



Billboard put up by the rank and file District 31 Organizing Committee outside U.S. Steel's giant Gary Works. It ran down the Steelworker's 7-point program for building the rank and file struggle against the steel bosses.

Forward from Sadlowski Campaign

Steel Demo Kicks Off Contract Fight

As contract talks opened up between the United Steel Workers (USWA) and 10 major steel companies on February 14 with a "sound-off" in Washington, D.C. where the union and management put out their basic negotiating positions, there were about 75 steel workers picketing outside chanting, "No Right to Strike, Can't Even Vote, Get Your Damn Hands Off Our Throats" and "sounding off" with the basic position of the rank and file.

Although it's too soon to analyze all the returns, it's been announced that in the February 8 election for USWA President the pro-company machine of I.W. Abel and his hand-picked successor Lloyd McBride beat challenger Ed Sadlowski. But while it's also still too early to thoroughly sum up the battle that took place around the election, it is already clear that the rank and file was able to overcome obstacles even within the Sadlowski campaign and make some gains in the course of it so that conditions today have grown more favorable for the rank and file to put up a real fight around this contract.

Abel is now negotiating the basic steel contract for 338,000 workers in the steel mills under the so-called Experimental Negotiating Agreement under which the union has signed away the right to strike, so that whatever issues haven't been agreed on by April 27 will go to binding arbitration. The workers in this industry don't have a single thing to say in the official ratification process of their contract, which is in the hands of the union leadership.

But as the Washington demonstration called by the *Steelworker* national newsletter makes clear, the dirty deal that management and its friends are trying to put over is far from being sewn up. In turn, whatever happens around the contract in basic steel will have a lot of effect on what happens around this year's contracts of USWA members in can and nonferrous metals and on local steel contracts, as well as the battles of the five million other workers whose contracts are up this year.

Workers in basic steel have never had the right to vote on a national contract and there hasn't been a national strike in 17 years. Because of this many steel workers look at the whole thing with a certain amount of cynicism, saying, "I wonder how we're going to get shafted this time." On the other hand, as the steel companies have tried to restore the falling profitability of the industry by stepped-up job combinations and eliminations, harassment, forced overtime and worsening safety conditions, there has been a relative upsurge of struggle.

As the pickets in Washington said in one of their chants, "1973, you sold us out then—we're fighting you now because you'll do it again." This first step in building a nationwide movement to fight for the interests of the rank and file in the contract negotiations included steel workers from all over the East Coast and Midwest. The actions in this campaign are

aimed at uniting with the sentiments of the masses of steel workers who know damn well that the USWA leaders will try to screw them in this contract, while at the same time fighting to overcome the sense of "well, what can you do?" that has held people back from entering into active struggle.

After the demonstration there was a meeting called by the *Steelworker* and led by rank and file workers who've come to the forefront of struggles in steel mills in the East and Midwest to discuss the question of turning the contract into a battle against the companies. After some lively debate, it was generally agreed that the sellout being cooked up had to be met head-on and that just entering the battlefield that the rank and file had been kept off of so long would itself be a step forward. It wouldn't be easy, people agreed, but thousands of steel workers chained by the ENA and company unionism in the face of company attacks are looking for a way to fight.

Pole of Resistance

The demonstration itself was the first step in phase one of the campaign, helping to establish a pole of resistance among steel workers to the contract sellout that the two-headed monster (the company and their union flunkies) are trying to bring about. Along with the national TV coverage this action received, leaflets in many areas are helping to fan the spark. The idea behind phase one of this campaign is to develop and flesh out concrete contract demands in the course of building the battles now going on in the mills and develop the rank and file's ability to fight for its interests around the contract. Whenever Abel or Lloyd McBride, or any other company men on the company or union payroll come around to try to get the rank and file to swallow a sellout, they'll be met with picket lines, and other actions, as the rank and file builds and organizes its resistance.

Although specific contract demands will take shape in the course of the battle, steel workers at the Washington meeting presented the main issues facing the rank and file today: 1) Smash the ENA and make the right to strike over local issues a reality. 2) End joint company-union productivity commissions and the attacks on jobs. 3) Better and broader protection for people laid off including no overtime in any plant where there are layoffs. 4) Strengthened safety and health provisions, with special emphasis on the workers facing brutal conditions in the coke ovens. 5) The contract must deal with the question of ending discrimination and make the company and not the workers pay for discrimination in the past. 6) Extended wages and benefits and better pensions.

It's not yet known what the companies and the union heads are going to come up with, but there's every reason to believe it'll be bad for the rank and file. Abel has been making a big deal about how this contract should be a step towards insuring "a guaranteed job for

life" for steel workers. This may sound good, but from the union's side it's all been just talk while the companies have made the specific proposal that, in return for agreeing to that idea in principle, the union should give up any real wage demands and expect to see a drastic reduction in company payments of SUB (supplementary unemployment benefits) to laidoff steel workers.

At any rate, since the rank and file has no say in the matter (as far as the rules of the game are concerned) it's pretty likely that whatever they cook up by April 27 will be a sellout and the agreement will go down without any chance for the membership to say no. At that time, as phase two of the contract battle begins, steel workers will be able to use the contract program developed during phase one as a standard to judge the contract by. At the Washington meeting plans were made to mobilize for union meetings to deal with the question of repealing any sellout contract and as part of carrying out a campaign to raise the demand that the contract be scrapped.

Steel workers plan to take out petitions repudiating the contract, to print up ballots and hold elections in locals where this is possible whether the union leadership likes it or not. The demand will be that the Basic Steel Conference of the union reject the contract and send it back to be renegotiated.

It was also agreed at this meeting that steel workers should take up the local contracts in their plants as part of this overall battle. While the emphasis should be on the contract in basic steel (which is the only contract not submitted to a vote and negotiated under the ENA), it was decided that the struggle should be built among can, aluminum and nonferrous workers who are in the USWA as well. The can contract which had been scheduled to expire in the spring was extended until October, after the canning season is over, and it looks like the union leadership plans to try to jam an ENA down the throats of can workers as well.

Build Off Victory in Basic

Although all the results aren't in yet, it seems clear that McBride and the Abel machine that backed him were voted down in basic steel. This puts a big hole in their claim that the ENA and other measures they've stood for represent the interests and will of the rank and file who've had to suffer the consequences of these policies. The defeat of Abel and McBride in basic steel weakens their ability to pull off a sellout by claiming that they have a "mandate" from the membership and it puts the rank and file in a better position to resist.

The whole question of building the workers movement in steel has become a lot more real for many more people in the last few months through the course of the battle fought around the union elections which were held February 8. McBride couldn't even run on the issues because he was on the wrong side on every one of them—from jobs, working conditions, dues increases, the Abel machine's dictatorial rule over the rank and file, the ENA and the phoney Consent Decree against discrimination to the whole question of company unionism. The challenger in this election, Ed Sadlowski, ran a campaign that took a stand, though often vacillating, on most of these issues and to some extent tried to draw strength from the growing anger of the rank and file.

By using the Sadlowski campaign as a way to take on the Abel machine and develop the struggle of the rank and file, steel workers were able to popularize their demands and mobilize around them, to raise the understanding of the rank and file as to the nature of the fight, to organize their ranks, strike some blows at the stranglehold of the machine in the union and create better conditions for further battles such as the contract struggle which is now breaking out.

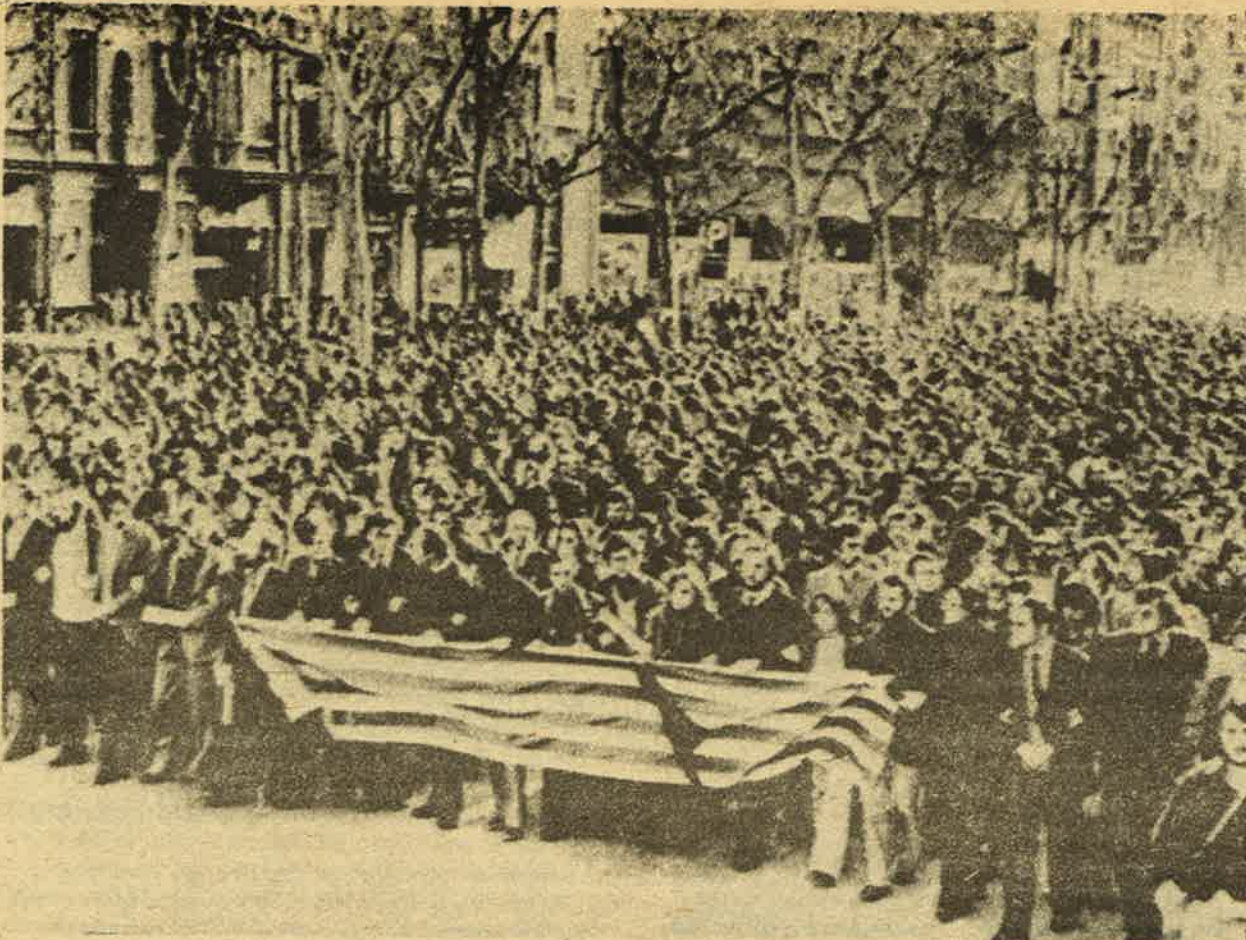
Many of the workers at the Washington demonstration had come forward in the election campaign in which the *Steelworker* and people grouped around it had been a relatively small but active and expanding force. Through taking out the campaign to elect Sadlowski and smash the Abel machine, people around the *Steelworker* were able to make contacts with a great many other steel workers, linking up what had been relatively isolated struggles in various steel mills and shops and helping to develop among the workers a sense of an overall movement building up against the companies and their henchmen.

By taking up these local struggles, using the Sadlowski campaign to help link them and bringing out the united demands of steel workers, some important gains were made in the organization of the rank and file. People from the *Steelworker* joined the Sadlowski Fight Back committees, and other forms of organization were developed as well, such as the District 31 Organizing Committee in the Chicago-Gary area. A conference to build organization in Districts 27-28 (around Cleveland) which was held during the course of the election battle brought together a number of local steel workers.

Breaking Down Divisions

Another advance that was made through the work of people around the *Steelworker* during the Sadlowski campaign was to begin breaking down the divisions within the union between workers in basic and those in steel fabrication shops. One of the main weapons

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Many thousands demonstrated January 27 against the repression of the Spanish regime with a banner of the Spanish Republic, long a symbol of resistance to Franco's fascist dictatorship.

Spain...

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democratic rights and the growth and organization of the workers movement—including the fact that six out of every ten workers went out on strike sometime during the last year against their bosses and the government that stands behind them—has forced the bourgeoisie to consider abandoning Franco-style rule and moving toward some sort of parliamentary set-up. Their hope is to change as little as possible, with as little disruption and as much continuity as possible for the government under King Juan Carlos, to throw out only just enough concessions to confuse and divide the masses and regain the initiative.

But especially because after two generations of fascist rule the bourgeoisie has few political figures who aren't completely despised by the people, it has had to count on the help of the so-called "opposition." Most prominent among these forces is the phoney Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) and the Communist Party, a totally revisionist outfit which won broad influence because it once led the fight against Franco but long ago betrayed this struggle and now stands as a prop helping to hold up the wobbly regime of Franco's heir, the King. Without such forces to spread the illusion that Spain's rulers have changed and that now the way forward for the people is a "reconciliation," as the CP calls it, with those who've unleashed so much terror against the people, these maneuvers wouldn't have any chance at all.

In November the Spanish Cortes—the so-called parliament appointed by Franco—was persuaded by the King's Prime Minister to agree to dissolve itself so that its members could run for election in a new parliament some time in 1977. A national referendum was held to approve the plan. The referendum was presented as the beginning of a new day because it was the first time Spaniards had been allowed to vote on anything since Franco overthrew the Spanish Republic in 1939 with the aid of Italian and German troops.

As it turned out, this referendum held in December was a joke—if you voted no, you voted for unadorned Francoism, and if you voted yes, you voted for Franco's hand-picked heir, the King. With this referendum as its birth certificate to make it "legitimate," the government announced that it now represented the will of the people and the people should stop making demands and wait for the government to hold parliamentary elections.

The referendum was widely boycotted, especially in the regions inhabited by the Basques and other oppressed nationalities which have long borne the government's heaviest repression. This forced the government to make some new concessions—for instance it legalized the Basque language, which had been outlawed—but the overall success of the referendum was limited because some parties of the "opposition"—especially the CP—which half-heartedly criticized the referendum in some of its publications actually worked to convince people that the referendum represented a step towards the satisfaction of the people's demands. In return, it's expected by many sources, including the U.S. bourgeois press, that the CP will be made fully legal any day now and will be able to run in the parliamentary elections.

Even among an opposition full of forces that have made a living negotiating compromises with the government and trying to get the masses to abide by them, the Spanish CP has distinguished itself as willing to break ranks with their opportunist partners and try to make even better deals for itself with the government.

The CP is not alone in this jockeying for position. The government has all but given the PSOE a pump to inflate itself with. It was the first "leftist" party for whom the doors of legality were opened. The PSOE's first legal Congress held in December was attended by heads of state and representatives of the "socialist" parties of Germany, France and Britain. The capitalists of these countries all have substantial investments in Spain, and they hope to use the same kind of social democrats who've served them so well in their own countries (such as the British Labor Party) to oversee their interests in Spain.

The Spanish revisionist CP cut off almost all ties with the USSR years ago. The rift between this CP and the USSR is so deep that the Soviets tried to set up a rival, pro-Soviet revisionist party. Last year CP head Carillo met with Kissinger to assure him that the Spanish CP wholeheartedly supports NATO and the rest of U.S. imperialism's interests in Spain. But there is still some question among some U.S. and Spanish capitalists as to whether the USSR might not still exert some pressure on the CP, and the USSR has shown its continuing interest in Spain by opening up talks about extensive trade relations with the Spanish government. In February Spain and the USSR restored diplomatic relations.

The Spanish CP has done its best to prove its loyalty

Steel Contract...

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that Abel was able to use to pull in a lot of votes for McBride was the strength of the Abel machine in fabrication and the greater isolation of fabrication workers which made the issues much less clear than in basic. Many basic officials didn't dare come out for McBride, while everywhere local fabrication hacks backed McBride. But this didn't go unchallenged.

For instance, through going to various plants with leaflets and playing up some real issues like the role played by company unionism, people from the *Steelworker* joined up with workers in a small fabrication local in New Jersey who'd just been shafted with a sell-out contract, and the workers in turn were able to use the election campaign to help unite and hit their local president. Another example is the Star Sprinkler shop in Philadelphia (see article this issue) where steel workers who'd been giving out pro-Sadlowski leaflets focusing on the issues joined up with workers in the plant to organize against the plant running away and in the process gained the initiative against the pro-McBride local union hack who'd held back the struggle.

All this underlined the real importance of taking up the Sadlowski campaign, and of doing it in a way that kept the initiative in the hands of the rank and file. Although the interests of the rank and file and those of Sadlowski coincided in going up against the Abel machine, the way Sadlowski's campaign was run from the top failed to mobilize the maximum strength possible

and to give free samples of its collaboration with the Spanish capitalists and their U.S. backers. Whereas until recently the CP went along with actions against the government (in its own way and for its own purposes), in the last few months, as the possibility of being invited to take part in the feast at the top becomes increasingly real, the CP has publicly called for a truce between the masses and the government.

For instance, in the recent massive outbreaks after the murder of the five lawyers, the CP put itself at the lead of many of the mass marches. Aided by the fact that the police tolerated them there while arresting others who came forward who are less "cooperative." CP marshalls did their best to prevent chanting, singing or anything else that would turn the funerals into militant political demonstrations. In fact, a CP leader, Simon Sanchez Montero, emerged from the Justice Department before one of the funerals saying, "We want to convert these vile murders into a reconciliation for all Spaniards," and then had the nerve to try to lead the thousands of mourners in shouting "Long Live Spain"—a slogan now being used by Juan Carlos himself as a refurbished version of Franco's slogan "Arriba España" (Up With Spain).

In the late autumn strike movement, the CP tried to convince workers to just stay at home and not demonstrate or do anything else that might lead to "possible confrontations" with the police. The CP justifies this by saying in effect that only in this way can the masses hope that Spain's rulers will give up repressing the people.

But the truth is that this repression, which the bourgeoisie has used to stay in power for a long time in Spain, has also put the bourgeoisie itself in a bind. The masses of people are outraged at the jailing of political prisoners, at the lack of even the rights to belong to political organizations and unions or to demonstrate, at the oppression of Spain's minority nationalities and so on. The government has tried to split the mass movement and cool it out as much as possible by making a few small concessions, and especially by more and more openly tolerating the "loyal opposition" and increasingly coming to count on its work.

But for the people the question of rights is not a question of something abstract nor of appearances. The Spanish bourgeoisie has denied these rights in order to hold the people down, and the masses of people, especially the working class, are demanding these rights as part of their fight for their interests and against the exploitation and oppression that Spain's capitalists and their foreign backers have heaped upon them. The regime's reforms have not satisfied and can't satisfy the demands of the people, and more and more people have consciously taken up the struggle to overthrow the regime outright.

Two generations ago all the big capitalists of the world collaborated to bring in the Franco dictatorship to help suppress the "germ" of revolution that Spain's working class threatened to spread throughout Europe and elsewhere. Since then they've tried to wipe out all protest in Spain. But the movement of the working class and the masses of people has again emerged powerfully and revolutionary organization has once again developed despite the revisionists' treason. The experience of these dark years and this growing movement have given rise to a deep desire for revolution and socialism among workers and other sections of the people. ■

in this fight. From the beginning at the USWA convention last August when Sadlowski refused to go along with rank and filers who wanted to take on Abel on the convention floor, there was a constant fight against the line of building the campaign from the top down, relying on alliances with local officials to build his own machine and treating the rank and file as little more than vote getters, contributors and poll watchers rather than as a force to be mobilized to take up the campaign as part of fighting for their own interests.

Opposing moves to organize the most active and advanced workers around the issues as the key force to reach out broadly, leading forces in the Sadlowski campaign did their best to restrict their role, claiming that they would alienate the rest of the steel workers. For this reason they tried to limit activity to pure campaign politicking and refused to back such actions as the demonstration in Chicago against McBride and the Pittsburgh demonstration to free Local 3059 which the Abel machine had put in receivership. Because this approach didn't really deal with the question of changing things that steel workers face, even many workers who generally favored Sadlowski didn't bother to vote.

But despite the fact that the election results seem to indicate a defeat for Sadlowski—the rank and file has made important advances in establishing a pole of resistance to the companies and company unionism in the industry. As a leaflet put out by the *Steelworker* to build for the D.C. demonstration put it: "We propose that steel workers across the face of this country unite together to promote our interest, to make this contract a battle, to win what can be won from the companies, to build the rank and file movement stronger. We have scored victories in the past; we have made advances in the Sadlowski campaign; let us move more determined and united to make the contract a real battle." ■