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 "sick-off" in Washington, D.C., the union and management put their basic negotiating positions, there were about 75 steel work- ers picketing outside chanting, "No Right to Strike, Can't Even Vote, Get Your Damn Hands Off Our Throats!" and "sick-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 election for USWA President the pro-company machine of I.W. and his hand-picked successor Lloyd McBride beat challenger Ed Sadlowski. But while it's still too early to tot up the verdict of this battle that took place around the election, it is clear that the rank and file was clearly aware of the Sadlowski campaign and made some gains in the course of the that conditions today have grown more favorable for the rank and file to put up a real fight around this contract.

Anyhow in 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 what- ever gains it has not been agreed on by April 21 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 ironed out. In turn, whatever hap- pens 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 and on steel mills, 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 faltering profitability of the industry by stepped-up job combinations and eliminations, harassment, forced overtime and woman- ing 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 fight- ing now because you did 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 force down this contract, while at the same time fighting to carry out the contract demands. It was glaringly obvious that "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 strategy of turn- ing the contract into a battle against the companies.

Afterwards, it was decided to agree that the contract demands and the idea that just entering the battlefield that the rank and file had been kept out of so long would itself be a stop for- ward. It wouldn't be easy, people agreed, but thou- sands of steel workers chased by the ENA and compa- ny unions in the face of company attacks are looking for a way to fight.

Pole of Resistance

The demonstration itself was the first phase in one of the campaigns, helping to establish a pole of resis- tance among steel workers to the contract sellout that the two-headed monster (the company and their union emissaries) are trying to bring about. Along with the na- tional 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 focus concrete contract demands in the course of building the battles now going on in the mills and develop the rank and file's abilities to put up a real challenge to 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 fight and it builds and organizes its resistance.

Although specific contract demands will take shape in the course of the battle, the steelworkers at the Washing- ton 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 com- pany-union productivity commissions and the attacks on the rank and file's rights to organize in the plant. The broader demand for for people laid off including no overtime in any plant where there are layoffs. 4) Strengthened strength and health provi- sions, 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 deal with the workers not the companies pay for dis- crimination in the past. 6) Extended waged and ben- efits and benefits. 7) Permanently.

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 the contract should be a step towards insuring "a guaranteed job for..." steel workers. This may sound good, but from the union's side it's all been just talk while the compa- nies have made precisely specific plans relating to for- agreeing to that idea in principle, the union should give up the contract demands and expect to see a drastic reduction in contract payment (like having unemployment benefits) to labor-off steel workers. As a way to achieve the right to strike, the rank and file has no say in the matter (as far as a few of them say). It's pretty likely that whatever they cook up by April 27 will be a sellout and the agreement will go down in the court of any challenge to the membership to say yes. At that time, as phase two of the contract battle begins, steel workers will be able to use the contract program developed during the negotiations as a background for a challenge to the contract by. At the Washington meeting plans were made to mobilize our union meetings to deal with the question of rejection of the sellout contract as well as in carrying out a campaign to raise the demand that the contract be renegotiated.

Steel workers plan to take out petitions, populate 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 is that the Basic Steel Conference of the union reject the contract and that it be brought up for renegotiation.

It was also agreed that in carrying that steel work- ers should take up the local contracts in their plants as part of this overall battle. While the emphasis should be on the contract in the local plants, the campaign's strategy is the contract not submitted to a vote and negotiated under the ENA, it was decided that the struggle should be built around among can, aluminum and nonferrous and steel workers are in the USWA as well. The can contract which had been scheduled to expire in a couple of months was extended until Oc- tober, after the canning season was over, and it is likely 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 Able machine that backed him were voted down in the basic steel. This was a big hole in their claim that the ENA and other measures were the real reason for the contract and what we've got. The defeat of Abel and McBride in basic steel weakens their ability to pull off a sellout by claim- ing that they have the votes for it. The ENA ending means and it puts the rank and file in a better position to resist.

The whole question of building the workers move- ment in steel has come up in the last few months through the course of the battle fought around the negotiations which were held February 8. McBride couldn't get his hands on the issues because he was on the wrong side one very. The joint action day, the Steelworker workers' committee, the Able machine's directive rule over the rank and file, the ENA and the phony Consent Decree against discrimination to the Basic Steel Company union- ism. The challenge in this election, Ed Sadlowski ran a campaign that took a stand, that often vocalizing, all of these issues and because the company just tried to draw strength from the growing anger of the workers and the rank and file.

By using the Sadlowski campaign as a way to take on the Steelworker machine and stop the struggle of the rank and file, steel workers were able to popularize their dem- ands and mobilize around them, to raise the under- standing of the rank and file to as the nature of the battle, to organize their ranks, strike some blows at the strangle- hold of the machine in the union and create better con- ditions for the next battles such as the contract struggle which is now breaking out.

Many of the workers at the Washington demonstration had some forward movement in their eyes. Johnson and the Steelworker and people grouped around it had been a relatively small but active and expanding force. Through taking out the campaign a sign of the basic steel struggle, the Able machine, people around the Steelworker were able to make contacts with a great many other steel workers, linking up the battles against the struggles in various steel mills and shops and helping to develop among the workers a sense of a overall move- ment building up across the lines of the plants (their bench- men).

By taking up these local struggles, using the Sadow- lowski campaign to help build on the ENA and united demands of steel workers, some important gains were made in the organization of the rank and file. People from the Steelworker and other Fight Back committees, and other forms of organiza- tions developed as well, such as the District 31 Or- ganizing Committee in the Northwest which was to build organization in Districts 27-28 (around Cleveland area) 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...
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 movements marked the fact that a quarter of the workers went out on strike sometime during the last year against their bosses and the government that stands behind them—further evidence of the impetus to consider abandoning Franco-style rule and moving toward some sort of parliamentary setup. Their hope is in the idea of widespread social coordination, a dream of a little discussion and as much continuity as possible for the government under King Juan Carlos, to throw out only the few elements of conflict that can take place and reignite the initiatives.

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 phony 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 crop hoisting up on the way, of Franco's heir, the King. Without such forces to spread the illusion that Spain's rulers have changed and that now the way is clear to establish 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 provoked by the King into a vote 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 a give-up at 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 in its byzantine certificate to make it "legitimate," the government announced that this 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 region inhabited by the Basque and other oppressed nationalities which have long borne the government's harshest repression. This forced the government to make some new concessions—for instance legalizing the Basque language, which had been outlawed—but the overall success of the referendum was limited because the referendum was limited because the CP—which itself heartlessly subjugated 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 able by themselves, the Spanish CP is distanced by various policies 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 in a small revolution. The government has all but given the PSOE a pump to inflate itself with. It was the first "letting go" party for whom the government has had to do as it pleased. 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 we've saddled them 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 Spanish group in 1976. 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 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 and to give free samples of its collaboration with the Spanish capitalists and their U.S. brothers. Whereas until recently the CP went along with actions against the government (most recently their own own split), in the last few months, as the possibility of be ing invited to take part in this last at the top becomes increasingly remote, the CP has been showing a more or less "cooperative" face. Marshall did their best to prevent chanting, singing or anything else that would turn the funerals into mass political events. After the funeral, Simon Sanchez Montero, emerged from the Justice Department before one of the funerals saying, "We want to prevent even the smallest manifestation 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 de mocrate or do anything else that might lead to "pos sible confrontations with the government." The CP justifies this by saying in effect that only in this way can the masses hope that Josph's rules will give up preserv ing the people.

But the truth is that this repression, which the bour geoisie has used to gain power for a long time in Spain, has also put the bourgeois itself in a bind. The masses of people are outraged at the jailings of po litical prisoners, and have backed the right to go to political organizations and unions to demonstrate at the oppression of Spain's minority nationalities and so on. The government has tried to split the mass move ment and cool it out as much as possible by making a few small concessions, and especially by more and more openly tolerating political opposition and "inrease ning" coming to count on its work as it propagates.

But for the people the question of rights is not a question of "who will govern," or "who will control the state, the republicans. The bourgeois has denied these rights in or der to hold the people down, and the masses of people, especially the workers, are seeing the repression and the struggle of the young people as part of their fight for their interests and a gainst the exploitation and oppression that Spain's capitalist system and system of exploitation enforces.

The regime's reforms have not satisfied and can't satisfy the demands of the people, and more and more people have come to the conclusion that the struggle to over throw the regime outright.

Two generations ago all the big capitalists of the world collaborated with the fascist dictatorship to help suppress the "jerm" 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 po litically and revolutionarily. The revolution has developed despite the revisionists' treasur. The experience of these dark years and this growing movement have given the masses of people a new desire for the socialism among workers and other sections of the peo ple.

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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 fabric ation 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 backed McBride. But this didn't go unchallenged.

For instance, there are a number of plants with drugs and playing up many serious issues like the role played by company unionism, people from the Steel workers Local 11 in New York who just had refused being referred to a sell-out contract, and the workers in turn were able to use the election last of February to merge with their own local president. Another example is the Star Sprinkhirn shop in Philadelphia (see article this issue) in which steel work ers who'd been giving job to pro-Safilowski leaflet to focus ing 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 official union hawk who'd held back the struggle.

This all underlined the reality of importance taking up the Safilowski campaign, and of doing it in a way that kept the initiative in the hands of the rank and file. Al though the interests of the rank and file and those of Safilowski coincided in going up against the Abel ma chine, the way Safilowski's campaign was run from the top failed to mobilize the maximum strength possible in this fight. From the beginning at the USWA conven tion in August they were able to go all out with rank and file that wanted to take on Abel on the convention floor, there was a constant fight against the line favoring building of companies to keep up arguments on alliances with local officials to build his own ma chine and treating the rank and file little more than vote getters, contrasted with the rank and file's running on as a force to mobilize to take up the campaign as part of fighting for their own interests.

Opposing moves to organize both active and adv anced workers around the issues as the key force to reach out broadly, leading forces in the Safilowski campaign that their bids were not enough to do explain to who they would alienate the rest of the steel workers. For this reason they had to increase their activity to pure campaign picketing and refusal to back off from actions. They won a demonstration in Chicago against McBride and the Pittsburgh demonstration to free Local 3059 which the Abel machine had put under pressure, who wouldn't do anything. They didn't really deal with the question of changing thing that was anything but the face, even workers who gen erally favored Safilowski didn't.

But despite the fact that the election results seem to indicate Safilowski's defeat, the rank and file has made important advances in establishing a viable resis tance to the companies and company unionism in the industry. As a leaflet put out by the rank and file to build for the D.C. demonstration it put: "We prove that steel workers across the face of this country unite to put our interests, to make this another real 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 scored other advances in the Safilowski campaign; let us move now more determinently and united to make the contract a real battle."