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### **INTERVIEW WITH THABO LEKGOBA MAKWELE**

**Dale McKinley (DM):** Just for the record if you could state your full name please.

**Thabo Makwele (TM):** I'm Thabo Ephraim Lekgoba Makwele, so Lekgoba its my granddad's name and traditionally we respect the elders by giving the young ones their names. And I grew up here at Rammolutsi, started schooling around, er.. and started participating in the revolutionary of change. I was a leader in the high school up to 1985 and I went down to Sasol as a boiler maker and security officer. But for the passion that I had for education I came back and started schooling and I was having friends but I started minimising them to be able to concentrate on my education and successfully I did it.

**DM:** You were born here in this community? What year were you born?

**TM:** Where?

**DM:** What year?

**TM:** 1967.

**DM:** So just tell us a little bit about how it was like growing up in this community and those in the 70s?

**TM:** It was very nice, because of, if you look at the atmosphere now and the situation at that time though it was very hard in the sense of the ruling party by that time. But checking on other things that we lose - the discipline the respect the way of in which us as youngsters handle things ... then really when we check back you will think of going back taking the time.

**DM:** How about the socioeconomic situation of the time?

**TM:** It was very hard but it was nice. Like I'm saying it's very much conducive when you are happy ... we were not happy as Africans but as families we were happy. Because at the end of the day the respect, mutual understanding, communication was there. Any man any black man was your dad, your parents, your brother, your sister. But with regard to the state of emergency and all those other things ... that was hard for us but we were together we were working all forcefully together. Economic wise it was hard but we could manage. Now everything is fine - it's in the hands of the people. But the problem is one only - those who are rich and those who are friends with those who are in power only succeed.

**DM:** Ok we will get to that, the more contemporary situation. But just tell us about your time as a student activist in the 80s ...you said you came back and you were involved in the struggle?

**TM:** Like I said we were combined ... we had that passion of changing the country that is to be liberated so every one's concept was to see us into that new field which we did not even know what it looks like. Like we were hurt by being called names by those who were using racial names ... but that is why we end up as students coming together to change things. But though we didn't just started saying we didn't want apartheid we started by rioting against certain things that forms part of apartheid that was the language used at the schools, the times, the harsh things that were done by the principals and all sectors that formed the system .

**DM:** Were you a member of any organisation like COSAS At that time?

**TM:** No, COSAS was not there by that time.

**DM:** Was just a local organization?

**TM:** Ja, We were called the S.A youth we didn't have a specific name like now that was an umbrella name that just combined us under a roof of the liberators, liberation forces, and we were just like that.

**DM:** When did you leave to go work?

**TM:** It was 1984.

**DM:** And you say you were a boiler maker?

**TM:** Yes I started as a boiler maker.

**DM:** What was your experience when you went to work?

**TM:** There was no experience like I said it was just ... life was good for us. At the end of the day I was one kind of a person that was loved by the white community I don't know why they loved me. I never had a problem of communicating with them or what so ever, from that age with that broken language but I could communicate and it was very nice for me. Like I said I worked as a boiler maker for a period of six months but I said no this is not what I wanted because what was in me even now I still believe I can be a soldier for the country but because of the restrictions and all those things I couldn't.

**DM:** Then you came back to Rammolutsi?

**TM:** Ja.

**DM:** What year was that?

**TM:** It was 1987.

**DM:** After that what did you do ... from '87 on?

**TM:** 87, I came up 86 to start schooling but it was unfortunate because the schools were full due to more population from the farms coming down ... the secondary here was the only source of education we never had others so we had to platoon and then in '87 down

the line I had to do something because of the shortage of the space in the schools, In '88 I started in Standard 7 because I had to refresh my mind it was no good use for me to start from where I ended first so i wanted to start back as to recap. Then '89/90 let me tell you from that year I have been working very good because that standard my position for the whole year we were making competitions to see to evaluate ourselves. I was in top five the whole year and at the end of the year I was number three. Standard 8 the same ... standard 9 the same ... and standard 10 the same and got an exemption. Then in 1992, I started training as a teacher.

**DM:** At that time when you started training as teacher ... that was in 1992/1993 things in a country were changing quite rapidly ... the negotiations were on. As a young person, as someone who has been involved ... how do you remember that period of time of early 1990s when things were moving very fast?

**TM:** I remember I was supposed to skip the country with a friend of mine. It was not a friend just a guy we grew up together and then certain guys from the MK came up and said it was not good for you guys to go out of the country now because we are all coming back. Irrespective of what we are coming back we have to fight from inside the country now. I was heart broken because I really wanted to go out because I love my country even today I love my country that is why I ended up joining DA because of what they did to me ... not what they did to me but to the people.

**DM:** In 1994 when the elections happened how did you feel at that time?

**TM:** It was a very good moment and the moment that one will never forget to see every one participating making their first mark of his life ... it was a good thing.

**DM:** At that time did you come back, did you finish your school, college?

**TM:** Ja, 1995 I started working I think it was in April.

**DM:** And what job was that?

**TM:** Teaching.

**DM:** Here in Rammolutsi, as a high school teacher?

**TM:** Yes, as a primary teacher.

**DM:** Just out of interest, what subjects in particular?

**TM:** You know what I did everything, but specifically the one that I did was English, Sotho Afrikaans, Biology, History and Education.

**DM:** How did you find ... at that point that was at the early 90s ...the education system as a teacher?

**TM:** It was very difficult because many things were introduced at the end of the day as a teacher we were lost. Within two months a new programme is introduced ... the OBE, the curriculum 2005 ... so many things were introduced. At the end of the day we never knew what to teach we were just teaching for the sake of doing the job. Many trainings were done, programmes we couldn't even understand ourselves exactly what, where we were going to end with this.

**DM:** And in terms of the quality of education you thought that children were getting?

**TM:** It was poor and we cannot run away from that because it was not at the end of the day reaching the limit because some of the things at the end of the day we couldn't even force them to be here by the students ... because of the lack of discipline. Discipline started dropping down because it was scrapped ...

**DM:** Why do you think that, you have mentioned that in the past discipline was something you really liked and now it is no longer ... after you have started teaching that was becoming a problem. Why do you think that shift take place?

**TM:** You know what maybe this is wrong this judgment is wrong but I think for my side it is right because some people start to see it the same way that I was saying. I don't say that people should be abused but I'm saying there should be a line. When I'm talking to you there should be a line, a line of respect, know exactly who this is, but now it is different. Your boy can smoke in front of you, you don't have to say anything, your wife can do whatever things ... that we as men see as wrong you don't have to say anything. I'm still saying those people who introduced that have lost the track.

**Ahmed Veriava (AV):** When you say introduced that what do you mean?

**TM:** What I'm saying is whoever came up with the concept of abolishing discipline not abuse ... abolishing discipline ...because abuse and discipline those are two different things.

**AV:** But are you saying discipline is corporal punishment?

**TM:** No, corporal goes with abuse I don't say abuse I say discipline. You should be able to communicate ... listen this is wrong and I don't take it. You are a father and you know why you say this even though maybe by the time you don't explain the reasons. But when time is right you can say no because of 1,2,3 that is why I said. But you can not say anything now.

**DM:** Ok when did you start to become involved in the local politics again, and party politics should I say?

**TM:** The first five years I was with the ruling party the second five years I was inactive because of the results of the first five years. I accepted that the first five years they were trying to recap to make home but let me talk for local here, it was very bad. Some of those who was in power abused the positions in the sense of employment which is the major thing in our lives ...we were not working some of our people was not working ... I'm talking about the community down here they were not working. It was embarrassing when you see someone who is not as qualified as you working in the municipality because of the card while you still have a card of the same party and the participation that you gave to that party is different from what this other person is giving ... and that person is working. At the end of the day there are so many things that are happening here at local level and that is why the outcry is so loud ... that the ANC is doing nothing with regard to the jobs ... they are only enriching their friends and their girlfriends.

**DM:** What did you think of at the time ... even if you might have been inactive in the late 90s ... of the ANC 's government 's national macro-economic policy? In other words the new way of looking at growth and development in the '90s that was adopted ... did you think that had any impact at the local level?

**TM:** Yes.

**DM:** What impacts?

**TM:** Like I said maybe this will be a wrong example but a few ... certain elements, certain people from the very same only benefited from what they have introduced not every one, not every one. They only use you as a spear-header ... you introduce something and at the end of the day you benefit rather than the people that you wanted to introduce this for.

**DM:** Can you give an example at the local level. How has that played itself out here ... the people who benefited how will they benefit, what kind of things were done to benefit certain people?

**TM:** You check on the jobs let me start with the municipal level. At first, all municipal workers, the municipal workers the administration part of it ... those people were working very hard but the municipal workers were the poorest people earning by that time because they were working wholeheartedly they never thought of everything to their pockets, I'm not saying there was nothing wrong by the time but I'm saying with regard to this it is different ...let me say those who are working at the municipality and have the card of the ruling party they only employ their fellow comrades ... no one, not bra Mere not whoever is not carrying a card of that can get to that. You have to be a close friend or whatsoever to be able to and verbally not here that is why in Deneysville the councillor was killed because of the councillor was involved in those things.

**DM:** When did you start making the shift to the DA? That is an interesting shift with someone of your background?

**TM:** The third term, as I said the first five years I was with them and the second term I was ignorant and not ja ja not a thief. Then I ended up saying because I started hating people who abuse other people then I study where I can fit and I was looking around and I said up to so far this number one opposition party to this ruling party it looks to be the party that will shift other things. Because when you check they say service delivery first, putting people first not enriching people, at the end of the day we shift to the lower classes.

**AV:** How did you get in touch with the DA, was there a branch in Rammolutsi?

**TM:** not a ... ja there was a branch here. I joined the DA with the influence of my brother who was working for the DA just as an office bearer ... we never has DA councillors. Then mine was to be there and study. I never wanted to be influenced I wanted to do my own decisions and be ok if, and it was like that. I started doing the office work and learning, reading and fine this is exactly what I wanted because this is what I fought for with my colleagues that side because if wrong is wrong is wrong I don't mind who are you, wrong is wrong.

**AV:** How did it differ with the work that you were doing in the ANC in the first five years?

**TM:** There is not that much difference like I said. What brought problems between the two of us, that is myself and the other guys in that party we couldn't agree ... I was saying wrong is wrong so that was the problem. Then when I checked this side they say service delivery so meaning we should ... what I wanted to be done that side I am able to do this side.

**DM:** Just out of interest ... you said from early age you never looked at skin colour it didn't matter, people are people ... so it didn't for you ... I am sure there was a perception in this community that the DA represents a particular kind of racial interest. How did you deal with that?

**TM:** For me it was very, very simple like I said. Let me start from a certain year ... I remember it was before 1994 first elections I was still with the ANC, a certain lady from the white community who was with the DP at the time ... because of the potentiality that I have and the activeness she came to me and I was running the cricket ... I introduced the cricket at Rammolutsi I was the first black man to introduce the cricket. We wanted to bring the two communities together but I was challenged saying that I am selling the nation because I was talking to the white community ... they thought I was going to sabotage the elections .. so now coming back to your question even today they say I think I'm white but I know for a fact that they discriminate, they are in a race racialism, rather than in the delivery race. But let me tell you it worked and it is recognised you can ask Bramage and he can testify people anything they want they know that Thabo is there and we talk to him about this and you know what I don't have difficulties to socialise. But other people do but at the end of the day those who had the perception because it was not with them it was thrown in by certain people they start to analyse and at the end of the day they start to say ja, this was right because some people say a white man knows exactly and you work for that, you get what you earned. But with us you look at your pocket and your family and you forget about that.

**DM:** When did you decide to run for office or when did the party put your name forward?

**TM:** I remember there was a problem with employment and the people ... people ... (break) I was saying because we were still having that problem it was something that... it was still an issue burning inside us and people wanted jobs and we wanted to fight this corruption of giving jobs to their friends, buddies and their girlfriends. Then there was a project coming down it was for sewage pipes, it was even before the elections and I was passing, dressing in a DA shirt and I saw people gathering and said what is this and they said this is the thing and I said fine. I went down there already there were a list making four hundred and something I think names and only 20 people were needed for that project and I asked some questions what is happening here? Then they started saying this is the thing of this party and really their friends must come to an end and how must we stop it? Rather than talking and they say come up with ideas. And I said alright fine and then I suggested what is the problem? I asked the chosen few who were just running the list. Who made the list? No we were told to make the list but they did not want to disclose and I said fine this thing is not going to happen ... those lists we are going to destroy

them, we are either going to start new list of those who are here because from that list I want to look at and check the list. Some of the people from the list were working they were going to leave their job and it was stupid because working permanently and coming and work for the project for which is going to grant for a short time so you can understand that this thing was done just to what make a favour or whatsoever. Then I met er ... what do you call ... the personnel of that project. I said listen here, you are not going to do with this one you stop and this thing stops now ... then I phoned the lady from DA. I said listen let's fix this situation how are we going to do this but she never knew because she was new with politics and I said listen I'm going to do what I'm going to do and then we made one list including every one ... those who was in the list but not present we scrapped them off ... and concentrated on the people who was present at the time. And we make a raffle, then people were chosen and then we wrote a report down to the DA and it was like that. And I stopped the rubbish that was going to take place at that time and during the elections it was, or should I say it was unfortunate because I did not win the ward because I was standing for a certain ward ... but because of what I did that mark we went to the interview after the elections of PR councillors because with DA it is different. With this party you go through the procedure, the process, the interview by 19 members of that panel of that team ... you will be interviewed at the end of the day. I won and that mark was still with them so that mark was known within the members of DA.

**DM:** What year of elections are you referring to?

**TM:** The last elections, 2005...2006 elections.

**DM:** I understand that there is another one councillor from DA in the area? There are two of you?

**TM:** Ja, that one she won, the same lady that I phoned.

**DM:** So tell us a little bit now that it has almost been, like what 2006, a year and a half you have been a DA councillor. How has it been to be a DA councillor in Rammolutsi which has been dominated by the ruling party, the ANC?

**TM:** You know, what it was very hard when we started but people are seeing the change because people are flocking down, up and down for me, to solve their problems. Like I'm saying it is good for me to put my head on the block for the people I don't mind what to say only if I know what I'm doing is right.

**DM:** Just give us an example of the work that you do as a DA councillor?

**TM:** Specifically as a PR, yours is to be in the party, you can just imagine I'm not going to mention this to the media because... but at the end of the day you still doing the same jobs that a ward councillor do. You attend to the problems of the people you go out up and down, running for anything that the community brings down - water problems, house problems, roads sewages, all those things we attend to them at the end of the day you wake up twelve o'clock or whatever you have to.

**DM:** Have you seen things changing for the better or not? How is the track record so far?

**TM:** Let me tell you the foot print for the DA is visible, because some of the things which were done the way they were done before there was no opposition. The first five years there was no opposition the second five years there was a DA PR councillor but he was ineffective and he was even swallowed by the ruling party. But by now it is visible because people can even talk if they do things they can say ok no problem we can join the DA.

**DM:** How is the response by the ruling party to your activities in the community?

**TM:** You don't want to know about it because they hate me, they hate someone who is intelligent to come and teach them. That is why they have the in-fight within them because those who are against them they are those who want to put light guys you are making mistakes 1,2,3,4 ...so, at the end of the day they sideline them as their members. So that is why we are in this ... but I don't mind with me because it is happening to them so what.

**DM:** As a councillor what would you identify as the key challenges for this community now, in terms of ... whether it be socially, economically or politically?

**TM:** Let me start with political fact. We need, we understand that ANC was part of the liberation forces ... not the ANC only liberated the people no it is wrong, because they were so many forces ... the Steve Biko's, the AZAPO's, the PAC. I appreciate that, I accept that but I will always respect the old man. I wish he could have time to rule again maybe we could have what we have now. People now that we have to face the problem, I think people should make a reasonable choice by choosing oppositions to guard against the ruler because a ruler without opposition is like maybe is a lost nation is a nation in the dark because anyone will do what he or she likes and then that brings our country in the map of African states face so we are not part of that. So we are still happy, it is still privileged that it was accepted that opposition was given the thumbs up ... so it is good for that. But right now people should use that opportunity, that alright you have failed let's put the next one and if he fails we will put the next one - that is how it works. Economically I think the ruling party should focus on uplifting the standards of the lives of the corporate. There is no way in which corporate can perform very good while at the end of the day they get nothing from that or is milked out. Do you understand what I'm saying?

**DM:** When you say corporate, are you talking about big business?

**TM:** The municipalities must sit down with the corporate, try to do things that will encourage corporate to expand, like corporate man with regard to check on water, electricity supply, the land. If the corporate want to buy the land you don't have because this guy is having money let me suck him up, no you destroy the business because that piece of land he buys he is going to extend and then he is going to need people to work on that. At the end of the day municipalities should play a role of making the local economies to be visible. Should interact the people to come down should make a way of making others to come to the municipalities.

**DM:** So you think in Rammolutsi there should be a greater involvement of the private sector?

**TM:** Exactly that. Socially; our people need to be taught that a human being is a human being irrespective of white, black, or whatsoever. And let me tell you that we reflect the image of God irrespective of colour, a white colour it's a neutral colour, a black colour as we are saying we are black is a neutral colour, you will never change that colour to a pink or brown it remains black you mix it with whatever it remains black and there is a saying which says, black is beautiful and white is also beautiful. You cannot mix white with another colour it remains white, so but other colours can mix with pink and blue but with us it means we are from somewhere and we reflect someone and that is God irrespective of what the scientists say where do they come from .... As I was saying, our people need to be taught, this guy is a good guy and then you understand our white community also needs to be taught and accept and forget because we still have them who are still pointing fingers who makes it difficult for us even their way of talking even from the working field ... some are still using the things that were using at the past so that makes it difficult for us.

**DM:** Just a very specific question ... I should have asked this previously. You were saying your constituents ... that a lot of people in the community come to you regularly. What are the main problems that the people come to you with as a councillor?

**TM:** Jobs my man, jobs, houses and food. How can you eat when you don't work? Where will you sleep if you don't have a roof? It was also mentioned in the newspapers everywhere that even the RDP house are still given to the friends and family not the needy. So what is the problem? So like now, even if you can go to the offices there is a queue for people who are still waiting for their names or whatever for that specific house...

**DM:** Just a couple of last questions. What would you identify, not identify but if you were to look at the next five years ... you are a councillor until 2011, you have got a quite a term to run ... how would you look at the next 3 years in terms of what you think should happen in this community and what you think will happen? What you would like to see and what you think is going to actually (happen)?

**TM:** I want to see people working. The ruling party should stop using the people's thing to their political benefit because anything that they are doing they say we as ruling party have done this and they are using the sources of the country to benefit themselves, so it's wrong, that should stop. I need to say the lives of people should change and how this has to change ... that is having houses, having food, being able to live and do whatever they want to. And our education system have to change especially in the township because we still have some school that are platooning and in winter times it is a problem and that is difficult.

**DM:** And very lastly we always ask all of our interviewees if there is something that you want to say that we might have not asked. We have asked so many questions but we might have not covered or asked something that you feel is important to say and you might do that now.

**TM:** You know what I think I have covered everything.

**DM:** Thank you very much

**TM:** Thank you.

**MINUTES: 42:25**