

by BEN FLETCHER

Rank and File insurgent Ed Sadlowski appears to have been defeated in his bid to gain the presidency of the United Steelworkers against Lloyd McBride, the hand-picked candidate of I. W. Abel and the labor bureaucracy. While the official result won't be announced until sometime in March, the unofficial tally has McBride the winner by some 50 to 75,000 votes.

The election turnout was heavy, with between 550 and 600,000 steel workers casting ballots, but not heavy enough for Sadlowski. Layoffs in basic steel as a result of the gas shortage held down the vote in a number of key Eastern districts. Since Sadlowski drew much of his support from younger workers with low seniority, the layoffs reduced his margins in these areas.

SADLOWSKI STRONG IN BASIC STEEL

Essentially, Sadlowski carried the heart of the USW, the workers in the basic steel concentrations in the East and Midwest, but not by a big enough margin to offset the heavy turnout for McBride in Canada and the South. As one Sadlowski activist put it: "They killed us in Canada", where McBride won by a 35,000 vote margin.

Sadlowski forces were scattered and poorly organized north of the border while McBride, who included a Canadian USW official on his slate, had the solid backing of the district and local leadership. In the South, McBride forces had relied heavily on redbaiting, apparently not without success.

Meanwhile, Sadlowski did not carry some of the Big Steel centers by the margin he needed and expected. In Pittsburgh, for example, he won by a very close margin, taking only a little more than half the votes. In the closing days of the election campaign, the McBride forces went all out in these areas to exploit the fears of the Steelworkers about losing their jobs.

They harped on the theme that Sadlowski was "strike happy" and that his militant stand against the Experimental Negotiating Agreement, in which the USW surrendered the right to strike for compulsory arbitration in collective bargaining, would lead to plant closings and export of jobs.

In the Pittsburgh area the day before the election, the McBride slate put out a leaflet aimed at the workers in the can industry that branded Sadlowski as a tool of the "Ban the Can" environmentalist lobby. These fear tactics undoubtedly affected the election result.

OBSERVERS LOOK FOR TAMPERING

Sadlowski forces expected widespread election tampering. These fears were based on ample precedent, as in the case of Sadlowski being robbed of an election for the Director of District 31 two years ago.

Part of the problem in this election was the unevenness of the Sadlowski organization. Where Sadlowski forces were strong, they were able to place observers at the polling places, which kept the election relatively honest.

Even in these areas tampering went on, as in a Baltimore area local where Sadlowski observers found that the ballot box had been opened a half hour earlier than election rules allowed. But where there were observers, Sadlowski for the most part either won or lost by close margins. Where there were no observers, as in Canada and much of the South and West, particularly in the smaller, non-steel locals, McBride rolled up suspiciously large margins often taking every vote in the local.

While Sadlowski may challenge the election results, the absence of observers means an absence of concrete evidence of election fraud. Also, the

Sadlowski Loses USW Election



SADLOWSKI. Ed Sadlowski (right) and Fightback leadership: their strength in Basic Steel wasn't enough to defeat McBride-Abel machine.

size of McBride's margin reduces the likelihood of a successful challenge.

STEP FORWARD FOR RANK AND FILE

In spite of the election loss, the Sadlowski campaign marks a definite step forward for the rank and file movement in Steel. The campaign served to draw some basic lines of demarcation between class collaborationism and class struggle unionism. This was the meaning of the stands Sadlowski took on the issues of contract ratification, the right to strike, the companies' productivity drive, the shorter work week with no cut in pay.

Sadlowski's whole candidacy grew out of the rank and file movement's growing maturity and coalescence around an embryonic class struggle program. And his election campaign in turn served to educate and mobilize broader rank and file forces around this program.

Rank and file organization was given a boost by the campaign. At the District Level, Rank and File Committees were formed that intend to stay together and continue the fight for union democracy and militancy. At the local level too, rank and file groups developed spontaneously out of the campaign.

The strength of this spontaneous rank and file movement is illustrated by the case of a local in Frederick, Maryland, where a rank and file group formed during the campaign. In spite of solid opposition from the local's president and executive board, Sadlowski carried the local by a 426 to 51 margin. The whole campaign, in the words of one insider, "drew clear lines between who the class fighters were." Careerists, who talked big before against Abel, tended to shy away from the campaign or to hedge their bets.

WEAK IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST RACISM

The Sadlowski campaign also had serious weaknesses. First and foremost was the candidate's weak stand on the whole question of racism. While Sadlowski ran with a multi-national slate and criticized the "consent decree" - in which the union had dropped the most pressing grievances of Black workers against discrimination in return for a cash settlement - he failed to aggressively pursue the fight against racism in his campaign.

The immediate result was a failure to mobilize Black support, at least in many districts. But more serious in the long run was the failure to use a great opportunity to educate the white workers as to where their true interests lie. The fight against racism and the building of Black-white unity is a key task of the rank and file

movement in steel and elsewhere and Sadlowski capitulated to the logic that shys away from the struggle on the grounds that it is divisive.

More generally, the Sadlowski forces, especially as the campaign progressed, played down the central issues in order to garner votes. The prospects of election victory led to a sacrifice of much of the educational content of the campaign.

ROLE OF THE LEFT

The left was a modest factor in the Sadlowski campaign. The revisionist CPUSA made a great deal of noise for Sadlowski,

but appears to have been short on active leadership within the movement. Generally the revisionists, true to form, tailed behind Sadlowski rather than providing critical and positive leadership.

The Revolutionary Communist Party, in a tactical shift, came out with critical support for Sadlowski, a support that was woefully compromised by the general sectarianism of that organization.

Meanwhile the October League, in the throes of yet another shift in line, marched resolutely to the extreme "left" and boycotted the election. The OL denounced Sadlowski as a "tool of Social Imperialism" and a "handmaiden of the CPUSA". By branding Sadlowski as the greater danger and engaging in vicious red-baiting, the OL lent its puny influence to McBride and the labor bureaucracy.

Less vocally and less visibly, Marxist-Leninists who are part of the trend that opposes both revisionism and dogmatism, played a small but positive role in a number of Districts.

On balance, the Sadlowski campaign marks another step forward for the rank and file. It is evidence of the growth of the movement both in numbers and in outlook, and McBride and his cronies know it. When one rank and file activist was asked if he thought McBride would now try to eliminate direct election of the Steelworkers' President, he replied: "He'd be a fool not to try it, because he's not going to win again."

"Outsiders" Aided McBride

by JIM GRIFFIN

The recent election contest between Ed Sadlowski and Lloyd McBride for President of the United Steelworkers involved not only the future of the Steelworkers, but the whole labor movement: Rank and file forces in other unions and progressives from outside labor's ranks actively supported Sadlowski.

McBride tried to make this an issue, hypocritically raising the spectre of outsiders invading the union while he himself took money from bureaucrats in other unions. Developments in the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU) illustrate the split in the trade unions between the kind of unionism represented by Sadlowski on the one hand and McBride on the other.

FINLEY MAKES DONATION TO MCBRIDE

ACTWU President Murray Finley not only vocally supported McBride, but gave him money - and called for his General Executive Board and staff to do likewise. In a memo dated Nov. 30, 1975 to the GEB and Joint Board Managers, Finley attempted to explain his fundraising for McBride on the grounds that Sadlowski was getting money from outsiders. According to Finley this raised the danger that "criminal elements or those whose political philosophy is opposed to free trade unionism... could... seize control of the union."

While Finley sees it as "totally wrong and improper" for people who don't belong to the exclusive club of AFL-CIO bureaucrats to give money, he sees nothing improper in his own fundraising for McBride. Finley had the gall to claim his support for McBride had nothing to do with McBride's or Sadlowski's positions on the issues and was only an attempt to

block "outsiders" from taking over the USW. While stating that I. W. Abel was an "outstanding labor leader and American", Finley said he "did not know either McBride or Sadlowski."

The ACTWU Rank & File Committee, a Philadelphia-based group that has been fighting to democratize the ACTWU since 1971, gave a more plausible explanation for Finley's action in a statement of support for Sadlowski: "We are not surprised that Murray Finley is supporting the likes of McBride. This is just another case of birds of a feather sticking together. As ACTWU members, we face many of the same problems steel workers do. Our jobs are being automated and exported away with only token protest from the union leadership. We too are denied the right to ratify our contract and other elementary forms of union democracy. Black, Spanish, Asian, women, and immigrant workers are the victims of discrimination in hiring and upgrading, as well as harassment on the job, and the union has done virtually nothing to combat it."

The statement went on to add: "Lloyd McBride has hypocritically accused Sadlowski of taking outside contributions, while he fuels his own campaign with money from bureaucrats like Finley and Shanker, head of the teacher's union. We believe it is clear that the whole labor movement has a stake in the outcome of this election - it is a contest between the old bureaucratic, management-labor harmony school of unionism and the new rank and file brand of unionism."

"We want to make it clear that Murray Finley does not speak for the ACTWU rank and file. The ACTWU Rank and File Committee believes it speaks for thousands of other members of our union in expressing our solidarity and support for the Sadlowski Slate and the rank and file movement in the USW."