. After her there was Vilma Shkreli and I finished primary school with extraordinary teachers. They didn't have the same education as teachers do today, but they were everything to us {shakes his head}. Until we could write beautifully, they didn't let us pass the first grade.

So, I finished primary school with teachers who were enthusiastic and had aspirations for young generations of Albanians to get educated, I am thankful. And those generations created a youth in Mitrovica who held all the technical, technological, educational, and cultural achievements in their hands.

**Anita Susuri:** How do you remember Mitrovica at that time, what was it like?

**Burhan Kavaja:** (Deep sigh) I think Mitrovica was a special city. With an industry, the mine, foundry and objects of plants, which no other city in Kosova had. Actually it was a city of miners. As children, when people got their salaries in Trepça, since those two-three days were a mess to get supplied with food, or clothes since most of them worked in Trepça. Trepça was a city which experienced everything from English colonies. It had a pool, tennis fields, ball halls, it had everything in Stari Trg and Zveçan and also Mitrovica.

There was a cosmopolitan youth and there were all those who initially didn't even have nationalist background. Later on it started, it is true that at that time, according to the statistics I saw later, 73 percent in Trepça and other productive organizations were of Serbian nationality. With the change of this structure, there was jealousy, unbearable situations were created that took the direction of nationalism.

**Anita Susuri:** Are we talking about the '50s?

**Burhan Kavaja:** We're talking about '47, '48, '50 and then later '60s. The English had left the tennis fields and the pool when they left here. So in '44-'45, and only Germans inherited those, they knew how to use them. The English worked in Trepça from the year '48 ['28] to '41. In '41, the Germans came....

**Korab Krasniqi:** '28 until '41 right? 1928 until '41.

**Burhan Kavaja:** Yes. Let me tell you a story (smiles) that might be a bit historical. After the imprisonments and such, I was in England and I went to the English parliament and asked, "Why don't

you take your shares that you have in Trepça?" To be honest, I wanted them to belong to the British and not Serbs. The English parliamentarians said, "Sir, we will look at these and we will meet after a couple of days." After a couple of days we met, they told me, "We have no income there. We don't have any capital, because in the '50s it was paid by the former Yugoslavia."

Later I read literature that Tito had paid all those obligations of the English, of course under pressure and they had also given up their shares that they had in Trepça, Yugoslavia had paid them all. And for the first time I had the opportunity in that parliament, although I was in Trepça, but I never saw the history of covering the expenses of the shares that Yugoslavia made for Trepça.

**Anita Susuri:** I wanted to ask you about Mitrovica, what kind of city it was, its appearance after the Second World War, did you notice the damage, how do you remember it?

**Burhan Kavaja:** Very good question because it stimulates my nostalgia (smiles). Mitrovica with two large rivers, Sitnica and Ibar, in addition to having amazing cleanliness, enabled the youth, the children to learn swimming. To experience all the benefits that rivers give, the rivers that flow through Mitrovica. Mitrovica had a *Dom* [Srb. *house*] of Culture, in the '50s, '60s, there were societies that dealt with folklore, music, but there were also clubs that organized radio broadcasting and photo clubs. Fortunately, at that time, I was in all those clubs both as photo-amateur and as radio-amateur, because in Mitrovica all of them were organized, in the years of the '50s.

**Anita Susuri:** Was this through the school, or you were engaged individually?

**Burhan Kavaja:** No, through the city. Within the city they were organized as clubs, they were financed partly by the Municipality, partly by the participants there. It was something that I believe other cities in Kosovo didn't experience at that time. No, Prizren. Prizren was an extremely good city, rich, with culture, but Mitrovica had its industry, it had income, it had the opportunity to develop cultural-artistic life in every aspect.

**Anita Susuri:** I know that the Ibar Bridge was demolished several times, rebuilt, do you remember how it was then?

**Burhan Kavaja:** Of course, of course. The Ibar Bridge is one of the bridges of that time, a special bridge, made out of metal. It was built partly with forging, which was narrow, but it had its own characteristic that, when the horse carriage passed, the whole bridge shook from the horses' legs movement (smiles). It was a special characteristic and as children we used to go to the bridge and hang out there and see how the bridge is moving, how the bridge is shaking. Of course, there were places on the bridge where we swam as children, Gjana, it was part of Kekiqi, Kekiqi mill. I want to give you a very short story about the Kekiq mill.

It was a mill with extremely great historical values, built before the war, and after the war it was completely demolished because no one maintained it. When I was in "Sharr" of Hani i Elezit, I proposed and brought the decision to help with the construction material from "Sharr" in Mitrovica for

the construction of the Kekiq Mill, that mill was a special story for us. And the nostalgia for the time when we went for Shëngjergj with *shelne*, and there we also took the stinging nettles, these are the things a person experiences once in a lifetime and never again, you can just remember them.

**Anita Susuri:** Are *shelne* flowers, a game, what?

**Burhan Kavaja:** *Shelne*...

**Anita Susuri:** For people who don't know (laughs)

**Burhan Kavaja:** Look... *shelne* are... I think they're called like that in Albanian also {shrugs}. Like those {point behind} there.

**Anita Susuri:** Willows?

**Burhan Kavaja:** Willows, willows. This is it (laughs).

**Anita Susuri:** (laughs) So we'll understand...

**Burhan Kavaja:** Yes, yes.

**Anita Susuri:** Okay, I wanted to ask you something about your dad's shop, because it seemed interesting to me, of course, you remember who came there to tailor clothes, were they people of the highest rank or who were rich, or ...?

**Burhan Kavaja:** At that time, mostly those who were in positions, or employed at Trepça, tailored clothes. After a short time, they all decided to buy their clothes abroad. Because they thought my father tailored old-school clothes. Therefore, he continued with his craft and over 80 percent of the villagers got their clothes at my father's shop.. He was a craftsman who... I think he was the third in all of Mitrovica at that time, and he was a skinny, tall and very hardworking man (smiles).

One Sunday I insisted on going to go see the game. Mostly because I didn't want to leave him alone in the store, but I also needed a little fun at the time. He decided and came with me, we went there, we were watching the game when some *jevg*<sup>1</sup> children {shows the height of the children with his hand}, they were collecting all the excess that had fallen when they built the stadium, they were collecting it with buckets and they were taking it home. My father saw them, he said, "Burhan, they are doing this for *idare* [survival] and I'm here watching the game! You stay here, I'm going." (laughs). He left me at that stadium.

**Korab Krasniqi:** Which game was it?

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<sup>1</sup> *Evgjit* - a member of a group of inhabitants living in different parts of the Balkans, whose origin is associated with Egypt.

**Burhan Kavaja:** Well, at that time, they played Trepça, Rudar, a game... Trepça was also in the fourth league. It was a football league which in that part of Serbia won a lot. Since we were in the same leagues as Serbia, Kraljevo, Kragujevac, and Belgrade.

*[The interview cuts here]*

**Burhan Kavaja:** I can say that at that time with no national differences, there were common entertainments. Fortunately, I lived near where I worked in Mitrovica, in the center of the city at the House of Armata and in the House of the Armata dance courses were organized twice a week...

**Korab Krasniqi:** Is this building now a museum?

**Burhan Kavaja:** I don't understand?

**Korab Krasniqi:** The House of Armata, is it a museum today, are we talking about that?

**Burhan Kavaja:** No, it was demolished.

**Korab Krasniqi:** It was demolished.

**Burhan Kavaja:** It was demolished. In the House of Armata, dance classes were held twice a week. And as children, we used to go there, we were participants in those dance courses. But, two other days of the week, there were musical instrument courses. Those who knew, there were Tumbaku brothers, they were Serbs, all of them practiced and later they were in the elite of instrumentalists, who represented Mitrovica both in Kosovo and outside Kosovo.

So, there was a cultural-entertaining life, surprisingly much bigger than now. Perhaps the condition and the low standard of living have somehow enabled everyone to socialize and be in some way the same {move hands parallelly} to attend all those courses. As has been the case, for example, with other cities, our youth knew how to dance, knew how to have fun, we had the theater. In other words, Mitrovica had a cultural and artistic life in the '50s and '60s, which was an example for other areas.

**Anita Susuri:** Did you go to the theatre as a child?

**Burhan Kavaja:** Yes, yes. Not only did I go to the theatre, but I also took part in plays. Of course in the background (smiles) but I was part of that theatre. I remember Don Quixote and some other plays which were funny at that time.

**Anita Susuri:** What was it like then... because I think there was a special kind of outfit you had to wear if you went to the theatre.

**Burhan Kavaja:** I don't know, at that time it seemed everyone looked the same, we all took part. I don't think there was any difference or division between the rich or poor or the educated or the uneducated people, because we all had roughly the same education. Either we finished elementary school or we had started high school. We know that, even when we started as students at the

Technical High School, we had organized Blue Evenings and various other topics in Mitrovica. Mitrovica was a vibrant city. Believe me, people from big cities often came to visit their families, they said, “You have an extremely good life here.” Yes, we had it, we had it. However, when the period of work and the struggle for existence came, all that entertainment was forgotten, those things that were important.

**Korab Krasniqi:** Mister Burhan, I wanted to take you back if you don’t mind. I wanted to ask you about your mother, Xhevahire, how do you remember her, what was she like?

**Burhan Kavaja:** Unfortunately, I remember her as a woman who was extremely hardworking and to this day I remember her feet in *nallune*,<sup>2</sup> red, in the snow, when she washed our clothes. Soaps were rare then, I’m talking about when I was a child, then it was completely different, she had to wash us, clean us, with those clothes that we had. But at that time she didn’t have socks, but with *nallune*, with red feet in the yard, and *nallune* were often covered with snow.

I mean it was a story of experience. However, my mother, Xhevahire, never consumed oil. Never in life have they smeared [the oil] of plants because it has been put in their mouths. It happened that when she was invited to dinners or weddings, she ate the bread only with a pepper. Because she didn’t know if they used oil. She only consumed butter when we had it, she lived 96 years. Surprisingly, my father lived 76 years, she lived 96 years. She also fasted during Ramadan, but the characteristic that was surprising for all of us was that she never consumed oil. Is it surprising for you too, or not? [Addresses interviewers] (laughs)

**Anita Susuri:** (laughs) It is very good, but it seems unachievable for us.

**Korab Krasniqi:** You told us about your siblings, you said you have three brothers.

**Burhan Kavaja:** Yes.

**Korab Krasniqi:** And two sisters, one of them...

**Burhan Kavaja:** Died. Shivizat died.

**Korab Krasniqi:** Can you tell us about the dynamics between your sister, brothers?

**Burhan Kavaja:** Shivizat died when she was 21 years old, in ‘61. We were four brothers and our sister Shukrije, who is now retired, but she worked as a teacher, we all helped our mother. This is where I want to mention what harmony in the family is. We had such a great harmony that when we woke up from bed in the morning, all of us helped our mother make the beds. Of course the mattresses were on the floor {moves his hand as if touching the mattresses} we layed like sardines there. Our little sister was very small.

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<sup>2</sup> Tur.: *nalin*, a kind of slippers with a wooden sole and a small strap on top.



If we needed to help our mother with something we didn't call each other by name Ramadan, Rexhep, Orhan but number one, number two, number three, "Help mother. Go help her!" (smiles) There was great harmony. My second brother, Orhan, is now in London with his family, he migrated around 20 years ago. My third brother, Rasimi or Ramda, has two names, he is here, retired, mechanical engineer. He has two daughters, two sons, they're all okay. They have an average life.

**Anita Susuri:** Why does he have two names?

**Burhan Kavaja:** (Smiles) My father went and registered him as Rasim, when he came back my grandmother said, "Hajrullah, you know there's Rasim Qerkagjiu. How did you name him?" He said, "Well I forgot, let's name him Ramadan since he was born during Ramadan." (laughs) Officially his name is Rasim but we call him Ramadan because we had a cousin who was named Rasim Qerkagjiun and my father forgot and... Rexhepi, graduated engineer, he worked at Elektrana, he's now retired, he has a son and two daughters, they're all married, children, nephews. They were here in the morning, we ate breakfast together, the nostalgia when we ate breakfast with our parents. My sister Shukria was a teacher, now she's retired. She was a teacher, we were all educated by my father's needle.

**Anita Susuri:** How did you decide to go into this field, did mining attract you because it was the city of the mine or...

**Burhan Kavaja:** I had been very interested in telecommunications since high school, low voltage. However, Trepça gave scholarships then, the scholarship was what forced me to go towards mining, because there was no financial opportunity to separate from my family and have income for studies, except for scholarships. Scholarships, loans were given to me and it was in a way what I faced as a freshman, as a student.

## Part Two

**Anita Susuri:** We were talking about... how you decided what to study. You talked about the scholarship...

**Burhan Kavaja:** Yes, it was, it was... because I was able to get an education with a scholarship. After graduating, I started working in 1964 in Kishnica, as a department engineer, then as a technical manager of surface equipment and at the end of '69 -'70 Aziz [Abrashi] joined the administration, he asked me to join him. I've been leading the Kosovo Mining Inspection since the 1970s. For the first time, according to the constitutional amendments of '69, administrative bodies were formed in Prishtina for Kosovo. Then I was the chief inspector of the technical inspectorates, then the deputy secretary or the deputy minister that, together with Aziz, we prepared many economic laws, which first started to apply in the '60s.

**Anita Susuri:** Aziz is your friend?

**Burhan Kavaja:** Yes. I have to tell you a little more about this period of time because it has to do with my evolution later in Trepça and elsewhere. As Deputy Secretary for Economy, at that time, we prepared the laws which were vital for the Albanian people. The Law on Electro-Economy, the Law on Mining, the application of these laws meant the full independence of Kosovo from Serbia, Article 1. The Law on Mining said that, “Kosovo’s wealth is social and belongs to Kosovo.” Exactly these were the basics which both as a young engineer and as one of the administrators at that time gave me a patriotic human incentive, not to say national. With the Constitution of ‘74, all competencies passed to Kosovo. At that time, with the organization of the inspectorates and other organizations, we decided and brought the documentation from Serbia to Kosovo.

I remember as if it were today when... we supervised the mining documentation from the Secretariat for Economy of Serbia and brought it to Kosovo in a truck. I also remember when I made the division of the border between Serbia and Kosovo 400 meters underground in Bellobërd. We invited the inspectors of Belgrade, Serbia to set the border together and Bellobërda is a mine which belongs to Kosovo and Serbia, we divided it 400 meters underground with a border. Every time our inspectors went to visit the mine and supervise and control it, they went to the border and inspected the part which belonged to Kosovo, the rest was inspected by the Serbian inspection.

**Anita Susuri:** Which year did this division happen?

**Burhan Kavaja:** What?

**Anita Susuri:** Which year did this happen?

**Burhan Kavaja:** In ‘72, ‘73 and in ‘74, when the Constitution was approved. But, the amendments of ‘69, gave us the authority to complete the division of wealth.

**Korab Krasniqi:** Who did you draft the laws with, you said that Article 1. said “Kosovo's wealth is social and belongs to Kosovo,” who did you work with and how did you feel when it was approved?

**Burhan Kavaja:** We made this law a draft project with all those employed by the Secretariat of Economy. There were quite a number of people who worked there. Let me not forget to tell you that it has often happened that we have copied other laws because we didn’t have such strong and large cadres, but every time we prepared the project and took it to the government, the government took it to the assembly and approved it in the assembly. However, we made such great preparations that no one can now explain how everything happened at that time. Because it was an enthusiasm, it was a thing that we formulated and made for the first time, based on all those amendments that Kosovo had. The second book that I wrote, I describe everything that happened when the Constitution of ‘74 happened, we had all the economic laws approved and they functioned with the bodies of the Secretariat for Economy of Kosovo.

**Anita Susuri:** I wanted to go back and then connect to this part. When you traveled abroad to study, was it your first journey, so to Belgrade, abroad, what was it like for you?

**Burhan Kavaja:** Could you please repeat it because I didn't hear you well.

**Anita Susuri:** Yes, sorry. When you went to study in Belgrade, was this the first time you traveled abroad, and how did you experience this journey being apart from your family, your country?

**Burhan Kavaja:** No, it wasn't the first time, because we, as students of the Technical High School here, we went and visited Belgrade and other cities. But, as a student in the second year in college, it was the first time that I had to provide for myself. It was good that I received the scholarship and I had the scholarship as material support to be able to study. Of course, there were some troubles with professors at that time, who were nationalists. However, most weren't, most behaved correctly. Actually some of them taught me at the Technical High School here in Mitrovica.

It wasn't easy being a student from here. But, I'll tell you about a very interesting episode. I decided to postpone my studies for a while after the first year, for financial reasons and I was hired in Shipol as a teacher. There they gave me the subject of mathematics, physics, and chemistry. In September, courses for adults in the evening also started.

**Anita Susuri:** Night school.

**Burhan Kavaja:** It was called night school. One day I had the acoustics class, explaining it as a teaching unit. Then these tape recorders of "Nikola Tesla" of the new Zagreb came out. I was showing them how to record, how the voice is reproduced. The moment I started recording, an old man started, "*Bismilahi rrahmon e rrahim.*" After less than two minutes, the door opened. The school janitor had heard through the door {points behind} he came in and took my tape recorder {as if grabbing something with both hands}. The next day people from the Secretariat for Internal Affairs came to my father's house and gave the announcement that I should go to the Secretariat of Internal Affairs at 10:00.

As every other parent {shrugs} he was scared, he asked me, I didn't know what to say. I said, "For nothing." And I didn't tell him because it didn't seem important to me. I went there the next day, they left me waiting until 14:00 in front of the door, from 10:00. When I went in, I remember as if it was today, an inspector of internal affairs, with glasses, I think his name was Sava. He said, "Do you know why I called you here?" I said, "No, I don't." He said, "Who do you think you are spreading religion in school?" I said, "Me?" I said, "I'm not religious myself." He said, "We have a recording." He stopped talking about this and started talking about becoming an activist for them.

"You," he said, "are obligated to come here every week and tell us what is happening at school in Shipol." I said, "I can't do something like that, you have people you pay for this, there's no reason for me to do this." And to be honest I was a little harsh, had I known what they can do to me, I wouldn't be that harsh. He said, "You are going to come back tomorrow." "Okay." They let me go after three and a half hours, almost four. When I told my father he said, "Get ready and go to Belgrade immediately." He didn't let me teach a day more, he sent me to Belgrade. In poor financial conditions, I don't know how he did it, he never told me, but he gave me the money and I went. And that was a very important

moment in my teaching career and my father disturbed. I wrote about this in my book also, and it was a moment... historical.

**Korab Krasniqi:** What happened when you went to Belgrade?

**Burhan Kavaja:** In Belgrade (laughs) a couple of friends from Mitrovica and me gathered and met at Borba<sup>3</sup> to ask for a place to live. A fat woman suggested we go to Dušanovo with her, she had a nice place and all. She gave us a cheaper price than anywhere else. Dušanovo was quite far from our university. However, we wanted something cheaper. When we went there, the house was almost collapsed, dirty mattress, horrible. We said, "We're going to sleep here?" We slept there that night and paid her some money. Then we moved to New Belgrade, an apartment, a room in a rented apartment, until we got the student dormitory.

The credits for our registration in the student dormitory go to Morina, I don't remember her name right now. She was from Prizren, vice secretary in the Secretariat of Serbia, a professor. She had great merits, because we went to ask for help to be put in the dormitory and not be bothered. Because we wanted to take the exams of the high school, she helped us a lot and so we continued there.

**Korab Krasniqi:** What was life as a student in Belgrade like?

**Burhan Kavaja:** Well, I can say that those of us who were ambitious to finish it as soon as possible and came back to get a salary, we had a difficult life. We couldn't be the same as the others who had much more free time. We learned a lot, as I said in the beginning, I had to get a special permit to graduate before the deadline.

*[The interview cuts here]*

**Korab Krasniqi:** Let's go back one more time. The protests of '68 and...

**Burhan Kavaja:** And... later about the protests. As Kosovo, we weren't prepared for higher advancement of the constitutional elections. In '45, there was a situation where we had just a few Kosovar intellectuals. With the establishment of the University in the '70s, we started a production, Albanian cadre with higher education. Here and there were people like me and others who went to Belgrade, Zagreb, and Ljubljana, but the number was very small. With cadres who graduated from the University of Prishtina, I also participated in those cadres, we created a genuine cadre who had the opportunity to confront the technique and technology, education, culture, jurisprudence in Kosovo.

This helped us create such a cadre, that in the early '80s, we had over 70 percent of the Albanian cadre in important positions. Even then, we could do something for the constitutional organization of Kosovo. Without cadres, we could have had the republic in vain, and the other constitutional organization when there were no cadres, even today we need to do everything to have more cadres. An independent state like Kosovo requires hundreds of staff for diplomacy, not to say that diplomacy depends on the material production of the state. So, we must have thousands of staff in material

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<sup>3</sup>The building where the newspaper "Borba" was produced.

production, to create conditions for greater income, for greater income, to enable the quality superstructure to protect us and to introduce Kosovo to foreign countries.

**Korab Krasniqi:** I think we're talking about that period of time, before you started talking about '74 when the competencies...

**Burhan Kavaja:** '74.

**Korab Krasniqi:** Were given to Kosova, because the Constitution changed at that time, you said that you asked to transfer the documentation of the mine from Serbia to Kosova.

**Burhan Kavaja:** We didn't ask, we took the documentation...

**Korab Krasniqi:** Can you tell us about that?

**Burhan Kavaja:** Yes.

**Korab Krasniqi:** Where were you working at that time, how did this happen?

**Burhan Kavaja:** I have worked at the Secretariat for Economy since '70, where I was first as a mining inspector, then as Chief Inspector of Technical Inspectorates, then deputy minister or deputy secretary, at the time, when the amendments were voted in Belgrade for the rights that Kosovo would have its autonomy. Then, we started the preparations for the '74 Constitution. As I said, in '72 we were prepared with all the laws. I worked at the Secretariat at that time as an inspector or chief inspector, later in '74, I was the deputy secretary for economy. During this period, we needed proper, professional preparation of the documentation. We asked for the documentation... since they had no other competencies here in Kosovo and the opportunity to control the mines in Kosovo, I insisted and we got the documentation from Belgrade, they gave it to us but not willingly. This was the period when we got all the documentation from there to here.

**Korab Krasniqi:** One more question and then Anita can continue. What did you find in that documentation that helped you at work?

**Burhan Kavaja:** The geological documentation was very important, which at that time was completely accumulated in Belgrade, about the reserves, resources, quality reserves, qualities of the first mineral lands in Kosovo, like Trepça and Obiliq, Leposavic, Kishnica, Novo Brdo. That documentation enabled me and Aziz later to prepare material that we used at the scientific gathering later in Tirana, "Kosovo resources as an opportunity for the socioeconomic development of Kosovo" where we had given the value of these resources and 505 billion dollars in prices when a barrel was ten dollars.

Kosovo's rich assets are in caustobiolites, in coal, the part of the first mineral, of non-ferrous metals is quite consumed. With new research it may happen that those reserves will increase, but in general they're consumed. But this was what gave us a hope that after the war with a proper organization, with a professional staff, we will soon reach a level of development and a standard that would have been enviable for Europe. Unfortunately, this didn't happen, something opposite happened as the sale of all

those assets. All of them were created with hard work and blood, they were organized in factories, fertile lands, meadows, forests, they were sold and it isn't known what happened to them.

Kosovo had a rapid and good development, it happened because we had the opportunity to compare. We had one-fifth of the national income in the '70s, in the '80s we reached one-third, from one-fifth to one-third of the national income per capita for Yugoslavia. It was a very strong commitment, a very large material production. I don't know, you are young, you don't remember, there was nothing that wasn't produced in Kosovo in the '80s. From non-ferrous metal and textiles, agriculture. With two Agro complexes, the Agro Kosova complex, the Trepça factory, the Obiliq factory, until we researched that we could produce a hundred other products from coal.

One of the products was also the production of margarine and we had the gas production plant, the only one in Europe. It had a capacity of 480 million cubic meters. That gas was used by the Skopje foundry, later I also used it at Hani i Elezit. The pipeline was from Skopje to Trepça. Unfortunately all of these are at zero now.

**Anita Susuri:** In which year did you become the director at Trepça, and how did it come to that?

**Burhan Kavaja:** I want to tell you how I went to Sharr beforehand. Ymer Pulaj was the head of the government then, I was in the Chamber of Economy, secretary for the industry sector.

**Anita Susuri:** Which year?

**Burhan Kavaja:** '80.

**Anita Susuri:** Yes.

**Burhan Kavaja:** '80. He called and said, "You have to go to Sharr in Hani i Elezit." Negotiations started and somehow I let it go on for too long. When he called me for the second time it was already the year '81 (smiles). He said, "You will go there as a violent director" because the loss was 4 million dollars. I had to go, I went on May 3 or 4. I immediately started an activity, but I had a lot of resistance from the locals there. However, I withstood everything. At the beginning of '86 I was called to the Committee and they told me, Azem Vllasi said, "You will go to Trepça." I left Sharr with a profit of 4 million dollars, from a loss of 4 million dollars.

**Anita Susuri:** Can you tell us what kind of company Sharri was?

**Burhan Kavaja:** Cement, the production of cement, lime, asbestos concrete, pipes. It was called Sharr. I thought you knew.

**Anita Susuri:** We have to mention it for people who don't.

**Burhan Kavaja:** And I left it a new factory, Sillkapori. So, the gain was 4 million dollars, 2,650 workers and the new factory that was built, Silkapori. Later I found out that 18 people in Hani i Elezit and in that vicinity named their children Burhan (smiles). Today, when I pass through Hani i Elezit, they salute

me with respect. Thinking that they have forgotten me after 30 years {moves his hand}, they haven't. They called me and told me I have to go to Trepça. He said, "We are conditioned by Aziz, he won't come to Trepça if you're not here." Aziz called me, I've avoided conversation with Aziz for three months, I didn't want to go because they had promised me to work at *Oda* or in the government.

And four years passed, traveling to Hani i Elezit every day, it was monotonous, dangerous, tiresome. After three months, Azem Vllasi called and told the secretary, "Burhan should come to the Assembly tomorrow at eight." When I went there, I saw Aziz, "What are you doing here?" He said, "What are you doing here?" (laughs) I knew he had insisted. We went in, he offered us coffee and said, "Burhan, you have to quit Sharri and go to Trepça." I said, "I have an agreement to go to Prishtina, now from one place to another." {moves his hand} It was a done deal and, after five days, I started working at Trepça, The Workers' Council held the meeting, I was appointed director in Stari Trg and I started there.

*[The interview cuts here]*

**Burhan Kavaja:** After five or six days, the Workers' Council was appointed in Trepça and I was named director of the flotation mine. I thought I would work with Aziz, Aziz said, "Now I don't want to talk to you. You go your own way, I'll go my way. When I call you, you have to come or else I'll take you to the Committee." And this is what happened (laughs).

### Part Three

**Anita Susuri:** Can you tell us a little about Aziz, who is here, his name, last name, you mentioned him a couple of times but...

**Burhan Kavaja:** Yes, of course. But before that I will tell you two cases which show what he was like as a person.

**Anita Susuri:** Yes.

**Burhan Kavaja:** A guest of his came to Trepça, a friend of ours, and we thought he would take him out to dinner in the hotel Numër tre, the hotel he had for representation, he said to him, "Blerim, come one let's go to Behtia's home because they made pie." He was very economical. Another characteristic, we were coming back to Mitrovica from work together, to Prishtina, Asllan Baruti was with us. Me, Aziz, Asllan and Aziz, and... us three and the driver. He asked me, "Did you get the salaries?" "Yes." How much did you get paid?" I told him. He said, "Good. Stop the car at Vicianum." We stopped there and he got the most expensive food on the menu and I told Asllan, "Thank God our head director took us to dinner, he never even buys us coffee."

When we were done, he told the waiter, "Burhan will pay." I said, "Why?" He said, "I am the head of the Labor Council, a higher position than yours, you're the director there, we're going to Prishtina, your salary is higher than mine, you will leave the surplus of the salary here." Aziz was a great student, nine years older than me. We lived on the same street in Mitrovica. After his graduation in Belgrade with

excellent grades, he worked in the chemical industry, in the oil trade, and he later served as Minister of Economy for three terms. An extremely sincere man, a fighter for national rights till the end. Also a man of his word.

We worked together for 41 years. Often, when he was mad at me, he would say, "I will tell your mother." {points right}. I was 60 years old and he would threaten to complain about me to my mother (laughs). So, he was a loving person and made me go to Trepça. We were imprisoned, one day in prison I saw him... we were going to trial, he cried, he apologized to me, "I put you in this mess by taking you to Trepça". I only have good words for him. He was very economical, he never used the state's funds for anything other than a lunch or dinner. He belonged to a very poor family, he lived with his brother and sister in Mitrovica, after he came to Prishtina he started to create a life, a better standard. He has a daughter and a son.

His son is now a well-known businessman, he runs a chain of shops, self-service, and his daughter is a businesswoman Mena and Linda, Gazmend Abrashi has these self-services, Maxi with 12-13 or 15 chains, also Linda is a well-known businesswoman. I mean, he has golden kids, good kids. Mrs. Bahti was my classmate, we were at school together, she was the same age as me and she spent her whole life, except at the end of her life, in education, at the end of her life, she was an activist for social-political organizations in Kosovo. This is about Aziz, next year it will be seven years since he passed away.

**Anita Susuri:** You told me he was the reason you started working at Trepça, what was it like when you came and took on all that responsibility?

**Burhan Kavaja:** I got to know Trepça a little from the aspect of control that I did as an inspector. So after Sharr where I had 2,650 employees, Trepça was a big challenge. However, the biggest challenge at first was facing material production of underground resources, as an inspector, yes, but now when I had to create income from production, it was not easy. Maybe even the economic independence, an opportunity to create an extremely great professional experience, both in administrative bodies, in the Chamber of Commerce, in production and as a lecturer in the faculty, gave me courage, a strength, which everything felt easy.

Then, the support which I had from the majority there gave me even more courage. I want to show you some cases to be able to understand that sometimes you have prepared for things. The first day I went to the office, I took the task, I thought, I asked for my office to be painted {points front}. When I came the next day, the office was painted and they had brought armchairs {opens his hands showing the size} big, good, like a sultanate's cabinet. I said, "I wanted to color the office, not fill it up with armchairs like that." They had problems with personal income, salaries were not given yet, there was a lot of material problems. I said, "Wait until evening, in the evening, take these out of here." It was filled with them, all leather.

"But Director..." "I don't want to discuss it, immediately..." I left those armchairs there that day, they were very nice. My first day started like that. The second day I had to make a solution so the drivers wouldn't come to get me from Mitrovica to Prishtina and from Prishtina to Mitrovica, it was too much



so I changed the driver, Vujadin, the second day. Vujadin was there like an Al Capone,<sup>4</sup> even bigger than the director, he had done everything! I changed him immediately, I took the driver I had at Sharr who lived in Prishtina, so we would come and go together. He wrote four pages with the help of someone there, he took it to the Provincial Committee of the Committee of Serbia. “He changed me just because I am Serbian.”

I changed him, I didn’t know it would create such a genuine atmosphere among the workers there. They appreciated it a lot. I did it for economic reasons, but it also had a psychological side. Then it happened that together with all Aziz we went to the restaurant and ate the dishes that they ate, we sat down with them. It again created a favorable situation. That’s how I started working there. However, at the same time, the *Jogurt Revolucioni*<sup>5</sup> [*Yogurt Revolution*] of Serbians began. The Serbs started from there, from there, from our organization, they went to the rallies of the Serbs. Even those chauvinistic relations against Albanians started.

**Anita Susuri:** In which years was this more noticable, when did it start?

**Burhan Kavaja:** In ‘87, a year and a half after I started working there, there was a great evolution of these Serbian nationalists. I employed 240 people in the surface part of the mine. Most of them, work invalids, as well as a large part of them from the Secretariat for Internal Affairs, to mine and spy. This will be important later. I couldn’t do anything without the Secretariat and the Committee knowing immediately after two minutes, three minutes... One day an inspector from Internal Affairs of the State Security came and knocked on the door {as if grabbing the door handle} without notifying me. When he came in, he said, “I have some work with you, Director.” “Okay.” I had Ibush Januz there, my technical director and Ibush got up to leave us alone. “No, no,” he said, “stay here” {lowers his left hand}. He told Ibush in front of me, I think I’ve described this in my book.

**Korab Krasniqi:** (laughs) I read it yesterday.

**Burhan Kavaja:** And he said to me, “Director...” No, {raises his hand} not director, “Burhan,” he said, “from now on, you can’t hire or fire anyone without me knowing.” {acts surprised} And he lectured me from the State Security aspect, there was nothing else left for me. I got up, opened the door and told him, “Get out, and I don’t ever want to see you here again.” {lifts his hands} I didn’t have any other choice, when he came to tell me what to do, I never let him in again. But, he was connected to the network of workers here. I decided all those who were disabled at work, to take them home, give them a salary, give them food coupons so that they don’t create commotion on the buses when the workers are coming to work because they were sitting in the first chairs and the workers got out of the mine tired and had to stand up in the bus. That was the main reasoning, and, in fact, I wanted to free myself from that network of workers.

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<sup>4</sup> Al Kapone (1899 – 1947) was a mobster and American businessman.

<sup>5</sup> The Yogurt case of the revolution in Fushë Kosovë is a segment of the sacred Serbian Doctrine during the special war in Kosovo conducted in the period 1981-1990. This case occurred during the visit of Slobodan Milosević in Fushë Kosovë..

I talked to Aziz because the food wasn't good, it was centralized, "I decided," I said, "to take this restaurant as our property." "You're going to ruin my plant?" I said, "This part, I need to take it." And I decided to take it to Stari Trg, I separated it from social food for the whole Trepça. I was the first one who did that, and it was useful to feed 1,300 workers in the mine. After the riots of Serbs started, we held a meeting, in that meeting some of them started telling us how they will cover their feet with the cabbage they're eating there during the winter. I also immediately returned to the political part and the events that are happening to us.

It didn't take much and after the discussions we had they asked to go to Prishtina. Then I told Liljana Gašić, "They want to go to Prishtina, you have to lead them." (laughs) She was leading them until people from the security came and took her out {pretends to grab something} and we went to Prishtina, 52 kilometers on foot.

**Anita Susuri:** Who was Liljana?

**Burhan Kavaja:** Liljana was a Serb who worked for us to charge the batteries, and later she was the secretary of the Mining Committee of the Communist League, Liljana Gašić. I told Korab I happened to go on November 23rd on Liberation Day to the military barracks when they called her Major. So, she worked as a clerk, as an electrician, in charging batteries, but she was a major of State Security. Our requests were known upon arrival in Prishtina.

**Anita Susuri:** I'm interested to know how that day went, because to go from Stari Trg to Prishtina, it's a long journey.

**Burhan Kavaja:** 52 kilometers.

**Anita Susuri:** What did you discuss...

**Burhan Kavaja:** 52 kilometers!

**Anita Susuri:** Yes.

**Burhan Kavaja:** That happened after the meeting we had, when some started to complain about the salaries, food, apartments. And the whole conversation after I told them what the rallies of Serbs are doing, where we will be as workers, as miners. Discussions started and it changed direction and it became a request that, "Who are they to do this to us? Let's go to Prishtina!" And from there this happened, we went there. There we also had the consideration of the constitutional amendments that wanted to change, the whole gathering started for social issues, turned into a public, political gathering for national issues. This was what prompted and started, and this is exactly what was a march that has never happened anywhere in the world.

52 kilometers for political issues, not social issues. So when we come to the strike, the world's biggest strike has taken place in Stari Trg for political, not social issues. However, this happened on November 17, after that there were rallies, gatherings on other sides that gave us support. This lasted until the end, or the beginning of February '89. On February 17, the Provincial Committee concluded that the

protests and the miners' marches were a hostile act against the Union-Brotherhood and the Yugoslav Constitution. And the organizers of these protests need differentiation, on February 17 we didn't have time more than three days for differentiation to begin. With differentiation we were immediately isolated, we were immediately isolated. Our isolation meant practically taking over the mine, the others. Exactly...

**Anita Susuri:** Differentiation... sorry for interrupting, just firing you from the job or imprisonment?

**Burhan Kavaja:** Firing us, first of all, came the expulsion from the Communist League, firing us, the moral-criminal responsibility, one after one. I knew what awaited us. Even in conversations with a group of people, I told them that this was awaiting us and there it was decided that we would strike. Some say that it happened by itself, nothing can ever happen if someone doesn't take the initiative. Those who were imprisoned were the main organizers. Azem Vllasi was with us in prison, he was imprisoned by the Provincial Committee. Aziz Abrashi was in charge of the plant, I and these others were from Stari Trg. With the start of the strike, every time, even now and before, I have said that I shouldn't be a person who started it, neither I nor the others wanted to be the first. Because this mentality has destroyed us as and from that moment it was, "Everyone is an organizer." In essence, the best and most functional organizers and... were those who were imprisoned.

I had told them, unfortunately, I don't have evidence, but the only director there who wasn't imprisoned was Beqir Maliqi. Beqir Maliqi was a director there and, the last three-four days, he appeared to be in bad psychological conditions and separated from us. His separation made me think he is connected to the others. I didn't have proof {puts his hand to his heart}, but the fact he wasn't imprisoned makes me doubt he was connected to the others and betrayed us.

Where did they find all those who were the most vocal, reasonable organizers who knew how to explain why we were on strike, how we were on strike. There's Veli Osmani, the deceased, he was a miner, head of workers, excellent. Mursel Haziri was a worker, head of workers, excellent miner. And all these 14 miners, not to mention, Avdi Uka and all, they were all people who were knowledgeable, they had the ability, they could speak and they kept those 1,300 people alive for eight days.

The miners' strike is the only strike in history, eight days for political and not social issues. There were also some like that when we started. Some asked for housing, salary, change of decisions or... but we told them that they have come to change our constitution. They retired all our teachers, lecturers from whom we learned, and they were imprisoned, they are coming with other political issues, these are all mentioned there {moves his hand vertically}, they approved this and every time with a greater responsibility, they were convinced that there is a need for a resistance as it was.

## Part Four

**Korab Krasniqi:** Can you tell us day by day, let's start from the 19th, the third shift, until the 28th, how, what happened in the mine? How did it manifest...

**Anita Susuri:** How did you experience it?

**Korab Krasniqi:** How did you experience it, how was the strike organized during these days?

**Burhan Kavaja:** Yes, of course.

**Korab Krasniqi:** Sorry for interrupting you one more time. You said there were gatherings before and different aspects were discussed, but when it was decided on the 19th, the third shift... on the 20th, the strike began and continued until the 28th. Every detail you remember that you would want to share with us about what happened there would be very welcome.

**Burhan Kavaja:** The psychological part of all those protests, marches, rallies of the *Jogurt Revolucion* affected production. However, with the beginning of the third shift and the first gathering in the mine, when the strike started, some of us weren't there, we were away from the mine, we were notified and came to the mine. We were talking to them and some of them started complaining about social issues, so, the first day in the mine, on the tenth level. There were also Serbs among the strikers, after I explained to them that, "I am obliged to take your demands and take them upstairs" they started telling me their demands.

However, in a way, we wrote them down the way they asked and gave them to Riza Musliu to print them, but before I read them, I {put his hands in front of his face as if reading} that, "Are these your demands?" I had collected the requests before and in some way I knew what our common demands were and I was telling them, "Are these your demands?" {counts with his fingers} To not change the Constitution, to not let them...

**Anita Susuri:** Retire.

**Burhan Kavaja:** ...expel teachers from education, we're organizers. "Are these your requests?" They, "Yes, these are our requests!" It was easy because I took their requests and printed them, I appointed two people who communicated with the media.

**Anita Susuri:** What about the Serbian strikers, those who didn't know the requests but supported you?

**Burhan Kavaja:** They came with social demands even when they saw that I turned the social ones into these real demands which were necessary, then they left the mine, the others stayed.

**Korab Krasniqi:** Who were the people who were appointed to communicate with the media?

**Burhan Kavaja:** Mensur Fejzën and Nedelković, I appointed these two to communicate with the media, while directly in the mine Veli Osmani and Mursel Haziri. The strike began. Miners of the first

and second shift started coming, they started gathering, there were around 1,300 miners. I could organize 20-30 miners and not have anyone else. But I couldn't overcome their desire for patriotism, because I would seem like an usurper, dictator, and I let them into the mine, the guards who stood in front of the well and let the people go inside were appointed. Two people named Jahir were assigned there, they were both named Jahir, one Neziri, the other I don't remember at the moment. They had the task of making the selection, who can go into the mine and who can't, because others could also come into the mine.

The moment when the strike began we had 2500 kilograms of explosives in the mine, which could have been a great tragedy. However, in a very pedagogical human way, I told them that we did everything in the mine from day one in agreement. The second day began, I was able to organize meals without having to go outside. The miners had three meals a day, so that it would not affect their health, only when we went on hunger strike and that was something else. For the hunger strike, it was different, there was no food at all. We moved the restaurant to the part of the mine and everything boiled. We had reserves, we had everything.

The second day got the attention of the media, TV, and radio stations, newspapers arrived and began reporting from everywhere, so we decided to let in only Kosovo journalists and for the rest to hold a press conference.. And that's what we decided. Until we got into a situation where ministers from federative organs proposed to give sedatives to the miners, so they would get numb and wouldn't be able to reason and we would get them out. Of course, I wouldn't allow something like that, and I didn't allow it. So, there were propositions like that also.

They asked for [Slobodan] Milošević, Stipe Šuvar<sup>6</sup> came on the fourth or fifth day, on the fourth or fifth day. Here I had a collision with Aziz, I didn't want to let him go into the mine, Aziz wanted to let him go into the mine and somehow he managed to let him go to the mine. Everything he said in the mine is recorded. I was against it to be honest, I don't know if I was right or not. I heard the miners say, "We don't want to see any of them, we want Milošević," and I had to listen to them.

Azizi insisted and invited them to the mine, he left the mine disappointed, he was afraid that they would kill him in the mine, he wasn't in any danger at all. It was a good, calm organization, with great courage. Often with an orator like Avdi Uka, he stirred up issues, sometimes he would say, "I have ten children, even if they all die. Sometimes he would say, "I will fall in the mine and kill myself." And it created a slightly more irritating situation.

But, what isn't known to the public is that the Reconciliation of Blood Feuds Campaign started in the mine. Blood reconciliation started there, with the request that, "You outside reconcile, we will do our sacrifice here." There were cases when I couldn't visit them all, because the halls are 200 kilometers long, they would say, "Director, you didn't visit us, we are very desperate, we are in a very bad condition," then, "Please, visit us too." This was one of the biggest requests when they were scattered in different levels {moves his hand around}.

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<sup>6</sup> Stipe Šuvar (1936 - 2004), Croatian and Yugoslav politician. From June 30, 1988 to May 17, 1989, he was Chairman of the Central Committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia.

**Anita Susuri:** Where did you stay during that time?

**Burhan Kavaja:** I moved all the time, I moved all the time. Shefqet Voca, for example, on the fifth horizon asked me to visit. From horizon ten to horizon five, in addition to increasing altitude and kilometers, it also took time. However, everything was under control, despite that, we managed to reach the end without any casualties, no injuries. Many nights the floor was like dry stone, and their clothes were covered in their sweat. There were also situations where they were able to get out of the mine to get some fresh air.

But my biggest concern was the second exit. We had the well in the north, which was full of frost and was practically impossible to pass through. I had to deal with it with a number of miners who, if it happened that the main well collapsed or if it wasn't possible to get out, to have a back up. I mean, for me as a person, as an expert, as a leader, it was an extremely serious hard psychological condition that I had the burden of it all. There were times when they criticized me, there were times when they didn't agree, but, in essence, most of us agreed with the action we had taken.

**Korab Krasniqi:** Were the demands articulated all at once or as the days went by there were other demands? What was this like?

**Burhan Kavaja:** All those demands, nine and ten are about the United States, they were articulated on the first day.

**Korab Krasniqi:** First day.

**Burhan Kavaja:** Yes. Because that was exactly the essence of it, the essence of it and these conclusions of the Provincial Committee that the protests are hostile, we didn't reveal them to them at all, we didn't tell them. Because we... the protest and here, it started for those fundamental constitutional issues. The evolution was to notify the United Nations, it was the tenth demand if I'm not wrong, that was the evolution of those gatherings. Otherwise, they would say, "I ask that the work decision be changed altogether." We {pretends to be writing} the demands were already formulated, we would say, "Okay, do you agree with this?" "Yes, we agree." So, everything WAS according to education, schooling, opportunities, political maturity and articulations.

**Korab Krasniqi:** Were there demands that weren't published, which you know...?

**Burhan Kavaja:** Yes, there were. There was a demand, "We want the Kosova Republic." Someone said that, I didn't let it come out as a demand, I explained to him, "Keeping Kosova at this level of independence, as a federal unit, enables the second degree. With these we are asking for the possibility of immediate imprisonment." However, we knew that this ... this was a demand which... no demand could be made without going through filters. All... but they were understanding. For example, the eighth day is interesting, with Ibush Januz and another team that accompanied me to visit the workshops, they started to come out, to take them out. But they were gathered right in front of the well in the corridor and no one was moving, and they came and said to me, "Director, they are calling you. 'If you don't go out first, none of us will.'"

It wasn't a matter of fear, but I did all that in a way to be common, quietly so as not to come out as a leader there. I said, "I have a lot of work to do, check all the workshops so there are no miners left there." Who knows, they might have fallen asleep, fainted and I didn't accept being the first to go out. The doctors immediately surrounded them {puts his hands to eyes} with bandages so that they would not come out immediately in the light after eight nights they were inside. And so began their exit. The next inspection brought me the decision, they closed the mine. The day after Milošević said in Belgrade, "*Uhapsićemo sve, Azem Vlasija, Aziz Abrašija, Burhan Kavaju*" [*We will imprison them all, Azem Vlasij, Aziz Abrashi, Burhan Kavaja*] and others came and got us.

**Anita Susuri:** But beforehand came the decision of the resignation, how did you expect that decision?

**Burhan Kavaja:** The decision to close the mine was made by Miloš Janić, Miloš Janić worked for me as an inspector and he felt bad. He came and said to me, "I prepared the decision, I have to give you the order that the mine is closed." He felt bad because he was my worker, he worked with me. I said, "If you have the order," I said, "Act." I took it and signed the decision that the mine was closed and they immediately brought the police and surrounded the mine, and they didn't allow anyone to go inside.

During the strikes, we can talk about what happened there for eight days and nights. But the essence of it all was to come out publicly and repent for this. Milošević demanded that from them, but no one dared to do such a thing. While in prison I told Ibush Januzi... Ibush Januzi is the technical director who was with me, I told him, "Hold your head high, don't frown and don't stay in a curved posture." "Director," he would say, "My neck doesn't hold." (laughs)

So, I insisted for each of us to stay with dignity, not repent. Now, when some came out as organizers, as syndicalists... it was hard, because they weren't there at the time, if they were I would have included them in my book.

**Anita Susuri:** I wanted to go back, more personally, when you found out you would be imprisoned how did you feel? Actually...

**Burhan Kavaja:** We went back the day when the decision to close down Trepča was made, we went home with Aziz. Aziz said, "Burhan, put on your warm socks". (laughs) I didn't know, my house, my apartment was surrounded by secret police for eight days.

**Anita Susuri:** Supervised.

**Burhan Kavaja:** Yes. Actually I'll tell you a detail, after those protests, a journalist allegedly from *The Syndicalis* from Belgrade came to my office. The secretary let him in and he asked for a picture. They didn't have my photo and he said, "We're preparing a monograph for the companies that received the gift from ANVOJ, AVNOJ."<sup>7</sup> I said, "I wasn't here when Trepča took it, we have to ask for the director."

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<sup>7</sup>The Anti-Fascist Council for the Liberation of the Yugoslav People - was the political umbrella organization for the national liberation councils of the Yugoslav resistance against the occupation of the Axis during World War II.

And I gave it to them, I knew a little but not quite. When they came to imprison me, that journalist came with the photo (laughs). He was part of Leskovac or somewhere else.

They took me at night around 10 o'clock, didn't even let me dress properly. They took me to the Secretariat of Internal Affairs of Prishtina, from there to Mitrovica, they kept me awake all night. They kept 'em away all day the next day. They didn't ask me anything, they just didn't let me sleep. There I got to see everyone who worked in the secret police. In the evening, "In the name of the people, you're imprisoned." They put... it was a situation, I don't know if anyone told you. A group of policemen {puts his hands up} six, seven policemen would surround you and they all yelled, "You're imprisoned!" All of them, surrounding you and putting on {touches his hands}...

**Korab Krasniqi:** Cuffs.

**Burhan Kavaja:** Cuffs, and they took me to prison. There I saw Aziz Vllasi, Aziz Abrashi, I was the third one and so on.

**Anita Susuri:** They came to your apartment that night, right?

**Burhan Kavaja:** They came to my apartment. I was...

**Anita Susuri:** Was your family scared?

**Burhan Kavaja:** I was alone.

**Anita Susuri:** Ah, alone.

**Burhan Kavaja:** All alone. My wife was in Banja e Pejës, healing, she was paralyzed and my children were over at my brothers', I was alone and they knocked on my door, I was surrounded, supervised. I opened the door. They ordered not to move, take something to wear. "We have a talk with you" and this is how my imprisonment happened. After that, they came and checked the house, they checked everything. We were in solitude in prison for more than two months. I can tell you two things about prison that are a little interesting. First thing, two guards came and told me, "You can save us, Burhan, not to embarrass ourselves because, after our shift, Serbs will start their shift and Azem Vllasi has been crying for twelve hours." He said, "You can go calm him down. If it happens, he said, "that anyone finds out, we will stay here instead of you." And that's how it really was.

They took me to Azem Vllasi, I started talking to Azem Vllasi. He was very emotional because it was his son's birthday and he was in a state where he could stop himself. When I told him... with the guard insisting and that people's eyes were on us and we couldn't be low like Ibush {points left} as I said, I calmed him down. He calmed down. He promised me he would be calm and it somehow ended. The same thing happened with Avdi Uka, the situation was different with Aziz. he had worse health, according to what he said in prison, he had taken around one thousand pills during that time. When the lawyer Bajram Kelmendi came to visit, he had 15 minutes for each of us. He would just make small



talk with me and said, “Go, because I have to stay longer with Aziz.” (laughs) And this is what happened. Those circumstances had funny scenes. One day they took us to the court cuffed...

*[The interview cuts here]*

**Burhan Kavaja:** I told Azem [Vllasi], “Did you listen to the news last night?” He said, “I did.” Aziz asked, “Where did you listen to the news? We said, “We have a transistor, they gave it to us.” Azem said, “Mine didn’t work well, I don’t know why.” Aziz said, “How did you get a transistor? Where?” We were just kidding, he thought we were serious. Or once we said, “We saw you in the hole there {makes a hole with his fingers} talking around. “Which hole?” We told them, “The hole in the door.” And he scraped off his nails {pretends to scrape something} thinking they had closed his door hole. And this was it, a tragicomedy. This is...

**Anita Susuri:** Did family visit you?

**Burhan Kavaja:** Yes, they did. My parents visited me through the bars. I remember my poor father had come, he couldn’t keep from crying. He was biting his finger {puts his finger near his mouth} so he wouldn’t cry in front of me. Or another case, I prepared to have my mother visit me, all night I had prepared how to stay in front of her without any emotions. The moment she came she said, “I am proud of you, Burhan” instead of me giving her...

**Anita Susuri:** Courage.

**Burhan Kavaja:** An opportunity for her to be stronger than me. My mother was very courageous and they let us stay there for about ten minutes. They let me see my children without the bars separating us but at a distance {explains with his hands}, an office, in the distance, like now. I noticed they were mentally prepared to control themselves, and that’s what happened.

**Anita Susuri:** How old were your children then?

**Burhan Kavaja:** Well, Erzen was around 20-21 years old, while... 19 years old, while Floren was 17 years old. It’s a very sad story, but also something to be proud of. I expected that after all these things we would come to a situation, where a person can live a peaceful, financially stable life, without problems and hear that there’s noticeable progress in the Albanian people, I didn’t expect this. Out of all these recognitions they gave to cats and dogs, they didn’t want to do something like that for us. But, on the contrary, every time the resistance of the miners was mentioned, they wanted in a way, to minimize it, not give it the right treatment. I didn’t want to get involved in politics. But, I ended my career with that resistance when we did, then I joined the union.

## Part Five

**Anita Susuri:** Yes, you were telling us about imprisonment, how long you stayed there, you said you were there for 14 months...

**Burhan Kavaja:** Yes.

**Anita Susuri:** After you were released... how did it come to that and how did you go back to your everyday life?

**Burhan Kavaja:** I was convinced that freedom would not come fast. But, at the hearing on 24 April [1990], Ismet Emra, the presiding judge, said, "The defendants were released from prison because they were charged with an indictment..." and started reading the indictment. Aziz didn't hear this first part, he said, "This is bad, Burhan," I said, "No, no, we're being released," "No," he said, "listen to what he is saying." He read it, the indictment was too long. As soon as they heard this, the first part of the enacting clause of the decision, of the verdict, the journalists immediately came out and made it public. You don't remember because you are young, it was a celebration all over Kosovo.

Around 200 thousand people gathered in Mitrovica, it was two days before Eid. People broke their fast, this was an historical date, April 24 when people broke their fast and celebrated, it was a celebration. We had tens of thousands of people who came to congratulate us on our release. Sometimes, I feel bad mentioning it, but because of the handshake {he extends his hand} which the miners and others shook too tightly, I had pain three or four months later. Seriously. It was a matter that was done from love, joy, love, and we didn't feel any pain at that moment, I only had that pain later.

However, my release from prison forced me to deal with something that made me resist again because we were completely occupied. Both Aziz and I went to listen to a union assembly led by Hajrullah Gorani in the madrasa. And as listeners we were interested in what the union was doing, it started some kind of debate, so big that it actually disappointed us. However, Aziz went and demanded unity. And they asked that Aziz and I join the Kosovo union, we joined the union and there we started the resistance, then a union for all those workers who were fired. We also complained to the ILO, the International Labor Organization, about 25,000 workers who were forced to leave their jobs. For example, here's an obligation, a food technology engineer comes who worked in the meat agro-complex.

*[The interview cuts here]*

**Burhan Kavaja:** And then we joined, but I was telling you about the technology engineer, the Serbs put him to clean the guts. He came to the union to tell us and ask our opinion on what to do. We told him, "We are sorry you were so degraded, but if you listen to us, you will not quit your job." So we had actions with the guards, but they didn't come up with ways how to degrade them. It has happened more than a thousand times that they were issued certificates, "Do you accept Serbia?" {pretends to write with his hand} Provocation at work. They said, "No, I don't accept Serbia." So they fired them.

So, we came to a station to deal with some cases that were very biased, nationalistic, chauvinistic, immoral, just to fire them. It happened to us while we were in the union that I went to ask for the

collection of the tax. From Zagreb, the provisional government said, “You shouldn’t work... pay anything from Serbia.” On the other hand, for the non-payment of the tax and the collection of the tax, they would take people’s property, imprison them. We would say, “Pay the tax in terms of inflation, it costs you less, don’t risk property and imprisonment.”

Or it was the case of apartments, for example, they started selling all the social apartments, which with inflation reached the price of 200-300 marks, and their value was 30-40 thousand marks. The Serbs bought them and our people didn’t want to buy them because they didn’t want to give money to the Serbs. We came out with a statement that, “When the apartments are offered to you, buy them because they are not destined by the decision of the Serbs for you, but the Serbs are enabling you and don’t leave them, buy the apartments.” On the other hand, the news from Zagreb was to not give Serbs money. There were some actions of the union of that time which even today I think were the right ones, they were good and have preserved the private and social wealth of Kosovo.

**Anita Susuri:** What were the union’s other commitments to help the workers? Specifically, for example, we know that there were some organizations to go to work in Malisheva, Family Helps the Family, we have heard about these.

**Burhan Kavaja:** It is an interesting thing that has had a humane progress, which not only for miners but especially for miners was at the highest possible level. Aziz and I went to Malisheva and a part of Trepça to talk to those who employed the miners, in the part of Dukagjini. In addition to agreeing to include the miners there, they also stated that they were ready to take care of families. And we had organized so, that’s how it happened, I mean where we went because they insisted that Aziz and I preceded.

They insisted, we didn’t want to be so involved in those currents at that time, because we thought that their issue would be resolved very soon. Wherever we went, they welcomed us, they helped us and they were connected, Family Helps the Family and they helped the miners to overcome a difficult situation. There were people who called us and asked for reconciliation of blood feuds and we went there, I believe that we achieved success in some places that deserve to be mentioned, but since the group for reconciliation of blood feuds existed, our work was minimal.

**Anita Susuri:** Did you have any other commitments... towards the union, that you dealt with in the ‘90s? How did you survive?

**Burhan Kavaja:** My personal commitment and Aziz’s at that time was the preparation of this book {shows it in front of him}. We were committed to make it as worthy as possible, accurate with notes, a book which can serve you and others now. We were engaged in two or three projects, those for the assessment of natural resources but also at international levels for the presentation of the situation of miners in Trepça after deportation from Serbia. These were our permanent commitments at that time, I believe we did it with full, full success.

But we were organized with the supply and organization of the KLA. I remember my son was working at that time at a company of canned meat, a truck with those canned goods that were taken to the KLA

in the part of Shala Bajgora. We ourselves were there two or three times, in addition to supporting them, to offer our help, especially in the district of Trepça, to protect the possibilities to not mine Trepça or bomb it, because it would have been a great loss. And I think that with our personal suggestions it was achieved, but of course with their commitment in the first place.

**Anita Susuri:** Were you here the whole war?

**Burhan Kavaja:** Yes. All the time.

**Anita Susuri:** What was it...

**Burhan Kavaja:** First, I want to tell you that in a registration, a registration for liquidation. Skelzen Riza came to look for me and didn't me, he told them at home... during the war, he said, "I saw" crying {puts his hand on his eyes} "Burhan in the list for liquidation." And from that moment me and Aziz decided to leave our houses and go. We went to Xhelal Spahija's house, he was Turkish, we stayed there. But, the food supply and the circulation that was done and we didn't stay inside all the time, they found out that we were there. The Serbian neighbor there notified them.

They came during the night, they broke the doors and came inside. When they came in, they told their commandant, "Aziz Abrashi and Burhan Kavaja are here." And there was another person there, "What do we do with them?" They, we could hear them over the radio, they said, "*To su velike zveri*" they're animals. Meaning that they shouldn't kill us immediately, but they should use us for a trade or something. They checked us, they took some money we had saved, they kept us surrounded... so bad that they didn't even let us drink water until something bigger happened and they called them saying, "You have to immediately go there, something else happened." Something had happened at the police and they went, they went and we got to breathe freely. We were free of them.

**Anita Susuri:** Did you leave the house?

**Burhan Kavaja:** Yes, we went to another house, there we stayed for three-four days and I went back home. My wife and one of my sons were at home, my other son was in Tirana, the young one, the older one with troubles like this. He had a lot of trouble and still has consequences today.

**Anita Susuri:** Was it police violence?

**Burhan Kavaja:** Everything.

**Anita Susuri:** The news about Prishtina's liberation, when NATO came in, were you... you probably were in Prishtina, how did you feel about it?

**Burhan Kavaja:** Yes, I was here when NATO began bombing, to tell you the truth, a physiological condition would be created that you always thought they wouldn't hit you, it would pass over you {raises his hands near his head}. It was bombed near... to tell you the truth, I felt pleasure when the reservoir of petrol and the Secretariat of Internal Affairs were being bombed and other objects... I was

here, I was here also when the Russians came and I was near Grand, when they came in with tanks and Serbs started celebrating, they started shooting, I also experienced that.

**Anita Susuri:** What did you think when you saw the Russians?

**Burhan Kavaja:** I had a feeling because when NATO came in, eleven Yugoslav-Russian airplanes from the airport of Slatina flew, left. I had a feeling that they had their military base here. But, I didn't think they would be able to change their uniforms and weapons that fast. I thought that if Jackson had been more coldblooded, the war could have begun in those conditions and in a way an armed conflict could start. NATO on one side, Russians on the other, and what would happen to people? Not to say for people in Prishtina. But, luckily that didn't happen.

**Anita Susuri:** Now I wanted, Mr. Burhan, to talk about the post-war period and your commitment... So, I know that Trepça was in a very difficult condition after the war and the staff was involved very late to continue working. Where were you during this time and what did you do?

**Burhan Kavaja:** On June 13, I had an old car, I took my wife and left for Stari Trg. On June 12, NATO troops stationed in Prishtina, I went to Stari Trg on June 13. On June 13, the Moroccans were there and I told them, "I came to visit Trepça, I was the director here and I want to see the condition it is in." He said, "We can't let you in." They even called the French command and, of course, they didn't let me in. My attempt for a long time to definitely return Trepça was made through negotiations with UNMIK. An UNMIK administrator enabled us to go for a month to write a report on Trepça. He said, "I'll let you in through the windows, you open the door." And so it happened and he let us in.

I went with a team of 200 people to Trepça, each prepared for what they were going to do. We had a few days to prepare. And we went there, we started, when we went in, KFOR would check us, inside we had old explosives. We were under control for 28 days with 200 people, visiting the mine. There we found traces of rape, we found traces of abuse, thefts which we reported and they came to photograph. After preparing the report in detail, we submitted it to UNMIK and submitted it to the provisional government. Do you think the provisional government ever looked at it? They didn't know how to look at it. UNMIK studied the whole thing and enabled us to continue the part of the mine for a while.

We had announced a protest, but our professional essence was to save the mine from sinking, so drowning by water, because we had five or six cubic meters of water per minute, which could sink. And we needed sacks to make it even and I called the French general with a request to give us some sacks and any material to make it even. He said, "Let's talk." I went to talk to the French general, I wrote all of this down. He said to me, "Yes, I will give you soldiers, with sacks and all. However, I ask you to stop the protests." I said, "Sir, I have nothing to do with the protests, they are carried out by these other units of Trepça, which are asking to return to work." He said, "I'm telling you if you want the sacks so that the mine doesn't sink, stop the protests."

Meaning my influence could stop them. And I came and told them, "We need to stop the protests because we need the sacks for the mine, to protect the mine." And that's what happened, they brought

me the sacks to protect the mine and we achieved that when we freed the mine it was completely protected, if it wasn't sunk, it would be destroyed. So, this was my activity after the war. Then I started to work in the mine again. I had the biggest problems with investment funds. UNMIK helped us with a hundred thousand euros for pumps and spare parts for equipment. With an extraordinary number of enthusiasts, we managed to prepare the mine for production. They brought the other team, they replaced us, the provisional government headed by Taçi, they removed us from there, they brought others, and they successfully started destroying it.

**Anita Susuri:** You mentioned something we didn't cover, the strike... the second strike, while you were in prison, what do you remember from that and what did you hear about how that strike went?

**Burhan Kavaja:** It was a strike which was completely dedicated to their fellow imprisoned friends, including everyone for their release. The strike, which managed to be stopped by special units of Belgrade and Baxha, they had previously given them hot bread with sedatives. They brought them to a state of mental distress and tied them with wires and threw them out. It was a strike in support of their comrades, as a solidarity strike with that first strike. In a way, Serbia acted the same with all of them, with violence. Then, they named the Serbian directors there, a Novako Belić, who worked with everyone else, with Bulgarians and others to engage in Trepça in the irrational use of raw materials. And with that destruction, it is in the rough condition it is today, but without harm of those who are destroying it.

**Anita Susuri:** When did this happen, I mean what was the date of that second strike, approximately?

**Burhan Kavaja:** I think it was in August '90. No it was, it was before, before... in the beginning of the year we were realized, so towards the end of '89.

**Anita Susuri:** Mister Burhan, if you have something to add...?

**Burhan Kavaja:** I don't remember at the moment. But thank you for your patience...

**Korab Krasniqi:** I have a last question if you don't mind. You went through phases and phases with Aziz and you mentioned he died over six years ago.

**Burhan Kavaja:** Yes.

**Korab Krasniqi:** How did you experience his death?

**Burhan Kavaja:** At the commemorative meeting which was held at the ABC cinema, I had prepared an in memoriam for him, in the part when I said, "When they ask me, 'Where is Aziz?' What can I tell them?" The whole hall started crying. It was very hard, I wasn't here when he died, but his son sent me a message and said, "Uncle Burhan, my father is dead. Consider that you have to travel, be safe." (tearful). I experienced his death very hard and I still miss him today.

**Anita Susuri:** Thank you very much!

**Korab Krasniqi:** Thank you, Mister Burhan!

**Anita Susuri:** Thank you!