

CRITICAL SUPPORT FOR SADLOWSKI

Why is there an Ed Sadlowski?

The crisis of capitalism and the employers offensive lay the basis for a rank and file workers movement. The old methods of class collaboration can no longer bring results for the mass of workers. The open cooperation between the big steel companies and USWA leader I.W. Abel brings forth strong resentment from workers whose wages are far behind those of other industrial workers and who are losing thousands of jobs every year. We know that under these kinds of circumstances, revolutionaries, armed with class struggle politics, can begin to win workers to a different view of unionism and union politics. But between our consistent class struggle unionism and the equally consistent class collaboration of I.W. Abel exists another view of how to change things. This outlook is trade union reformism.

Trade union reformism is an inconsistent view and practice that is torn between class collaboration and class struggle. It looks back to the "good old days" when unions were more militant and generally more democratic. Its view of what is wrong tends to focus on democracy and other structural problems in the union - election procedures, dues, etc. In other words it concentrates on the relationship of the union's leaders to its ranks. Its views on the employers are usually contradictory, although they tend toward more militancy and less open class collaboration. Trade union reformism, like all bourgeois versions of unionism, however, in no way questions the right of the bosses to boss, management to manage, or the capitalists to reap profits. The exploitative wage slave system is as acceptable to them as to the most hard cased, corrupt old bureaucrat.

Trade union reformism springs from many of the same dissatisfactions that give class struggle ideas credibility, but it attempts to pose an alternative to the present union bureaucracy that accepts the same fundamental proposition as the Tony Boyles and I.W. Abels: that the health of the employers is the precondition for the well being of the worker. It is this fact, this link between trade union reformism and capitalism, that precludes reformism from being a genuine solution - even within the system - for either the short run or long run interests of the workers.

Arnold Miller ~~is a case in~~ is a case in

point. A dedicated trade union reformist, Miller was swept into office on the crest of a genuine rank and file movement. The movement that gave birth to the Miners for Democracy was a mass strike movement lead by rank and file miners. The MFD became the major organizational expression of that movement, though MFD itself was not massive in numbers. The politics of the leadership of MFD, however, were trade union reformism. Neither Miller nor any of the other major leaders of MFD questioned the bosses right to profit from the labor of the miners, or the idea that ~~that what was good for the boss was good for the miner~~ a profitable industry was good for the miners. Miller and the other MFD leaders genuinely wanted to win decent^{safe} conditions, a decent pension, and better wages for the miners. But like all union leaders who accept this system, they could not or would not do what was needed to win those things

The UMWA was greatly democratized, salaries were reduced, trusteeship lifted. Indeed, a program not unlike that of PROD or Badlowski was put into practice. The relationship between the leaders and the ranks was, to a considerable extent, reformed. But the relationship between the union and the bosses was not changed. The bosses pursued the employers' offensive in the coal industry. Arnold Miller and the UMWA reform leadership were unable to respond in a way consistent with the interests of the ranks. Under constant pressure from both the ranks and the bosses, the UMWA leadership soon began ~~improving~~ opposing wildcats and safety walkouts. The 1974 contract fight was less militant than it could have been and the contract far from satisfactory.

Because they could not constantly fight the employers, that is, because they could not change the relationship between the union and the employers (turn the employers offensive into a workers offensive) the relationship between the ranks and the leaders soon degenerated. Today, the UMWA leadership is pathetically weak^{and}, its reform tendencies nearly exhausted or broken, ~~and the right wing has taken over~~ It is now waging a witch hunt for reds and trying to expell those who led the mass strike of last year. Both wings of the UMWA leadership today side with the employers in one strike situation after another.

In short, the crisis produces reformers, just like it produces revolutionaries. In fact, because ~~if~~ most workers still believe in or have illusions about this system, reformism is often more attractive than class struggle politics. But reformism cannot solve the problems that produced. It is not simply that it can't solve them in "the long run," but even in the short run. Under conditions of exceptional business prosperity in the coal industry, the bosses did not even bother

to give Miller ^{much} breathing space.

WHO IS ED SADLOWSKI
Ed Sadlowski is the Arnold Miller of the USWA. Years of disgust with the Abel leadership, with ENA, with lagging wages, and shrinking jobs have produced mass sentiment for a change. Sadlowski, and those around him have come forth to offer one kind of change. Like all reformers, his ~~primary~~ political emphasis is on reforming the structure of the USWA. Though he is certainly vaguer than Miller or the MFD ever was, he is known to stand for election reforms, against excessive dues and salaries for officials, and for the right to vote on the contract. While he projects an air of militancy toward the employers, he has yet to be pinned down on much of anything. Even specific contract demands are generally absent from his literature and public speeches. While Sadlowski makes it clear that he does not like the ENA, he does not have a position for breaking it in 1977. On the contrary he has been quoted as saying that his hands are tied until 1980.

Trade union reformists can spring from splits in the top levels of the union or come up from the ranks, as did Miller. Sadlowski is a mixture of these two extremes. He comes from the ranks. About 13 years ago he was elected president of Local 65 at the US Steel Southworks. A few years ago he became a staff representative for District 31 (Chicago-Gary). As a staffer he worked ~~from~~ ^{or} his ^{later} political opponent, Sam Evett. There is no question that during his 13 years as an official and staffer he has built himself a strong and loyal base in the rank and file. This base is a coalition of white, black and latin workers. This base made him Dist. 31 Director in 1974.

As Director of Dist. 31 Sadlowski has already shown signs of becoming a run of the mill bureaucrat. As Dist. Director he has some influence over the bargaining of some of the smaller contracts. But during a long strike by USWA members at Danly Machine in Cicero, Ill, Sadlowski refused to make any show of support. Danly workers picketed his office. He refused to endorse a demonstration set up by one of his support groups, the Indiana Steel workers Cause, against Abel and Evett. In the area of International Union politics he has done little except his short lived campaign against the dues increase. His presidential campaign is certainly not politically sharp or even stylistically dazzling.

Sadlowski has faced certain objective problems. Above all has been a consistent campaign by Abel to undermine him and deny him the resources anyone would need to run a 117,000 member district. The recent election victories in a few big locals in Chicago and Gary were an important boost to his authority. But even here, the weaknesses of union reformism show through. While some of the officers who won are people with a militant and even "leftish" history, the leaders of the Sadlowski slate at one U.S. Steel local were little more than opportunists in search of allies. Sadlowski was apparently quite willing to make such expedient alliances with rotten elements. His willingness to do so in the area of his greatest strength, foreshadows worse things in the elections for president of the international union.

Why, then, should we support Sadlowski at all?

Trade Union Reformists arise from the same conditions that allow class struggle unionists to lead movements. They are an alternative to class struggle politics, as well as to the more blatant collaborationism of the preceding generation of union leaders. In part, they arise because we, the revolutionaries and class struggle unionists, are so weak. Underlying this fact, is the unfortunate, but undeniable truth that the vast majority of workers share more common assumptions with the reformists than with us. If there is a way to make the union fight without all the hassle of taking on the whole system, most workers will choose it. Trade union Reformism appears to be that alternative.

Sectionarians could draw the obvious logical conclusion that since these reformists are an alternative to us - a bourgeois alternative to proletarian strategy and politics - we should have no truck with them. But the balance of real forces and the level of existing consciousness render this approach sterile. The two strategies are alternatives that one day will clash directly. But today, particularly in the USWA, we do not have the troops to mount that fight. It is not just that we would lose. ~~There is an additional, and decisive, political reason for not simply turning our back on the movements that arise around these reformists. No matter how rapidly they degenerate, or even if they lose electorally, the reformists, partly because they do call the ranks to aid, cannot help but open up the political situation in the union. The campaign against the bureaucracy and any~~

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reforms that are actually implemented allow more freedom of movement for the ranks. Once the bureaucracy appears to be vulnerable, the cynicism and resignation of the mass of workers begins to be undermined. And this, the crumbling of resignation, is a necessary prerequisite to the growth of a real movement for class struggle politics in the union.

The events in Dist 31 show that this is true. Without in the least wishing to create a movement of any sort, Sdalowski has had to take steps that could well lead in that direction. To get ride of Evett Sadlowski had to agitate the workers and raise their expectations. He had to take at least one small step toward involving them in union affairs - getting a ~~xxx~~ previously passive membership to turn out and dump Evett. Having accomplished that, Sdalowski then felt the need to reorganize his base to some extent. For this he created Steel Workers Fight Back in Chicago. His ever loyal supporters in the Communist Party helped him by turning Sadlowski campaign organizations into on-going causes; for example, the Indiana Steelworkers Cause. While none of these is as dynamic as the strike movements of the coal miners, they are actually rank and file groups. Some of them have programs, on paper, that are much better than anything Sadlowski has ever said. Some of these groups have initiated or participated in direct actions. In spite of the fact that they are meant to be campaign organizations for Sadlowski, they help to draw some workers into struggle.

We must be part of the events, actions, and organizations that are motivating and politicizing workers in the USWA. It is not enough to comment favorably on the good and denounce the bad - all from the comfortable and safe side lines. We want to see Sdalowski run and get elected president of the USWA because it will open things up more and will draw more rank and file workers into activity.

Our support is unconditional. That is, we put no conditions on Sadlowski to win our political support. But our support is also critical. That not only means that we frankly state our criticisms of Sdalowski's actions, lack of program, or whatever, but also that we ~~put~~ put forward our class struggle views. In WP and other IS literature we want to make it clear that we do not believe sadlowski can take on the big steel companies or really turn the USWA into a fighting union because he is still fundamentally a supporter of the capitalist system. We want to put forward class struggle union politics in the rank and file steel workers movement.

Within the various rank and file groups and within the movement

generally, we want to give this fundamental difference an agitational focus around one single demand - Break the ENA. This demand points toward what a real class struggle union would do. It also puts a potential political wedge between Sadlowski and his best supporters. This wedge is not designed to cost him votes, since we insist that real fighters vote for Sadlowski. The wedge is a more long range one meant to lay the basis for a ~~rank~~ rank and file movement more along class struggle lines. It is an agitational demand in the sense that it has real sentiment among thousands of the best people in the Sadlowski camp and among the best shop floor fighters - even when they are unaware of the election campaign.

We want to enter the proSadlowski organizations wherever possible. Where we are in previously existing groups we want to get them to endorse Sadlowski - such as the Cleveland RAFT groups. We will campaign for Sadlowski. However, the thrust of our political work will be around convincing people of the need to break ENA. As in the past we will put forward our positions on other issues, such as the Consent Decree, only now in the Sadlowski milieu. But it is the ENA on which we will focus. That is the demand and the idea that our members will be known for, that is the demand we will fight to get the various groups we work in to endorse and fight for.

What will happen after the elections?

On the basis of our theory and of what we know about Sadlowski, we can be sure that he will not take on the companies. All of the issues that create a base for him now, will become headaches for him once he is in office. Because he will be in a weak position vis a vis his International Executive Board, and because Abel will certainly settle the contract in April or May - unless the ranks force Sadlowski to lead an anti-ENA movement of serious proportions - Sadlowski will have even more difficulty than Miller in carrying out what little program he is committed to.

On the other hand, the pressures on the job are not nearly as great in steel as in the mines. While thousands of jobs are being lost, the employers' offensive does not necessarily express itself in sharp speed up. ^{on "IMMINENT DANGER."} So, the pressure from the ranks will be less than it was in the UMWA. Also, the very fact that Sadlowski will be in a weak position in the leadership will probably make the ranks more tolerant of his failings than the miners were of Miller's. This means that any short term attempt to break people off from Sadlowski in large numbers, say

around a contract fight or local bargaining issues, is not likely to go very far. Our strategy must be more long range. It will be our ability to take clear positions on issues like the ENA, local bargaining issues, the Consent Decree, and others, and fight for them consistently, ~~that will~~ ~~lay the~~ as well as ~~our~~ becoming respected shop floor fighters that will lay the basis for leading more massive movements latter on. For now, we will be able to win small numbers to our views and to those direct actions, in union affairs or at work, that we can mobilize. Having been active in the Sadlowski campaign and in those rank and file groups that support him, we will have positioned ourselves deeply in the rank and file movement as it really exists.