

ELECTIONS NO SOLUTION FOR STEELWORKERS



As the fierce cold this winter has been used by steel barons to lay off tens of thousands of steel workers, one question remains a hot issue for steelworkers: will Ed Sadlowski beat Lloyd McBride for President of the United Steel Workers of America on February 8th? Few labor elections in recent years have been carried on with so much furor internally and with so much attention paid to it externally as this USW election.

Within the Union bitter clashes have occurred between Sadlowski and McBride forces. Sadlowski supporters have been shot and beaten up. Charges and countercharges continue to fly. The handling of the election procedure itself is just one more reflection of how the labor bureaucrats have gained control of this huge industrial union.

Local 1397 at Homestead, Pa., has some 6,000 workers. Mostly industrial workers, they voted to nominate Sadlowski. However, Local 3036, an office and technical employee local at Homestead has about 600 members and they voted for McBride. Each local's nomination counts the same. In this way, the nominations of smaller locals and salaried employees carry the same or more weight as non-salaried employees.

Even against such odds, Sadlowski has made some headway, though almost exclusively among the industrial workers of the union. The clear exception is that many workers in Sadlowski's own district have refused to support him because of what they see as his neglect of union duties.

The present union hacks have done all they can to insure a McBride victory. I.W. Abel, outgoing president in June, threatened to resign if Sadlowski won the February 8th election, with the implied threat of handing union negotiations over to an inexperienced team. Amid all the heat and fury of this campaign, the *real issues have been covered up*. And this is clearly the aim of both Sadlowski and McBride -- who seek to avoid the necessity to defend the genuine interests of the workers.

CONTRACTS UP IN AUGUST

All basic contracts of the USW expire August 1st. Bargaining in basic steel begins on February 14th in Washington. If issues are not resolved by April 20, the contracts go to the arbitrator. These negotiations will be conducted under the terms of the ENA pact made in 1974. Among the issues coming up are income security, shorter work week, lifetime job security and guaranteed wages.

Both Sadlowski and McBride claim the need for a change. These claims have spread way beyond the pages of *Steel Labor* and the plant gates, and have attracted widespread attention.

ELECTIONS NO SOLUTION

But in the closing days of the campaign, as both candidates feverishly peddle their wares, one thing is certain. *Whatever the outcome of the election, this election will not settle the question of whether or not the USWA will continue to be saddled by bureaucrats or whether power within the union will be retaken by the rank-and-file.* The choice between Lloyd McBride and Ed Sadlowski is NOT a choice between bureaucratic control and rank-and-file control. Both candidates represent the interests of the capitalists, but simply in two different ways.

Lloyd McBride has attempted to present the campaign as a question of "the USW against the outsiders" (either the "limousine liberals" or the "communists and



Lloyd McBride

activists") while offering more of the same collaboration with the real outsiders, the capitalist class, that Abel has championed. Ed Sadlowski has presented the campaign as a struggle of "democracy versus bureaucracy", and has promised more of a say in "how the pie is cut up", but not in the least does he question the filling of the "pie", the capitalist system which has brought steelworkers to the crisis they now face.

The supposed "insurgent" character of Sadlowski's candidacy has set the tone for his election campaign. While claiming to recognize the class nature of the struggle in the union, he has capitalized on the dissatisfaction of steelworkers and has put himself forward as the candidate for "change". But what does he have to say about this class struggle, and how does he see the necessary changes coming about?

Sadlowski's "Message to Steelworkers and Their Families" (mailed to all members of the USW in January) ends with these words:

"We are confident that steelworkers will vote to return our union to the membership it was organized to serve. We think the choice is clear. An opportunity to choose does not come often."

These words reveal the true class nature of the Sadlowski campaign and points to the fact that any "fight back" Sadlowski has, or will put up, is guaranteed to stay strictly within the bounds of the capitalist system.

The lessons of history of the international working class movement have clearly shown two things: (1) *That the issue of whether the rank-and-file or a bureaucratic machine will control a union - any union - is NEVER settled by an election;* (2) *That the opportunity to settle that issue is not something that only comes along every few years or whenever a couple of candidates with "fairly sharp differences of opinion" come forward to run for office. That opportunity, rather, is the very meat and bones, the heart and soul, of the day-to-day struggles of the union, or of any truly working class organization.* While Sadlowski sees elections as the basis for the struggle against the union bureaucrats, experience has proven that elections can only have their full significance for workers as one part of the over-all struggle of the class for its economic and political emancipation.

BUILD THE RANK-AND-FILE, NOT THE REFORMERS

What, then, do we do about the present elections?

We certainly do not sit back, as some have urged, and simply boycott the election. While Sadlowski is just one more union bureaucrat with a popular calling card, the *program* that Sadlowski has

been forced to adopt in order to challenge the Abel/McBride machine objectively stands for greater union democracy. *While reformists like Sadlowski must be dealt with critically and exposed for what they are, we must support any move toward the extension of democracy that allows class conscious workers to work towards a greater fighting capacity in the struggle against the bourgeoisie.* To the extent to which Sadlowski objectively assists the struggle for union democracy he should be supported. Steelworkers should vote for Sadlowski. *But what must be built is not Sadlowski as a candidate but the consciousness and organization of steelworkers.*

The choice before us is not one of either mobilizing our forces in unconditional support of Sadlowski or of sitting on our hands and doing nothing. Our goal and our work is to raise the level of struggle against *both the capitalists and the union bureaucrats* and to turn the USWA into a fighting organization of and for the working class. In this struggle to bring the union under working class control, elections can only serve as a gauge of the success of our struggle throughout the union. They are not the starting point, and election victories are certainly not the aim of our struggles.



Ed Sadlowski

Sadlowski may be the "lesser of two evils" insofar as he may actually serve to prepare the necessary conditions for a real mass fight against the ENA, for better wages, for job security and safe working conditions, and for real equality on the job. It is clear that McBride will not prepare the conditions for such a struggle. But as the working class drive for socialism grows we will undoubtedly have to fight Sadlowski just as we have fought Abel and McBride before him.

POLITICAL AGREEMENTS WITH LABOR LIEUTENANTS

At times we should and will, in the interests of furthering the aims of the working class, reach agreements with bureaucratic forces within the unions on the basis of their stand on particular issues, specific questions and events. But in making these agreements we must be assured of the ability and opportunity to criticize these bureaucrats, to expose them as objectively agents of capitalism at the same time that we bring to light, explain, and develop further anything that they do which serves the interests of the class. Our aim is not to attach ourselves slavishly to reformist messiahs, to shut our eyes and the eyes of the masses of workers in the hope that something good will come of it.

OUR TASKS

Our tasks is to sever completely the ties and the influence which these bureaucrats have within our own ranks. This task demands that the proletariat organize its own party armed with the most advanced understanding of the class struggle and capable of providing the ideological and

political leadership required for successful revolutionary struggle. It demands the establishment of an unshakeable network of nuclei within the factories, impregnable to the attacks of the capitalists while able to react consistently and immediately to every need of the class, at the workplace where it counts. It demands, in general, a level of consciousness and organization among steelworkers which will allow us to maintain our independence and initiative under any circumstances, either of political alliance and compromise, or the hottest all-out struggle.

DISCARD REFORMERS AND REVISIONISTS

These conditions do not yet exist within the USWA, or within any major union. Those forces, such as the "Communist" Party, USA, or the Revolutionary "Communist" Party (neither of which is the least bit communist or revolutionary), who ignore this fact and who call for total commitment to the Sadlowski Fight Back campaign have turned their backs on the working class and the cause of the socialist revolution and, under the guise of aiding the working class, have attempted to deny the working class those very things which are necessary for the achievement of its goals.

Our aim is to seize power away from the capitalist class as the only means by which capitalism as a system can be smashed and eliminated once and for all. The seizure of power away from the bureaucrats in control of our unions is a crucial step in this direction because the trade unions as the broadest organizations of the class, organized around the day-to-day needs of workers, will necessarily play an essential role in the over-all struggle of the class for emancipation. But the capture of political power, either in our unions or in society as a whole, cannot happen peacefully through reforms, or through elections. The capitalist class will never allow anyone to take away its power to squeeze profits out of the working class - not without a tooth-and-nail fight.

Anyone who knows the history of struggle in the USWA knows that. Neither will the bureaucrats give up their privileges and power by simply stepping down after an election. *The power of the bureaucrats must be broken on the shop floor and throughout the day-to-day life of the union before any real victory can be scored against them in elections.* The power of the capitalist class will only be broken by the resolute struggle of the masses of workers themselves, not by labor politicians who claim to act in behalf of workers. These struggles require class-conscious leadership that emerges from the class struggle itself, leadership that spreads no illusions about "reforming" capitalism - and neither the old bureaucrats like Lloyd McBride nor "new" ones like Ed Sadlowski fill the bill.

BUILD A VANGUARD COMMUNIST PARTY!

BUILD THE CONSCIOUSNESS AND ORGANIZATION OF THE RANK-AND-FILE!

REMOVE FROM UNION OFFICE ALL WHO SPREAD THE CAPITALIST WAY OF THINKING AMONG WORKERS!

TURN THE USWA INTO A FIGHTING ORGANIZATION FOR THE WORKING CLASS!