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Albania

The Wonder That Brings Hope: The Union Candidate in Albania's Parliamentary Elections

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It is these conditions that prompt the need for a reliable and hopeful alternative. Elton Debreshi is such an alternative. A figure with the potential to challenge the hegemony of the corrupt power and bring hope to all the marginalized social groups. It is not his political ambition that pushes him to the podium of the parliament, but the historical demand of miners and citizens for a real and honest representation. A representation intact from the influence of criminal groups, violence and dubious businesses. Elton Debreshi has, for many years, sustained through his work the system that produces goods, on behalf of the oligarchs. Now it is time to seek on behalf of the city of Bulqiza the fair share of those people who work and live on a rich land, blessed with chromium, but spend their lives in poverty.

On Wednesday, 20th January 2021, we learned from the news that the United Miners of Bulqiza Trade Union (SMBB) will support the independent candidacy of one of their miners in the district of Dibra on the April 25th election. Elton Debreshi, miner, son of a miner, father of four and head of the new union of the chromium miners in Bulqiza, was fired more than a year ago because of his trade union activity, together with three of his co-workers, while working in the pit under the administration of AlbChrome.

Elton Debreshi was one of the youngest workers when his fellow miners elected him unanimously as the head of the union. Through a life that demanded sacrifice he was denied the lightness of youth. And yet all what is associated with it is still there: honesty, kindness, the spirit of solidarity and protest. Elton is young, not because of his age but because he has refused to conform and let the con artists, the cynics and the wealthy to dictate his life. The meaning of Elton's candidacy transcends the framework of electoral logic and lies deep in every dimension of grassroots politics, politics as a creation and will of the majority that is left in oblivion.

Elton Debreshi. Source: Roza Che | Wikimedia Commons.

The massive student demonstrations of December 2018 exposed not only the urgent need for change but also the need for a social movement that could and should include all social formations with organizational and subversive potential. Something was needed that exceeded the 30-year symbiosis of oligarchs with the three major parties at the expense of the people. A fundamental question was raised: what is to be done?

It didn't take long for the workers to answer this question. In April of 2019, three months after the protest was called off, the miners of Bulqiza – tired of the old unions supported by the powers that be – started to articulate the need for a new, independent trade union. On 17th of November that same year, at the centre of Bulqiza the miners announced the founding of the United Miners of Bulqiza Trade Union. Immediately after this event, Elton Debreshi with three other trade unionists were fired and AlbChrom workers went on strike demanding pay rise, reduction of the labor rate, recognition of seniority and difficulty at work, compensation in cases of accidents, negotiating the collective agreement with the new union which had reached over 600 members, and above all the return to work of the dismissed trade unionists. After the strike ended, trade union miners, pushed forward by the force that gives conviction to the cause, and with the support of many friends, undertook the signing of a petition for the legal recognition of the Miner's Status, collecting more than 11.000 signatures and the solidarity of the citizens all over the country.

Never before during the long years of transition had a workers' struggle been waged with such fervor in Albania. Samir Mane, the wealthiest and most powerful man in Albania, supported by both government and opposition, made sure that no media reported the news about the strike. Samir made sure that even small parties or "independent" individuals would remain silent about it. Rotten unions in the hands of wealthy and powerful owners fought against the collective effort of workers that risk their lives underground. And again, the stronger the pressure, the greater was

the resistance.

There is no coincidence that makes these events happen. The universe did not conspire to bring closer in time and space the protests of the students, miners, oil-refinery workers and artists protesting against the demolition of the National Theatre. Conditions and contradictions are what created the event. The government of Edi Rama cannot justify itself, at least since the students' protest. Not even the most zealous admirers of liberalism would have fathomed such political events unfolding.

The implementation of neoliberal policies – the privatization of public corporations, neoliberal reforms in higher education, concessions of public services to oligarchs close to power, systematic violence against small businesses camouflaged as a fight against informality – faced an unorganized society who had turned its gaze towards the West, where hundreds of thousands of Albanians flee, legally or otherwise. In the image of the same power structure converge not only the cultural hatred for the common man but also the whip that replaces the justifying facade. Brute violence, from here on, becomes the only tool for maintaining power vis-a-vis the lack of a real opposition and a popular alternative that speaks the language of the people.

It is these conditions that prompt the need for a reliable and hopeful alternative. Elton Debreshi is such an alternative. A figure with the potential to challenge the hegemony of the corrupt power and bring hope to all the marginalized social groups. It is not his political ambition that pushes him to the podium of the parliament, but the historical demand of miners and citizens for a real and honest representation. A representation intact from the influence of criminal groups, violence and dubious businesses. Elton Debreshi has, for many years, sustained through his work the system that produces goods, on behalf of the oligarchs. Now it is time to seek on behalf of the city of Bulqiza the fair share of those people who work and live on a rich land, blessed with chromium, but spend their lives in poverty.

Hope doesn't have boundaries and borders. Hope is a living matter, with roots in the consciousness of the oppressed. This hope turns into the conviction that the miners' and students' organizations will not fall apart the next day. That is why the struggle of Elton Debreshi constitutes a political articulation of a historical inevitability. Inevitable in relation to history, not in the form of the supreme leader, infallible and absolute – not even as a positivist turnout of events; but historical inevitability as the moment when the oppressed appear on the public stage. The history speaks the language of battles despite triumph or defeat. In this sense, Elton is the voice that echoes the common social aspirations for radical change.

26 February 2021

Source [LeftEast](#).

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