

STEELWORKERS ELECT LEADERSHIP

On February 8th, the 1.4 million members of the United Steelworkers of America (USWA) will elect their top international union officers, including a successor to retiring president I.W. Abel. In this contest, the entrenched sellout leadership, whose slate is headed by District 34 (St. Louis region) director Lloyd McBride, is being challenged by an insurgent ticket headed by Ed Sadlowski. This challenge against an entrenched bureaucracy, in the largest industrial union in the country, reflects the rising rank and file discontent with sellout union leaders who earn large salaries (at the expense of the membership) and turn a deaf ear to the needs and grievances of the members.

In the 11 years that Abel has been in power, he has collaborated with the steel monopolies (U.S. Steel, Bethlehem, Republic, etc.) to increase productivity, abandoned the strike weapon, and raised union dues and officer's salaries. The Sadlowski forces are calling for rejection of this type of class-collaboration and business unionism that makes the union a business enterprise and not an instrument of struggle against the persistent attacks of the bosses. As a result, they have tapped a reservoir of rank and file discontent.

SADLOWSKI AND THE SFB PROGRAM

Ed Sadlowski is the director of District 31, Chicago-Gary, which claims a tenth of the USWA membership. He first ran for his present post in February 1973 against Sam Evett, a handpicked Abel candidate, and lost 25,103 to 22,753. But he and the Steelworkers Fight Back (SFB), the rank and file organization that backed him then and is supporting his present candidacy, challenged the results and succeeded in having the Department of Labor call a new election. In November 1974, Sadlowski won 39,637 to 20,058. This inspired other reform candidates in District 31 who succeeded in ousting Abel Lieutenants in the 18,000 member Local 1010, the largest in the nation, and the 10,000 member Local 1011.

The program that Sadlowski's Fight Back organization advances highlights three key issues: rank and file ratification of basic steel contracts, the right to industry-wide strikes, and a rollback of union dues. Other demands focus on a guaranteed annual wage, a cost of living clause for pensions, and a streamlining of grievance and arbitration procedures. However, lacking in the program is a strong stand against racist discrimination. Although Sadlowski/SFB has criticized the failure of the anti-discrimination Consent Decree (which has in fact institutionalized racism in the industry), this is not enough. Based on the long history of discriminatory practices in the industry, which have divided oppressed nationality workers and white workers and undermined their solidarity, strength, and combativity, a militant stand must be taken against discrimination. Having underestimated this task, the

Sadlowski/SFB slate fails to combat and expose racism as a key ideological tool used by the bosses and union sellouts to divide the workers and defeat all struggles.

JOB SECURITY, PRODUCTIVITY AND THE ENA

For steelworkers, a major issue in the elections is job security. Abel's solution to this issue has been to cooperate with industry measures to increase worker productivity. He has united with the steel monopolies in calling for the American worker to join with Big Business to increase productivity in order to meet the growing competition from Japanese and European steel. In 1971, he established joint committees on productivity with the steel monopolies. In this way, the American steelworker would be rewarded with job security. However, increased productivity has actually meant the loss of more jobs for the U.S. steelworker. To illustrate: employment in blast furnaces and steel mills dropped from 528,000, to 487,000 between 1960 and 1974 (the year before the recession hit steel), while production increased. On



the other hand, injury rates doubled between 1961 and 1969. In 1974, 15 out of 100 workers in blast furnaces and mills - and 30 out of 100 foundry workers - suffered an occupational injury or illness. For the workers, the rewards of increased productivity have been increased unemployment and

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occupational injuries and illnesses, while for the steel monopolies it has meant increased profits. The lesson is clear: in this society, productivity is sought with the goal of securing greater profits for the owners of Big Business instead of improving the conditions of the working class.

Tied to the issue of productivity has been another Abel pet project: the Experimental Negotiating Agreement (ENA) signed in March 1973. Like all national steel agreements, the ENA was not submitted to the membership for ratification, which characterizes the lack of democracy in the USWA. The ENA forbids industrywide strikes in basic steel and allows companies almost complete freedom to make productivity improvements at the expense of the workers. Under ENA, the USWA has to submit grievances or contract disagreements to compulsory arbitration through 1979. The net result of the ENA has been to rob steelworkers of their most powerful weapon - their power to stop production. As Sadlowski so aptly characterized it, the no-strike pledge is like having "a watch dog in your house with no teeth."

SADLOWSKI AND REDBAITING

Naturally Sadlowski's opponent, Lloyd McBride, has defended and rationalized all the Abel policies. Moreover, McBride and the entrenched machine have redbaited Sadlowski very strongly. They have alternated from calling him a "communist" dupe to being an outright "communist." Unfortunately, Sadlowski has given in to these attacks by vehemently stating that he opposes communism and by urging that communists be purged from the union. By these statements, he has weakened the struggle against the sellouts and given in to their reactionary and class-collaborationist ideas and positions. In addition, his position weakens the struggle to gain unity among the rank and file - unity needed to combat the bosses - and gives legitimacy to the most backward, self-serving leaders in the union who demagogically redbait to quell discontent and circumvent democratic practices. Moreover, the position is not consistent with history and the exemplary role the members of the Communist Party played as organizers in the 30's in the Steelworkers Organizing Committee the predecessor to the USWA.

The Sadlowski/SFB campaign is not the first reform campaign in a major union in recent years. That trail was initially blazed by the Miners for Democracy/Arnold Miller campaign in 1972 in the United Mine Workers. Unfortunately, the Miners for Democracy was disbanded after the election. As a result, Miller, who has had to share power with holdovers from the old administration, has grown more distant from the rank and file movement that elected him. Indeed, he has given in to redbaiting and not supported the wildcat strikes initiated by the rank and file over safety hazards and unjust firings (a long standing miner's tradition that a "blow against one is a blow against all.") SFB, on the other hand,

has stated that Sadlowski is "our vehicle" and that "individuals don't make changes."

FOR A CLASS CONSCIOUS RANK AND FILE MOVEMENT

The Sadlowski campaign is a militant, trade unionist movement that lacks a consistent and thorough working class perspective. Fundamentally, it lacks a firm stand on racism and has an anticommunist perspective. As a result, these weaknesses hamper the development of rank and file unity and the struggle against the union bureaucracy and the steel monopolies. Despite these weaknesses (which we do not underestimate), the Sadlowski campaign is a progressive development in the USWA which manifests and represent the rising discontent among steelworkers with the sellout leadership of the Abel machine. In particular its call for union democracy and the rejection of class-collaborationist policies (such as the ENA) are important steps towards building a militant, class conscious union. Thus, it is important to struggle for the election of the Sadlowski/SFB slate. However, it is more essential to develop the SFB as a militant, class-conscious rank and file formation with a defined program that unites the middle (such as Sadlowski) and left forces and is independent of an individual figure. In this regard, the lessons of the Miners for Democracy/Arnold Miller experience are extremely valuable and enlightening.

