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The crisis of trade union representation in post-1973 unions and the role of the full-time shop steward (FTSS): A case study of NUMSA at BMW Rosslyn Plant Tshwane South Africa

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The crisis of trade union representation in post-1973 unions and the role of the full-time shop steward (FTSS):

A case study of NUMSA at BMW Rosslyn Plant

Tshwane South Africa.

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Sociology).

Johannesburg, 2023

Declaration

I declare that this is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Ethic clearance number: **H16/07/22**

Musawenkosi Hemelton Malabela

(Name of candidate and Signature)

Date 22 December 2023

PhD Abstract

Full-time shop stewards (FTSSs) are elected trade union shop stewards paid by the employer to do full-time union work. This is a peculiar arrangement in the South African industrial landscape which draws from the German model of workers' councils. These FTSSs were first negotiated in the early 1980s at Ford and Volkswagen (VW) in South Africa. The main reason for these FTSSs was, as noted by Gomomo (1985), to deal with production pressures and disruptions caused by ordinary shop stewards, who, from time to time, would be pulled from the production line to attend to trade union business. The employer offered these positions as a tool for addressing this dilemma. This benefitted the trade unions that were growing exponentially and did not have money to hire organisers to service every organised and non-organised workplace. The s served to augment the role of the organisers; they became a de facto organiser. This study, through in-depth interviews, document analysis, focus groups, ethnography and participant observation, explores the contradictory role of FTSSs through the case study method at BMW.

The findings highlight the significance of the FTSSs in building the power of the trade union at the shopfloor level and the potential they have in building a strong, vibrant and militant trade union movement on the ground or branch level. The evidence shows that, if not properly managed, FTSSs' positions can be used for upward social mobility by self-interested individuals. This is because of the benefits and resources attached to these positions, which accord incumbents some level of social status. Hence these positions are highly and fiercely contested. For these positions to yield positive outcomes, FTSSs ought to be accountable to the rank-and-file members through regular meetings for feedback and mandate takings, and regular

elections ought to be institutionalised. Notions of career pathing of FTSSs need not be entertained as they will open space for the institutionalisation of upward social mobility of FTSS. Although upward social mobility is one of the options for an FTSS, those who are not re-elected to office face social downgrading, which includes going back to the production line. This comes with a huge personal loss and has a psychological impact as they lose the benefits associated with these positions and the social status that comes with it.

The thesis turns Michels' (1958) notion of 'iron law of oligarchy' on its head as it shows that FTSSs should act as a countervailing force against the development of oligarchic tendencies in the workplace. Because accountable FTSSs suffocate the development of oligarchic tendencies in the trade union. The thesis argues that accountability is a pain of democracy—it should be embraced and promoted, and regular elections of FTSSs should be encouraged and institutionalised as a countervailing force to the development of oligarchic tendencies. This will promote the worker control principle, which is the cornerstone of these post-1973 trade unions.

The thesis further argues that the FTSS falls into the trap of being a tool of management if not properly managed. They become a communication bridge of management or information brokers[1] (see Malabela, 2012) by communicating production schedules. Borrowing from Tony Lane's (1974) thesis of shop stewards being the *man with two masters,* it argues that the FTSS is the man with three masters. The three masters are the workers who elected them, the second one is the employer who pays their salary, and finally, the trade union who they represent and on whose card they were elected. I posit that all these masters have different expectations: the

[1] See Malabela, 2012

first is to represent them against the employer, the second is to maintain labour peace and avoid unnecessary strikes and stoppages, and the third is to build a strong workplace organisation.

In the final analysis FTSSs are an important and integral part of South African industrial relations—and benefit both the employer and the trade union. The trade union needs to develop clear policies to manage FTSSs, so that the positions are not abused for upward social mobility and to hold them accountable. Accountability occurs through regular general meetings with workers to solicit mandates and report back, and FTSS elections should be institutionalised. Trade unions ought to benefit a great deal from FTSSs only if these positions serve the intentions of the trade unions and build a vibrant workplace organisation that serves the interest of the rank-and-file.

List of abbreviations

AMCU	Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union
BEC	Bench Executive Committee
BGM	Branch General Meeting
BMW	Bayerische Motoren Werke (in English Bavarian Motor Works)
CCMA	Commission for Conciliation Mediation and Arbitration
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions
FTSS	Full-time shop steward
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HR	Human Resource
ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union
IR	Industrial Relations
LOB	Local Office Bearers
LOB	Local Office Bearers
LSSC	Local Shop Steward Council
MAWU	Metalworkers and Allied Workers Union
MICWU	Motor Industry Combined Workers Union
NAAWU	National Automobile and Allied Workers Union
NALEDI	The National Labour and Economic Institute
NBF	National Bargaining Forum
NEC	National Executive Committee
NOB	National Office Bearers
NIHSS	National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUMSA	National Union of Metalwokers of South Africa
OB	Office Bearers

OCCB	Organising, Campaigns and Collective Bargaining
PEC	Provincial Executive Committee
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
POPCRU	Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union
REC	Regional Executive Committee
ROB	Regional Office Bearers
SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Union
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers Union
SAFTU	South African Federation of Trade Unions
SAHUDA	South African Humanities Deans Association
SATAWU	South Africa Transport and Allied Workers Union
SS	Shop Stewards
SSC	Shop Steward Council
TUCSA	Trade Union Council of South Africa
UMMAWOSA	United Metal, Mining and Allied Workers of South Africa
VW	Volkswagen

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Dedication

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Ignorance is the curse of the God; knowledge is the wing wherewith we fly to heaven.
(William Shakespeare: Henry VI Pt 2)

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Show me your friends, and I will show you your future. (Dan Pena)

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

In 1982, the National Automobile and Allied Workers' Union (NAAWU) embarked on a prolonged strike at Volkswagen South Africa (VWSA) in Uitenhage, located in Port Elizabeth (now named Gqeberha). The union sought a weekly wage increment of R2.00. Following the protracted strike, NAAWU and VWSA's management reached a settlement that not only resolved immediate issues but also marked a historic shift in the country's industrial relations landscape. A significant outcome was the introduction of full-time shop stewards (FTSSs), a groundbreaking aspect of the post-1973 trade union movement. Forrest (2011: 26) highlighted that the first FTSS agreement was initially established at Ford, with subsequent adoption by VW. Ford's agreement set a precedent, leading to VW and other companies following suit and offering full-time shop stewards full pay. These FTSSs, elected by the trade union members, received support from the employer in the form of allowances, resources, and facilities to carry out their full-time trade union responsibilities.

The late John Gomomo, one of the first FTSSs at VWSA, a founding member of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and its president from 1991 to 1999, recalled that the reason NAAWU and the VWSA management agreed to the formation of the FTSSs was the constant complaints by the company supervisors (Gomomo, 1985). They were unhappy with the unabating disruptions to the production line caused by NAAWU's senior shop stewards. Whenever there were worker complaints within the plant, NAAWU's senior shop stewards would abandon the production line to attend to these complaints. This invariably

disrupted production. The employers perceived that the FTSSs held the potential to mitigate against disruptions and help foster peace within the plant.

NAAWU's leaders, on the other hand, viewed the FTSS as a mechanism that could be used to build the strength of the trade union, both at branch and local levels. They started negotiating for FTSSs in other plants, where NAAWU was organising. This set a precedent that other trade unions followed, and they, too, began negotiating for FTSSs. Trade unions believed that FTSSs were to augment the role and function of a trade union organiser, which included recruitment, organising, campaigns, and conducting other union activities. This, in effect, turned FTSSs into some form of an organiser of the trade unions. Due to a lack of funding, trade unions could not employ more organisers. For this reason, they took advantage of the agreement between themselves and the employers to elect FTSSs, who assisted the already overstretched organisers who could not service all their workplaces.

Worth noting is the deferential role of shop stewards, FTSSs and organisers. The shop stewards are the primary representatives of workers on shop floors as they are directly elected by workers and work side-by-side with the workers. The FTSS, on the other hand, is a secondary shop steward who is directly elected by workers and, in some instances, elected amongst the ordinary shop stewards themselves. They focus on full-time union work situated in the trade union office in the workplace. The organiser is the trade union official appointed by the trade union to organise and service workers. Thus FTSSs were also advantageous for the unions because, unlike ordinary shop stewards, they had unlimited time off to attend to union activities and thus augment the role of the organiser.

This then brings in the question of the contradictory role of FTSSs and the question of loyalty, whose interests do the FTSSs serve? Where does the loyalty of FTSSs lie? The employer that pays their salary or the rank-and-file members that elected them? This thesis sets itself the task of understanding this contradiction and explores the FTSS in more detail by asking the questions: What is the role of the FTSS in the post-1973 trade unions? What are the advantages and limitations of FTSSs in promoting worker control and internal democracy?

This study is informed by the principal questions: What accounts for the leadership crisis in post-1973 trade unions? Are FTSSs part of the problem? Have they contributed to the crisis of leadership in the trade unions?

In addition, the study attempts to address the following sub-questions:

- Worker control: What is the role of FTSSs, and how do they enhance the principle of worker control? How does the work of FTSSs enhance the work of the trade union? How are FTSSs different from ordinary shop stewards?
- *FTSS the man with three masters:* Why is there a need for FTSSs? What is unique about them? Who are the masters of the FTSS?
- Upward social mobility and the trade union used as a stepping stone versus social downgrading: Are the FTSS positions employed for upward social mobility? What are the perks and resources attached to the position of? Are these perks the reason for the fierce contest for FTSS positions?
- Internal democracy and accountability: Does the position of FTSS afford space for the 'iron law of oligarchy' and social distance? Are FTSSs un/accountable to their constituency? How do FTSSs account to both members and the trade union?

- Social downgrading: What happens to FTSSs who fail to secure re-elections? What are the options available to FTSSs who are not re-elected?

Worker control and internal democracy are some of the basic principles that set apart the post-1973 trade unions and their predecessors. These principles ground these trade unions in the workplace where workers work through shop stewards who are directly elected by members.[2] Shop stewards are accountable to their members through mandate taking and report-backs, which arrested the development of oligarchic tendencies in these unions. This is one of the key themes that the thesis explores and gives an account of its continued existence in these post-1973 trade unions.

The introduction of FTSSs in the 1980s presented a predicament for these post-1973 trade unions as it presented a layer of shop stewards who were to do trade union work on a full-time basis. This presented a challenge for worker control and internal democracy and, more sharply, the issue of accountability, which these post-1973 trade unions guarded dearly. Ideally, FTSSs were expected to benefit both the employer and trade unions. However, the relationship between the employer and trade unions is antagonistic in character, even though it involves cooperation between workers and employers in executing production.

The post-1973 trade unions established after the 1973 Durban strikes were particularly different from the trade unions that existed before them because they sought to build shop floor structures that would ground the trade union movement in the workplace. Workers were to elect shop stewards who would be their leaders on the ground (see Maree 1982,; Baskin 1990;

[2] See Baskin 1990, Friedman 1987, Maree 1982 & 1987 and Webster 1985

Friedman 1987; Webster 1985). The workers were to take charge of their own organisation and hold these elected shop stewards accountable through regular mandates and feedback.

The worker principle and internal democracy were to guide these trade unions, and thus, workers were to participate in the decision-making process of these unions. The decisions of the unions mirrored the desires and aspirations of the workers and not of the trade union official, who was subject to the direct control of the members (Ibid). This marked a shift in the South African trade union movement, especially for independent black trade unions that emerged after the 1973 strikes. Maree (1987: x) posits that independent trade unions were "unions that emerged in the early 1970s and were free from the control of white unions, from those African unions that appeared content with such controls. Over time the meaning of 'independent' broadened out to incorporate trade union autonomy from both the state and employers."

These trade unions were independent, and they were to be truly democratic in the control of their members. The introduction of FTSSs presented a new dimension into the anatomy of these unions, for FTSSs were to be fully paid by the employer while doing full-time union work. This begs the question, are they an organiser accountable to the trade union, or are they workers still accountable to the employer? Thus the contested meaning of the s is explored in this study.

This thesis carefully explains the role of both the shop steward and FTSSs and provides a detailed account of the shop steward movement that gave birth to FTSSs. It argues that FTSSs are an excellent avenue to build the strength of the trade union and avoid oligarchic tendencies, as Robert Michels (1958) argued in his seminal work. Michels contended that as democratic

organisations grow, they tend to develop oligarchic tendencies. This means that instead of the majority dominating decision-making processes within an organisation, these processes tend to be dominated by an elite few. Michels's argument applies not only to organisations but also to trade unions. To avoid oligarchic tendencies from developing within trade unions, the thesis asserts that they must adequately manage FTSSs to ensure they are accountable to the trade union members. Lack of accountability may result in FTSSs being a law unto themselves as well as risk being co-opted and turned into tools of management. Furthermore, the thesis demonstrates that FTSSs utilise the social status and prestige attached to this position for upward social mobility and as a stepping stone to lucrative positions. Finally, the thesis asserts that the opposite is also possible for those who fail to secure re-election as they face social downgrading.

Problem statement

The celebrated German sociologist Robert Michels (1958) memorably argued over a century ago that even though working-class organisations are started on the basic principle of democracy, as they grow, these principles inevitably evaporate, and oligarchy emerges. Michels, (1958: 418) stated:

> [w]ho says organisation says oligarchy. Every party organisation represents an oligarchical power grounded on a democratic basis. We find everywhere electors and the elected. Also, we find everywhere that the power of the elected leaders over the electing masses is almost unlimited. The oligarchical structure of the building suffocates the basic democratic principle. That which is oppresses THAT WHICH OUGHT TO BE.

He called this phenomenon between democracy and oligarchy the 'iron law of oligarchy'.

Trade unions face this quandary because although they are based on democratic goals, they find these difficult to realise in practice. Democracy, however, is a contested concept that can assume different forms. Direct democracy occurs where participation in decision-making occurs through popular assemblies or mass meetings. The election of shop stewards in trade unions is an example of direct democracy. Democracy is also evident in more indirect ways where participation takes place through representatives, for example, in a parliament. In this instance, parliamentarians are elected to represent the interests of their constituency (Pateman, 1970).

This thesis seeks to interrogate Michels' notion of oligarchy and examines, through the lens of FTSS, how oligarch tendencies can be averted at local and branch levels of the trade union, whether it is a law or a tendency. If it is a *law* it would mean that as organisations grow, they will inevitably be *suffocated* by oligarchy and dominated by the elite. With the re-emergence of independent trade unions in South Africa after 1973, Maree (1982: 42) argued that the shop steward "rests on the ultimate control by workers of their organisation. This requires that they take part in decision-making on policy and strategic matters affecting the union and that union representatives and officials remain accountable to the rank and file." In a sense, this is what all trade unions strive to achieve. This was especially the case regarding the unions that emerged after the strikes in Durban in 1973, which emphasised the principle of worker control.

The relation between oligarchy and democracy is explored by examining the role and function of the shop stewards, particularly the FTSS. In the wake of the Marikana massacre in August 2012, FTSSs have come under the spotlight. FTSSs were blamed for being too close to management and neglecting workers, thus becoming tools of management (see Chinguno,

2012; Hartford, 2012 and Sacks, 2012). Marikana brough to the fore the fault lines of internal democracy within the post-1973 trade unions and the challenge that democratic institutions such as trade union faces an existential crisis under neo-liberalism.

FTSSs can be a tool of management, which in turn undermines the democratic principles of the trade union and worker control, much to the frustration of workers who they ought to represent. FTSS, in this context, become a threat to their own organisations as they fail to represent their members, and individual self-interests take over, thus the eruption that occurre.

This study seeks to understand the role of the FTSS, whether they contributed to the growing social distance between rank-and-file members and their elected leaders, and whether they have become the bottom layer of managerial bureaucracy on the shop floor.

The question of union democracy has been enduring in industrial sociology. Lipset et al. (1972: 163) discussed the changing role of trade unions in the United States. They argued that the position of a union leader comes with a certain price. They experience moving up the status hierarchy, enjoy the "income and prestige of the member[s] of the upper-middle class (North and Hatt, 1949), and often wield more power than the average upper-middle-class person." Lipset et al. (1972: 163) further noted that higher positions possess some security of tenure.

Democracy, on the other hand, implies permanent insecurity for those in leadership and government positions: "The more truly democratic the governing system, the greater the insecurity. Thus, every incumbent of a high-status position of power within a democratic system must of necessity anticipate a loss of position" (Lipset et al., 1972: 163). Hence, ironically, leaders of democratic organisations often thrive on a lack of democracy.

A range of questions arise at this point. Is this the case with FTSSs? Do the perks of being an FTSS make them want to retain their positions? Is the high level of contestation for these positions due to the perks associated with this position? Does Lipset et al.'s (1972) argument apply to FTSSs? Do they stifle democracy as it presents greater insecurity for them instead of entrenching democracy? Lipset et al. (1972: 163) warned that "[i]t is hard for the persons in such positions to accept insecurity with equanimity. Once high status is secured, there is usually a pressing need to retain it and protect." Does this also apply to both male and female FTSSs? These are the questions that the thesis grapples in particular, on the issues around the bureaucratisation of the trade unions, which are linked to Michels' (1958) notion of the 'iron law of oligarchy'. Does the failure of union officials to be more responsive to members turn principally around bureaucracy or class mobility?

Accordingly, this study investigated how shop stewards negotiate and execute their functions. The literature suggests shop stewards serve both the employer and the workers, which places conflicting demands on them. This thesis seeks to understand the contradictory role of FTSSs, who have to do this job on a full-time basis of representing their members while maintaining labour peace in the workplace, as expected by management who pays their salaries. For this reason, Tony Lane (1974) classified shop stewards as the *man with two masters*. They are expected to satisfy the employer, who wants labour peace in the workplace, and the workers seeking representations against the employer. Thus, one may ask if FTSS are a problem and a danger to shop floor democracy or not. Do FTSSs lead to bureaucratisation and oligarchy in trade unions because of their character of representing workers on a full-time basis while paid by the employer? These are just some of the questions that this thesis answers.

Structure of the thesis - Chapter outline

This thesis comprises nine chapters. Chapter 1 is the introductory chapter. The background to the problem and historical context are provided in Chapter 2. BMW is located in the large car assembly industry of South Africa. The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) is the union involved in the company. BMW is a critical player in the car assembly industry in South Africa and a significant contributor to the gross domestic product (GDP) of the country. BMW provides an interesting case for this study on FTSS because of the company's unique arrangement with the trade union. It is the only company in South Africa with an all FTSS Shop Steward Committee (SSC), a first in South Africa. Consequently, I decided to study this company. NUMSA, on the other hand, is a significant player in the labour sphere and the largest trade union in the country. It had over 400 000 members before it declined to 290 000 members, as recorded by the South African

Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU) in its 2022 National Congress report.[3] NUMSA has expanded its scope to cover more sectors, including higher learning institutions. The union is the major and almost the only trade union organising in the auto sector.

The literature review of the thesis is presented in Chapter 3. A list of theorists that outline the significant themes employed in the thesis is discussed. The themes explored in this thesis include worker control, internal democracy, and democratic rupture. The works of Michels (1958), Maree (1982; 1990; 2017) and Pateman (1970) are explored. The second theme

[3] Eye Witness News: https://ewn.co.za/2022/05/24/saftu-s-vavi-numsa-fawu-have-seen-drop-in-membership-in-the-last-5-years

engaged in the literature review as a tool of analysis is the modernisation project of trade unions as outlined by Buhlungu (2010; 2012) and Masondo (2012).

The modernisation phase that trade unions undergo, including introducing FTSS as part of this project, is studied. The third theme examines the role of the FTSS as a central feature of the post-1973 trade unions by first focusing on the evolution of the shop steward movement that gave birth to FTSS as outlined by Wright-Mills (1948), Beynon (1973), Lane (1974), Webster (1985; 1992), Theron (1990) and Muller (1992). The fourth theme concerns accountability in the trade union movement and draws from the works of Maree (1992), Webster (1992), Buhlungu and Tshoaedi (2009), Sacks (2012) and Chinguno (2012).

The final theme examines upward social mobility and how the trade union can be vulnerable and employed for self-interest as a stepping stone for ambitious individuals occupying the FTSS's office. In this regard, the works of Buhlungu (2000; 2012) and Masondo et al. (2015) are reviewed.

In Chapter 4, the methodology of the study is presented. The qualitative methods that were employed in the study are detailed. The research methods employed included document analysis, ethnography, focus groups, life histories and in-depth interviews. These were employed in triangulation and complemented each other and helped me to gain a deeper understanding of FTSS towards answering my research questions. The summary of some of the methods employed is as follows:

- In-depth interviews: To gain in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon of FTSS, I interviewed 10 FTSS at BMW, former FTSS, former and current trade union officials, experts, labour historians, and industrial sociologists.
- Life histories: To understand the lives and daily experiences of the FTSS and their history of trade union activism.
- Ethnography: To study a day *in the life of a FTSS,* I stayed in the township of Ga-Rankuwa for eight months and went to the BMW workplace almost every day. I also attended trade union activities, including union meetings at plant and local levels, campaigns and strikes. I also socialised with workers and FTSS in the township during the week and on weekends to acquire a first-hand understanding of the daily experiences of FTSS and a complete picture of their work as FTSS. The ethnographic research complemented the other research methods employed in the study.

Chapter 5 explores Buhlungu's (2010) notion of a paradox of victory, arguing that the introduction of FTSS was in itself a paradox of victory as it has yielded two contradictory outcomes. One is promoting availing extra hands for the trade union as FTSS augment the work of organisers, and the second one is the fact that the position opens space for upward social mobility and self-interest. The letter impacts negatively on the trade union as it is reduced to being a stepping stone for self-interested individuals. This is explored through the principle of worker control and internal democracy, which is explained, particularly the principle of worker control amongst the post-1973 trade unions. Worker control is premised on the notion that members should control the union and their officials and elected leaders, including shop stewards and FTSS.

Chapter 6 explores the notion of worker disconnect between the FTSS and the workers they ought to represent. A gap is created between workers and FTSS, who see themselves as office workers and hardly connect or visit the production line to engage with workers. Thus, it places emphasis on the issue of having regular general meetings for mandates seeking and reporting back and that trade unions' decisions should mirror the interests of the workers on the shop floor. Regular FTSS elections need to be institutionalised to maintain worker control and internal democracy.

Chapter 7 highlights the resources and perks attached to the position of FTSS. At BMW, these include a BMW car with a petrol card, air-conditioned office, communication facilities, including a laptop and internet access, and other resources as tools of trade. I argue that if not properly managed, these resources attached to the FTSS are likely to be used for self-interest, and FTSS may neglect the trade union objectives and duties. Trade unions must develop tight monitoring structures to use trade union resources or tools of trade so that they are not abused for personal use. It is noteworthy that the resources and perks associated with the FTSS elevate the status of the member occupying the FTSS position. FTSS also enjoy prestige. Thus, the thesis argues that FTSS have become a stratum within the workforce because of the perks and resources attached to this position. These perks include being removed from the production line to an air-conditioned office, receiving a BMW car and being afforded educational opportunities. These FTSS benefits as markers of social status for the FTSS explain the fierce contest among trade union members for this position, notably the prestige this position bestows on the member.

In Chapter 8, I explain that despite good intentions from the trade unions, the FTSS position affords self-interested individuals an opportunity for upward social mobility because of the historical fact that both shop stewards and FTSS are a recruitment ground for management, especially for team leaders, foremen, and Industrial Relations (IR) and HR managerial positions. Thus, self-interested individuals can abuse this position for their upward social mobility and employ it as a stepping stone to more lucrative positions. I argue that trade unions should put measures in place to mitigate against this position from being employed for such purposes.

Findings from BMW in Rosslyn, in Tshwane, clearly demonstrate that this position not only presents an opportunity for upward social mobility but also that social downgrading is possible for those not re-elected to this position. The latter are forced to return to their old posts in the production line. I contend that social downgrading comes at a significant personal cost. Three options are open to members. First, a member is demoted and is forced to return to their job in the production line. Second, members may resign or retire early to avoid returning to their old jobs. However, after failing to be re-elected, I also demonstrate that some of the FTSS may enjoy a more lucrative opportunity or, as commonly known, have a *soft landing* when they are offered a less intense job with a better salary. I argue that social downgrading should be understood in the broader context of human development, which is about progress and not regress, thus the member's psychological traumas.

Finally, in Chapter 9, the issue of accountability is elucidated. It is contended that *accountability is a pain of democracy.* I argue that FTSS need to be accountable to members to avoid the development of oligarchic tendencies and that they have to promote worker control

in the trade union movement. I contend that failure to do so risks FTSS becoming tools of management, and thus, they could easily be co-opted to the detriment of the trade union movement. Thus, it is imperative that FTSS be accountable to their members to mitigate the risk of them becoming an instrument of management. In this way, they will entrench the principle of worker control, which is the cornerstone of these post-1973 trade unions.

Chapter 2: Historical context and background

Introduction

This chapter aims to establish the historical context and foundation of the thesis by delving into the South African trade union movement, focusing on the black trade union movement that gave rise to post-1973 unions, including NUMSA. It offers insights into the history of NUMSA, the central trade union under examination, and traces the evolution of the shop steward and Full-Time Shop Stewards (FTSS) movement. The emergence of FTSS is elucidated, driven partly by management's response to production disruptions caused by shop stewards being diverted from the production line for union duties.

The chapter explores NUMSA's FTSS policies and related documents, comprehensively understanding the union's stance on FTSS. Conversely, trade unions' negotiations for FTSS are outlined, emphasising their role in strengthening the union at the shop floor and local levels. FTSS, intended to complement the organiser's functions, encompass campaign work, recruitment, and overall trade union organisation. Additionally, the historical background of BMW South Africa and the location of the studied FTSS, organised by NUMSA, is presented, emphasising the pivotal role of FTSS in the union's organising machinery.

The narrative extends to the challenges faced by FTSS, including issues of upward social mobility, social distance, and accountability. The chapter concludes by critically examining the idealisation of the worker control principle and assessing the continued meaningful role played by FTSS in monitoring post-1994 transformative policies within the workplace.

A brief history of the rise of the black trade union movement in South Africa

The black trade union movement's evolution is one of defeat and triumph, and its existence today marks the resilience black workers have always had in the fight to have a voice in a system that viewed them as second-class citizens who did not deserve the right to have a voice or representation. The South African trade union movement has a rich history, especially the black trade unions movement dating back over a century, with the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) established in 1919 (Baskin, 1990; Forest, 2011).

In 1955, following the demise of the ICU, black workers formed the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). SACTU suffered massive repression by the white government, and their leaders were imprisoned, and some were exiled. Subsequently, the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) was born as a breakaway of SACTU, having explicitly critiqued them and their tactics and alliance with the ANC (see Friedman 1987). FEDUSA was established to continue efforts to organise black workers in South Africa. The 1973 Durban strikes catalysed this movement, eventually forming the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU).

COSATU, formed in 1985, adopted one of the fundamental principles of FOSATU, which focused on building shop floor structures to sustain the trade union under state repression, which jailed union leaders and led to the subsequent demise of the unions. This shop floor organisation was led by shop stewards elected directly by workers to lead the union on the shop floor. The shop steward movement has carried these unions over the years and is premised on the worker control principle. The worker control principle views workers as the owners of the union and their active participation as central. Worker control is premised on participatory

democracy, and membership participation breathes life into the principle and shop floor democracy on which shop stewards are premised.

The black trade unions in South Africa developed their shop floor organisation and strength. They started negotiating for recognition and shop floor representation in the form of shop stewards and, later, FTSS. FTSS positions were negotiated to strengthen the work of the trade union on the shop floor as well as the local office of the union, as FTSS were to represent union members on a full-time basis and not engage in any form of work or production while being paid by the employer.

The introduction of the FTSS strengthened the union organisation and gave birth to a new stratum of leaders in the union and dimension. Unlike other union workers and officials such as organisers, FTSS were paid by the employer even though they worked full-time on union work. Gomomo (1985) noted that for the employer, the introduction of FTSS was a solution to production disruptions caused by shop stewards who frequently had to leave production to attend to union business. In this sense, FTSS benefited the trade union and the employer for different ends.

The National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa: *Insimbi Ayigobi* (Metal that will not bend)

NUMSA has a rich history in South Africa and continues to be one of the militant trade unions in the country. NUMSA was formed in May 1987 when four unions that organised in the metal industries amalgamated, namely:

1. The Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU);
2. Motor Industry Combined Workers Union (MICWU);

3. National Automobile and Allied Workers Union (NAAWU); and
4. United Metal, Mining and Allied Workers of South Africa (UMMAWOSA).

The General and Allied Workers Union (GAWU) and Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), both COSATU affiliates, handed over their metal workers to NUMSA in adherence to the COSATU principle of one union, one industry[4].

NUMSA organised workers in the metal sector, including motor components manufacturing, bodybuilding, car servicing, petrol attendance, tyre and rubber and auto assembling (ibid). Over the years, the scope of the union has been increased to include energy, engineering, and related industries. In 2013, the trade union expanded their scope to organise across the value chain, including organising workers over 22 industries and sectors. The 2013 amended Constitution of the union notes that: "The Industries (sic) defined above shall hereinafter be referred to as the metal and related industries, 'The scope of the union."[5]

Notably, these metal and related industries included mining, health care, the IT sector, industrial chemicals, transport, cleaning, security, building and construction, and canteen services. The expansion of NUMSA's scope meant they were encroaching on the scope of other COSATU affiliates. It defied the trade union federation's principle of one union, one industry of which they had previously been beneficiaries, as highlighted previously. The failure of NUMSA to reverse its decision to expand its scope as requested by COSATU led to their expulsion from the trade union federation on 8 November 2014. Subsequently, they formed another trade union federation, namely, the South African Federation of Trade Unions

[4] NUMSA History: https://numsa.org.za/history-2/
[5]NUMSA Constitution: https://numsa.org.za/numsa-constitution/

(SAFTU), in 2017, together with the suspended and later expelled former COSATU General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi.

NUMSA, at the time, claimed over 350,000 members and was the largest trade union in COSATU and the country. The trade union continues to have a significant influence and voice in the South African labour space and is regarded as one of the country's progressive and militant trade unions. Its strength is based on the continued adherence to the worker control principle, which grounds the trade union in the workplace through shop stewards and FTSS. The trade union prides itself on adhering to values that include worker control and democracy.[6]

NUMSA's forerunners, UAW and NAAWU, were the first trade unions in South Africa to win the rights of FTSS at the Ford and VWSA plants, respectively (see Masondo, 2003 and Forrest, 2012). This agreement was a game changer in that it transformed the industrial relations landscape in the country and set a precedent for others to start demanding FTSS. Other trade unions that followed this historical agreement started to demand FTSS rights in the workplaces where they organised.

The rationale for FTSS: FTSS as an organiser

Unlike the employers, trade unions negotiated for FTSS as part of building the trade union machinery at the branch and local levels. The FTSS were to augment the role of the organiser as the trade unions increased in size and did not have the necessary resources to service individual workplaces. The National, Labour and Economic Institute (NALEDI) State of Affiliates (SOA) Report reveals that FTSS has become a central feature in the South African

[6] NUMSA Service Charter: https://numsa.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/NUMSA-Booklet-DPS.pdf

Trade Union movement, especially in COSATU affiliates. It details that FTSS, in most instances, are considered part of the organising departments of the trade unions, as noted previously, because they augment the role of an organiser. Thus, in Table 1, the report notes what it represents or illustrates (NALEDI, SOA Report, 2012: 36): "The Table reviews the numbers of staff in various categories of relevance to organising, including local and provincial organisers and organising-related staff."

It is noteworthy that the organising-related staff in Table 1 also include FTSS as part of the personnel relevant to organising because the FTSS perform the organising role of the trade union. The NALEDI SOA Report further notes that:

> The public sector unions and NUM have more full-time shop stewards than local organisers. In fact, SADTU and POPCRU have no local organisers, and their full-time shop stewards act as organisers. In the case of the public sector, they have negotiated for these FTSS to be seconded full-time to the union. Therefore, they can more effectively act as organisers. (NALEDI, SOA Report, 2012: 36)

This provides evidence of the rationale of FTSS augmenting the role of organisers. The NALEDI SOA Report also states:

> In fact, in SADTU's case, the FTSS are full-time regional secretaries. NUMSA combines local and provincial organisers and full-time shop stewards, which appears ideal, although the union's ratio of organisers to members is rather low. (ibid)

The low ratio of organisers to members can be attributed to the belief and notion that FTSS augment the role of organisers; hence, there is no need to have more organisers if you have a large pool of FTSS. The evidence from Table 1 supports this notion. Thus, NUMSA has 123 FTSS compared to 94 local organisers.

Table 1: Union Staff Numbers (NALEDI SOA Report, 2012: 36-37)

Union	Membership 2012	No of locals	Full Time Shop Stewards	Local Organisers	Local Administrators	Provincial Organisers	Provincial Administrators	Organising related staff	Other staff	National staff	total staff
CEPPWAWU	80 658	32	19	55	14	0	7	0	0	23	99
CWU	18 666	42	17	0	0	5	11	0	0	12	28
CWUSA	1 500	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4
DENOSA	74 883	0	12	0	0	13	14	9	5	35	76
FAWU	126 930	44	0	42	13	49	15	9	9	29	166
NEHAWU	260 738	39	65	76	39	9	9	27	9	85	254
NUM	310 382	746	173	0	0	60	27	9	0	85	181
NUMSA	291 025	45	**123**	**94**	54	10	42	31	0	65	296
POPCRU	149 339	90	125	0	0	0	9	0	9	25	43
SACCAWU	120 352	60	29	84	18	4	13	17	3	31	170
SACTWU	85 025	30	5	26	20	0	30	3	4	30	113
SADTU	251 276	53	53	9	48	9	9	0	0	47	122
SAMA	7 759	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	11
SAMWU	153 487	35	60	0	10	44	29	3	2	28	116
SASAWU	7 074	28	1	8	3	0	3	0	0	3	17
SASBO	67 402	28	61	28	0	0	0	0	0	89	117
COSATU	**2 191 016**	**1 274**	**743**	**431**	**240**	**262**	**266**	**108**	**109**	**643**	**1 951**

It is evident from Table 1 that trade unions overall have more FTSS than local organisers. Trade unions have almost double the number of FTSS, 743, compared to 431 local organisers. Thus, the significant role of FTSS in organising at the local level of the trade union is worth noting. In the table, it is also clear that FTSS are a central feature of the union's organising department, mainly developing the trade union in their workplace and in that specific locality, also known as the local. In essence, FTSS augment the role of the organiser as envisaged when they were first negotiated. Thus, overall, trade unions have more FTSS than local organisers as they perform the organising duties of the trade union. FTSS are viewed as part of the staff complement of the trade union organising departments because they do full-time union work and are more accountable to the trade union than the employer.

Bayerische Moteren Werke (BMW) South Africa

This study was conducted at the BMW plant in Rosslyn, north of the Tshwane Municipality in Gauteng, South Africa. Masondo (2003:39) explained,

> BMW South Africa was the first BMW plant to be established outside Germany … In 1972 the Munich-based parent company, Bayerische Moteren Werke (BMW), took control of the South African operation. In 1973 BMW South Africa was born as a wholly owned subsidiary of BMW.

BMW-SA has been in the country for over 50 years, currently employs approximately 3,500 workers, and can manufacture over 76,000 units annually.[7] The BMW plant in Rosslyn was first designed to produce the BMW 3 series. In addition, the famous Gusheshe was manufactured in the plant. In 2018, BMW invested immensely in the South African plant and started making the X3 models in the Rosslyn plant. Most of the vehicles manufactured in the

[7] BMW Annual Report 2018: https://www.bmwgroup-werke.com/rosslyn/en/our-plant/history.html

Rosslyn plant are exported to markets in the USA, Great Britain, Japan, Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore, New Zealand, Taiwan, Germany, and Iran (Masondo 2003).

> BMW Group announced a R6.1bn investment to prepare the Rosslyn facility, and the associates who work there, for X3 production. It is one of the biggest single automotive investments in South African history. In February 2018, Plant Rosslyn produced the last 1 191604 BMW 3 Series cars built over five model generations and 35 years.[8] (ibid

The BMW-SA Group is an essential player in the country's automotive industry, contributing significantly to the country's GDP and creating employment opportunities for our citizens. The company is organised by NUMSA, which has been in the plant since 1978, through its predecessor, the United Automobile Workers Union, which merged with NAAWU (Masondo, 2003). NUMSA's presence in the plant has matured over the years and they won the rights to FTSS in the plant.

The rights of FTSS at the BMW plant in Rosslyn have evolved over the years. The plant is one of the union plants with a unique arrangement and agreement regarding FTSSs, as all the shop stewards are FTSSs. In the early 1990s, the company, in pursuit of production and efficiency, offered the trade union the option to have an all-FTSS committee in exchange for lowering the number of shop stewards in the plant. The employer had argued that ordinary shop stewards who are also engaged in production line tended to disturb the production process in terms of planning and efficiency. Ordinary shop stewards can sometimes be called and pulled out from the production line to go and represent a worker in a hearing or attend to other union activities, which in turn disturbs production, because their replacement is not always readily available. as a replacement for the shop steward in the line is not always available. The employer subsequently offered the trade union the agreement to have an all-FTSS shop steward

[8] BMW Annual Report: https://www.bmwgroup-werke.com/rosslyn/en/our-plant/history.html

committee, ten FTSS and reduced the number of shop stewards in the plant. Both parties agreed on this. Accordingly, it was decided to study FTSS in this plant and how they have contributed to the trade union representation dilemma that was foregrounded in the Marikana massacre.

The NUMSA FTSS policy

The book Labour Beyond COSATU based on the fifth Taking Democracy Seriously Survey U notes that although the trade unions have negotiated for shop stewards in the workplace, FTSS has become a central feature of these unions (Buzuidenhout & Tshoaedi, 2017). Maree (2017) explained that of all the participants surveyed in 2014, 76.1 % reported having had a FTSS in their workplace. The COSATU Workers' Survey also confirms the presence of FTSS in workplaces:

> Overall, two-fifths of COSATU members said they had at least some full-time shop stewards. (COSATU Workers' Survey, 2012:29)

These findings indicate that FTSS exist in workplaces organised by COSATU in South Africa and have become part of the trade union organising machinery in the country. NUMSA, as depicted in Table 1, has more FTSS than organisers. This is due to their emphasis on FTSS organising work for the trade union and building a democratic and vibrant trade union movement at the local level. Thus, the trade union has an articulated policy on FTSS, which states the roles and functions of the FTSS, including ratios and related matters.

The NUMSA FTSS policy notes:

> There should be at least one full-time shop steward (FTSS) for every 250 paid-up members of NUMSA or fewer members as required. Where the Union and its members see the need for a NUMSA FTSS in a particular workplace, the Unions shall, irrespective of the size of the workforce/membership, engage with management to secure this fulltime shop steward in that specific workplace by the provisions of the NUMSA FTSS Policy Full-time. (Shop Stewards Policy 115 of NEC May 1994 as amended CC July 2010)

The policy further notes that FTSS would be elected amongst the ordinary shop stewards:

> Once members have elected part-time shop stewards, NUMSA would call on the membership to elect their full-time shop stewards from amongst the part-time factory shop stewards committee. (ibid)

The policy also emphasises the accountability of FTSS to their members by their worker control principle, which places workers and members at the centre of the trade union organisation, specifically, workers as owners of the trade union. The policy's Rule of Conduct (Shop Stewards Policy 115 of NEC May 1994 as amended CC July 2010), which is in line with its democratic principles, clearly articulates that:

- Every full-time shop steward must take instructions from the factory shop stewards committee, the factory general meeting and the REC.
- Every full-time shop steward must give a full monthly report to the factory shop stewards committee and the general meeting.
- Every full-time shop steward must write a full monthly report on their activities to the local shop stewards council. A copy of this report must be sent to the regional secretary for the REC.
- A full-time shop steward must notify the chairperson of the shop steward committee, the senior shop steward and the local union office if they are leaving the plant or will be away from it and must give the reason. Full-time shop stewards can only leave the plant for *bona fide* union business. If they leave for private enterprise, they must take time off like ordinary workers.
- No full-time shop steward can accept an increase in wages a bonus, or any other extra remuneration for being a full-time shop steward. Full-time shop stewards get the expected increases for their normal grades.

- No full-time or part-time shop steward can use company transport for any private business.

The policy breathes life into the principle of worker control and internal democracy in the trade union and enforces the FTSS to be accountable. This policy serves as a countervailing force against developing oligarchic tendencies among FTSS, rooting them in the workers and enforcing accountability. For trade unions to be genuinely democratic, their FTSS and other elected leaders ought to be accountable to the general membership of the trade union and represent their interests at all material times through regular mandates and reports, hence ensuring the centrality of a democratic and participatory public meeting. Failure to do so will lead to the possibility of abuse of office, positions for self-interest and upward social mobility and erosion of the democratic principles of the trade unions. The development of trade union bureaucracy and the elite few that are unaccountable may lead to the development of oligarchic tendencies.

The sins of incumbency and social distance

> There are debates within unions about the role of FTSS; while they are often viewed as closer to workers in their orientation and experience, there are also significant problems in addressing accountability issues for workers and the union. Of course, trade unions may also experience challenges regarding the accountability of their officials (organisers). It is important to view accountability in relation to workers and union structures from the workplace upwards. (NALEDI, SOA Report, 2012: 38)

The accountability of FTSS is sacrosanct in preserving the principle of worker control and internal democracy in the trade unions. Therefore, this thesis seeks to investigate this as there is increasing evidence that FTSS have become a law unto themselves and, thus, the crisis of trade union representation (see Chinguno, 2012, Sacks, 2012; Masondo, 2010). Hence, the focus has recently been on FTSS, especially after what happened in Marikana. The 2012

Marikana massacre, which resulted in the death of 34 mineworkers at the hands of police on 14 August 2014, highlighted the issue of FTSS. Chinguno (2012), Hartford (2012) Sacks (2012), Alexander (2014) and other authors that followed the killings of the mineworkers detailed how NUM FTSS were part of the genesis of the dispute that eventually led to the massacre. The authors argued that the NUM members in the platinum belt in the North-West province had rejected their trade union representative, particularly the FTSS. They opted to represent themselves and engage management directly. The workers and members argued that the FTSS had been co-opted and first represented management interests and then their own and were accordingly rejected. Thus, the increasing gap between members and their representatives, particularly FTSS, may be referred to as social distance.

There is consensus among labour scholars and analysts in South Africa that an increasing gap between union leaders and rank-and-file members the former claim to represent has emerged. Byrne et al. (2015) argued that this development permeates all affiliates of the COSATU; This presumably includes the unions that were expelled from COSATU and formed parallel trade unions. I am of the view that this increasing gap is endemic to all trade unions in South Africa across federations. In the process, opportunities for oligarchic tendencies have opened up, undermining longstanding principles of worker control, which are the cornerstone of these trade unions and safely guarded tradition.

At its 2012 National Congress, COSATU noted:

> There is a growing social distance between union leaders and the membership. Different lifestyles and material realities create a leadership that is not fully in tune with what members are facing. (COSATU, 2012: 16)[9]

[9] COSATU Secretariat Political Report of the 11th National Congress 2012: http://www.cosatu.org.za/show.php?ID=6535

The federation further admitted that worker control is declining, an important guiding principle of the labour federation. The transition to a democratic dispensation presented a paradox for COSATU. While COSATU's influence grew, the labour federation was plagued by a chronic loss of organisational power, especially on the shop floor where it mattered (see Adam et al., 1997; Buhlungu, 2010). Loss of organisational power has negatively affected the founding principles of worker control of these post-1973 trade unions. Indeed, worker control has entered into a whirlpool of decline. The notion of social distance captures the emerging reality of material inequalities between rank-and-file members and union leaders. COSATU, in particular, attributed this to full-time unionism. However, others have argued that oligarchic bureaucracy that reduces worker control results from the union leaders' corruption and material greed (see Byrne et al., 2015). These differing interpretations are not merely analytical but the basis of the dramatic political contestation within unions. Thus, FTSSs present a dilemma of trade union representation at the branch and shop floor level. Thus, this thesis seeks to provide a detailed account of what FTSSs are and how they function as part of the trade union structures, particularly their relation to shop floor democracy within the trade union movement. The BMW plant in South Africa was employed as the case study. It is noteworthy that although the principle of worker control is the cornerstone of these trade unions, it has been more formal than practical at times, thus leading to the trap of over-romanticising it.

Romanticising of worker control and internal democracy

Webster (1985) noted that the agreements negotiated by the Metal and Allied Workers' Union (MAWU) in the 1980s were too complex. The shop stewards did not easily comprehend legal documents, and organisers with minimal education levels had to rely on a white organiser who was often a lawyer: "The complexity of the agreement entered into with management could make the accountability of the negotiating committee to the rank-and-file formal rather than

real" (Webster, 1985: 248). This highlights that even though worker control was seen to be at its pinnacle during the 1980s, in some instances, it was formal rather than real or practical. Certain decisions were made without rank-and-file participation because of their complexity.

In an interview with Webster (ibid), John Stanwix, a white MAWU organiser, explained the intricacies of agreements and how there was a lack of participation by black shop stewards and organisers:

> The kind of agreements we discussed in the Transvaal were absurdly complex. That was the mistake we made. People were struggling to understand the agreements. The shop stewards could not negotiate the agreements, and the African organisers were extremely reluctant to negotiate without the white organisers present.

This demonstrates that even though shop stewards and organisers were meant to be accountable, they may have gotten away with some non-accountability because the various agreements they negotiated were just too complex for the rank-and-file. Thus, there was a danger of over-romanticising worker control in the 1980s when the state of unions was assessed, especially when the decline in attendance of union meetings compared to the past was examined. Attendance at meetings meant participation in decision-making. Thus, it is imperative to consider that worker control has shortfalls when accessing the trade union movement and explore ways to make it more practical than lip service.

The trade union movement has evolved over the years. Furthermore, FTSSs have become a central feature of the trade unions in South Africa. The democratic breakthrough in 1994, which presented the trade unions with new opportunities and dynamics, has had mixed results. From 1994, the trade unions could organise in a democratic terrain that required new organising and engagement strategies. Buhlungu (1994) and Masondo (2012) noted that the democratic breakthrough opened new avenues of progression and career opportunities for trade union activists, including business, government, and civil services opportunities. At a local level,

FTSSs were also given opportunities both within the company and at the local level of the state. This led to an increasing acceptance of shop stewards and FTSS promotion at the plant level.

The 'we didn't struggle to be poor' syndrome: Transformation of the apartheid workplace regime and shop stewards

The general acceptance of trade union members post-1994 for shop stewards and FTSSs to be promoted into management may be attributed to addressing past injustices (see Buhlungu and Tshoaedi, 2012). Managing the apartheid workplace meant that Blacks who in the past could not hold semi-skilled, skilled, technical, and professional positions had to be affirmed and, accordingly, offered opportunities to develop and occupy such positions. The colour bar and Job Reservation Act had to be addressed, which meant that positions that were previously reserved for whites had to be opened for previously disadvantaged or designated groups or individuals, namely, black people who are defined as Africans, Coloured and Indians as well as both Black and white women and people living with disabilities. This was achieved by employing affirmative action legislation such as the Employment Equity Act (EEA) and the Skills Development Act (SDA).

The EEA and the SDA, which aimed to skill the South African workforce, were within the framework of affirmative action and viewed as contributors to redressing the imbalances created under apartheid. The trade union movement, in particular COSATU, had a considerable role in addressing past injustices and became a powerful and vital social partner for both the state and business in the new social dialogue platforms, for example, NEDLAC.

FTSSs played and continue to play a crucial role in monitoring this transformation in the workplace. FTSSs were crucial in monitoring the Employment Equity Act implementation process, a key aspect of the transformation agenda. This ensured that the previously disadvantaged or designated groups were prioritised in promotions and career advancement.

The FTSSs were on the transformative committees established regarding the Employment Equity Act in the workplace. Their role was also to ensure that employers adhered to the legislation. Some of the FTSSs sit in the Skills Development Committees as well. They play an active role in monitoring the progress of affirmative action and skills development policies in the workplace, thus making certain that they are an essential stakeholder in ensuring that the legacies of the past are addressed.

In this chapter, the historical background of the black trade union movement in South Africa and its evolution have been provided. The history of NUMSA, the trade union under study, and the shop steward's growth and FTSS movement have been detailed. The rationale for FTSSs from the perspectives of both the employer and trade unions has been examined. Specifically, concerning the employer, issues of production disturbances caused by a shop steward who, from time to time, had to leave the production line to attend to trade union issues while the trade union FTSSs were expected to augment the organiser's role and thus be recognised as part of the organising department were explored. Furthermore, the history of BMW South Africa, where the FTSSs under study are located, was provided.

The centrality of FTSSs in the organising machinery of the trade unions and some of its challenges, including issues of upward social mobility, social distance, and accountability, were also explored in this chapter. An over-romanticising of the principle of worker control, which has always faced challenges of being more formal than practical, was outlined. An examination of the continued meaningful role that FTSSs plays in monitoring transformative workplace policies in post-apartheid South Africa concludes the chapter.

Chapter 3: Literature review and theoretical framework—From worker control to upward social mobility: The rise of the FTSS movement

Introduction

This chapter comprises the literature review and theoretical framework. It begins by exploring the evolution of the shop steward movement, central to establishing the democratic foundations of post-1973 trade unions. The establishment of shop stewards aimed to cultivate a leadership layer deeply connected to the shop floor membership, promoting accountability to the rank-and-file (Webster, 1985; Friedman, 1987).

The second theme delves into the impact of the democratic breakthrough of 1994 on the shop steward movement, transforming it into a recruitment ground for both management and the state. This shift introduced opportunities for upward social mobility within the union, raising concerns about the potential co-option of the union as a stepping stone (Buhlungu, 2002; Masondo, 2012). Examining Michels' (1958) 'iron law of oligarchy', the chapter assesses how trade unions employed the shop steward movement to counteract oligarchic tendencies, emphasising the importance of rootedness in workers and accountability.

The third theme explores the modernisation project of the trade union movement, noting the brain drain caused by seasoned unionists transitioning to parliament, business, and civil service (Buhlungu, 1994; Masondo, 2012; Adam et al., 1997). This shift, coupled with the notion of upward social mobility, has influenced younger union activists' perceptions, creating expectations of using unions as stepping stones. This influence extends to the shop floor, where positions like shop stewards and Full-Time Shop Stewards (FTSSs) are sought for upward mobility, impacting accountability and leading to intense competition. These roles have become a recruitment ground for management positions in the Industrial Relations (IR) and Human Resources (HR) departments, contributing to a crisis of representation.

The rise of the shop stewards and full-time shop stewards' movement

> The backbone of our labour movement has always been and always will be the democratic shop-steward movement which has been built up by the ordinary members themselves. This powerful shop steward movement is a triumph for the ordinary people of this country. It is a triumph for the people who create the wealth of this country, and yet they and their families continue to be deliberately excluded from enjoying that wealth. (Jay Naidoo cited in Southall, 2015: 162)

The post-1973 trade unions were built on the solid democratic tradition of shop floor leaders and shop stewards. This notion was inherited from the British trade unions, which were a vehicle for democratising trade unions. Shop stewards play a very significant role in the life of trade unions because they are leaders on the shop floor who are elected by the members who feel the same wrath of capitalist exploitation. In the first instance, the trade unions developed these layers of leaders as lessons from previous trade unions that did not have shop steward leaders. Friedman (1987) argued that these trade unions had regional and national leaders.

The danger of this trade union strategy was that if the union leaders were arrested or exiled by the apartheid regime, these unions were weakened, and some closed down. Therefore, shop stewards were an attempt to counter this strategy. Shop stewards were expected to keep the union alive even when their leaders were arrested. The trade union would still be able to exist on the shop floor as they would have shop stewards. Therefore, the shop steward's role was significant in the trade union as it went beyond just organising and representing workers but also keeping the trade union alive.

The roles and duties of shop stewards were "to represent the interests of the union members in their department, to protect the rights of the workers against management and, if necessary, to challenge management decisions" (Webster, 1985: 233). John Gomomo, a leading shop

steward in the Volkswagen plant and later President of COSATU, defined the role of the shop steward and that of the FTSS as:

> [t]he main role of the part-time shop steward is to take up workers' grievances and process these through the procedures. The issue is taken up first with the foreman. If it cannot be dealt with there the steward goes first to the general foreman, then the labour relations officer. If the grievance is not solved, then one of the full-time stewards takes the issue to the labour relations manager and eventually to the industrial relations director or managing director. (cited in Maller, 1992: 118)

He thus further explained the role of the FTSS:

> The full-time steward's role is to deal with general issues rather than take up individual grievances. We police the agreements, take up questions of job promotion, training, discrimination, new technology and generally counter top management. (ibid)

Other FTSSs have argued that their role included "monitoring management policies; educating management; taking decisions with top management; and crippling the power of management" (Maller 1992: 119). There is a clearly defined role and hierarchy between the two types of shop stewards and the FTSS. The latter deal with factory-wide issues and are not concerned with individual worker cases, which is the role of the part-time shop steward.

FTSSs are meant to extend this role or articulate or execute these duties carefully. Unlike ordinary shop stewards, they are not responsible for performing duties for the employer. Instead, their role focuses solely on trade union work. Chinguno (2012), Sacks (2012), and Hartford (2012) argued that FTSSs are part of the crisis of representing members. Thus, it could be argued that the crisis of representation is exacerbated by the FTSS for which these unions fought hard in workplaces: "In many cases, full-time shop stewards function as officials. They may organise workers and negotiate on their behalf. Yet they are not subject to the controls to which officials are subject, because they are regarded as workers in terms of the constitution" (Theron, 1990: 63). Accordingly, FTSSs are less accountable to workers and unions.

Consequently, FTSSs have become a law unto themselves to the detriment of the union despite their critical role for unions as it eases the workload of the union organiser. The unions are afforded extra hands at no cost because the employer pays the FTSSs' salary even though they concentrate solely on union work. However, this thesis does not consider the notion that FTSSs and shop stewards are homogenous and attempts to better understand the differences between stewards. The FTSSs are employed as the analytical prism to tackle representation in trade unions and trade union democracy. Michels' (1958) 'iron law of oligarchy' is employed to understand the phenomenon of FTSS as representative of workers and how they facilitate democracy. Furthermore, Tony Lane (1974) described the shop steward as a man with two masters employed to explore the phenomenon of FTSSs.

This thesis examines the extent of recent developments and whether the FTSSs have contributed to the increasing lack of accountability and crisis of representation in trade unions. The extent to which both accountability and representation still exist are also explored. To what extent are the FTSSs at the centre of the crisis of representation in these unions? Have they made it a norm for leaders not to account for their members? Can senior leaders in the pecking order do as they wish because the FTSS socialises workers into a culture of non-accountability? Is the contrary also possible?

Webster (1992) highlighted the following five characteristics of a shop steward:

1. Shop stewards are rooted in the workplace, and "their power and position largely depend on the continued support of their members" (p. 3). Shop stewards spend most of their work alongside the elected workers and are thus highly visible on the shop floor and subject to the same work as the members.
2. They are the link between the union and the workers on the shop floor. Furthermore, union officials rely heavily on them to carry out union tasks in the workplace, such as settling everyday grievances and keeping members informed of union actions and policies.

3. "An important characteristic of the shop steward is that they are not simply 'stirring up' trouble; they are performing the managerial function of settling grievances … shop stewards have an inevitable interest in 'orderly' industrial relations" (p. 4).
4. Shop stewards are not immune to co-option by management; they serve as a recruitment ground for management for positions that turn them against their fellow workers.
5. Most shop stewards have a "working class factory consciousness" (p. 5). "In its simplest form, to have a factory consciousness is to understand how you are exploited in the factory and how you can best combat management" (ibid).

These characteristics help us understand shop stewards' role, their centrality in the trade union movement and, specifically, the role that the FTSS is designed to perform. On the other hand, it has been argued that FTSSs have been aloof and distanced from the workers. Some have utilised their position for upward mobility, misrepresented members and become too close to management. However, these tensions related to the role of shop stewards lie deep in the history of the contemporary labour movement. In 1992, Keet (1992: 33) quoted a NUMSA shop steward who stated,:

> [W]e as shop-stewards are opposed to becoming full-timers. The full-time shop stewards become distant from workers. Sitting in clean clothes, they don't feel the same conditions. We have learned from experience that full-time shop stewards become tools of management.

This is one of the allegations that was levelled against full-timers by the workers in the platinum belt who were on strike. Namely, their FTSSs were becoming too close to management and were failing to represent their needs (see Chinguno, 2012; Hartford, 2012; Sacks, 2012). In effect, they had become tools of management and somehow co-opted.

Webster (2001) argued that worker leaders, including FTSSs, "manufacture compromises." In other words, FTSSs do not always represent the interests of the workers. They manufacture compromises reflected in the deals or agreements signed with management that do not consistently reflect the workers' wishes. Union leaders might do this because they are what Wright-Mills termed "managers of discontent" (1948: 8). "The shop stewards' function, as they

understand it, is to establish a stable relationship between management and the workers–a perception which is in contrast to management's stereotype of shop stewards as trouble makers" (Webster, 1985: 235).

This notion of union leaders as manufacturers of consent supports Michels' (1958) 'iron law of oligarchy'. To what extent are shop stewards, the FTSSs, willing to create labour peace or harmony in their workplace? Do they compromise the interests of workers to accommodate management and create a healthy and stable working environment, or do they discard management orders to satisfy their members? Are FTSS "managers of discontent", as Wright-Mills (1948) argued? These are some of the questions this thesis explores and attempts to answer.

It is noteworthy that shop stewards are drawn from a particular layer of workers. Maller (1992) argued that the qualities sought after for candidates of shop stewards include education, bravery (not afraid of whites or bosses), good communication abilities, discipline, impartiality/fairness, intelligence, and accountability to workers. Maller (1992: 117) further asserted:

> [T]his may reflect an element of elitism amongst stewards, or simply may indicate a level of pragmatism amongst worker respondents who appreciated that without these qualities no shop steward could effectively deal with white managers.

This creates the notion that shop stewards are drawn from a layer of workers perceived as having various distinguishing characteristics, which creates elitism in the position of the shop steward. This thesis also investigates how members become shop stewards.

It is essential to note that the position of the FTSS is linked to perks, which may include a car, a cell phone allowance and (at times) a salary increase or adjustment as a result of being re-graded to a higher grade, usually equivalent to that of an HR or IR manager. These perks create

high levels of competitiveness to try and attain the positions. Gavin Hartford examined what he termed the *defensive leadership aristocracy* in the person of the FTSS:

> In the mining industry, the historical practice is for all top five union branch office bearers to become full-time shop stewards and be graded and paid C1 or above upon their election into NUM office; they are joined in the office by a cluster of other full-time shop stewards; they are removed from production or underground work; they live in air-conditioned offices; they have largely unrestricted movement across the operations; they get a range of perks and benefits including significant time off for external union duties; they influence everything from operational stoppages (s54 safety stoppages), to certain tenders and in some instances recruitment of new employees; they can identify and at times remove unpopular managers. These features constitute significant new authority and benefits to being a senior full-time union representative at the mine level and moving the union office bearer at a personal level into the entry zone of home and/or car ownership almost overnight. In an environment of scarce resources, deep inequalities, and limited options for BEE empowerment for employees, the union's office becomes a sought-after place to secure and retain. And once acquired, the union office is a place to uphold and defend to protect these benefits and lifestyle advantages.[10]

This excerpt highlights the power and influence that FTSSs have in the mines. This phenomenon, however, cannot be generalised to other unions but appears to be the case with other unions. Evidence suggests these positions have become more about personal gain, thus heightening contestation while members are neglected. Therefore, one may argue that the position of a full-timer is used as a form of co-option by management. Webster (1992: 5) argued that "shop stewards are not immune from co-option. Promotion is a common device for dividing the shop stewards loyalties. It is well understood in many firms that service as a shop steward could be a prelude to promotion to foreman, charge hand or personnel work." Beynon (1973: 134), in his classical study of shop stewards in Liverpool, thus described the phenomenon:

[10] Hartford, 2012 Newspaper article: http://mg.co.za/article/2012-10-11-alienation-paucity-and-despair-make-for-toxic-catalysts

> The promotion of the steward to the foreman's job is one of the oldest tricks in the book, and many of the stewards would get worked up about anyone who turned coat … Those supervisors who had once been stewards were pointed out to be like lepers. Did you see that bloke in the white coat we just passed? He used to be a shop steward… the bastard. The Lads gave him hell for a bit though.

Upward social mobility in South African trade unions post-1994

The South African radical democratic breakthrough in April 1994 meant that organisations that played a significant role in the anti-apartheid struggle would play a meaningful role in the post-1994 era, including trade unions, in particular, COSATU and its affiliates. The transition achieved by South Africa in April 1994, through the first-ever one-person-one vote general election without regard to race and gender, was radical and democratic in that it both introduced a breakaway from the apartheid regime and its social relations and dislodged it from power. However, the transition did not end the fundamental contradiction of the South African society, namely, the exploitation of labour by capital as well as the inequality that it is both based on and reproduces as well as its wider societal consequences, hence, radical democratic breakthrough rather than, as it is widely perceived, achievement of freedom and complete social emancipation.

Nonetheless, the new democratic dispensation allowed activists to be nominated to serve in strategic positions in the state's various branches, organs, and institutions, including in the civil service and business. COSATU, the country's largest trade union federation, sent 20 unionists to the first democratic parliament as part of the African National Congress' (ANC) list of members of parliament (see Buhlungu, 1994; Masondo, 2012). This was to ensure that some of the cadres that had fought for the struggle would reap the fruits of the battle in material terms, but importantly, continue representing workers, this time in the state. On the shop floor, this meant that transformation had to happen through affirmative action laws introduced by the

new, democratically elected government by promoting black people, women and people with disabilities into previously white-reserved jobs such as supervisors, foremen and managerial positions. The FTSSs, previously viewed by certain sections of workers as sell-out positions, were now generally accepted by workers and the trade union movement, which harnessed them to build its strength on the shop floor and at the upper layers of its activities.

Buhlungu (1994, 1999; 2000) referred to this as a brain drain in the trade union, leading to the unions being viewed as vehicles for upward mobility, or put differently, the union as a stepping stone for personal advancement. But management, too, reaped the fruits by using FTSS positions as a recruitment ground for its transformative agenda at the workplace. Several FTSS were promoted to the positions of industrial relations (IR) and human resources (HR) management officers and other frontline managers.

According to Buhlungu, "[t]he opening of opportunities for senior positions in the public services, politics, business and non-governmental (NGO) sector has seen scores of senior unionists leaving positions for greener pastures" (1994: 24).

The South African democratic breakthrough of April 1994 meant that the trade union movement would play a central role in constructing the new South Africa in all government, business, and civil society spheres. COSATU was to be a key partner in the government's transformation agenda. COSATU was expected to lead the charge on the shop floor in championing transformation. Transformation at the workplace meant that the legacy of apartheid had to be addressed. The legacy of apartheid comprised apartheid social relations of production involving articulation of economic exploitation based on racial and gender oppression, marginalisation, and exclusion of the oppressed black majority from essential positions in the economy and the state. Webster and von Holdt (2005) referred to it as

particularly the racialised (and genderised) structure of the workplace that they produced, an apartheid workplace regime.

The workplace mirrored the apartheid system and was characterised by fear and victimisation of workers by employers. Furthermore, the relationship between employers and trade unions was protracted and antagonistic. The 1994 democratic breakthrough was expected to foster a new workplace that dealt with all the injustices of apartheid and promoted the democratic principles of the new regime. Trade unions played a significant role in this transformation agenda in the workplace. In addition, shop stewards and FTSS were central to this process.

The 1994 democratic breakthrough also meant that positions such as FTSSs were viewed as a tool to facilitate the transformation agenda. Buhlungu and Tshoaedi argued that

> [t]his trend (desire for mobility amongst unionists) emerged in the early 1990s and has continued since as shop floor activists, shop stewards, branch, regional and national leaders, and full-time officials at various levels continue to move into better remunerated and often high-powered positions in management, politics, the civil service, and business. (2012:15)

They further asserted:

> One of the most intriguing findings of the Cosatu Workers' Survey is that rank-and-file members see nothing wrong with upward mobility, even when their shop stewards accept positions in frontline management on the shopfloor, such as supervisors and foremen. … This is in stark contrast to the ethos of the struggle years when such moves were considered to be acts of betrayal against the struggle of the workers. (ibid)

The general acceptance of shopfloor activists, shop stewards and FTSSs to being promoted to frontline managers has opened up opportunities for these positions for upward social mobility or career progression, thus employing the union as a stepping stone. These positions have become a recruitment ground for employers to address past imbalances. This was perceived as selling out in the past because gaining promotion from these positions was viewed as some

form of co-option. Keet (1992) asserted that the FTSSs who were co-opted were perceived as management tools. However, another reason for the general acceptance of the change was the fact that workers and trade unions no longer viewed these positions as selling out against an oppressive regime (apartheid) and employers as they had been in the past.

The April 1994 democratic breakthrough dislodged the apartheid regime. Upward social mobility was currently viewed as part of the transformative agenda, and employers were perceived as social partners with whom the union had to work to address past injustices and champion affirmative action in the workplace. Hence, as previously noted, there was a general acceptance of FTSSs in workplaces to facilitate the transformation agenda. Workers' general acceptance of FTSSs has opened an avenue of upward social mobility. As shown in Chapter 7, these positions elevate the individuals that hold them. Therefore, there has been a fierce contest for these positions because of their benefits. Buhlungu (2010) stated that contestation and competition for FTSSs have led to a high turnover in these positions. This has had a negative effect on the trade union because it has led to organisational stagnation and inertia.

The contestation and competition for FTSS positions are problematic for the trade union. It affects the capacity of shop stewards to represent workers without distractions and divided focus. As noted by Keet (1992) and Buhlungu and Tshoaedi (2012), unlike in the past, when shop stewards did not even think of accepting promotions from management or rejected the notion of FTSSs, there is fierce competition among some shop stewards and even workers for the positions of FTSSs. The issue of upward social mobility in the trade union should be located in this historical context, where union positions were altered by some into an avenue for upward mobility. FTSS positions, in particular, became a recruitment ground for management, for IR managers, in the main. Both union leaders and workers on the shopfloor generally accepted the

post-1994 shift in how they had previously viewed upward social mobility; hence, fierce contestation or competition for these positions rose.

Buhlungu and Tshoaedi (2012) stated this was not only limited to the political leadership or the elite, but also applied to trade unions. Union leaders who kept the fires burning when the ANC was in exile also had to show their families that their struggle was not in vain. It is well documented (e.g., Buhlungu, 1994, 1999, Adam et al., 1997; Masondo, 2012) that trade unions played a crucial role in the liberation of South Africa, especially when the liberation movements were banned. The democratic breakthrough meant that trade union activists also had to be accommodated in the new dispensation because the state was not one they were at war with but their own, as the ANC was in power.

In 1994, key trade unionists were released to join the government in parliament and other spheres of government. Many (see Adam et al., 1997, Buhlungu,1994, Masondo, 2012) have referred to this as the brain drain in the union movement. This was characterised as such because seasoned leaders of the trade union movement with years of experience and institutional memory were lost to the government, business sector and other strategic spheres of society. This opened space and a general acceptance for former union leaders to go into business and enjoy promotion in their companies as this was viewed as part of the transformation agenda. At the workplace, this meant that shop stewards who had previously not considered accepting promotions from management now did. These positions of FTSS that became generally accepted post the 1994 democratic breakthrough gave the incumbents some level of social status and opened doors for social capital; thus, the FTSS became a stratum in the workforce.

Social status, social capital and FTSS as a stratum in the workforce

FTSSs are in close proximity to management. Because they interact with management on an ongoing basis, they build social capital, which ordinary workers do not have. Bourdieu (1986) noted social capital is important for someone who aspires to move up the social ladder and is acquired primarily through one's social position and status. Hence, social capital is one of the privileges and advantages or benefits that FTSSs have over ordinary workers in the plant, giving them prestige and status. The social status that FTSSs acquire is linked to the resources or perks attached to their positions, including a BMW car and office work. The former is a symbol of power and also affords them opportunities to acquire social capital because of their close ties with management. The social capital is built through the close relationships and networks that individual FTSS build with management, with whom they interact frequently. These connections, networks, or social capital that FTSSs have can be used for personal advancement by self-interested individuals for their own career progression. Thus, the positions are employed for upward social mobility and promotions while the trade union is reduced to a stepping stone. This explains the fierce contests for these positions of FTSS. FTSSs are a recruitment ground for management, especially for line manager positions and other junior manager positions such as team leader and foreman.

Thus, social status should be understood in this broader sense as a producer of social capital that is available to FTSSs and can be used for upward social mobility of FTSSs. Bourdieu and Passerson (1990) argues that there are three aspects that determines one's class status and they include socioeconomic status, class habitus, and cultural and social capitals It is worth noting that Bourdieu believed social capital is one of the sources of status. Therefore, FTSSs also derive their social status through their social capital and connections with management. Their constant interaction and close proximity with management give them an advantage over

ordinary workers for upward social mobility and career progression. Social status and, in turn, social capital explains the constant fight for these positions.

In Weber's terms, FTSS constitute a stratum, which he defined as follows:

> A social '*stratum' stand* is a plurality of individuals who, within a larger group, enjoy a particular kind and level of prestige by virtue of their position and possibly certain monopolies. (Weber 1947: 428-429)

Thus, FTSSs are a stratum in the workforce by virtue of the prestige and social status that they acquire through these positions. Although they are still workers in the plant, the resources and opportunities that they enjoy distinguish them from the rest of the ordinary workers. Thus, they become a new stratum in the workforce and enjoy some level of prestige, privilege, and social status. Weber further highlighted three different sources for the development of a distinct stratum:

a. The most important is the development of a peculiar style of life, including, particularly, the type of occupation pursued;
b. The second basis is hereditary charisma arising from a successful claim to a position of prestige by virtue of birth and
c. The third is the appropriation of political or hierocratic authority as a monopoly by socially distinct groups (Weber, 1947: 429).

In accordance with the first and the third points, FTSSs are a stratum because they have a peculiar lifestyle in comparison to the other workers, as revealed that when elected, they assume office worker status, as they are removed from the production line to a trade union office. This makes them distinct from ordinary workers, and the perks and resources attached to their positions also elevate their social status; thus, they become a different stratum in the workforce. Their political power also contributes to their social standing in comparison to ordinary workers in the plant. Thus, they are a stratum in the workforce because they command political power and have influence in both the workplace and in the trade union as a whole.

The influence that FTSSs command is important in understanding the democratic principle of worker control in the trade union movement because if it is not managed it can erode this principle and open space for oligarchic tendencies in the trade union.

Worker control as the cornerstone of trade union shop—floor internal democracy

Underpinning the idea of worker control is that "the role of the union official was to be de-emphasized. … This tradition of unionism, in which workers and worker leaders played a more prominent role than union officials in decision-making, was emphasised. The rationale was to build a culture of democratic participation by the rank-and-file and to discourage the emergence of oligarchic tendencies in the new union movement" (Buhlungu, 2000: 3). Webster and Buhlungu (2004) postulated that this tradition challenges Michels' (1958) pessimistic notion of an 'iron law of oligarchy'. They further argued that it is not a law but a tendency and one can create counter-tendencies that challenge oligarchy (Webster and Buhlungu, 2004). Worker control in this light was to counter and prevent oligarchic tendencies from arising by ensuring organisers and all worker leaders were accountable to the union's rank-and-file through reports on their mandates. This was the democratic essence of the union movement post-1973. In light of this argument, Maree (1992) examined the origins of shop floor democracy and how the democratisation of these unions unfolded in the early years. He argued that this challenged Michels' (1958) notion of the 'iron law of oligarchy'. He further asserted that there were three democratisation processes in these post-1973 unions. The first was "the creation of democratic structure" (Maree, 1992: 718), the second was "developing workers capacity to control the unions" (ibid), and the third was the attempt at "establishing representative and accountable leadership" (ibid). He further noted that this process was

complex as these unions "owed their existence to oligarchic organisations other than trade unions" (Maree, 1992: 719). He thus explained:

> Instead of the unions starting as democratic organisations and ending up as oligarchies, as the iron law predicts (or as stated by Michels), the independent unions commenced as oligarchic organisations and underwent a process of democratisation in the first seven years of their life. The unions did not become fully democratic with completely effective workers' participation and control. Nor did union democracy increase continuously and smoothly throughout the period. Nevertheless, the first seven years in the life of the independent unions were unmistakably years of democratisation of the unions. During this period the unions conformed more closely to Gouldner's 'iron law of democracy' in which the intellectuals and workers doggedly built the walls of democracy that caused the scaffolding of oligarchy to crumble and collapse. (Maree, 1992: 753-4)

Maree further noted:

> Contrary to Michels, the empirical findings do not portray an 'iron law of oligarchy' operating in the independent trade unions. Instead of democratic organisations inevitably becoming oligarchic as Michels predicted, there was a contrary trend of oligarchic organisations becoming more democratic. (1982: 51)

Shop stewards were at the centre of this democratising process, making these unions very different from other forms of trade unionism, especially what could be termed business unionism. Gwede Mantashe (2008: 94) described business unionism as "banking on benefits and service to retain members."

With regard to the notion of business unionism, Faulkner (1999: 19) stated, "[i]n the USA, unions developed 'business unionism' to tackle declining membership and to maintain existing members' loyalty". In the quest to retain membership in a terrain where workers had lost confidence in the trade unions in the USA and the United Kingdom, trade unions adopted business unionism to lure workers into the union and as a retention strategy. Business unionism included offering workers benefits that were regarded as ordinary in the private sector,

primarily through insurance companies. Faulkner (1999:20) cited some of the benefits that British trade unions started offering their members, including "discounts cards schemes, set up insurance companies, negotiated private health care schemes for their members (despite appeals by poorly paid health workers to support the National Health Service), established banking facilities and a range of other enterprises." He further noted that in the USA "unions went further. They did all the above, but also bought casinos, resorts, hotels, hospitals, and a whole host of 'going concerns' to provide services to members and make money for the union movement."

Trade unions, in this sense, are seen as service providers and not representatives of workers fighting for them in the workplace. Thus, the South African labour movement differs from the business unionism approach, focusing on representation through shop stewards accountable to the workers. Internal democracy and worker control are central to the South African trade unions, especially the black trade unions that emerged in the post-1973 Durban strikes. The significance of internal democracy and worker control in the post-1973 unions sparked my interest in studying how social distance could emerge despite the current emphasis on worker control in these unions.

Deanne Collins (1994) stressed the importance of the principle of worker control and argued that these trade unions were, in the words of Alec Erwin, "laboratories for democracy." (Collins, 1994:33) Further stated that:

> Workers would be trained and empowered to take control, not only in their workplaces, but, ultimately, of every aspect of their lives. Control of their unions was the first step towards a society where workers would resist anybody – government, employers, political activists, and even their leaders – who tried to make decisions for them. (Ibid)

Forrest (2011: 27), who quoted Joe Foster, who was a firm believer in the principle of worker control and enforced it through accountable shop stewards on the shop floor, asserted:

> We believed very strongly in participatory democracy in grassroots democracy. We, the executive and officials, could run the union efficiently like a business if we wanted to … but we don't think things should run that way. We believe that a future democratic South Africa should be run by the people; that the workers should participate in the running of the country.

Worker control was the cornerstone of these unions. The union was expected to advance this principle through shop stewards, as they would involve workers in almost all union decision-making processes. The principle would entrench democracy in all aspects of the workers' lives and an envisioned democratic South Africa. Thus, the union decision-making structures such as the National Executive Committees (NEC), Central Executive Committees (CEC), Central Committees (CC) and congresses were dominated by workers and shop stewards from factory floors. This is to ensure that workers take ownership of their union. Kally Forrest (2011, 12-13) quoted Bernie Fanaroff, a MAWU (later NUMSA) organiser, who explained the significance of worker control:

> Everything was workers' control. Everything had to be discussed at a general meeting. The shop stewards would not make decisions without going back to the general meeting. We pushed for shop stewards to discuss things with their departments at lunchtime and meet as a shop steward committee in the factory.

He also noted:

> This made workers feel that they owned the union, which was another thing we insisted on—organisers don't own the union, workers own the union, and the result was that workers didn't feel the gap between organisers and members and demanded things from the organisers. If they couldn't win things, they saw it as their problem.

The significance of worker control involves workers feeling that they own the union as they actively participate in the decision-making processes and take ownership of the decisions made

by the trade union. Thus, even when a decision yields undesired results, they still take ownership of the blame and do not shift it to organisers and leaders as they would have been mandated in general meetings by union members.

Given the recent decline in workers' participation in union general meetings, it can be argued that worker control is in decline both in principle and practice. This is evident from the Taking Democracy surveys from 1994-2012, which revealed that attendance at union meetings, which is one sign of union democracy, is in decline. In 1994, 34% of the workers reported having weekly meetings compared to 22% of workers in 2008 (Buhlungu and Tshoaedi, 2010: 290). This significant decline in union meetings highlights the fact that democracy within the trade union may be diminishing as fewer workers participate in union activities, especially attending the meetings where they are expected to hold leaders accountable and give them mandates. This notion suggests that failure to attend union meetings leads to oligarchy, and the rank-and-file are responsible for the failure of the union to represent them. Lipset et al. (1972: 162) asserted that low union participation could be attributed to the fact that "few members show much interest in the day-to-day political process within the union, apathy of the members is the normal state of affairs."

However, in the South African case, it could be argued that the democratic breakthrough affected workers' union participation. Workers are no longer fighting the apartheid state and the employer simultaneously, while previously, the struggle for democracy was intertwined with the struggle for better working conditions. Equally, this decline in union meetings and worker participation could be viewed as a sign of something more significant, a lack of democracy rather than just a growing social distance between leaders, particularly between shop floor leaders (shop stewards) and workers. The social distance of leaders from the federation of COSATU and its member unions poses a danger to the previously closely guarded

principle of worker control. Thus, I also seek to understand how social distance developed in trade unions despite their emphasis on worker control.

Although the principle of worker control is sacrosanct to the post-1973 trade unions, the principle has had various challenges related to being more formal than practical. Evidence indicates a crisis of representation in COSATU—from the shop floor to the national level (see Buhlungu, 2010; Bezuidenhout and Tshoaedi, 2017; and Chinguno, 2012). Shop stewards, who are meant to be the first port of call for workers when they have a crisis or a problem, have themselves become part of the problem (see Chinguno, SALB, 2012). By contrast, this thesis also seeks to investigate the tensions faced by shop stewards and FTSS, who remain committed to the workers' struggle and are accountable to members by seeking mandates and reporting back to their workers. There might be shop stewards who are excellent in executing their duties and serving workers' interests, taking mandates, and reporting back to their members. They are workers' mouthpieces allowing worker control to flourish in their unions and workplaces.

The modernisation project of the trade union movement and influence in the democratic state: brain drain

Webster (1985) contended that there is a danger of over-romanticising the worker control principle of the 1980s. He further revealed that although worker control was emphasised in the past, the agreements that trade unions entered into or signed were too complex for ordinary workers and shop stewards to understand. Trade union officials took the lead in the process and signed them on behalf of shop stewards.

The post-1973 trade unions played a significant role in the liberation of South Africa and kept the fires of the struggle burning when the political parties were banned. The democratic breakthrough of 1994 led to the accommodation of seasoned trade unions into the ANC-led

government. It opened other opportunities for the trade union activists in business and the civil service. This resulted in an exodus of seasoned trade unionists in the trade unions and led to what labour scholars have termed the 'brain drain' (see Buhlungu, 2010; Masondo, 2012; Adam et al., 1997). Notably, this 'brain drain' has also impacted the strength of the trade union movement.

The sending of trade unionists to parliament allowed trade unions to be used as some form of upward social mobility because participation in the trade union movement in post-apartheid South Africa was to be a vehicle for the opportunities that were opening up in the state, business and civil service. Buhlungu (2010) argued that trade unions played a significant role in the liberation years, and those who participated in the struggle wanted to prove to their families that their struggle was not in vain. Hence, there was an exodus of a number of experienced trade unionists who sought greener pastures. The latter became an accepted norm.

Buhlungu (1994) noted that 20 COSATU leaders were sent to join parliament on the ANC ticket in an endeavour to acknowledge their contribution to the struggle for liberation. This has been the tradition in every election since the 1994 elections. COSATU leaders are sent to parliament, provincial legislatures, and local government as mayors and councillors under the ANC banner (see Masondo, 2012).

In 2019, the president of COSATU, Sidumo Dhlamini, became a member of parliament and was appointed Deputy Minister of the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development. Three of the COSATU Provincial Secretaries in North West, Eastern Cape and Gauteng became members of the provincial legislatures, with two elected as MECs. These opportunities informed COSATU's strategy of influencing the government from within. Pillay (2015) contended that COSATU has failed to control the government, citing the implementation of anti-worker policies such as GEAR. Devan Pillay (2015), in evaluating the

performance of COSATU deployees in government, argued that they have failed to deliver to the workers but rather have used these positions for their upward mobility. Hence, I argue that opening up these opportunities has created an expectation from those within the trade union movement that their positions in the union can be used as a stepping stone. The positions are seen as a reward to those loyal to the trade union and the ANC-led alliance. Thus, these positions are utilised for upward social mobility locally or on the shop floor.

Buhlungu (1999: 24) argued:

> The problem has been highlighted by the departure of scores of union leaders to parliament. The brain drain has been happening for years now. …The problem is that union continues losing experienced and skilled people and is finding it increasingly difficult to replace them with people of the same calibre.

This has impacted the strength of the trade union in representing its members effectively and efficiently. Adam et al. (1997: 150) added:

> The brain drain of experienced union officials to government and the private sector has caused a weakening of union clout. At the same time, the presence of less experienced union representatives has led to a marked increase in strike actions since the end of 1995.

The brain drain is linked to, and impacts, the trade unions' capacity since those likely to leave are those with experience and institutional memory, weakening the trade union's clout. Once they leave, the union cannot replace them with the same calibre of people, thus impacting the capacity of the trade union to represent their members effectively and efficiently.

Trade union leaders on the shop floor and, in particular' shop stewards and FTSSs might see these positions as some form of upward mobility because of the experience of their former shop stewards and FTSSs that previously enjoyed promotion. This is very important in understanding the fierce contests for these positions. They are seen as a stepping stone as those who occupy them may be promoted to management or line managers such as team leaders and

supervisors. The currency is that activism in the trade union is rewarded due to the legacy of trade unionists who have been drawn into strategic positions in the state, business, and civil service.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the literature review and four themes on which the thesis is built are explored. The first theme concerns the rise of the shop steward movement, which gave birth to FTSS, the focus of the thesis. This assists in understanding the shop steward's genesis and the rationale of why the trade union negotiated for them in the first place. This was related to developing a trade union leadership rooted in the workplace and accountable to the rank-and-file membership, thus building internal democracy and worker control. This theme builds on the role of the shop steward and FTSS and accountability, explored in Chapters 4 and 8, respectively. The second theme explores upward social mobility, highlighting that the democratic breakthrough allowed trade union activists to be absorbed into the state, private sector, and civil service as part of the transformation agenda and was perceived as a reward. Subsequently, this afforded opportunities for upward mobility. Even at shop floor level, this was frowned upon. FTSS were generally accepted as part of the transformation agenda, including their promotion to foremen and team leaders. This led to a ‘brain drain’ in trade unions, which has affected their capacity (see Adam et al., 1997; Buhlungu, 1994). This is significant in understanding the notion of the trade union being employed as a stepping stone for upward social mobility, which is explored in Chapter 7 of the thesis, as well as the crisis of trade union representation, the central theme of the thesis.

The third theme is worker control. It is concerned with building the democratic tradition of the trade union movement through democratically elected shop floor leaders, shop stewards and FTSS. Shop stewards and FTSS are accountable to the rank-and-file leaders of the trade union,

which is significant because it is a countervailing force against the development of oligarchic tendencies, as argued by Robert Michels (1958). Upward social mobility and downgrading are explored in Chapter 7.

The modernisation project of the trade union is the fourth theme explored in this chapter. It is linked to the 'brain drain' thesis examined in Chapter 7. It is a critique of upward social mobility as it creates an avenue for the trade union to be employed as a stepping stone, thus undermining accountability and the democratic principles of the trade union. This affords opportunities for the trade unions to be used for personal interests and advancement, hence, the call for the career pathing of FTSS. This is examined in Chapter 6, particularly the social mobility of FTSS and the prestige and social status linked to these positions.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology: Qualitative research methodology using ethnography

Introduction

> No claim to 'impartiality' can release us from either the dilemmas of being part of the world we study or the unintended consequences of what we write. What we write circulates into the world we seek to comprehend and from there sprays dirt in our face. (Burawoy, 1998: 17)

This thesis examines the questions around the internal democracy in the trade unions through the FTSS and how they have contributed to the crisis of trade union representation in the post-1973 unions. It explores questions around worker control and internal democracy as well as upward social mobility, which reduces the trade union to a stepping stone by those selfish and self-interested individuals elected to the positions of FTSSs. The thesis also explores accountability, the key and central pillar of the worker control principle that is the cornerstone of these post-1973 trade unions. Thus, the thesis employed qualitative research methods, which offer a detailed and in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (see Greenstein, 2003; Legard et al., 2003; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The extended case method was employed.

In his *extended case method,* Burawoy (1998) cautioned researchers not to think of themselves as outside of the things and subjects that they study and to be aware that they are part of the world they are studying. This study drew from the extended case method, in particular ethnography, in an endeavour to understand FTSSs.

In this chapter, the research methods that were employed in this thesis are detailed. The sampling is first described: how the sample was chosen and the methods employed. Subsequently, the research methods that were employed in the study are explained. Other research methods include the life histories of some of the FTSSs and semi-structured in-depth

interviews with experts and key informants. Informal chats also aided in the collection of information.

Where the research encountered specific gaps, document analysis was employed to verify some of the information interviewees gave me, mainly when they referred to documents such as the union constitution, union and company policy and other signed agreements between the employer and the union. Document analysis was also employed to familiarise the researcher with the field, particularly documents related to FTSSs, including recognition agreements, trade union FTSSs and shop steward policies, trade union constitutions and policy documents. In this chapter, how the data was analysed is also described. Thematic data analysis was employed to make sense of the data collected throughout this study.

The following interlinked questions informed this study: What accounts for the trade union representation crisis in contemporary unions? Are full-time shop stewards part of the problem of trade union crisis representation? Have FTSSs contributed to the crisis of representation?

In addition to questions already noted, the thesis attempts to address the following sub-questions:

- What is the role of the full-time shop steward? What do they do in reality? This is examined in Chapter 5, in which worker control and internal democracy, as well as a day in the life of an FTSS.
- Is the shop steward "the women/men with two masters," as Lane (1974) argued? Or how many masters does the shop steward have? This is answered in Chapter 5 of the thesis. The role of the FTSS and the three different masters of the FTSS, namely, the trade union, employers or management and the rank-and-file members of the trade union, are examined.

- Are FTSS positions used for upward mobility, or do they serve as co-option by management? Are FTSSs tools of management? These questions are addressed in Chapters 7 and 8 of the thesis. The upward social mobility and social downgrading and accountability of FTSSs are explored in Chapters 7 and 8, respectively.
- Are full-time shop stewards in touch with members and their members' needs? Or are they tools of management? What role do the FTSSs play in advancing worker control on the ground or the shop floor, and are they committed to advancing worker control and being accountable to their members? This is discussed in the section on accountability and shop floor democracy in Chapter 8 of the thesis, which highlights the benefits management draws from having FTSSs, thus, ensuring FTSSs are tools of management.

Rationale for the thesis

Shop stewards have received some attention from labour movement scholars both internationally (Wright-Mills, 1948; Lane, 1974; Hinton, 1975; Beynon, 1973; Hyman, 1975) and locally (Webster, 1985; 1992; 2001; Buhlungu, 1999; 2000; 2002; 2010; Masondo, 2010). These scholars have studied the roles and characteristics of union officials and leadership. A lack of attention has been given to the position and attributes of FTSSs. While Webster's 1985, 1990, and 2001 works studied shop stewards, Buhlungu (1999, 2000, 2002; 2010) examined union officials, and Masondo (2012) explored shop stewards. Only Maller (1992) studied some of the roles of the FTSS.

This study set itself the task of providing a detailed understanding of the roles of the FTSS and how they have contributed to the crisis of leadership in the unions. Woods and Dibben (2006: 52) contended that: "

> Shop stewards are experiencing various difficulties in playing their role. Firstly, they face a dilemma: are they on the worker's or management's side? Workers seek individual gain and promotion within the organisation, and shop stewards are, at the same time under pressure from management to persuade workers to agree to unwanted changes.

This dilemma is what Tony Lane (1974) termed "the man with two masters." This study, in turn, interrogated how the FTSS manages this contradictory role. It also sought to understand the relationship between FTSSs and shop stewards, with political organisations affiliated with their unions and union leadership and officials. It may be possible that they become women or men *with four masters* as they also have to account equally to the union leadership, officials, and the Alliance (the ANC, SACP in particular, for COSATU affiliated unions). Given this four-fold set of competing pressures the FTSSs have to face, this study examined the crisis of representation in trade unions in South Africa by focusing on the roles of the shop stewards and FTSSs in particular, as they have been at the centre of the debate concerning social distance and the decline in union democracy.

Qualitative research method

As noted previously, this study adopted a qualitative research approach to afford an in-depth understanding of the role of FTSSs and how they have contributed to the crisis of leadership in contemporary unions "Qualitative methods can be used to uncover and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is yet known" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 19). This study sought to explore the role of FTSSs and understand how the FTSS movement emerged in South Africa.

Because knowledge of the phenomenon is scarce, qualitative methods were preferred to quantitative methods. Bryman (2004) noted that qualitative methods emphasise words rather than quantification in data collection; thus, quantitative data would not have assisted an in-depth understanding of FTSSs. It would have provided data on the number of FTSSs in the

country or the sector and not explored the roles of FTSSs and their impact in the crisis of representation. This approach was appropriate for this study as it also sought to focus on what participants narrated rather than statistics, which would not have assisted an understanding of the role of the FTSS in contemporary trade unions. The qualitative research methods afforded an understanding of the phenomenon of FTSSs from the participant's (FTSS's) perspective.

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA[11]) and BMW case studies

As highlighted in Chapter 2, NUMSA is one of the biggest trade unions in South Africa, has a long history of struggle and militancy, and is grounded in the principle of worker control. NUMSA was the first trade union to negotiate and win the right of FTSS at Ford and VWSA and has developed policies on managing them. As one of few workplaces in South Africa with an all-FTSS Committee and no ordinary shop stewards, BMW's Rosslyn plant was chosen as my research site for the company's long history in the country and its contribution to GDP and employment[12].

Both high and low levels informed my criteria in selecting the case study of worker participation and levels of militancy. Shop floor participation in the union is one of the critical measures of union democracy. Although it does not mean that high levels of participation lead to accountability and vice versa, high levels of participation are a fair measure that has been employed over time in surveys such as the Society, Work and Development Institute's (SWOP) Taking Democracy Serious Surveys and NALEDI's Worker Survey and State of Affiliates. Both have indicated over time that union meetings in workplaces are declining.

[11] Affectionately known as Insimbi Ayigobi (Metal that doesn't bend).
[12] BMW SA employs 2 413 employees producing over 75 000 per annum.

Ethnography and participant observation: A day in the life of a full-time shop steward

The sociologist Michael Burawoy, in his seminal work, *Extended Case Method* (1998: 4), contended:

> The extended case method, which deploys participant observation to locate everyday life in its extra local and historical context. The extended case method emulates a reflexive model of science that takes as its premise the intersubjectivity of scientist and subject study.

This study is an ethnographic study of FTSSs at BMW; I was at the plant for eight months between February and September 2017, during which I rented a room in Ga-Rankuwa Township in Tshwane, a township approximately 15 kilometres from the BMW plant in Rosslyn. Initially, I travelled to the BMW plant in Rosslyn, Tshwane. I went to the plant for approximately three months, between two and five days a week. I spent another five months going to the plant on an ad hoc basis. This included documenting the day in the *life of the full-time shop stewards* and having informal conversations, which proved to be very beneficial in understanding FTSSs.

I clocked in every morning with the FTSS at approximately 7:00 and attended their preparatory meetings, also known as pep talk meetings of the FTSS Committee. These meetings generally started at 7:00. I then remained at the plant for the whole day until the FTSS knocked off at 15:30 or 16:00. I kept a diary and captured the day in the life of FTSS. This is depicted in Table 1 below as based on the day in the life of FTSSs in Chapter 5. Their daily activities and a glimpse into the life of FTSSs at BMW are detailed in the table. I debriefed in the afternoon and recorded all my experiences and highlights of the day at the plant.

Similar to other studies, this study was very ambitious and sought to understand FTSSs on a broader scale, including examining two public sector unions and two industrial unions. However, this would have taken longer than three years and was beyond the scope of the thesis. Accordingly, I agreed to narrow the scope thereof. My supervisors and I agreed that to understand the FTSS movement thoroughly, conducting an in-depth study of one union would be essential. Second, I decided to conduct the study on NUMSA because it had been one of the trade unions negotiating for FTSS. Furthermore, because it was in the auto sector and a global phenomenon in the industry, it was one of my strongest motivations to study NUMSA's auto sector, specifically BMW. BMW was an interesting case study because they have an all-FTSS committee and no ordinary shop stewards. This is further discussed in Chapter 5. Accordingly, I spent five years in the BMW plant:

- attending meetings,
- conducting interviews,
- conducting participant observation, and
- collecting documents for document analysis.

This constitutes an extended case method because it employed a case study approach, and the researcher was present in the field and interacted with the participants or *the case*: "By ethnography I mean writing about the world from the standpoint of participant observation" (Burawoy, 1998: 6). This was my sole reason for using ethnography and becoming a participant observer: I wanted to understand the role of the FTSS through observing what they do. The ethnographic work assisted in grasping what FTSSs do in practice and not just what they say or what the NUMSA constitution[13] details, as there is often a disjuncture between what people tell you and what they do. It also assisted me in developing and gaining the FTSS' trust, which

[13] https://numsa.org.za/numsa-constitution/

helped them to share and provide me with information and documents that I requested for document analysis. Although some of the in-depth interviews and life histories were conducted during this period, the bulk of the informal discussions, chats and interviews also took place during this period.

Furthermore, informal focus group interviews were conducted during this period to understand the work of FTSSs and how the FTSS committee functions. These focus groups included a briefing on how the FTSS executed their tasks. Subsequently, I would pose clarity-seeking questions. Some of the questions were based on the limited literature on FTSSs, which I had engaged prior to coming to the field. These focus groups opened a space for us to engage and allowed me to explain my project and what I sought to achieve while introducing me to the rhythm of the union. In these focus group meetings, I explained what methods I intended to employ, including interviews, participant observation and document analysis. All the participants welcomed the study and allowed me to attend some of their meetings as a non-participant observer. Participant observation was the foundation of this research and facilitated all the other research methods employed. The participant observation helped me to refine and enrich some of my questions for my in-depth semi-structured interviews. It also assisted me in my document analysis, especially in obtaining the documents I needed to request and examine to enrich my data.

Herbert Gans, in *The Urban Villagers*, noted that "every social research method is a mixture of art and science," but that participant observation is the best empirical research method available because it allows us to study, first hand, what people do, think, and believe, in their own groups" (Adler and Adler, 2013: 42). Participant observation was employed in this thesis because it offered me the opportunity to understand first-hand what FTSSs actually do at the factory by observing them carrying out their duties. Langley (1988) suggested that participant observation involves carefully listening and looking at the subject. Davies (1999: 71) added

that it includes “participation in their (people’s) lives to the extent that the researcher comes to understand the culture as an insider.” I employed participant observation to have an in-depth and intimate understanding of FTSSs. To some extent it allowed me to build rapport with the FTSS to the point where I was considered an insider, a comrade. This is discussed later in the chapter.

Participant observation was employed to complement the in-depth interviews because often, as previously stated, what people say does not correspond with what they do in reality. Davies (1999: 71) stated that “participating in the everyday lives of the people is a means of facilitating observation of particular behaviours and events and enabling more open and meaningful discussion with informants.” Participant observation facilitated building trust with the FTSS, who became comfortable with my presence and became themselves and not ‘subjects’ of study. This resulted in them, after some time, being willing to open up. This assisted me in acquiring an in-depth understanding of their role in the workplace and the union. Participant observation made it possible to document and describe a day in the life of an FTSS. The day in the life of an FTSS was conducted by following full-timers, and I observed what they do daily to understand the nature of their work and their role in the union and workplace. This also enabled me to understand their relationship with management, workers, and the union’s structures.

Sampling

Sampling is an integral part of the research process as it grounds the research and ensures that the findings are reliable and, at times, can be generalised to explain a phenomenon under research (Greenstein, 2003). This study employed purposive sampling about the FTSS because it was clear from the onset that it was necessary to explore FTSSs, particularly at BMW. The main advantage of purposive sampling is that it clearly defines the target group. The case study

was chosen on the basis that BMW has a peculiar arrangement in terms of FTSSs, as it has an all-FTSS Committee (SSC).

Snowballing sampling was utilised for the expert and other key informant interviews, including interviews with former FTSSs, current and former trade union leaders and officials. Snowball sampling is used when a researcher cannot identify participants who fall within the categories they are researching beforehand (see Bless, 1996). Initially, I had an idea of some key informants and relied on them for referrals to recruit more participants, which proved helpful. Consequently, snowballing sampling was employed because I did not know some of these experts, former FTSSs and trade union leaders and officials before the study. I relied on my initial contacts to recruit them. This advantage of snowballing benefitted me in the study.

Full-time shop stewards

The sample was constituted of all ten FTSSs at the plant, who were also all on the FTSS SSC. This enabled me to understand FTSSs from a plant's perspective, where the union is empowered with substantial resources to represent workers full-time. Although the union enjoys the added advantage of having people assigned to do union work which the employer pays, it also challenges the principle of worker control, which dictates that the FTSS should be held accountable by a chairperson who is an ordinary shop steward. This is examined in s, which focuses on the accountability of FTSSs. Hence, I chose this case study in an endeavour to understand how the union navigates this contradiction and enforces worker control in the workplace. Can FTSSs hold each other accountable when they are all FTSSs?

I employed snowballing sampling to identify participants from former FTSS. Greenstein (2003: 27) explained that snowballing sampling "is used to target difficult-to-reach people (members of religious sects or illegal migrants) by asking them to direct the researcher to others

of the same group." I used snowballing sampling to access former FTSS. I relied on the current FTSS to assist me in identifying some of these key informants, especially former FTSS and key union people.

I wanted to understand the history of the FTSS movement at BMW and how management agreed to an all-FTSS committee. To answer this question, I needed to speak with the former FTSS who were there when this agreement was negotiated and signed. Accordingly, I knew that the current FTSS would be able to assist in this regard and thus, I employed snowball sampling. At the end of every interview with the FTSS, I asked the participants to kindly refer me to some of the people who could assist me with the project, especially former shop stewards and FTSSs who were there when it was agreed to have FTSSs and an all-FTSS committee. In most instances, the FTSS knew one or two former FTSSs and gave me their names and contact details. Although I contacted the latter, I did not enjoy success in securing interviews with them. However, listening to those in the positions and acquiring outsiders' views on FTSSs was beneficial. I also categorically requested that they provide me with names and contacts of former FTSSs who still worked at BMW, especially those who had been promoted and those who had not been elected and returned to the production line.

Although the participants found it easy to refer me to those promoted, they were reluctant to share the details of those who had not been re-elected and returned to the production line as they were perceived as troublemakers for the current FTSS. Some were even accused of organising a rival union, the Association of Mining and Construction Union (AMCU). Although I attempted to locate these former FTSSs myself, I abandoned the process as it became clear that the FTSS were uncomfortable with me talking to these former FTSSs, whom they deemed as their rivals. I did not want to be perceived as going against my hosts, the FTSSs, and talking to those they regarded as enemies. I wanted to avoid tension between us and being the cause of conflict with the current FTSSs. They resented these former FTSSs who were not

elected as they argued that they had organised against them and even petitioned to remove the current FTSSs.

Regarding the former FTSSs who had retired or been promoted, the present FTSSs arranged for me to meet them. This assisted me in obtaining interviews with these former FTSSs. The FTSSs welcomed me, especially the retired FTSSs and those who have left the plant for greener pastures to become councillors, government employees and other senior positions in the union. A former FTSS related, "I enjoy doing these kinds of interviews (assisting students with research). It gives me greater pleasure that I contribute to someone's studies" (Interview: Ronny Zitha, 13/11/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW). Furthermore, these former FTSSs were frank and were willing to assist. Thus, snowballing resulted in honest reflections on the phenomenon of FTSSs, which greatly assisted me as the interviews with former FTSSs were invaluable in understanding the historical context of FTSSs at BMW and the general understanding of the role of an FTSS at the plant,

Current and former union officials

I also employed snowball sampling to make contact with current and former unionists. In this regard, the FTSSs also assisted in identifying this category of participants as they introduced me to some of these participants, especially those who resided in Rosslyn. I requested the FTSSs to assist in identifying union officials and former union officials willing to participate in my study. This was crucial in an endeavour to attain the institutional memory of how FTSSs came to be in the union, especially at BMW. It was vital for me to interview the people who had negotiated for these FTSSs to understand the union's rationale on why they negotiated for FTSS. The FTSSs provided me with their contact details. Furthermore, as they had with the former FTSSs, they called some union officials and introduced me. This facilitated a smooth process of accessing them.

Purposive sampling was also employed to identify some of these union officials. This was based on my research with the unions as a researcher at the Society Work and Politics Institute (SWOP) at Wits University, the National Labour and Economic Development Institute (NALEDI) and the Chris Hani Institute (CHI). I had an idea of the people who have institutional memory of the FTSSs, having had discussions with some of these key informants during the infant stage of my thesis conceptualisation. Prior to officially conducting this study at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits University), I had worked at NALEDI and had an immense interest in the phenomenon of FTSSs.

Although I thought this was an interesting phenomenon, the literature was limited. Consequently, I decided to conduct a PhD study on this. The union officials I had engaged on the matter also highlighted that little had been documented on FTSSs even though some of these officials had a wealth of information about how they came to be. I employed purposive sampling for my expert and key informants because it "is the judgement of the researcher as to who can provide the best information to achieve the objectives of the study" (Kumar, R 1999: 162). I targeted these comrades with whom I had prior discussions before deciding to conduct semi-structured interviews; hence, purposive sampling was employed.

Expert and key informant interviews: trade union activists and officials, as well as labour scholars and researchers

I also employed purposive sampling to acquire expert and key informants to be participants because similar to union officials, I had had discussions with them, and they had fascinating views prior to my study. These experts and key informants ranged from academics to labour activists and labour researchers. I not only conducted interviews with some of these participants, but they also assisted with materials on FTSSs and their own research. The academics, including a NUMSA historian I interviewed, had broadly researched and published material on the issue of internal democracy within unions and during the formative stages of

what became the post-1973 unions. They had a wealth of knowledge on how these unions were formed on the principle of worker control and why they advocated for this principle. This assisted in linking FTSSs and internal democracy.

Research instruments

The following qualitative research instruments were utilised:

1. Ethnography and participant observation,
2. In-depth semi-structured interviews, and
3. Document analysis

A discussion on the first two instruments follows and I problematise their impact on my research study.

Ethnography and Participant Observation: Meetings

Ethnography and Participant Observation included my attendance at FTSS meetings and the recording of life history interviews. The FTSS meetings included. Pep Talk, the local shop steward council, and quarterly general meetings.

Pep talk meetings

Preparatory meetings or pep talks detail the daily activities of every FTSS. Every FTSS is given an opportunity to outline their activities for the day, and if any tasks need to be allocated, task allocation is also conducted. Tasks include issues related to who will be manning the union office, who will be available to assist workers and any outside activities with which comrades need to assist the local union office, such as campaigns and other union activities. Other activities are managed through the union diary, which the FTSS committee secretary manages and is linked to the ER Manager, who approves time off for the FTSS.

Time off for FTSSs is usually used for outside plant union activities like attending CCMA meetings or other plant-related matters outside the plant, including union campaigns and representing other workers in other plants. Notably, the employer pays FTSSs to do full-time union work inside and outside the plant; hence, they are allowed to represent other workers in other plants and conduct union-related activities during office hours outside the plant.

These pep meetings allowed me to understand some of the issues that the FTSSs were dealing with and how the union functions, especially *the day in the life of an FTSS*. Throughout my ethnographic stay in the plant and subsequent visits between 2018 and 2019, these pep meetings assisted me in understanding the rhythm of the union and some of the issues they were dealing with as the FTSS committee. I became part of them, so they discussed sensitive information and conflicts in my presence. One of the senior FTSS often said, "We must not put our daily laundry outside *rena lebayeti* [we have visitors]." In a heated pep meeting, an FTSS replied, "Musa is not a visitor. He is part of us. He must see the real thing happening here. We must not pretend."

There were fights over the use of union-negotiated cars (pool cars). This is further detailed in Chapter 5 when the perks and resources attached to the position of FTSSs are discussed. In one of these heated pep talks, I was kindly requested to excuse myself as they did not want to discuss an embarrassing issue in my presence. One of the FTSSs later told me it was about the misuse of the cars and fights amongst comrades related to the cars. This highlights that even though I was trusted, some FTSSs still viewed me as an outsider.

I had a portable notebook to capture what happened in these meetings. Emerson et al. (1995: 19) noted, "[i]n some instances, the field researcher makes a brief written record of these impressions by jotting down keywords and phrases." I did this a great deal while conducting my fieldwork, especially while attending various meetings. This assisted me in recalling later

when I wrote my detailed notes. It also helped me to jot down some phrases (including their jargon) for which I would later seek clarity. Thus, it helped to avoid asking questions or seeking clarification on some of the jargon they had used with which I was unfamiliar. Emerson et al. (1995: 20) added that:

> [j]otting translate to-be-remembered observations. … A word or two written at the moment or soon afterwards will jog the memory later in the day and enable the fieldworker to catch significant actions and to construct evocative descriptions of the scene.

Jotting down some of the observations and keywords and sentences of what people were saying in meetings assisted a great deal in remembering the key moments of these meetings and observations. In the evenings, I reflected and wrote detailed notes of what had happened that day and critical highlights. I did this in all the meetings I attended, inside and outside the plant.

Local shop steward council meetings

> The Local Shop Steward Council promotes the interests of the Union and members within the jurisdiction of the Local Shop Steward Council. (NUMSA Constitution: As amended at Special National Congress in December, 2013: 26)

According to the NUMSA Constitution, local shop steward council (LSSC) meetings are meant to sit once a month and are constitutional, meaning they are decision-making meetings. Every workplace writes a report and submits this to the local organiser (LO). The LO subsequently compiles a local report in which all the plant activities in the local area are detailed, in this case, the Rosslyn Local, which is presented in the LSCC and, after the meeting, sent to the regional office. These meetings are meant to be where individual workplaces account to the locals.

All shop stewards and FTSSs in the local are expected to attend these meetings. The NUMSA constitution on the composition of LSSC states that: "[l]ocal Shop Steward Council shall be composed of all the shop stewards from every Shop Steward Committee within the jurisdiction

of the Local Shop Steward Council" (ibid). This means that all shop stewards and FTSSs in the jurisdiction of the LSSC must attend the LSSC meeting once every month. Although the constitution is silent on the quorum of the LSSC, the shop stewards and FTSSs with whom I interacted argued that all shop stewards, including FTSSs, should attend these meetings once every month.

Attendance at these meetings is poor; for example, 45 shop stewards out of approximately 240 shop stewards in the Rosslyn Local attended the 7 November 2019 meeting. The explanation I received is that some shop stewards from the other firms had exhausted all their time off, so they could not attend these constitutional meetings. I wrote the following in my notepad: "This constitutional meeting of the union sits without a 50% plus 1% quorum, which is a norm in most constitutional meetings of trade unions." This meant that one-fifth of the meeting was present, and the others did not report or account for the month to the local and subsequently to the region.

Attending these meetings was invaluable because it gave me a sense of the accountability processes of the union and also brought to life the union's constitution. I realised that with all its good intentions on accountability and internal democracy, things were not as they should be. Although the NUMSA constitution stipulates that National Executive Committee (NEC), Regional Executive Committee (REC), Central Committee (CC) and National and Regional Congress meetings require a two-thirds majority for them to have a quorum, it does not specify anything for LSSC meetings.

Quarterly general meetings

I attended these quarterly general meetings where FTSSs addressed workers' activities inside and outside the plant, gave mandates, and reported back to workers. These meetings are essential because they enforce internal democracy and worker control in the union. After all,

this is where the FTSS accounts to their members in the plant. These meetings are meant to hold those in positions of power in the union accountable and those that members have lost faith in can be recalled through such meetings.

The post-1973 trade unions are built on this secret principle of worker control, which dictates that worker leaders from all spheres and structures of the union should take mandates and report back to their members. These quarterly general meetings are based on this worker control principle. Furthermore, the FTSSs are meant to convene these meetings and members must hold them accountable and give them mandates.

These quarterly general meetings at BMW are held on Sundays because the plant has three rotational shifts during 24 hours: 6:00 – 14:00, 14:00 – 22:00 and 22:00 – 6:00. The first shift of the week starts at 6:00 on Monday—the last finishes at 6:00 on Saturday. Therefore, the rationale for having these meetings on Sunday is that all the workers and members should be free to attend. One FTSS thus explained why these meetings are held on a Sunday:

> At the general meeting, we call the whole plant at the same venue, and usually, we call them on Sundays when everyone can attend because we are working shifts, so it is impossible to call a general meeting during the week because of shifts. So, on Sundays, we cannot call them on Saturday because some workers are clocking out in the morning. On Saturday, you will find that if you call it at 10 am on Saturday some people are from the night shift they're tired they cannot participate. (Interview: Lawrence Modise, 17/10/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

Interestingly, the employer pays the workers and members to attend this meeting at double the rate. This explains the good attendance at these meetings. This is further discussed in Chapter 8, which deals with the accountability of the FTSS. One FTSS thus explained the good attendance at these meetings: "Even non-NUMSA members attend these meetings because it is free six hours that the employer pays to every attendee" (Interview: Kenneth Madumo,

27/07/2019. NUMSA FTSS at BMW). NUMSA allows non-members to attend their union meetings as it is also used as a recruitment tool. One FTSS thus highlighted this:

> Because you will find that there is someone who was not interested in joining the NUMSA, but by attending the meeting, she can decide to join NUMSA, then it becomes sort of a recruitment drive for us. (Interview: Lawrence Modise. 17/10/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

All the members and workers who attend these meetings must sign the register for Human Resources' records to know who attended and must be paid for attending. The meetings are also vibrant; workers engage the union FTSSs robustly and want answers. The FTSSs are held accountable. One stated, "If you are not tough, you will resign" (Interview: Kenneth Madumo, 27/07/2019. NUMSA FTSS at BMW). I witnessed this and observed that FTSSs called some members to protect some of the FTSSs when they were held accountable or questioned. The robustness of these meetings highlights the vibrancy of internal democracy in the union and worker control at play. Attending these meetings was instrumental in witnessing internal democracy and worker control. FTSSs would often say *let me assist the meeting* to thwart debate, an issue or when they were held to account. The local organiser often intervened by offering to investigate the matter further and report to the workers and members at the next meeting. My observation of these meetings received many reports, and workers could ask questions and deliberate on the issues. The FTSSs then tabled some of the problems they were engaging management on, and they sought a mandate to approach such matters.

Life history interviews

Life histories were employed in the study because they assist in delving deeper into the meaning people attach to their social world. They assisted the researcher in understanding FTSSs from their perspective and not what the constitution or trade union policy prescribes. Life histories proved very important because the FTSS shared personal experiences of their role as FTSS and provided life examples to express their role. The rich data solicited through

the use of life history were invaluable and could not have been acquired had other methods been used.

Life histories with former shop stewards and FTSSs, including the current ten FTSSs, were collected to have a clear and in-depth understanding of their lives and roles as FTSSs from their lived experiences. Life histories helped me understand these FTSSs and how they evolved to being elected FTSSs. This assisted in understanding their characters and the reasons people stand to be elected to these positions. In all the in-depth interviews with current and former FTSSs and unionists, I asked the following open-ended background questions, which formed part of the life history collection:

> Please give me a brief background of yourself, where and when you were born, your schooling, how you got employed at BMW, when you joined the union and why. And when were you elected as a FTSS.

This was my attempt at collecting the life histories of these current and former FTSSs and unionists, which allowed me to acquire a glimpse of the participants' lives. The life histories assisted in understanding the background of who is likely to become a FTSS as well as their character and characteristics. For example, some of these FTSSs and former FTSSs were former student activists. This explained why they joined and participated in the union when BMW employed them. One shared, "When I first joined the company, I looked for a union office and joined the union. I wanted a political home" (Interview, Thabo Mogoroe,19/11/2019. NUMSA FTSS at BMW).

The FTSSs had formal education, with others having completed Grade 12. Furthermore, some had some a form of tertiary education. It is noteworthy that life histories assisted in understanding what kinds of attributes the participants believe are required to be an FTSS. The FTSSs indicated they had some activist background and stood up for worker issues when they were assembly line workers. All the participants mentioned that they had been trustworthy

from early childhood and reasoned that workers had trusted them to represent their interests and all aspects of union life.

Life histories and capturing the stories of the FTSSs were essential in developing rapport with them before difficult questions were asked. It assisted in building some level of trust with them and ensuring they relaxed in the interview process and did not perceive it as an interrogation. Through their life histories, we touched on their upbringing, where they were born, their schooling, their first employment, and how they became employed at BMW. This exercise was important in facilitating rapport between myself as a stranger and a university student and them as workers and union representatives at FTSS.

In-depth semi-structured interviews

In-depth semi-structured interviews were employed in the study to solicit further information to which I would not otherwise have had access. Legard et al. (2003: 141) highlighted that in-depth interviews combine both structure and flexibility and further noted that "the structure is sufficiently flexible to permit topics to be covered in the order most suited to the interviewee, to allow responses to be fully probed and explored and allow the researcher to be responsive to relevant issues raised spontaneously by the interviewee."

Although I had a list of questions to ask, I clustered them into themes for the interviews to enable a conversation to allow the participants to speak more broadly and afford flexibility. Accordingly, the interview became interactive and conversational (see Greenstein, 2003; Legard et al., 2003). Aligned with "Interviewing gives us a window on the past" (Weiss, 1995:1), the interviews were employed to understand why unions negotiated and demanded the right to have FTSSs and what they envisioned as their role. This provided me with *a window into the past* regarding the rationale of why the trade unions negotiated FTSSs.

It was imperative for me to understand the historical context of why unions negotiate for the positions of FTSSs and why management conceded to the union's demands. Through in-depth semi-structured interviews with FTSSs, former shop stewards and FTSSs, including current and former unionists at all levels of the union, one could understand the historical context and rationale for FTSSs. I also interviewed management to acquire their perspective on the role of the FTSS and to shed light on management's views and perspectives on the role of the FTSS. Management was crucial in understanding why they conceded to the demands of FTSSs, granted ten positions for FTSSs, and no longer allowed ordinary shop stewards, thus making BMW an interesting case study. The findings revealed it was prudent for management to allow the union to have an all-FTSS SSC for operational reasons.

Furthermore, I wanted to investigate why FTSSs are essential for industrial relations and why employers agreed to pay them to do full-time union work. Once again, management, former and current unionists, and FTSSs were critical in answering such questions. Workers were also interviewed to understand their thinking on the role of the FTSSs: whether they served their needs as workers and if they perceived them as essential players in the union. The interviews with workers were mainly semi-structured and were not recorded. I took extensive notes of these discussions. The problem with interviewing workers was that the employee relations (ER) manager declined my request through the secretary of the FTSS committee at BMW. In an interview, he explained why he had declined the interviews:

> You see, they are not creative. They do not need my approval for you to interview workers. They must take the initiative and organise the workers for you. I said no on the email because of the paper trail, because they will go around pulling workers from their work station saying that I have agreed. You see what I mean: in the past we used to take the initiative and cause chaos just to get access to the firms. (Peter Dantjie, Interview 26/08/2019. ER Manager at BMW)

Notably, the ER Manager was a former union official who acted as NUMSA's Acting General Secretary. After this meeting, I proposed to the FTSSs that we arrange to meet with the workers during their own time, usually between shifts, either before or after their shifts. These workers did not have enough time for a full interview with me, and thus, most of them preferred informal chats. Some former FTSSs referred me to workers with whom I could conduct one-on-one interviews outside the plant because, in most of the plant interviews, the workers were uncomfortable talking to me because of sensitive questions such as rating the service of their FTSSs. However, these interviews were never conducted because some felt they would *sell out* the union. In addition, some of them questioned my intentions and wanted permission from the current FTSS to speak to me. Because of the lengthy process, I abandoned the process.

These in-depth semi-structured interviews afforded me, as the researcher, the opportunity to be more flexible and allow participants to speak broadly on the issues, and I probed for further information. Greenstein (2003) explained that in-depth semi-structured interviews involve a clear list of issues that need to be addressed and questions that need to be answered by the participants. I had a list of the questions for each category of participants that I wanted to explore. I used in-depth semi-structured interviews because I wanted the interviews to be a conversation where the participant was allowed to discuss issues more broadly, give examples and not be confined to the questions asked. This proved invaluable, especially for the workers who were challenging to acquire because of their time constraints.

I conducted more than 50 in-depth and informal interviews, including informal chats and discussions with workers, management, current and former full-time shop stewards, current and former union officials, and key informants such as labour experts, academics, and researchers. These interviews afforded me deep insights into FTSSs, how they came to be in the South African trade union movement, and some of the challenges they have brought into the union. The former and current FTSSs shared detailed information about their experiences

as FTSSs and some of the challenges and gains of the FTSS movement. These are detailed in the subsequent chapters of the thesis.

It is noteworthy that the FTSS has limitations in effectively representing workers as they are pulled in different directions and spend very little time with workers as they confine themselves to the union office and outside plant activities.

Later in the study, I started using my cell phone to record the conversations, with the workers' and FTSS's consent. Where they refused, I used my cell phone and wrote notes in shorthand to capture as much as possible. These informal discussions were very valuable. I regarded the information they shared as gold because it was spontaneous, not confined, and not taking place in a formal interview setting.

Insider-outsider: Building repo from a researcher to a comrade (insider): A reflection from the field

> The interviewing social scientist cannot avoid domination and being dominated. Entry is often prolonged and surreptitious power struggle between the intrusive outsider and the resisting insider. (Burawoy, 1998: 22)

The insider and outsider between myself as the researcher and the participating FTSSs I engaged was negotiated over time. Sufficient trust levels were built between myself and the FTSSs to the extent that I was no longer regarded as an outsider. We eventually perceived one another as *comrades,* and the FTSSs felt comfortable with my presence in their space. Hence, the use of the word *comrade* in this thesis, which resulted from well-developed trust levels between the BMW FTSSs and me over time, is noteworthy. We became *comrades, friends, and brothers.* They no longer viewed me as a student from Wits University researching a thesis but as their *comrade*. When they introduced me to people who visited the union office, I recall them saying:

> This is comrade Musa, our comrade from Wits (University) doing his thesis studies on FTSSs here in the plant; he might contact you soon to get your views on FTSSs.

I was introduced this way to LSSC meetings, general meetings and to union officials. I was referred to as *the comrade from Wits* when introduced to management. This made me feel very welcomed, and I embraced it. I became friends and brothers with some of my comrades, and we even invited each other to social functions over weekends, where we would continue our discussions on FTSSs and the union.

These social gatherings were also crucial for me to gain more information on FTSSs in a more relaxed environment than the usual formal workplace. More importantly, we gained friendships and relationships in the process. Thus, after the interviews and ethnographic work, we stayed in contact; comrades checked on my family and me, particularly my wife, and I reciprocated. We continue to send each other WhatsApp messages to show how intimate the relationship between me and the ten FTSSs, and some of the former FTSSs, became. Some of the FTSSs even requested I obtain books for them from the Wits University library, which I gladly did, and they returned them when finished. This is the friendship and comradeship that this research brought into my life.

It is noteworthy that this did not cloud my objectivity as a researcher. I told the story as it unfolded from an outsider's point of view, not as an insider. Adler and Alder (2013: 42) warned, “Ethnographers need to step back as well, to take a detached look at people’s worlds so they can analyse underlying patterns of behavior (sic).”

Data analysis

The data from both the informal and semi-structured interviews were transcribed. When transcribing the interviews, I started to generate and note the emerging themes. After transcribing some of the interviews, I conducted follow-up interviews with relevant *comrades*

from whom I needed further clarity. I was grateful as comrades availed themselves for such follow-up interviews. Thematic data analysis was employed to develop themes and sub-themes, as evident in the chapters. In the follow-up interviews, I explored or asked questions about some of the emerging themes that I had identified in the previous interviews. This I did to enrich the relevant themes, which subsequently informed the chapters.

Thematic data analysis was deployed from the ethnographic work, informal conversations, and in-depth interviews. As the fieldwork unfolded, I identified some common themes. I later merged some of these themes to develop chapters. Chapter outlines were developed according to major emerging themes. Subsequently, I included some of the common themes as sub-themes for chapters, which were refined during the writing of the thesis. These themes guided the writing of each chapter and assisted with its flow.

Ethical considerations

> A researcher learns intimate knowledge from the field that is given in confidence. She has a moral obligation to uphold the confidentiality of the data. This includes keeping information confidential from others in the field and disguising members' names in field notes. (Neuman, 1994: 363)

The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were guaranteed. This study used pseudonyms for all the participants: workers, current and former FTSS, trade union officials and management. Although the participants were guaranteed their information would remain confidential during the interviews, some key informants requested that they be named in the writing up of the findings. Some added that I could use their names if I chose to. Therefore, the findings are presented in different formats. At times, the expert and critical informants are named. At other times, I have referred to them as a veteran unionist, a former union leader or a senior union leader.

All the in-depth interviews were recorded, and at the beginning of each interview, I requested permission to record the interviews as it would prove difficult for me to take notes throughout the interviews. Taking notes would have also made the interview longer and, thus, hindered rapport. All the participants agreed to be recorded. “Informed consent rules that require the permission of those studied” (Adler and Adler, 2003: 45); as such, informed consent to conduct the interview was also sought. I made it clear to all the participants that participation in the study was voluntary and that if they wanted to withdraw at any stage, they were free to do so. Fortunately, none of my participants withdrew. However, some sometimes requested that I turn off the recorder as they wished to speak off the record. I respected the off-the-record information. Although it is not recorded on these pages, it served to give me some context and to consider the information when I detailed my findings.

Chapter 5: FTSS a Paradox of Victory: The Challenging Roles of Full-Time Shop Stewards

Introduction

This marks the initial empirical chapter of the thesis, examining the intricate role of Full-Time Shop Stewards (FTSSs) within the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) at the BMW motor vehicle plant in Tshwane (formerly Pretoria), South Africa. The focus here is on elucidating the concepts of worker control and internal democracy within the trade union, viewed through the prism of FTSSs at BMW.

The principle of worker control, which emphasises the centrality of the general membership of the trade union taking ownership of the decision-making processes of these organisations, is the foundation of the post-1973 unions (see Buhlungu, 2004, 2010; Maree, 1982; 1992; Webster and Buhlungu, 2004; Forrest, 2011). Worker control further dictates that the membership of the trade union should control trade union leaders and officials and ought to be accountable through taking regular mandates and reporting back (ibid). This principle entrenches internal and participatory democracy and thwarts oligarchic tendencies. Michels (1958) argued that political parties or democratic organisations tend to become oligarchic as they grow and become dominated by an elected few. Thus, these post-1973 trade unions adopted the principle of worker control as another mechanism and a countervailing force against developing oligarchic tendencies in their ranks.

In this chapter, the principle of worker control and internal democracy is described through the lens of FTSSs. The FTSS movement, based on entrenching worker control and internal democracy, is first discussed, and how FTSS have advanced this is explored. The role of the FTSS is outlined and the rationale for unions to negotiate for creating a FTSS structure and

why management conceded to it are examined. The argument is advanced to trace the rise of FTSSs; one has to understand it through the shop steward movement that underpinned the post-1973 unions.

There were two main reasons I propose as to why the FTSS came to be negotiated and implemented. First, it was to resolve production pressures because shop stewards were not full-time. The second reason was for union administrative purposes to augment the work of organisers and to assist with union-related matters at the plant. The manner in which the system of FTSSs works at BMW is subsequently detailed, highlighting that with all the good intentions from both the unions and the management, trade unions have failed to harness and entrench the principle of worker control through FTSSs.

Suppose these positions of FTSSs are not appropriately managed. In that case, they can be a danger to the unions' worker control principle as FTSSs tend to be roving or flouting FTSSs and are not accountable to members. Thus there is a need for the trade union to monitor and to instil measures to ensure workers can hold FTSSs accountable. Because internal democracy and worker control are not events but processes, there is a need for innovative measures to hold FTSSs accountable. This might mean constantly revisiting how accountability can be enforced in the workplace to safeguard worker control and internal democracy, the cornerstone of these trade unions. Accountability of the FTSS is further discussed in detail in Chapter 9 of this thesis.

This thesis reveals that oligarchic tendencies can be curtailed if FTSSs are accountable to their members and constituencies. Thus, in this chapter, I argue that worker control should be enforced through regular general meetings and elections to hold FTSSs accountable and guide them with workers' mandates. FTSSs should be rooted in the workers and guided by their mandates, which serve as their shield and promote internal democracy within the trade union.

I also contend that worker control needs to be safeguarded and, thus, the need for agile policies to enforce it in the workplace to avoid the development of oligarchic tendencies in the trade union at the workplace level, as argued by Michels (1958).

The FTSS is a worker elected as a shop steward to do full-time union work. This is the contradictory position of the FTSS. One may ask whether they are accountable to those who elected them or those who employed them and paid their salaries. This chapter explains this contradiction that FTSS find themselves in and draws from Tony Lane's (1974) notion of a shop steward as a man with two masters. Borrowing from Lane (1974), I argue that an FTSS is a man with three masters. This chapter further details and explains the evolution of the shop steward movement that gave birth to FTSSs. The birth of the FTSS meant that the employer and the trade union always had a full-time person on standby to attend to any union matter without disrupting production. This chapter details a day in the life of the FTSS, drawn from the ethnographic research conducted over eight months in the plant.

I explore the life of the FTSS and their contradictory nature. Borrowing from Tony Lane's (1974) notion of a shop steward with two masters, I argue that the FTSS serves three masters. These three masters are the workers and members that elect them, the trade union they represent and finally, the management that agreed to this arrangement of FTSSs and paid their salaries. Thus, the FTSS is caught between these three masters who want different things from them. For workers wanting representation, trade unions rely on FTSS to represent the voice of the union on the ground, including recruiting and representing trade union members. The third master is the employer, who wants the FTSS to maintain labour peace and avoid unnecessary strikes and work stoppages. At the centre of this, FTSSs should represent members and maintain labour peace in the workplace.

The birth of the shop steward movement and FTSS

> One of the central features of the early recognition agreements (RA) was the recognition of shop stewards at that time (1982). We were not talking about FTSS but the shop stewards. The shop steward chapters of the recognition agreements were crucial because the recognition of shop stewards was seen to be at the core, at the heart of building the union in the workplace. (Interview: Jane Barret, 28/09/2018. Labour Activist)

The shop steward movement in the South African trade union movement was built on creating shop floor leadership to advance internal democracy and worker control in the trade union movement, as highlighted in the above quotation of a former unionist. It was argued that workers had the right to elect their representatives to represent them on the shop floor. Through shop stewards, workers would be the true custodians of the unions and actual owners.

> They also created a structure of workplace representation that ensured that unions remained democratic and sensitive to their members' needs and interests. The shop stewards ensure that the power was devolved within the industrial relations system to the workplace and did not become a bureaucratic exercise between representatives of management and labour. (Webster, 2001: 201)

The shop steward movement gave life to the principle of worker control because shop stewards became the mouthpiece of workers: "Whatever power the shop steward had, he drew from his position as an articulator and tutor of the rank-and-file aspirations" (Lane, 1974: 197). These shop stewards were accountable to the members through mandates and reporting back (see Webster 1985; Maller, 1992; Theron 1990).

> We always boast, I mean to boast in the labour movement that shop stewards represent the health and the vibrancy of workers' democracy at the grassroots level. So that is what shop stewards are in a way; they're a mirror, a reflection of the extent to which workers' control, workers' democracy and in some countries, they call it 'union democracy', in some 'workers' participation'. Still, effectively it is the practice of democratic organisations. (Interview: Steven Faulkner, 29/08/2019. Labour Activist)

The shop steward movement was developed to root the trade union in the workplace and advance worker control and democracy, as argued above, to root democracy in the workplace where workers are.

> What happened, I am cutting a long story short, what happened is the political and intellectual orientation of the new movement, I would argue, came from young white intellectuals, and they did not play this alone, but they were a factor mainly in the unions like MAWU. Two things about these groups are that they were critical of the previous experiences of organising under the auspices of SACTU. They felt that one of the weaknesses of SACTU was that SACTU did not build shop floor organisation" (Interview: Dinga Sikwebu, 18/10/2019. Former NUMSA Head of Education).

Hence, the apartheid government quickly thwarted these unions because the arrest of their leaders meant the death and demise of their trade union. These new unions that emerged post-1973 emphasised shop floor organisation, particularly shop stewards.

> The shop steward movement was established to build a shop floor organisation for these unions and a layer of leaders on the shop floor that can carry the union even in times of repression and arrest of leadership, which was not the case with SACTU. When SACTU leaders were arrested, the unions died a natural death. (Interview: Dinga Sikwebu, 18/10/2019. Former NUMSA Head of Education)

The shop steward movement was by the worker control principle that guided these new unions and developed strong shop floor organisation and presence for the trade union. Worker control is the cornerstone of the post-1973 trade union. As highlighted in Chapter 2 (background chapter), the unions were placed in the hands of the workers so that they could enjoy active participation in the union, especially in decisions that affected them on the shop floor. The shop stewards become the union's leadership rooted in their members. The leadership method was not top-down but bottom-up. Maree (1987: 232) argued that when speaking of worker leadership:

> We are not talking about leadership in the same sense that is usually discussed—in terms of individuals and 'great men'. This view of leadership is not what is important for a worker

> organisation. We are interested in the elected representatives of the workers and the officials they appoint to work within the organisation.

This elected leadership, the shop steward, is accountable and answers to the workers they represent on the shop floor. They facilitate this through worker participation. A former unionist noted that shop stewards:

> Have always been an indicator which I think for your purposes it is essential, it is an indicator of the extent to which there is true membership participation and not just participation but control. (Interview: Steven Faulkner, 29/08/2019. Labour Activist)

Accordingly, worker control is concerned with how the workers control their representative, the shop steward:

> So, these unions said, No, we are different from TUCSA. We are building a different movement that is based on worker control, where the people make the decisions, they get involved in solving the problems, and the shop stewards become an important player. (Interview: Dinga Sikwebu, 18/10/2019. Former NUMSA Head of Education)

In this sense, shop stewards offer the workers and union members direct participation in the union, first by electing them as shop stewards and second by holding them accountable through mandates and reporting back. FTSSs are seen as an extension of this role of shop stewards because they work full-time in the union office. This, in turn, affords them the opportunity to be closer to the workers and effectively facilitate membership involvement in the life of the trade union in the plant.

Dinga Sikwebu, a NUMSA veteran official, contended that the shop steward movement was used to inculcate the culture of worker control, which was based on the socialist notion of workers controlling society and started with workers first controlling production and then society. He further argued that worker control was a code name for socialism:

> [i]nstead of building unions outside the factory, there was an idea of building unions inside the workplace, and there was an idea about worker control and building an alternative society

> which the workers would control. And if you had that in a prefigurative way, you needed workers to be organised at the point of production and the idea of shop steward symbolised that. (Interview: Dinga Sikwebu, 18/10/2019. Former NUMSA Head of Education)

Dean Collins (1994) quoted Alec Erwin, who argued that trade unions, in a sense, were laboratories of democracy, which workers aspired to in the broader society. Thus, these trade unions needed to practise democracy in preparation for what was to become the post-apartheid order and socialist future.

> But there is a second aspect of worker control where worker control was also an aspiration: if people controlled their organisation, this would be the school for them to control society in a post-capitalist order or socialism or whatever you want to call that. And you also, if you are going to have an economy organised differently, the people who will control production there would be workers. …Ultimately, the producers must control society. (Interview: Dinga Sikwebu, 18/10/2019. Former NUMSA Head of Education).

Shop stewards were also conceived to build a socialist culture in worker organisations like trade unions and build workers' power. Kally Forrest, a NUMSA historian who wrote the book The Metal that Will Not Bend, contended:

> Worker control—it was all about building power and that people understood that if you go in and tell people 'do that and that' as a union, you are not going to build power. You only build power if people own the union foundation and they own the struggle and what has been done I suppose that's always the power of unions, that you speak to workers' self-interests but also speak to the interests of the commune of everybody. So, you draw in people as individuals but also to bring them in because they understand that power is built through solidarity. (Interview: Kally Forrest, 27/08/2019. NUMSA Historian)

The shop stewards were expected to develop the union in the workplace. Friedman (1987) asserted that in the past, unions were not based in the workplace but acted as service providers to workers. Dinga Sikwebu highlighted:

> If you take the TUCSA (Trade Union Council of South Africa) unions, the TUCSA unions, let me make a caricature of them. You will have members, and then the members in a meeting in an office somewhere in town would elect an executive, and that executive would employ

> officials. And you, as members, go to town, and you pay your subscriptions if you have that type of organisation, so the organisation is outside the factory and the workplace. So, you go and join it and also maybe you don't tell other workers that you are a member. You put your card somewhere, and when you are in trouble, you go and report in the office, and they will intervene. (Interview: Dinga Sikwebu, 18/10/2019. Former NUMSA Head of Education)

The shop steward movement was expected to counter this type of unionism, ground the unions in the workplace and entrench the principle of worker control. The shop steward movement was also a political and organisational strategy against state repression and a counter to the union of old, which was top-down. Faulkner noted:

> The old ways of unionisations where you had the layer of leadership and followership and did as it was told, in that situation, if the leadership is wiped out, then the workers are leadership less, and they're vulnerable. But if you have a vibrant leadership between the shop stewards and the people they represent, you are bringing up workers and generating a new generation of shop stewards. So, you are building the leadership of a union where worker control and worker participation are fundamental aspects and not by-products but essential to preserving the future of the union; they are a self-defence mechanism. (Interview: Steven Faulkner, 29/08/2019. Labour Activist)

The same sentiments were shared by Dinga Sikwebu, a former NUMSA official, who argued that the strategy of rooting the union in the workplace was also about averting state repression under apartheid:

> But also, there was a feeling that if you root this in the shop floor, it will survive the political repression because the workers must continue to work anyway. It is unlike if you have offices and the union is based outside the workplace; it is easy to repress it. So, all of that led to this kind of movement that emphasised the shop floor and the shop steward as the centre of organising. (Interview: Dinga Sikwebu, 18/10/2019. Former NUMSA Head of Education)

The shop stewards were to breathe democracy into the life of the trade unions by rooting the trade union movement in the workplace and at the hands of workers. Maree argued:

> The reason democratisation was so important … I saw trade unions of the 70s building their power democratically through workers' powers on the shop floor. So, it was so important that

> workers have a say first on who they elect as shop stewards that they would regularly meet with their shop stewards. (Interview: Johanne Maree, 02/07/2018. Labour Scholar)

He further noted:

> I was doing my PhD research in the late 70s. I was involved in founding one of the unions in the earlier 70s, and it was very important that workers felt they could take action. They could decide what to do and elect a leader accountable to them, whereas if it were a top-down structure, workers would take orders from the leaders or simply not act where necessary. So, I saw how the union built their power base through democratic worker participation in the workplace. (Interview: Johanne Maree, 02/07/2018. Labour Scholar)

The power base was solidified because worker control was entrenched, and workers were in charge of the union's decision-making processes and assisted them in controlling union officials. Forrest noted:

> This was discussed early on: If you become larky of someone, you lose power fast and that independent voice. The second one, worker control, means that you control the officials. So, the officials might do many things in your name, but you have the right to say, 'No stop there, continue, no we want you to work in this way' workers to the officials. (Interview: Kally Forrest. 27/08/2019. NUMSA Historian)

She further elaborated and argued:

> These were people (the founders of the post-1973 trade unions) who have studied the British trade union and how shop steward council committees worked there and how that trade union had built power there because there was a buy-in from below (the workers). And because the officials were calling the shots in other areas with unions like the United States, the movement had been fundamentally weakened, and militancy had disappeared. They had seen that and that the only way to build your movement was from the base (shop floor) and that once understood that they controlled what was happening. And they did those days; they absolutely did control the union, and officials were accountable to them and reported back to them and always got a mandate in a general meeting and had frequent general meetings and, of course, shop steward committee meetings as the book describes. (Interview: Kally Forrest. 27/08/2019. NUMSA Historian)

In this sense, workers are in charge of their organisations, and the decisions made by the trade union mirror their aspirations. The trade union that emerged post-1973 strikes was democratic,

as illustrated above, and the shop stewards played a central role in building these unions' democratic traditions.

A day in the life of a Full-Time Shop Steward

I subsequently detail the working day of the FTSS by examining some of the tasks that they perform in the workplace. I give a breakdown of the different duties and kinds of meetings they attend. This demonstrates that the FTSSs have to be full-time because of the numerous meetings that they attend, revealing that if they also had to do production work, they would be overwhelmed; this would also disturb production, and thus employers introduced FTSSs as a way of dealing with production disruptions caused by shop stewards. These findings of a day in the life of an FTSS were the product of the ethnographic work I undertook over time and through interviews about the actual meetings that FTSSs attended and their significance.

The working day of the FTSS is complicated and unpredictable except for scheduled and routine meetings with management. The FTSS day starts very early, at 6:00, to ensure that they interface with both the evening and morning shifts, with the former finishing at 6:00 and the latter starting at 6:00. This is to allow the members from both shifts to have access to the FTSS. FTSSs finish working at 15:30 to ensure they interface with the day and afternoon shifts, which end and start at 14:00, respectively. The rationale behind this is that workers from all three rotational shifts must have access to the FTSS and consult with them if any issues need the FTSS's attention. In essence, the FTSS must be available to all the shifts in the plant; thus, their day is structured in a way that overlaps with all the shifts.

The first hour of the day of the FTSS is dedicated solely to the night and day shift workers who can consult the FTSS in their office. The second hour is dedicated to the FTSS' diary, as each FTSS shares their daily activities and discusses issues that must be addressed. Furthermore, this time is also used to caucus if there are any meetings with the employer.

The daily schedule of meetings

Working hours for full-time shop stewards are 6:00–15:30 (paid for 9 hours and have a 30-minute unpaid lunch break. Thus, there is a one-hour (1hr) guaranteed overtime every day).

Table 2: Daily Schedule of Meetings for the FTSS

Time	**Activity**	**Percentage**
6:00 -7:00	- FTSSs arrive at the plant office, and for an hour, they wait to assist the night shift workers (22:00 – 6:00 shift) - Plant-tour - some FTSSs conduct plant tours to obtain the workers' issues on the ground. This happens haphazardly most of the time because FTSSs are in the plant office helping members. According to the formal description of the plant tour, FTSSs are meant to use this hour to go to the plant to determine if workers are experiencing any issues and gauge the mood and happenings on the shop floor. The main aim of the plant tour is to ensure that the FTSSs are in touch with the workers on the shop floor.	1 hour = 11.1%
7:00 – 10:00	- FTSSs preparatory meeting (pep meeting)—in this meeting, FTSSs discuss their calendar and activities of the day.[14] The meeting is also used to obtain reports from the various committees[15] (both in the company and the union) that individual FTSS attend. These meetings are also used to discuss developments, prepare FTSS committee	3 hours = 33.33%

[14] Sometimes these meetings are cut short such as when they (or one or more member(s) of the FTSS committee) have a meeting with management at 8:00, for example, (which is the starting time for office workers at the plant) which is usually the case. And at times you have FTSS who do not have an activity for the day, and these are then assigned with manning the office and dealing with workers who come to the office for assistance.

The length of the preparatory meetings fluctuates depending on the rhythm and workload of the union and FTSS. At times, these meetings are short when there are no report backs from the FTSS and are longer than the allocated time when there are many reports. Hence, the length of the meetings fluctuates depending on the rhythm and workload of the union and FTSS.

[15] Committees such as the Health and Safety Committee, Transport Committee, and Canteen Committee etc. And normally two FTSS typically sit on each committee.

	representatives, and plan strategies before meetings. - The chairperson of the FTSSs committee chairs this meeting. In his absence, the deputy chair steps in.	
10:00 – 15:30	FTSSs attend various meetings[16] including the following: 1. Employee relations (ER) meeting with the ER manager 2. Training department meeting 3. Health and safety committee meeting 4. Transport Committee meeting, which convenes once a month. Two FTSSs attend the transport committee meeting (this meeting addresses issues of transport for night shift workers, which the employer provides) 5. Canteen meetings 6. Social investment committee meeting 7. Employment equity meetings 8. National Bargaining Forum (NBF) meetings (five FTSSs attend the NBF) 9. Medical aid trustee meetings 10. Provident fund trustee meetings 11. Joint management and employee representative meetings. 12. Other urgent meetings are called by the department heads and management if there are pressing issues. CCMA[17] cases and representation Other activities include case preparation, group grievances,[18]	5 hours = 55,56%

[16] These meetings are usually attended by two FTSS, the main FTSS responsible for the portfolio and an alternate FTSS, so FTSS have divided themselves accordingly and each FTSS has a committee that they are responsible for. This arrangement also makes it a point to ensure that there is always someone manning the union office when some FTSS attends these meetings.

[17] BMW FTSSs are allowed to represent members from other plants on request from the NUMSA Local Office and the employer grants them time-off for such cases. The ER manager normally grants FTSSs time off for such cases unless there are plant activities that a FTSS must attend to. Some FTSSs noted in interviews that attendance of CCMA cases opens the space for abuse of time off as some of the FTSSs can take the whole day to attend a two-hour matter.

[18] Group grievances are normally done by all the FTSSs.

	manning of the office and assisting workers with the loan scheme as well as recently with the housing allowance, which is being rolled-out by BMW	
Once a month (happens last week of the month to plan production for the following month)	Scheduling committee meetings (this meeting plans production for the month and the scheduling of the general meeting, constituency meetings, plus the one-hour quarterly meeting with the technical director or the CEO meeting[19] where the CEO addresses the whole plant when needed).	One day of 21 days (4,76% of the days of the month
Once a month	Once a month, there is a Local Shop Steward Council (LSCC). All the FTSSs attend this meeting, and no one is left in the plant office to attend to members. The company grants FTSSs paid time off to attend this meeting.	One day of 21 days (4,76% of the days of the month spent in this LSSC Meeting[20])
Once a month	Zonal meetings attended by: - the FTSS responsible for a constituency - the chairperson[21] of the FTSS Committee - Health and safety representative (or FTSS) - Training representative (FTSS) - the different departmental heads, including the general manager (GM).	One day of 21 days (4,76% of the days of the month

[19] These meetings are attended by all BMW employees in the country, including the Midrand office and they are convened when there is a business challenge or when there is an improvement in the business to motivate the staff.

[20] These meetings offer an opportunity to abuse time off as FTSSs come to the meeting to sign the register in the morning and leave to conduct their own business and come back later in the afternoon just before the meeting concludes and sign the attendance register again and leave, but do not participate in the discussions. This I observed numerous times when I attended these meetings as part of my ethnographic research.

[21] The chairperson of the committee attends all these meetings because "he is the champion of all the issues happening on at the plant" and must know what is happening in each department.

Once a month	CEO coffee with the office bearers (OB[22]) of the FTSS committee "is a touch and feel of am I doing you wrong or are you doing me wrong." This meeting is used to address broad plant issues that the CEO should address and help build healthy working relations. "More about building the relationship between the union and the company itself."	Normally ½ day meeting (2,4%)
Once a month	During shop steward committee meetings, the office bearers (OBs) identify an issue they want the committee to discuss. The issues include grievances, disciplinary actions, and health and safety. The OB comes up with a strategy on how to address such issues.	One day of 21day (4,76% of the days of the month)
As and when there are strikes, marches, pickets or campaigns	Other activities that the FTSSs are expected to help organise include NUMSA pickets and marches, especially those related to national, regional or sector strikes.[23]	One day of 21 days (4,76% of the days as and when they happen[24])
Once a month	NUMSA revived its recruitment campaign drive in 2018 and negotiated with local companies for FTSSs to be part of the recruitment and campaign teams. FTSSs are given time off, a day or two every month, to recruit other companies. Because FTSSs in NUMSA are used as, or regarded as, organisers, they are expected to recruit and represent other workers outside their plant.	1-2 days out of 21 days (4,76%-5,5% of the days as and when they happen).

[22] Office bearers include the secretary, deputy secretary, chairperson and deputy chairperson who are FTSSs in the plant and elected by the ten FTSSs and they are part of the ten FTSSs.

[23] For instance, 13 August 2018 we attended the NUMSA picket at the Brazilian Embassy which was about the arrest of Lula da Silva the former President of Brazil who was re-elected in 2022 for a 2nd term. NUMSA was calling for his release and five BMW FTSSs were granted time off to attend the picket. The others who did not attend had other union business in the plant but would have joined the picket if they were not committed.

[24] Some of these pickets are for 2 hours but FTSSs take the whole day off, for instance, the 13 August 2018 picket started at 10:00 and finished around 13:00 but four of the FTSSs that attended the picket went home after the picket and only the regional chair went back to the plant because he had an NBF meeting. This is evidence of the abuse of time-off.

The last hour of the FTSS, just like the first hour, is dedicated to workers and members to consult with the FTSS. It is noteworthy that during the rest of the day, even if there are meetings, there is always one or two FTSSs on stand-by to address any member who comes to the union office and needs their services. Table 2 details the day in the life of an FTSS.

Three FTSSs detailed the complicated nature of the work and a day of an FTSS that requires balancing to ensure that members are serviced efficiently and effectively. Tumelo Nyatama, a 25-year-old male who started working at BMW in 2012 as an underbody assembler, explained what it entails:

> Assembling underbody components like brake parts, your hitch heel, your petrol tank and your exhaust system. (Interview: Tumelo Nyatama, 27/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

He was later elected as an FTSS in 2014 in a by-election and became the youngest FTSS at 22 years of age when one of the FTSSs was promoted to be a team leader, which falls outside the collective bargaining scope of the union. He was an FTSS until he was fired for misconduct in 2018. He thus narrated a typical day of an FTSS:

> A typical day of an FTSS at BMW—let's say on a Monday you clock in at 6 am and that 6 am was on the basis that you will attend preparatory meetings (pep talks) on the production line. Before the start of the shift, the team members meet and discuss the challenges faced by the last shift and then discuss communication from management before the start of the shift, and they allocate each other to workstations. Because sometimes there might be absent employees and so on, the purpose of FTSSs clocking in at 6 am was around that. But now, because you are ten, you can't be deployed to every PEP talk because there are more than 50 pep talks, so we need to rotate. (Interview: Tumelo Nyatama, 27/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

He added:

> So, you go and attend that (pep talks), and now you come back and have your pep-talk with SSC members at 7 am, debate issues you encountered in the production line, and raise outstanding issues. So basically, you have a meeting with a fully blown agenda to discuss those things. And also, if there is a matter negotiated with management you prepare for that item or that meeting that will discuss that item. Then, from there, you attend meetings if there are

> meetings on that day, and if there are hearings, you do that. …So, you prepare for hearings if there are any; you deal with grievances if there are any. But in the absence of that, you just now have the whole day to yourself (which is normally the case) or the whole day to members so you can go to members and service members. (ibid)

Notably, the ethnographic research I conducted to supplement the interviews revealed that FTSSs hardly attend pep talk meetings in the production line. Instead, they sit in the trade union office and wait for workers to come to them. The FTSSs were critical of themselves in this regard. The FTSSs are not in touch with their members as they do not go to the production line and engage with workers in these pep talk meetings, which are important to assist FTSSs in understanding the plant issues and daily realities of workers.

The life of an FTSS is complicated as they are hardly in the plant because of other trade union commitments, especially those who also hold positions in the upper structures of the trade union either at local, regional, or national levels. For instance, Thabo Mogoroe, a 44-year-old male, was employed at BMW in 2000 as a line supplier. First elected in 2013 and was a FTSS until his tragic death in 2022. He was hardly at the plant because he was the NUMSA Hlanganani Regional Chairperson[25] and also held the following positions:

- Trustee of the Industry (Auto) Medical Aid;
- Deputy National Chairperson of NBF; and
- Training representative, responsible for training in the plant and therefore, he also spent most of his time at the BMW training centre and around the plant resolving issues related to training, especially cases of employees who went for training and on finishing the training were not promoted or the skill acquired was not recognised or paid for by the employer.

[25] This requires him to attend union activities regionally and nationally, which includes Regional Executive Committee (RECs), Central Executive Committee (CEC), Central Committee (CC) meetings, Regional Shop Steward Council (RSSC), National Shop Steward Council (NSSC) and other regional and national events of NUMSA and SAFTU like pickets and marches.

Thabo noted that ideally, FTSSs need to be in touch with members, and thus, their day should start with contact with workers even before the meeting as the FTSS SSC, thus reiterating the point previously made by Tumelo. He explained:

> We are clocking in at six am, and each department from different sub-departments, 6h00-6h10 have their pep talks. So, the process was that we would then clock in at 5h50, change into our PPE and attend one pep talk every morning. We would then start our (FTSS) pep talk at 7h00 because, remember, the pep talk (in the line) is ten minutes. It is a communication platform for the team leader to communicate what happened in the previous shift to the coming shift, but when you (the FTSS) are present, the team leader will give you two to five minutes, depending on his schedule. Obviously, after the pep talk, workers would call you on the side, and hence, we said we would start at 7h00. And at 7h00, if there are issues, you would then report your activities of the day. The chairperson is the one that normally goes to pep talks of workers in the line. (Interview: Thabo Mogoroe, 27/07/2019. NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

Another former FTSS notes the significance of being in touch and close with members on the shop floor, positing that:

> We had a problem in terms of servicing our members, you know FTSSs would come in the morning, some will just remain in the office, in fact what we should do is that when coming in, because you must report before start-up time, I think we were starting at six o'clock. We must all attend pep talks; some would just remain in the office and that was very difficult because we didn't service our members properly. It would be one or two FTSSs that would be going and engaging with workers and come back and report about members' problems that they found at the production line but majority would say 'No, no I will go tomorrow' they would postpone attending those pep talks. (Interview: David Mohajane, 06/10/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS 2006-2016 at BMW)

This is important because the FTSS must be in touch with the production members to represent them effectively and understand their material and working conditions. Thus, the ideal day of an FTSS should engage with workers in pep talk meetings, but Thabo noted this is not the case. This highlights the complicated nature of the role of an FTSS in that there are no clear guidelines on how they should carry out their tasks or the structure of their day. Instead, the day's activities define and determine the day of the FTSS. Most of the time, the day is

dominated by meetings with management. This is depicted in Table 2. However, this removes FTSSs from the workers who are their primary focus and whom they should serve.

Thabo further shared that FTSSs spend their time in the union office and engage with management in meetings but not enough with workers. He said:

> We sit in the office the entire month. The only time we move out of the office is when we go to a meeting with management … I think you have observed it [indeed, I observed this]. Remember, the FTSS policy talks about 50% in the plant and 50% outside, but we are 90% in the plant (in the union office) and 10% outside. And when we are in the plant, we are in the union office. (Interview: Thabo Mogoroe, 27/07/2019. NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

The challenge of FTSSs who are office-bound is that they become detached from the daily realities and issues of their members which FTSSs ought to know and understand in order to effectively represent that, as noted by one former FTSS that:

> It was like I said, comrades were no longer attending to worker issues, like pep talks meetings and the need to move around your constituency as an FTSS because workers are not always allowed to move away from their working station, you must go there. You must wear the PPEs and go around to workers and check if they are okay. It is your duty, and by attending pep talks, you assist in clarifying some of the issues because not all workers attend union meetings. Sometimes, they will have an unnecessary argument with management, then you understand these issues better, you need to clarify, and sometimes they will raise issues with you as an FTSS, and if you are available you will clarify. You will also understand worker issues if you go to workers (Interview: David Mohajane, 06/10/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS 2006-2016 at BMW).

Workers' issues can only be attended to and addressed if FTSSs are visible and on the shop floor with workers on an ongoing basis. Thus, FTSSs need not be office workers who tend to remain in their union office, waiting for workers to come to them. This concurred with my observations when conducting ethnographic research in the plant. The FTSSs were always in their air-conditioned offices in clean clothes, and some, such as Thabo, who held other positions in the upper structures of the union and the federation SAFTU, were hardly in the plant. Hence, it was tough for me to interview him because, after the FTSS pep talk meetings,

he went outside the plant to attend to BMW's union business or NUMSA's business outside the plant at regional and national levels. His day was characterised by meetings outside the plant and representing workers in other plants as senior FTSS and a regional leader. His duties also included NUMSA regional business.

Vuyokazi Mathebula was a 37-year-old female NUMSA FTSS at BMW. At the time of the interview, she was one of the youngest FTSS at BMW and the only female FTSS at the plant. She started working at BMW in 2012 in the logistics department (CKD), and after four years in the position, she was elected as a FTSS in 2016. She recalled, "2nd of May 2016" (Interview: Vuyokazi Mathebula, 13/11/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS 2017-2020 at BMW). She was an alternate FTSS for health and safety at the plant. She said:

> I am also the Deputy Chairperson of Gender of NUMSA in the Local, and I also sit in the employment equity structure where we discuss issues around empowerment, and I am also part of the kitchen committee where we discuss canteen-related issues from cleanliness to the diet issues. (ibid)

Vuyokazi's day in the office consisted of attending meetings in these committees and conducting research related to some of the issues in preparation for these meetings. It is noteworthy that the ten FTSS are allocated committees where they represent workers and members. These include canteen, health and safety, and transport. Thus, the day of the FTSS is filled with them preparing for and attending these meetings. Some of the FTSSs, such as Vuyokazi, are elected in other structures of the union outside the plant at local, regional, and national levels, similar to Thabo, who was a member of NEC of both NUMSA and SAFTU, the federation to which NUMSA is affiliated.

Consequently, the FTSSs leave the plant to attend such meetings. One of the significant activities that filled the day of an FTSS was conducting research and preparing for these meetings and cases, which part-time shop stewards had been unable to do. Thus, FTSSs are

important in building the union's strength in the workplace as they represent members on a full-time basis, thus giving them time to prepare, research, and consult broadly in the union and outside to represent members effectively.

Table 2 depicts that FTSSs spend 55,56% of their day attending the different meetings in the plant with management. Thus, they are drawn away from the workers, their primary focus, which in turn creates some form of disconnect, which is part of the paradox of victory (see Buhlungu, 2010), which is problematic. This is problematic in the sense that the gap created between FTSS and members works against the initial objectives of FTSSs in the first place, which was to improve the service of members on the ground, as they are full-time in the union office to service members.

Conclusion

FTSSs, with all the good intentions of building a strong workplace organisation by having full-time worker representatives on the ground, stationed in the workplace, to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the trade union movement as a whole. Their strategic location in the workplace is one that sets them apart from other layers of the leaders in the union, as they ought to be in touch with members and service them on a full-time basis without the distraction of working on the line. The fact that they have unlimited movement both inside and outside the plant presents a challenge, especially the unrestricted outside-the-plant movement; this draws them apart from their constituencies on the ground. As argued above, this creates some level of disconnect with their members and thus becomes a paradox of the original intention of FTSSs. This disconnect works against the initial objective of uniting them with workers for better and improved service delivery to the union members. This is the paradox of the FTSS movement, which creates a disconnect from the intended connection of FTSSs and members on the ground, as FTSSs are seen as organises in the plant, which in turn ought to

enhance the service delivery of members. This paradox is amplified by the disconnect with members, which the thesis unpacks further in Chapter 6 below.

Thus, I propose that trade unions develop a strategy to ensure that FTSSs are continuously connected with workers. As noted previously, attending pep talks every day should be institutionalised as part of the duties of FTSSs and monitored so that this happens. This will ensure that FTSSs remain grounded on the workers' issues on the ground and in constant contact with them. FTSSs ought to be the central pillar of the trade union on the branch level, which can only be possible if they are connected to members and represent them at all material times.

Chapter 6: FTSS and membership disconnect and its implication

Introduction

The FTSS movement was created, or negotiated, to build the strength of the trade union on the ground by having a full-time contingent of shop stewards whose sole function would be to service members on the ground. FTSSs, in this sense, were to augment the work and functions of the organiser and carry out the organising work of the trade union at both the branch and the Local level. Their role would include organising, campaigning, servicing of members and other duties related to that of the organiser.

FTSSs were more than just shop stewards. They were to carry out this union task of organisers while being paid by the employer to do full-time union work. This is the contradictory role of FTSSs, which questions the loyalty between those who elected them—the workers and those who pay their wages—the bosses or management. The chapter, in turn, explores the disconnect of FTSS from their constituencies and members and how this manifests itself on the ground and its implications—arguing that FTSSs ought to be connected with the rank-and-file members on the ground if they are to achieve their historical mission of enhancing and improving servicing workers and building a strong and militant trade union movement.

Shop stewards as the central pillar of workplace organisation

As the trade unions grew over time and cemented their ground, they started to negotiate for the positions of FTSSs to further the advances the shop steward movement had achieved over the years. Webster (1985) highlighted that shop stewards were instrumental in building the union on the shop floor and assisted with collecting union subscriptions, recruiting members and representing workers there. FTSSs were expected to further advance these functions of the shop

steward on a full-time basis. The three reasons why the trade unions and employers negotiated and struggled for the positions of FTSSs are:

1. Production requirements and pressures;
2. FTSS as union organisers and
3. Unlimited time off for full-time shop stewards.

Production requirements and pressures

Trade unions won the right to elect FTSSs because of the production pressures. Management acceded to the demand for FTSSs because of the benefits they presented in terms of production. John Gomomo, one of the leading trade unionists and a former Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU) shop steward and later COSATU President, contended:

> Originally there was no agreement with full-time shop stewards. But senior (shop) stewards were spending more and more time away from their jobs. Supervisors complained that this disrupted production, so it was simpler for management to release us full-time. Also, after the 1982 strike, management was no longer opposed to full-time (shop) stewards. (South African Labour Bulletin, 1985:72)

The unions won the right to elect FTSSs because management viewed it as a way of dealing with disruptions that ordinary shop stewards caused on production. The FTSSs I interviewed expressed the opinion that management gave positions to FTSSs at BMW to ensure smoothness in production planning. One FTSS explained:

> I found it like this when I joined the union and the company, but my understanding is that the company could not handle the demand of an (ordinary) shop steward or shop stewards from the line of production leaving production from time to time; hence they (management) requested that they become FTSS. (Interview: Kenneth Madumo, 27/07/2019. NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

Another thus explained it graphically:

> On their (management) part, there were a lot of administrative issues because it caused a lot of disruptions in the line (of production), especially in terms of planning. For example, today, you will plan that in production, you will have 20 people only to find that at some point, without warning, you would work without two shop stewards who would withdraw from the line because they have to go and attend a meeting. That destabilised planning. It was advantageous for them to have FTSS. (Interview: Ronny Zitha, 13/11/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

A third concurred:

> You know management will prioritise production. They did not want to lose any headcount from the production line, and they felt that they needed to give shop stewards and the union space to do their union work efficiently. And it worked because BMW is one of the stable plants in the auto sector, and there is the flow of information and communication through the FTSS. (Interview: Kenneth Madumo, 27/07/2019. NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

FTSS became an advantage for management because it dealt with the abrupt disruptions in production caused by shop stewards who, without prior notice, would leave the production line to attend union activities, represent workers or attend meetings with management. Hence, FTSSs became the solution. It is noteworthy that, unlike other plants in the auto sector, the BMW plant took the FTSS model further, offered NUMSA an all-FTSS SSC and did away with the ordinary shop steward. As argued by a former FTSS, the reason for this was production purposes. Accordingly, the union is empowered to have full-time union representatives available to service members in the plant. Their effectiveness is assessed later in the chapter. The employee relations manager highlighted the reason management conceded to the demand for the formation of FTSSs or why they opted for or gave the union FTSSs:

> We have ten FTSS (and no ordinary shop stewards), and they are immediately elected, taken off the production line and serve full-time in the union office. There are two reasons for that: part-time shop stewards and when you want them to attend a meeting, they disrupt the production process because they are partly operators and partly union representatives. Now, as and when you need them for a meeting, you have to go through via a production manager to

> release them to attend a meeting, and they disrupt production. (Interview: Peter Dantjie, 26/08/2018. ER Manager at BMW).

One former FTSS noted that the employer offered these positions of FTSSs to the unions rather than the other way around. It was solely for the reasons provided by the ER manager, namely, production reasons. The employer offered the positions in a quest to manage production planning so that shop stewards would not be involved in the production as they caused unnecessary disruptions every time they had to represent workers. One FTSS thus summed it up:

> FTSSs are there in the policy of the union, but I think around 1998/9, BMW called in the union and said they have a challenge of part-time shop steward because, time and again, they leave the production line to attend meetings and queries and enquiries and stuff. (Interview: Thabo Mogoroe. 19/11/2019. NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

One former unionist argued that the argument presented by management related to the shop steward disrupting production was also about getting rid of shop stewards in the line whom some perceived as disrupting production and instigators of conflict:

> This BMW plant seems like a classic case where management is happy with them (FTSS) doing what they want, and they don't want the disruption in the line, basically 'get them outside our hair'. (Interview: Jane Barrett, 28/09/2018. Labour Activist)

FTSS positions were offered to eliminate the shop stewards who were troublesome in the production line. Accordingly, they were distanced from the members and had limited contact with them. Gomomo, when he highlighted the rationale why the management gave way for FTSSs, contended that "[t]hey (management) thought that the shop stewards had caused the strike (the 1982 VWSA strike), and this (FTSSs) might be a way of separating the (shop) stewards from the workers. (South African Labour Bulletin, 1985:73). Thus, the FTSSs could be viewed as a strategy by management to separate troublesome shop stewards from the

workers and, thus, deal with the militancy of the union. This is further discussed when the accountability of FTSS and shortcomings are examined.

One union official thus explained:

> Okay, look, if you have a set of FTSSs, maybe let's start there; the employers sometimes say, 'This guy is troublesome. Let's just give him a FTSS position.' I am talking about a small workplace. You know, you get a militant shop steward who is always fighting and demanding that there is a training and meeting he needs to attend; you know you can't plan production with this guy. He is here, he is not here, and he fights and says that 'the LRA says I must have time off.' Just let the guy be an FTSS and say, 'Go work in the union, and we will just pay you'. (Interview: Dinga Sikwebu, 18/10/2019. Former NUMSA Head of Education)

He further argued that shop stewards can be disruptive to production in large plants where they have to leave their workstations to go constantly, and service members:

> The main rationale was that if you are attending cases every day, it is disruptive to planning, and the shop steward, you don't know if (s)he is going to be there. And the law says there must be a representative in hearings, so make them (shop stewards) full-timers who will deal with this mess. Because if you have a shop steward who is a worker on the line and he says 'at 14h00 I have to go to a hearing,' you can't say no, so for the efficient running of production, make them FTSS. (Interview: Dinga Sikwebu, 18/10/2019. Former NUMSA Head of Education)

As highlighted by David Mohajane, a former NUMSA FTSS at BMW, the main reason the employers gave NUMSA the rights to FTSSs and offered them all FTSS SSC was to deal with the disruptions that the shop stewards caused on the production line.

FTSSs as union organisers

Equally, FTSSs are beneficial to the union as they offer extra personnel at the employer's expense because the employer pays them to do full-time union work. Thus, the FTSS is an organiser because it augments the organiser's tasks, which include representing workers inside and outside the plant, recruiting for the trade union and organising and participating in trade

union campaigns. Therefore, the FTSS may be perceived as an extra hand for the union. The ER manager noted:

> At the time, it was a financial and human resources question. It became obvious that the unions were not adequately resourced in terms of HR, and union full-time officials then took the decision to negotiate with employers to release shop stewards who could then complement the role of a union official (especially that of an organiser). People who can be dedicated solely to dealing with union activities in their plant first and, where possible, also outside their plan. The background was to augment the lack of HR within the union movement and to serve in the same role as union officials. (Interview: Peter Dantjie, 26/08/2018. ER Manager at BMW)

The union negotiated for these positions to deal with the immense administrative tasks that emerged when the trade unions grew. The trade union needed more resources to have organisers servicing every workplace; hence, they negotiated for FTSSs, and one of their tasks was to augment the work and functions of organisers. The FTSS plays an extended role beyond merely the administrative functions of the unions; it also augments the functions of an organiser. Thus, one FTSS highlighted the rationale of FTSS at BMW and argued:

> [it] differs from company to company because the union negotiated for these FTSS positions to try to have people on a full-time basis in the office where administrative work of the union in a particular company can be done. Where the union is seeking extra assistance, the FTSS can assist, so it was done on that basis, but then in BMW, we are all FTSSs. There are ten of us, and then the ratio is not cast in stone. (Interview: Tumelo Nyatama, 27/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

The FTSSs and some of the participants I interviewed highlighted that FTSSs are effectively organisers:

> Now, one of the justifications that was made for FTSSs was that unions were not in a position financially to employ thousands of organisers; what they needed to do was to negotiate with the employer to get the employer to pay for effective organisers (FTSSs are effectively organisers). And FTSSs were seen first and foremost as organisers for the union. (Interview: Steven Faulkner, 29/08/2019. Labour Activist)

As such, FTSSs are involved in other union activities outside the workplace, including:

- Campaigning and recruiting for the union;
- Servicing as a board of trustees in union pension funds, medical aid schemes and the like;
- Representing union members outside their workplace, both at the plant and CCMA level;
- Serving in sector negotiation committees such as the NBF and
- Serving at local, regional, and national structures of the union.

FTSSs are thus effectively organisers paid by the employer. One informant contended:

> As and when there is conciliation because FTSSs are trained in conciliation, they become the assistant to and organiser; they must provide that service and be involved in campaign structures. Let's say there is a recruitment campaign; FTSS must leave their workplaces and form part of that campaign structure and make sure that they recruit members locally. But first, they recruit in their company, then local, and they can even become part of the Regional Campaigns Committee because they must assist the regional leadership during the regional recruitment campaign. That is the broader responsibilities of the FTSSs. (Interview: Mike Fushane, 3/10/2019. Former NUMSA Rosslyn Local Organiser)

One FTSS summed up the duties of the FTSS as follows:

> As an FTSS, my duties are to represent the workers in disciplinary hearings and grievances, to engage and negotiate with the management and to try to build a relationship with management to negotiate in good faith. And even arbitration and conciliation at CCMA as an FTSS, I can also represent a worker outside the plant and organise, working as an organiser in other companies. The local coordinator can call me to represent a worker in another company as an FTSS. (Interview: Lawrence Modise, 17/10/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

Another argued:

> As an FTSS, you are like an unofficial organiser or a union official. As an FTSS, you are not confined to your company alone; the union can deploy you anywhere as and when required per the employer's arrangement. For example, if there are cases in the CCMA as the FTSS and if the organiser is not available, I will go there, conduct elections, and negotiate a recognition agreement with the employer on behalf of the union. I am essentially doing the job of an

> organiser or union official's job. (Interview: Thabo Mogoroe, 19/11/2019. NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

The FTSS augments and assists the union in doing the work of an organiser, and if well trained, they can do the organiser's work, including representing workers at the CCMA. This may be regarded as a benefit of the FTSS to the trade union. The FTSS, in other words, becomes an organiser because of the flexibility associated with their work, allowing them to move outside the plant to conduct union-mandated activities, which sometimes include organising tasks. A former NUMSA organiser that used to service Rosslyn Local to which the BMW plant belongs contended:

> But more and above that, for the organisation to employ officials, it is a costly exercise now you rely on these FTSS to make sure that you beef up these officials; that's why I was saying that one of their reasons is to go to the CCMA and represent workers either in conciliation but if you have confidence that they can also represent workers in arbitration and they have been trained they could also represent workers in an arbitration. (Interview: Mike Fushane, 3/10/2019. Former NUMSA Rosslyn Local Organiser)

A former FTSS at BMW explained the significant role that FTSSs play at the CCMA and in representing workers from another plant:

> Sometimes FTSSs are utilised as organisers if organisers are not available to represent workers at the CCMA, especially at the lower level at the conciliation level because there is conciliation and arbitration. FTSS will represent members at the conciliation level and other workers in other plants if their shop stewards are not available; as an FTSS, you service other plants. That is sort of your role as an FTSS; you are sort of an extended official of the union. (Interview: David Mohajane, 6/10/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

The reason for augmenting the organiser's tasks makes FTSSs very important in the trade union's organisational machinery, especially at the branch and local level, as they assist the union in organising and representing members where there may be no or scarce resources for organisers. This crucial role of the FTSS augments the role of union officials, particularly the organiser. Thus, they were negotiated to fill the gap of organisers as the union could not afford

to have organisers in every plant. Accordingly, FTSSs can extend their function to other workplaces where there are no shop stewards to go and service them.

The duties of the FTSS extend beyond their workplace. FTSSs can attend union activities outside the workplace and service workers from other plants because they are in the union office full-time and do not have to negotiate for time off. Hence, an FTSS is strategically placed to perform these tasks, thus enhancing the union's work. The former secretary of the FTSS committee at BMW explained:

> You want me to expand more on the uniqueness of the FTSS, let me say the following. I will give you an example of the uniqueness of being that, let me say that you are nominated as a trustee, fund trustee. Then, you are required to investigate the resolution of the benefits of one of the workers. If you were to be a part-time shop steward, it would be difficult for you. Still, if you are an FTSS, it is unique in the sense that you can negotiate and engage, and if you are good at doing investigations, you can even have time off to do that. (Interview: Paul Mahlangu, 12/07/2017. Former NUMSA Secretary of the FTSS Committee at BMW)

FTSSs are powerful because they are rooted in the workplace. Therefore, they can consult members. Furthermore, decisions made in these forums will likely reflect the views and interests of the workers on the shop floor. Hence, the NUMSA slogan is that *a shop steward (and FTSS) is an organiser.* This is the second reason why the trade union negotiated for FTSSs to ensure that the union is afforded staff paid for by the employer. They not only represent the union in the plant on a full-time basis but also augment the role of the organiser and help the union with matters related to administrative and organisational issues. The idea of an FTSS as an organiser is premised on the union's vision of building a capable army of cadres in the workplace that can service members. Hence, a union official explained that NUMSA discourages organisers from getting involved in some cases in the workplace and encourages shop stewards and FTSSs to take up such cases. Accordingly, the union has invested a great deal in the education of shop stewards. He explained:

> The union (NUMSA) says 'no organiser must represent a worker in a disciplinary hearing that is the role of the shop steward and FTSSs, do not get involved in every case that happens in a factory, that is the role of the shop steward. You are a bad organiser when you start spoon-feeding the shop steward. The guys would not learn how to defend other workers; that is the role of the shop steward… We teach them how to handle cases inside the plant, the organiser; the law says that the organiser must represent the shop steward when the shop steward (or FTSS) has a charge of misconduct or whatever, then the organiser comes. But they (shop stewards and, in the case of BMW FTSSs) do the other workers. (Interview: Dinga Sikwebu, 18/10/2019. Former NUMSA Head of Education)

Therefore, because of the centrality of shop stewards and FTSSs in the workplace, they ought to represent the workers and members in their workplace and, in turn, represent the union. Thus, the shop steward and FTSS are viewed as organisers in the workplace. One may ask how an employer can pay an FTSS to do full-time union work. In class terms, this presents a contradiction. Thus, one might argue that from a class perspective, it does not make sense to have your class enemy, the employer, paying for the people to defend you as a class against them. However, industrial relations are a contested terrain with both class opponents with the primary goal of having peaceful industrial relations. Hence, the management or the bosses opted to pay for these FTSSs as another way of building the relationship between the two parties. Although one could argue it is a contradiction in class terms, a working relationship facilitates a healthy relationship between the unions and the employers, bringing about labour peace. Thus, FTSSs are a benefit to both employers and the trade union. The FTSSs resolve the issue of time off for both the employer and the trade union, harmonising the relationship.

Unlimited time off for full-time shop stewards

> Because the ten of us (FTSSs) are full-time, it is beneficial to the trade union and us because we can have spontaneous meetings, strategise, and have more time to make sure that we deal with issues affecting workers and the organisation. We have more time to engage management, more time for management to engage us, and more time to see our members and communicate with them on issues. What I am saying is that we have a more flexible structure as the FTSS. (Interview: Tumelo Nyatama, 27/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

FTSSs benefits the union because of their flexibility and unlimited time off. Hence, the third and last rationale for FTSS is linked to time off because ordinary shop stewards usually only have limited time off, affecting the union's effectiveness and efficiency. Therefore, the union negotiated the positions of FTSS to address the issue of time off.

> Most unions struggle with releasing union shop stewards to do union work. I am not sure when, but the large unions started engaging employers with the view that shop stewards should be released for the duration of their election period as FTSS. That they can bolster the union in the many things that the unions are involved in so the release of the shop stewards (on a full-time basis) was one factor that contributed to this idea of an FTSS. Even now, most unions have got 15-20 days of time off, and some of them as little as 12 days for shop stewards release per year. So, it is always advisable with the large enterprises that some shop stewards should be released for the full duration of their election as FTSS. (Interview: Bhabha lika Maphikela Nhlapho, 20/09/2019. COSATU Education Secretary)

FTSS positions were negotiated to deal with the matter of time off, and it was also a way of building a good working relationship between the trade unions and management. One union official outlined this in detail and argued:

> [s]o my thing Musa is that from the side of the employers, you know the employers they fought the unions, they did not want the unions but the unions were there, so they said ‘oh well this organisation is here and is here to stay it is not going anywhere, for stability it is better to have people who do the work, who are trained. (Interview: Dinga Sikwebu, 18/10/2019. Former NUMSA Head of Education)

Thus, the employers agreed to the idea of FTSSs because they understood that the unions were going nowhere and, therefore, it was essential to build a working relationship with them. One FTSS noted:

> I think that management conceded to that (FTSSs) because it was relationship building with the union, so to build the relationship to enter into healthy engagements and negotiations, something like that. (Interview: Lawrence Modise, 17/10/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

Building a healthy relationship between the union and the company is imperative to maintain labour peace in the workplace. Accordingly, one of the FTSSs argued that FTSSs do union work and work for BMW. He argued that building a healthy relationship between the workers and the company also benefits BMW:

> Also, BMW works because the engagements of the union and BMW are in BMW's best interests because if you do not have workers who do not have a communication channel, you will have an unstable company (or workplace). So, basically, the work I am doing is as a BMW worker as a FTSS. It is relations work for BMW, liaising with the organisation and the union. Because now if there is no one negotiating on behalf of members and the union is negotiating with the company directly, they will not know the material conditions the same way as us workers or FTSSs who know their material conditions. So, we are managing that as FTSSs we know the employees, and we know what is best and what is the best approach to deal with issues, now the organisation has tasked us to do that, and whenever we need advice, we consult (the union), and whenever they need clarity we also consult with the members. So, we are doing (both) BMW and union work; we are the relations gatekeepers. (Interview: Tumelo Nyatama, 27/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

The FTSS, in this instance, becomes a crucial part of the company's industrial relations as it serves as a communication channel between the union and the union members on the ground. Therefore, as such, FTSSs help the employer ease communication between BMW and the workers on the shop floor, which I detail in Chapter 7. Thus, FTSSs become an information bridge or brokers between the employer and the trade union and create harmonious industrial relations in the workplace. COSATU Education Secretary thus highlighted this:

> Management concedes to FTSSs because it is in their best interests to have a proper industrial relations regime at the workplace, which is why they conceded to FTSSs. They also concede, now, according to the new LRA, because the LRA has a section where it asks companies to respect what it calls Organisational Rights. …But in the main, management concedes because they want to have proper relations with the unions, they want to have a proper feed of information from the office to the workplace, and they know that some of the disputes and work stoppages come through because there is no proper communication between the office and the workplace. So, they are more gunning for a sound labour relations regime at the workplace,

> which is why they concede. Not that suddenly, they like the union. (Interview: Bhabha lika Maphikela Nhlapho, 20/09/2019. COSATU Education Secretary)

It is noteworthy that even though these FTSS rights were won through struggles to strengthen the union at the shop floor, the union did not have the resources to have organisers servicing each workplace. Management also conceded the latter. In the case of BMW, management offered these positions of FTSS to the union to ease the production disruptions that ordinary shop stewards caused. Therefore, it was a win-win situation for the union and the employer. The union won the right to have FTSSs do union work on a full-time basis, while the employers won as there would be no unnecessary production disruptions by shop stewards because they would all be full-time. Buhlungu (2010) warned that FTSSs came with its contradictions for the trade unions; hence, his *paradox of victory* thesis. Despite the advantages of having FTSSs, they presented various challenges for the trade unions, which they had not considered, such as not being accountable and being a law unto themselves; thus, the reference to a roving and floating FTSS.

FTSS as the man with three masters

> The shop steward, in short, was the point at which several conflicting pressures converged. The rank-and-file pressed him to resolve their grievances; management pressed him to contain his members' grievances; union officials also pressed him to control his members – though for different reasons than managers. The shop steward, therefore, was simultaneously a rank-and-file leader, an unpaid personnel manager, and an agent for his union. (Lane, 1974: 197)

While Lane (1974) argued that in this sense, the shop steward was the man with two masters, I contend that the FTSS is a man with three masters: the union members, the union itself and management. All of these actors expect something from the FTSS, and the FTSS has to navigate these competing pressures and ensure that all of them are satisfied in the workplace. Hence, I think that the FTSS has three masters for their role as "a rank-and-file leader, an unpaid personnel manager and agent (organiser) for his (and her) union" (Lane, 1974: 197).

Notably, FTSSs are paid personal managers, not in the conventional sense of a personnel manager as their union representative. Still, the employer derives some benefit from them being full-time in the union office.

Table 3: The three masters of the FTSS

The FTSS Master:	Expectations from the FTSS:	Traits:
Workers (Rank-and-file members)	Expect the FTSS to "resolve their grievances" (Lane, 1974:197) and represent them.	• FTSS mirrors the aspirations of workers. • Represent and resolve workers' and members' grievances and cases with the employer.
Employers (managers who represent management)	Employers expect shop stewards and FTSSs to "contain his (or her) members' grievances" (ibid). Shop stewards are expected to ensure that they contain their members' grievances and that there is labour peace in the workplace.	• Resolve workers and members' grievances. • Maintain labour peace and avoid unnecessary stoppages and strikes.
Trade union (NUMSA local, regional, and national offices)	The trade union expects the shop steward and FTSSs "to control his (or her) members" (ibid) in the workplace. To ensure that the union members are serviced, and their grievances are resolved, FTSSs in the workplace become the face of the union and embodies what the union stands for. They have to service members by ensuring they resolve members' grievances, organise for the union, and build organisational power for the trade union.	• Control and service members in the name of the trade union • Organiser and recruit for the trade union • Maintain labour peace and avoid unprotected strikes. • Building organisational power for the trade union.

Table 3, above, illustrates my argument of the FTSS being the man with three masters, with each master having contending expectations. The union noted the importance of FTSSs in the FTSS union policy that BMW adopted. One NUMSA official stated:

> The role of the FTSS was well defined in terms of the NUMSA constitution (actually policy and not constitution), and I must say that they were the back rock of the trade union because, at that time, FTSSs were also trained on understanding the LRA and other legislation so that FTSSs can help organisers who are overloaded by work. There are cases like conciliation because once a dispute leaves the workplace for conciliation in the bargaining council or CCMA, it is not as complicated as arbitration, so you can send an FTSS. FTSSs were also used for health and safety campaigns, so FTSSs were trained to be militant and vibrant and be the beacon of hope. (Interview: Zanoxolo Wayile, 17/10/2019. NUMSA Head of Education)

The trade union relies heavily on the FTSS to represent them in workplaces and build organisational power on the shop floor because they work full-time in the union office and augment the organiser's work. Hence, FTSSs are seen as the back rock of the trade union because of their significant role in the workplace. The union does not worry about sending organisers to workplaces where there are FTSSs. This is evident at BMW. Unless there are pressing issues that FTSSs are not confident handling, organisers do not come to the plant. The organiser may serve as a resource person to the FTSS and offer guidance and support, but they do not get involved in the actual representation of workers and members in the workplace.

Members, on the other hand, expect FTSSs to represent them diligently. The workers I had informal chats with echoed what one worker said when asked about the role of the FTSS: “They are our voice; they must represent us.” Workers expect representation from the FTSS, and they have attested that the FTSS represents them and that they have faith in them to resolve their issues. A NUMSA official argued that one of the most fundamental roles of the FTSS was to represent workers and members:

> FTSSs—their role was to make sure that, first and foremost, they service workers in the workplace, but over and above that, the role of FTSSs was to be available for the work of the

> union outside the workplaces. (Interview: Zanoxolo Wayile, 17/10/2019. NUMSA Head of Education)

The representation of workers is the paramount duty of a FTSS. Therefore, some workers argued they were the "bosses of FTSS because if they do not represent us, we recall them" (Informal chat with a worker). The workers, in this sense, are the true masters of the FTSS because the workers elect the FTSS and account for them directly by accepting mandates and reporting back at union meetings. The significance of the workers in the union is marked by the very fact that the strength of the union is its numbers, meaning the number of workers they organise. FTSS are also mindful of this fact; thus, they try to represent workers and win cases, as their efficiency is derived from how many cases they win for workers.

> But you see, there is no use for you to compete, and later you lose cases, you become unpopular, and then the workers deal with you (by recalling or not re-electing you), is not a given thing that it is a competition at the same time you have got to win cases and you have to emerge as a leader and prove that you can stand. And this does not want some unguided militancy. There are laws, the LRA, signed agreements and some of those things make it impossible to achieve what workers want at that moment, which is what dealt with the NUM in Marikana. (Interview: Alex Mashilo, 19/04/2019. Former NUMSA Head of OCCB[26]).

It may be argued that in Marikana, shop stewards and FTSSs fell out of favour with workers and members. Furthermore, they were rejected by the workers and members of the NUM who opted to represent themselves (see Chinguno, 2012, 2014; Hartford, 2012 and Sack, 2012). Hence, members are significant. Actually, they are the primary stakeholders of the union and FTSS, in particular. Therefore, it is imperative that FTSS first satisfy their primary master, the workers.

Workers (rank-and-file members) as a master: The roving and floating FTSS

> The FTSS comes in and sits in the union office the whole day and waits for workers to come and see them. They do not go and visit workers in the line. Maybe that is why everyone wants

[26] Organising, Campaigns and Collective Bargaining (OCCB)

> to be a FTSS, to be paid to sit and do nothing. (Interview: Thabo Mogoroe, 19/11/2019. NUMSA FTSS at BMW).

One of the dangers of having FTSSs is that they may view themselves as office workers. As noted in the previous quotation, they may clock in and sit in the office waiting for workers to come to them. By the very nature of the arrangement that FTSSs are expected to be full-time in the union office doing union work on a full-time basis, this could have a negative effect on trade union representation and internal democracy in the trade union. Complacency may result in a reluctance to service workers as FTSSs view themselves as office workers. The FTSSs at BMW were self-critical of themselves, saying that they sometimes failed workers because they behaved like office workers and neglected servicing workers on the shop floor.

> There is a possibility that you (as an FTSS) might spend more time in the office without interacting with the workers, and that might cause connection distances that might give rise to a disconnect. I do not want to use the word social distance. It is not social; it is a disconnect. It might result in a disconnect between the FTSS and the workers. I mean, if you are FTSSs, view your office as your workplace (workstation). You might spend more time in the office or other functions outside your workplace, which might give rise to some level of disconnect between you and the constituency you are representing that has become a problem. Let me call it organisational disconnect. You are organisationally disconnected from your constituency. (Interview: Alex Mashilo, 19/04/2019. Former NUMSA Head of OCCB)

FTSSs must be reminded that they are not office workers but shop stewards working full-time to represent workers and should be forced to be in constant contact with the workers and members on the shop floor. This would improve the efficiency of the union on the ground and the service delivery to members. This is only possible if FTSSs are in constant contact and in touch with the daily realities of members. One of the FTSSs asserted that if FTSSs are in touch with the workers on the line, some issues will be resolved effectively and efficiently on the line, without workers coming to the union office and laying a formal complaint:

> Firstly, is to man the office, but most importantly, is to represent workers effectively and efficiently as an FTSS; I know that we are not meant to be doing that, but we are doing it; we

> are not meant to be sitting in the office the whole day. You are expected to connect with workers, and you have no reason why you cannot do that because you are not a part-time shop steward who has production responsibilities and the union work; yours is solely doing union job. (Interview: Thabo Mogoroe, 19/11/2019. NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

The FTSS added:

> Yours is to represent workers in the grievance process, in whatever shape or form; as FTSS, our job is not to sit in the office and wait for workers to come and consult with us. In fact, from where I am sitting as an FTSS there should be queries that you should resolve there (on the floor) without workers coming into the union office or making formal emails and communication. Because when a worker is coming here, then you must email the supervisor or management, but when you are there, you can be there and resolve the issues. (Interview: Thabo Mogoroe, 19/11/2019. NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

The dangers of FTSSs being distant from members were foreseen by the forebears of these post-1973 trade unions; John Gomomo, a former MAWU FTSS and later COSATU President, warned in 1985 when these positions were introduced:

> There is a danger of full-time stewards losing contact with the workers. We combat this by keeping close touch with the factory. The plant is demarcated, and the part-time stewards in the area report daily to one full-time shop steward. The chairman of the shop stewards calls the full-time stewards together each day. In this way, we maintain complete knowledge of every part of the factory, and problems can be shared. (John Gomomo, SALB, 1985:72)

FTSSs are meant to have full knowledge of every part of the plant or factory to service their members. The BMW arrangement of having only FTSSs is even more strategic as the FTSSs have unlimited time to engage with workers, have a full grasp of the issues on the floor and could service workers with absolute precision. However, the evidence at BMW is disappointing because of FTSSs, who are office-bound. In the absence of ordinary shop stewards such as BMW, the FTSSs must be in touch with the ground, and thus, going to the shop floor frequently is paramount.

Failure of FTSSs to be in touch with members leads them to become what Jan Theron (2016:311) called managers of discontent: "[t]his was because, regardless of what was agreed

when such a scheme (FTSS) was introduced, a full-time shop steward could not be removed without reference to the employer." FTSSs are likely to be managers of discontent and become tools of management if they are not grounded and rooted on the shop floor but become what may be termed floating or roving FTSSs. Accountability of the FTSS should be rooted in the workplace, particularly the union membership. They should be accountable to the workers that they represent on the shop floor. There is a danger of FTSSs becoming a law unto themselves by not accounting. One union leader stated:

> Of course, some take this thing of FTSSs as somehow being kings and queens because they're now an FTSS, and they no longer report to their base (workplace), and they no longer service their base. They end up creating a social distance between their base and themselves. They are being dined and wined and taken to golf courses, so in that sense, FTSSs are also a problem when they develop that mentality of no longer remembering that 'first and foremost, I am a worker.' And the union also does not hold them accountable; the union does not know whether 'I am at work or the union, so I am in between,' they do not service workers. (Interview: Dumisane Dakile, 19/09/2019. Former COSATU Gauteng Provincial Secretary)

The *queen and king's mentality* that we are warned about poses a danger to the worker control principle on which these unions are built. The union needs to accept that for internal democracy and worker control to be entrenched, tight accountability measures in the workplace should be established for worker control. Furthermore, internal democracy will likely be a slogan if FTSSs remain unaccountable to their members and the trade union. Most of the FTSSs at BMW admitted that one of the plant's major issues was that they are not in touch with union members because they remain in the union office the whole day and do not go to the line and connect with workers as they are meant to do. Lack of accountability can lead to the bureaucratisation of the FTSS of the union at the branch level. Michels (1958) cautioned that democratic organisations such as trade unions tend to become oligarchic as they grow; hence, he conceived the 'iron law of oligarchy'. Masondo, Orkin and Webster (2015: 214) contended:

> Over the period of the two surveys have been conducted, a process of bureaucratisation of the shop steward has taken place. Did it follow, as Robert Michels predicted a century ago, that

> worker organisation, despite its democratic origins and objectives, would be as prone as any other organisation to an iron 'law of oligarchy' so that—using our terminology—a managerial outlook among shop stewards would increasingly prevail over a militant one?

I argue that the union can be bureaucratised at the national level, as Michels (1958) predicted in his 'iron law of oligarchy' thesis, and a representative democracy rather than implementing a participatory decision-making process. However, at the local and branch levels and in the workplace, there should be a participatory democracy. The practice of worker control is possible because workplaces, regardless of size, are making it possible for shop stewards, particularly FTSSs, to engage with their members on decisions that need to be made directly. Hence, the union should admit that these two democracies can co-exist in the union. Evidence has shown as Masondo, Orkin and Webster (2015: 214) noted:

> A countervailing tendency is the widespread recognition that shop stewards ought to be controlled by workers: this sets significant limits to the oligarchic tendencies in full-time shop steward structures.

Maree (2012: 57) stated:

> Extensive research established that a high level of democratic participation had been established at the shop floor level and that representative leaders were held accountable to workers at higher levels of the union's organisation.

This contrasts with Michels' (1958) 'iron law of oligarchy' as these post-1973 trade unions still maintain the worker control tradition, especially at the shop floor level through democratic shop stewards' structures. The outcome of the 2020 NUMSA FTSS election at BMW was testimony that worker control and internal democracy still exist in the union because workers voted most of the incumbents out of office. This reveals that workers still have the power to elect their leaders. Whether the process was manipulated or not, the workers and members still could remove leaders, which is a countervailing force against the bureaucracy and oligarchy that Michels (1958) postulated.

This countervailing tendency, in contrast to oligarchic tendencies with workers controlling shop stewards and FTSSs, is possible if these shop stewards are in touch with their members. At BMW, much is desired with FTSSs, who have developed a managerial outlook by viewing themselves as office workers. It is important to note that although this managerial outlook seeks to entrench itself at BMW in a subtle way, regular FTSS elections countervail this tendency. Hence, I contend that bureaucratisation of the trade union is more difficult because workers, through regular elections, hold their FTSSs accountable. Thus, in the 2020 election, six of the nine[27] FTSSs were removed.

There is a need for countervailing measures to safeguard against the bureaucratisation of the trade union and to avoid co-option of the FTSSs. Thus, the union must develop clear guidelines and policies on the accountability of FTSSs and clear channels on how the FTSS accounts to the members, not only the union but also the members that elected them. This is important, especially in a plant such as BMW that does not have ordinary shop stewards to hold the FTSSs accountable. Therefore, workers should have direct channels to keep the FTSSs accountable. These should include FTSSs being visible to members and attending pep talk meetings with workers every day so that they are in touch with what is happening in the production line and workers have direct access to FTSSs. This is one countervailing measure against the bureaucratisation of the FTSS office and can curb the disconnect and distance between members and their FTSS. Another measure, as noted previously, is regular elections of FTSSs as an accountability measure.

The evidence presented in this chapter reveals a loophole in the notion of FTSSs, which impacts the worker control principle of the trade union. Hence, there should be strong accountability measures as a countervailing force against possible bureaucratic tendencies that might creep

[27] Now nine after one of the FTSSs, Tumelo Nyatama, was dismissed for misconduct, and was not replaced.

into the unions on the shop floor. These countervailing measures can assist in making worker control and internal democracy not merely a slogan but a lived reality of union members on the shop floor. FTSSs will not float and be a law unto themselves but rather be grounded in their members. Worker control and internal democracy are powerful tools for workers. Leaders should be aware that if they involve members in everything they do and their decisions, the workers will be their protectors, as noted by one FTSS. Workers should feel that they are in charge of the union. This is evident when decisions reflect their aspirations and mandates. Part of the workers feeling in charge of their union involves regular FTSS elections linked to the principle of worker control and internal and participatory democracy.

Management/Employer as a master: FTSS "drinking tea with the bosses."

> Our material conditions affect us; if I spend all my time as FTSS in head office drinking tea with the bosses, my experiences are very different from the guy who must fix a pipe or be a security guard at dark when *tsotsies* [thieves] want to steal. Those are different experiences, and hence, they have a different outlook in life. That is the materialist notion, and if you take workers away from that experience, you lose the connection. (Interview: Rob Rees, 4/10/2019. Labour Scholar)

The lack of interaction between FTSSs and the workers on the flow creates a connection distance as FTSSs are removed from the lived realities of their constituencies. Thus, as highlighted above, they develop a new outlook of seeing themselves as office personnel and an appetite for upward social mobility; hence, they frown on returning to the line when not re-elected. They use their positions to build connections and networks with management for future employment prospects and upward social mobility. Management as a master of the FTSS presents a contradiction for the FTSS because they hold the card for their career progression in the company. Thus, the have to manage this delicate relationship with management.

FTSSs interact with management or the bosses frequently. This builds not only their confidence but also their social outlook and networks. Thus, others start thinking of career moves and upward social mobility as subjective, not objective, namely, their natural, structural class position shifting or becoming fluid. This is contradictory because they must navigate their allegiance between the workers who voted them to be FTSSs, on the one hand, and the employers who pay their salary, on the other. Tony Lane (1974) called the shop steward *a man with two masters*, their members, and the employers.

Management's promise of upward social mobility plays a key role, especially in the workplace and the life of a FTSSs. Buhlungu (2010) employed the term *paradox of victor*y to describe such contradictions. Some use all the good intentions of having FTSS to strengthen trade union work at grassroots and shop floor levels as opportunities for their advancement rather than for the intended purpose. The positions of FTSS have become a terrain of struggle used by some as a stepping stone to advance their interests of upward social mobility. In addition, the increased interaction with management leads to a disconnection with their constituencies if it is not anchored in soliciting their mandates and reporting back regularly.

As the BMW NUMSA FTSS election impasse showed, an added contradiction is that, at times, there are divisions among union members, appointed union officials, and elected leaders up to the highest echelons. Amid the divisions and, by extension, the rest of the other contradictions associated with the different masters, the FTSS must ensure that all the masters are serviced very well.

The employer becomes the primary beneficiary of the contradictory situation facing the FTSS. The promise of upward social mobility plays a key role, especially in the workplace. This is a *paradox of victor*y, borrowing from Buhlungu (2010). All the good intentions of having FTSSs to strengthen trade union work at grassroots and shop floor levels may lead to opportunities for

their advancement rather than for the intended purpose. The positions of FTSSs have become a terrain of struggle used by some as a stepping stone to advance their personal interests of upward social mobility. In addition, the increased interaction with management leads to a disconnection with their constituencies if it is not anchored in soliciting their mandates and reporting back regularly. One FTSS boasted that sitting with management and discussing issues as equals is very strategic. One FTSS stated:

> When we are here (FTSS' office), we start to see ourselves as exposed to senior management, and we want to impress senior management, forgetting that you impress senior management at the expense of workers and the union at large. You say, 'Eh, I am rubbing shoulders with the CEO'. (Interview: Thabo Mogoroe, 27/07/2019. NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

Another added:

> It is true that people think that becoming an FTSS opens avenues to management, and you become friends with management, and then you will get promoted. Yes, we have seen such happenings in the past with other FTSS who applied and perhaps had luck and had the requirements of the positions and got promoted. (Interview: Vuyokazi Mathebula, 13/11/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS 2017-2020 at BMW)

A third noted:

> FTSSs function at a strategic level because you interact with directors and CEOs, you get first-hand information and they (management) tell you their side that members on the floor do not know for you to be able to engage openly. (Interview: Paul Mahlangu, 12/07/ 2017. Former NUMSA FTSS 2012-2020 at BMW)

These high-level meetings that FTSSs get exposed to contribute to changes in some of the FTSSs' outlooks and make them feel very important. It influences their ambitions to move up, perceiving that returning to the production line when not re-elected will waste the experience acquired while an FTSS. This leads to levels of aspiration among the FTSS. One FTSS, when asked about the possibility of co-option of FTSSs by management, argued:

> No. I think that one (co-option of FTSSs) is an ethical thing. It is based on how you are as an individual because when you are a worker, you also aspire as a person to grow … and if you want to grow unethically, if there are certain things like co-opting, then you will be co-opted. (Interview: Tumelo Nyatama, 27/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

The FTSSs stated that using FTSS positions as a stepping stone or springboard is an ethical issue. Some were co-opted or used their positions as a stepping stone for their career advancement, while others who were principled did not want to be co-opted. Notably, the promotion of FTSSs into management may lead to the aspiration of becoming part of management. Thus, when they were not elected, almost all of them were against the notion of going back to the line of production as they perceived that as a waste of the company and union resources used in training them. They believed that they should be absorbed into management, and thus, they favoured the notion of FTSS's career path. This is linked to the perks and changes in the material condition of those thinking so. Consequently, they advance the notion of career pathing, which is part of upward social mobility. The material benefits that entice individuals to these positions at BMW are described as follows:

> As an FTSS, you will have a car. You will be in the office full-time, in a well-equipped office with a computer, telephone and other things that go hand in glove with the office, like printers and so forth. There is a 10 per cent across-the-board allowance [which is not applicable at other companies or those companies to FTSS above Skills Level 5]. … Your movement is not strictly monitored or fully controlled by the company. You just move in and out (of the plant) as you please. You just need to tell them (management) that 'I am going there and there', and they will not refuse you as an FTSS. Those are the benefits, especially the car in the auto industry. (Interview: David Mohajane, 06/10/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS 2006-2016 at BMW)

These benefits encompass the source of competition for these positions. More importantly, it is also the source of the FTSSs' outlook as it changes their material conditions. When not elected, they lose all these benefits and return to the production line, becoming an ordinary worker. Those for whom this social downgrading is not an option opt for early retirement or

resign and pursue other things, as discussed in Chapter 7. For example, Molane Alpheus May resigned when he was not re-elected in 2020.

Trade Unions as masters: The sin of the office for FTSS

One of the significant disadvantages that all the FTSSs, former FTSSs, union activists and officials I interviewed raised, and I witnessed, was the culture of FTSSs viewing themselves as office workers. From my ethnographic work at BMW, I witnessed the FTSSs coming to the plant and attending their morning prep meeting for an hour or less and, after that, sitting in the office the whole day. This is problematic as it creates some form of disconnect with the worker; thus, some FTSSs even argued that there is a social distance between members and the FTSS:

> The only disadvantage was that people started remaining more in the office than at the plant level servicing workers because they had too much time on their own. Most would be outside without accounting for their activities, which becomes a disadvantage because the union was now becoming ineffective. (Interview: Ronny Zitha, 13/112019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

FTSSs, who are office-bound, bring disservice to the members as they become out of touch with workers and render the union ineffective. One FTSS argued that this behaviour turned the union into a consulting firm:

> That's the reason why the union negotiated for a certain number of FTSSs and a certain number of part-timers (shop stewards). That is the main reason to close that social gap. It is human nature that you will seldom visit the production line again after some time, eventually stopping altogether and becoming a consulting firm. Workers should come here and consult you, whilst it should be the opposite. That is what we sit here, and I think you have observed. (Interview: Thabo Mogoroe, 19/11/2019. NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

I observed this and noted that it was a worrying phenomenon that the FTSSs sit in the office and wait for workers to come to the union office, particularly as the workers have limited mobility in the plant as they are expected to be on the production line. An FTSS added:

> We will sit here all day, open YouTube, play music, attend to one or two emails. If there is a meeting, we would meet 30 minutes or an hour before the meeting and rashly prepare and go to the meeting. But if there has been no meeting for the past two to three days, starting from last week, there are no meetings, we sit here the whole day. (Interview: Thabo Mogoroe, 19/11/2019. NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

The notion of the union being a consulting firm may be linked to business unionism, where the union is seen as a service provider for its members. Members do not participate in the life of the union but only draw a benefit for which they pay; in this case, representation. The union becomes a law firm that provides representation to its members. However, this differs from what NUMSA stands for or how a trade union should operate. NUMSA is founded on the principle of worker control. This principle stipulates that workers are the union's owners and participate in the organisation's life; thus, the FTSS should touch base with their workers to involve them in the life of the trade union. A former FTSS explained how they tried to deal with the problem of office-bound FTSSs:

> We had a problem servicing our members; you know, shop stewards would come in the morning. Some will just remain in the office; in fact, we should do that when you come in because you must report before start-up time. I think we were starting at 6 o'clock. We all attended pep talks (on the line); some would just remain in the office, which was very difficult because we did not service our members properly. One or two workers would be going and engaging with workers and coming back and reporting problems they found at the production line, but the majority would say, 'No, no, I will go tomorrow.' They would postpone attending those pep talks. (Interview: David Mohajane, 6/10/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

These pep talk meetings on the line, which FTSSs are allowed to attend, are an ideal opportunity for FTSSs to engage and check in with workers, but, unfortunately, FTSSs do not leverage this avenue, which the employer has allowed for engagement. One FTSS explained that pep talks are a strategic platform to engage with workers, and although there was a proposal that they should attend these meetings, that did not materialise:

> We are clocking in at 6 am, and each department from different sub-departments, 6h00-6h10, have their pep talks, so the process was that we would then clock in at 5h50 and change into

> our PPE and attend one pep talk every morning. And we would then start our (FTSS) pep talk at 7h00 because, remember, the pep talk (in the line) is ten minutes. It is a communication platform for the team leader to communicate what happened in the previous shift to the coming shift, but when you (the FTSS) are present, the team leader will give you two to five minutes, depending on his schedule. Obviously, after the pep talk, workers would then call you on the side, and hence, we said we would start at 7h00. At 7h00, if there are issues, you would report and report the day's activities. The chairperson is the one who normally goes to pep-talks of workers in the line. (Interview: Thabo Mogoroe, 19/11/2019. NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

FTSSs are self-critical in that they have failed to use workers' pep talks as a platform to be in touch with workers and their needs and interests, which can also be used to service workers on the line and be accessible to workers. The lack of visibility and contact between FTSSs and the members is what creates the disconnect between the two because FTSSs are not accessible to workers and only accessible through the union office. Hence, others have argued that employers use these positions of FTSS to distance FTSSs from their members, which I witnessed in the plant. This, as the FTSSs sit in the office and wait for members to come to them and do not go to the line to engage with workers. Thus, some have referred to FTSSs as *roving shop stewards*:

> You are detached from your members, which is the primary reason why you are a shop steward in the first place. You were elected because you were articulating issues that were affecting workers as workers. So, now you are still a worker, but you are not physically working on the line. Now you are doing administrative work, and too much administration work can also be dangerous because you would do your work and end up not having any work to do; that is when you become a roving FTSS. (Interview: Tumelo Nyatama, 27/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

The danger of FTSSs is that they are full-time in the union office, and sometimes have nothing to do. The failure of FTSSs to go to the line and connect with workers restricts and confines them to the union office, which may lead to them being idle and becoming roving FTSSs. A roving shop steward is a shop steward with no work to do. One FTSS asserted:

> You cannot have meetings Monday to Friday with management; you cannot have issues every day that you must resolve with management. There are times when there is not much pressure in the office on issues that need to be negotiated or demands or agreements that are negotiated. Hence, you do not have much to do. (Interview: Tumelo Nyatama, 27/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

In this instance, FTSSs tend to be floating and do nothing. Therefore, it is suggested that the union should think creatively about how FTSS can be kept occupied, as a floating FTSS does not assist the union and its members. Theron (2016: 312) explained this pitfall of the FTSSs and shared that one comrade of his was even ashamed of being an FTSS because he said:

> There was no way I was assisting workers as a full-time shop steward,' he told me, 'I was floating.

These floating and roving FTSSs pose a danger to the trade union movement since they do not know what they are doing but just sit in the union office and do nothing all day, thus creating a disconnect between the union members and the FTSS.

The evidence presented in this chapter reveals a loophole in the idea of FTSSs, which impacts the worker control principle of the trade union. Hence, there should be strong accountability measures as a countervailing force against possible bureaucratic tendencies that might creep into the shop floor unions. These countervailing measures can assist in making worker control and internal democracy not merely a slogan but a lived reality of union members on the shop floor. FTSSs will not float and be a law unto themselves but rather be grounded in their members.

Worker control and internal democracy are powerful tools for workers. As one FTSS contended, leaders should be aware that if they involve members in everything they do and the decisions they take, workers will be their protectors. Workers should feel that they are in charge of the union and can see when decisions reflect their aspirations and mandates. Regular

elections of FTSSs, linked to the principle of worker control and internal and participatory democracy, will allow workers to feel they are in charge of their union.

I argue that these roles and expectations, as illustrated in Table 3, ensure that the FTSS is a man with three masters. In his seminal work, Tony Lane (1974) argued that a shop steward is *a man with two masters*. The rank-and-file employers are the foremost masters because of their proximity to the FTSS as they work with FTSSs inside the workplace. The trade union is equally a vital master that derives its strength from the shop steward and FTSSs on the shop floor. The trade union expects a great deal from FTSSs in regard to their organisational strength on the shop floor. The trade union's power is derived from how well the FTSSs on the shop floor represents union members.

Thus, a trade union such as NUMSA has invested heavily in educating FTSSs so that they are equipped to represent workers. Therefore, the trade union becomes a significant master of the FTSSs because they must also account to the union about their activities, which is a mechanism of ensuring that the union is alive in the workplace through the monthly LSSC meetings at NUMSA. The trade union relies heavily on the shop steward to ensure the union is alive in the workplace because they are based there. Thus, the trade union becomes a significant master of the FTSS because of the union's expectations that they will service workers full-time and resolve their grievances.

Worth noting is the fact that the union machinery at workplace is also important for other political means, thus FTSSs become of significant value for the trade union. This is especially the case for trade unions affiliated to COSATU and the Alliance as the trade union structures and machinery on the ground becomes a significant and integral part of the ANC campaigning machinery during elections. These structures play a significant role in mobilisation for the ANC and Alliance partners at different intervals and periods of political mobilisation. As noted in

the past that during elections branches and workplaces become a very important sphere of voter and mass mobilisation for political parties.

Hence, equally, the FTSSs, to a greater extent, becomes a man with three masters, with each master expecting different things from them. There are thosse who argue that trade unions ought to be independent from political parties. In the case of South Africa, independent from the ANC and the Alliance in particular, as they fall into the trap of being over consumed and used by the Alliance and the ANC for the narrow factional and political fights which derail them from fighting for workers and the issues on the ground (see Pillay, 2015 and Vavi, 2012). This school of thought or what has been termed workerist in the past (see Friedman, 1987, Baskin, 1990 and Webster, 1985) argued that trade unions ought to fight for 'bread and butter' issues of workers on the shopfloor and when engaged in community struggles ought to be non-partisan or non-politically align to address working class issues. Thus, the call for independent trade unions that are not aligned to any political party or non-aligned.

The FTSS is a man with three masters who have competing demands. The rank-and-file members, employers, and the trade union put the FTSS in a compromised position to satisfy all the masters. Thus, there is the danger of the FTSS being a roving or floating shop steward in the quest to satisfy all their masters and undermining the principal master, namely, the workers they must always represent.

Conclusion

The shop steward movement that emerged in the 1970s was significant in the trade union movement that gave birth to post-1973 unions and helped to build the democratic traditions of these unions through the worker control principle, which is the cornerstone of these unions and which shop stewards played a central role in grounding and cementing. FTSS were negotiated to further advance the shop steward movement and the gains in democratising the trade union.

The trade unions also negotiated FTSS to augment the growing administrative tasks of the unions because as these unions grew, organisers were over-stretched, and the unions did not have the resources to employ more organisers to service all the workplaces they were organising. FTSSs were negotiated to tap into employers' resources to pay them to do union work full-time. The unions also negotiated FTSSs because ordinary shop stewards exhausted their time off and missed crucial union activities. FTSSs can attend union activities and programmes because they are full-time in the union office and have unlimited time off. Hence, FTSSs played a considerable role in building the trade union movement on the shop floor and helped employers, as noted previously.

Employers offered FTSS positions to the union for selfish reasons, namely, production because they argued that ordinary shop stewards disrupted production planning. Thus, companies such as BMW even offered an all-full-time SSC.

However, FTSSs tend to be office-bound and not in touch with workers on the shop floor, making them unaccountable to the members and impacting the worker control principle of the post-1973 trade unions. The FTSSs are a massive advantage for the union and, if monitored and managed correctly, could yield positive results for the union in building worker control and as a countervailing force to the development of oligarchic tendencies.

In this chapter, I have argued that the trade union needs to be innovative in dealing with FTSSs because they have considerable potential to promote worker control and internal democracy in the workplace. The trade unions need to understand that democracy is not an invention or event but a process; hence, the unions need to be creative and innovative in how they deal with FTSSs to ensure that they are accountable to workers and they become the link between the union and the workers in the workplace to avoid the disconnect between FTSSs and their members. If this is not done, union bureaucratisation on the shop floor is inevitable.

Hence, accountability is a necessary countervailing force that needs to be entrenched in workplaces, and FTSSs should be accountable to their members. Thus, FTSSs need to be in touch with the daily realities of the workers in the plant, and FTSSs should also see worker control and internal democracy as their protection, and shield and not their enemy. If FTSSs functions on workers' and members' mandates, the mandate will be their shield against victimisation from management and re-election.

Therefore, I propose that it should be mandatory for FTSSs to go to the shop floor to interact with the workers once or twice a week to bridge the gap between them and their members. This will assist with bridging the gap between members and FTSSs and avoid the development of a social disconnect and distance on the shop floor. FTSSs should not regard themselves as office workers because that will also change their outlook, and they will start to identify themselves with other office workers in the plant. This could explain why it is difficult for FTSSs, when not re-elected, to go back to the line because they no longer identify themselves with the workers in the line. FTSSs should be rooted on the shop floor by constantly contacting the workers. This will also help the union to service workers on the line effectively and efficiently.

Chapter 7: Full-Time Shop Steward: A class-in-the-making

Introduction

In this chapter, the life histories of the FTSSs are employed to demonstrate how the position of FTSSs can afford opportunities for upward social mobility and how the trade union is used as a stepping stone for those elected (see Buhlungu, 2010; Masondo, 2012). One may postulate that the tools of trade and resources allocated to FTSSs can be abused for personal benefit, namely, perks. These perks are also the source of the personal status accorded to FTSS, and thus, I argue that the FTSS becomes a stratum in the workforce because of the social mobility that one acquires by being voted into these positions (see Buhlungu, 2010; 2012, Masondo, 2012, Sacks, 2012; Chinguno, 2012). The social outlook of FTSS schanges due to their sense of importance and the perks attached to their positions. Buhlungu (2010:118) noted:

> The introduction of FTSSs has resulted in a similar change at the lower levels of the unions. In such cases, the perks that come with these full-time offices–such as cars, cellphones, air travel, hotel accommodation and meeting venues in comfortable conference centers–provide the outward indication that those who occupy these positions are important people. This visible symbol of the importance of union leaders is often intended to match or even surpass those of their employer and state interlocutors.

Furthermore, the issue of class formation and social status is explored in this chapter. I contend that FTSSs acquire social status by virtue of being FTSSs because of the perks and resources associated with these positions. Furthermore, the positions of FTSS are associated with some level of importance because of the social status attached to their positions, which are further associated with perks or resources, including being in the union office on a full-time basis and the upward mobility prospects that ordinary workers do not enjoy.

The auto sector has constant pressure to ensure the job is done correctly the first time so as to achieve production targets. The production targets are set at the national level and are linked

to the productivity of a plant. The BMW plants compete against each other in the BMW Group globally and compete against other auto manufacturers in countries where they operate. A poor performing or uncompetitive plant faces the risk of being shut down or having its staff downsized. This leads to reduced production and fewer jobs. The BMW plant in Rosslyn prides itself on upholding the first-time-right principle, which stipulates that workers must assemble parts correctly on the first attempt. This places immense pressure on the auto assembly workers.

The positions of FTSSs allow them to escape the production pressures of the line of production and the wrath of capitalist exploitation. Thus, these positions are sought after by all workers because they help them for a temporary escape from the wrath of capitalism exploitation. Because of the fact that they continue to experience the wrath of capitalism in their daily lives as members of a capitalist society when they go home and outside the plant which includes high levels of consumerism, rents or house bonds, financial insecurity and other plights of the working class generally. Hence, their escape of the wrath of capitalism as FTSSs in the plant is a temporary one. Burawoy (1985) argued that conflict in the workplace is caused by the power relations between those who have power, namely, managers and employers and those who do not have it, namely, workers. FTSSs escape this conflict as they are no longer engaged in direct production work.

In this chapter, FTSSs and identity formation are explored. I argue that the positions of FTSSs afford opportunities for class and upward mobility. I highlight several factors that contribute to this class mobility and change in social position. I am of the view that the change in the working environment of FTSSs, since they no longer engage in direct production work and move into an office to execute full-time union work, alters their social status and outlook.

FTSSs, in a sense, become office workers, and they do more creative and self-initiative work than the routine and repetitive work of the production line. In essence, they become union

fieldworkers because of their freedom of movement. This is coupled with the tools of trade that are allocated by the employer, including a BMW car, which I contend are perks that elevate their social status. Accordingly, the implications of these perks are explored.

Although the perks are meant to assist the FTSS in executing their tasks, tool-of trade in essence, these perks have come with unintended consequences, which have a negative impact on the union and open the possibility of abuse for personal benefit. FTSSs are also given an opportunity to develop themselves academically; I believe this contributes to their class mobility and elevates their status. Hence, the suggestion that there should be career pathing of FTSSs.

The career pathing assumes that with the experience and knowledge that FTSSs gain while in office, it is a loss for them to return to the line when they are not re-elected. Hence, these positions present class mobility or what I contend is a class-in-the-making as their positions open up future career opportunities both within the employer, the union and other spheres of society, including government. I am of the view that by virtue of the FTSS position and the benefits (perks) that are associated with it, identity formation occurs in the process, and the position presents some form of class mobility. Thus, I contend that FTSSs are a class-in-the -making, a class in waiting or a mobile class created by the position, which offers them benefits not enjoyed by ordinary workers.

Goodbye machines, hello freedom: FTSS an escape from the toil of capitalist production

Marxian theorists on industrial relations have argued that conflict in the workplace is fuelled by differences in power relations between those who are in positions of power and their subordinates (Burawoy, 1985). While the owners of the means of production set the rules, workers with only their labour power have little say (Bray, 2004). The owners of the means of production give instructions regarding how the work should be done and delegate tasks to

managers who represent their interests. Managers, in turn, employ workers to actually engage in the actual production of the commodities or to deliver a service. There is always tension between those who give instructions, that is, foremen, supervisors, and team leaders and those who must translate those instructions into action, the workers. Workers are forever looking for ways to evade instructions in the labour process, a process which is not always easy. For capitalist production to be successful, this process requires the consent and cooperation of the workers (Burawoy, 1985). Capitalist production is about buying labour power, which is exploited by capitalists, who are set on drawing surplus value, that is, profits, as Marx (1996) argued.

However, unlike the unavoidable conflict that Marx and Engels (2007) described, which is between the owners of the means of production and those that sell their labour power, workers believe that by exerting effort, their chances of earning more are increased, and they consent to the entire process without resistance (Burawoy, 1985). Hence, trade unions, in particular shop stewards, are important in negotiating the conflict that could arise if such consent is not realised. Unlike the theorisation of the unavoidable conflict between the capitalist and the workers, the FTSSs act as a buffer by relaying the workers' interests to management and vis-à-vis.

Having FTSSs is one way of ensuring that workers' interests are represented, but as it has been argued, once they have been elected to their positions, they discontinue the work that they were doing at the time of their election or were employed to do. Instead, they now engage in full-time union work while being paid by the employer, as highlighted in Chapter 4.[28] FTSSs are removed from the labour process: they qualify to have BMWs and are transferred to the union

[28] Which details how FTSSs function and what happens on being elected and details their roles and functions.

offices. The office becomes their new workstation where they execute their duties of doing full-time union work. One former FTSS noted they are exempted from the production process:

> [As] FTSSs, you are exempted from the day-to-day running of the production line; like me, I was in the logistics department, which means that I will be removed from the production team here at logistics to go to man the FTSS office. Then I am exempted from the supply and logistics issues of the production line so they cannot expect me to report to that particular department they know that I am now a FTSS shop steward. (Interview: Katlego Makgaleng, 11/09/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

Another FTSS echoed similar sentiments:

> In the auto industry, we have FTSSs and part-time shop stewards. The FTSS is not physically in production; he is always in the office or in the production line addressing worker issues or attending meetings running the day-to-day affairs of the union and the company. (Interview: Alpheus May, 12/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

FTSSs are stationed full-time in the trade union office and exempted from production line work. I believe that this arrangement contributes to the new identity they assume upon being elected as FTSS, which is that of being an office worker. This becomes one of the exclusive benefits associated with the position of FTSS, which, in turn, contributes to the new identity formation experienced by FTSS. This new identity defines them as office workers and white collar workers. Upon being elected as an FTSS, they bid farewell to machines, *bye-bye machines,* or production and become union fieldworkers or office workers. Accordingly, one FTSS argued that the fierce contests for the positions of FTSS are because they do not work on the production line or engage in physical labour and have flexible working hours. He stated:

> But also working flexible hours and not having too much work to do as a FTSS—hence these positions are contested, as people would match the money with the work output. So, there is not so much work to be done here as an FTSS, and there is no physical work here (in the FTSS office). So that's why they will contest not to work physically there. (Interview: Tumelo Nyatama, 27/07/2017. Former NUMSA BMW FTSS)

One FTSS was honest enough to highlight the personal benefits of being an FTSS and working in an office rather than in the production line. She explained that it helped her to concentrate on furthering her studies. She shared:

> I will be brutally honest I would like to continue to be an FTSS because I have learnt a lot and still want to learn a lot, and I think it is also going to give me time to focus on my studies because when I am on the (production) line, I will go home exhausted and not feeling like reading. (Interview: Vuyokazi Mathebula, 13/11/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

For this FTSS, being an FTSS and working in an office helped her escape from the exhaustion that comes with working in the line, which was a hindrance to her studies. Thus, leaving the production line benefited her in furthering her studies. The physical labour associated with the line of production is one from which FTSSs escape. Therefore, I am of the view that they are escaping the wrath of physical capitalist exploitation, which affords them some form of social status and opens other opportunities like furthering one's studies. The office worker status associated with these FTSSs was thus explained clearly by the ER manager at BMW:

> The guys (FTSSs) are full-time in the union office, and they're resourced with vehicles, resourced with a furnished (sic) office (including ten laptops for each one of them) so that they can do their job effectively and efficiently. As and when they report to work, they go to the union office paid by the company, so their role on a daily basis is to do union work. Two, on a daily basis, to represent the employees and three, on a daily basis, to represent the union internally and partly externally. (Interview: Peter Dantjie, 26/08/2018. Employee Relations (ER) Manager at BMW)

In this sense, the role of the FTSS is being a full-time trade union representative who is stationed inside the workplace. In my opinion, this contributes to the formation of their identities. As noted previously by Buhlungu (2010), they are viewed as important people. The following factors or attributes ensure these FTSSs are considered important:

- Moving from the production line to a trade union office on a full-time basis;

- Change in the nature of work conducted; now conduct full-time union work and no longer engaged in the production process;
- Ability to move around the plant and outside the plant;
- Acquire perks or resources to conduct union work;
- Afforded training opportunities and
- Opportunities to engage with management.

Identity formation: FTSS as office workers - from the machine (shop floor) to the office:

These attributes contribute to the identity formation of the FTSS. As noted by Wright-Mills (1948), they become '*new men of power'*. One former FTSS contended that they become leaders and they are expected to mirror this in their dress code:

> When you are in production, there is this norm or culture that you just dress because you are coming to work, but when you become an FTSS, you do not just dress for the sake of dressing, you dress as a leader, you must be presentable and accommodate everyone in the sector. (Interview: Alpheus May, 12/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

The change in dress code is associated with the new status associated with the position of being an FTSS in that they are no longer ordinary workers, but rather leaders and office workers and accordingly, should look the part. One former FTSS argued that their positions as FTSSs are very important because they *rubbed shoulders* with senior industry players. He stated:

> FTSSs function at a strategic level because you interact with directors, CEOs you get first-hand information and they tell you the side that members on the floor do not know for you to be able to engage openly so. (Interview: Paul Mahlangu, 12/07/2017. Former NUMSA Secretary of the FTSS Committee at BMW)

Another FTSS echoed the same sentiments:

> To sit in boardrooms with statisticians, lawyers and all those people in the corporate world who the business (BMW) has trusted them to run their business, when we sit in boardrooms and we are seen as equals irrespective of how low I get paid but the fact that I can effect change, I sit

> as an equal with those people—it gives me the greatest pleasure. (Interview: Esrom Hlophane, 26/09/2018. Former FTSS)

I am of the view that FTSSs perceive themselves as functioning on a strategic level because they interact with company executives, which is a contributory factor to their identity formation. In essence, they view themselves as women and men of importance. Identity formation does not happen in a vacuum. Therefore, the workplace is a microcosm of society. The new South Africa has been associated with the hope of upward mobility and hence, this is mirrored in the workplace, where people look for avenues for upward social mobility. The position of FTSS provides such an avenue. Mojalefa Musi, a former trade union educator and union activist, argued that FTSSs should be understood in the broader scheme of things and in accordance with what is happening in the South African polity (Interview: 12/12/2018. Former CEPPWAWU Educator and Part-time CCMA Commissioner).

> In a society where there is the process of class formation to think that FTSSs will remain FTSSs; and the people who expect that are all middle class, and they say this from the comforts of middle-class life. So, I am not too worried about FTSS' upward mobility. (Interview: Dinga Sikwebu, 18/10/2019. Former NUMSA Head of Education)

He further argued that what he is concerned about is that as FTSSs move upward, it is important that they be grounded in working-class ideology and ethos to advance the struggle of the working class. He explained:

> Over the years, a comrade who wants to get out and go to greener pastures and opportunities, as an educator, my biggest worry is whether we have done enough for him (or her) so that wherever he (or she goes) goes he (or she) carries the working-class ethos. To think with class formation and class mobility happening in society that you (as the union) are immune from that and that you have this movement that is not affected. (Interview: Dinga Sikwebu. 18/10/2019. Former NUMSA Educator)

He argued that trade unions are not immune to class mobility, and thus, FTSSs are afforded opportunities for upward social mobility. This should be understood in the broader context of South African society, which is undergoing class formation. It is unlike the past when shop

stewards were reluctant to be FTSSs because they perceived it as *selling out*. Keet (1992:33). An experienced NUMSA shop steward, Sam Mthethwa to explained:

> We shop stewards are opposed to becoming full timers (FTSSs). Full time shop stewards (FTSSs) become distant to the workers. Sitting in clean clothes, they don't feel the same conditions. We have learned from experience that full time shop stewards become tools of management.

The fear of the old guard (older unionists of the past) was that as a FTSS one is most likely to be a *baas boy* and work for the employer, rather than represent the workers. Moreover, the positions can be used by self-serving individuals for their own personal advancement. Thus, without over romanticising the past, the democratic breakthrough of 1994 led to a general acceptance of the notion of FTSS, let alone the promotion of some of the FTSSs by employers. This highlights why FTSSs are resented because their positions distance them from their members and thus, they could become an extension of management. One former NUMSA official explained:

> In many cases, FTSSs become an extension of human resource management, which is something that never happened in the past. … You become an extension of HR when you are told to go and communicate the decision of management with workers, management just gives you a memo, and they say, 'go and read this memo to workers'. (Interview: Mike Fushane, 3/10/2019. Former NUMSA Local Organiser)

Keet (1992: 33) noted two union officials who argued that "some shop stewards are keen on becoming full-timers because their jobs become 'cushy.'" Another warned FTSSs of becoming *boss boys* or *baas boys* as they become an extension of management. In the past, shop stewards were opposed to FTSS positions, for they feared they would be co-opted by management and neglect the work of the union, which is to represent members. A former NUMSA official argued:

> Management does this by first creating a social distance between you and your members, and once your members lose confidence in you, they know that they can do anything they want with

> you because they know you don't have back-up support. But if you have the support of your members, it is not easy for management to, in fact, do anything with you. (Interview: Mike Fushane, 3/10/2019. Former NUMSA Local Organiser)

The positions of FTSSs afford management opportunities to capture these FTSSs and use them for their own narrow interests. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 7. These positions were embraced by the trade union movement post-1994 as part of the redress of the apartheid past, which blocked Blacks from occupying certain positions under the Job Reservation Act (Masondo, 2012). Whereas, "The advent of democracy has opened up new opportunities for the labour movement to both consolidate its organisational gains and to win further concessions from the employers and the state" (Webster and Buhlungu, 2004: 229). These new opportunities and concessions included these positions of FTSS. A former CEPPWAWU union official noted that part of the rationale for FTSSs in the post-apartheid industrial relations (IR) was linked to the notion of trying to democratise the workplace, which included FTSSs:

> So, the point I am making here is that as we democratise the industrial relations system, as you democratise the workplace, you have to build the capacity to free time and do everything that lends itself to trade unions playing a part in the industrial systems and in how companies are functioning and managed. (Interview: Mojalefa Musi, 12/12/2018. Former CEPPWAWU Educator and Part-time CCMA Commissioner)

However, I am of the opinion that this also presents possibilities for the manipulation of the positions for personal gain and may be used as a stepping stone. This is discussed in a later section of the chapter. Hence, the trade union movement should be vigilant of the unintended consequences presented by these positions, which might harm the union. This was noted in Chapter 4. The new South Africa has meant that positions such as FTSS, which were frowned upon in the past, have now been embraced as part of the redress project, and unions have taken them up as a way of strengthening the work of the unions. These positions strengthen the work of the union if safely monitored. However, there is a danger of some FTSSs seeing these

positions as an avenue for upward mobility as they enter into new terrains, which assist them in escaping the wrath of the line of production.

The production line worker, unlike the FTSS, experiences subordination, which is part of being a worker. One former NUMSA official and FTSS explained:

> You know there are people who are production workers, and production work can confine you, and it can be very difficult; in fact, when you are a direct production worker, you are a real subordinate. You are subordinated, there is a team leader, there is a supervisor, or there is a foreman—you really feel the wrath of someone managing you, you see 'don't do this, do that'. (Interview: Alex Mashilo, 19/04/2019. Former NUMSA Head of OCCB)

The FTSS escapes from these confines of the labour process, as explained by the former NUMSA FTSS official. Furthermore, this contributes to their new identity as FTSS. The position of the FTSS affords one greater flexibility as they have unlimited movement around the plant. They are not confined to the workstation and take orders from team leaders and foremen like production workers. They now get paid by the employer for representing workers on a full-time basis. I believe that this newly found status is based on nothing but their election, which creates a new stratum in the workforce. Hence, the FTSS becomes a stratum in the workforce because they are still workers but are not engaged in the work processes (or labour processes).

As Mashilo contended, FTSS escape the wrath of capitalist exploitation in the workplace, which included the fact that they do not have to take instructions like the other workers that are employed: "

> You don't feel the wrath of capitalism as an FTSS because you are not subjected to any work and taking instruction from some foreman. (Interview, Alex Mashilo, 19/04/2019. Former NUMSA Head of OCCB)

Rather, they engage with former team leaders as equals and seldom take orders from management. They assume a new identity in the workforce by virtue of being elected to these positions. One FTSS highlighted:

> There is not so much work to be done and there is no physical work here [as an FTSS]. So that's why they will contest [for these positions] not to work physically, unlike there in the line. (Interview: Tumelo Nyatama, 27/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

Being elected as an FTSS allows one to escape from the physical work, physical hardships of production and the work processes to which workers are subjected. They no longer take orders from bosses such as supervisors and team leaders like ordinary workers. Cliff and Gluckstein (1986:27) noted that union officials are:

> Removed from the discipline of the shop floor, from its dirt and dangers, from the immediate conflicts with the foreman and manager, from the fellowship of his workmates to the very different environment of the office.

In turn, I contend that the same applies to FTSSs. Steven Faulkner, a seasoned trade unionist, explained that incumbents no longer engage in the labour processes but are stationed in air-conditioned offices. He explained:

> The most striking example of that was in the NUM where you had a situation where the NUM argued. … If you became a shaft steward, that is the full-time shop steward for the mines, you became a shaft steward you had an office, you did not go down to the pit, you did not work (not engaged in the production process) you had an office that has an air-con, and you got more or less the same benefits as a shaft management supervisor including the salary. (Interview: Steven Faulkner, 29/08/2019. Former Unionist)

Similarly, the BMW union office is air-conditioned. When FTSSs report at work, they go straight to the union office, which is their workstation and sit there in clean clothes. FTSSs immunity from the labour process forms part of the new identity that one assumes when elected as an FTSS. They become office workers sitting in air-conditioned offices and have unlimited movement (*freedom of movement)* inside and outside the plant. The office is one of the major

sources of the new identity of the FTSS, as illustrated by Alex Mashilo, a former NUMSA official:

> You see, when you are an FTSS, you have the time to walk and sit at a computer. You are not subject to the labour process, in fact let me put it this way 'When you are a full-time shop steward, you are not subjected to the labour process and the management and supervision associated with it.'… You can stand up and go to the line and interact with workers: 'Hi, how are you? What are your complaints?'… but when you are not in that position, you are part of the labour process. (Interview: Alex Mashilo, 19/04/2019. Former NUMSA Head of OCCB)

The same applies to FTSSs, who work for BMW. They have unlimited movement around the plant and consult workers on the line at will. Hence, they have common lunches and suppers with workers, which are used as information-gathering meetings and a platform to address pressing issues, take the workers' mandates, and report back to the employer. It is noteworthy that all of this has nothing to do with the BMW labour processes of producing cars, even though this forms part of maintaining labour peace in the workplace, which is important for the employer to meet their production targets. One can, therefore, argue that even though FTSSs are not engaged in the actual labour process, their role of representing workers and being available to address workers' issues contributes to the smooth running of the labour processes. The flexibility and free mobility of the FTSS also benefit the company. This was thus explained by one FTSS:

> Because of the fact that the ten of us are full-time, it is beneficial to us (as a union) because we are able to have spontaneous meetings, we are able to strategise, we have more time to make sure that we deal with issues that affect workers and the organisation. We have more time to engage management; we have more time for management to engage with us, and we have more time to see our members and communicate with them about issues. Basically, what I am saying is that we have a more flexible structure of FTSS. (Interview: Tumelo Nyatama, 27/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

The flexibility of the FTSS is beneficial to the union because the former has more time to plan and prepare cases and attend other union and management meetings as well as other activities.

Therefore, it strengthens the unions' representation capacity. Hence, I contend that FTSSs are an important structure in the union for efficient and effective representation of members. Therefore, it is imperative that these positions should not be used by incumbents for narrow selfish interests, with the new identity that comes with these positions. FTSS should not see themselves as office workers but rather as full-time representatives of workers in the plant. Thus, they should have constant contact with the workers.

Members also have unlimited access to FTSSs and do not have to be pulled from the line, unlike ordinary shop stewards. FTSSs, in a sense, are helpful to both the union and management with regard to the smooth running of the company, industrial relations and coordinating union activities. Because FTSSs are available full-time for union work and do not engage in the labour processes as highlighted above, FTSSs are accorded some level of importance in the running of the company and its industrial relations as well as some social status.

FTSS and upward social mobility: *It is given that FTSS will become the first to be considered for development and promotion by employers*

> It is given that FTSSs will become the first to be considered for development and promotion by employers precisely because management invests in them heavily. Some employers take the positions of FTSS quite seriously. That is why they capacitate them in terms of reading financial statements, and then you could have also invested in them in other aspects [especially Labour Law]. (Interview: Dumisane Dakile, 19/09/2019. Former Gauteng Provincial Secretary)

The position of an FTSS is a strategic position in both the union and the workplace because those elected to these positions are given careful attention and developed by both the employer and the trade union to effectively represent members. The trade union, especially NUMSA, has invested heavily in training their FTSSs to be effective representatives of members, both in their workplace and locality. Therefore, FTSSs are considered to be organisers by the union, with the slogan *an FTSS is an organiser*. Employers, on the other hand, especially at BMW

and in the auto sector in general in South Africa, place more emphasis on the education and training of the FTSSs.

Well-trained FTSSs assist in maintaining labour peace and avoiding unnecessary strikes, which may affect production negatively. Employers also prefer promoting former FTSSs in the workplace when there are openings and opportunities for positions that deal with workers directly, in particular, HR and IR, including line management. This clearly highlights the point that the position of FTSS affords opportunities for social capital to these FTSS, and accordingly, they are first in line to be considered for promotion. Bourdieu (1986) noted that education contributes to one's social status; thus, the education that FTSS acquire when in the office contributes to their social status, enhancing it. Therefore, I am of the view that they become a stratum in the workforce, with some form of prestige.

Consequently, these positions of FTSS in the trade union are sought after because they afford opportunities for upward social mobility and promotion. Webster (1985: 236) contended:

> []romotion is a common device for dividing shop stewards' loyalties. In many firms it is well understood that service as a shop steward could be a prelude to promotion to foreman, charge-hand, or personnel/human resource manager.

Thus, the positions of shop stewards, and I argue FTSSs, are a recruitment ground for employers, in particular, in industrial relations and related positions that deal with workers directly. Huw Beynon (1973), in his classical work *Working for Ford*, contended that the promotion of shop stewards by management is the oldest trick in the book. I am of the view that management does so, promoting and co-opting FTSSs, to both weaken the union and also to draw from the expertise of former worker leaders because of their enhanced insights into how the union works and their excellent understanding of workers from a worker's perspective.

This co-option takes the form of promoting FTSSs, especially as line managers such as foremen and team leaders or IR managers who deal with workers directly. This co-option or promotion is the platform that provides upward social mobility for those elected as FTSS; thus, these positions are highly contested. The contestation of these positions, as noted in Chapter 5, is associated with prestige and elevated status as well as resources and benefits to which ordinary workers do not have access or benefit. The perks and resources attached to the FTSS are detailed in Chapter 5, and therefore, in this chapter, it is sufficient to note that these positions offer upward social mobility. As noted, FTSSs have a good opportunity of being promoted as foremen, team leaders and IR managers when such becomes available. One COSATU official argued:

> There is nothing stopping you from going back [to the production line], and that is your original job anyway. Even if you go back, you stand a better chance for promotion, unlike any other person who has not been exposed to that position of FTSS. You can even get a promotion internally in the company. You can be a better HR manager; you can be a better training officer, and a better employee relations officer because you are exposed to higher levels of employment relations. (Interview: Bhabha lika Maphikela Nhlapho, 20/09/2019. COSATU Education Secretary).

The exposure of FTSSs to high-level industrial relations gives FTSSs the edge, advantage, and a good chance for promotion within the company because employers are more likely to consider such individuals for promotion than ordinary workers. Consequently, some people contest for these positions as it gives them an advantage when it comes to promotion. The investment that both the company and the trade union put in training FTSSs, for example, in understanding and applying labour law as well as other company procedures, is essential for future career opportunities and prospects. The experience that one also acquires by representing workers on a full-time basis as an FTSS also assists them to be considered first for promotion. Thus, the FTSS is a recruitment ground for the positions of HR and IR officers. One former

union official argued that it is a given that FTSSs are more likely to be considered by management for promotion than ordinary workers:

> These are leaders (FTSSs), already made material and a manager of a company cannot just get an ordinary worker who has not demonstrated the ability and the capability to lead compared to an FTSS who has gone through all this training and has demonstrated at the political level leadership skills. When promotion comes, whom are you going to take? (Interview: Dumisane Dakile, 19/09/2019. Former Gauteng Provincial Secretary)

He argued that it is evident that management will consider the FTSSs over an ordinary worker, based on their training, which they acquire while in office as an FTSS as well as their experience in representing workers. Therefore, they are preferred for positions that deal with workers directly or labour matters and are, thus, best suited to be HR and IR managers. FTSS positions can be considered to be unique in this sense because in this position they learn about labour relations and the laws that govern it in practice through, among others, representing workers on the shop floor. This also equips FTSSs with scarce skills that employers cannot acquire in the labour market. Nelson Ndinisa, former SARHWU FTSS and at the time of the interview, SATAWU FTSS, was interviewed by Sakhela Buhlungu (2000: 57). Ndinisa argued:

> Basically, the information I was exposed to, and I gained through the trade union movement, was the best certificate of my lifetime. I doubt if I could have gained this anywhere else. The trade union teaches your life something which formal education takes for granted. Secondly, it also teaches you to understand human beings. Thirdly, it gives you knowledge in the sense of reading and understanding the environment in which you operate. Those are the critical things which I benefited from and which are key to my success in whatever I have today (Ibid).

These three attributes highlighted by Nelson Ndinisa are the invaluable things that shop stewards and FTSSs learn and acquire through practice and tacit knowledge, which management seeks. Accordingly, they are the first to be considered when there is a promotion. Thus, in the transformation agenda of the post-1994 workplace, employers were more likely to

consider shop stewards and FTSSs for promotion in managing industrial relations. FTSSs understand industrial relations through practice and tacit knowledge and are able to handle the union better as partners than adversaries. However, they may use their positions as a stepping stone to management and upward social mobility.

Esrom Hlophane was not re-elected in the 2020 FTSS elections at BMW and this he argued was linked to factions, what he termed *'cabals'*, and he fell out of favour with the dominant faction. He was devastated because he thought he was a good FTSS and believed he went the extra mile to represent workers. The devastation was also on a personal level as he explained how going back to the line destabilised his life. He shared, "I now have to go back and work shifts" (Interview: Esrom Hlophane, 05/032020. Former NUMSA FTSS 2014-2020). Although despondent and disappointed, he was hopeful he would enjoy an opportunity to be promoted because of his experience and the education he had acquired as an FTSS. Asked about his career prospects at BMW, he said:

> Yes. What I am definitely sure of is (promotion) that they just want to see my attitude and whether I can take instructions because we used to give team leaders instructions as FTSS. I am now reporting to the people that I would give instructions. They want to see my attitude and discipline, whether I come in late, they want to see my mannerisms and character. Whether I am respectful enough to them or a team player. I think currently, for them (management) is more of an observation, and obviously, should there be a vacancy, I will apply. I think I will excel because I know what is entailed [in the work] and what they want, even though there are also those who have been in the line longer than me. (Interview: Esrom Hlophane, 05/032020. Former NUMSA FTSS 2014-2020)

The high hopes espoused by the FTSS reveal that FTSSs have a better chance of being promoted. The above assertion can also be attributed to the fact that the position of FTSS helps them to acquire skills and/or even social networks that management will find beneficial if they are promoted. The rationale for the education opportunities one is exposed to as an FTSS was discussed in Chapter 5. When FTSSs are in office, they miss out on opportunities for

promotion, career advancement and progression processes, which happen on the production line. An organiser thus explained the rationale:

> The personal advancement of FTSSs is also an issue which has unintended consequence because when you say to management train FTSSs, we say: Management trains, because remember, these FTSSs are in office for a period of four years. The FTSS has no space to apply for positions in the line where they came from. So, their development in FTSS positions came as a result of the union saying: Because s/he has not had an opportunity to develop oneself and apply for positions in the line, management must, therefore, develop the FTSS. To say that if, after four years, s/he does not become an FTSS, s/he cannot go back to square one (where s/he was prior to being an FTSS). What I am saying is, for me, that would be morally wrong. (Interview: Mike Fushane, 03/10/2019: Former NUMSA Rosslyn Local Organiser)

The personal development and education that were negotiated for FTSSs were not intended for them to use as a stepping stone to management. Instead, it was to augment and compensate FTSSs for the fact that while in office, they missed out on the career progression taking place on the line of production. A NUMSA official emphasised that this was negotiated because "no one would want to stand as FTSS if there were no incentives for them as a union representative because they miss out on promotion on the line" (Interview: Dinga Sikwebu, 18/10/2019. Former NUMSA Head of Education).

The training and development of FTSSs has its unintended consequences. Among others, it has the effect of attracting individuals who then use these positions as a stepping stone. A COSATU official noted that "many of our FTSSs see these positions as a stepping stone" (Interview: Bhabha lika Maphikela Nhlapho, 20/09/2019. COSATU Education Secretary). The education programme that was negotiated by unions for FTSSs as part of their capacity building, but which others see as an incentive for them to stand for these positions, is employed by some for narrow interests and as a stepping stone for upward social mobility.

> That is why the union said, 'At least there must be a particular reward.' In some cases, we thought it was going to assist, but in some cases, people get into these positions knowing very well that 'No, I am not going to pay for my studies the company will pay.' And again, I am saying that on that basis, the union didn't see the issue that was going to be a problem going forward. But again, it goes to the point that I have made that pre-1994 trade union politics are totally different to those of post-1994 because there is this self-greed. (Interview: Mike Fushane, 03/10/2019. Former NUMSA Rosslyn Local Organiser)

Thus, the positions are contested by some for personal interests of upward social mobility and not to genuinely represent workers. The skills, education, and development that FTSSs acquire while in office as FTSSs make them attractive and ideal for management in positions in IR and HR. Thus, FTSSs are ideal candidates to handle labour relations, human resources, and industrial relations matters. Hence, in the post-apartheid labour regime, some employers have sought to promote former shop stewards, particularly FTSSs, for these positions. Those who have personal ambitions to rise within the company perceive these positions as a stepping stone, thus the fierce contest for these positions.

Johan Maree argued that the promotion of FTSSs to become part of the management team is not a problem, provided they possess the necessary skills:

> The question is, are these FTSS positions a recruitment ground for foremen and managers? I believe they are, to some extent I do not see something wrong with that if someone shows a great capability and management says, 'I think you can do this job which is more senior and has more responsibility.' I nevertheless see a shift in moving from being a worker representative to now management representative, which is problematic. (Interview: Johan Maree, 02/07/2018. Emeritus Professor UCT Department of Sociology)

The problem arises from the fact that such promotions of FTSS weaken the trade union. Furthermore, when promoted, the assertion is that more often than not they can become antagonistic towards the trade union they once served as FTSS. Thus, many participants were against the notion of career pathing of FTSSs, which is linked to their promotion in the

workplace. One participant who opposed the notion of career pathing and promotion of FTSSs argued:

> As an FTSS, you are the servant of the people (workers and your members), and if you want a career go somewhere. … Career pathing of the FTSS are bosses telling us to collaborate and this is blurring the class line of us and them. (Interview: Rob Rees, 04/10/2019. Senior Researcher at NALEDI[29]).

This is important to understand the class contradiction of career pathing of union representatives, in particular, FTSSs, because it is like giving the employer our well-trained arsenal to counter and even erode some of the gains made by the union. Bhabha lika Maphikela Nhlapho noted:

> My experience is that most of the IR Managers and HR Managers who come from the unions is that they are the most brutal; my personal experience is that most of the brutal HR Managers and brutal supervisors were once shop stewards or FTSS of the trade union. (Interview: 20/09/2019. COSATU Education Secretary)

This highlights the argument advanced previously that some of the FTSSs who are promoted to management tend to be antagonistic towards the union and erode the gains made by the trade union. Thus, the general view is that although it is not wrong for career pathing or the promotion of FTSSs, such should be conducted carefully to ensure that the gains of the unions are not eroded and that such promotion does not erode the strength of the trade union.

These reveal how upward social mobility and downward social mobility occur. Esrom Hlophane, Marvin Molefe and Alpheus May, who were all FTTSs, were not re-elected in the 2020 elections. They all experienced different fates of social downgrading. These stories illustrate the fact that although FTSS positions afford opportunities for upward social mobility, the latter is not permanent but is based on FTSSs retaining their positions. This is detailed

[29] National Labour, Economic and Development Institute (NALEDI) which is COSATU's research institute.

further in Chapter 8 on social down grading. These are classic examples of how not being elected can disrupt one's life as it implies regression. As highlighted by Esorm above, a former FTSS who was not re-elected,had to go back to the line and go back to working shifts which FTSSs do not work.

However, human beings are prone to progress and not regression. Being an FTSS propels someone to an enhanced life in a society that is upwardly mobile and has immense promises for the future. In BMW in 2020, six of the nine FTSS were not re-elected, and they had to return to the production line. The ousted FTSSs contested the elections that removed them from office. An observation by the Employee Relations Manager at BMW was that the contestation was due to the social status associated with the position of FTSS:

> Well, for me, one is the status (that comes with the position), but two is more about the lifestyle time thing. … Is more of a status because people are viewing leadership as a status issue than serving people, but also is the office lifestyle. *I clock to sit in the office*—it becomes a lifestyle—*I clock to drive cars*—it becomes a lifestyle.. (Interview: Peter Dantjie, 26/08/2018. Employee Relations (ER) Manager at BMW)

Being an FTSS affords some form of elevated status and access to social capital to those elected and also comes with perks, as already alluded to, because FTSS are no longer engaged in the labour processes and escape the production line, which confirms Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) analysis on social status. Hence, they now view themselves as being different from ordinary workers who engage in the labour process as they do not have to wear overalls and get their hands dirty during the production and assembly of cars. And thus being a stratum in the workforce (see Weber, 1947) who now clock in only to report to the union offices, as noted by the ER Manager. This was also highlighted in Chapter 5 when the tendency for FTSSs to become office bound and not go to the line and service workers was discussed. This gives the image of a comfortable job, and hence, there is competition for these positions because they are perceived to be elite titles that come with the work associated with the office. Thus, these

positions elevate the status of the office holders of the FTSS office. The status that comes with being elected to these positions explains why there is a fierce contest for the FTSS positions, as being elected also gives one access to resources.

> The third other disadvantage is the fact that given that they (FTSSs) get extra allowances and, in some instances, from their own companies, they negotiate particular perks of being FTSS. FTSS can be seen as a position that has material benefits. So, you might sometimes not get the right candidates to be FTSS, but getting those that are interested in the perks—those are the disadvantages. (Interview: Bhabha lika Maphikela Nhlapho, 20/09/2019. COSATU Education Secretary)

The perks and resources associated with these positions and the social status that comes with FTSSs attract self-interested individuals to these positions. These material benefits or perks contribute to the social status of FTSSs, and thus, these positions are highly contested.

> So, the competition for these positions is in that context; people are seeing these positions as a lifestyle of some sort. They see these positions as a status of some sort; they see these positions as access to these facilities (perks) that we just spoke about. (Interview: Peter Dantjie, 26/08/2018. Employee Relations (ER) Manager at BMW)

One FTSS attested to this:

> Remember, workers are not stupid, and some of them are our friends, and they know that we are no longer working hard. We are sitting under air conditions, and when we go home, we get into a BMW. We drive a BMW home, and during the weekend, I would rather neglect union activities and take the union pool car to my personal activity. To workers, we are sending a message that we are living a luxurious life at their expense; that's why everybody wants to come here and wants to see himself or herself as an FTSS. (Interview: Thabo Mogoroa, 26/11/2019. FTSS at BMW)

Another FTSS stated:

> Also, for lifestyle, as I said, BMW is a big machine (car) in the same league as Audi and Mercedes Benz. If you haven't driven these cars before, you can also be confronted and approached by people who have an interest in you. It (the car) draws attention from people, and if you are not strong with a weak character, you will be swallowed because it speaks about status; it is about recognition and a symbol of wealth which you don't even have. I always tell

> the comrades (FTSS) that 'don't live a lie' I tell them that 'don't live a lie be realistic, be who you are'. (Interview: Kenneth Madumo, 27/07/2019 NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

This luxurious lifestyle portrayed by FTSSs, together with the material benefits attached to it and the elevated social status that is associated with being elected to these positions, causes competition for such. BMW also offers lucrative benefits, which include driving a company-sponsored BMW vehicle. The BMW car symbolises social status and is a symbol of power (see Bourdieu, 1992). Thus, the status and perks or benefits that come with being elected to these positions motivate people to want to hold these offices for life while at the same time alienating them from their members. One former FTSS argued that at BMW, no one declines nomination to be an FTSS even though, in some companies, it is perceived as a heavy burden. He shared:

> What I always say in BMW, and I have conducted elections of (shop steward and FTTSs) elsewhere deployed to go and conduct some elections, I see sometimes people decline in other areas when they are nominated or elected to the position of FTSS. But here at BMW, it is not easy to see a comrade declining because I believe there is a sweetener there. I always say that there is a sweetener, and it is related to driving a flashy car and leaving the line and working in an office. Tthat's my opinion and I still believe that there is a sweetener. (Interview: Marvin Molefe, 21/07/2017. Former FTSS at BMW)

The *sweetener* creates the social status that is attached to the position of FTSS. At BMW, this is exacerbated by the fact that FTSSs are given BMW cars as their mode of transport and part of the tools of trade. While this is not the case in other small firms with limited resources, suffice to say that this is the general practice in the auto sector where FTSSs are given cars by their respective employers. For example at Mercedes-Benz, Ford and VW FTSSs are given or allocated cars as part of their tools of trade of their respective brands. Hence, another FTSS noted that, in general, being an FTSS in the auto sector is an attractive position because of the benefits attached to it:

> That's why if you go to smaller companies, people don't want to be a shop steward; no one wants to be a shop steward or FTSS because you become the victim of management, and you become frustrated by the complaints of workers. But in the auto industry, because when you

> become an FTSS, there is a 10% increment of the salary, there is a car allowance, there is an exclusion on working on the line and you are now in this air-conditioned office, and you start to see it as a luxurious thing and a nice thing to have. So, it is more about benefits on the politics of the shop floor more than the representation of workers' interests. (Interview: Katlego Makgaleng, 11/09/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

The status associated with being an FTSS is one that attracts people to these positions for personal interest at the expense of service to members, thus the detachment between members and FTSSs. The elevated status that these positions offer creates a disconnect between members and FTSSs. Webster (1985) contended that shop stewards, by their very nature, are meant to experience the conditions of the workers in order to be able to represent them. Previously, shop stewards had to be part of the workforce to enable them to be more sympathetic and in touch with the working conditions of the workers that they represented. As highlighted in Chapter 5, an FTSS model presents a dilemma as there are no ordinary shop stewards who work with ordinary workers and rank-and-file. Furthermore, there is a disconnect between the workers and the FTSS because they do connect with workers. The level of disconnect was thus highlighted by one FTSS:

> But for me, having the entire shop steward committee being full-time also has its own disadvantages because somehow you are detached from members in terms of feeling the work on the ground that they (workers and members) do. You are no longer on the line any more. You are doing full-time union work on a full-time basis. You negotiate full-time, so you are not really affected by what is happening on the floor, but you are told members need to first raise grievances about their situation before you are aware of it, which is not how normally it should be as an organisation. (Interview: Tumelo Nyatama, 27/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

This highlights the extent of the disconnect, and it is linked to the fact that FTSSs are not involved in production line work. This alienates them from the work and the conditions that workers and members experience daily. Thus, one COSATU official argued the manifestation of social distance is linked to the detachment of FTSSs from their members:

> The second disadvantage of FTSSs is that they could be detached from the workplace and spend less time in the workplace, where we talk about the concept of the social distance between the union and the membership. One of the creators of social distance is FTSS, who do not bring back the information and the operations and everything back into the union. (Interview: Bhabha lika Maphikela Nhlapho, 20/09/2019. COSATU Education Secretary)

This creates some alienation between the members and the FTSSs, thus the manifestation of social distance between members and their representatives on the shop floor. As noted previously, some FTSSs spend their time outside the workplace. One FTSS warned that FTSSs develop some alien tendencies:

> That's why you (as an FTSS) start being reactionary instead of being progressive in terms of discussing issues; before they (workers) come, you start being reactionary; you wait for situations to happen before you can respond to them. (Interview: Tumelo Nyatama, 27/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

Another FTSS argued that FTSSs fear their members because some have neglected the mandate of the worker:

> The other thing is that we are not executing workers' mandate as we were mandated and going to the production line, they will question you about that, and you will not have answers and so this (union office) is our hiding place. (Interview: Thabo Mogoroe, 19/11/2019. NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

In a sense, FTSSs become disconnected from the daily realities of the production line workers and get a second-hand account of what is happening on the floor. This has serious implications for workers on the floor and contributes to the prevailing crisis of representation and social disconnect. Subsequently, FTSSs become more defensive and not proactive because they are not up to date with the realities of the line of production. Because FTSSs are confined to the office, they are removed from the daily realities of the workers and only rely on their past experiences when they were engaged in the production processes. This, in turn, leads to a disconnect in the connection.

> There is a possibility that you might spend more time in the office without interacting with the workers, and that might cause connection distances, which might give rise to a disconnect. I don't want to use the word social distance. It is not social distance, it's a disconnect. It might result in a disconnect between the FTSS and the workers. I mean, if you are FTSS and view your office as your workplace (workstation). (Interview: Alex Mashilo, 19/04/2019. Former NUMSA Head of OCCB)

This was discussed in Chapter 4. FTSSs perceive their office as their workstation, and therefore, they do not go to the line to connect with workers and service them. Instead, they wait for workers to come to the office and consult them. Thus, one FTSS warned that there is a danger of the union being reduced to a consulting firm as workers and members consult the union, but the union becomes the office of the FTSS because of the time the latter spends there.

> That's the reason why the union negotiated for a certain number of FTSS and a certain number of part-time shop stewards. That's the main reason to close that social gap. Because it is human nature that after some time you will then seldom visit the production line and eventually stop altogether and become a consulting firm. (Interview: Thabo Mogoroe, 19/11/2019. NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

The danger of FTSSs, who view themselves as office workers, is that they remain in the office doing other activities rather than being on the production line with workers, losing touch with workers' experience in the process. Hence, the need for FTSSs to be augmented by a contingent of ordinary shop stewards who work side-by-side with the workers and have first-hand experience of the conditions of ordinary workers. This to bridge the gap between the elected leaders as shop-stewards and rank and file members. A former NUMSA official explained the danger of this disconnect between members and FTSSs as an organisational disconnect, which manifests itself when FTSSs are no longer in constant contact with members. He postulated that FTSSs who spend their time outside the workplace develop some level of disconnect:

> Let me call it organisational disconnect. You are organisationally disconnected from your constituency. (Interview: Alex Mashilo, 19/04/2019. Former NUMSA Head of OCCB)

My participant observation (ethnography) at the BMW plant revealed that the FTSSs regard the office as their workstation and prefer being in their offices to engaging with workers who are in the production line. In all fairness, being on the production line also does not offer opportunities for the FTSSs to engage continually with workers on the line, as line managers and foremen do not always allow FTSS to engage with workers; they actually see them as a distraction to the production process. Once production starts, managers want workers to focus on the production process and not to be distracted by FTSS visits to the lines.

Thus FTSSs were introduced in the first place to address this disturbance as highlighted in the earlier chapters of the thesis. Therefore the connection or disconnect between the workers and FTSSs has been designed by management to prevent constant contact between FTSSs and the workers, especially having access to them on the lines. This, in turn, has led to FTSSs being legalistic and always advising workers against downing tools. At times, the FTSSs are even apprehensive about listening to the workers' grievances because they are oblivious to the reality of the work process and issues confronted by workers on the line. All of this is linked to their newly acquired status as office workers.

In analysing the changes in the material conditions prevailing in post-apartheid South African trade unions, Buhlungu (2010: 118) asserted that "[w]hat is important is that many union leaders and full-time officials give the impression that they would like to be seen as important people with an elevated social status." The same applies to FTSSs, who, from my observations, perceive themselves to be different from workers and speak differently about themselves. They view themselves as part of the new stratum in the workforce—all of this is made possible by the fact that they are not engaged in the labour processes. They speak of *the associates* as if they were not *associates* themselves or workers of the company, and they speak of engaging with management as equals, which is a right only reserved for them. There is some level of othering of the associates or workers and union members. I found it puzzling that they viewed

the people who voted for them as 'the other'. This *othering* is not negative and discriminatory but about social status, namely, that FTSSs are better than the associates and thus look down on them. They often see the members and workers as troublemakers. Therefore, their approach is legalistic and about following procedures, and they do not seek recourse from the worker or the union member. This is all linked to the acquired elevated social status. Utterances from FTSSs such as the following are common:

> One thing again, the very same car that they have given me, I am enjoying it, I love it, and I feel very comfortable in it, and I feel like it has given me status, so I don't want to lose that benefit, we call it a benefit I don't want to lose that. … Losing a BMW is a problem; losing the status of being in an office is a problem. (Interview: Voyokazi Mathebula, 13/11/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

Another FTSS highlighted the status that comes with being an FTSS:

> Because I drive this car back home, it elevates my status in the community; I have seen it myself. It elevated my status in so far as in the community, with my friends and my church and the girls you know. (Interview: Katlego Makgaleng, 11/09/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS)

Hence, FTSSs want to hold on to these positions because they no longer see themselves as associates because of the acquired status associated with the position. Thus, this causes tension in the event that they are not retained or re-elected to these positions. Therefore, some do not want to return to the assembly line. The ER Manager warned:

> It is unfortunate that individuals have lost the political perspective and they are using these positions to launch themselves or as a path for development, it is a path for a career path, it is a path for some—life, artificial life of some sort. (Interview: Peter Dantjie, 26/08/2018. Employee Relations (ER) Manager at BMW)

This artificial life is linked to the elevated status of FTSSs, which is reinforced by the perks associated with being in these positions. Buhlungu (2010: 118) highlighted that the introduction of FTSSs:

> [H]as resulted in a similar change at the lower levels of the unions. In such cases, the perks that come with these full-time offices–such as cars, cellphones, air travel, hotel accommodation and meeting venues in comfortable conference centres—provide the outward indication that those who occupy these positions are important people. This visible symbol of the importance of union leaders is often intended to match or even surpass those of their employers and state interlocutors.

FTSSs at BMW admit that the perks associated with being in the positions accord them some social status. According to an FTSS, the position affords them an opportunity to drive the cars that they manufacture, which they would not otherwise afford: "Remember, we cannot afford these cars, and somehow we're benefitting by driving these cars but not being able to afford them" (Interview: Tumelo Nyatama, 27/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW).

Another FTSS shared:

> Remember, we have an issue in the auto companies, especially these premium auto companies VW, BMW, Mercedes Benz. We are building cars that we cannot afford to buy, but then we have an FTSS position that gives a person a fulfilment of saying 'At least I have driven the car'. (Interview: Alpheus May, 12/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

Another FTSS reiterated this stance:

> Remember, we cannot afford these cars, and somehow, we're benefitting by driving these cars that we cannot afford. (Interview, Esrom Hlophane, 26/09/2018. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

Therefore, being elected as aN FTSS at BMW affords one the opportunity to drive a luxury BMW, which they would not otherwise afford. This elevates their status inside the plant, among workers and also in the broader society. One FTSS narrated that he felt like "the man" when, at one stage, he took a BMW 7 series (meant for the FTSSs) to a car wash. People paid "serious attention" to him. This elevated status accorded to FTSSs makes them important people in the plant and in society in general. Perhaps what has not been explored in depth is that the perks are not only limited to being in the workplace. Being treated like "the man" makes it difficult

for them to go back to being factory workers, where they cannot afford to drive the cars that they manufacture. This could explain the 2019 FTSS election stalemate that happened because those who were not nominated were now faced with the reality of going back to the line and relinquishing the acquired social status of being an important person. This, in turn, undermines the democratic principle of the trade union and worker control, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Cars as a source and symbol of social status and power

> Management gives you a pool of cars, and in the course of that, some form of co-option emerges, so it is important for the union to be always innovative about this, and sometimes we don't do that, so these tendencies (co-option and abuse of union resources) set in. But every reform you win introduces a dynamic of its own, and I think that is a class struggle. People will always find ways, and there are self-interests. (Interview: Dinga Sikwebu, 18/10/2019. Former NUMSA Head of Education)

The trade union NUMSA at BMW negotiated for pool cars as a part of the tools of trade for FTSSs. These pool cars have created conditions for co-option and self-interest amongst some of the FTSSs. This is evident in the BMW FTSS committee, where FTSSs fight over the personal use of the cars, especially over weekends, as the employer allows them to take the cars home every day, including weekends. The personal use of the cars has become one of the major symbols of status amongst the FTSS, and thus, they fight over the use of the cars. It is noteworthy that the workers at BMW, like all workers in a capitalist system, assemble luxury cars that they cannot afford.

Marx (1996) argued that the working class is alienated from the product of their labour in a capitalist system. One of the major benefits of being elected FTSS at BMW is that one is accorded an opportunity to drive the cars that they manufacture, which gives them a new social status. The BMW car is the source and symbolises social status. Furthermore, it is a symbol of power, which FTSS themselves admitted was an aspect of the major benefits of being an FTSS.

On the contrary, management argues that cars are given to FTSSs as tools of trade because of the nature of their work, which requires them to be mobile:

> Well, for mobility, because the nature of our activities is that there will be internal and external meetings or industry meetings which require people to go external, so it is important that they (FTSSs) are mobile so that they move from point A to point B in terms of union-management activities. (Interview: Peter Dantjie, 26/08/2018. ER Manager at BMW)

The mobility nature of their work explains why the union negotiated to have a car as one of the benefits and why management acceded to the demand. Having a car thus enables FTSSs to drive the product of their labour. Almost all FTSSs at BMW alluded to the necessity of having this benefit. One former NUMSA FTSS official asserted:

> First of all, we are building cars, so we must use our product to do union work. You cannot build a product that is a means of production, and then you don't have access to that means of production to advance the aims and objectives of the union. (Interview, Alex Mashilo, 19/04/2019. Former NUMSA Head of OCCB)

Meanwhile, another FTSS thus summed it up:

> There is an issue of driving union-negotiated cars, nice BMWs, because each and every auto company has their own brand, which the union negotiates for each and every FTSS to have as a means of transport on working on union-related issues and between union and company. And for the company to have good relations, they need to have capacitated FTSSs, so if there is training to be attended somewhere and if there is a meeting to be held somewhere, these FTSSs must be able to be mobile. (Interview: Tumelo Nyatama, 27/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

The union negotiated for FTSSs to be given cars merely because they are the manufacturers of the cars, as well as because of the nature of the work they do, which requires them to be mobile. This, however, has brought unintended consequences in the sense that having a car has become more of a benefit than a resource to execute the responsibilities of a FTSS. Therefore, I contend that the cars have become more of a perk than merely a tool of trade:

> The cars have created a huge fight; they have actually become a [personal] benefit (rather than a union tool to perform union work). They were never negotiated as a benefit, but they have actually become a personalised benefit of the FTSS, which is wrong. They are meant for union work union. (Interview, Alex Mashilo, 19/04/2019. Former NUMSA Head of OCCB)

One FTSS highlighted that FTSSs use the cars more for personal use than union business:

> The personal use of the cars is higher than the FTSS union work; you know people are using these cars not for work-related issues, for example, if they say take a witness to the CMMA, you will hear people say, 'No, I have a meeting, or I have to go to the medical station.' Making up stories to avoid going to the place you are required to go to. People are abusing the cars—and people would go to Sun City with the car, but when there is a funeral of a member locally, you will not see them. (Interview: Vuyokazi Mathebula, 13/11/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

The cars were negotiated as a tool of trade to enable FTSSs to execute their tasks, and management conceded for this reason, which at times included union activities outside the plant. These include representing workers from other plants and attending CCMA hearings. This was discussed in Chapter 4. The FTSS is viewed as an organiser in NUMSA. The car has become a personalised benefit as FTSSs can use them for their own personal benefit; hence, they are allowed to take them home over weekends. One FTSS noted, "You can use the car subject to your own fuel; you can take it to Cape Town" (Interview: Paul Mahlangu, 12/07/2017. Former NUMSA Secretary of the FTSS Committee at BMW). This demonstrates the extent to which having these cars has become a personal benefit. Having a car for one's personal use has become a source of conflict among FTSSs as they all fight to keep the cars over extended periods of time.

> These fights among shop stewards I have witnessed are a major source of conflict amongst the FTSSs because of the fact that some want to keep the cars more often than others. (Interview: Alex Mashilo, 19/04/2019. Former NUMSA Head of OCCB)

These fights interfere with the service of workers. I witnessed some of these fights during my plant visits. One FTSS concurred:

> It is greed from some of us; some of us want ownership of the cars, they want ownership and don't want to give others a chance to utilise the car. (Interview: Lawrence Modise, 17/10/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

He further noted the sources of these fights are linked to the brand of cars they are given as FTSSs at BMW:

> It's a BMW it's not a Dustan Go, even when we reach the weekend everyone wants to have it and it becomes difficult so that's a challenge. Sometimes they make us operate poorly because most of the time we are solving the problem of the cars instead of solving workers' problems. (ibid)

This was collaborated by most FTSSs, who attributed most of their fights to the personal use of the cars:

> Another problem that causes fights in the FTSS committee is the union pool cars; the cars are a big problem. One of the things that makes the cars a problem is the fact that we have four cars, and we share them among the ten FTSSs; we have a rotational system that this week is your week of driving the car, and the next week is mine. One of the things that makes us fight is that when someone has to hand over the car, they don't want to, and then we fight. (Interview: Vuyokazi Mathebula, 13/11/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

This fact became clear during my fieldwork when I attended some of the FTSS meetings. Some of the fights were sparked by someone failing to wake up early to pick up another comrade. Furthermore, that person wanted to keep the car for extended periods, including weekends. One of the FTSS explained:

> Ja, sometimes there are a lot of altercations for the cars, on the usage of the cars because you will find that someone wants to use it for private use whilst the other one also wants to utilise it and then it leads to altercations—it is not like if everyone had a car. So, most of the time there are altercations in terms of this thing of cars and mostly for personal use because each and everyone wants to benefit from it and there are only four cars, and we cannot utilise four cars at the same time the ten of us for personal use. (Interview: Lawrence Modise, 17/10/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

The greed of wanting to keep these cars for themselves is a major distraction for the union, and even when FTSSs are called to duty to union activities on weekends, they turn them down

because they want to use the cars for their own personal use. Dinga Sikwebu (Interview: 18/10/2019. Former NUMSA Head of Education) highlighted an incident where FTSSs refused to assist the union because they had a personal matter to attend to. He recalled:

> Well, we had international visitors, and we wanted the transport of the Ford workers (FTSSs); the guys had some personal things on the weekend, and they wouldn't want to drive around the guys. Only to discover that there was a wedding somewhere they wanted to attend. (Interview: Dinga Sikwebu, 18/10/2019. Former NUMSA Head of Education).

This illustrates how personal use takes precedence because one wants to appear at a wedding while driving a car because of the social status associated with that. One FTSS shared:

> For example, I had a partner that we shared the car with. He would tell me in advance that 'I have a funeral' or 'I have a wedding' or 'I am invited to a wedding, and it is not my week to have the car can I borrow it.' And even myself, if I had something over the week and it is not my week I will 'eish Joe I have a funeral my classmate has passed away please lend me the car'. (Interview: Vuyokazi Mathebula, 13/11/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW).

Another stated:

> We drive a BMW home, and during the weekend, I would rather neglect union activities and take the union pool car to my personal activity. (Interview: Thabo Mogoroe, 19/11/2019. NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

Another FTSS recalled such abuse of union pool cars for personal use:

> Delicious (a nickname of one of the former FTSSs) also has that tendency when he has weekend plans, and we say 'meeting', he says 'no comrades, I want my weekends. I want to enjoy my weekends with my fiancé' and we will say 'Okay fine, bring the car' and he will refuse and say, 'No it is my weekend of having the car'. (Interview: Marvin Molefe, 7/03/2020. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

These are examples of the status and comfort enjoyed by driving a car. This is linked to identity formation, or the sense of importance derived by FTSSs from driving BMW cars. Thus, I contend that the cars elevate their status and ensure they are people of importance. Ronny Zitha, a former FTSS, explained how he personally benefited from driving a BMW:

> Ja, it elevates your status, and I know in many cases when driving a BMW Yoh! My wife was attracted by this car. I am a beneficiary of the car. (Interview: Ronny Zitha, 13/11/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

Another FTSS who has since left BMW explained what I missed about being a FTSS:

> The cars, I miss them more than I miss the members and the FTSS Committee. (Interview: Katlego Makgaleng, 11/09/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

This reveals the symbol of status associated with the cars. Cars were a memorable highlight of being an FTSS and something they missed about the position. Hence, I have referred to them as a perk rather than a tool of trade, given what they came to mean and symbolise for these FTSSs. The elevated status associated with having a car as a perk leads to fights over cars amongst FTSSs and affects service to members. In South Africa, public transport is poor, and thus, a car has not only become a symbol of success and status but also an important mode of reliable transport to and from work and servicing the union. Including personal activities such as weddings and funerals that might not be in the same town, having a car makes one's life easy and hence, one cannot blame FTSS for wanting to hang onto their positions to enjoy the comfort of having a car to drive.

These fights need to be understood in the context of the comfort that comes with driving a car. A NUMSA official thus explained:

> There is a comfort drawn from the fact that you have access to a car and a car that you cannot be able to afford, you can make it, but you can't afford it. The question of inequalities in society is that these people make cars, but they will never be able to afford them. We seem to think 'Ah these workers are crooks', but it is society that makes people to make cars which they can never afford, then how do you blame them for having that appetite? (Interview: Dinga Sikwebu, 18/10/2019. Former NUMSA Head of Education)

The comfort associated with driving a car in South Africa, which is undergoing class formation, is linked to status and class mobility. Hence, I argue that these cars that are provided to FTSSs are actually one of the sources of the status of the FTSS, and thus, they fight to retain their

positions when they are not re-elected because the position affords some form of social status, which comes with driving a luxury BMW in a country where the public transport is poor, and there are high levels of inequality. Dinga Sikwebu asserted:

> The way people see driving a BMW and being mobile in a country where the public transport is a mess, that's a relief from getting into a train (which is always late and unreliable). My thing is that the question of class formation and the fact of dispossession and how unions and being active in the unions are stepping stones; it is part of class formation and class mobility. (Interview: 18/10/2019. Former NUMSA Head of Education)

This acquired status was linked to class formation, and thus, these positions form part of upward mobility. Furthermore, the union is employed as a stepping stone, which is discussed later in the chapter. This is also linked to the positions of FTSS and their close proximity to management, which affords opportunities for upward mobility. One former FTSS noted that "because of the close vicinity towards management, because you are able to showcase yourself as one exceptional person or the other but others, they would do these things, but management will not consider them" (Interview: Ronny Zitha, 13/11/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW). FTSS use their positions as a way to sell themselves to management. Therefore, as some FTSS noted, they gravitate towards management in an endeavour to please management at the expense of workers and members so that they will be recognised and the first to be considered for promotions as and when opportunities arise.

> Even when the term of office of FTSS is about to end, you will see people being power hungry and applying everywhere and becoming friends with management and changing their tone in meetings and not being robust but being soft on the issue. (Interview: Vuyokazi Mathebula, 13/11/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

She further argued that management has ears and eyes in the FTSS committee:

> The issue that I have mentioned at the beginning is that being a FTSS doesn't give you leverage to be friends with management; we cannot be friends with management as FTSS. We can't. Because there are instances where you go to a meeting, and you find one of the managers speaking your language and knowing what you discussed in your meeting as the FTSS

> committee, and they are ahead of us and raise our issues before we even raise them and having all the answers to our issues for the issues that we have been discussing as the committee. Some of the management guys even tell us, 'I have ears inside the committee, ' and you will see that he has ears in the committee. … This affects the functioning of the committee. (Interview: Vuyokazi Mathebula, 13/11/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

A former NUMSA FTSS at BMW asserted that while FTSSs look after their own interests, they do not represent the workers:

> I am definitely sure that there are people who represent their own jackets, and there are people (FTSS) who would inform management even though not the full composition of the discussion, but they would give them the component of what happened in the meeting. No, they're preparing to object item number 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. (Interview: Katlego Makgaleng, 11/09/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

Kenneth Madumo explained that some FTSSs use these positions for their own narrow self-interests and as a stepping stone. Thus, they become friends with management:

> Like I said, people should understand what they are elected for and for what, and to a larger degree, some people do use it (FTSS positions) as a stepping stone; I will talk specifically about what I witnessed since I became a FTSS. … People do somehow get promoted, and people do behave somehow so that they are preferred by a particular manager so that tomorrow they might be considered for a position. (Interview: Kenneth Madumo, 27/07/2017. NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

Another FTSS spoke about how some FTSSs do not take the mandate of workers seriously so as to advance their narrow self-interests:

> Our guys want to be good boys and girls in management. The unfortunate part is that it is done at the expense of the workers; you will have a mandate from workers, and management would say 'no.' And you would try and find a way of addressing this mandate but without angering management, you water it (mandate) down. … So that management can consider you for promotion so that when your term ends here, you don't go to the production line. (Interview: Thabo Mogoroe, 19/11/2019. NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

This reveals how these positions afford opportunities for self-interest among the FTSSs. Close proximity leads to people employing these positions for their own upward mobility. Thus, when

people are elected as FTSS, they tend to use it as a marketing tool for management so that management will consider them when opportunities for promotion arise. This marketing exercise is always at the detriment of the needs of workers and members. Therefore, FTSSs accused each other of *selling out,* as noted previously, all in the name of being friends with management.

Although the FTSSs enjoy the car benefit and the status that is associated with it, some were frustrated by the fictitious lifestyle of FTSSs. One of the FTSSs argued, "Some of these resources (like the cars) make us look like we are living lavish lifestyles, you know, just because of a car that I don't even own; I think that is one of the frustrations" (Interview: Paul Mahlangu, 12/07/2017. Former NUMSA Secretary of the FTSS Committee at BMW). The frustration highlighted by this FTSS concurs with the argument I have advanced, namely, that these positions afford some elevated social status, which is the result of the perks and resources associated with being elected to FTSS. Hence, some feel frustrated by the social status acquired as a result of being elected to the position of FTSS; that is, society perceives them as something that they are not because of the BMWs they are driving, which is a tool of trade. The car, in essence, is a union benefit for members elected as FTSS to enable them to execute their tasks. At the same time, while it offers them some social status, which they enjoy, others, such as the FTSS mentioned above, become frustrated. One of the FTTSs remarked, ''It's also nice to drive a BMW even though you can't afford it" (Interview: Esrom Hlophane, 2/08/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW). This is important and should be understood in the context of a capitalist society that is marred by consumerism and influencer culture of the 21st century, that promotes hyper consumption of luxury goods as a source of prestige and social status as symbols of success.

Although there is nothing unique about the behaviour of these FTSSs who are excited by driving the luxurious BMWs, what is concerning is the fact that they ought to be the vanguard

of the workers that elected them and the working class broadly. This vanguardism should supersede their instant gratification of driving luxurious cars. The benefits that are enjoyed as an FTSS do not only include cars, but they are entitled to attend training courses for their own personal development, which qualifies them to get an allowance.

Education Benefits for FTSSs: Education and training opportunities for FTSSs

The education and training development programme for FTSSs is another benefit they enjoy as their training is prioritised, unlike the education and training of ordinary workers. Therefore, being a FTSS opens doors for one to receive some form of education and training. I am of the view that this education and training opportunity, which is offered to FTSSs, is a benefit and perk that lays the foundation for their upward social mobility because ordinary workers do not get this opportunity. Hence, I believe that this benefit is a perk and that it also enhances their acquired social status. Hong and Zhao (2015:6) revealed the interlink between education and social status and postulated:

> In modern society, education has become an important stepping stone for obtaining social status and is the core element of cultural capital.

Furthermore, the training opportunities facilitate the upward mobility of the FTSS. One FTSS also noted that the education and training opportunity is not just a benefit, but actually a perk: "And also the education which should be regarded as a perk because some people (meaning normal workers) have to pay for it, but you get it (education and training) courtesy of being a FTSS" (Interview: Paul Mahlangu, 12/07/2017. Former NUMSA Secretary of the FTSS Committee at BMW). Education becomes a perk because it is linked to being an FTSS. The rationale behind the education and training benefit is to develop a capable FTSS who will be able to represent workers. However, in the process, management benefits from such education and training opportunities because FTSSs advise workers correctly as they are now conversant with the law:

> If I can tell you something, it is better for management to train these guys. Imagine if the workers didn't know Labour Law or the dangers. Management also benefits from these things because if you are well trained, you become legalistic. You can tell the workers 'no, no according to the LRA section what, what, that can make you lose your job', and you end up enforcing management discipline. So, sometimes this education is good for management, is good for the shop stewards and is also good for workers because imagine if your shop steward he/she is just an illiterate fellow who is going to deliver you to dismissal because of lack of knowledge. (Interview: Alex Mashilo, 19/04/2019. Former NUMSA OCCB Head)

The education and training opportunities afforded to FTSSs are a double-edged sword that benefits both the union members and the employer. FTSSs themselves also benefit as it equips them with skills which they can further use after their tenure. Therefore, it may be considered to be a perk. Webster (1985) contended that, at times, FTSSs enforce management's authority and are able to discipline their own workers.

Consequently, they become tools for management, of which the FTSS and shop stewards in Marikana were accused (see Chinguno, 2012 & Sacks, 2012). This is risky and also contributes to the crisis of leadership because FTSSs become enforcers of management discipline in that they become too legalistic and do not display creativity and initiative to represent their members. Thus, Mashilo, a former NUMSA OCCB Head, warned that enforcing management discipline constitutes a negative aspect of the education and training benefit because they take labour law courses. This explains management's willingness to send FTSSs to these courses because, in turn, they benefit from this because FTSSs becomes more legalistic and helps enforce the law. Hence, management is advantaged by sending FTSSs to this education and training programme because FTSSs are able to advise workers accordingly. However, the disadvantage is that, in the process, unknowingly, they are enforcing management discipline. Hence, they are able to maintain labour peace in the workplace. Thus, Mashilo further argued that FTSSs may become too legalistic and enforce management discipline. This advantages the employers and not the workers. This is evident in the following quotation:

> You see us, we are guided by this Red Book, the constitution of NUMSA. You don't go on strike without a strike certificate. There are processes that you need to follow, and we have legal services that we get from regional and national offices. Locally, we have an organiser. And a strike is not always a solution . It's a tactic to address issues. (Interview: Alpheus May, 18/08/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

The impact and reason behind the legalistic nature of the work of FTSSs, which seeks to exhaust all the laws and processes before going head-on with the employer, is highlighted in the above quotation. Hence, the *Red Book* guides the activities of the FTSSs. Webster (2001) regarded union representatives (I include FTSSs) as managers of discontent who endeavour to manage conflicts in the workplace between workers and employers and at times act in the interests of management. This affects the FTSS' efficiency in representing their members and, in turn, exacerbates the crisis of representation as workers' issues are, to a large extent, neglected. Another FTSS explained that they tend to be to be legalistic:

> When a comrade comes into this office as a FTSS, you are caught between telling the comrade what he (or she) wants to hear and telling the comrade the truth; when you tell the truth, they say, 'oh, he is pro-management'. (Informal discussion with Esrom Hlophane, 2/08/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

The argument that he put forward was that, at times, workers come with unrealistic demands, which border on the law and breaking it. The FTSS thus explained that when they tell the truth, they lose popularity:

> They come and say, 'No, she is my aunt who has died. I am not coming to work.' I will say, 'Comrade, you come to work. She is not your immediate family. The policy says this and this, and comrade, if you don't come, you will face the music, and you will have a final warning of non-attendance.' When we say such things, we become unpopular, and they go and tell other members. (Informal discussion with Esrom Hlophane, 2/08/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

However, the role of the FTSS is to represent workers and negotiate on their behalf, and thus, one may argue that in such situations, the FTSS should negotiate with management and present the worker's case. It is commonly known that in African families, aunts may be regarded as

our immediate families as they might have taken the responsibility of taking care of us when we were growing up and are our responsibility, just like our biological parents. I thought that this argument put forward by the FTSS was inadequate. Rather, it reveals how legalistic they have become because they tend to lack creativity and do not take any initiative. Thus, FTSS representation may be questioned. The ER manager argued that FTSSs have become too legalistic to the detriment of the union membership:

> This shows that the laws that were won have made FTSSs complacent, and by following them too much, the FTSSs have become more legalistic, which is a problem, especially when it comes to taking control and making initiatives and realising the power that they have. (Interview: Peter Dantjie, 26/08/2018. ER Manager at BMW)

I agree with the ER manager that these FTSSs have become too legalistic and do not take any initiative to improve the benefits and conditions of workers. As they have become the managers of peace or labour peace in the workplace, thus avoiding unnecessary strikes and always pointing to the law and the rules and regulations that governs the workplace and the trade union in the workplace. Thus, Webster (1985) noted that shop stewards were viewed as enforcers of the law and company policy. When one considers the preceding quotation, this applies to the FTSSs too. I contend that their legalistic nature is a result of the education that they receive, which makes them experts in certain fields related to understanding both the policies of the union and employer including labour laws. Thus, they perceive themselves as experts and, accordingly, approach cases from a legalistic perspective and do not take other factors into consideration. This forms part of Buhlungu's (2010: 126) classification of career trade unionists who "want to make a lifetime career" by "becoming [an] expert on specific aspects of union work." I concur because the FTSSs at BMW have divided themselves into different departments or specifications in the courses they take. While some are studying health and safety, others are attending courses at the Wits Business School, and some are studying labour

law. These comrades are positioning themselves to become experts in certain fields of the union and, thus, becoming career unionists.

This is also supported by the fact that many of them do not want to return to the line but want to pursue careers either within the company management structure or union. Some even argued that they want to go into business based on the experience that they received as an FTSS. Hence, career pathing was suggested by the FTSSs, union officials and management. I am of the view that this career path is based on the career unionist and entrepreneur unionist to which Buhlungu (2010) refers.

Career pathing for FTSS and the life after being a FTSS

> The third type, the entrepreneur, deserves some examination here as it does not feature in conventional debates on full-time union officials. Indeed, it would seem that the emergence of this category may be a function of an accelerated process of class formation spawned by the deracialisation of the South African society. (Buhlungu, 2010: 127)

I draw on Buhlungu's classification of full-time union officials because I argue that he offers a helpful tool of analysis for understanding FTSSs. From the evidence that I gathered at the BMW plant, it is clear that FTSSs are classified into different categories. While FTSSs are committed to helping the workers and advocating slogans of socialism, others employ the union as a stepping stone for advancing their future careers. Those that are committed are the ones that are critical of themselves and highlighted some of the shortcoming of FTSSs being office workers and not in touch with workers on the ground and highlighted above. The latter are entrepreneur unionists.

Buhlungu (2010) classified entrepreneur unionists as "individualistic and manipulative 'empire builders. Union is a steppingstone in upward mobility" (2010:126). In my observation, these empire builders are the FTSSs that contest these positions for their narrow interests and employ the union as a springboard for their own personal advancement. Hence, their calling for the

career pathing of FTSS. I also contend that the educational programmes that are offered to FTSSs invite these kinds of workers to want to employ the union as a stepping stone. Thus, the ER manager who was interviewed proposed career pathing as one of the solutions for curbing the tendency to fight for FTSSs positions. This was supported by the FTSSs themselves. BMW has now started providing FTSSs with education and training support in line with the National Bargaining Forum (NBF) agreement. As part of the company's education and training programme, some FTSSs are attending courses in project management at the Wits Business School, while others have enrolled and graduated as safety reps. These training programmes are linked to the NBF agreements, which stipulate that:

> In September 2004, the parties agreed to develop a Shop Stewards' training programme. Successful completion of this programme will result in the payment of an allowance of up to 10% of the SL4 (Skills Level 4) Qualified Rate. Such training will commence within three months of appointment. Such allowance will be paid only while shop steward remains in office. (National Bargaining Forum (NBF) Agreement, Signed 2018:64-65)

The education and training opportunities that these FTSSs receive are linked to the career pathing that the ER Manager highlighted. These courses, offered by business schools on project management and other business administration-related courses, do not prepare them to return to the line but to venture into careers outside the production process. These are career pathing FTSSs from both management and the FTSS themselves, as these career programmes gives way for the entrepreneur unionists who subsequently use the union as a stepping stone opportunity for manipulation. Although there is a call for career pathing for FTSSs, this is already happening at BMW, with the education and training that these shop stewards receive from both the employer and the union. It is noteworthy that NUMSA also provides extensive training for their shop stewards and, in particular, FTSSs and prides itself on doing so. These education programmes are aimed at developing the FTSSs, as the ER manager highlighted:

> It is to allow the guys (FTSSs) to develop themselves and have a career path during their term of office because if they develop themselves and have a career path during the term of office. When they leave office, they have something to rely on academically they will not avoid venturing into untested waters. (Interview: Peter Dantjie, 26/08/2018 BMW ER Manager)

The career pathing of FTSS is another indication that these positions offer opportunities for upward mobility. Therefore, I contend that FTSSs are a class-in-the-making or a mobile class, as evidenced by the fact that on being elected, they are afforded opportunities not available to the rest of the workforce. Furthermore, the education and training that they receive assist their upward social mobility. Thus, the FTSSs called for career paths because of the education and experience they gain while in these positions, which also prepares them for enhanced opportunities on the production line. Hence, one FTSS argued that being FTSS is a stepping stone to better opportunities and jobs, even within the company:

> I know FTSSs who have gone to become union officials within the organisation locally and regionally. They were on a springboard and were deeply involved in union matters and remember everyone has their own ambitions and remember being an FTSS is not a career and after being an FTSS you need to map a way into the future. So, if you become an ER manager, you will be well placed. When you are an FTSS, you will be equipped with the skill set to be able to execute that. Everyone has ambitions, and you have to plan for the future because today you are popular and tomorrow you are not popular anymore, and when they vote you out, do you go back to the production line. (Interview: Paul Mahlangu, 12/07/2017. Former NUMSA Secretary of the FTSS Committee at BMW)

He added that FTSSs should be redeployed elsewhere in the company because of the skills and experience they had acquired when they were FTSSs. He believed that this happened because no FTSSs wanted to go back to the line. Hence, these positions are used as springboards or stepping-stones for enhanced positions. Thus, the FTSSs ensured that they acquired the skills and knowledge that will be beneficial for them to advance their careers. This contributes to the crisis of leadership in the union.

Masondo, Orkin and Webster (2015: 194) advanced the argument further by questioning if union shop stewards are militants or managers: "[f]or many, becoming a shop steward is a 'stepping stone' to a managerial position." They further observed that "[i]n many firms it is well understood that service as a shop steward could be a prelude to a foreman, charge-hand or personnel/human resource manager" (ibid). At BMW, there are former FTSSs who have been promoted to team leaders (foreman); some ventured into politics, and others were employed by the union. One FTSS shared:

> In 2014, there were by-elections because one of the FTSSs, George Tefo, got a promotion to be a team leader, and that scope of work is not the hourly side. He was now going to be staff, and then the union conducted by-election, and that's when I got the opportunity to lead or should I say the privilege to lead. (Interview: Tumelo Nyatama. 27/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

The precedence for career advancement and career pathing informs the views of the FTSS to advocate for career pathing as FTSSs; so that they may be considered for promotion. This explains their determination for career development. They would rather attend training courses that will advance their careers than improve their capacity to represent workers and prospects for future work. Thus, shop stewards tend to attend accredited training rather than normal popular education and trade union education, as noted in the recent NALEDI-HRDC Report (2018)[30]. Career pathing for FTSSs seeks to institutionalise the position of an FTSS as a stepping stone to greener pastures and poses the danger that people might use their positions to gain upward mobility rather than provide service to their members. Career pathing ensures FTSS do not return to the machine or line but are accommodated elsewhere in the company

[30] NALEDI-HRDC Report 2018: *Worker Education Needs Analysis, Review of Provision & Recommendations for Skills, Institutional Development & Sustainable Funding*.

and even outside of it. FTSS should know that if they do not represent their members well, they run the risk of not being re-elected. Barret asserted:

> And that's where most of the problems have been and unions have quite been slack in holding their elections as frequently as their constitutions say they should. But I know a lot of cases of shop stewards losing their positions either as FTSS or not as FTSS because they're seen as not servicing the workers. A FTSS should not be able to go on indefinitely constitutionally they should always be subjected to election in the workplace. (Interview: Jane Barret, 28/092018. Labour Activist)

This was the case at BMW when six of the nine FTSS were not re-elected in 2020. However, those not re-elected fought back. The implications of having a career path are that if a FTSS is not re-elected, they will not be compelled to go back to their previous position or the line. Instead, they will be accommodated elsewhere in the union or the company, which, in turn, weakens accountability because of guaranteed future employment elsewhere. Therefore, when in office, they tend to focus on career advancement rather than representing the workers. At BMW, when a FTSS is not re-elected, they go back to the line, which makes them accountable to the members. The FTSS raised issues related to providing service to members so that they would be re-elected. However, other FTSSs supported the notion of career pathing of FTSSs:

> Remember, as an FTSS, you function at a very strategic level, so if I am going back to drive a fork truck or winged truck and supplying the production line, I will be very frustrated because I have so much information and skill set and knowledge that I accumulated in my term (of office) as an FTSS. Again, it becomes wasteful to the company because they have invested money in you, and it becomes a waste in the union because they spend money on you. Again, remember NUMSA is one of the few unions that invests money in the education and training of their shop stewards; hence, some of the things (including your career) you need to map out because you can't be an FTSS for the rest of your career it is not sustainable. (Interview: Paul Mahlangu, 12/07/2017. Former NUMSA Secretary of the FTSS Committee at BMW)

A former NUMSA FTSS at BMW, agreed about the notion of career pathing as part of career progression and growth for those not re-elected:

> It is important that we have career paths as FTSS so that FTSS are prepared when they are not elected because if you go back to the line as an FTSS when you are not elected, yes, you are armed with information for me, I think you should be given a better position so that you can grow. (Interview: Vuyokazi Mathebula, 13/11/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

Although for different reasons, there is a general acceptance of the career pathing and promotion of FTSSs at BMW. Because the employer does not view anything wrong with it, the FTSSs supports the notion of career pathing for FTSSs. However, this was not the case in the 1980s. Consequently, unionists denounced the idea of FTSSs as it was viewed as a form of co-option or a stepping stone that ignored representing the working class's interests.

The post-apartheid workplace has also accepted the general promotion of some of the FTSSs. An ex-NUMSA shop steward, interviewed by Masondo (2012: 120), stated:

> Union members do understand that transformation is not negotiable … they understand our objective as the Congress Movement as outlined in the national democratic revolution. They know very well that white people benefited a great deal under apartheid … our government has given us a chance to occupy positions which were previously reserved for the whites.

It is important to understand the rationale behind having training opportunities for FTSSs, as articulated in the above excerpt, FTSSs need to acquire these skills while still in office to be prepared for life beyond the line in case they are not retained. The arguments advanced by the shop stewards and FTSS support Buhlungu's (2010) notion of an entrepreneur unionist.

Management believes that FTSSs should be promoted to management to advance management's interests. One FTSS disagreed with this notion and stated:

> Yes, an ideal position is that you put former FTSSs into strategic positions within management but for strategic reasons for the union and not as a strategic move by the company, which is to protect the company against the union. Strategic reasons in the sense of stabilising the plant and ensuring that the relationship between the union and the company is smooth because if you get that the plant is stable, and production is stable. (Interview: Thabo Mogoroe, 27/07/2019. NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

The point made by the FTSS is that career advancement or the pathing of FTSSs should benefit the union and not solely the employer.

Even though the union would benefit from such promotions, such career pathing should not be institutionalised. FTSSs' promotion should not be facilitated because that borders on co-option. Hence, some union officials warned that career pathing of FTSSs can also be used to destroy the union:

> We should also be speaking freely of the experiences that we have seen where someone took that career pathing and became a manager and became the worst enemy of workers. You get isolated, and you've got the money and whatever, but you isolated from the members and the workers, and the worse danger is not workers but the employer because they give you that position to kill the union. (Interview: Theo Steele, 23/08/2019. COSATU Organising Secretary)

She was earnestly opposed to this notion of career pathing because she viewed it as an attempt to destroy the union. She added:

> Career pathing (giggles) what are their (management) intentions of that career pathing? It is to destroy the union men once you have a career path for those FTSSs in the company. (Interview: Theo Steele, 23/08/2019. COSATU Organising Secretary)

Another asserted that the brutal HR managers were once FTSSs or from the union rank:

> My experience is that most of the IR managers and HR managers who come from the unions … they're the most brutal—my personal experience is that most of the brutal HR managers, brutal supervisors, they were once FTSS of the union. (Interview: Bhabha lika Maphikela Nhlapho, 20/09/2019. COSATU Education Secretary)

Another union official asserted that career pathing of FTSSs is not a good idea and might create problems for the trade union noting that if FTSSs are guaranteed a position in management post their office as an FTSS, this will have a negative effect on how they represent workers:

> I think the options should be much more open; they shouldn't be linear. I am sure management would like linear options so that they can further co-opt the FTSS. I cannot imagine FTSSs who are guaranteed further senior positions in the company; that those particular FTSSs would wholeheartedly serve the constituencies they are meant to serve. You are basically dangling a

> carrot for them to sell out. That's what you are doing, and very few people given the opportunity to sell out would take the option of servicing members as opposed to the option of selling out. (Interview: Bhabha lika Maphikela Nhlapho, 20/09/2019. COSATU Education Secretary)

These are the dangers that career pathing of FTSSs may pose. It gives them opportunities to neglect their primary duties of serving workers and instead sell out workers in return for their career advancement. Stories of how FTSS swho joined management became the worst enemies of the unions because they now served the interests of the bosses abound. They merely used the unions as a stepping stone. One former FTSS highlighted the danger of co-option and the promotion of FTSSs to management, which leads to the brain drain in the union:

> Brian drain in the sense that if you become more effective to the detriment of the company, you will be co-opted or be offered a position as part of the employer; you will form part of the employer's contingency now and no longer an FTSS. But mainly, you will also be used to counter all the gains that were made by the union, so it becomes a disadvantage on the part of the union because it would lose the experienced FTSS who now become part of management, and often, they become against the union. I can name a few; it is only Peter Dantjie (the BMW ER Manager who is a former NUMSA official) who has become exceptional, but most of them that I know have become counter unions. (Interview: Ronny Zitha, 13/11/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

I propose that they have always had ambitions of being in management, and the union offered them that vehicle or stepping stone. Thus, some of the FTSSs are more comfortable with management than workers. It was clear to me, as a participant observer, that some of the FTSSs were happier to meet with management or senior leaders of BMW than they were prepared to meet with their members. Hence, they tended to fight over who should attend a particular meeting with management. The FTSSs were always keen to meet with management, leaving the office unattended. I witnessed this in my ethnographic study, when I was often left alone in the union office, or would have to go home, because all of the FTSSs had gone to a meeting with management. This means that should a worker require urgent assistance from the FTSS when such meetings are in progress, no one will be in the union office to assist them. This

defeats the purpose of having FTSSs. The purpose of having FTSS is to ensure that workers have unlimited access to them.

This, then, contributes to the crisis of representation and leadership in the trade union. The desire for personal development and being ambitious is not a negative, but workers ought to receive the bare minimum service to which they are entitled, and FTSSs should not put their personal development interests before the interests of the very same members who elected them to represent them. Some FTSSs are more concerned about personal development than representing members. Even when they engage with management or the employer or represent members in other forums, such as the CCMA, they regard this as an opportunity to advance their personal development. One FTSS asserted:

> Right now, I want to go to business, and I can quit and go into business because I am stronger there, but above that, I will explore a role in business management or research. You know, something like that, but mine is to fly solo and go into business. Because I understand a lot of aspects of how to run a business because I have been on the other side (before coming to BMW) and now am on this side (side of labour) and have gained leadership skills, and I know how to deal with labour and its dynamics, and I know how to deal with myself as a leader of a business and how to drive it and how to strategise and how to plan, and I sharpened them when I was a FTSS because again as the secretary (of the FTSS Committee) you also manage the office so also your leadership skills sharpen in that or they tested in that. (Interview: Paul Mahlangu, 12/07/2017. Former NUMSA Secretary of the FTSS Committee at BMW)

This is a classic example of an entrepreneur unionist. Even though they might not have intended to run for the election when in office, they explored other possible opportunities that the position presented and capitalised on them to further their own personal interests. I argue that this has the potential to undermine some of their basic tasks of representing workers and, instead, focus on their own personal development. This is because they have nurtured their personal ambitions while in office. The position is professionalised, not only by the union or employer but also by themselves in how they conceive their roles and future prospects. This

sparks ambition amongst these FTSSs for upward social mobility. Buhlungu (2010: 121) asserted:

> In short, a union leadership position (including those of FTSSs) today places one in an extremely strategic position for upward mobility, internally and externally.

This upward mobility of the FTSS is also coupled with having perks that elevate the social status of these FTSSs. The perks that the FTSS enjoys are part of the tools of trade that are given to them to execute union work and include:

- Fully furnished offices with telephones, internet, photocopier and kitchen (with a fridge, hot water, microwave and other kitchen essentials);
- Every FTSS has a laptop;
- Cars have a petrol card with one full tank per week, but if they use more than the allocated petrol, they can negotiate for more fuel.; and
- 10% allowance of the salary of the FTSS.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the position of FTSSs and identity formation in this complex production process and argued that the position of FTSS ensures that they escape the work processes and, in turn, the production pressures associated with production work. FTSSs escaped the wrath of capitalist exploitation in the very complex production process of assembling cars. This, in turn, produces an avenue for upward mobility for those who occupy these FTSS positions and offers freedom of movement away from the wrath of the production line. This, then, accords them an elevated status as office workers, which is enhanced by the perks and resources associated with this position. These perks include having shared offices, driving BMW cars and education opportunities. The elevated status makes them privileged in relation to ordinary workers. Accordingly, I contend that FTSSs become a mobile class or a class-in-the-making by virtue of being elected to these positions.

In this chapter, the concepts of upward social mobility, class formation (elite formation), career pathing, and social status were explored to demonstrate that FTSSs became a stratum in the workforce at the plant. This new class stratum of FTSSs is made possible by the benefits associated with these positions, which include perks such as BMWs, education opportunities, and the freedom to move in and out of the plant. Thus, the chapter argued that FTSS sbecame a class-in-the-making because their positions afforded certain opportunities not accorded to ordinary workers in the plant. These opportunities elevate their social status and afford opportunities for acquiring social capital. The close proximity of FTSS to management builds their social capital and career progression opportunities. The newly acquired social capital and status of these FTSSs leads to the career pathing of such FTSSs because of their experience and the exposure that such positions present to them. Hence, the question of whether the FTSS affords upward mobility and career progression may be asked.

This chapter, through themes related to escaping the labour process, opportunities accorded to FTSSs, benefits, and perks, argued that these positions allow opportunities for class formation or stratum formation in the workforce. Thus, FTSSs are a class-in-the-making or in transition. FTSS is a transitional class[31]. Although a transitional class, the positions of FTSS still fulfil their historical mission of permanent union representatives in the plant or on the shop floor, with some unintended consequences. Thus, the chapter concurs with Buhlungu's (2010) notion that FTSSs can be either career or entrepreneur unionists. As revealed, some of the FTSS employ these positions for their own personal ambitions and interests.

This chapter argued that the position of the FTSS helps workers escape the wrath of capitalist production and exploitation in the auto sector in a plant such as BMW. This presents a

[31] A class in transition is one which is not a class yet but transitioning from one stratum of the class to another. FTSS class status is enhanced by these positions, which give them an elevated status to a middle-class status because of the perks that comes with the position.

contradictory class location for those elected to these positions of FTSS whose social class status is elevated by virtue of being elected. Equally, when they lose these positions, they have to go back to their former social class of being a line worker and face direct capitalist exploitation and the wrath of capitalist production. Consequently, I believe these positions of FTSS open space for upward social mobility because of the opportunities afforded to FTSSs, which include education opportunities and the associatied perks that are not accorded to ordinary line workers.

The thesis recommends that these resources need to be monitored by the trade union in particular so that they are not abused for personal use and gratification or employed by management to divide workers or to buy FTSSs and thereby weaken the trade union.

Chapter 8: “I will never stand for an elected position in my life”: Social downgrading of Full-Time Shop Stewards

Introduction

In this chapter, research findings that give an account of the opposite of upward mobility, namely, social downgrading, are provided by studying FTSSs that are not re-elected into these positions and have to return to the production line. The findings revealed three options are available to these FTSSs who fail to secure re-election. The first is returning to their original jobs, becoming an ordinary worker, and facing the wrath of capitalist exploitation. The second option is having a *soft landing* in the production line, that is, having less intense work than their original job but with better pay. The final option is resignation or taking early retirement for fear of returning to their original jobs and being ordinary workers.

Three life histories of the FTSSs who suffered different fates from the 2020 shop steward elections are presented to illustrate the three types of social downgrading. The term social downgrading is employed because the FTSS positions offer space for upward social mobility, as revealed in Chapter 6. On being elected, FTSSs acquire some sort of prestige and a sense of importance as office workers and enjoy a managerial lifestyle. Thus, there are fierce contests for these FTSS positions because of the prestige and social status attached to them. Although the positions of FTSS are intended to strengthen the trade union at the shop floor level and the locality in which they are situated, opportunities for upward social mobility may be abused for self-interest. Hence, those who fail to secure re-election feel a sense of loss and encounter social downgrading.

This chapter argues that all these factors constitute the social downgrading associated with not being elected as an FTSS. Although literature (see Buhlungu, 2010; Masondo, 2012; Sacks,

2012) has emphasised the upward social mobility of shop stewards, the evidence at BMW reveals a different scenario and provides a nuanced approach to understanding the social mobility of shop stewards in that it can be both upward and downward.

This chapter thus argues that the contestation for these FTSS positions is linked to opportunities for possible upward mobility as it is a recruitment ground for senior positions in management. Equally, those who are not re-elected find themselves in a challenging situation at a substantial personal and psychological cost when they have to return to the production line when they are not re-elected. Thus, I argue that the trade union should put measures in place and develop policies that will safeguard the positions not being used for upward social mobility by self-interested individuals. Those elected in these positions should be true servants of the workers and not self-interested individuals who employ the positions for their narrow, selfish interests of upward social mobility and, in turn, use the trade union as a stepping stone. Furthermore, the social downgrading that occurs should be normalised and accepted as part of the democratic processes of the trade union. Moreover, the will of the workers should be respected. FTSSs that are not re-elected should go back to the production line as they were workers prior to becoming shop floor leaders.

The social downgrading explored in this chapter reveals that these positions are used for personal interests and gratification and, thus, the sense of loss for those not re-elected into these positions. This sense of loss is a result of those not re-elected losing their accumulated social status, social capital and the perks associated with these positions, which was explored in Chapters 5 and 6. These are indeed the source of the social status of the FTSS as *woman or man with power, influence, and importance.*

Thus, the thesis argues that social downgrading should be embraced as a possibility and normalised in the trade union and those elected to the positions of FTSS. Social downgrading

serves as a reminder that FTSSs are workers, and these positions are meant to serve workers and not for personal gain and self-gratification.

Democracy in action: The 2019 FTSS election stalemate

A watershed moment for the trade union was the FTSS elections of 2020, which illustrated democracy in action, where six of the nine FTSSs were not re-elected. A protracted appeal process was followed by those who were not elected who challenged the nomination process. The incumbent FTSSs were accused of buying time as they were perceived by those who levelled the allegation as still wanting to enjoy the benefits that come with the positions. The deadlock was caused by the incumbents arguing that due process was not followed and those who managed the process by acting on behalf of the union had flouted its constitution. They argued that non-union members were allowed to nominate shop stewards, and a salaried employee also nominated one shop steward candidate. These actions were not in accordance with the NUMSA constitution. As succinctly stated by a FTSS:

> [it] … is a simple matter; you cannot elect in a general meeting if you are not a member or elect someone who is not a member. The process was flawed and did not follow the union procedure. (Interview: Marvin Molefe, 7/03/2020. Former FTSS 2010-2020)

Another FTSS noted:

> There are some people who are not NUMSA members who were nominated and some who are not NUMSA members who seconded the nomination, so there is a discrepancy there. (Interaction: Esrom Hlophane, 19/11/2019. Former FTSS 2014–2020)

The NUMSA constitution stipulates, “Union members in a workplace can elect shop stewards to represent them on a Shop Steward Committee (or to be shop steward)” (NUMSA Constitution 2014: 22). The process clearly disregarded the NUMSA constitution. Consequently, the six incumbent FTSSs challenged the nomination process as they felt that the violation would set a wrong precedent in the union. It is noteworthy that the NUMSA strategy

involved all members in a workplace who attended their general meetings, which also nominated and elected members. At BMW, one of the reasons members and non-union members attended the NUMSA general meeting is because it was held during the occasion of a quarterly general meeting, which is ordinarily held on a Sunday and, perhaps more importantly because the employer pays workers who attend this meeting at a double rate. It is a collective bargaining negotiated meeting, which explains why non-union members also attended the NUMSA general meeting that was held on the occasion of the plant-wide quarterly general meeting to nominate its leadership on the shop floor, the FTSSs.

This occurred in January 2020 after the election had been stalled for almost seven months for reasons relating to contestation or competition for the FTSS positions. Non-union members were allowed to nominate FTSSs, and a salaried employee also nominated one FTSS. This was not in accordance with the NUMSA constitution. When the election finally took place, six of the nine FTSS were not re-elected. Their years of service spanned two to eight years. Seven new FTSSs were elected, including replacements for those who were not re-elected.

The major outcry from what was referred to as the *Concerned Six Plus One* FTSSs was that the nomination process was flawed and had flouted the NUMSA constitution. If the elections were accepted without challenge, they argued, violating the NUMSA constitution would set a detrimental precedent in the union. This chapter is significant because the FTSSs' failure to be re-elected meant they had to return to the line of production and be subjected to manufacturing cars, which is routine work. Furthermore, they would lose all the benefits associated with the position of FTSS, including the social status attached to the position. In essence, they were facing downward social mobility, which I term social downgrading.

Although the BMW plant has had a good history of having regular elections over the years, 2019 presented a difficult year for the union in terms of upholding this democratic tradition of the union during the FTSS elections process:

> As I am speaking to you now, there are serious problems within the BMW FTSS committee; there are serious division workers who have nominated FTSSs, but they are unable to conduct elections precisely because there was an objection by one or two of the FTSSs. Saying that one of the nominees was nominated by the salaried employee, but that person is a union member as well. (Interview: David Mohajane, 06/10/2019)

The tradition is that salaried employees do not participate in this process as FTSSs are hourly-paid workers and have to be elected by hourly workers; thus, salaried employees are prohibited from participating even though they may attend the meeting. Six of the incumbent FTSSs who were not nominated launched an appeal with the union contesting the nomination process. An FTSS explained the reasons for the appeal as follows:

> There are some people who are not NUMSA members who were nominated and some who are not NUMSA members who seconded the nomination, so there is a discrepancy there. They tried to push it to the Region and the Local, but they couldn't because the nominations were on the 23rd of June 2019. Until now (November 2019), the elections haven't happened. (Informal Discussion: Esrom Hlophane, 2/08/2017. Former FTSS 2014–2020)

It should be noted that NUMSA allows non-NUMSA members to attend their union general meetings because they view it as an opportunity to recruit members. One FTSS said, "Because you will find that there is someone who was not interested in joining NUMSA, but by attending the meeting she can decide to join NUMSA, then it becomes sort of a recruitment drive for us" (Interview: Lawrence Modise, 17/10/2019).

The impasse over the nomination of FTSSs stalled the election process and meant that the FTSSs were currently functioning with an expired mandate in union terms. It is noteworthy that when the plant closed on 6 December 2019, the elections had not taken place, and the FTSSs were still in their positions. They were in their office for six months after their mandate

had expired. I am of the view that this undermined internal democracy and worker control and highlighted the weak accountability structures within the union in the plant. In a normal situation, workers would have questioned the retention of FTTSs after their term had ended and would have forced an election. The FTSSs petitioned the local office as well as the national office in a quest to challenge the election process they argued was flawed.

One FTSS noted that the process that unfolded was an escalation because both the local and regional offices had upheld the nomination, and hence the aggrieved FTSSs escalated the matter to the national level. One may ask why the FTSSs wanted to hold onto these positions and did not want to respect the democratic processes that had unfolded. One FTSS explained:

> Come the day you are not elected; you are at the forefront of causing havoc against the same union. Like is currently happening the majority of our guys (current FTSS) are not nominated and since June there has not been an election at BMW, because the same guys that are not nominated are blocking elections. They're saying the process was flawed and blah, blah, and you check it because they're not nominated; they are buying time. So, you can imagine if a person has to go back to the production line, how frustrated they're going to be. (Interview: Thabo Mogoroe, 27/07/2019. NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

This is linked to the findings that revealed that the FTSSs perceive themselves as office workers, which elevates their social status. The perks that are associated with these positions also exacerbate the matter because not being elected means losing these union benefits. The FTSS office provides some form of luxury and comfort rather than repetitive and routine production work. This may also explain the stalemate encountered in the FTSS elections. When the FTSSs faced the possibility of not being re-elected, they became anxious and hence, the election process at BMW was stalled. This is possibly linked to the comfort of their office and their subsequent reluctance to return to the production line. One may deduce that the FTSSs at BMW undermined the democratic principles for their own selfish interests.

It is noteworthy that FTSS, besides the comfort of the office, are also afforded other resources, including a cash allowance, BMW car, travel and other luxuries that are not available to ordinary workers. One may deduce that these perks influence FTSS' refusal to leave the office and return to the line as one of the factors of their refusal and protest. Hence, it is imperative the trade union come up with innovative ways of dealing with the issue of FTSSs who are not re-elected. A *soft-landing* strategy is one option that should be considered so that democratic processes such as elections of FTSSs are not undermined by FTSSs who are not nominated. Jane Barret, a former union official, contended:

> Because people get wedded to the salaries rather than the job, then what happens when you lose your elections? Because if you lose your position then you go back to your (previous) grade (prior to being elected a FTSS). In Transnet (SATAWU), we negotiated what we called the *soft landing.* It was sort of a process where you were not overnight reduced to your previous grade, but you held that grade but didn't get increases for a while. But it is a real problem if you have an FTSS whose salary is way above any of the members. That person would want to hold on for dear life. They're going to buy a house, a car and they will get into debt and they will need to service that debt. So, they are going to want to hang on to these positions like crazy and are going to create a fight in the union. (Interview: Jane Barret, 28/09/2018)

The *soft-landing* strategy could be a solution to deal with the incumbents who put up resistance when they are not re-elected. Rather, it would provide some form of relief, in particular, financial relief. The challenge is that these positions can be employed for upward mobility and viewed as some form of promotion and would not motivate incumbents to service workers so that they are re-elected, because they guaranteed some sort of *soft-landing.* Even if they are not re-elected, they would have to gain some remuneration increase linked to the position, which they could retain after being an FTSS. However, it may affect their commitment to service members. FTSSs losing their positions and returning to the line was noted by the FTSSs as a serious hindrance for the new FTSSs that are elected to execute their tasks because former FTSSs discredit the new incumbents so that they can continue serving as FTSSs. A current FTSS explained:

> Former FTSS contributed they were angry that they were not coming back to the office (not re-elected) they are feeding the comrades (workers) with the wrong information. (Interview: Alpheus May, 12/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

This was further elaborated on by a former NUMSA official:

> You mobilise and win, but for that period, there is no work done by the union because the union is busy extinguishing fires. You also find those who are elected for four years don't have a chance to work because they also must defend themselves against that group. What I am saying is that in that way, the trade union loses focus, but management wins in most cases. Whilst we are busy fighting, management is busy implementing policies without consulting you because you are busy fighting your own battles while management changes policies bit-by-bit. (Interview: Mike Fushane, 03/10/2019: Former NUMSA Rosslyn Local Organiser)

This clearly highlights the dangers that former FTSSs pose to the union when they lose their positions. They tend to become the union's enemy as they rebel and revolt, which has an impact on the union's work. The FTSSs at BMW highlighted incidences of former FTSSs who were even trying to introduce AMCU in a bid to become FTSSs again. But this failed as by the time I finished the research work NUMSA was still the only union in the plant. This demonstrates the serious implications of these former FTSSs to the union. Thus, I argue that the union should consider ways of dealing with former FTSSs, who might turn against the union and derail its work when they are not re-elected.

Former FTSSs use petitions as a tactic and a way of discrediting the incumbent FTSSs or removing them because they want access to the perks that are associated with these positions. Employers are the major beneficiaries of these infightings and petitions as the work of the union is stalled. A former NUMSA official explained how petitions were abused by former FTSS to get rid of new FTSSs:

> Initially, when there was a petition, you were removed, but now the union said 'No, no, we will investigate' because of the fact that the petition system was abused by some for personal benefit and to remove others from office. Someone (usually former FTSSs) who wants that allowance (of being an FTSS) or who wants that car can generate a petition, who wants the time-off, who

> wants to leave the labour process. (Interview: Alex Mashilo, 19/04/2019. Former NUMSA Head of OCCB)

The petitioning by former FTSSs is done to retain the elevated social status that is associated with the position; hence, workers fight for these positions so that they can continue to have access to these perks and resources. Mike Fushane argued the petitions that he had investigated in the union were related to access to resources that FTSSs are afforded:

> I always say that we must appreciate that trade unionism in our days is quite different from trade unionism prior to 1994 because post-1994 things changed. In some cases, you might find out that petitions are not only about accountability but also about access to resources. You will find that there is a revolt against an FTSS, and when you investigate, you will find that revolt is not tangible—safe to say that everyone wants to access the car, and everyone wants to access the laptop, and everyone wants to access that office. That's why I am saying that, in many cases, there are no genuine cases against FTSSs. Safe to say that access to resources became a phenomenon. (Interview: Mike Fushane, 03/10/2019: Former NUMSA Rosslyn Local Organiser)

These petitions against FTSS then are used as stop-gap measures to retain the resources associated to these position and as some form of recourse. I postulate that because of the resources associated with the positions and the status associated with the FTSS, they become not only a stratum in the workforce but also a class of some sort, a class-in-the-making, Hence it becomes difficult to let go of the positions when not re-elected as one loses all the associated resources and benefits. Therefore, these positions offer space for class mobility and upward mobility. Hence, they want to cling to these positions, which bring a change in their class orientation and general outlook on life, coupled with elevated social status and a sense of importance. They also cannot imagine what they will do after being an FTSS as they definitely do not consider returning to the line but being placed elsewhere in the company or union. Thus, being an FTSS is a stepping stone and affords opportunities for upward mobility. None of the FTSSs who were interviewed indicated that they would return to the line if they were not re-elected, but rather, they envisaged a future outside the plant or being in management roles

because their term in office had been an opportunity to acquire the necessary skills for upward mobility.

A former union official was explicit that one of the solutions is to negotiate for former FTSSs not to return to the line but to be absorbed by management. He argued:

> [t]hat is one issue we must look at and make sure that when an FTSS is removed, he does not go back to the line. At least he must go up because when he goes back, there is grief that goes with leaving that office. As a result, that person goes down and mobilises workers. (Interview: Mike Fushane, 03/10/2019: Former NUMSA Rosslyn Local Organiser)

He added that this will deal with the grief that is part of losing the position of an FTSS, which makes them bitter. One may ask why the grief if you were genuinely serving workers. The pride should be in the fact that you were given an opportunity to serve your fellow workers, but as noted previously, the status, perks and resources that are associated with these positions explain the grief. The cars are a major contributor to this resistance and revolt from FTSSs, who are not re-elected and have to return to the line because of the social status that is associated with driving a BMW car.

Social downgrading: The pain of an FTSS returning to the production line

Esrom Hlophane's life history is illustrative of the frustration of being an FTSS and then returning to the line of production after failing to secure re-election. Esrom was a 34-year-old male from a working-class family in Ga-Rankuwa. His highest qualification was Matric. He started working at BMW through an apprenticeship programme and then in the plant in 2012 as a fixed-term contract worker. Prior to joining BMW, he worked in the hospitality sector as a barman and was unfairly dismissed. He argued that this is what propelled him and ignited his love and passion for politics, in particular, trade union politics:

> The thing that got me involved in the movement (trade unions) is because in my previous job (in the hospitality sector), I was unceremoniously dismissed, and I didn't have

> representation and didn't know much about my rights as an employee. So, as soon as I was employed at BMW, one of the things I wanted to conscientise myself with was to know my rights and the LRA … And wanted to assist those who were in trouble, and that's how I got involved, and luckily, I was one of the democratically elected FTSSs. (Interview: Esrom Hlophane, 26/09/2018. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

He attributed his election, as an FTSS, to his passion and love for serving and representing workers. This explains his rise in the trade unions because his passion was recognised by the workers, and hence, he was elected to the position in 2014, two years after starting at BMW. He was a true activist and eager to represent workers as an FTSS and was popular amongst both young and old workers.

Prior to being elected as an FTSS, he was an operator in the line of production (fondly known as *the line)* assembling cars. He recalled:

> I was eager to learn, and I was gradually making my way up. … When I started, I was doing parcel shelving and speaker assembling; I just did many things, even putting up windscreens. I was doing general assembly work; hence, I am saying I was just eager to learn as much as I can. (Interview: Esrom Hlophane, 26/09/2018. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

As a line worker, he encountered the brute wrath of capitalist exploitation as a manual labourer on the line and was not in any supervisory or foreman role. He further noted that he was elected as an FTSS when his main function on the line was to install "windscreens and was on entry Level 2 in terms of the AMIC levels of the salary band which I am still there." He remembered what unfolded on the day of the election:

> I didn't know that there was a general meeting, and I was just walking to the gym. It is the first time I am sharing this, and I ran across Tumelo Nyatama (who was also elected as FTSS), who said, 'Comrade, where you are going, there is an election happening today; let's go.' And that's how I went to the meeting; I knew about the meeting, but I never found interest or knew that I would be elected. And I don't know whether to call it fate or what? (Interview: Esrom Hlophane, 26/09/2018. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

On that day in 2014, he was elected as an FTSS and assumed the office thereof and expected life to change for the better. Prior to being elected as an FTSS, he was a fixed-term contract worker and was elected by fixed-term workers who perceived him to be a fit candidate to represent them. He continued to be a fixed-term contract worker from 2014 until 2016, when his contract ended.

> But after a few months then the contract ended, and the same applies to other associates, who were given contract extensions and not all of us, but we were made permanent. There was a conversion; there were those that were converted to be permanent, and others got contract extensions. (ibid)

He did not dispute that his position as an FTSS might have assisted him in being made permanent in the plant. I am of the view this is one of the benefits afforded to FTSSs. FTSSs are at the forefront of negotiating with management for permanent positions and can use their influence to negotiate such for themselves in the process. He admitted that becoming permanent had created problems and divisions amongst the fixed-term contract workers:

> The permanenting part created a lot of divisions like really there were comrades who were with us, and when we first came in (the plant), we came in together. And of course, we were from different technologies, but we came together and when they had to do the permanenting, ja it created a lot of divisions. There were those that said, 'I came before so and so, why is this person given a permanent post.' Even though you were not given a permanent post, you were given an extension. But people wanted job security … It created that division. (Interview: Esrom Hlophane, 26/09/2018. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

He also noted his luck:

> I was lucky enough to form part of that contingent that was given permanency, but they had a selection criterion of which I fell in, and there were others that fell off the wagon. But it is one of those things; you cannot always have things your way. (Interview: Esrom Hlophane, Interview 26/09/2018. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

These divisions are understood in the context of South Africa with high levels of unemployment, with the expanded unemployment, which stood at 44% in 2021, according to

Stats SA (Statistics South Africa, Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) Q2:2021). Security of tenure is important to those who find employment. Thus, the frustrations of those who did not get permanent posts are understood. Giving a fixed-term FTSS a permanent post could have also fuelled the divisions and frustrations of those who were sidelined. There was no clear data on what happened to those whose contracts were extended regarding whether they eventually got a permanent post or were released after their contracts had expired.

The FTSSs also received certain benefits, which included a 10% allowance. They argued that the allowance was linked to skills acquisitions:

> Now, after being elected, I now acquire the office in terms of my work as an FTSS (being a full-time office worker) doing FTSS work and no longer working on the line. …The only thing that changed is getting a 10% (cash) allowance on top of my normal pay because of the skills that you are acquiring and applying. (ibid)

It is relevant how Esrom Hlophane defined the 10% allowance and how it is linked to skills. These skills distinguish the FTSS from the normal workers because they are afforded an opportunity to acquire certain skills to execute their work as an FTSS. I am of the opinion that these skills elevate their status as they start to perceive themselves as better than the normal workforce who do line production work and use it to justify the 10% monthly allowance that is attached to their positions.

Esrom Hlophane was one of the FTSSs who enjoyed the social status that came with the position. He was not afraid to voice his excitement and acknowledged the privileges that come with being an FTSS, which included driving a car and *rubbing shoulders* with senior management. The upward social mobility he enjoyed as an FTSS was however short-lived, as in 2020, he was not re-elected and he became very dejected. This is understandable because the privileges he had enjoyed would end, and he would have to return to the line and

manufacturing cars. This is a form of downward social mobility that I refer to as social downgrading.

Social downgrading occurs when the upward social mobility someone has enjoyed is reversed, and one returns to where they were before; in this instance, FTSSs return to their original jobs. Thus, Esrom Hlophane, who experienced social downgrading, vowed never again to take up an elected position such as that of an FTSS, which elevates someone's social status and offers upward social mobility when a mere election can lead to social downgrading. Esrom, expressed his frustrations and vowed not to accept an elected position again, because he believed elected positions, unlike appointed ones, were not judged by performance. He felt betrayed by his fellow workers and members because he perceived himself as a committed FTSS:

> And, of course, all of us are saddened about what happened [not being nominated as FTSSs], and I assure you, Musa, [that] I will never put myself in an elected position because elected positions differ from appointed positions. When you are appointed, you will be given tasks that you must do this and this and that, and when you perform those tasks, it means your job is done. In an elected position, even if you perform or outperform your peers, come the end of your term–your position is not guaranteed. (Interview: Esrom Hlophane, 05/03/2020. Former FTSS 2014-2020)

The former FTSS was saddened that despite his hard work in the office and even representing workers, defending them at the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA), his performance was not recognised. Instead, new people with no experience were elected. He shared:

> That feeling is not a nice feeling. I worked my butt off, and I have done conciliation, I have done arbitration at the CCMA. I am telling you about comrades in that office who are doing their fourth term now. They have never done a single conciliation or an arbitration or represented anyone at CCMA. They do not know how the CCMA works. But I have done that, and I enjoyed it, and I have won cases. (Interview: Esrom Hlophane, 05/03/2020. Former FTSS 2014-2020)

Consequently, he vowed never to stand for any elected position again because his hard work was not rewarded or recognised. Regardless of how effective FTSSs have been in the work place, they can be removed in a democratic process. However, those who have mastered the game of being an FTSS and know how to work the ground are re-elected during every election without doing much work, because after all the FTSS positions also involve some form of politics and political tactics.

Political tactics include covert campaigning and lobbying members to vote for one to these positions, and they also include factions and voting as a bloc or slate politics. One may thus question how workers are elected. Are they elected on merit, or through networks, or factional lines, or through slates? The latter appears to be the case. These networks are then fused in the democratic processes of the trade union and worker control, influencing who workers think are suitable to represent their interests when there is an election—regardless of experience and effort.

The danger of an elected position is that there is no certainty of re-election, even though they offer some form of upward mobility. One is not judged based on performance, but worker control in the unions takes precedence. However, at times, there can be misguided worker control. It can also be the result of manipulated processes, as was argued by the ousted FTSSs in the 2020 election process. Moreover, it is easier to oust someone in an elected union position than in an appointed company employment position. The will of the members prevails regardless of an FTSS' hard work and efforts. Esrom Hlophane recalled a story of a veteran FTSS who was ousted after having served the union for years with absolute dedication:

> I am grateful that I was elected, but prior to that, there have been stalwarts who served for decades, people like comrade Mohajane, who had institutional memory of the trade union, and those guys loved NUMSA with a passion; they have served with passion. But still, workers said, 'No Mohajane, we want new blood; we want new guys,' so that whole nomination process

> and worker control and whether it takes the union backwards as the new guys have to be trained and understand the dynamics, it doesn't matter. (Interview: Esrom Hlophane, 05/03/2020. Former FTSS 2014-2020)

The veteran FTSS, David Mohajane also attested to the fact that he was removed in office having served NUMSA with distinction but accepted the democratic processes and worker control that removed him. Noting that:

> I was very passionate in this position of being a shop steward, very passionate, and others would tell you that: I was, God sent, it is just they realized that after one is gone and they say, 'Hey we had a very strong FTSS'. Right now I cannot just go pass comrades without them saying 'Hey comrade can you come and assist we regret not electing you.' I told them that 'No, no comrades leadership comes and goes, it was my time to go.' (Interview: David Mohajane, 6/10/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

Saying that he could not impose himself on the members because of his experience and institutional memory. Worth noting is the fact that these worker control processes also include political tactics and campaign, are political in nature, and include slates and factional politics. This underlines the nature of worker control that prevails in the union, and regardless of the number of years that one has served, workers have the right to elect whoever they see fit for the position. Thus, stalwarts and veterans can be ousted and removed from office through the democratic processes. Elected positions are acquired by a show of hands rather than by performance appraisal or an assessment of capacity. The cry from almost all the ousted FTSS was that the process was manipulated:

> What I can say is that the nomination process was choreographed. It was so systematic that they picked this one, and this one will pick that other group. That's my own assessment. There was even a guy who stood up and went and grabbed the mike from the guy who was responsible for the roving mike. And he said, 'Hey, I also want to nominate; why are you only picking that group and that group?' (Interview: Esrom Hlophane, 05/032020. Former FTSS 2014-2020)

The ousted FTSS believed what happened in the election nomination process was planned and the union constitution had been disregarded. One recalled:

> The nomination process did not go well, and we were challenging that because the issue is that you cannot elect or be elected without being a union member in good standing … the union constitution does not allow it. But people just bridged it deliberately, and it was something that was planned there, and we do not know what they wanted to achieve. Because, you know, as we are sitting here, we can decide that we want to oust so and so and say, 'Let's do this and that. This is the plan', and you will find that it works accordingly. (Interview: Marvin Molefe, 07/03/2020. 2020 Former FTSS)

Thus, the comrades decided to challenge the election process because it was flawed. They contended that the nomination process did not follow the NUMSA constitution but instead bridged it. The local, regional, and national offices overlooked this and allowed the election to continue. Although the former FTSS accepted going back to the line, their fight, the legal challenge against the flouting of the NUMSA constitution, was based on principle. They wanted the union to uphold its constitution to the letter rather than allow irregularities to continue and set a poor precedent for future generations. This is an example of the contestation that unfolds on the shop floor related to the positions of FTSS because of the prestige and status associated with them. The election stalemate at BMW is thus linked to factionalism, which can be deduced from their accounts. However, this was underpinned by other possible reasons, specifically by the upward social mobility that these positions afforded some of those elected to occupy them. Failure to secure re-election meant downward social mobility as they had to return to the production line, which by its nature is social downgrading.

Furthermore, one of the major reasons for the source of contestation was that FTSSs are not involved in production work, as highlighted in the preceding chapters. The comfort of the FTSS office leads to high levels of contestation for the positions. Some of those who are in office, as well as some those who are not but want to ascend to the office, fight to hold on, on the one

hand, or to ascend, on the other, to the office. While those fighting to hold on to the office do not want to be relegated to the production line, those fighting to ascend to the office want to leave the production line and seek upward social mobility.

The shock of returning to the production line

The will of the people and worker control prevail in the trade union movement as workers in elections employ their power and elect who they deem fit. The elections of 2020 at the BMW plant were such an example of a significant exodus of FTSSs, as six of the nine FTSSs were not re-elected. Workers exercised their democratic rights. This was disappointing and frustrating for some of the FTSSs, who felt that this was unjust as they felt that they had exceeded expectations and outperformed some of the FTSSs that were retained. However, the will of the workers prevailed. This reveals that worker control still exists in the trade union movement, especially at the plant level. Even though the protesting FTSS noted that they were politically out- manoeuvred hence the argument was that the election process was a sham.

The difficulty for the FTSSs is that they have to return to their previous jobs in the production line and lose the perks and social status associated with these positions. The accumulated social status that comes with the position is eroded, and thus, those who had to return to the line voiced their discomfort and frustration. Some shared that not being re-elected destabilised them because they had to readjust to rotational shifts. Second, there were financial implications associated with losing the FTSS allowance and the guaranteed overtime. Losing the perks and benefits associated with the position included no longer having access to the BMW, which was a source of transport. They now had to provide their own transport to travel to and from work, which had cost implications. Third, they lost the education opportunities that are granted to FTSS, and if they wanted to pursue their studies, they would have to pay for it themselves.

They would also not have sufficient time to focus on their studies. These were the frustrations experienced with going back to the line and being an ordinary worker again.

The social degradation that is associated with not being re-elected as an FTSS is one of the major shocks that those FTSSs who were not elected to their positions had to confront. Capitalist production, by its very nature, is not pleasant, and the introduction of new technology, as in the case of BMW, results in intensity and long hours in the work process (see Hlatshwayo, 2014; Mashilo, 2019; Webster et al., 2009). Braga (2012), in his work on the post-Fordist call centre industry in Brazil, notes the intensity of the work in the new age of technology but also the pressurised working hours associated with the work. According to Magoqwana and Matatu (2012), work has become more routinised and individualised with a very high level of monitoring or surveillance and supervision. This increases the intensity of the work with serious supervision, putting extreme pressure on the workers; in the case of BMW, this is marked by their first-right principle and high level of quality control. Workers in the assembly line are under severe pressure to get things right the first time, with serious consequences if they do not. FTSSs are exempt from the latter, the highly routinised work and surveillance, but the failure of re-election implies a return to this unpleasant situation.

Production line work is not pleasant. It is routinised and repetitive with less creativity; hence, a worker uses every opportunity available to escape exploitation on the production line. An opportunity that offers prospects for upward social mobility, such as an FTSS position, is thus lucrative and contested because it is also a route to escape capitalist exploitation on the production line, that is, the brute wrath of capitalist exploitation. Therefore, there is fierce competition for these positions and democratic processes that cause some of these FTSSs to be rejected. One FTSS noted the revolt by former FTSSs who made their job difficult by lobbying and organising against the incumbent FTSS:

> Usually, when you are not re-elected as an FTSS, rather than taking it as a man, you revolt because you believe that maybe you should be there, and why are you not there? That is the trend that I see. So, these people they're always disruptive in our meetings. (Interview: Marvin Molefe, 21/07/2017. 2020 Former FTSS)

This is a clear example of how when some FTSSs are not elected for fear of returning to the line and the hardships associated with it, they can mobilise in another formation in a bid to contest the incumbent FTSS and return to office. Hence the need for FTSSs that are not re-elected to demobilise to avoid these tensions as posited by the ER Manager:

> What the union has failed to do is to demobilise people who are not re-elected as FTSSs, they lose office and there is no demobilisation, they continue to be an unelected leadership on the shop floor. So, it becomes a competition between the elected and the un-elected leadership because they both have knowledge, experience and expertise and then it becomes a competition, '*I want to prove that I can do better than them (the incumbents)'.* So, in the meetings, in the general meetings, you are not contributing constructively, you contribute to prove a point that *'the current FTSS are failing you and I can do better'*. (Interview: Peter Dantjie, 26/08/2018. ER Manager at BMW)

This highlights the fact that leadership positions and that of FTSSs are a contested terrain and hence people want to hang on to power at all costs. It is evident that the comfort of the office and the perks associated with the position, as well as the anxiety associated with losing the latter, leads to the FTSS wanting to contest to retain office. An FTSS also shared that ambition and self-interests associated with upward social mobility are further reasons for their revolt when not re-elected:

> It is the ambition of some of these FTSSs if you serve for a term and you are not re-elected, instead of saying, 'Look in this position, people were there before me, and I served, and I can't serve anymore there are people who must come in now.' Instead of supporting them, you start to revolt against them, and the reason, as I have said, is because you are a bad loser. You want to lead, but you cannot be led. (Interview: Marvin Molefe, 07/03/2020. 2020 Former FTSS)

Marvin Molefe added:

> It's the issue of leadership. Sometimes when you taste it you do not want to relinquish it and it is natural, you know what I mean, in the politics of today, everywhere else you start as a very good leader, and you become a dictator and you want to stay forever. (ibid)

Another FTSS noted that leadership is always a contested terrain, hence there are always internal fights and squabbles. They noted:

> But you know very well that where there is leadership there are squabbles, there are conflicts, there are personal interests, You know them very well about those things, and that's where it creates some kind of a problem. (Interview: Paul Mogano. 17/10/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

This is associated with positions of power where people do not want to accept defeat. Rather, they mobilise to destabilise the newly elected incumbents and frustrate them instead of supporting them and offering help. This explains the fierce contests in these leadership positions as an FTSS further argued, "Naturally if you have tasted power, it is difficult to relinquish that power" (Interview: Marvin Molefe, 07/03/2020. 2020 Former FTSS). The FTSS positions promise a better future and opportunities for upward mobility. Consequently, those who occupy them want to use them as a stepping stone and do not want to return to the line. Thus, there are fierce fights and competition for these positions because of the resources and perks provided and the social status associated with them. They are perceived as important people both in their communities and the plant. Thus, when these FTSS are not elected, they may experience social downgrading.

As highlighted previously, those who work on the line are subjected to the real wrath of capitalist exploitation and taking orders from managers and foremen. They are engaged in routine work, unlike the FTSS, who are stationed in air-conditioned offices. The challenge of the 2020 elections should be understood in this context. Individual FTSSs are able to pursue

other careers or have businesses outside the workplace while being employed as an FTSS. As noted by Vuyokazi the FTSS position not only allowed her to pursue her studies but also to explore other sources of income and business opportunities. This also was the case for other FTSSs, including Kenny Majozi, who was later involved in the solar panel business, and Alpheus May in small-scale farming—all while being FTSSs.

The concerned group agreed that they were going to challenge the outcomes of the election and convened a legal team to challenge the union in the Labour Court to ratify the flouting of its constitution at BMW. The leader of the concerned FTSSs noted:

> Now, as we speak, we are talking to attorneys. They just want money, and we are busy trying to organise the money with the other comrades. This is just based on principle. I don't want to be treated like trash. Yes, the elections came, and they are gone, but the issue is that if we let this thing go away, it could happen again. It will set (a wrong) precedent, and people in the future will say, 'No, it happened here in front of everyone. It was accepted, and nothing was wrong.' So, this is not okay. So, we are going ahead with the lawyers to see whether we are right or wrong, and if they are wrong, we will see what they do. We are ignored right now. Because they were supposed to come to us and say, 'Hey comrades, let's solve this thing organisationally,' we don't have to go to courts. It should be the last resort to go that route. (Interview: Marvin Molefe, 07/03/2020. Former FTSS 2010-2020)

This legal challenge was going ahead in the court because all the internal discussions and interventions in the union, including at local and regional levels, as well as the national office, agreed with the process that unfolded, ordered that the elections continue and gave a date. The comrades felt aggrieved. Consequently, they decided to take the matter to the court because they were also disappointed that the matter could not be resolved inside the union by its structures. The concerned FTSSs raised a key issue: that their legal action was meant to assist NUMSA, and avoid setting a wrong precedent and causing future problems. They emphasised that they were not fighting for their positions as FTSSs. They argued further that even if they

won the case, they would not stand if new elections took place because this was a matter of principle, namely, the protection of the union's constitution rather than a self-serving agenda.

One FTSS asserted:

> I was telling the other comrades (the Concerned Six Plus One) that even if this thing is reversed, I will not stand for election and the six of you, please do not stand for election. Decline nomination, but you would have shown the organisation that this is how we need to operate. We are not just doing this, but every organisation has its own constitution, and it must be adhered to. (Interview: Marvin Molefe, 07/03/2020. Former FTSS 2010-2020)

It was evident that the comrades were not worried about the outcome of the election or going back to the production line to work like all workers who are not shop stewards. They accepted their fate of returning to their old roles as plant and production workers.

"Di a bowa daar": The intensity and toughness of the production line work

When the hard-working Esrom Hlophane was not re-elected as an FTSS, which he experienced as painful, he felt betrayed by the workers. He argued that he had served with absolute dedication but was pollitically out-manoeuvred. However, the will of the workers and worker control took over, as in all democracies, the will of the people prevailed. He had to return to the line of production, to the same department and become an assembly worker. He thus argued:

> Now I am back on the production line and working where I used to work. I'm very good already. I can't say that I am enjoying it because it is labour intensity (wrath of capitalism exploitation), but I like the fact I can rely on my team. There's reliability on the team, and there are no hiccups. (Interview: Esrom Hlophane, 05/03/2020. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

Workers want to escape the intensity or the exploitative nature of the labour process on the production line and become an FTSS to enjoy a level of freedom by those who are not involved

in direct production line work. FTSSs escape the wrath of capitalist exploitation of the production line, as explained in Chapter 4. The intense labouring hardship on the production line is real. One FTSS highlighted the difficulty other former FTSSs experience when they have to adjust to the production line:

> He is fine. He went back to where he came from, logistics, in Body Shop, but he is complaining. He says, '*Di a bowa daar, Bra* Marvin [*Di a bowa* is a Sepedi/Setswana proverbial expression for 'It is hard there' ('difficult' or 'tough'), *daar* is an Afrikaans word for 'there' in English, while Bra is a colloquial form of the word 'brother' in English or '*broer*' in Afrikaans]. So, he says, 'It's tough there.' I said, in my reply, 'No. It is fine. You will get used to this. Just hang in there.' And I know it, for sure, because it is not the first time for me to go back to the line from being an FTSS. (Interview: Marvin Molefe, 07/03/2020. 2020 Former FTSS)

He elaborated further:

> Maybe the issue is that we become too comfortable in the FTSS office, and perhaps we should negotiate with the company that if you serve two terms as FTSS, because some of the things in the line have changed drastically, then let them use your knowledge and experience for other things. (Interview: Marvin Molefe, 07/03/2020. 2020 Former FTSS)

The comfort of the office is a reason FTSSs want to stay in the office for extended periods of time. When not re-elected, they feel the real difference when they are demoted to the line of production and become ordinary workers and engage in labour intense work. The status and comfort that are part of the FTSS office are, therefore, also linked not only to upward social mobility but to avoiding the hardships of intense exploitative labouring on the production line, that is, for those who came from the production line. It is noteworthy that not everyone suffers the same fate. Some FTSSs who are not re-elected are deployed to easier and less intensive tasks. Marvin Molefe, for instance, was given a *soft landing* on the line.

Career pathing and *soft landing* of FTSSs

The FTSSs were all in agreement that FTSSs who are not re-elected should be *strategically deployed* in the workplace. Furthermore, the FTSSs proposed career pathing of FTSSs, which ensures that when an FTSS is not elected, they are given a *soft landing* in the production line rather than being sent back to the original jobs they occupied prior to being elected as an FTSS. The argument for career pathing was premised on the experience and knowledge FTSSs gain while in office. This is linked not only to acquired labour/industrial relations skills that either get wasted or are not used when one goes back to the line but also to upward mobility. A *soft landing* may be regarded as career pathing. The line is a labour-intensive process to which they have to re-orientate themselves in the event they are not re-elected. If advanced, the talk of career pathing could increase the turnover of FTSSs as they would use these positions as a stepping stone for greener pastures. Chinguno (2012) stated that there are FTSSs who develop a tendency not to represent workers, and thus, social distance emerges between them and their constituencies.

Should career pathing be adopted specifically for FTSSs as a union or company policy, it could have the effect of opening the space for the office to be employed as a stepping stone for upward social mobility. Some of those elected to these FTSS positions would be guaranteed that if they were not re-elected, they would never return to the line. This could affect their service to members negatively. Servicing of members could become secondary as some of those elected as FTSS would be guaranteed employment elsewhere with the exception of the line, regardless of their service and performance to members, which should be the yardstick of whether one is elected or re-elected as an FTSS. Buhlungu (2010) and Chinguno (2012) noted that these positions would be used as a stepping stone. The union would, therefore, be employed for career advancement or careerism.

The notion that FTSSs have to return to the line if they do not service their constituencies may be viewed as healthy for accountability, specifically for keeping FTSSs in touch with members in their respective constituencies and not looking for positions and upward social mobility. However, for this accountability mechanism to work, weaknesses in the election and re-election of FTSSs have to be addressed. For instance, what the BMW NUMSA's *Concerned Six Plus One* raised is a serious indictment, that is, being elected or re-elected as a shop steward was not based on an assessment of one's capacity to serve workers and, to that end, performance appraisal. The two attributes, performance and capacity to serve members, are ignored, particularly in a situation characterised by the BMW NUMSA's *Concerned Six Plus One* because *manipulated worker control* or flawed electoral processes were underpinned by cabalism or factionalism.

Career pathing affords opportunities for FTSS positions to be employed for upward social mobility. However, Buhlungu and Tshoaedi (2012), as well as Masondo (2012), revealed that it has become accepted by the trade unions for shop stewards to be promoted to management positions. However, what happened to the six FTSSs at BMW suggests otherwise. Even though theorists have contended that the position of shop steward and FTSS are at times taken advantage of by some of those who are elected to occupy them, the BMW case and evidence reveal a different picture that should be considered as well.

The FTSSs may have assumed the positions to further their narrow self-interests of upward social mobility and promotions, but, on the contrary, they returned to the line after they were not re-elected. Moreover, they decided not to make themselves available for re-election while challenging what they perceived as a disregard of the union's constitution and a flawed election. The evidence suggests that even though these FTSSs may have had upward social mobility ambitions, as argued by some of the incumbent FTSSs, some indeed did have such

ambitions and did not want to lose their positions. Thus, they felt politically betrayed by both the workers and incumbent FTSSs. However, there are not enough positions in management to accommodate all FTSSs. Only a few gain promotion when the opportunity arises. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that some of the FTSSs who were not re-elected believed fervently that their positions advantaged them for promotion opportunities, and they were confident that if promotion opportunities arose, they would benefit as well.

"You know how bad it is that you leave a leadership position": The impact of social downgrading.

Marvin Molefe was a 57-year-old male from Ga-Rankuwa and one of the longest-serving members on the FTSS Committee, having started working at BMW in 1994. He had an institutional memory of the trade union in the plant. Consequently, the young FTSSs perceived him as their mentor, one whom they relied on for advice on how things were conducted. He commanded respect from both the workers and the FTSSs and served as the deputy chairperson of the FTSS Committee at BMW. As the senior FTSS, he was known affectionately as Bra Marvin (and referred to as such in this thesis), which demonstrates the respect he commanded. Workers also trusted him, and ordinarily, they would want to talk to, and be represented by him, because of his experience.

In the assembly line, Bra Marvin worked at the engine plant. He joined NUMSA in 1994, the year he was first employed at BMW and was elected as a part-time shop steward within a year. He recalled how he became a shop steward:

> And within a year (after starting at BMW), I was elected as a shop steward and stayed in the office for two terms until my constituency was dissolved and had to go to the trim shop and worked there at the trim shop for almost three years, and I was elected again as a part-time shop steward. By then, we only had two FTSSs for education and training, and the other one was for IR (industrial relations). (Interview: Marvin Molefe, 21/07/2017. Former FTSS 2016-2020)

He noted that as a part-time shop steward, it was easy to accept not being re-elected as a shop steward because part-time shop stewards were involved in production line work while also representing workers. He shared:

> I served another term and came to other elections, and then I was not elected, but after that, the term lapsed. I was elected again, and since then, I have been serving as an FTSS since 2011. This is my fifth term as a shop steward, but there was a break between the terms. (Interview: Marvin Molefe, 21/07/2017. Former FTSS 2016-2020)

Bra Marvin had experience moving from the line to the shop steward and FTSS positions and back again to the production line and back to being an FTSS. He spoke of the frustrations and disturbances experienced in that these moves affect someone's life plans and career trajectory. He added that this destabilises one, especially planning for one's future. This also reveals that the mobility of the FTSS is not guaranteed and is linked with some anxiety when there are elections because no one's position is guaranteed; rather, one may have to return to the line and suffer social downgrading.

> I know people that came before me and how they were treated when they lost their leadership positions; you know how bad it is that you leave a leadership position and people start talking foul about you. That thing just disorganises you as an individual, that turns your life upside down. (Interview: Marvin Molefe, 07/03/2020. Former FTSS 2016-2020)

This highlights the impact of social downgrading and its consequences in that one's life is changed when you lose a leadership position such as that of being an FTSS, which is associated with some level of prestige and associated perks. Thus, they encounter some form of regression in the sense that the position of FTSS promises and provides some form of upward social mobility and social status because of the benefits that are linked with the position, which include driving a company car, working in an air-conditioned office, getting an FTSS allowance and enjoying education opportunities. All of these are taken away when one is not re-elected. Thus, when not re-elected, regression occurs and adjusting to being an ordinary worker again is difficult. Accordingly, Bra Marvin contended that this turns one's life upside

down. Bra Marvin was also one of the FTSSs who suffered the unfortunate fate of not being re-elected in the 2020 election, after serving five terms as an FTSS. Although he was part of the six FTSSs that challenged the nomination process, he said he would not stand for re-election if they won the appeal. He argued they challenged the process purely on principle and to avoid setting a wrong precedent and he had also advised the other FTSSs not to stand for re-election if they won the case:

> I was telling the other comrades (the concerned six) that 'even if this thing is reversed, I will not stand for election and the six of you please don't stand for elections decline, but you would have shown the organisation that this is how we need to operate.' We are not just doing this, but every organisation has its own constitution, and it must be adhered to." (ibid)

He added that he only had two years left before his retirement and would not stand for re-election. As noted previously, he was happy with his new job because it was less intense. He had been afforded a *soft landing*, even though he faced social downgrading. However, he was more fortunate than the rest of the FTSSs, who returned to their original jobs. Thus, they complained about the intensity of these old jobs, as highlighted previously.

However, returning to the line has disadvantages as FTSSs lose perks linked to the position. However, some, such as Marvin Molefe, are not as negatively impacted as others. With two years left before retirement, management found him less intense work and with guaranteed overtime. Some argued that management rewarded him for a *job well-done as an FTSS.* He confessed that his work was not as difficult as that of the others who had returned to the production line. The problem, as noted by the FTSSs, is that when FTSSs are elected to these positions, their outlook changes, and they start to view themselves as office workers. Thus, they fail to readjust when they are not re-elected because their outlook has changed as they now perceive themselves as important people, office workers with an elevated status. This was the case for May and Mohajana, whose life histories are subsequently detailed. They decided to resign and retire, respectively because they could not readjust to being ordinary workers

after years of service as FTSSs. This can be attributed to the change in their outlook. Worker representatives should identify with the workers to allow them to effectively represent them efficiently and effectively. Furthermore, they should suppress their personal ambitions for upward mobility. Thus, FTSSs who are not re-elected should not find it difficult to return and adjust to the production line because, first and foremost, they are workers and should identify as such.

Resignations and early retirement of FTSSs who are not re-elected for fear of going back to the production line

Molane Alpheus May was a 45-year-old male from Mabopane, in Tshwane, in what was formerly Bophuthatswana. He came from a humble working-class family. He started at BMW in 2011 through a learnership programme and was formally employed in the company in 2015. He was subsequently elected as an FTSS in 2016. He served as a health and safety representative in the company and a negotiator at the National Bargaining Forum (NBF), representing NUMSA.

Molane Alpheus May, fondly known as May (referred to as May in this thesis), was a community activist involved in community struggles related to land restitution. He shared, "I serve in the land claims programme in the rural area where I come from in Mamadisha District" (Interview: Molane Alpheus May, 12/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS at 2016-2020 at BMW). He was also a former ANC member who left the ANC prior to the 2007 Polokwane Conference in protest of the ill-treatment of Thabo Mbeki's supporters. Thabo Mbeki was then the president of South Africa. In 2007, May started a small-scale semi-commercial farming business, which included livestock farming of pigs, goats, sheep, and cattle.

May shared that he had been an activist all his life, and thus, being an FTSS came naturally to him, further noting that he was a *born leader*. He thus explained how he was elected as an FTSS:

> When you are a born leader, one will identify you from a distance. Thus, I never campaigned. I was approached by comrades from different departments, and they asked me, 'Can you stand for this position (of FTSS)?' and I thought about it and then agreed, and I was elected in a general meeting. (Interview: Molane Alpheus May, 12/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS 2016-2020 at BMW)

He says that he accepted the nomination and election as an FTSS after careful consideration because: "I am about serving workers." During my ethnographic research, I observed that it was evident that he cared for workers and did his utmost to represent them. In my research notebook, I wrote, *a true activist and worker leader*.

May emphasised that he was a *rural boy* and thus his humble approach to life. Hence, he did not even drive the BMW pool cars allocated to them as FTSSs:

> Because where I come from, they told me that what is yours is yours, and what's not yours, and don't claim something that is not yours as yours; that background helped me not to get involved in those things of cars. (Interview: Molane Alpheus May, 12/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS 2016-2020 at BMW)

Although he exhibited a humble approach to life, he was very militant on worker issues. He was one of the dedicated FTSSs and set weekly targets for representing workers. He stated:

> There are certain goals that I have set for myself; there is a target that I have set for myself, which is, in a week, I want to assist two workers, one male and one female, if not both genders, at least similar genders. If they have a case, I have won that case; if there are process issues, I have addressed those issues, and they're happy. If it happens that I have not reached that target and I have only assisted one, it haunts me. (Interview: Molane Alpheus May, 12/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS 2016-2020 at BMW)

This illustrates his commitment to the workers. He also argued that losing a case was stressful because it implied that as an FTSS, you had failed the workers and representing workers. In 2020, when the election process unfolded, this committed FTSS was part of the six FTSSs who were not re-elected, and he had to return to the production line. However, because of his business interests and his farming business in particular, he resigned. Returning to the line would mean going back to rotational shift work and being subjected to overtime, including weekends and night shifts. As an FTSS, May worked from 6:00 until 15:00, giving him time to focus on his farming business after work and on weekends. Working shifts would disrupt his business venture, which he was passionate about, and thus, he opted to resign and focus on his business.

The story of May reveals that although the position of FTSS affords a degree of opportunity for upward social mobility, another major benefit they enjoy is their working hours. FTSSs are in a privileged position in terms of working hours and are able to plan their lives accordingly without the disruption of shift work and overtime work. His resignation highlights how the social downgrading that happens when one is not re-elected can lead one to resign because of the disruption to one's life and fear of returning to being an ordinary worker.

This is also illustrated by the story of David Mohajana, who was fondly known as the *veteran shop steward.* He was an FTSS for ten years, from 2006 until 2016, and one of the longest serving FTSSs at BMW, having been elected in the early 1990s first as a part-time shop steward and subsequently an FTSS in 2006. However, in 2016, he was not re-elected as an FTSS and went into negotiation with management for some form of *soft landing* to be a plant educator.

David Mohajana stated that he was not willing to return to the production line because it had changed a great deal. He confessed that it would be difficult for him to go back to the line because "the technology had advanced too much; it was going to be like my first time in the

line" (Interview: David Mohajane, 06/10/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS 2006-2016 at BMW). In essence, he was not willing to return to the production line; he believed he was too old to learn new technologies, and he also qualified for early retirement.

Instead of offering him the position of plant educator, management proposed early retirement and said, "You have reached your early retirement age. We can give you your package" (Interview: David Mohajane, 06/10/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS 2006-2016 at BMW). After considering the offer, he decided to take it. He recalled that although he was still eager to serve the workers, returning to the production line was not an option. He shared:

> I went back and considered their (management) proposal of an early retirement package, and I told myself, 'No, maybe it is time to go.' then I applied for that particular voluntary early retirement, and I retired in 2016 in April. (Interview: David Mohajane, 06/10/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS 2006-2016 at BMW)

He admitted that returning to the production line after being an FTSS for a considerable number of years was a difficult choice. Thus, people consider their options when they have to return to the line because of the hardships and intensity of working on the line. The social downgrading associated thereof is also aggravated by the hardships of manufacturing cars and also losing the benefits attached to the position of being a FTSS, including driving a BMW and the FTSS allowance. Mohajane explained:

> If you are not elected, you will be going back to the production line, and no one wants to move from the office (FTSS office) and back to the production line (laughs). That's our problem— it is tough in the production line, it is very tough and, in the office, especially when you are an FTSS at BMW and most motor companies there are cars—people don't want to move away from those cars. At BMW, it is worse because it is a luxury car. (Interview: David Mohajane, 06/10/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS 2006-2016 at BMW)

The car and the associated social status that accompanies it are among the reasons the FTSSs want to retain their positions. One FTSS thus explained:

> Remember, we have a challenge in the auto companies, especially in these premium auto companies VW, BMW, and Mercedes Benz. We are building cars that we cannot afford to buy. And we have a position that gives a person the fulfilment that 'at least I have driven the car' and that fulfilment can derail a person from fulfilling the purpose of being an FTSS, that's the situation. That is how things are, and you can use those cars for personal use and are seen in a BMW. (Interview: Molane Alpheus May, 12/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS at 2016-2020 at BMW)

Marx (1996) argued that workers in a capitalist society make commodities that they cannot afford, and thus, they are alienated from the products that they make. Being an FTSS gives the worker the opportunity to drive the commodity, in this instance, a BMW. Driving the car was one of the key reasons people wanted to be FTSSs. The difficulty of the production line may explain why someone like May, who has the option of focusing on his business when not re-elected, will opt for the latter rather than returning to the production line. It is significant that FTSSs have other options rather than returning to the line of production when they are not re-elected. Thus, even dedicated FTSSs like May and Mohajane chose the available options of resignation and retirement, respectively, rather than returning to the line of production and becoming ordinary workers when they were not re-elected. The social downgrading associated with returning to the line would disrupt their life.

The main reason why FTSSs, such as May and Mohajane, opt for early retirement or resignation when not re-elected is because there is no *soft landing* or career pathing that guarantees them a better position. Thus, both trade union officials and FTSS supported the career pathing of FTSS, as captured in Chapter 5, to preserve the union's institutional memory and learn from the experience of these former FTTSs. However, career pathing can also have devastating consequences, including the notion of *selling out.*

The promise of career pathing of FTSS is *'basically dangling a carrot for them (FTSSs) to sell out.'*

> I think the options should be more open. There should not be a linear progression for FTSSs. I am sure management would like linear options so that they can further co-opt FTSSs. I cannot imagine FTSSs, who are guaranteed further senior positions in the company and will wholeheartedly serve the constituencies they are meant to serve. You are basically dangling a carrot for them to sell out. That is what you are doing. And very few people given the opportunity to sell out would take the option of servicing members as opposed to the option of selling out. (Interview: Bhabhali Lika Maphikela Nhlapho, 20/09/2019. COSATU Education Secretary)

The COSATU official argued that the promise of position and upward social mobility presented by the position of FTSS leads to FTSSs selling out workers. This is exacerbated by the perks associated with these positions. These perks tend to attract people who are interested in the perks and are not true activists committed to the workers' struggle, as highlighted in Chapter 4. One FTSS contended that the benefits become the *sweetener*:

> What I always say in BMW, and I have conducted elections elsewhere—deployed to go and conduct some elections, is that I see sometimes people decline in other areas when they're nominated or elected to the position. But here at BMW, it is not easy to see a comrade declining because I believe there is a sweetener there. I always say that there is a sweetener, and it is related to driving a flashy car, leaving the line and working in an office. That's my opinion. I still believe that there is a sweetener in these positions. (Interview: Marvin Molefe, 21/07/2017. Former FTSS at BMW)

Another former FTSS added:

> That's why if you go to smaller companies, people don't want to be a shop steward; no one wants to be a shop steward because you become the victim of management, you become frustrated by the complaints of workers. But in the auto industry, because when you become a FTSS, there is a 10 per cent increment of the salary, there is a car allowance, there is an exclusion of working on the line, and you are now in this air-conditioned office, and you start to see it (being an FTSS) as a luxurious thing and a nice thing to have. So, it is more about benefits on the politics of the shop floor more than the representation of workers' interests. (Interview: Katlego Makgaleng, 06/10/2019. Former FTSS 2012-2019 at BMW)

This explains why these positions are highly contested in companies such as BMW. In addition to prospects for an upward social mobility trajectory, there is pressure from intense exploitation on the production line, compelling others to want to leave. Driving a BMW car is viewed as part of being upward mobile, and thus, people fight to be an FTSS in order to drive the cars and the status associated with it.

> Some of them want to be FTSSs because of the resources, which are vehicles, and if you are in these vehicles 24/7, you can't do trade union work; you can't do studies, I must tell you. Because what would then go with those vehicles would be a nice time, and a nice time doesn't pay tomorrow. (Interview: Mike Fushane, 03/10/2019. Former NUMSA Rosslyn Local Organiser)

The FTSS position entices those with personal interests and ambitions for upward social mobility based on the perks, in particular, the car associated with these positions. Those who are elected to these positions have their social standing enhanced. "So, the position of FTSS can also be used as a stepping stone to elections to other positions, and it can be a disadvantage to the union because it can be abused" (Interview: Bhabhali Ka Maphikela, 20/19/2019. COSATU Education Secretary).

This abuse of the position for personal interests contributed to the occurrence of the Marikana massacre (Chinguno, 2012; Sack, 2012; Hartford, 2012; Alexandra, 2012). FTSSs prioritised their own interests and neglected the workers, opening space for social distance. The social distance was created because the self-interest of the FTSSs in the platinum belt took precedence over union members' issues. The workers who went on strike rejected their own union FTSSs, and opted to represent themselves because they saw them as a *sell-out*. This is the paradox of victory that the FTSS movement has brought to the South African trade unions. With all its good intentions of empowering the unions, the positions of FTSSs have come to haunt the union movement. This results in a crisis of trade union representation.

> Many people go into these positions of FTSS with pure interest of making their lives better and not to serve the interests of the workers that they're supposed to serve. So, the perks, yes, do play a role, but it is the generic societal views and feelings that give rise to these particular views amongst FTSSs. By the way, we shouldn't restrict these views to FTSSs alone but union leaders who are not necessarily union FTSS but who are sometimes officials in some instances, they suffer from the same. (Interview: Bhabhali Ka Maphikela, 20/19/2019. COSATU Education Secretary)

In this case, the position of the FTSS is viewed as some form of promotion solely because of the benefits that they are given, as well as the upward mobility opportunities it presents. A senior FTSS contended:

> Eighty to ninety per cent of the individuals who contest for the position of FTSS are not doing so because of honest reasons of wanting to represent the people and betterment of the lives of workers and their benefits but for selfish reasons. (Interview: Thabo Mogoroe, 27/07/2019. NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

Servicing members, which is supposed to be the sole reason people stand for these positions, becomes secondary and is overtaken by upward social mobility by some. This should be understood as an aspect of a transforming society, such as South Africa, where the promise of democracy came with high hopes, especially for former trade union activists who made serious sacrifices for their families. These trade unionists left the union for politics, management, other civil service jobs, and to be frontline managers.

Buhlungu (1994) stated that the reason for this is that union work was not paying that much. He further argued that this was informed by the fact that "[t]he family men or woman of the 1970s and 1980s now had to prove to the family that the sacrifices that they made over the years in the name of the struggle were worthwhile" (Buhlungu 1994: 27). This has set a precedent and informed the general acceptance of trade union members for trade unionist activists and shop floor leaders to be promoted into management and move to government and business. Furthermore, it has become the general trend post-1994. It has influenced the new

generation of trade unionists who view the union as a stepping stone. Buhlungu and Tshoaedi (2012: 14) stated, "[i]n the post-apartheid era, (trade union) activists believe that they also deserve to live a better life and that they should prove in material terms that the sacrifices they made by joining the struggle were not in vain."

Maree noted that "the one thing is that I heard stories of FTSSs being well-off and sitting in air-conditioned offices and driving 4x4s and more like managers than they are worker representatives and managerial in their lifestyle" (Interview: Johan Maree, 02/072018. Labour Scholar). Maree characterised FTSSs as "managerial in their lifestyle" because their lifestyle mirrors that of managers and some become increasingly office bound. This changes not only their outlook but equally their material conditions, as, unlike normal workers who have to take public transport to work, the FTSS now drive to work and back home. Being an FTSS thus places one at the door of being part of the middle class, not by hard work and merit but by being elected by a "show of hands" as noted by an FTSS.

Some FTSSs start perceiving themselves differently from the workers and identify more with the people with whom they always meet, namely, management. One FTSS stated:

> When we are here (FTSS office), we start to see ourselves as exposed to senior management, and we want to impress senior management, forgetting that you are impressing senior management at the expense of workers and the union at large. You say, 'Eh, I am rubbing shoulders with the CEO.' (Interview: Thabo Mogoroe, Interview 27/07/2019. NUMSA FTSS 2014 – 2020 at BMW)

Katlego Makgaleng, a former FTSS elaborated:

> They (FTSS) start to forget what they were elected for and start to represent other interests. Now that you are close to management, you have a feeling that 'I can get a position (promotion) to move out of this office' because BMW comes with those benefits of lease cars, and it is a serious point of interest this thing of lease cars in BMW. (Interview: Katlego Makgaleng, 06/10/2019. Former FTSS 2012-2019 at BMW)

Another FTSS contended:

> The benefit, I would say, is having that luxury of sitting in boardrooms with management, and they would give you the business rationale and tell you how they do things and the direction they want to take the plant. Having to consult and do research, having that leisure of knowledge, harnessing your skill, articulating the members' position, and making sure that everything that is done in the workplace is in compliance with the LRA and the BCEA. That's the benefit of acquiring knowledge and skills and to be at that front row of the business. (Interview: Esrom Hlophane, 05/03/2020. Former NUMSA FTSS 2012-2020 at BMW)

This exposure to management is one that affects the general class outlook of these FTSSs. FTSSs should be conscious of their class positions. They can never be friends with management as they are in opposing class camps. They belong and represent different class interests. This is the dilemma in which FTSSs find themselves. But worth noting is that it is beneficial for the workers to adhere to the labour laws of the country and FTSSs play an important role in this regard and maintain labour peace in the workplace. But equally, these positions can also be manipulated for personal gains and advancement. As one former FTSS noted, these positions are earmarked by others solely for personal advancement. Historically, frontline managers such as team leaders have been recruited from the FTSS office:

> So, most of the FTSSs and even many before our term were taken away (promoted) from being FTSSs to become team leaders (the oldest trick in the book as argued by Masondo 2012 *my illustration*), so it became a trend or a norm that six months or one year down the line they [are] promoted. Even others come to the office of FTSSs with the intention to say, 'I must make sure that before I even get out of the office, I must get the position of a team leader.' That person will start relationships with management and this would not be a beneficial relationship for the workers but a self-interest one, as you are now representing

> your own interests with management. (Interview: Katlego Makgaleng, 06/10/2019 Former NUMSA FTSS 2012-2019 at BMW)

He added:

> Then office tensions start amongst the ten, and now you will start to label the other a sell-out, and another the friend of management, and that small number of FTSS that was meant to run with the vision of the workers, and the interests of the workers, they are now divided. A small number of the ten FTSSs are divided; others represent the interests of workers and their interests and the interests of the company. (ibid)

At BMW, the FTSSs alleged that some of their fellow FTSSs had *sold out* workers and became the eyes and ears of management within the FTSS Committee, which, in turn, weakened the work of the trade union:

> The issue that I have mentioned at the beginning is that being an FTSS doesn't give you leverage to be friends with management; we cannot be friends with management as FTSSs, we can't. Because there are instances where you go to a meeting, and you find one of the managers speaking your language and knowing what you discussed in your meeting as the FTSS committee, and they are ahead of us and raise our issues before we even raise them, and having all the answers to our issues, for the issues that we have been discussing as the committee. Some of the management guys even tell us, 'I have ears inside the committee, ' and you will see that he has ears in the committee. … This affects the functioning of the committee. (Interview: Vuyokazi Mathebula, 13/11/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS 2017-2020 at BMW)

The allegations of management having eyes and ears in the committee are, in essence, *selling out* within the committee, although it was difficult to verify. Nonetheless, these strong allegations were made because some of the FTSSs were of the view that self-interested individuals use these positions for their own career advancement. The fear of going to the production line when they were not re-elected as FTSS was another factor. Some FTSSs argued that their committee was divided and had factions, which they referred to as *cabals* that were informed by self-interests linked to upward social mobility.

> We have *cabals*, and the thing is that we don't want to confront this issue; hence, the unity in the committee is broken. This is caused by people who are hungry for positions and people who think they're intelligent and smarter than the rest of us, especially those that think they are veterans of the union. (Interview: Vuyokazi Mathebula, 13/11/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS 2017-2020 at BMW)

Another FTSS argued:

> *Cabals* are there, and I will say that *cabals* are there in every organisation and even in the corporate world, there are *cabals*. *Cabal* is slang, but I will say it goes with favouritism on who favours whom and who pulls with whom. But there is nothing wrong with *cabals* as long as they are there for good reasons; they're just like slates. There is nothing wrong with slates as long as they are there for good reasons. But if *cabals* are for bad reasons, then it doesn't work for the organisation. And from what I have seen, they are killing the organisation but also affecting individual's operation because now you are pursuing something that you don't like, but because you are a friend of so and so, then you don't have a choice like I was saying it kills another people's morale. It definitely does not work this thing of groups with bad intention; I call *cabals* groups with bad intentions. (Interview: Kenneth Madumo, 27/07/2017. NUMSA FTSS 2015-2020 at BMW)

These *cabals* that were created within the trade union FTSS committee are dangerous to the life of the union as they affect the work of the union. They are driven by self-interest and not by the work of representing trade union members. These *cabals* had an impact on service to members. One FTSS contended that the *cabals* were created because some FTSSs wanted to use members to advance certain views within the committee:

> That is the reality. There are *cabals* because we are not elected based on the qualities that we have; I am not saying that other FTSSs are not competent to be FTSSs, but the background of understanding issues, articulation, debates, you know, because people want an easy way out you have a friendship that will deal with numbers. To say that if you have a view and for us not to debate that view, we rather outvote the view. (Interview: Tumelo Nyatama, 27/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW)

He further argued that these *cabals* were formed as a power block and used to suppress debate within the FTSS committee. Crucial issues were put to a vote, and those with numbers always

triumphed. This killed the culture of debate within the trade union and affected its effectiveness in addressing workers' issues. The research fieldwork demonstrated that tension rose when issues were not debated but instead voted on through factional lines. This affected the effectiveness of the FTSS committee.

These *cabals* are linked to upward social mobility of union activists that takes centre stage stifling debate, and in turn, the servicing of members suffers. Consequently, FTSSs are now advocating for career pathing of FTSSs, as highlighted in Chapter 4. Upward mobility, including career pathing, has been opposed by some in the trade union as they argue that it will afford opportunities for the FTSS to abandon members over their career ambitions as it would guarantee FTSSs a future post of being FTSSs and possibly lead to non-accountability.

> Think about it, if an FTSS knows that after this position I will get a particular position in the union would that FTSS serve the workers with the utmost required service? You are basically giving him or her the ammunition to forsake the union sometimes. I have never thought that an FTSS should automatically be guaranteed a position in the company or a higher position in the union, for me that's a danger. Because sometimes, as the FTSS, you really need to go back into production line so as to reconnect with the workplace. (Interview: Bhabhali Ka Maphikela, 20/09/2019. COSATU Education Secretary)

He elaborated:

> Even worse you go to that position having calculated your next move, so it is a dangerous thing because if the structures are not strong, that is going to happen in most of the instances, nothing stops an FTSS from being an IR officer or IR Manager. For us (as the trade union movement) to assume that the next step will be this particular one in the company, I think we might be sitting with danger. (ibid)

Career pathing of an FTSS is a poor idea because it leads to expectations of those elected to be FTSSs and ensures the position is a form of career advancement. Career pathing ensures that once elected as an FTSS, one's career is sorted. This might cause devastating consequences as

some fight to become FTSSs for their own advancement rather than for the interests of serving workers. One former NUMSA organiser noted:

> That's why I am saying that sometimes you can become the victim of your own victories because we have been victorious in negotiating with the employers with the view that we don't disadvantage those that raise their hand (and become FTSS) and say, 'we are prepared to lead'. But now opportunistic agendas use that as just one tool to revolt and remove FTSSs and become beneficiaries of that agenda. (Interview: Mike Fushane, 03/10/2019. Former NUMSA Rosslyn Local Organiser)

The former local organiser further noted that although the union has negotiated for FTSSs to be trained and develop themselves while in office, as highlighted in Chapter 4, this has led to some employing the FTSS positions for their own personal agendas. This has led to fighting for these positions to access some of the training opportunities that will enhance their career prospects in the future.

Conclusions

The positions of FTSS, with all the good intentions of strengthening the trade union movement at the shop floor and the locality where they are positioned, has over the years been employed as a stepping stone for upward social mobility. In this chapter, I have highlighted that the post-1994 dispensation afforded opportunities for former unionists to advance and take positions in the state, business, and management, including as line managers, foremen, supervisors and in this study, BMW team leaders. This has led to some opportunists using these positions for upward social mobility, and hence, they are fiercely contested.

The contestation is linked to the benefits associated with these positions, which, in turn, elevate the status of those who hold these positions, and accordingly, some live a managerial lifestyle. This lifestyle is due to the benefits associated with the positions and because they also mingle with management and tend to see themselves as equals with management. This explains why

these FTSSs do not want to leave these positions when they are not elected, and thus, they are calling for career pathing in these positions. This is opposed by the trade union and some experts as it is believed it will set a poor precedent in that FTSS will be guaranteed a career, and thus, they will contest these positions for self-interest rather than serving members. I argue that over the years, these positions have afforded opportunities for upward social mobility for those with upward social mobility ambitions and self-interest. But, equally, these positions can lead to social downgrading.

When FTSSs fail to retain their positions or are not re-elected, they face the unfortunate fate of having to socially downgrade, which is a painful exercise, as illustrated by the life histories of three FTSSs. Esrom Hlophane had to go back to the hardships of the production line and become an ordinary worker at immense personal cost as he had to work rotational shifts and overtime in a labour-intensive production line. Bra Marvin was lucky as he was deployed to a less intense job with guaranteed overtime and a straight shift. Thus, he had a *soft landing* back in the production line. May could not bear the thought of returning to the production line as it would have a negative impact on his business ventures, and thus, he opted to resign. These three scenarios highlight social downgrading and the options available to former FTSSs who fail to secure re-election.

Thus, I contend that the impact of social downgrading is experienced differently by these former FTSSs, and hence, they exercised the different options presented to them and suffered different fates and consequences. Some FTSSs find it more difficult to accept not being re-elected as they return to the production line from whence they came. Thus, they face regression instead of progression, which is at a significant personal cost as they have to adjust from being *a man with power and prestige* (the FTSS) to being an ordinary worker. They hope that

someday, they will be promoted because of the experience and education they acquired as an FTSS.

Hence, FTSS are in a precarious position as their middle-class status is linked to their term in office. I argue that although FTSSs are not re-elected into FTSS positions, they face social downgrading; this should be accepted as part of the democratic process of the trade union movement. This will prevent these positions from being exploited by self-interested individuals for their career pathing and progression. Serving members as FTSS should be viewed as contributing to the workers' movement and not some form of promotion and prestige.

The trade union should not entertain issues of career pathing of FTSSs and negotiating a *soft landing* for FTSS that are not re-elected because if they do, FTSS positions will be employed for upward social mobility and career progression. It will be a vehicle for promotion and not entirely to serve members and build the strength of the trade union on the ground. Social downgrading of FTSS should be embraced as a possibility by those elected as FTSSs and should serve as a reminder that these positions are for serving members and not for personal gain and self-gratification. Equal workers do not struggle to be poor and regression is not part of human nature. Human beings strive for progress, and these FTSSs open space for progression for those elected to these positions. Hence the proposal for career pathing of FTSS in Chapter 6 as part of the career progression of FTSS so that they do not go back to their previous jobs when not re-elected. This is linked to the growth that all workers, including FTSSs, aspire— and all working class broadly—to change their material conditions.

Chapter 9: Shop floor Democracy and *Accountability: A painful outcome*

Introduction

In this chapter, the notion of accountability, one of the pillars of the worker control principle of the post-1973 trade unions, is analysed. The accountability of elected trade union leaders, particularly shop stewards, is sacrosanct as it enforces and promotes internal democracy in the trade union. Thus, shop stewards are central to building accountability in the trade union and entrenching internal and participatory democracy (see Muller, 1992; Maree, 1992; Webster, 1992; Buhlungu and Tshoaedi, 2009; Forrest, 2011; Chinguno, 2012). Webster (1985: 236-237) contended:

> Shop stewards are directly accountable to the shop floor. It is, in other words, a form of direct democracy. … The strength of the shop steward's position depends entirely on the degree of organisation on the shop floor.

In this chapter, the notion of trade union democracy, which compels union leaders to be accountable to the members of the trade union, is explored. Furthermore, internal trade union democracy through the lens of FTSSs who ought to be accountable to members by accepting mandates and reporting back. FTSSs, like shop stewards, are accountable to the workers they represent in the workplace.

This chapter analyses the research I conducted at the BMW plant in Rosslyn, which NUMSA organises. NUMSA at Rosslyn has an arrangement in that all the shop stewards work full-time. This chapter argues that this arrangement flouts NUMSA's FTSS policy on the separation of powers and accountability. The NUMSA policy states that the chairperson of the SSC cannot be an FTSS. As the findings in this chapter reveal, this disregard for union policy raises issues related to the accountability of the FTSS within the union.

Of paramount importance, various elements of the bureaucratisation of the trade union at the branch and workplace levels are examined. Three arguments are presented. First, if FTSSs are not held accountable, remnants of what Michels (1958) termed the ''iron law of oligarchy' at the branch level, where direct democracy and worker control are possible, may be seen.

Second, to move beyond the emerging 'iron law of oligarchy', union general meetings serve as a countervailing force against the bureaucratisation of the trade union at branch and workplace levels. Meetings are a source of strength for members where they can hold their FTSSs accountable. Trade union meetings are essential in promoting direct democracy and worker control because they allow workers to vote and recall FTSSs.

Third, an important observation, which is known by those who are interested in participatory democracy within unions (see Webster, 1985; Baskin, 1990; Muller, 1992; Collins, 1990; Friedman, 1988), that the voting rights of members should be respected and preserved to foster participatory democracy in the union is examined. The right of members to recall FTSSs that no longer carry their mandate serves a critical role in the functioning of the union.

Finally, the trade union's petitioning for the removal and recall of FTSSs at BMW is generally explored. This highlights the importance of the separation of powers, in which the election of an FTSS, who is also a chairperson, can result in a conflict of interest. The evidence suggests that self-interested individuals abuse these petitions because of the material resources associated with the position of FTSS. Thus, the union has developed a rejectionist approach to petitions because of the abuse of this petition system with baseless petitions.

In the chapter, it is contended that the union should employ stringent measures to safeguard this petition system of removing FTSSs because it is a good accountability tool to promote worker control and internal democracy in the union. The union should discipline members who abuse the petition system to protect the petition system and promote accountability of FTSSs.

The key argument of the chapter is that accountability is a painful aspect of democracy that the trade union should embrace and promote in their structures, particularly at the branch and workplace levels, to encourage members to first interact with the union.

Separation of powers and accountability: The BMW FTSSs arrangements disregard NUMSA's FTSS Policy

> Ours at BMW is a unique arrangement; we are the only plant in the auto sector with ten FTSSs who are full-time in the (union) office. History tells us that was negotiated by the previous organiser and NUMSA's regional and national office, hence the number and the dynamics that were there in the company, because the company would not afford to have a shop steward that leaves production and goes to the HR director's office to attend a meeting for an hour and come back and go back on production, it was inconveniencing the production line. They concluded that, okay, let's have them in an office full-time. It was a benefit to NUMSA because on campaigns and things like that, we assist in any local that is in our region, the Hlanganani Region we assist. (Interview: Molano May, 18/08/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS 2010-2020 at BMW)

The NUMSA FTSS policy indicates that FTSSs should be accountable to members and ordinary shop stewards in the workplace. The FTSS who is full-time in the union office must account for the ordinary shop stewards who are not full-time. Thus, the policy states:

> FTSS cannot be chairpersons of shop steward committees but can be a chairperson in the regions and locals and can also be an office-bearer in the union." (Shop Stewards Policy 115 of NEC May 1994 as amended CC July 2010)

It further notes that "[n]o full-time shop steward can be a senior shop steward" (ibid). This is premised on the separation of powers that the senior shop steward or the chairperson of the shop steward committee who holds the power in the committee cannot be an FTSS.

The rationale is that the chairperson and the senior shop stewards should have the power to hold the FTSSs accountable and thus, the latter cannot hold any of these positions. This provision provides for the separation of powers in the committee and ensures that the FTSSs should be accountable to the shop steward committee. This provision in the union policy guards

against the abuse of power where an FTSS is also a chairperson of the SSC or the senior shop steward. Through this arrangement, FTSSs are required to report to the chairperson and the senior shop stewards who work in the line and have to monitor the work of the FTSS and ensure that they are accountable to the workers in the workplace.

The accountability of the FTSS is of paramount importance because if they are not accountable, they can become a law unto themselves and use this position for their self-interest for upward social mobility, as discussed in Chapter 6. Hence, FTSSs must be held accountable in the workplaces where they operate to ensure that they service members of the unions in accordance with the trade union policies. According to the worker control principle, accountability is premised on elected leaders, especially at the local and branch level, who should be accountable to their members (see Webster, 1985; Webster et al., 1991; Friedman, 1987). This is important in making sure that FTSS service their members and do not become a roving shop steward, as highlighted in the preceding chapters and are unaccountable in the process.

The study's evidence shows that the absence of ordinary shop stewards to hold the FTSSs at BMW, members, and the local office accountable, becomes an important feature. Thus, regular BGMs need to mandate and receive a report back, including holding the FTSSs accountable.

The NUMSA shop steward committee, which comprises FTSSs as all the shop stewards at BMW are full-time, is not in accordance with this NUMSA FTSS policy provision that states categorically that the "[f] full-time shop stewards cannot be chairpersons of shop steward committees but can be a chairperson in regions and locals and can also be an office-bearer in the union" (NUMSA FTSS Policy as amended by Central Committee July 2010).

One former FTSS thus attested to how the BMW arrangement disregarded the NUMSA FTSS policy:

> Maybe one thing I need to mention as well: I was elected also as an office bearer (OB). I was the Chairperson of the committee, and it was difficult again with our constitution (actually the FTSS policy and not the constitution) as NUMSA because an FTSS cannot become an office bearer in the workplace. An office bearer should be a part-time shop steward; you can be an office bearer as an FTSS in our external structures (local, regional and national structures), not within the committee in the plant. But the fact that we were all operating on a full-time basis, I was elected the Chairperson. (Interview: David Mohajane, 06/10/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS 2006-2016. BMW)

This clause is concerned with the separation of powers between the two types of shop stewards. The chairperson who has the power should hold the FTSS to account and must report their activities to the chairperson. This is based on the worker control principle that workers should be in charge of the union. An FTSS, who, as explained in Chapter 4, becomes a sort of de facto organiser or union official, should account for the ordinary workers. The chairperson is an ordinary shop steward who is an ordinary worker on the line. The NUMSA FTSS policy clearly states that the FTSS reports to the chairperson of the committee and reports their activities to the chairperson.

> A full-time shop steward must notify the chairperson of the shop steward committee or the senior shop steward, and also the local office if they are leaving the plant or will be away from it and must give the reason. Full-time shop stewards can only leave the plant for *bona fide* union business. If they leave for private business, they must take time off as ordinary workers would do. (NUMSA FTSS Policy as amended by Central Committee July 2010)

This provision clarifies that FTSSs are accountable to their fellow shop stewards in the workplace before they account to the union's local and other upper structures. Hence, the emphasis is that the FTSSs must report their activities to the chairperson and the senior shop steward in the branch and the workplace. The chairperson must know the whereabouts and activities of the FTSS. This facilitates accountability of the FTSS to the union structure in the workplace. Thus, even when FTSSs leave the workplace for any reason, they are expected to

inform the union structure in the workplace, namely, the chairperson of the SSC, which facilitates the separation of powers between the two kinds of shop stewards in the workplace.

This separation of power also ensures that FTSSs are not too powerful and a law unto themselves, but grounds them in the workplace and makes them accountable to their fellow leaders or other shop stewards in the workplace. In the absence of ordinary shop stewards in the workplace, as is the case with BMW, this separation of powers is undermined as the chairperson of the SSC is an FTSS.

This means that FTSSs account to other FTSSs, and thus, the accountability processes set out by the trade union policy are weakened. The separation of powers is essential for the accountability of the FTSS, as Dinga Sikwebu argued:

> What I remember is the discussion of whether the chairperson of the SSC can be an FTSS; what they needed to do was [ensure] that the chairperson who has the power was a non-FTSS so that the people who are not FTSSs can control the FTSS, you cannot as the FTSS also be a chairperson; it was some separation of powers. (Interview: Dinga Sikwebu, 18/10/2019. NUMSA Former Head of Education)

Thus, to maintain some form of balance, an FTSS cannot be the chairperson of the SSC as this is a powerful position and cannot be given to anyone who works in the union full-time and needs to account for their colleagues who are not full-time in the office. Therefore, to separate the concentration of powers, the union opted not to have the FTSS occupy the position of chairperson but to be subjected to the latter in terms of accountability.

Dinga Sikwebu further noted: :

> I do not have a problem with FTSSs; I think the necessary thing is to ensure you control them. I think the 1996 resolution (which prohibited FTSSs from being chairperson of the SSC) was an attempt to ensure that this new layer of FTSSs is not drifting away. (Interview: Dinga Sikwebu, 18/10/2019. NUMSA Former Head of Education)

The *drifting away* would mean that FTSSs are not accountable to the members, and accordingly, NUMSA emphasised that the FTSS cannot be a chairperson, but they have to account to the chairperson who is not an FTSS. This offers some control of the FTSSs and makes them accountable because of the nature of their work, which sometimes takes them outside the plant to do other union work. Thus, the chairperson of the SSC should be the one who controls and holds the FTSS accountable. In the absence of a chairperson who is an ordinary shop steward, the policy of accountability, separation of powers and worker control are undermined. Thus, the BMW arrangement disregarded accountability and worker control.

The rationale of this provision was to ensure that the FTSSs are held accountable by the shop steward to whom they should report their activities in the plant per the principle of worker control. This implies that ordinary shop stewards working in the production line as workers should hold the FTSS accountable. Furthermore, this ensures that the principle of worker control is realised as FTSSs would account for worker leaders and ordinary shop stewards. The evidence from the BMW case study reveals that FTSSs are continuously less accountable to the members because no ordinary shop stewards hold them accountable at all times.

Hence, FTSSs accused each other of being lazy, sitting in the shop steward's office, and not going to the ground to service members. This was discussed in Chapter 5. If the BMW plant had ordinary shop stewards to hold FTSSs accountable, the FTSSs would be doing groundwork and servicing members and not only meeting continuously with management. FTSSs have admitted that they are lacking in terms of being in touch with and servicing their members. This presents some level of social distancing between them and their members. Social distance can lead to bureaucratisation of the trade union at the branch and workplace level, with FTSSs who are not accountable.

A former union leader argued that another reason why FTSSs should not hold the position of chairperson of the SSC is because they wanted to ensure the FTSSs are neutral:

> How then do you neutralise the FTSS so that he also does not become a dominant factor so that you will have an FTSS, but you will then have a position of a chairperson (of the SSC) and a secretary. The FTSS then accounts to these (ordinary shop stewards) because if you leave an FTSS to become a chairperson or secretary or anything (in the office bearers in SSC) it defeats the objective of why you have an FTSS. (Interview: Dumisane Dakile, 19/09/2019. Former COSATU Gauteng Provincial Secretary)

The neutralisation of the FTSS ensured they did not become a law unto themselves and undermined the union. This ensured that they first account for the union in the workplace, representing workers and being elected. FTSSs are meant to serve the members in the branch full-time, as highlighted in Chapter 4. This has to be monitored by the other shop stewards in the workplace; hence, the clause in NUMSA's policy that they cannot be the chairperson of the FTSS to ensure that they are accountable to the union in the branch. In addition, the role of the chairperson is to hold them accountable at all times.

With all the FTSSs being in the committee, the BMW plant in Rosslyn disregards the NUMSA FTSS policy and constitutional provisions. As indicated, accountability is at risk because it does not allow for the separation of powers between FTSSs and ordinary shop stewards who should hold FTSSs accountable. Without ordinary shop stewards to monitor the functions of FTSSs in the workplace, the organiser needs to be given more power by the trade union to monitor the work of the FTSSs.

If the FTSSs are not monitored at the plant level, they may become a law unto themselves. The BMW Rosslyn case reveals that FTSSs blame each other for being lazy and complacent about servicing members, always sitting in the office and not going to service members on the line. This goes against the spirit of worker control and accountability, which the FTSS policy should achieve because all the FTSSs are full-time. The dangers of a lack of accountability at the shop

floor level is that it may lead to abuse of the position for narrow individual interests and result in the bureaucratisation of the trade union. This can lead to Michels'(1958) 'iron law of oligarchy' at the branch level, which can be avoided if the trade union has accountable leadership at the workplace or branch level.

Lack of accountability can lead to the bureaucratisation of the union at the workplace and branch level.

Accountability is a fundamental tool to counter the bureaucratisation of the trade union movement, especially at the local level. Buhlungu (2002) argued that Michels' 'iron law of oligarchy' only applied at the national level but that at the local level, direct democracy was still possible and alive. The evidence suggests that, indeed, direct democracy and accountability are possible at the branch level through BGMs that seek to hold FTSSs accountable. The robustness of these meetings suggests that, indeed, they may be effective as an accountability tool. Thus a veteran trade unionist noted that countermeasures should be put in place to avert co-option:

> My feeling is that there should be all these countermeasures to counter co-option and bureaucratisation, but they are never watertight, even them (the measures). You have got to be reinventing them all the time. And when you say recall, it must be sophisticated and not 'I don't like you' or personalised. (Interview: Dinga Sikwebu, 18/10/2019. NUMSA Former Head of Education)

These countermeasures ought to be put in place in order to deal with the contradictions of FTSSs and their accountability. It is imperative for the union to develop clear guidelines and policies on the accountability of FTSSs. This is particularly important in a plant such as BMW that does not have ordinary shop stewards to hold the FTSS accountable. Therefore, workers should have direct channels to hold the FTSS accountable. These should include FTSSs being visible to members and attending pep talk meetings with workers two or three times a week so that workers are in touch with what is happening on the production line and have direct access

to them. The accessibility of FTSSs in an environment such as BMW serves as one of the tools to ground FTSSs to the needs of their members and ensure that they are accountable to them.

Countervailing measures are needed to ensure that co-option does not occur in the union. This is an ongoing process, not an event; thus, the union movement needs to be innovative and constantly refine some of its policies to close the gaps and loopholes FTSSs can exploit for their selfish and personal interests. Dinga Sikwebu captured this:

> Management gives you a pool of cars, and in the course of that, some form of co-option emerges, so the union needs to be always innovative about this, and sometimes we don't do that, so these tendencies (cooption and abuse of union resources) set in. But every reform you win introduces its own dynamic, and I think that is a class struggle. I don't think you can seal that 'that's now done people won' they will always find ways, and there are self-interests. (Interview: Dinga Sikwebu, 18/10/2019. NUMSA Head Office Official and Former Head of Education)

Accordingly, the union needs to be always alert and innovative in looking for solutions and measures to counter some of these tendencies, which can be detrimental to the union, particularly workers' control and democracy. The danger is that if these tendencies are not addressed, they create space for oligarchic tendencies in the union, and FTSSs become a law unto themselves. One former union leader stated:

> Of course, some take this thing of FTSS as kings and queens because they are now FTSS and no longer report in their base (members) and they no longer service their base. They end up creating social distance between their base and themselves. They are being dined and wined and taken to golf courses by employers, so in that sense, FTSSs are also a problem when they develop that kind of mentality of no longer remembering that, first and foremost, I am a worker. And the union also does not hold them accountable, they do not know whether they are a worker or at the union official, so they are in between, they do not service workers. (Interview: Dumisane Dakile, 19/09/2019. Former COSATU Gauteng Provincial Secretary)

The danger of a lack of accountability is that FTSSs have a habit of no longer servicing their members. They lack clarity on whether they are workers or union officials. This breeds the bureaucratisation of the trade union at the branch level. Suppose FTSSs are held accountable

at the branch level? In that case, they are more likely to be dangerous to the union because they can bureaucratise the union at the branch level, where direct democracy should be enabled and practised, and in the process undermine the worker control principle, which is the cornerstone of these unions. Social distance and bureaucratisation in the trade union can only be possible when you have an unaccountable leadership.

Thus, unaccountable FTSSs at the branch or workplace level allow opportunities for the bureaucratisation of the union at the branch level. The FTSS policy indicates that FTSSs should produce monthly reports to submit to the local and regional levels to ensure that they account to the union. This is a strategy that unions have adopted as a way of holding FTSSs accountable. A former union leader asserted:

> These FTSSs are supposed to produce monthly reports and monthly activity sheets saying what you have been doing for the whole month, in terms of what you said you would do last month, how far you are, and your plan. So, unions have also abandoned their systems of holding leadership accountable, so if they cannot hold their office bearers accountable, what more about FTSSs? (Interview: Dumisane Dakile, 19/09/2019. Former COSATU Gauteng Provincial Secretary)

A former NUMSA local organiser echoed similar sentiments:

> But FTSS also beyond working in that plant representing workers and accounting to the office bearers of the committee also accounts to the LOB of the local because remember LOB are not full-time in that office of that local they work in companies. (Interview: Mike Fushane, 03/10/2019. Former NUMSA Rosslyn Local Organiser)

He further noted:

> From time to time, they (FTSSs) must submit reports not only to their OB (usually the chairperson) at the plant but also to the LSSC of the work that they have done in the local area during the month. Because the constitution provides that these LSSCs meet at least once a month, they must submit reports to the local to say 'look for the month under review. This is what I have done at the plant. (ibid)

Although FTSSs are compelled to compile and submit monthly reports to the local, from my ethnographic research and observations of attending some of these LSSCs, there was little that FTSSs reported about at BMW. The reports did not offer much detail on what the union had been doing in the workplace and even less on the work of individual FTSSs. For example, the 7 November 2019 BMW report to the LSSC reported:

> BMW SA
>
> - A meeting between the Local, regional, BMW shop stewards, and BMW management was held on the 10th of October 2019 at BMW premises to discuss the election process or guidelines.
> - The regional office was represented by the Regional Secretary and Regional Educational Officer, and the Local Chairperson and Local Deputy Chairperson represented the local.
> - The BMW shop stewards committee demanded the RS (regional secretary) to make a follow-up on their concerns, which they had escalated to the national office.
> - We then received a presentation from the BMW IR Manager on the shop stewards elections guidelines. (LSSC Rosyln 7 November 2019)

This clearly shows the limited reports, which did not detail much of what the FTSSs had been doing for the whole month. The report is meant to represent and detail the activities of the FTSSs for the whole month. Thus, I contend that these reports need to be more detailed and list the activities of the SSC so that they can be held accountable and to ensure transparency on what the FTSS does.

I found this was one of the weaknesses of having an all full-time SSC because they all account to each other and thus, it is easy to build a consensus, support each other, and cover up each other's weaknesses. This is unlike the situation where there were ordinary shop stewards and the chairperson was an ordinary shop steward who would first demand the monthly reports from the FTSSs before they accounted to the LSSC. This is one of the unintended consequences of having an all-full-time SSC of FTSSs who tend to be less accountable:

> Sometimes it causes conflict in the union because you have FTSSs who are just flouts and not accountable. Some of them get corrupted by service providers, and some of them become an

> extension of HR. Instead of doing union work, they do HR work, which also becomes a source of conflict for the union. So, it is not automatically that if you have a FTSS and then it follows that the following will happen you might have unintended consequences which might come to the detriment of the organisation. (Interview: Dumisane Dakile, 19/09/2019. Former COSATU Gauteng Provincial Secretary)

Buhlungu (2010) wrote of a *paradox of victory*, which included victories that the union acquired, such as the right to have FTSSs. This is intended to strengthen the workplace trade union at the employer's expense. They can also have unintended consequences that can harm the union and, in turn, FTSSs can become tools of management by being an extension of HR. I concur with Buhlungu (2010) that some gains have unintended consequences that can harm the trade union. The positions of FTSSs pose the same danger. Consequently, they must be carefully managed to ensure that workers and the union reap maximum benefits. Accordingly, FTSSs need to be accountable.

FTSSs can undermine the trade union by perceiving themselves as HR, and thus, at BMW, they conduct the company's loan scheme, which indicates that they have become an extension of HR. Furthermore, workers are pleased to have the FTSSs administer the loan scheme. One noted, “Since the scheme has been put in the hands of the FTSS, our loans are always approved and never declined” (Worker informal chat). This sentiment was held by the workers I interacted with in the union office who came to apply for the loan scheme. This subsequently impacted accountability because the FTSSs tended to focus more on this loan scheme as their primary job and neglected representing workers. The union office is always busy a week before payday as workers flood the union office to apply for loans. I observed this in wonder. I grappled to understand whether the loan scheme was moved to the union office because HR was too stringent in evaluating who qualifies for the loan or if the FTSSs are more friendly and relaxed when dealing with workers.

Evidently, the loan scheme was given to the union office to keep the FTSSs occupied and assist HR and the finance department. Regardless, it is noteworthy that FTSSs were engaged in HR work for the management, and thus, one could argue that they have become an extension of HR and, to some extent, the finance department that pays out the loans. Even though this might bring workers and members closer to their representative, about the actual service of the union, the FTSSs are found wanting. Thus, one cannot dismiss the social distance at BMW between workers and the FTSSs about service to the workers.

> Social distance, I must tell you, is a very dangerous thing, and I think it is one of the issues we are not addressing. I think the organisation has to focus more on that because you will find that in many companies, shop stewards who do not call plant general meetings that talks to social distance. Because your connection with members is through meetings, taking mandates and giving feedback, but if that does not happen, members lose confidence in those shop stewards. (Interview: Mike Fushane, 03/10/2019. Former NUMSA Rosslyn Local Organiser)

He further argued:

> But because we tend to defend shop stewards unaware of why workers are against a particular shop steward, that leads to a conflict between workers and a particular shop steward. What I am saying is that it (social distance) does exist in some companies and again, in some companies, it does not because workers would meet every Wednesday and receive feedback. In that way, you are fostering a close working relationship with the members and shop steward. (Interview: Mike Fushane, 03/10/2019. Former NUMSA Rosslyn Local Organiser)

General meetings in the workplace are powerful tools for accountability and serve as a countervailing force to the development of oligarchic tendencies that might arise in workplaces. For example, if general meetings are not convened in the workplace, shop stewards and FTSSs are more likely to be distant from their members and, thus, create social distance. NUMSA at the BMW plant has preserved this democratic culture of having regular general meetings even though they take place every three months. This has proved to be one of the important tools to hold the FTSSs accountable to workers through the given mandates and reporting back to the

workers. General meetings are also crucial for building the union as an organisation and allow workers to learn from each other through sharing experiences.

General meetings are a central tool for accountability.

In relation to mutual understanding among members of the unions, Byrne et al. (2015: 76) asserted:

> Members need to hear and understand each other's concerns and problems as part of exploring and building the basis of their unity and agreeing on demands. Shop stewards are an important link for this across the workplace and into other levels of the union. The general meeting provides a space for members to hear each other directly and through shop stewards (if they bring the voice of the other workers). Regular meetings can also provide a platform for members to exercise control over their workplace leadership through the mandates they give and report back they receive. The strengths or weaknesses of this practice include the prior work of shop stewards amongst their constituency and the collective planning by the shop steward committee on how they will use the meeting to build an organisation, provide the possibility for workers to influence both the decisions that directly affect them and the overall direction of the organisation.

Trade union meetings between shop stewards and members on the shop floor are one of the key fundamental principles of worker control. General meetings through giving mandates and reporting back are platforms that enhance the worker control principle and accountability. The NUMSA constitution provides general meetings for the SSC to engage with workers, take a mandate, and report back, and these must happen quarterly, and indeed, they are held as prescribed by the constitution. This is a culture that has continued over the years. The effectiveness of these general meetings on the ground should be assessed if accountability is enforced through these general meetings. As part of my ethnographic work, I attended a couple of these general meetings, which were generally well-attended and robust and indeed, FTSSs were held to account and mandated in the process and report backs on previous mandates demanded. They normally took place on a Sunday to accommodate all the workers in the plant who worked different shifts. One FTSS stated:

> At the general meeting, we call the whole plant at the same venue, and normally, we call them on Sundays when everyone can attend because we are working shifts, so it is impossible to call a general meeting during the week because of shifts. So, on Sundays, we cannot call them on Saturday because some workers are clocking out in the morning. Saturday, you'll find that if you call it at 10 am on Saturday, some people are from the night shift they're tired they can't participate. (Interview: Kgomotso Modise, 17/10/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS 2018-2020 at BMW)

The FTSS added:

> So, on Sunday, we know that everyone's mind is fresh, and then they can participate in all of them, and it is there where we can take mandates and give feedback to the workers on all the meetings we held during those three months. Before we go to a general meeting, we combine everything: the reports from zone meetings from the paint shop, body shop, and assembly. We combine them and take them all to the general meeting and the workers. It is where they decide which steps to take. (Interview: Kgomotso Modise, 17/10/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS 2018-2020 at BMW)

Draft agendas for these meetings are given to workers and members in advance so that they can prepare. This also assists the FTSS to prepare thoroughly. The discussions in these meetings are robust, and FTSS are called to account; thus, before a general meeting, the FTSS prepare thoroughly to ensure they are prepared for the hostile crowd of members and non-members. It is noteworthy that NUMSA at BMW allow all the workers in the plant to attend these meetings regardless of whether they are union members. These meetings are also used for recruitment purposes or a union marketing mechanism.

> Everyone can come, but the participation is limited to NUMSA members. Everyone can be an audience there, but the company emphasises that it should be only NUMSA members. However, according to the NUMSA constitution, everyone is welcome to come. Because you will find that someone was not interested in joining the NUMSA, but by attending the meeting, she can decide to join NUMSA, it becomes sort of a recruitment drive for us. (Interview: Kgomotso Modise, 17/10/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS 2018-2020 at BMW)

Furthermore, these meetings are paid for by the employer. The employer pays everyone who attends these meetings. One FTSS stated:

> Ja, general meetings, they pay for the full hours that workers attended the meeting, and normally it is three hours, and on Sundays, they pay three times two (3 x 2 which equals six hours) because is double the hours on Sunday. (Interview: Kgomotso Modise, 17/10/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS 2018-2020 at BMW)

Another FTSS argued that because employers pay workers to attend these meetings, quarterly general meetings are always packed:

> The NBF dictates that the employer must pay, and the sad part is that if you do not attend the quarterly general meeting, you do not get paid. … I see the payment part of these meetings as a sweetener because most of our meetings are packed, the attendance is very good. (Interview, Kenny Madumo, 27/07/2017. NUMSA FTSS 2015-2020 at BMW)

The fact that these meetings are paid for by the employer facilitates the high number of workers who attend them. However, some in management argue that this reveals the low levels of commitment to the union on the part of the workers, arguing that the numbers would be low if they did not pay for workers to attend these meetings. The ER manager asserted, "We pay them to attend on their own; if we do not pay them, they will not attend their own general meetings" (Interview: Peter Dantjie, 26/08/2019. ER Manager at BMW).

On the contrary, because the union in the workplace convenes well-attended general meetings, it reveals some level of democracy and worker control in the workplace. Thus, this serves as a counter against oligarchic tendencies that might develop among some of the FTSSs because they are all expected to stand before the workers in a general meeting and account for them every three months.

> More above that, there should be a general meeting because those Wednesday meetings are constituency-based, but at some point, you have to call all workers to one general meeting once a month or once in a quarter, and the constitution also provides for that because shop stewards (including FTSSs) the only way to account as a shop steward is through a general meeting. There is no other way. (Interview: Mike Fushane, 03/10/2019: Former NUMSA Rosslyn Local Organiser)

The BMW case study also reveals that general meetings play a vital role in facilitating democracy within the trade unions as these meetings afford the workers opportunities to provide input on the direction of the union and influence decisions that have to be taken, in particular, decisions that have to be made at the plant level that affect workers directly. These general meetings allow workers to give input on these decisions and hold their FTSSs accountable. The general meetings' attendance and robustness demonstrate the vibrancy of democracy at the BMW plant. Although the IR manager argued that the good attendance of these meetings is because the employer pays the workers to attend these meetings, the management does not pay the workers to speak and support particular views. Workers have a platform through these general meetings to engage and give mandates to their FTSSs and receive feedback on various issues. These meetings give them direct access to the union, and they can participate democratically in their organisation.

Other meetings between workers and FTSSs include constituency meetings as well as common lunches that are held in between the quarterly general meetings. These meetings address some pressing issues that may arise between quarterly general meetings. I contend that these meetings help curtail the detailed social distancing happening in the union because the workers and FTSSs are kept closer to each other. Between these quarterly general meetings, the FTSS can meet workers and members urgently to address ongoing issues and seek a mandate or report back in constituency meetings and common lunches and suppers. One FTSS explained:

> To the workers, we account by pushing what is given to us as a mandate … we use two structures to solicit a mandate, which are general meetings and a constituency meeting. But then the constitutional one is a general meeting, the constituency meetings are departmental meetings. … Departmental demands and issues are dealt with through constituency meetings by engaging departmental management; they are calendared and happen once a month. The general meetings are quarterly every three months. (Interview: Molano May, 18/08/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS 2010-2020 at BMW).

Another former FTTS noted:

> Here at BMW, we have our monthly constituency meetings, we have our quarterly general meetings which were negotiated at NBF and in between, we have our common lunches and common suppers discussions if there are urgent matters that are arising. (Interview: Marvin Molefe, 21/07/2017. Former FTSS 2010-2020)

He provided another example of an upcoming common lunch and the matters to be addressed:

> Like next week Monday, we will have our common lunches and suppers meetings as there is an urgent matter, and the workers have to know that as of August, they will be working a different shift that has been agreed upon by the union and management. As and when there is an urgent matter, there is this arrangement that we meet them. (Interview: Marvin Molefe, 21/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS 2010-2020 at BMW)

These common lunches and suppers occur during workers' lunches and suppers, which FTSSs addresses workers. As noted previously, these are not constitutional meetings. The employer has an agreement that allows the FTSS to address workers during their own time, in this case, lunch and supper breaks, so that they do not disturb scheduled production. These are important to prepare workers for general and constituency meetings and keep workers informed on the work of the FTSS. This also helps in the accountability processes of the union and keeps workers and members in touch with the FTSS. These common lunches and common suppers help in the mandating processes, report backs on urgent issues and serve as preparatory meetings for constituency meetings as noted by one FTSS:

> And we have this other one we call them common lunch and common suppers if we have a pressing issue or if there are certain issues we just go there and conscientise them and say 'look here is an issue go and think about it and when we meet in the constituency meeting this is what we are going to deal with.' We prepare them before the meeting; common lunch is when we meet the workers during lunch or supper time. (Interview: Molano May, 18/08/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS 2010-2020 at BMW)

Even though they are not constitutional structures or meetings, they help FTSSs keep in touch with the workers and serve as an accountability platform. During these meetings, workers are allowed to give FTSSs a mandate on addressing a pressing issue that could have necessitated this meeting in the first place. These mechanisms put in place by NUMSA keep the FTSSs accountable to their members. They are countermeasures for the bureaucratisation of the trade union at the branch level. This forces the FTSS to engage with members, which narrows the gap between them and assists in dealing with the issue of social distancing.

The ethnographic study undertaken for this study indicated that these meetings are effective and force FTSSs to engage with their members. Even those FTSSs who ordinarily opt to man the office and have less interaction with workers when these meetings are scheduled are forced to prepare and account to workers. As revealed in Chapter 5, problems with FTSSs involve their tendency to perceive themselves as office workers and sit in the office, not as service workers. Through these meetings, they are forced to engage with workers and be held accountable.

These meetings and general meetings, in particular, are important as they serve as an election platform because members elect their shop stewards in a general meeting. Because general meetings are election structures, they are regarded as important, and thus, as per the constitutional provision. The election of a shop steward takes place in a general meeting that the local office of the union must facilitate. Thus, the power of general meetings should not be undermined because workers practise their primary democratic right of voting in the union through the union.

The union members' rights include electing people to represent them on the shop floor (shop stewards). Thus, if members are deprived of this right, they are deprived of their democratic right, which infringes on the principle of worker control. General meetings ensure the principle

of worker control and democracy in the trade union is realised as they serve as the voting structure within the union. By voting for shop stewards, workers and members give shop stewards and FTSSs the mandate to represent them in the workplace. The shop stewards and FTSSs become representatives of the union members because the members vote for them.

Webster (1985), Freidman (1987), and Baskin (1990) contended that the right to vote for one's representatives in the workplace distinguished these post-1973 unions from the unions that existed before them. Furthermore, this was based on the worker control principle. The worker control principle advocates that the members should take charge of their organisation. Trade union meetings and, in particular, general meetings facilitate this member's participation within the union, which affords them the power to keep their leaders in check and, thus, worker control is brought into practice.

NUMSA at BMW still keeps this tradition of allowing members to elect their shop stewards every four years. Workers and members participate in the process. In between elections, members also have the opportunity to petition the union's upper structures to remove FTSSs who they feel have drifted from their mandate and no longer represent them. But during the research, no such petition was launched against any of the FTSS at BMW, although there were some allegations of faceless petitions, as noted below.

Petitions as an accountability platform

One of the strongest tools at the hands of the trade union members is their right to recall shop stewards and union leaders who no longer represent their interests. NUMSA makes provision for the recall of shop stewards and FTSSs. The NUMSA constitution states: "Shop stewards must leave their position in one or more of the following circumstances." (NUMSA Constitution as Amended 2013: 24).

Circumstance number seven reads:

> If the Local Shop Steward Council receives a petition calling for the removal of the shop steward from office, the petition must be signed by no less than 30% of the paid-up members employed in the workplace or section of the workplace that the shop steward represents, as the case maybe be. Any such petition should explain why the shop steward must be removed. (NUMSA Constitution as Amended 2013: 25)

This constitutional provision on the removal of shop stewards also applies to the FTSSs:

> Any full-time shop steward can be recalled by the members at any time or resign in accordance with the NUMSA constitution. (NUMSA FTSS Policy 115 as amended by the CC July 2010)

The constitution of NUMSA and the NUMSA FTSS Policy gives members the power to recall and remove shop stewards and FTSSs through petitions. This affords the members the power to hold their elected leaders and representatives accountable at the workplace. The evidence at NUMSA at BMW reveals that these petitions are abused sometimes; for factional reasons and discredit FTSSs with no positive proof; hence, one FTSS noted that they had received some petitions for their removal from faceless sources:

> Is highly contested in that in the past few months, we have faced faceless petitions, more than five of them from January to date, there have been five faceless petitions against us to say that we must all go down. We are not working in the best interests of members. But, they say that they are disgruntled workers, but they do not present themselves (hence faceless) even in a general meeting, they do not present their grievances. So, you can see how it is contested. There would always be controversy around the FTSSs to discredit them so that they can *fuluga* (get off) and others would come. (Interview: Tumelo Nyatama, 27/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS 2015-2018 at BMW)

The faceless petitions expose the weakness of the petition system as it does not provide transparency in terms of who can sign one. The anonymity implies that even non-members can sign such a petition for the wrong reasons or discredit the FTSS. One of the reasons for some of these faceless sources to petition the removal of these FTSSs is associated with the material benefits and resources attached to the positions of FTSSs. Thus, some of the FTSSs argued that former FTSSs use petitions to discredit incumbent FTSSs because they want to return to their former positions:

> In principle, we are accountable to our members once we are elected as NUMSA FTSSs, and when we do not perform our duties, they (former FTSSs) are the first ones to raise petitions to say that 'nah, the comrade is not assisting us … We had a petition two months ago where the former FTSSs were coming with allegations that we are not doing this, we are not doing that, so they received a lot of attention from fellow constituencies, especially the F-Shift guys, those who are working fixed night shift and attached their signatures. Saying, 'We have been working the night shift for these number of years, and these guys have said that they are going to fix it; those FTSSs are not working for you because they are permanent staff and don't care about your guys.' That's where the petition came from because there was a detachment from us as a committee, and those comrades who are working on a permanent night shift—they felt that we ARE not representing them, 'they don't care about us'. (Interview: Esrom Hlophane, 02/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS 2014-2020 at BMW)

The ER manager also cautioned about the authenticity of some of these petitions against FTSSs, saying that some of them did not truly reflect the wishes of the workers and that others were about the resources and material benefits attached to the positions of the FTSSs. The ER manager asserted:

> There are always petitions here, and the petitions—one can argue that they are genuine, but sometimes they are not genuine but informed by personal benefits or perspective for two reasons. Some petitions people would argue that the FTSSs are not serving them, which would be a trigger to a petition. In some cases, for me, it is within the belief that 'I need to dislocate you—to be in the office so that I can enjoy those benefits based on the status thing; it's back to the office lifestyle. (Interview: Peter Dantjie, 26/08/2019. ER Manager at BMW)

It is important to note that although the union has these provisions of the petition in place to have shop stewards and FTSSs who are not accountable removed or recalled by members, these processes can also be abused by members, thus weakening the system because of the inherent loopholes in the procedure and process.

> I always say that we must appreciate that trade unionism in our days is quite different from trade unionism before 1994, because post-1994, things changed. In some cases, you might find that it is not about accountability but access to resources. You will find that there is a revolt

> against an FTSS, and when you investigate, you will find that the revolt is not tangible … safe to say that everyone wants to access the car, and everyone wants to access the laptop, and everyone wants to access that office. That is why I am saying that in many cases, there are not genuine cases against FTSSs … safe to say that access to resources became a phenomenon. (Interview: Mike Fushane, 03/10/2019: Former NUMSA Rosslyn Local Organiser)

The disputes over union resources at the workplace can also lead to baseless petitions for the removal of an FTSS, as noted in the preceding quote. Therefore, to a certain extent, this weakens the petition system of accountability. This further generates a rejectionist attitude from the union when genuine petitions are launched against FTSSs who are truly failing workers in their workplace. Thus, NUMSA has developed an attitude that every petition to remove shop stewards and FTSSs must be investigated because history has shown that these petitions are driven by the resources attached to the position of FTSSs. The genuine petitions are those that actually hold water and are in the interests of the union and hold shop stewards accountable and are not fueled by political and factional battles. The abuse of petitions has prompted the trade union to be cautious of petitions, hence the investigation of launched petitions. Alex Mashilo, a former NUMSA FTSS, elaborated:

> Initially, when there was a petition, you were removed. Now the union said, 'no, no, we investigate' because some abused the petition system for personal benefit and to remove others from office. Someone who wants that FTSS allowance or who wants that car can generate a petition, who wants the time-off, who wants to leave the labour process can generate a petition. (Interview: Alex Mashilo, 19/04/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS and Head of OCCB)

The abuse of the petition system for removing shop stewards and FTSSs, one of the accountability mechanisms put in place, is problematic and can lead to leaders who display less accountability in the trade union. This is linked to the rejectionist approach that the union develops because of the abuse of the system for narrow self-interests. This subsequently questions the accountability of FTSSs and may result in FTSSs that do not service members remaining in office even when petitions to remove and recall them are launched. One former

local organiser argued that some investigations revealed that petitions for the removal of FTSSs are baseless:

> What I have observed in many cases where I have been involved in investigating or coordinating investigation processes is the only thing we have come across is access to those resources. In many cases, it is about resources. Because you cannot say that a shop steward doesn't call a meeting, but when it was called, you were not in attendance because once a meeting is called, we expect a full house, but the same people that claim a meeting was not called when you call a meeting they stay away from the meeting. For me, from that point, there is no base for such an allegation. What I am saying is that in many cases where we investigate, we will find nothing. (Interview: Mike Fushane, 03/10/2019: Former NUMSA Rosslyn Local Organiser)

The petition system of holding FTSSs accountable by offering workers the power to remove shop stewards and FTSSs that no longer represent them is a powerful tool of accountability and democracy. The petition system is premised on the principle that worker control promotes direct democracy in that workers must control their representatives, and if their representative fails to represent them, they must be recalled. It is important that this principle is safeguarded and not open to abuse by those who use the petition system for narrow self-interests to have access to material benefits associated with the position of FTSSs. Accountability of FTSSs is important, and thus, the union should always look at innovative ways of ensuring that FTSSs account to their members. The petition system should be enforced and closely monitored so that ambitious individuals do not abuse it for their material gains and other political reasons, as noted by the union officials who have been involved in such processes.

FTSSs as information brokers for management (i.e., tools of management)

FTSSs are similar and have limited powers in the workplace's decision-making processes, especially in production-related decisions and matters. However, they play a role in relaying information from management to the workers and members of the trade union. Thus, FTSS can

be rendered information brokers and bridges by management and only communicate production schedules and decisions by management. One FTSS noted:

> We have various structures in the company, and we have a constituency meeting and monthly meetings. Basically, those constituency meetings will come after we have held a production meeting with management. Management will communicate a production schedule for a particular month to the FTSS, and we (the FTSS) are responsible for cascading that particular information to members. Not only are the FTSS responsible for that, but management also has the prerogative to communicate the production plan with the members directly. (Interview: Kenny Madumo, 27/07/2017. NUMSA FTSS 2012-present)

Every month, FTSSs convene constituency meetings, which occur after meeting with management to discuss production schedules, which dominate these meetings. An FTSS noted that one of their fundamental roles is the cascading down information on production schedules. This highlights that they are information brokers or conveyor belts of information to the members and the general workforce. The FTSS explained:

> Well, what we do to workers is that in meetings, after meeting with management on certain issues like scheduling shifts, we attend that meeting every month, the first week of the month. We then need to have a constituency meeting to report to workers on how we will work this month and quality, and whatever we performed last month, we report to them in constituency meetings. Maybe this Saturday, management is proposing overtime for you. We do that at constituency meetings after the scheduling meetings, which we attend every first Tuesday of the month; after that, we report to the worker. Then every three months we call a general meeting with workers where we ask for mandates, which we take to management and higher structures. (Interview: Kgomotso Modise, 17/10/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS 2018-2020 at BMW)

The fact that these constituency meetings although part of the accountability mechanisms as the link workers with FTSSs and are interactive, but largely are dominated by production related matters signals and reduces FTSSs to becoming information brokers to communicate management decisions on production. This marks the contraditory role of the FTSS as a representative of workers while being some form of tools of management to some extent. This

is informed by the fact that they carry some authority over the workers and members because they are elected by the workers and represent the union. Management exploits this by getting the FTSSs to give the production schedules to the workers, which in turn legitimises management's instructions and communication. Hence, I contend that because they communicate such information to workers, they become tools of management, or this possibly is one of the benefits management draws from having FTSSs and the reason management conceded to the notion of FTSSs. Accordingly, an FTSS argued that the communication role of FTTSs is one of the major benefits employers enjoy from having FTSSs. He explained:

> The benefit to management is that they're able to communicate with the union better because you do not have to wait for someone to come from somewhere or be available to make decisions. If you have urgent communication like if they (management) want to cancel production, obviously they will have to inform the union, if there are issues related to discipline a worker cannot stay for a month or so with a case pending. (Interview: Marvin Molefe, 21/07/2017. Former NUMSA FTSS 2010-2020 at BMW)

I refer to FTSSs as information brokers in this respect because one of their roles is to relay information and communication between the employer and the employees, including HR and administrative duties. This needs careful management because management can use FTSSs as tools of management to their advantage by conveying instructions which may not be beneficial to their constituency as part of the information and communication function. Therefore, when management has urgent issues communicating with workers, FTSSs are used as the communication tool. This can weaken the powerful structure of FTSSs and question their accountability because, as such, they become mere tools of management, which limits their accountability to workers. Management can use FTSSs to inform workers while performing their communication function, and thus, they are tools of management in the process.

In Chapter 4, I revealed that the HR manager controls and manages the affairs of FTSSs as they form part of their headcount in terms of employment in the company BMW. This allows the HR manager and FTSSs to build a working relationship, which can undermine the accountability lines in the union. Mashilo contended:

> I can tell you that management can deliberately manipulate the FTSSs by favouring a certain FTSS; in fact, I can say that the management can naughtily use FTSSs or establish their network among the FTSSs and naughtily use them as their resources. There could be certain FTSSs who can become influential, and management cannot want them to be compromised and can always favour them and not management but certain members of management … For example, let's say management wants overtime when we do not want it, but this guy can lobby for overtime to be delivered or maybe because he has misconducted himself or maybe because he is given a car. (Interview: Alex Mashilo, 19/04/2019. Former NUMSA FTSS and Head of OCCB)

Considering this statement and other matters previously discussed, some members of management might manipulate FTSSs if they want certain favours from them. This is made possible because accountability lines are blurred in the union, and FTSSs become information brokers. As argued in Chapter 6, FTSSs fall into the trap of doing HR and IR work, which is outside the scope of their work, and accordingly, accountability to the members is compromised, especially when they become information brokers on issues of production and acquiring workers' support on issues such as overtime.

FTSSs are not supposed to be involved in production issues and the communication of production schedules unless it involves the abuse and exploitation of workers. FTSSs, by their nature, ought to represent members and fight for better working conditions rather than communicating production schedules. Thus, accountability of the FTSSs should be given to the workers who elected them to represent them, and they should refrain from being used as tools of management as information brokers. The trade union's strength can be built only if FTSSs adhere to the principle of accountability to workers by accepting mandates and reporting back.

Hence, I contend that FTSSs should not be information brokers for management and communication of areas such as production schedules. Furthermore, they should refrain from being entangled in production related issues other than the protection of workers from the exploitative nature of the production line. FTSSs should shield workers from the exploitative nature of the production line and extraction of surplus value at all material times. The trade union can only be strengthened if FTSSs are committed to being accountable to their members and always representing them without them being used as tools of management at the expense of their members.

The evidence presented here suggests that inevitably, management is benefiting from having FTSSs as they reduce them to being information brokers which distracts them from their historical mission and duties of being the mouthpiece of workers. Instead they are being reduced to the mouthpiece of employers which dilutes their role as committed unionists and sole representative of workers.

Accountability a pain of democracy

> Accountability is not a nice thing, and it will never be a nice thing. It is a pain of democracy; the issue of accountability is not a problem for the trade unions but is a problem for society in general. People do not want to account; unions are not immune from this. The question is that if trade unions, which are meant to be the conscience of society, are in this state that they are in, then what is the state of society? To call a meeting and say this is what we have done is a painful exercise. Accountability is not a nice thing people do not want to account for, and it has never been nice, and it will never be nice; there is nothing as painful as accountability in life. (Interview: Dumisane Dakile, 19/09/2019. Former COSATU Gauteng Provincial Secretary)

Dumisane Dakile further argued that leaders systematically collapse accountability structures because they do not want to be accountable because that is a threat to their position and also affords opportunities for them to do as they please without workers holding them to account:

> For you to loot, you must have weak structures, so you systematically and intentionally deal with structures so that you can be able to loot by co-opting chairpersons and secretaries of

> regions so that they become lapdogs and clap hands for the leadership. Hence, you have this thing of personality cult where people start to worship leadership and fail to hold them to account. (Interview: Dumisane Dakile, 19/09/2019. Former COSATU Gauteng Provincial Secretary)

These weak structures impact on accountability and undermine the democratic principle of worker control and have impacted on the radicalism of these unions as FTSSs are reduced to conveyor belts within the union of upper structures as posited by Steven Faulkner a former unionist that:

> So the unions lost their radical edge, and when you lose your radical edge, you also lose the impetus of why workers need to be completely involved in the decisions of their union, and accountability because now those decisions can be made by people who know better (the top leadership). (Interview: Steven Faulkner, 29/08/2019. Labour Activist)

Further noting that:

> You know, if you have a line from the top, you become a conveyor belt to the rank and file. The opportunity for critical thinking becomes greatly diminished. They just do as they're told, and I saw it with my own eyes. (Ibid)

The erosion of the worker control principle, in particular accountability, is concerning as the post-1973 unions were built on this principle to suffocate oligarchic tendencies within the unions. The reason the forebearers of these unions insisted on accountability was to ensure that leadership was not involved in corruption and carried the mandate of the trade union members in every decision-making process in which they were involved. Accountability suffocated any elements of self-interest to the detriment of the worker's and members' mandate and built the union from the bottom up. Accordingly, leaders of the union, including shop stewards and FTSSs, would not meet with management without a worker present. This was to ensure that they did not sell out and sign secret deals with the employer. Before meeting with management, leaders of the trade union would meet members to solicit a mandate and thereafter call another meeting to report back to the workers. This was worker control and internal democracy in

practice; hence, leaders could be bold when talking about issues because they were supported by the workers' mandate and had their support.

These processes of worker control and accountability have come under severe pressure as the trade unions have grown in numbers. Furthermore, some of these processes at upper levels of the unions are logistically impossible. There is an increasing culture of a lack of accountability by union leaders, which has led to what has been termed social distance and the bureaucratisation of the trade unions. Accountability at the branch and workplace level is more logistically possible, as shop stewards and FTSSs can be held accountable by workers through general meetings.

Conclusion

Although accountability is a pain of democracy, the trade union should preserve it in order to protect their founding principle of worker control and internal democracy, which is the foundation of these post-1973 trade unions (see Buhlungu, 2010; Keet, 1992; Chinguno, 2012). The Numsa FTSS policy explicitly states that an FTSS cannot be a senior shop steward or chairperson of the SSC. However, this was disregarded at BMW because all the shop stewards are FTSSs. This subsequently impacts accountability and the separation of power, which the policy sought to address. This arrangement lessens the responsibility of the FTSSs because they undermine the two centres of power by collapsing it into one. Second, FTSSs' responsibility to workers is subverted by perks that come with the position as tools of the trade and because they are also engaged in administrative tasks such as administering loans and communicating shift schedules. They are thus tools of management of some sort. They become less accountable and do not promote the principle of worker control, which is sacrosanct to the trade union movements that emerged post-1973. Moreover, accountability is a fundamental pillar of this principle.

Worker control can only be realised when members of the union experience some sense of ownership of their union, that the decisions and the direction that the trade union is taking reflect and represent their aspirations. Although one cannot argue for absolute consensus in decision-making, decisions should have some relative consensus and reflect the consent of members. This can only be realised when the trade union members continually participate in union activities, especially at the branch level, which is the basic unit of the union, because without workers as members of the union, worker control will cease to exist as we know it and be nothing but a slogan. Thus, accountability ought to be preserved in the union, and an accountability structure that is important is regular democratic general meetings that are vibrant and well attended.

General meetings ought to be democratic to allow workers to shape the direction and mandate elected leaders without fear of victimisation and intimidation. Workers, through constant political education, should be empowered to take charge of their trade unions and hold their leaders accountable. Thus, I propose that the trade union ought to invest in the political education of workers to allow them to understand, articulate and implement the principle of worker control clearly, that the union belongs to them and they need to take charge of it by holding elected leaders accountable and through consensus building and promote the culture of debate. This will thwart the development of oligarchic tendencies, as argued by Michels (1958), and the abuse of trade unions for personal interest. Hence, accountability is important in ensuring that workers have control and internal democracy becomes a lived reality rather than a slogan.

The NUMSA case study, where employers pay workers to attend general meetings, is a progressive one and demonstrates the gains that a strong worker organisation can achieve. Thus, the recommendation and proposal that trade unions should negotiate or adopt the NUMSA strategy of forcing employers to pay for trade union general meetings so that they are

well attended, as this is a significant instrument of accountability. The unions in South Africa should invest in this campaign if worker control and internal democracy are to be preserved in the trade unions. Regular and well-attended general meetings are important to enforce internal democracy and worker control, including regular elections of FTSSs and ordinary shop stewards. Elections are an important tool for enforcing internal democracy and worker control as the rank-and-file members are given an opportunity to elect leaders of their own choice. Thus, the 2020 FTSS elections at BMW were an important and watershed moment as they highlighted the power of rank-and-file members as they removed six of the nine FTSSs. This was democracy in action regardless of the disputes that were raised by FTSSs.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

Introduction

The year 2023 marks 50 years since the Durban strikes that gave birth to the independent and African trade unions in South Africa that changed the labour landscape and contributed to the liberation of South Africa from apartheid. These trade unions were built on the worker control principle that placed workers at the centre of the life of these trade unions. Workers were to be owners of these trade unions. Chief amongst these post-1973 trade union organising strategies was shop floor leadership through shop stewards (see Webster, 1985; Buhlungu, 2010; Maree, 1992; 1982; Friedman,1987). Shop stewards were to play a fundamental and central role in building the democratic traditions of these trade unions. Furthermore, they were to be accountable to the ordinary rank-and-file membership of the trade unions by soliciting mandates and reporting back regularly.

This worker control and internal democracy tradition was adopted to guard against the development of oligarchy tendencies in the trade unions, namely, being dominated by a few elites (see Michels, 1958). The noble intentions and sacrosanct worker control principle of these trade unions have come under severe strain in recent years. There has been growing consensus amongst labour scholars that there is a growing distance between trade union leaders and their rank-and-file members, thus a crisis of trade union representation. The Marikana massacre is an example of this rupture (see Byrne et al., 2015; Chinguno, 2012; Sacks, 2012; Hartford, 2012).

This thesis sought to investigate this increasing gap and employed FTSSs as a tool of analysis to understand this crisis of representation in these post-1973 trade unions. NUMSA was the union under study at the BMW plant in Rosslyn. The main question asked was: What accounts

for the trade union representation crisis in post-1973 trade unions? Are FTSSs part of the problem, and have they contributed to the crisis of leadership in the trade unions?

In addition, the study addressed the following sub-questions:

- Worker control and role of a FTSS: What is the role of FTSSs, and do they advance the principle of worker control? What is the difference between an FTSS and an ordinary shop steward?
- The contradictory role of an FTSS: *FTSS, the man with three masters:* Why the need for FTSSs? What is special about them? Who are the masters of the FTSSs? Who do FTSSs serve?
- Upward social mobility and the trade union employed as a stepping stone: Are FTSS positions used for upward social mobility? What are the perks and resources attached to the position of FTSSs? Are these perks the reason for the fierce contest for FTSS positions and are they a source of upward social mobility? Are FTSSs the source of social status and social capital?
- Internal democracy and accountability: Does the position of FTSS afford opportunities for the 'iron law of oligarchy' and social distance? Are FTSSs (un)accountable to their constituency? How do FTSSs account for both members and the trade union?
- Social downgrading: What happens to FTSSs who fail to secure re-elections? What are the options available to FTSSs who are not re-elected?

The rise of the FTSS and their contradictory roles

FTSSs have become a central feature of the post-1973 trade union movement in South Africa since the historic agreements were first signed at Ford and Volkswagen (VWSA) in the late 1980s that changed the landscape of industrial relations in the country. The agreement meant that trade unions would now have a segment of shop stewards that would do full-time union

work and be paid for by the employer. This was a major benefit to the trade union movement, and it was shaped by the German Multi-National Companies model of workers' council. It changed the industrial relations of the country and the relationship between companies and trade unions, introducing some form of cooperation, mutual understanding, and respect. Employers accepted that trade unions *are here to stay* and, thus, needed to be given a much greater voice and resources to be able to represent their members and maintain labour peace in the workplace effectively and efficiently.

FTSSs have become a central feature of the post-1973 union since the first FTSS agreements were signed. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, unions negotiated for the right to have FTSSs. FTSS agreements have since become part of the trade unions' tradition, including NUMSA, the case study of this thesis. At times, the right to have an FTSS is included in the Recognition Agreement, which is the first agreement a trade union signs with the employer, which recognises and gives the trade union organisational rights, the rights to recruit and organise in a workplace.

In the workplace, the FTSS agreement becomes a separate agreement that details the ratios of members to FTSSs, rights of FTSSs, duties, allowances, facilities, and other related matters. Trade unions have used the position of a FTSS as a key organisational tool and instrument in building the trade union in the workplace or shop floor and at local levels of a union. FTSSs have undertaken union work inside the workplace on a full-time basis and are paid by the employer. This has strengthened the union on the ground as it affords them extra support to attend to union issues as they augment the role of an organiser. The union, through the FTSSs, is constantly visible at the shop floor level on a full-time basis. The FTSSs also acts as an organiser, meaning that it also executes the tasks and functions that the organiser would ordinarily perform. These tasks include but are not limited to recruiting, campaign work and representing workers inside and outside their plant, notably at the CCMA.

FTSS and the (crisis) of trade union representation

Only a limited amount of research has been conducted on FTSSs, and accordingly, this study addressed this gap in the literature by studying the role of FTSSs in-depth and answering the questions related to trade union representation. The shop steward movement that grew out of the post-1973 trade unions that emphasised worker control as the fundamental principle and the building block for the democratic tradition of these trade unions defined these trade unions and built their strength and militancy (see Buhlungu, 2010; Maree, 1982; Webster 1985). Shop stewards were to breathe life into the democratic principles espoused by these trade unions. FTSSs were an extension of this shop steward movement.

It is noteworthy that the rationale for FTSSs was largely a management initiative as they were initially proposed and offered to the trade unions by the employers as a mechanism and instrument to deal with the disturbances in production caused by shop stewards. Shop stewards would often be called from the production line to represent workers and members as well as to attend to trade union activities (see Gomomo, 1985). These disturbances had an impact on production scheduling as shop stewards were not guaranteed to be on the production line for the duration of their shifts but were dictated to by the unpredicted trade union activities. Thus, employers offered the positions of FTSSs as a measure to deal with these disturbances and disruptions and, accordingly, stabilise production.

On the other hand, the trade union accepted the proposal and negotiated for the FTSSs to build the strength and militancy of the trade union on the ground to their advantage. The rationale for trade unions to further negotiate for FTSSs was informed by the lack of resources to hire organisers to organise every workplace as they grew in size. FTSSs were negotiated to help augment the role of the organiser. Thus, they play a significant role in organising at the shop floor and local levels.

This thesis has shown how FTSSs play the role of being an organiser as they participate in broader trade union activities, including campaigns and recruitment drives of the trade unions. This is one of the central roles of FTSSs and plays a significant role in building a vibrant and militant trade union on the ground or at branch and local levels.

The FTSS, as an organiser, affords the trade union extra support at the expense of the employer, which then may question the FTSS' loyalty. Who is the master of the FTSS? Tony Lane (1974), in his seminal work, called shop stewards *the man with two masters*. However, this thesis argues that the FTSS is a man with three masters and not two. While the first master is the workers who elected them and expect them to represent them, the second master is the trade union they represent in the workplace and expects to keep the organisation functional in the workplace and at the local level by organising, campaigning, and representing workers. Finally, the third master is the employer that pays the wages and salaries of the FTSS and expects them to maintain labour peace in the workplace. This is detailed in Chapter 5.

FTSSs at BMW

This thesis studied the evolution of both the shop steward and FTSS movement by employing a case study of NUMSA at the BMW Rosslyn plant in Tshwane. The first FTSSs at BMW were negotiated in the early 1990s, and the union and employer have since come to an agreement to have an all-full-time SSC due to production efficiency and effectiveness. The trade union currently has ten FTSSs and no ordinary shop stewards in the workplace. This is a unique arrangement that the union entered into with BMW and the only one across the unions and sector. Consequently, it makes the BMW plant an interesting plant to study. Over the years, trade unions have used the position of FTSSs as a key organisational tool for building the union in the workplace and locally. Thus, the FTSSs are referred to as organisers because of their role in augmenting the role of an organiser, as revealed particularly in Chapter 5.

The BMW FTSSs play a significant role in organising the trade union at the Rosslyn Local as they are always available to campaign and recruit for the trade union. They are also available to represent workers in other plants in the Rosslyn Plant and help to assist in organising shop steward elections in other workplaces in the local structure. Thus, the FTSS SSC of BMW does not only benefit the BMW rank-and-file members but also benefits members of other plants locally and helps in strengthening the trade union. Thus, the thesis argues that all FTSS SSC should be explored in other locals as part of building a strong local branch.

Role of an FTSS: FTSS as an organiser with unlimited time-off

The thesis makes the following theoretical arguments. In Chapter 5, the role of the FTSS is explained. Furthermore, it is argued that one of the major gains for the union to have FTSSs is that, unlike ordinary shop stewards, they have unlimited time off to attend to union activities and represent workers, both inside and outside the plant. The FTSSs sit in the union office on a permanent and full-time basis to execute union work. The evidence at BMW confirms the advantages of having FTSSs as the union's point of contact in the workplace. NUMSA members have unlimited access to the trade union through the FTSS. However, while workers have to go to the union office to access the FTSS, the latter only goes to the workers rarely. There is visibility of the union on the shop floor and workers and members have access to the union on the ground, which helps in building a strong organisation at the shop floor level.

The FTSS' role, like that of the shop stewards, includes the representation of workers in the workplace and outside the workplace, for instance, at the CCMA. Their roles also include:

- Representing workers in disciplinary hearings and not limited to it both inside and outside the workplace;
- Organising workers and recruiting workers to join the union;

- Participating in union campaigns, both inside the workplace and outside the workplace; and
- Participating in other management and union committees, which include issues linked to provident funds, health and safety and production scheduling.

FTSS is a class in-the-making

Chapter 6 of the thesis further argues that FTSSs are a class-in-the-making because FTSSs have become a stratum in the workforce because they conduct full-time union work and, unlike other ordinary workers, are not engaged in production work, which they are employed to do. On being elected, FTSSs ceased to do any production-related work and focused on union work. The rationale thereof is that they are now working for the union on a full-time basis, and hence, all their work focuses on that.

This thesis contends that FTSSs are a class-in-the-making because they are not engaged in any production work but union work, thus escaping the wrath of capitalist exploitation. This, in turn, separates them from ordinary workers, and they become the middle-class stratum in the workforce. The evidence at BMW has revealed that as FTSSs do union on a full-time basis, they tend to change their outlook as they start perceiving themselves as office workers as they sit in their air-conditioned union office, in clean clothes and not engaged in any production work. FTSS themselves admitted that they do not have much contact with workers but wait for them in the trade union office. Consequently, this creates a gap between workers and their elected FTSSs. There is a crisis of representation and a division between members and FTSSs. This change in outlook is also influenced by the acquired social capital and social status of the FTSS. Accordingly, when there are elections, FTSSs want to hold on to these positions because of the comfort of the office and being an office worker. They are afforded *perks* or resources which are linked to their acquired status.

Thus, the thesis further proposes that FTSSs need to be in touch with their members in order to represent them effectively and be aware of their needs and aspirations. This connectedness is important to ensure that they are accountable to their members and promote the principles of internal democracy and worker control.

The thesis further argues that internal democracy and the power of the rank-and-file in holding elected leaders, including FTSSs, accountable through the ballot is sacrosanct to maintaining the principle of worker control and promoting internal democracy within the trade unions. Hence, general meetings and regular democratic elections in the trade union are important for members to exercise their democratic rights without fear, favour, or prejudice. Members, through these processes, effectively take ownership of the trade unions and ensure the principle of worker control, which remains relevant in the trade unions today and is more important than ever, is upheld to ensure that oligarchic tendencies do not emerge in the trade union and erode the democratic nature and foundations thereof.

The sin of incumbency: Perks or resources or tools of trade

In Chapter 6, FTSS agreements that have been negotiated in the past and present are detailed. They include not only the full-time release of an FTSS but also facilities and resources as tools of trade to allow them to execute their duties effectively and efficiently. These facilities and resources are provided, and paid for, by the employer and include:

- An air-conditioned office to which members have unlimited access as it becomes the union office onsite or in the workplace;
- Office equipment, which includes basic office furniture;
- Communication tools, including computers, laptops, telephones, cell phones and printers;

- Transport, which, depending on the resourcefulness of the employer, includes a car. At BMW, the FTSSs are given four BMW cars to share amongst themselves on a rotational basis. They take them home every day and on weekends and are given a petrol card. They may use the car for personal use, and
- FTSS' allowance, which is 10% of AMIC Level 4 for the auto sector to which BMW belongs, is negotiated at the NBF level.

These facilities and resources provided by the employer constitute part of the tools of trade for the FTSSs to enable them to execute their tasks effectively and efficiently. The tools of trade have become the source of conflict and contestations for these positions of FTSSs, especially the car. Hence, the sins of incumbency.

Evidence from BMW has shown that cars are a source of tension amongst the FTSSs because the company allows FTSSs to use cars for personal use and over weekends. It is noteworthy that the ten FTSSs are only given four cars, which they have to share on a weekly rotational basis. This is the source of the conflict, as some FTSSs want to keep the BMWs more than others. None of the FTSSs can afford luxury cars such as BMWs.

This is in accordance with Marx's argument that workers are alienated from the product of their labour. Importantly, BMW cars are associated with social status. This source of conflict and competition for the cars affects NUMSA's work at the plant level. These cars do not only give the FTSSs a mode of transport to execute their duties but are also a symbol of social status and achievement. The elevated status attached to this position is one of the reasons these positions of FTSSs are highly contested and people want to be an FTSS. They do not necessarily want to serve the union but enjoy the status attached to the position.

Thus, these tools of trade are perks attached to FTSS positions. Therefore, the thesis recommends that trade unions develop a strong policy on the monitoring mechanisms to be

employed to ensure that these resources and facilities are not abused for personal gain and gratification. Rather, FTSS need to service members and build a strong worker organisation at the shop floor and local level of the trade union.

Upward social mobility and social downgrading

In Chapter 7, how FTSS positions can be exploited for upward social mobility because of the resources, namely, the perks that are attached to these positions, is explained. These positions are thus used as a stepping stone by ambitious individuals. Research (see Buhlungu, 1994; 1995; 2010) has revealed that the FTSS positions are recruitment grounds for management, specifically for the positions of HR and IR managers and, more recently, at BMW for other senior production line positions such as team leaders. This has created the impression that one must first be an FTSS to be considered for promotion. Thus, they employ these positions for upward social mobility and career paths.

History at BMW has also shown that these positions are recruitment grounds specifically for production line managers, which include team leaders and foremen. Thus, others want to be an FTSS so that they are afforded the opportunity for possible promotion on the production line. FTSS positions have become a source of upward social mobility and, as such are used as a stepping stone.

Thus, in order to address this issue, the trade union should adopt policies that will curtail personal interest tendencies, including strong accountability instruments. It is noteworthy that those who fail to retain these FTSS positions encounter social downgrading as they have to return to the production line and face the wrath of capitalist exploitation again. These FTSSs are presented with three options when they fail to secure a re-election:

1. Returning to their old position in the production line;

2. Soft landing, which entails returning to the line but doing a less intense job with guaranteed overtime and
3. Early retirement or resignation to avoid returning to the line and facing the hardship of the production line and the wrath of capitalist exploitation.

This is the social downgrading that those who fail to secure a re-election face and is the antithesis of social upward mobility in which promotion, such as being team leader and foreman, is enjoyed. Social downgrading is difficult and involves serious personal costs. It should not be viewed negatively but should be embraced as part of the democratic processes of the trade union. It should serve as a countervailing force against oligarchic tendencies and the trade union being used as a stepping stone.

I contend that social downgrading and accountability are part of democracy's pains. They should serve as a reminder to those who occupy FTSS positions that they are the servants of the workers and members. Furthermore, failure to represent members has the consequences of not being re-elected and returning to the production line. It is part of democratic and worker control principles to empower workers to choose who to represent them.

Finally, the thesis contends that although these positions of FTSS afford opportunities for upward social mobility and the acquisition of social status and social capital, those who are not re-elected may experience social downgrading. Those who are not re-elected are faced with the unfortunate situation of returning to the production line to their old jobs. This is at an immense personal cost as they lose the perks and social status associated with the positions of FTSS. The thesis argues that this should not be viewed negatively but should be a motivator for those elected to these positions to become service members. Failure to do so may result in not being re-elected and returning to the line. The thesis argues that although there are calls for the career pathing of FTSS from both management and the FTSSs themselves because of the experience

one gains from being an FTSS, this should not be encouraged as it will afford opportunities for the trade unions to be employed for upward social mobility by self-interested individuals. FTSSs should return to the line when not re-elected in their positions to ensure that they are not used the position as a stepping stone or as a vehicle for career progression in the plant or workplace.

Accountability is a necessary pain of democracy

In Chapter 8, the notion that shop floor democracy is important to maintaining the democratic principles of the trade union movement and worker control is discussed. Therefore, accountability should be enforced to deal with some of the challenges presented by FTSS positions, including those employed for upward social mobility and career pathing.

NUMSA has an FTSS policy that details that FTSSs have to be accountable to the members on the shop floor through the general meeting and to each other as shop stewards through the SSC. It states that the FTSS should be accountable to the SSC through regular reports to the chairperson of the SSC, who should be an ordinary shop steward. Accordingly, the FTSS is held accountable as they report their daily activities to the SSC. Evidence at BMW reveals that this policy is undermined because NUMSA does not have ordinary shop stewards who are meant to be the first to hold FTSSs accountable in the SSC. Furthermore, the chairperson of the SSC is also an FTSS. Thus, general meetings have become the only important tool available to hold the FTSS accountable in workplaces such as BMW, which does not have ordinary shop stewards. The general meeting serves as the mandating instrument for the FTSS and reporting back, which, in turn, enforces accountability.

Accountability is a powerful tool of democracy in trade unions such as NUMSA, which are built on the democratic principle of worker control that needs to be enforced for them to be truly democratic and avoid the development of oligarchic tendencies. Accountability at the

shop floor level is easier to attain than at the other upper structures, such as the regional and national offices of the trade union. At the local branch or workplace level, FTSSs should be accountable and hold regular general meetings to solicit mandates and reports. At BMW, general meetings are held every quarter, and in between these meetings, FTSSs have common lunches and suppers when there are pressing issues to be addressed.

Constituency meetings are also convened by FTSSs every month to communicate the company's production schedules. The thesis argues that these constituency meetings reduce FTSSs to nothing but communication brokers and tools of management as they communicate production schedules and other operational issues, which have nothing to do with their trade union work. FTSSs serve management by being a communication channel and, thus, a tool of management as these meetings are normally supposed to be convened by foreman and team leaders. However, FTSSs convene the meetings and convey production schedules. This then undermines their accountability to the workers and, in turn, serves the interests of management. This confirms my thesis argument that the FTSS is a *man with three masters*. In this case, the employer, the third master, benefits from FTSSs as a communication tool for operational and production needs and requirements.

The trade unions should enforce accountability of FTSSs at the branch level because failure to do so will lead to the bureaucratisation of the trade union at the branch level, which can be avoided if regular general meetings and elections of FTSSs are convened. These regular general meetings and elections are a countervailing force against what Michels (1958) termed the 'iron law of oligarchy', the tendencies of premised democratic organisations that are dominated by a few elites when they grow in size.

Organisations can grow in size and still be democratic at the local and branch level. In the workplace, it is possible and practical for trade unions to have internal democracy. Internal

democracy involves the active participation of individual members in the organisation. In the trade union movement, active participation can be realised through general meetings and regular elections of FTSSs. These elections must be democratic by allowing members' views to be expressed freely without fear, intimidation, influence and interference.

Accountability is a necessary pain of democracy that trade unions should embrace and promote if they are to embrace worker control effectively and efficiently in representing workers at the workplace through elected shop floor representatives such as shop stewards and FTSSs. Thus, to promote and preserve worker control, the cornerstone principle of the post-1973 trade unions, FTSSs need to be accountable to their members because the lack of accountability will afford opportunities for oligarchy tendencies and create a crisis in trade union representation. Those elected in these positions of FTSS will serve their own personal interests and use these positions for their selfish interests and upward social mobility, reducing the union to a stepping stone instead of building a solid and militant worker organisation on the shop floor.

The thesis argues that accountability is a necessary pain of democracy that needs to be enforced to ensure that these trade unions remain true to their democratic foundations of worker control and internal democracy. FTSSs should be accountable to their members through regular general meetings to solicit mandates and give feedback. Regular democratic elections are important in grounding the trade union movement in their democratic principles and worker control principle, which are essential to ensure that trade unions reflect the aspirations of their members. The thesis argues that regular democratic elections continue to breathe life into the worker control principle, which is the foundation and sacrosanct to these post-1973 trade unions. Rank-and-file members, through regular democratic elections, exercise control of their trade union by voting for their representatives without any influence, fear, favour, or intimidation.

I argue that trade unions ought to be democratic, especially at the branch level, and reflect the aspirations of their members. Thus, FTSSs need to be accountable at all material times for worker control to be a living practice and not just a slogan. Internal democracy can only be enforced through accountable elected leaders at the basic level of the trade union, the branch, and the shop floor. This can only be achieved with a targeted and broader worker education of rank-and-file members of the trade unions.

Workers ought to be trained and conscientised to understand how worker control works and how to take charge of their organisation, which will enable them to hold shop stewards and FTSSs accountable. Both organisational and political education are important for this purpose. Thus, although accountability is a pain of democracy, it must be entrenched within the trade union and institutionalised through worker education. It is imperative that accountability is understood by those taking up leadership positions at all levels of society, including the trade union movement.

Democracy can only be built and practised if the people who elect leaders can hold them accountable and have the power to recall them if they fail to represent their interests and aspirations. The post-1973 unions built on worker control should be at the forefront of leading and advocating for accountability in society broadly because their existence is premised on this very factor.

However, the NUMSA arrangement at BMW of having an all-FTSS SSC disregards the NUMSA FTSS policy on accountability of FTSSs. If the system is harnessed correctly, a worker's model can emerge, yielding positive results and building the organisation at the plant level. This system needs careful management, and FTSSs need to be accountable to the workers before they report to the higher structures of the union. Regular general meetings are a viable solution, and the union needs to think creatively to avert this system being exploited for

personal material gains and self-interests, including the union being used as a stepping stone and upward social mobility. The workers need to be socialised and conscientised to understand the basic principles of worker control, that they are the owners of these unions, and the FTSSs must account for them.

FTSS positions offer temporary upward social mobility to those elected to them; this temporariness can be compared to Barchiesi's (2011) work on the permanent insecurity of workers in precarious jobs because of their precarity. The permanent insecurity that FTSSs face is premised on the fact that their job and tenure as an FTSS are fixed to a term of office of usually three years, and thereafter, they should stand for re-election.

Failure to secure re-election results in one going back to the production line and facing the wrath of capitalist exploitation, which is temporarily escaped when elected to these positions. This insecurity explains why FTSSs fight to maintain these positions and the fierce contestation for them. These positions help them escape the work on the line and elevate their social status and the resources attached to them, which, if not re-elected, they lose.

Hence, I have highlighted the social downgrading of FTSSs who have not been re-elected for these positions. This results in them having to go back to the jobs that they held prior to being elected to the FTSS position. This is the dilemma that these FTSSs face, as failure to secure the position results in them facing social downgrading, as I highlighted in Chapter 8.

The elevated status and perks or resources attached to these positions must be understood as trade tools and not benefits. Thus, I propose that the unions should socialise FTSSs to understand such resources as such and not benefits or perks and that they should be used to serve members and not for their own personal needs and self-gratification. Yes, workers do not struggle to be poor, but equally, the trade union need not be used as a stepping stone or for

career progression and advancement; instead, it is a tool for workers to fight for better working conditions and conditions of service with better wages in a capitalist society.

The post-1973 trade unions as worker-controlled organisations ought to preserve this principle so that they can continue and remain as the mouthpiece of workers rooted in the workplace, where workers are, and not a self-enrichment scheme for the elected few or FTSSs. This supports a bottom-up instead of a top-down organisation and will ensure that oligarchic tendencies are suffocated within these trade unions, which have a rich history in the South African labour movement and liberation history.

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Appendices:

NUMSA FTSS bios and background information

Name	Age	Gender m/f	Level of education	When did you join BMW	When did you join NUMSA	When were you 1st elected as a FTSS	Number of years as a FTSS	Position before being elected as FTSS	Other positions occupied in the union
1. Paul Mahlangu	30	Male	Tertiary Certificate in what?	2012	2014	2015	4yeears	Logistics department	Plant FTSS Committee secretary
2. Paul Mogano	47	Male	Tertiary	2001	2001	31/04/2013	6yeears	Metal finisher (body shop)	Plant FTSS Committee chairperson
3. Thabo Mogoroe	44	Male	Matric (grade 12)	2000	2000	31/04/2013	6yeears	Line-supplier	Regional Office Bearer (ROB), NBF Chief Negotiator, Sector NOB, SDF
4. Vuyokazi Mathebula	37	Female	NQF Level 5	2012	2012	2017	2yeears	Logistics	Health and Safety alternative FTSS
5. Lawrence Mo	53	Male	NQF Level 2 (Entrepreneurship)	1999	1999	2017	2yeears	Assembly quality inspector	Gender committee, EBT Trustee, Transport

	dise									committee
	Name	**Age**	**Gender m/f**	**Level of education**	**When did you join BMW**	**When did you join NUMSA**	**When were you 1st elected as a FTSS**	**Number of years as a FTSS**	**Position before being elected as FTSS**	**Other positions occupied in the union**
6.	Kenny Majozi	46	Male	Matric (grade 12)	2000	2000	2011	8years	Assembler	Deputy Secretary of FTSS Committee, medical aid trustee, NBF negotiator, NUMSA Local Chair
7.	Marvin Modise	57	Male		1994	1994	2011	8years	Assembly plant	Plant FTSS Committee Deputy Chairperson,
8.	May	45	Male	NQF Level 5	2011	2011	2016	4years	Logistics line supply	NBF Negotiator and Health and Safety Representative.
9.	Esrom	14 November 1984	Male	N6 Civil Engineering	02 November 2012	2013	2014	4years (2014-	Line operator at the Assem	Deputy Health and Safety Rep,

							2019)	bly Depart ment	Chair Transpor t Committ ee Medical Aid Board of Trustee

List of interviews:

Name of interviewee:	**Date of interview:**	**Place of interview**	**Designation:**
Alex Mashilo	19/04/2019	Braamfontein: City of Johannesburg	Former NUMSA Head of OCCB
Alpheus May	12 July 2017 & 18/08/2017	BMW Plant Rosslyn: City of Tshwane (CoT)	Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW
Bhabha lika Maphikela Nhlapho	20/09/2019	COSATU House Braamfontein: City of Johannesburg	COSATU Education Secretary
David Mahojane	6/10/2019	Ga Rankuwa: City of Tshwane	Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW
Dinga Sikwebu	18/10/2019	NUMSA HQ Johannesburg CDB: City of Johannesburg	Former NUMSA Head of Education
Dumisane Dakile	19/09/2019	Sandton: City of Johannesburg	Former COSATU Gauteng Provincial Secretary
Esrom	2/08/2017 & 26/09/2018	BMW Plant Rosslyn: City of Tshwane (CoT) and Spur Restaurant Montana CoT	Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW

Jane Barrette	28/09/2018	Braamfontein: City of Johannesburg	Labour Activist
Johanne Maare	2/07/2018	University of Western Cape: City of Cape Town CoCT)	Labour Scholar
Kally Forest	27/08/2019	Wits University: City of Johannesburg (CoJ)	NUMSA Historian
Katlego Makgaleng	11/09/2019	Tshwane Municipal Offices: City of Tshwane (CoT)	Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW
Kenny Majozi	27/07/2019	BMW Plant Rosslyn: City of Tshwane (CoT)	BMW FTSS
Lawrence Modise	17/10/2019	BMW Plant Rosslyn: City of Tshwane (CoT)	Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW
Marvin Molefe	21/07/2017 & 07/03/2020	BMW Plant Rosslyn: City of Tshwane (CoT) and Ga Rankuwa respectively.	Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW
Mike Fushane	3/10/2019	Ga Rankuwa: City of Tshwane	Former NUMSA Rosslyn Local Organiser
Mojalefa Musi	12/12/2018	DISTELA HQ Johannesburg CBD: City of Johannesburg	Former CEPPWAWU Educator and Part-time CCMA Commissioner
Paul Mahlangu	12/07/2017 & 18 August 2017	BMW Plant Rosslyn: City of Tshwane (CoT)	Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW
Paul Mogano	17/10/2019 & 31/10/2019	BMW Plant Rosslyn: City of Tshwane (CoT)	BMW FTSS
Peter Dantjie	26/08/2018	BMW Plant Rosslyn: City of Tshwane (CoT)	ER Manager at BMW
Rob Rees	4/10/2019	NALEDI Office at COSATU House Braamfontein: City of Johannesburg	Labour Scholar
Ronny Zitha	13/11/2019	City of Tshwane	Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW
Ruby Vuyokazi Mathebula	13/11/2019	BMW Plant Rosslyn: City of Tshwane (CoT)	Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW

Steven Faulkner	29/08/2019	Braamfontein: CoJ	Labour Activist
Temelo Nyatama (later fired)	27/07/2017 & Jan 2018	BMW Plant Rosslyn: City of Tshwane (CoT) and Johannesburg CBD respectively.	Former NUMSA FTSS at BMW
Thabo Mogoroe	19/11/2019	BMW Plant Rosslyn: City of Tshwane (CoT)	19/11/2019. NUMSA FTSS at BMW
Theo Steele	23/08/2019	COSATU House Braamfontein: City of Johannesburg	COSATU Organising Secretary
Zanoxolo Wayile	17/10/2019	NUMSA HQ Johannesburg CDB: City of Johannesburg	NUMSA Head of Education