

Moses Lamola

Facilitator: This is an interview with Moses Lamola, we are in Pretoria the date is 4 September 2012. Papa thanks very much for your time. Please give me a background of where you are, where you were raised, and then your schooling and how you ended up in the world of unions or where you are currently working?

Respondent: I was born in another world called Lifiso, Marapyane, Hammanskraal District. I went to school at Lifiso up until I completed my Standard 6 in 1964. I could not study further, so I stopped going to school and came to Pretoria. At the time the law did not allow people from other districts to work in other districts but I came and looked for a job, I had to come because we were starving at home. So when I arrived here I first worked for Sales House for about 5 years and then looked for a job with SATV, at the time it was called Electrical Television. At the time I was a football player, I played semi professional and eventually was moved into the office. In 1975 I was appointed Secretary for Pretoria and District Football Association and at the same time. Are you interested in the sport history as well?

Facilitator: You can talk about it, maybe I will come back.

Respondent: So as the Secretary of the Association ..., we were able to produce two professional teams which was Mamelodi United and Mamelodi Sundowns. So we were very happy because we had two professional teams in Mamelodi and the economy grew. You can imagine when a professional team visits a township on a Saturday the taxi industry benefits a lot, including those selling fruits, food, shebeeners etc. If there's a big match today the following day the other one would be playing and the economy was growing.

In 1983 I joined CCAWUSA, Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union. I was nominated shop steward in 1984.

Facilitator: Where were you working when you joined CCAWUSA?

Respondent: I worked for OK/Hyperama. So in 1985 I was appointed a member of the Regional Executive Committee of SACAWU. This is when COSATU was born the same year in December, 1985

Facilitator: Of SACAWU or CCAWUSA, I do not understand?

Respondent: It was still CCAWUSA until the launch of COSATU in 1985. In 1987 we went to a conference and the main purpose of the conference was to deal with adoption of the Freedom Charter, CCAWUSA split into two wings before the COSATU Conference. At the COSATU conference, we went, we approached the conference being two wings, CCAWUSA (a) and (b). Based on that COSATU delegated Sydney Mufamadi and Bennie Fanaroff to reconcile the two wings. The two wings reconciled by agreeing to change the name to SACAWU, we turned CCAWUSA to South African Commercial Catering Workers Union. And at the same time after the merger, in 1987 I was also elected to be the Regional Chairperson of COSATU of the Northern Transvaal at the time. It is now a COSATU region

Facilitator: Was it called Northern Transvaal then?

Respondent: Then yes. So it was difficult ..., alright for me yes it was difficult because I was chairing SACAWU this side and COSATU this side. I did that job until 1990.

Facilitator: Both jobs?

Respondent: Yes both jobs until 1990. In 1989 I went with a delegation to Zimbabwe to attend a workshop of the South African Communist Party. The workshop was based on the kind of South Africa we want post apartheid. That was the theme of the workshop. So it was mentioned that as leaders/shop stewards, you are carrying a very big responsibility that of transformation. The main challenge will be transformation. How will you transform the society because you were the people who were making the country ungovernable? How are you going to turn those people around, crime must also stop because we will be governed by black people. That thing discredited us, when we came back we started to sing the song that "theft must come to an end" and the workers labelled us sell outs. They said we have now crossed the floor they are now working with white people, why are they asking us to stop stealing, it means they have stolen enough for themselves. We were then discredited and were no longer in the workers books and we were booted out of office.

Facilitator: Really, just for that?

Respondent: Yes because we had to call them to order, we were also tasked in the township for forming Community Policy Forums, these were wagons that we wanted to use to transform the people. So when we called for the relationship between the community and the police, we were told that we are sell outs. So but because we knew what we were doing, we stuck to it. So on my side, I pushed it the first CPF was formed in Mamelodi in this country after the apartheid structures.

Facilitator: Were you not chased out of Mamelodi?

Respondent: No

Facilitator: So you remained the Northern Transvaal Chairperson?

Respondent: I left in 1990 when we implemented the workshop results of Zimbabwe, we must now start to work with the police and we must transform our workers, we were then voted out, most of us who were from Zimbabwe.

Facilitator: What happened after that, did you continue with unions or did you just become an ordinary member?

Respondent: I became an ordinary member up until 2000 that is when I retired in 2000.

Facilitator: Were you involved in any other activities because come 1990 you are no longer a union leader, but what about township activities, township struggles, were you involved in them?

Respondent: Yes in 1994 I became the Chairperson of the CPF in Mamelodi until 2004, for ten years.

Facilitator: What were its highlights, the Community Policing Forum?

Respondent: The main purpose was to change the ideas of the society in calling for working together with the police. That was the main challenge or the main task. It was very difficult to convince them to work with the police because at the time police were hostile to us during the struggle and some of us were labelled as sell outs because of that. But we did not go back, we continued.

Facilitator: And just going back baba, your first job you worked for Sales House?

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: So there were no unions then?

Respondent: There were no unions and I still say I was dismissed without any hearing from Sales House

Facilitator: What happened?

Respondent: Because I was popularising the workers to join the union, I became a threat for Edgars.

Facilitator: Edgars/Sales House is one industry?

Respondent: Yes, the big boss is Edgars

Facilitator: What about the workers, were they willing to join?

Respondent: They were willing but the unfortunate part was that there was no slogan of "an injury to one is an injury to all". If you are dismissed it was your baby. So I lost my job because I was spreading the message that we should join the unions. I lost my job and remember before you were employed anywhere, they would first

call your previous boss. So when I got into OK Bazaar, they phoned my boss right here in Pretoria, my previous boss at Edgars. They asked him "if you were in our boots would you hire Moses Lamola?". He said "no I wouldn't that's why I kicked him out he's a trouble maker". So when he dropped the phone he said to me "I'm told you are a trouble maker". The fortunate part was that OK Bazaar was running a football league, now I was the secretary of the association and was the one controlling the grounds. So the manager who was running OK Bazaar league, influenced the employing manager to employ me because this man is not troublesome, he is the one running the league in Mamelodi. So the fixtures were taken out, put on the table to indicate that I am the one who is running this kind of a big league and he is a responsible somebody, the manager was convinced, he then employed me. So in 1983 the manager regretted why he employed me. I organised the workers in Hyperama, 50 plus 1

Facilitator: Under CCAWUSA?

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: But did you find CCAWUSA there or did you form it from scratch?

Respondent: I found it there, it was under Emma Mashinini was our general secretary. She was the one who went around organising in the branches.

Facilitator: And then you became a shop steward of CCAWUSA in 1983?

Respondent: Yes, co-ordinating shop steward

Facilitator: The whole area of Pretoria?

Respondent: The whole store, it's a big shopping centre in Menlyn, so I co-ordinated it

Facilitator: the Menlyn Branch?

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: what were the pressing shop floor issues there, at Menlyn Branch.

Respondent: What we were fighting most was the unfair dismissals because at the time you would just be told that today is your last day, you leave today. The presence of the union fought against unfair dismissals. And again job security ..., for women, if you became pregnant you cannot come back, your job has been taken. And we fought against it until the women were granted 3 months salary at home and her job is secured, she goes back to her work. It was a good achievement at the time, the workers appreciated unions for the achievement. We were fighting against the labour laws by then because the government used to formulate laws that affected the workers without consulting them. So we fought this, that they cannot decide for us without consulting us. So that created a space for unions to be recognised in 1984. Trade unions were recognised in 1984.

Facilitator: What about the working conditions, how were they?

Respondent: They were very difficult but with the intervention of unions we were able to address very many issues such as late coming due transport because we

were staying far from our working place. So we had to establish transport committees. Those representatives were the ones to testify that yes in Mamelodi there are bus boycotts, hence the workers are coming to work late or the trains are irregular, the transport committee would report to management with the information so that people are not dismissed for late coming due to transport challenges. Otherwise in the past they would just dismiss you irrespective of the transport challenges. They would say when we employed you we never talked about transport. So the union intervened on that. And we popularised the injury to one is an injury to all – that slogan worked for the union members because once you touch one of them, they go on strike, they put the tools down.

Facilitator: So it worked very well?

Respondent: Ja it worked very well the, slogan, I still respect it.

Facilitator: Any health hazard issues at work, OK Bazaar, some of the workers may have been working with fridges and therefore getting affected?

Respondent: We initiated a mini sister's room there, to say management we have workers who are not healthy and we need check ups to be done on daily basis for whoever is not feeling well at that time. So a sister's room was created for check ups, some were diagnosed with rheumatic fever they would come out and register their sickness to the sister who will then refer them, take a decision where necessary for them to be removed.

Facilitator: So that worked?

Respondent: It worked

Facilitator: What about general safety at work?

Respondent: Ja we had safety committees there and a number of people were trained including myself, we were trained for first aid and fire extinguisher unit was also established, so safety issues were taken care of.

Facilitator: Was there a need for you to have protective clothing as well at work?

Respondent: Only for those who were working in the fridges but in general membership we did not have protective clothing.

Facilitator: So no struggle about protective clothing, it was just provided or was it a war first?

Respondent: They were just provided, I must be honest, OK Bazaar on protective clothing were very much honest about it.

Facilitator: And what about issues of benefits at OK Bazaar, were you happy with the benefits as CCAWUSA members?

Respondent: We were not happy at a certain stage as CCAWUSA members but we fought for a 13th cheque, we striked for it at the end we got it. Like in the 1986 CCAWUSA strike, that was the longest strike by women. It took three full months, we went on three months strike fighting for a living wage including the 13th cheque and we ended up winning those demands.

Facilitator: The employers gave up because you had valuable reasons on the table?

Respondent: Yes and we took the matter for a solidarity strike by COSATU affiliates. COSATU affiliates approached OK Bazaar Head Office to say we are now going to go on sympathy strike, and OK Bazaar felt that they are going to lose a lot before COSATU affiliates went on sympathy strike.

Facilitator: But were you members ..., was CCAWUSA an affiliate of FOSATU?

Respondent: No CCAWUSA was not, you were not under FOSATU

Facilitator: What were the reasons?

Respondent: I don't have information on that because what we had was that our secretary and chairperson of CCAWUSA, in their reports they said leadership of FOSATU are not putting all the cards on the table, so as a result we will have to wait until we are satisfied about the administration. So whilst waiting, talks came out about the formation of COSATU and we focussed on the formation of COSATU without even checking as to how far is FOSATU.

Facilitator: And then you become a regional executive committee member in 1985 for CCAWUSA?

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: Why you of all the people and what were the challenges of running this particular post?

Respondent: As I indicated that I was the secretary general of the Pretoria and District Football Association. The players who were playing were workers during the week and as a result I was very much popular because our association was based in Mamelodi and Atteridgeville also. So when I got into COSATU, the workers at COSATU at industry level were the football players during the weekend and as a result I became popular into COSATU also.

Facilitator: And the challenges of running this particular position at regional level, regional executive committee?

Respondent: Ja and of both organisations?

Facilitator: Ja

Respondent: It was a very heavy challenge and you see organisations were using tactics to have you accepting these positions. You will be told this is a deployment and workers are feeling strongly that you should take that position, and if the majority says take the position who are you to say no, and as a result I was busy every weekend. I would attend SACAWU meetings, COSATU meetings of executive, general council of shop stewards, shop stewards council of COSATU this side. I had it tough that time, but because one was committed for our freedom, I said regardless of these challenges let me move forward. What we wanted is freedom because we had to mobilise internal working class. That was our main aim

Facilitator: Your commitment to unions did it impact negatively on your family?

Respondent: No fortunately my wife was working at Pep Stores and Pep Stores also was under SACAWU, so she understood why I was always on the road. That was fortunate.

Facilitator: You mentioned that there was a split between CCAWUSA, there was CCAWUSA 1 and 2, what happened, what exactly were the underlying issues?

Respondent: The main problem was the adoption of the Freedom Charter in 1987 at Wits University, it was on a Monday morning when we voted in favour of the adoption of the Freedom Charter before the COSATU Congress because we had to go there with a position. So we voted in favour of the adoption of the Freedom Charter, others said no ways, Freedom Charter is a sell out document we can't vote for it. So the union split, it was in the hands of Sydney Mufamadi on the day. He was crying tears. So the union went into two groups. So I remained in the group that was in favour of the Freedom Charter. I went on as a regional chairperson.

Facilitator: What was the problem of the other group who was against the Freedom Charter, what were the issues exactly?

Respondent: The main issue was that they indicated that Pan African Congress moved out of the ANC simply because of this Freedom Charter that says South Africa belongs to all who live in it, both black and white, they said no whites cannot be South Africans, they are saying they are Europeans you must go and read on the toilets, it's written Europeans (white) only, blacks only, so we can't say South Africa belongs to Europeans. So based on that they walked out of the conference. It was difficult

Facilitator: Eventually how was this resolved then?

Respondent: Eventually a mini workshop was called for the leadership of those who were against the adoption of the Freedom Charter, chaired by Bennie Van der Hoff. He workshopped the leadership and won them over. So the leadership called a meeting, a broader meeting and sold the idea and the members agreed to say okay let us merge and change the name, so the name was swapped and called SACAWU.

Facilitator: So they all agreed?

Respondent: They all agreed and the conference of COSATU to adopt the Freedom Charter was next week, so we merged and next week we went to the conference. The Freedom Charter was adopted by COSATU in that conference.

Facilitator: In all the activities were there no threats from the police, being arrested or being killed?

Respondent: Arrests were .., threats were there everyday, we had just arrived, as you see me I am still volunteering is because I am thanking God that a big number of people died and I am still alive, thank you God, let me help other people. Threats were there, we were threatened. I remember when we went to Zimbabwe, a day before we went out, they came the Special Branch and I was warned, told that "you are making our job difficult and we are not going to turn back what we are doing, we know you are going to attend a meeting called by the Communist Party, do us a favour by not going there". In Zimbabwe I raised it at the leadership led by comrade Brian, I said that matter and said I think the best thing, let the others go I can no longer go there I must stay away. They said if you can't do that if you do that you are an informer, you need to go there and be part of that information, they

told me that we want them to remain without a leader, the Mandela came out and went for training and went back into the country and went to go and operate within the country because they were leaders, we can't have leaderless people. So I came back sweating. But I must say the slogan "An injury to one is an injury to all" saved me many times because one day I was carrying pamphlets, I delivered in Brits, Rustenburg, Thabazimbi, PP Rust, when I arrived in Warmbaths, the Special Branch stopped me and when they opened the boot there were pamphlets. They phoned Pretoria, Captain Brits in Pretoria. They told him they have me with a car full of pamphlets calling for a stay away. So when he was responding they dragged me to listen. Captain Brits said to them "listen here, if you want PP Rust to be stinking tomorrow, lock him up or otherwise take away those pamphlets and let him go". They swore at me, one of them slapped me. Alright the threats were there nearly everyday but what protected me was that slogan because once you arrest me workers will go mad, go on strike, even the mine workers would join the strike. That is what saved me.

Facilitator: The township struggles, did the people from the township support the worker struggles?

Respondent: Yes because as workers, as shop stewards, our attitude was to be shop stewards at shop floor level, in the streets and even at home to promote the workers rights. So we were working hand in hand with the CIVICS. So, community based organisations were working hand in hand with the working class.

Facilitator: What were the highlights of your career as the Northern Transvaal Chair of COSATU?

Respondent: My highlights were ., our struggle against the Labour Relations Act, we fought against it up until the government agreed to go to the table with the leadership of COSATU and NACTU. And also our rolling mass action on workers

rights, I think those were the highlights for me, where we managed to win workers rights in every factory level, being a union member or a non-union member as long as you are a worker you were protected. They could not ill treat you simply because you are not a union member. We were covering everything for all workers.

Facilitator: So everyone was covered?

Respondent: Yes, everyone was covered.

Facilitator: Your trip to Zimbabwe, I know you were deposed after that, yourself and others because of the Zim trip, but did it achieve some things that it set out to achieve?

Respondent: With me yes because we were told about the biggest challenge of our struggle is transformation of the society, comrade Hlophe, I remember his name, he was the man in charge of that workshop. He said the biggest challenge that we are going to be faced with is to transform the very same workers that we are leading, to change their minds is going to be very difficult because you educated them to disrespect every law of the government, how are you going to make them to respect all the laws of the coming government, it's going to be difficult. We were charged to come back and form CPF's, it was a very challenging thing to stand in front of the community to say let us begin to work with the police, the community was not happy. And at that time remember, some of our comrades were missing, we did know what had happened to them, they were locked up, taken by the police and you stand up and say let us work with the police. It was very difficult. But because we were working with the leadership during the struggle, we were able to call all community based organisations together and address them, and tell them which best system can we employ to be able to close the gap between the community and the police. We need a vehicle that will carry these two parties and

we are saying the only vehicle is Community Police Forums, the community must jump into this wagon with the police otherwise we will not win the crime.

Facilitator: Ja, it was opposed of course

Respondent: Ja

Facilitator: But how long were you at OK Bazaars?

Respondent: I left in 2000

Facilitator: Was that a relief for the employer?

Respondent: I took an early retirement because of changes of the situation at store level, I was no longer a shop steward, I was a target, by management, they would put above me those who were not in the struggle to be my supervisors. And they were told how to handle me. They won because I had to quit

Facilitator: They put you under pressure?

Respondent: Yes, they won because I had to throw away the towel

Facilitator: Did they want to fire you or find a way of firing you?

Respondent: Ja they wanted to get a way of firing me, they would give me difficult tasks, they would ask me to clean the floor for instance, and imagine I was the supervisor prior to my union involvement. They came with a system of restructuring, they restructured and took away all the supervisory positions and said we are no longer working with supervisors here. So restructuring was a final management decision. So they told me that as from now on you are going to be responsible for this place, keep it clean at all times. I had to choose to keep it clean or take early retirement. So I chose to go.

Facilitator: Just when you look back papa, starting with CCAWUSA, what would you say were the main achievements of CCAWUSA before we can come to SACAWU that is after 1987?

Respondent: The main achievement was to have the recognition agreement signed, to be recognised by the bosses. That was the main achievement.

Facilitator: Were they refusing to recognise the union?

Respondent: They did not want to recognise the unions, they wanted unions to have 50 plus 1 in the company of membership. And we recruited enough members to reach 50 plus 1 and we went to the table speaking from a powerful position to say here are our members, now we are sharing responsibility, you have the money we have the power, so it's a must that we work together. It was Emma Mashinini who declared that on the table to say "management we are equal in the store, you must not do a thing without informing our shop stewards". That was a wonderful achievement, we went out with our fists raised.

Facilitator: And for SACAWU the main achievements of SACAWU?

Respondent: I think the major one was job security. Which was won by SACAWU in 1988, it was protecting pregnant women.

Facilitator: What is the future of COSATU today?

Respondent: I am no longer in touch with them, because they also do not want to know where we are.

Facilitator: You mean you've been forgotten?

Respondent: We are, we were like SACAWU level, we are written off

Facilitator: Does that bring about bitterness or is it okay?

Respondent: No with me no, I don't feel a pain, with me I got what I wanted, what I wanted was freedom and I'm happy because the peaceful settlement that was reached was created by ourselves, we were mandating the negotiators at Kempton Park, we gave them a mandate to go for peaceful settlement and that was achieved, everybody for himself now.

Facilitator: So any regrets, do you regret why you spend so much time in the unions and then you are forgotten at the end of the day?

Respondent: No regrets and I'm happy, my wife also is with me, she is supporting what I am doing even now. So we have got no regrets as a family, my children also have got no regrets. We have achieved what we wanted to achieve, I am always

telling them "are you seeing what is happening in Libya, Syria, do you see what is happening up there". We are in safe hands here and they appreciate that, to say you people, you leaders chose the right way because we had only two ways to go to war or to negotiate. So we chose negotiation, and my family is happy about that.

Facilitator: Thanks very much for your time papa, that was worth it.

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