

# OL CAMPAIGN HITS RACISM AND REFORMISM IN STEEL ELECTIONS

The demand to smash the Consent Decree in steel is an important front in the battle against discrimination in the mills. The October League has raised this as one of its main demands in a boycott campaign of the Feb. 8 steel union elections. The purpose of the campaign is to expose the class-collaborationist and chauvinist character of both presidential candidates, McBride and Sadlowski.

Rank-and-file workers have seen first hand how the steel bosses and the United Steel Workers (USW) bureaucrats have used the Consent Decree to attack their struggles against discrimination.

This has been the case at Republic Steel in Chicago, as well as in other mills around the country, where union bureaucrats joined the steel bosses to oppose battles against language discrimination, plant segregation, layoffs, deportations and Klan-inspired attacks on Black workers.

Hiding behind the Consent Decree, they argue that there is "no discrimination in the mills," and that "the Consent Decree took care of it." Both the bosses and bureaucrats insisted that the Decree would change the racist policies built into the seniority

system but, as workers learned, the "changes" it provided for were minor and short-lived.

The Decree was worked out behind closed doors in 1974 by the largest steel monopolies, the government and the I.W. Abel leadership of the USW. According to the Decree, the steel companies agreed to give as compensation for any "possible" past discrimination—a miserably small payment to minority and women workers who had been in the mills prior to Jan. 1968.

The steel barons insisted that these payments in no way represented an admission that discrimination had ever existed. They even added to the Decree a statement denying any "pattern or practice" of discrimination. Along with this disclaimer, there is a pro-

vision requiring those who received token payments to sign away their rights to protest any past discrimination.

When some 46,000 checks were issued last spring, many thousands of steel workers raised protest. At Sparrows Point in Baltimore, for example, many workers refused to cash their checks.

The bureaucrats tried unsuccessfully to block any organized opposition by refusing to call meetings or allow discussion of the Consent Decree at regular union meetings.

At a Dec. 9 meeting of Local 1033 at Republic Steel in Chicago, union members protested against the Consent Decree and racist attacks at the mill. Local president Frank Guzzo tried to suppress the struggle and supported the Decree, insisting that it was "non-negotiable."

At this meeting, a member of the rank-and-file Workers Defense Committee denounced Guzzo's collaboration with the steel mono-

polists in perpetuating discrimination in the mill and promoting chauvinism among the workers. He also exposed Ed Sadlowski, contender for the USW presidency, who had told Republic Steel workers at an October union meeting that there was "something un-American" about workers' defense teams patrolling the area around the mill to protect Black workers from Klan attacks.

The Workers Defense Committee member explained to *The Call* that the fight to smash the Consent Decree was a necessary part of the struggle against the capitalist system and its props, as well as against concrete instances of discrimination.

## WORKERS JOIN STRUGGLE

At Republic, he pointed out, many workers have joined the struggle to win back the job of Jaime Ruiz, fired for returning late from a special leave to care for his sick mother in Mexico.

From the start, the Consent Decree has provided the reformist and revisionist union misleaders with another screen to cover up their attacks on the workers. The Abel leadership has labelled this racist agreement "the most advanced of all affirmative action programs to equalize job opportunities." Self-styled insurgent Ed Sadlowski has also given his backing to the Decree and only last month negotiated a similar agreement at Inland Steel.

The revisionists of the phony Communist Party (CPUSA) echo

Abel's very words, describing the Decree as "an historic step forward in providing for a more just system of seniority."

They portray the Decree as a great reform in order to disarm the workers in their fight against discrimination. The revisionists plead with workers to dismantle their organizations and end their struggle, saying they have already "won" the Decree as a fruit of their long and militant labor.

## DECREE NO REFORM

But the Decree is no reform and has left discrimination intact in the mills. What is more, it is a weapon in the hands of the bosses and bureaucrats, allowing them to attack those workers who fight discrimination by denying it exists at all.

While it is important to continue the fight for what the Consent Decree pretends to provide—strengthened seniority rights, training and job transfer rights as well as compensation for past discrimination—workers must also break with the kind of reformist leadership that tries to restrict the struggle to these demands alone.

## FIGHT AGAINST THE SYSTEM

The struggle against the Consent Decree and against the reformists and revisionists who support it must hit the capitalist system, which is itself based on national and class oppression.

To root out discrimination and build class unity among all nationalities, workers must direct their movement against those who profit from national oppression and from national and sex divisions within the working class: the capitalists and their chauvinist agents in the trade union bureaucracy.

# STRIKE OVER - BUT NURSES FIGHT ON

The fighting spirit of Cook County and Oak Forest nurses is running high as they return to work after their 38-day strike. They scored a victory in their struggle, not only for themselves, but for other health and city

