

A Night that made me proud

It is not every day that one feels a glow of pride at being black in this country.

What with violence in KwaZulu-Natal leaving a never-ending trial of death and destruction, the taxi violence, the near hysteric campaign against black expatriates and the witch hunts.

But last Saturday was an exception. The gala evening at a Johannesburg hotel where the Black Lawyers Association celebrated the tenth anniversary of its Legal Education Centre (LEC).

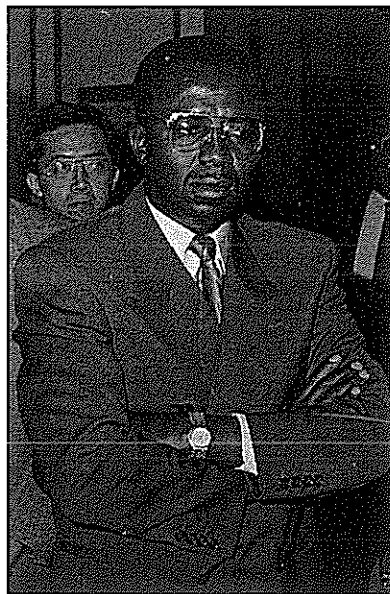
It was a night to celebrate the achievements of the LEC and to honour black lawyers who have since progressed to some of the highest offices of the legal profession. I sat in the audience and many thoughts went through my head.

Thoughts of the many struggles that I have personal knowledge of which were waged by various communities and organisations with the backing of the LEC.

Foremost in my mind was the Zebediela strikes in 1989 and 1990, when workers who were paid less than R70 a month downed tools and demanded more money. Management of this parastatal company called in the police, who unleashed dogs on the strikers and forced them out of their compounds.

This had been the trend over the years, and such police intervention would invariably lead to the collapse of the protests as the workers depended on the company accommodation. But this time around the had a union that called the LEC in. And in no time a magisterial order to evict the workers had been challenged, and reversed.

BLA-LEC Intervention



Moseneke

The problem did not end there. Management did not want to speak to the union.

The LEC sent a team comprising of renowned legal people, Dikgang Moseneke, McCaps Motimele, Dolly Mokgatle and Francis Davis, who camped in the area - stopping numerous attempts by

the police to disrupt union meetings.

These four literally negotiated as if they were the union. They worked up to 2am on a number of consecutive days.

In the end the workers won



Moloto
some money, but more importantly, they won a major psychological battle of fearing management nomore.

This was the victory that was to propel the workers into future battles, which they also won.

There were many others who would get assistance from the LEC - like students expelled from schools for political activities and communities that faced forced removals and evictions from houses for not paying rent.

Black Knights

All these thoughts came cascading through my mind as I sat there and saw this night of

black knights in progress. And there was this glowing feeling of pride in being there, in being associated - albeit from a distance - with the BLA-LEC. When former director Justice Moloto told Deputy President Thabo Mbeki that the government must stop pandering to white lawyers and start giving black lawyers briefs to do Government work, the cheers were deafening.

One almost felt like shouting Viva when Moseneke, he of many battles and many trials, stood to receive his award.

He was at his best too, telling those gathered that their numbers alone were an achievement. "Remember how few we were when we started? Look at us now, just look at us. We are becoming ministers of justice, judges and we will

become attorney generals and we will rule this country. We will," he said. Very emotional stuff that brought near tears of joy. A joy at being there to see this positive aspect of black life being celebrated in such a good way. It was inspiring, it was reviving, it was magic. It made one feel good at being black. Well done Black Lawyers Association. Well done Legal Education Centre.

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