

Selinah Monametsi

Summary

This is a wide-ranging interview with Selinah Monametsi and another respondent who is only named as 'George' who may be her husband (so he would be George Monametsi?) and who seemed to work(s?) at Kelloggs.

Selinah was born in 1958 in Kwa Thema, one of 7 children in the Madlopha family. She schooled in KwaThema and Swaziland and returned in July 1976, having completed Std 4 and with a young baby boy. She found holiday work at I&J (now McCain) and went back to do Form 1 in 1978 and completed Form 4 in 1981 after giving birth to a baby girl.

She worked for I&J from 1982 and joined Food Beverage Union soon after where she learnt of the limits of liaison committees. She touches on the differences between Food Bev and Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union (Sfawu) and gives the reasons for workers moving to Sfawu.

When Sfawu came into I&J in 1983 she became very involved in the union and was elected a shop steward. She remembers many weekly union meetings – in the factory and in the union – as well as battles over wages, working conditions (freezing conditions in parts of the factory), grading and the fight against petty apartheid (separate canteens and toilets).

She married George in 1985 and gave birth to their child in 1986. She remembers the stayaways of 1984 and 1985 during which 15 residents of KwaThema lost their lives and the 1985 State of Emergency. Because both she and her husband were actively involved in the union, they decided that she should withdraw from a leadership position in Sfawu because it was too risky for their children to be left without parents.

She describes how they approached a battle with management in a strategic way – first a go-slow, then a consumer boycott and if that still didn't produce results, workers would go on strike. However they would link the strike to particular times of year eg when it was time to freeze peas because peas needed to be processed quickly.

Both she and George relate the debates and arguments that took place within the union movement in the 1980s over whether trade unions should work together with the UDF and should be involved in community struggles. They bemoan the compromise reached at Codesa as well as the weakness of current unions, how trade union leaders have become corrupt and how despite getting rid of Mbeki, Zuma has not made any difference to workers' lives. In fact George recommends that unions should get out of the alliance.

Facilitator: This is an interview with Selinah Monametsi in KwaThema, the date is the 26th June 2012, and interview is done by Brown Maaba. Ma thanks very much for your time.

Respondent: Ok

Facilitator: Let's start with your family background, where you come from, schooling, how you were educated and how you ended up in unions.

Respondent: I was born in 1958, January 6, in a family of 9, I am the fifth on the girls and then two boys come after me and then two more girls which makes us nine. Mr. and Mrs. Madlopha are my parents, my mother passed away in 2005 at the age of 80, then I am still left with my

father who was born in 1920, I think he is 92, he is still alive. I was born here in KwaThema, in Mlambo, White City. In terms of my schooling, when I was in standard two, my father took me to Swaziland where he was born, that's where I did my standards 3, 4 and 5. Then because of the state of affairs in Swaziland which were not good, there's a lot of slavery in Swaziland as you can see they are still struggling there. I told my father that I could not live there any longer, I came back in 1976, after the riots of 1976, and I think it was around July or August if I am not mistaken. Because it was during the year, I had to find work, I worked in the kitchens in Idlevic until November 1976, I went McCain, and at that time it was called Macology brothers. I worked there, I think I am mistaken, it was not Macology, and it was I&J. I worked from November 1976, 1977 and I was saving money during this time, in January 1978 I went back to school, in Thembalikazulu and did Form 1 there. I would go to work part time in I&J during school holidays, my father didn't want me to go back to school, he was angry because I left others in Swaziland and came back here because I couldn't tolerate the life in Swaziland. So every school holidays I would work so I can have money for school for the following year, and already in October 1975 I had a baby boy, so I had to feed that child and at the same time go to school. I went to school up to 1981 when I was doing Form 3 which I was doing in Phulong Secondary School, Thembazwe only went up to Form 1, then I went to Phulong and I passed my JC, I went to school up to JC in Phulong and then I went to Kenneth Masekela to do Form 4. In December 1981 when I was doing Form 4 I gave birth to a baby girl, then I finished Form 4 and then went back to work at McCain, it was I&J at that time, I carried on and worked until 2000 where it became McCain.

I got involved in unions in 1982, at McCain the union that was operating was the liaison committee, the Chairperson was Bennet, and

I can't remember his surname. Then it changed and Food Beverage was introduced, the very Chairperson which was Bennet also became the Chairperson of Food Beverage. It still operated as the liaison committee because the very Chairperson was elected by the employers, so even when Food Bev was introduced, it still operated as if they were still under the employers. I met Jackie in early 1982, around March or April where he was organizing that Sweet Food come in and replace Food Beverage. During Food Beverage, Skhakhane was General Secretary and Paul Ntuli was President. Then in 1983 Sweet Food was established in I&J, the Chairperson in was Rusty and I was his Vice Chairperson. During that time, from 1983 until 1985 we had a lot of stay-aways in KwaThema, in fact not just KwaThema but nationally, we had two at first in 1984, a two day stay-away. I think in early 1985 we had a three day stay-away, that's where about 15 people died here in KwaThema and at work only one person died. During those times of stay-aways people were also killed with bombs, if I remember correctly there were other four people who died. In this group of 15 people who died, Tutu also came to address us during that funeral, one of the people was Paul who worked with us, he was from Kgaswane, and he worked at Coldstone during that time.

In 1985 there was a state of emergency, because I got married to George in 25 September 1985, then on the 12 February 1986 we had a baby girl. Sweet Food was affiliated to Fosatu; it was in 1985 when Cosatu was established. Chris Dlamini was the president of Fosatu. During those times, between 1983 to 1985 was when I was very involved in union matters, but I stopped in 1985 when I got married because I was pregnant, then I delivered my baby in 1986, that's when I stopped because both of us could not be involved in the struggle, it was difficult at that time because the Boers were also fighting against

us. So we didn't want to leave our children orphans just in case something happens to us. That's my history.

In 1992 we had two weeks strike in McCain, we called in a sleep in, where workers got arrested and held in Dunnotar and in Brakpan. Because I knew the struggles unions went through, I organized a lawyer for them, Gugu Yende, she was our lawyer which we paid every month just in case something would happen, I can't remember what had happened with unions, whether we could not find them or what. I had taken them food; I was in management by then, so when I got there I found them and decided to call Gugu. We worked all night trying to release them from Dunnotar, it was a Friday and they were released on Saturday afternoon. It was around June when we were negotiating, it was winter (unclear), and it was in 1992. During Fosatu the president was Chris Dlamini and the Secretary was Jay Naidoo. My history ends there, but I worked a lot, attending seminars for weeks. There was a time when we were forming 9 August; I was going to go overseas in Geneva. Because of the crookedness of the union people I was overlooked, I can't remember who did that but ended up not going.

(Discussion not clear). Yes we found the one you took.

Facilitator: I brought it back same day.

Respondent: Yes thank you, we found it under the door; I think that's the only one I have for unions. I was in a week's training/seminar there; I can't remember the date though.

Respondent 2: Do you have Rusty's phone number?

Facilitator: I interviewed him.

Respondent: That's the only photos I have, with Rusty and others, we were all in a get togethers. This is the only photo I have with people of the struggle. So that is how I left, in 1986 after I got married and gave birth, I had to stick to being a housewife and work, but George continued with the unions.

Facilitator: Who introduced you to the unions, because you came in as a part timer at I&J?

Respondent: I was introduced by George and Rusty; he was a close friend with Rusty.

Facilitator: What was your impression of unions?

Respondent: As I was saying that at I&J there was Food Beverage, their cooperation was not what I thought the (unclear) should be. When I looked at George's firm, Kelloggs, they already had a union, Sweet Food; it worked way better than Food Beverage, that's where I saw that we should remove Food Beverage so that we can have our own shop steward, brought by us, so that she/he can listen to us and do better than Food Beverage. Food Beverage was still owned by the whites and the Chairperson got mandate from the whites. So we wanted to change things, the salaries they were paying us, the white's attitude, a lot of things were still very behind, our firm was very cold and they didn't provide us with warm things. When Sweet Food started, they managed to change a lot of things, things like having protective clothing to suit where we worked, Sweet Food did a lot of things that Food Bev couldn't do. That place was cold but it didn't have protective clothing, the selected who got it and that protective clothing was not proper, when Sweet Food started in 1984 they sent us

a person who came to check how cold it was and was going to do recommendations on what we should be wearing, that is when they built us a boma, there were people who worked in the refrigerators, it was very cold there, they said the boma must be built so that when a person leaves the refrigerator they can go to a warm place. The salaries were fixed as well and they were better, the employer also acknowledged us now.

Facilitator: The liaison committee before Food Beverage, how was it?

Respondent: They had people who represented people, as I said before about the Chairperson, he was in management, he was a foreman. It was him and one shopsteward, but at the same time because he was a foreman and a Chairperson, most of the time he wasn't representing the worker, he pretended to be representing the worker but in reality he received his mandate from the employer. If we would ask him to do something, when he got to the employer, they would bribe him with things we could see and then we realized that we should remove him. In fact we decided to first look for a union that would represent us, then we got Food Bev but we saw that it was still coming in with the same person we wanted to remove, Food Bev was more representative of the employer than the employee, if I am not mistaken they affiliated to Inkatha. Food Bev later didn't want to join Fosatu, instead they affiliated to Inkatha, when all the other unions were joining Fosatu, Food Bev didn't want to join.

Facilitator: Food Bev?

Respondent: Yes

Facilitator: Didn't that cause tension?

Respondent: It did cause tension because before Sweet Food started, there was a time when we ended up voting whether they want the union or the person, because they liked this person although they saw that he was not fully representing them, but they were comfortable with him. So we ended up voting whether we wanted him or the union, so luckily we ended up with Sweet Food. It was bad because there were people who got fired.

Facilitator: Was it as bad as Jabula Foods?

Respondent: No it wasn't as bad as Jabula Foods, but it was heading that way.

Facilitator: What prevented it to not become that terrible?

Respondent: To tell the truth, I am a Christian, so everything I did, I did through prayer, we would hold our strategic meetings at home for Sweet Food, and I was a very strong woman in prayer, so I prayed a lot. The other thing was doing things the mature way, and that meant you had strategy when doing things. Rusty and I were very mature, there was a guy called Siphoniso who was very bully, we would call him to order and tell him we are trying to persuade these people. It was Rusty and Siviwe, we don't know what happened to him, he disappeared, it was myself, Rusty, Siphoniso and Siviwe, we don't know what happened to Siviwe, he was a very strong organizer and was very intelligent although you would never notice, he disappeared in 1984 and we never heard from him again, he didn't even collect his money, we don't know if he died at home or something, he disappeared. So we had a very good manner of approach and that we knew how things were in the struggle so we did things carefully.

Facilitator: So when Sweet Food took over, you became Augustine's deputy at branch level?

Respondent: Yes, in the firm. During that time there was a local shopsteward committee which I was a member of, and I was a member in the BEC (branch executive committee), there was also REC (regional executive committee) which I was a member of.

Facilitator: Recruitment of people to join the union, at I&J, was it easy?

Respondent: It wasn't easy to move people from Food Beverage to Sweet Foods, it was difficult because you would find that just when we thought we had 50 + 1 then we would find that someone has gone back and then we would start again to persuade that person, it was not easy. When we started it in 1983, we signed it in Park Hotel and we sang songs about it, we signed the agreement.

Facilitator: As Sweet Food what were the pressing issues, shop floor issues because you took over Sweet Food to address workers issues. What needed to be changed at I&J?

Respondent: One was wages were very low, working conditions also were not good, so those were the things we targeted. Working conditions were part of the negotiations. In other firms, when an employee starts they were forced to be a member of a medical aid, they were also forced to be a member of the pension fund. In I&J it was voluntary, so a lot of people joined the pension fund around 1985/6 after we had persuaded them to join because when they left the company they wouldn't have money, I&J made it voluntary but in other companies it was part of the package, your contract. So those

were the main objectives, the things we wanted to change. So we wanted to change the maternity leave was non-existent because women would stay at home without being paid, so we negotiated that for every one week in the twelve weeks people get their pay, other companies were much better than us because they received their whole pay while on maternity leave.

Facilitator: Was the pay issue ever fixed properly?

Respondent: No, even today it's still the same problem, people would go on strike almost every year, at that time the union was very poor, we would go on strike maybe for 72 hours and then go back to work. We did not target very high as well, we wanted to be reasonable and not jump to very high demands.

Facilitator: Were you ever satisfied as workers about the pay after the strikes and negotiations?

Respondent: Not exactly satisfied but we would reach that compromise because we would not get everything we want but would be happy that at least we got some of the things we wanted for example on benefits. We pushed until the last strike that we had which was in 1992.

Facilitator: Did you have to fight for maternity leave as well?

Respondent: They gave us but they didn't want to give us what we wanted (unclear) the one week for twelve weeks, and also staying at home a month before you deliver your child and get your pay, then the three months you get one week's pay.

Facilitator: Generally, how were the working condition at I&J, because you were talking about the fact that it is cold and so on?

Respondent: When I started there were three departments, there was food can where we did tinned food, then there was quick freeze, it was very cold and they worked with water and it was cold behind the tunnel, behind the tunnel where we chopped veggies it was a little bit warm on the top but on the floor there was water and cold and then when we finish they would go to a place like a kitchen and then it goes straight to an area which is very cold. Most of the time they didn't provide us with protective clothing, most times we would work wearing soccer socks, we would buy a lot of socks to put underneath and then put the soccer socks on top. Until 1985 where there was a person who came who was sent by Sweet Foods to assess everything and the areas we were working in. The third one was the (unclear); it was not cold because it did pies, burgers etc. The department that was cold was the deep freeze, so he assessed and found that it was cold there and people were getting sick as a result, they were requested to provide us with Freezer jackets, tracksuits, socks, gloves, balaclavas. They starting giving us these things, one for each per person, then things improved and we received two and now we are getting four pairs. They also started to give us freezer pants, but in some areas they don't give them they only provide tracksuits, unfortunately our unions is not functional anymore, they don't represent us anymore so that things can change, but they give us although they are selective. At that time we used to work with gumboots and not safety shoes, we were forced to wear gumboots because we worked in a wet area, now we work with safety shoes. As I said that we all used to wear these soccer socks because they were the only ones that could hold the socks we wore underneath.

Facilitator: Did people buy these socks from their own pockets?

Respondent: Yes we would.

Facilitator: Till today do you still buy your own?

Respondent: No they buy for us now. By then our canteens were divided, there was one for whites and one for blacks, so when Sweet Foods arrived we negotiated that they do away with the segregated canteens, although I can't remember when it was done away with but we no longer have two canteens, we also had different toilets for blacks and whites, but now we use same toilets.

Facilitator: At I&J there's more women than men?

Respondent: Yes, majority are women.

Facilitator: Did employers not take advantage of that and exploit women, do whatever they want?

Respondent: Not really because women are more vocal than men. Although there were other areas of work, but they were not exploiting us, most working areas they were able to differentiate them for men and women. No they didn't exploit us. During that Liaison committee Chairperson's time people were given a raise not on merit but because you were liked by him or not. He had his own people that he liked, it didn't matter how hard you worked, if he didn't like you then you didn't have a chance. So we then had to correct that and it only depended on whether you were A1, A2, A3, B1, B2, B3, B4 and B5 then the scales, so it was like that with us, but for them to exploit us, no it was not happening.

Facilitator: The men that were there, were they willing to be led by women like yourselves.

Respondent: Yes they didn't have a problem they knew (unclear), and by then Rusty was there, when he left I can't remember who took over, but they never had a problem, because even now, I am sure for more than 6 to 7 years we had a male leader and then after that we had a female leader again till two years back.

Facilitator: You also sat in different committees of Sweet Food, didn't that take up most of your time as a woman, also the responsibilities you had a work? How did you balance those things, home life and union work?

Respondent: By then I was still at home, I was not married then, so I left my kids at home with my mother, then at work I was given time off, I was QC at the time and that meant that if I had gone away then I would get time off, that was the agreement, we had ten days per year of union activities (unclear).

Facilitator: The strikes that you would have, were they effective?

Respondent: They were very effective. Remember that time, it was supported by people in the township, if there was a strike at a certain firm, you wouldn't see someone going there to look for a job, because the very same things that were happening in the workplace were happening in society, so we all had a common cause, we didn't have these things of labour brokers, people were supportive. If there was something to be done in the firm during the strike the employer would have to ask one of their white counterparts and management to do it, they were very scared, they would for instance see a bug(?) and they

would run away so they would see that it's better to negotiate with us and come to an understanding on issues raised. When you strike you should be mindful of where you conduct your strike, you must look at where you should attack so it hurts, for instance having a strike during peas season, you would have hurt them.

Facilitator: Peas is important?

Respondent: Yes almost all of our products use peas, it's also expensive, it has a lifespan of three hours if I am not mistaken for you to process it, it comes green and after three hours if not tended to it changes and becomes brown, immediately it arrives you must process it. So when we would strike we would check on what we were doing and concentrate on products that have a short lifespan.

Facilitator: Were there people who would sell you out during the strikes and so on?

Respondent: They are always there, you find that you talk amongst yourself about what you are going to do and they go tell management, for instance if we are embarking on a go slow, and someone goes tell management, if they come and ask us, we would tell them, can't you see we are working, we don't know what you are talking about.

Facilitator: Were the go slows effective?

Respondent: Yes they were, we would do them first before we go on strike. We would start with the go slow, then boycott (unclear) and then if they are still not listening then go on strike, at that time we would have already applied to go on strike and we wouldn't tell them when

we would do it, and then if they would give us an ultimatum to go back to work, then two minutes before the stated time we would go back to work, before we go to the ultimate strike where we have to file papers of the intention to strike.

Tea break (MA please check Brown is speaking to a guy in Sotho, I don't think it's part of the interview though).

Facilitator: Did you receive training for union issues and so on?

Respondent: Yes.

Facilitator: What kind?

Respondent: When you were a shopsteward you would be trained on how to deal with employers, I don't know how to explain, but we did get a lot of training.

Facilitator: Who provided the training?

Respondent: Sweet Food would organize mostly people from overseas to train us, they were advanced on union matters.

Facilitator: Was it good?

Respondent: Yes. The shopstewards of today don't even go to training, they go to these seminars, I don't think they still get any training. Even meeting, you can't hear them saying they have meetings, we used to attend a lot of meetings. I knew that Wednesday I would attend the local committee and then Saturday I

would go to Germiston to attend BEC, we would be there to attend to a lot of issues and problems from different companies and learnt from and advised each other, by the time you go back to work you know how to deal with issues and problems.

Today there's lack of activity, shopstewards don't attend all those things.

Facilitator: What went wrong?

Respondent: I think it's with management, in FAWU itself, that's where I see the problem, FAWU has serious problems. When they are called they don't come, for instance our shopstewards have three years in the positions, their tenure is coming to a finish, I don't remember them saying they are going to training, last month was the first time. If you look at the things they are doing you can see that they don't have an idea of what they are doing, they mix-up messages and directives. So it looks like (unclear). The other thing is that when 1994 came, people thought we had arrived where we were going, all that energy and goals we had before 1994, they have evaporated into thin air. Now we are trying but our efforts are no longer effective.

Facilitator: So you are saying unions have lost power.

Respondent2: They were very weak, it's no more like before. Officials are getting bribed by top executives in the companies, implementation is just so weak, (unclear) and dictates.

Respondent: I think that they are weak because if you look before 1994 companies were uncontrollable, South Africa itself was ungovernable, there were strikes left, right and centre and were all

powerful. The employers and the white people at large were feeling the pressure; we did win because Mandela was finally released. They are coming back on top again because we are letting them; they are now oppressing us in a civil way not like before when they were doing it openly. I think we had very high expectations before 1994 as unions.

Respondent2: Unions had money because they were getting it from organizations abroad, from countries like Britain, South America, France and lots of funds and just after we took over, those funds were withdrawn, reason I don't know. It was maybe because of the political stance, the unions had say in the political issues of the country. Funds were withdrawn because now they were talking different issues, (unclear). The hardship started, we witnessed whereby unions were having problems, (unclear) affairs of the workers, they couldn't pay bills, phones and rentals. Then employers started taking the situation for granted. The worker movement was not healthy because they were financially bankrupt, big bosses started bribing, so the reluctance of representation, getting weak, some of the grievances were suppressed from the union side. It's my view point.

Facilitator: What about squabbles between unions themselves?

Respondent2: There were unions that were not pro this thing, squabbles started, the majority of the people were white who were marking these unions, that they must never divert from worker movement, ANC is ANC, unions mustn't be part of the political party. This is one of the issues that cost a province. I remember when UDF started recruiting trade unions, I was one of those that were delegated by Fosatu, from plant level I was delegated by Chris Hani, (unclear) instructed that there will be a meeting whereby you'll be meeting people from UDF, we met people like Poppy, already we had

caucused with Chris and the likes, that we will just go and meet those people and tell them that we are not joining them, we don't see ourselves (unclear) to do with politics. After that meeting the UDF was very disappointed because we dismissed them. After a while Mandela made an invitation to Chris.

Facilitator: While he was in prison?

Respondent2: While he was still in prison, with complaints coming from UDF that Cosatu is negative, it doesn't support the movement, Mandela was still in Pollsmoor, no I think he was in Robben Island. On their way back, there was change of politics, the language was no more the same, divisions started, whites who were lecturing us, (unclear) Adler started fighting amongst themselves with Chris and others, and the majority of them were dismissed, it was said we can do without them. Majority of whites were totally against that, that they cannot take the movement to, worker movement must remain worker movement.

Facilitator: That was the change of direction?

Respondent2: Mandela and others were saying you cannot divide worker movement and the political organization because the very same worker in the township is the same (unclear) now where do you divide the two? There was a debate of the worker in a community, do you remember, it derived from that, that no the worker becomes the community at the end of the day, how do you divide the two. After that split we started foiling (forming?) ties with the ANC, all the unions, there were these other unions that were anti ANC though, they were not party to that. They started (unclear) in exile, some little schooling was done, we saw the leadership...

Respondent: (unclear) were teaching us about the Freedom Charter.

Facilitator: Openly, those seminars?

Respondent: Yes.

Facilitator: But (unclear) did they embrace that, the whole thing of charterism.

Respondent: As I was saying that is why during that time all unions, we were mad, we were all fighting for one group, we saw that if Mandela can be released we would realize all of what is in the Freedom Charter, but after he got out, it was not ok. The Freedom Charter gave us hope. As he was saying, we were sponsored more by organizations from overseas.

Respondent2: We never thought the Freedom Charter would be sacrificed, because we strongly believed and were promised in exile that this is the road that would be taken. We suffered for the Freedom Charter (unclear) after pushing it we would have our own workers' charter that would protect the workers. But when Mandela negotiated with Boers, we sacrificed the charter in order to win the imperialist, the Americans and the likes (unclear).

Facilitator: Was it worth it to hook up with the ANC, because initially the stance was no politics but after the meeting with Mandela it was suddenly yes to politics.

Respondent2: We can say we regret it, because we never thought this would turn, it's spilt milk, something you cannot cry over.

Respondent: I don't think it's something I can regret, because as Mandela said, other things you cannot separate or differentiate, it's like the Church and politics.

Respondent2: We can say the ends and objects of the workers were defeated by the sacrifices we made in Codesa, they were defeated.

Respondent: You cannot separate those things, it goes back to people who are well educated and have money, when they look at us struggling and fighting, it's like we are doing something wrong, he has money and does not know the struggles poor people are going through. There is no way you can separate yourself from something that is happening where you live, if there is a strike in KwaThema and you don't live there, what matters is that you live on this earth and you cannot hide from these things. There was no way we could have said we don't want the ANC because we were all fighting for the same cause and goal. The only way we were going to achieve our goal was to unite, we couldn't say the ANC must do it alone, it wouldn't have accomplished what it did without uniting with us, it wouldn't have been recognized. That's why there was pressure to the government to release Mandela so that things can change in South Africa. That is where we lost of the things that were right. We would have not separated ourselves from what was happening.

Facilitator: Because of the working conditions in I&J, were there any people who were deformed over time, you find people getting sick.

Respondent: There were lots, that place was cold, it deformed people.

Respondent2: I can say 85% of people at I&J are crippled, arthritis and other things.

Respondent: People from there, during that time it was voluntary to join the pension fund, now they want to retire but cannot because he doesn't have money, he's been working since 1963 or 1964, when they leave today, they don't have anything and they are ill. There's a lady called Poppy Khoza, she lived here in (unclear), she was crippled and she was always in bed, she couldn't even bath herself. George can tell you that you can tell a person that worked in our firm, you can see by the way they walk. It's different shapes of women because of the deformity from working in the firm. The men are dying because of other illnesses like HIV, but women are deformed by the cold conditions. I was lucky because when I came back from school, I did management training through international correspondence and got a supervisory certificate and I went to Wits and got 60 hours of (unclear) a distinction, I went to Wits to do a one year Business Management Development Programme and got a certificate. Now I was in Durban Westville and was doing Train the trainer. I helped myself by studying in order to get into management, I didn't just sit and do nothing. Now people have started to learn, it will now start, after I had educated people to take pension funds and medical aid, there's a person I mentored who works at (unclear) who will be retiring at 55 years, most of the people who worked at the firm started two years back to retire at 58, others worked until they were 61 or 62 years. I saw that people were dying before they could enjoy their money, others would die still waiting for their money to arrive, others would die just after the first installment of their money arriving. I told people to retire early so that they can enjoy their money, but the time they turn 60 they have enjoyed their money. I learnt all of this while I was still a shopsteward so I passed on what I learnt to others and they used those learnings. The group that is going to retire now, at least they are not

deformed but those that work in the cold department don't want to leave and they are going to be deformed.

Facilitator: Has I&J been taken to task about the people that leave there deformed?

Respondent2: They are not, the union is so helpless today.

Respondent: They are helpless, as I was saying, if the union had worked as much as it did in 1984, if we had shopstewards that were as enthusiastic as the ones in 1984 things would be different, instead things are being taken away from workers, things that help them while at work.

Respondent2: The benefits.

Respondent: Yes, as I was saying, we used to have freezer (unclear) and jackets, now we don't get the freezer (unclear) because we are told it's only for people who get into the fridge we call a tunnel and those who get into the cold storeroom, the person who is in the department does not get those things, we don't get balaclavas either. We used to have a clinic that operated 24hrs, Monday to Friday, now we have a sister who comes in from 7am till 11am on day shift, in night shift we rely on first aiders if someone gets injured, if you are ill they must call your husband to take you home, but if you are injured the first aiders must treat you or if they can't then call an ambulance for you, during our time there would be a sister who worked night shift, we didn't need to go to the doctor unless the problem persists. There is nothing like that anymore.

Facilitator: What is the future of the unions, or at I&J?

Respondent: Ok, before I talk about the future of the unions. What also happened is that because of the squabbles in the unions, people started looking at being a shopsteward as a way to gain what they want, if they are powerful they use that for their own gain and not workers. We had a shopsteward like that, the FAWU officials ended up firing her, the case is still in court, she won it at CCMA, now it is at labour court.

Facilitator: Are they fighting amongst each other?

Respondent: Yes they are. They called her for a meeting in Germiston and she went there and yet here she said at work she was ill and was going to consult a doctor, when she got there they made her sign an attendance register, they took the register and gave it to the firm showing them that she was not ill but in a meeting, the firm fired her, a powerful person.

Facilitator: Who is that?

Respondent: Busi. When we try to follow-up the story, it seems she fought with an official in a seminar, they had booked accommodation and were supposed to share, two in a room, the official was not supposed to be part of the seminar and he came to the seminar with a partner, a room was booked for him, so she was querying that and the official got angry and decided to get her fired, and indeed she was. She was powerful in the firm but she ended up wanted to dictate to people and didn't want to follow people's mandate. She was now working together with the employer and getting some benefits from that, the workers were now aware of this and they decided to work together with the officials to get her fired. We are now in a mess because shopstewards were fired and it was a mess when voting was

happening, protocol in collecting votes was not followed and the official that was there didn't try to stop this mess from happening because they wanted her fired. We are stuck with the new shopstewards that were elected now, last week they were fighting about changing medical aids, we are using Discovery and the union brought a cheaper one called Umvuzo for people who are earning less money and cannot afford a medical aid, so that everyone can have a medical aid since we don't have a clinic anymore. There were consultants who came, if you have a problem you would speak to them and get help because other people don't have access to computers and phones in order to make direct queries to medical aids. The union suddenly says to workers they must not be consulted by the consultant from Discovery and said they will send their own person from the union, you ask yourself where does the union feature in Discovery's business, and then we hear that that there's 6% that will be deducted from our medical aid money going to the union, when we asked what this money was for, I was not there though, I was working from Marble Hall when this squabble started last week. This 6% was going to be a salary for this person from the union who was going to be a consultant from the union, what for, because I pay medical aid to a company, why now do I have to pay 6% to the union.

The union has lost direction what their purpose is at the firm. The way they are operating, a lot of people have left the union, now they are back full force, they want to remove all these shopstewards, so they are playing this game of electing people and removing them. The way I see it, we are going to end up with no unions, we are going to go back to being exploited by employers. So I see unions dying.

Facilitator: It's just a matter of time?

Respondent2: I don't think they will die, they will take a stance. The way the situation is, the unions will pull out from the tripartite alliance and they will come up with a party that represents workers, this is how I see it. You must check the political setup that we have currently in the country, between Vavi and them, where it's pushing this thing. I saw this from the onset that it was not going to work. There's a lot of suppression of workers in South Africa, and the bosses are in control of the government, and that itself kills the unions, unions are helpless today. Look at the question of labour brokers, it's terrible.

Respondent: I think they make themselves helpless, look at your union in Kelloggs, they are still recognized even today, they still rule in the firm, when the employer wants to do something they consult it first, they are very scared of it. But look at our firm, the union is dead, the employer spoke about restructuring and said those people, 12 of them must work up until June, they didn't consult the union, they just called the twelve people and told them that they are restructuring and they must apply again because they are only looking for four people out of the twelve. At Kelloggs where George works, if I fought with someone they would give me a warning and the next thing that person would run straight to his union, and the emails will be going left to right asking what happened to that person, that is how much they are scared of the union at Kelloggs. It depends what they do in that company, we are helpless but why is it that they are not helpless at Kelloggs.

Facilitator: They are still strong?

Respondent: Very strong. They consult the union about everything, in a sense that they are behind on standards they should be adhering to because of the union, they can make the changes because they can't force the changes to happen because they are scared of the

strikes. We have a union and the situation is like this, it's either the union knows the situation or they pretend as if they don't know. People wanted to do away with it and I reminded them where we come from with this union, we must just look for a way to change things not to part ways with it. Some have left but when I think about where we come from with it, I can't, even though I am in management and they don't represent me anymore, but I won't withdraw, ever since I joined I have been will carry on to be a member. I will leave in December because I will be going but not because they are not doing the job. If I am somehow involved in a case, I know it will reach the CCMA unlike if I was representing myself. Maybe George is right that the unions get out of the alliance, maybe that's the best way, but I don't see where that will take us because if the ANC is still the ruling party and they are messed up at the top I don't know where we are going.

Facilitator: Are the workers for the idea of a breakaway?

Respondent2: The organized workers have had enough of what is happening, within government they have had enough, we have changed from Mbeki to Zuma, still there's no difference, the very same Zuma is toeing the line of Mbeki, the dislike from Vavi towards Zuma is becoming too much.

Respondent: Workers are ready for that, don't forget that others are members of unions but are not members of the ANC, it's only that they work for a firm that is represented by a union that is affiliated with the Cosatu, somewhere, somehow we are sure that if you are affiliated to Cosatu then automatically you are with the ANC. So if unions pull out of the alliance they would be happy about that because it would give them freedom for them to be able to show themselves, who they support. So the sooner they pull out, they will be happy.

Respondent2: What makes things worse, what was agreed upon on some of the resolutions in Polokwane, things that were agreed upon to be pushed, were suppressed, and workers were part and parcel of those things, they were suppressed by Mbeki, we pushed Mbeki out of office and voted for Zuma thinking he will toe a different line, we find ourselves worse, and that can cause a split, workers can go at any time. If we change Zuma, who do we elect?

Respondent: If we are to succeed, we must pull out.

Respondent2: The workers during that time and the workers of today, there's no difference, nothing has changed, the way we organized then, we should now be saying land or economy are with us. Look at the years that we fought the struggle.

Respondent: Coming back to the firms, things that were agreed upon in the unions when the alliance was formed and the BEE, there was something else that was agreed upon with employers, I don't remember what it was, but all those things never changed anything.

Facilitator: Was it empowerment?

Respondent 2: Skill?

END OF TAPE

