



"Abel, Abel, we say No, ENA has got to go!" At the USWA 1974 Convention in Atlantic City, 250 steel workers and others denounced steel union chief I. W. Abel for selling the rank and file out to the steel companies.

Shake Abel Machine in Steel

Rank & File Utilize Sadlowski Race

The United Steelworkers of America (USWA) will elect a new president and top officers in February of next year. Usually these elections are no more than a formality in which the incumbents get rubber stamped, and the rank and file gets screwed. But the story is different this time because of the growing struggle of the rank and file against the companies and the union machine and because this situation has given rise to an election battle which can lead to real advances for the struggle of the rank and file.

The USWA is currently in the hands of I.W. Abel, who has run the union in the interests of the companies and never hesitated to smack down the rank and file when they challenged this cosy arrangement. Although Abel is retiring, his hand-picked successor Lloyd McBride is hoping to inherit Abel's machine within the union and continue his policies. Challenging the Abel-McBride machine is Ed Sadlowski, director of USWA District 31 (Chicago-Gary area), whose campaign is one important vehicle the rank and file can use right now to build the fight against the steel companies, deal a real blow to the stranglehold these companies have had over the union, and contribute to the building of a strong movement in the steel industry as part of a developing workers movement.

The last year and a half has seen the beginnings of an upsurge among steel workers as the productivity drives of the steel companies and the layoffs of the past couple of years have resulted in many jobs being combined, crews shortened, increased harassment and deteriorating health and safety conditions. On top of this, the workers in basic steel (the steel mills) all across the country have been hit with two sharp attacks. One is the so-called Experimental Negotiating Agreement (ENA) between the union and the companies, under which the union leadership has signed away the right to strike until 1980. The other is the Consent Decree concocted by the union, the companies and the federal government which tries to turn the steel workers' struggle against discrimination back against them, putting the burden on all steel workers for correcting some of the companies' past discrimination, while allowing the companies to keep on discriminating.

Development of Struggle

In the past couple of years there have been an increasing number of strikes in non-basic steel plants, walkouts and work stoppages by crews and departments, and several important walkouts in basic steel mills. Overall the struggle has been plant by plant, local by local. But as the elections approach, some basic questions have come up about how to fight the conditions steel workers are facing and what direction their union is going in. This has meant that steel workers are beginning to look at things much more from a national perspective.

To most steel workers, the name I. W. Abel is more

than a dirty word on the shop floor. It has become a symbol of treachery and oppression. He stands for company control of the union, gangsterism and machine dictatorship. He stands for productivity commissions (the union-company committees designed to drive each worker to the maximum for the companies' profit). He stands for subservience to the companies in the face of all the attacks that are coming down on steel workers. The heart of Abel's policies is his line that the future of steel workers lies in "a company-union partnership"—and that is exactly what he stands for. For the rank and file now rising in struggle, the election of Abel's candidate would be a real slap in the face, serving to reinforce the bourgeois line that Abel himself has promoted, that struggling can't get you anywhere.

The Sadlowski campaign is the only real opposition the Abel machine has faced in years. His campaign has, to a large extent, spoken to and reflected the sentiments and aspirations of the rank and file for a union that fights the companies, for a more unified and democratic union, and the right to strike. The Sadlowski campaign has the steel companies worried, not mainly because of the positions he has advocated, but more importantly, because this campaign is a reflection of the growing determination, demands, organization and strength of the masses of steel workers. For this reason the Abel machine has gone wild to "get" Sadlowski, at the recent steel workers convention, in the union paper and through the machine's well-placed hacks in most every local. All this has served to polarize things even more.

In turn, the fact that steel workers around the country are more and more in motion has already had an effect on Sadlowski. In recent months he has taken a firmer and harder stand on some basic questions, moving from his previous vague opposition to the ENA and to the fact that the membership in basic doesn't have the right to ratify contracts, to pledging that if elected he wouldn't sign a contract that contained a no-strike pledge or hadn't been ratified by the workers.

An election that defeated the Abel machine would be a real step forward for steel workers and lay the

Notice

The publication of this issue of *Revolution* (Vol. 2, No. 2) was delayed until late November to allow coverage of the Conference on the International Situation. It would have normally been dated as the November 15, 1976 issue. However, we have changed our dating policy to correspond to the actual distribution period of each issue. Therefore this issue, which follows the October 15 issue (Vol. 2, No. 1), is dated December 1976. Future issues will be published in the third week of each month and dated as the following month.

basis for real gains in the struggle around the no-strike deal and the rest of the companies' attacks which Abel has been a partner to. Further, fighting for Sadlowski's election can itself help to advance the class struggle, if it is taken up in such a way as to raise the issues and unite the rank and file around a program that reflects their interests and demands, and to build their organization and understanding.

Sadlowski Campaign No End in Itself

This is why it would be a big mistake to take up the Sadlowski campaign as an end in itself, or to consider getting Sadlowski elected the only task now in steel, as some forces within the union have urged, promoting the illusion that Sadlowski's election alone would insure a better day for steel workers. After all, Abel himself once portrayed himself as a "reform candidate" before he settled down into being an incumbent. Although he has taken a good stand on some key issues, Sadlowski has also done other things which the rank and file must take note of. For instance, at the USWA convention where workers wanted to show their outrage at Abel's double-dealing, Sadlowski urged them not to raise hell but to "wait till February"—in other words, to confine their struggle to voting for him. And recently, as District 31 Director, he okayed a consent decree with Inland Steel behind the membership's back despite all his promises never to do such a thing.

But it would also be wrong to take the line that steel workers should stay away from Sadlowski because he's not "revolutionary enough," as some other forces have done. This position is not revolutionary at all—in fact, it's the flip side of the other wrong line—because it hinges everything on who will be president of the union without taking as the basic thing the question of how to advance and develop the struggle of the rank and file.

Fundamentally, the question of whether or not to support a candidate in union elections does not begin and end with the candidate's professed stand on the issues facing the workers, but also must take into account the concrete conditions in the industry—how the workers see the candidates, how the elections relate to the struggle waged by the rank and file, what the opportunities to advance that struggle are, and most importantly, how concretely a decision to support and work for the election of a candidate can develop the initiative of the rank and file. In steel, the extremely widespread hatred of the Abel machine for being pro-company and the way Sadlowski has called on the rank and file to support him to break up the Abel machine are important factors, as is the general level of the rank and file struggle and its needs in the industry.

The story of Arnold Miller in the miners' union is a good lesson on this, although this does not mean that Sadlowski would necessarily act in the same manner as Miller. Miller's challenge to the hated, all but openly pro-boss, gangster Tony Boyle machine in the UMW reflected the rank and file miners' upsurge in the late Sixties and early Seventies, which had to clear out Boyle as a real obstacle to their struggles. In the battle to get rid of Boyle the miners built up their organization, unity and understanding, winning a real victory. At the same time, some forces from the bourgeoisie were also very active in promoting Miller in order to use him to put a cap on the miners struggle, to confine it within the limits of reformism, at a time when Boyle could no longer control the workers. Once in office Miller turned around and attacked the rank and file, trying to smash the rank and file's organization, but the miners had grown stronger through the course of the battle, and could, not relying on Miller, continue to advance their fight against the capitalists and all their flunkies.

Struggle Advanced During Earlier Elections

The round of steel elections that took place in the mills earlier this year for leadership on the local level has already brought about some advances that can be built on, as steel workers formulated demands and took them out widely to mobilize and unite the rank and file. *The Steelworker* newspaper has helped sum up a program of struggle for the industry nationwide (see *Revolution*, July 15, 1976) and to begin to bring together workers from different areas to spread the struggle and its lessons. It is this kind of work that helped make possible the Pittsburgh steel workers' demonstration (see story p. 3), which was a real breakthrough for steel workers in linking up and broadening their fight.

Steel workers' contracts are coming up next year. Already there is talk that Abel and the companies would like to have an agreement signed before the union elections in February. Although the fight to break up the Abel machine and elect Sadlowski and the fight around the contract are battles on different fronts, each will have a big effect on the other.

By taking up the Sadlowski campaign in a correct way, with the overall and long-term interests of the working class in mind, steel workers can become more organized, conscious and able to hit at the companies, and to take part in the overall development of a class conscious workers movement fighting on all fronts.