

**Project name:** Alternative History Project  
**Date of interview:** 2007-06-16  
**Location of interview:** Maandagshoek, Limpopo  
**Language of interview:** Xhosa/English  
**Name of Interviewer/s:** DM McKinley & Ahmed Veriava  
**Name of Interviewee/s:** Laurence Xhetsa & Simon Bongo  
**Name of translator:** Emmanuel Mokgoga  
**Name of transcriber:** Moses Moremi  
**Audio file name:** AHP\_MAA\_XhetsaLaurenceBongoSimon\_20070616

### **INTERVIEW WITH LAURENCE XHETSA & SIMON BONGO.**

**Dale McKinley (DM):** Can you just tell us your full names and, what are your jobs that you hold in the mine?

**Laurence Xhetsa (LX):** My name is Laurence Xhetsa; I'm a team leader in the company called Ubuntu small scale mining which is subcontracted in mining in Burgersfort.

**Simon Bongo (SB):** I am Simon Bongo I'm working under Ubuntu small scale mining company as an operator.

**DM:** Can you tell us how long you have been here in this community, since when have you been working here?

**SB:** I have started working in the mining industry since 1979, then I left the mine in 1998 and joined this company. By then the company was operating in Klerksdorp and I have been transferred from Klerksdorp to this area.

**DM:** What year were you transferred here?

**LX:** I came here in 2003 and I left the company but I came again in 2005.

**SB:** I started working here in 2003 and I'm also from Klerksdorp.

**DM:** You said you have been in the mining industry for a long time, just tell us about before 1994 prior to democracy ... How was working in the mining industry, just generally the conditions and the workers?

**LX:** I joined the mine since I left school in 1979, and I found that it was difficult to organise the union in the mine and it was difficult to find a place to stay because things were divided, there was a place for blacks and a place for whites. If you can do something wrong in the mine, they will just dismiss you without a hearing. In 1992 that was when we organised a union called National Union for Mineworkers. The union changed things and if you done wrong there will be a hearing and steps will be taken from there. Things started changing and even the benefits, we started having them. The way things are now it's better than before. By that time if they can find you organising workers you were to be arrested and if you are not arrested then you would be dismissed or be blacklisted and you can't work with the industry because you have a bad influence

to workers. And if you or your family member passes away, there was nothing to cover even for the burial and NUM then addressed these issues ... now it is better but not 100%.

**DM:** I'm assuming that most of the work that you did in the 70s, 80s and 90s was in the Rand areas around Joburg, Pretoria and the Vaal ...?

**LX:** No, I was in Welkom.

**DM:** And you have been a member of NUM since 1992?

**SB:** Since 1992 I have been with NUM and now I am a shop steward, serving in NUM.

**DM:** You said a lot of things were bad, even the conditions, How did you feel when the April 1994 elections happened? What did they make you feel as a mine worker looking to the future?

**LX:** Things were better because they introduced the labour relations to do things that helped the workers and the introduction of the CCMA which if there is a problem between two parties the matter will be taken to the CCMA or to the labour court. It was better because a lot of things were introduced, even the funeral covers and we were then recognised as workers and now we are free. We even have political organisations and we have union activities and the procedures that you have to follow when you elect a leader without any restriction.

**DM:** Now both of you said that in the 90s you shifted and started working for a company called Ubuntu. One of the main complaints of the unions has been the process of outsourcing and the problem of casualisation of labour and that kind of thing. Would you consider going and working for the company without all the benefits as something that was a negative thing.

**LX:** Yes it was negative because this issue of outsourcing, where the big companies such as mines are outsourcing the workers to contracting companies, where then they are hiring cheap labour people and doing exactly the same job done by the miners. The same applies on us here ... we are working as contracting company here with the mine and we are doing the same job.

**DM:** Did both of you loose your jobs ... I mean at the mine and then you got contracted and recruited by Ubuntu? How did that happen?

**SB:** In my case; I resigned after the 1997 national strike. We were all dismissed, when I came back I was demoted from the position of team leader to down there to the team worker, then I decided to resign from the mine and then I joined this company Ubuntu

**LX:** Myself I started with him only in this company.

**DM:** Which year did you join?

**SB:** In 2003 here at this community.

**DM:** How did you get this job?

**SB:** They did come to Eastern Cape, I found the job here.

**DM:** Did you come to Maandagshoek looking for work?

**SB:** I was transferred from Transkei to Klerksdorp and from there to here

**DM:** In terms of work here in Maandagshoek, what types of conditions do you find yourself working on in the mine? Have they been good and have there been a lot of strikes here at Modikwa mine recently? Describe the relationship in this mine between the workers and the management of Anglo and ARM?

**LX:** The problem started in 2003 when the companies in this mine were supposed to hire workers from this area. What happened was that at the time the mine started, the system was to take the people from other mines to come and work here, like the issue of Canops Corporation. When it started they started with people from school but without experience and most people from here never worked at the mine and the mine wanted people with experience. The other problem with Modikwa is with salaries because if you are a parent and working underground and working in the mine, the salaries are the same, whether you are an operator driving a machine, the salaries are the same. It happened that on the side of the workers and the management, things were not good. This is what caused the strike that was here. In other words the workers are not happy with how they are being treated.

**DM:** Can you describe the relationship between yourself and the people of this community? Because there has been some tension about the community saying there should be only local people working in the mine?

**SB:** It was difficult especially when we first arrived here, because there was a perception that we came to take their jobs because when you start, the management wants to look at the skills that you have. But along the line we started understanding each other and said that as South Africans we must differ because of the employer but still it was not 100% because there were people who would say we are taking their jobs. We will try though to solve these difficulties and there will be mines which are going to open for people to get jobs. There are still tensions even now but it's not like before when we first arrived here. Another thing is that when the mine started to operate there were some promises to the community in terms of water, roads and things like that but those things never happened and these promises made the conflicts that are between all the mine workers in all the mine here and the community. And now the community are saying someone comes and asks to operate a business here, it should be them to agree. If you can remember well the past few weeks there were people who were arrested for protesting against the opening of the new mine.

**DM:** How would you describe the relationships between the people who were hired by Ubuntu and the people who were hired by the section 21? Because there seems to be differences in salaries and conditions?

**LX:** What is happening especially with the contractors, the conditions are not the same and other contractors they don't even have benefits, you just get your salary and that's it.

**DM:** This mine is supposed to be a joint venture between Anglo and African Rainbow Minerals (ARM) right? ARM is supposed to be a BEE partner, as a worker how do you

experience that in the mine in day to day operations? Is there any kind of thing that is of benefit or is there anything taken away ... can you describe that to us?

**SB:** The BEE does not benefit us as workers but it benefits only individuals. There are no changes and benefits and this thing that was said by the former president James Motlatsi is not right (Motlatsi is now the owner of Ubuntu) because even the conditions are not good and then we now experience more exploitation than before.

**DM:** Why do you think that's the case? I mean we have Cyril as a former unionist and now a multimillionaire, you got Patrice Motsepe, why do you think we have former comrades doing exactly the same thing as the former oppressors did?

**LX:** To my observation, even if we have the people from NUM, ANC but things are still bad, I think it's the system they are using. I may call it their strategy but it's their way of running business. Yes they are there but they hired people who were in the capitalist system as managers and themselves are there as directors and these managers are the ones who were there in the apartheid, using that experience of exploiting people, so that is why there is no change. That is why there is a gap between us and the top guys. You can't just go up there without going via the managers and they are implementing the old procedures, unless these people can change and train the disadvantaged people to run their businesses, is where you can see the change

**Ahmed Veriava (AV):** Why do you think former miners/union leaders are capitalists today?

**LX:** When we talk about BEE, when we took the government from the old regime we said black people must occupy positions. But now the problem we have is that instead of these people reporting back to the people, they don't report, they are just serving themselves and their jackets where they are now. If you look you will find that during the time instead of being the unionists they become capitalists. We don't see any changes because the system they are using it was used even before.

**DM:** You are new to this industry (LX) and you have been in this industry for a long time (SB). How does that make you feel? All the struggles that have happened ... the NUM pioneered unionism in this country and all of the collective bargaining, the rights and everything, you have mentioned some of the things, the LRA. But now you are sitting in the mine working for this outsourced company with its BEE component. How does that make you feel about things since 1994, on a personal level, as a worker?

**LX:** Taking a person like Patrice Motsepe as a director and making John van Veen the manager who reports to him, is not right because things will never be good.

**DM:** This place that you live in now, do you think that the conditions, I mean one of the main complaints of the workers in the past was the single sex hostels and the separation from families for a long period of time. How do you think your conditions of work not in the mine but here, has changed in this kind of situation?

**SB:** In fact we tried to address our situations about staying with our families in the case of Modikwa where there are hostels. We found places to rent like this and in the places that we stay, this is not a hostel we stay with our families here but it's not enough because

the room I'm staying in is small. It is only for my wife not with children but it is not yet being addressed saying there is a place where workers can stay with their families.

**DM:** Are you married as well? And do you have children here with you?

**LX:** Yes I'm married but I don't stay with my children here.

**DM:** Do you wish your children can be here?

**LX:** But I don't have enough space.

**DM:** How do you pay rent? Is it a separate arrangement or it was arranged by the mine?

**LX:** It is a separate arrangement.

**DM:** And the rate that you pay here, do you think it is fair or do you think it is too much?

**LX:** No one has said whether it is fair or it is too much but everyone wants to make a profit. But for us, for example I'm paying R290 including water and electricity, it is reasonable for me.

**DM:** Where do you get your water from?

**SB:** From some taps, there is a shower, and a tap for drinking water

**AV:** This question may be embarrassing, but for a man like yourself whose wife is far away. You know they say a man has needs ... for man who lives here without their wife ... what do they do for women?

**SB:** They visit their wives at home, maybe only on weekends

**AV:** I'm actually asking, broadly ... now considering that you can't see your wife, what do you do .... maybe not you but take another man for example?

**LX:** You just have to go around, out there but it is not safe,

**AV:** What do you mean, 'not safe'?

**LX:** It is easy for you to get sick because of the diseases and again you may get injured because you are approaching somebody's wife.

**DM:** In social terms here, do you feel like you are separate from the community, like this is where you are, maybe you go around and get some things but this is where you belong? Is that how it feels?

**LX:** Yes

**AV:** Are there prostitutes that men from the mine use?

**LX:** It is not prostitutes as such, but men are just having relationships with women outside. But bear in mind that the people from this community – the Pedi speaking people – they may say to you this is not your area, so why are you doing this...?

**DM:** That raises a question for me in the workforce, in the mine. One of the things that NUM pioneered was bringing people together in a mine who were from different ethnic groups? Has the outsourcing and the division of things in a place like Modikwa raised

that, were there any problems with regard to being Xhosa speaking and/or Zulu, Pedi speakers or is that not an issue at the work place?

**SB:** At work we just work as workers all of us.

**AV:** As you mentioned the causes of the strike ... how many of those issues were resolved after the strike?

**SB:** Some issues were resolved but some are still in the process

**AV:** As a worker, are you enthusiastic about the processes that have been set up, that have come after, the strike? Do you think it is actually going to address the problems?

**SB:** As I have said it is a process, and the main problem was the fact that we had to work on Sundays because of the CONOPS system ... some of us we are church goers and we also have to go to funerals, but at the end, there was a compromise and an agreement reached.

**DM:** Both of you come from the former Transkei, generally a rural area. How do you think since 1994 things have or have not changed for these kinds of rural areas which are quiet similar around South Africa if you look at the problems.

**SB:** If you look at the rural areas in SA there no changes. There is still a lot of work that needs to be done. If you check where I come from there is no water and also RDP houses and so many things are not right in rural areas because it is the same thing even in Limpopo. And even here if you don't have money you won't get water in your house ... it's a problem because most of the water they have to get for themselves.

**DM:** As workers I mean if you see around South Africa there have been a lot of changes and still you are saying there are no changes. What do you think needs to be done, At the bigger level not necessarily at the mine or just here but in our communities, in rural and also in urban areas. What kinds of things do you think need to happen, to be done to improve people's lives?

**LX:** Also the basic needs of people have not yet been met and there is still a problem of implementation and the strategy that they use to implement and the skills are not there to deliver. So at the end of the day there is no delivery. You can see that there are some things that have changed but we are still suffering like that and in terms of a living wage we still have a problem. If you can look at SA as a whole workers are working some private sectors and you may find that they are not getting enough ... the workers in government are better.

**DM:** At the end of every research, as this tape will be seen by a lot of researchers and the government, we always ask if there is anything that we have not covered that you will like to say?

**LX:** I think we have covered every thing.

**Minutes: 50**

