

# Steel delegates outline program

**Merrillville, Ind.**—Some 800 delegates and observers from 96 steel locals attended the District 31 Conference of the United Steel Workers union on June 29 and 30 to map out a fighting program that targets the steel monopolies and the sellout policies of International President Lloyd McBride.

The annual conference was marked this year by the militant participation of rank-and-file steelworkers. They voiced unanimous opposition to the International policies of continued support for the no-strike pact (ENA) and opposition to the demand for the right to ratify contracts. These policies have acted as a brake on the steelworkers' ability to fight against worsening conditions in the mills.

District 31 Director James Balanoff, taking note of the workers' angry sentiments, pointed to the battle for union recognition at Newport News, Va., shipyard and the recent victory against the Weber case as examples of what steelworkers can accomplish when they are organized and united.

In his opening remarks to the convention he stated, "Workers won't continue to sacrifice while company profits soar."

The following are some of the main points included in the program adopted at the conference:

**Carter's 7% limit and the ENA.** The conference denounced Carter's anti-inflation plan and passed a resolution calling for a 30% wage increase when the USWA contract expires next year.

The district leadership went on record against the no-strike ENA with its 3% wage ceiling and demanded the right to ratify the USWA contract. William Andrews, Local 1010 president, urged a co-ordinated letter campaign to McBride calling for the right to ratify and a special conference to be held before the meeting of basic steel presidents to resolve the issue.

A delegate from Local 1011 pointed out how the right to ratify would be meaningless if unresolved issues went to an arbitrator as called for by the ENA. The sentiment at the conference was that the right to ratify must be backed up by the right to strike.

**Discrimination against minorities and women.** Numerous resolutions were submitted and discussed calling for an end to discrimination and for affirmative action for minorities and women in steel. Conference participants spoke of the defeat of Brian Weber's "reverse discrimination" suit as a victory for all workers.

Resolutions from the Local 1010 Women's Committee

spanned a range of issues including company-financed childcare, expanded pregnancy coverage, abortion rights and equality within the union, including the creation of an International Women's Department.

**Health and Safety.** Balanoff cited health and safety as a number one priority for steelworkers in the coming year. Local 65 President Alice Puerala emphasized this by pointing to the high rate of silicosis in the steel foundries. The companies, she said, are using the threat of layoffs to hold workers hostage to dangerous working conditions.

**The energy crisis.** Throughout the conference there was discussion and debate on the energy crisis and the ripoffs by the big oil monopolies.

Many workers in attendance had taken part in various activities and demonstrations to protest the building of a nuclear power plant near Indiana's steel mills. The conference adopted a resolution demanding that the government "investigate and develop safe forms of energy." They also resolved that District 31 "immediately begin an energetic campaign of energy education among its members and other trade unionists and the public."

District officials attempted to use the meeting to channel the militancy of the steelworkers in-

to a support campaign for Democratic Party officials who spoke at the conference as "friends of labor." Sen. Birch Bayh, the featured speaker the second day of the conference, blamed foreign workers for the past crisis in the steel industry and promoted the "Be American, Buy American" slogan as the solution to the problem of declining jobs.

Delegates took the floor to speak out against Bayh, calling for unity between workers in the U.S. and abroad. This internationalist sentiment was also expressed in a resolution adopted at the conference which denounced apartheid and called for solidarity with Black workers in South Africa. The resolution further called on District 31 locals to "withdraw all union monies from banks which carry on business with the Republic of South Africa" and directed the international to give any aid possible to the Black metal miners in their struggle for justice.

The importance of this recent conference lies in the fact that rank-and-file forces can now use the program adopted here to keep district and local leadership committed to it. A fighting program like the one the delegates passed will put steelworkers in a good position for the contract struggles next year.