MILITANCY AND DEMOCRACY

As each campaign issue unfolds, Sadlowski and McBride fall on opposite sides of the fence around two basic principles: how much rank and file democracy is necessary, and how militant a union should be with respect to the manufacturers.

Sadlowski is fighting for a union leadership which is forced to be another brand of the base, while Abel's machine considers such a position to be idealistic and defeatist. He has not been the court votes by charisma and sweet-talk.

Sadlowski is looking for the return to the militancy of the thirties, a militancy which depended on the strength of the people united rather than on the sophisticated, statistian-like negotiations of the labor bureaucracies. A good many of his followers take the opposition to Abel's policies very seriously his stand for the six-hour day, an end to layoffs during the length of a contract, an end to compulsory overtime, and other such reforms.

Sadlowski's history as an independent and militant trade unionist goes much farther back than this particular campaign. He has made some advances: while Abel considered the conscientious objector a tremendous victory for minority workers in steel, Sadlowski has called for the struggle against racism to go further. He has supported the demand for a total reform of the seniority system, more bidding for jobs, and plant or corporation-wide seniority.

His slate includes both Black and Spanish-speaking candidates, while Abel included a Black member on his racist team and made an effort of pressure from the rank and file. These steps are only a beginning, however, and must be followed up by a more systematic program against discrimination if Sadlowski is truly to establish a new kind of unionism.

Sadlowski has also shown real weakness in his understanding of the need for a frontal attack on anti-communism. While he has consistently opposed red-baiting, he has not understood the need to define the right of communists to play an active part in union politics. His vacillation around this issue has the door open for red-baiting to successfully silence union members, despite his insistence on his belief in the right of all members to voice their opinions.

The bosses aren't nearly so confused about what Sadlowski represents. They know that the campaign around him has the potential of unleashing years of worker discontent and militancy, and as the president of Illinois Steel and Belted Co. said, negotiations with him would be "a new ball game".

The Sadlowski movement could indeed force a whole new ball game, but the future of their program depends much less on the man himself than on the strength of the rank and file movement. The Sadlowski campaign has initiated the formation of a network of fight-back committees based in the shops and mills and run by rank and file dissidents. It is these committees and others like them that can force the success of the rank and file movement behind Sadlowski. It is these committees which, if they remain organized and active even after a Sadlowski victory, can force the new administration not only to carry through on already defined goals, but also to expand its understanding to class struggle unionism.

DOGMATISTS DÉNONCED

Sadlowski isn't a communist, he isn't a socialist, and his program definitely suffers from real inconsistencies. His weakness to make sure that the dogmatists like the October League that they have even called for a boycott of the elections.

"Ed Sadlowski in the USWA,...hails..and even developed a circus as instruments for derailing and suppressing the genuine rank and file rebellion of the same time that they promote themselves into positions in the trade union bureaucracy", argues OL. Sadlowski, they argue, hopes "to turn rank and file anger away from its developing revolutionary directions." For the first time in many years the class collaborator Abel machine is being forced to face a serious challenge to its policies, spontaneous discontent is being organized and finding a voice, and the OL calls for a boycott of the elections to protect the purity of some mythical "purer" revolutionary workers movement.

United Steelworkers union insurgent Ed Sadlowski (center).

Even his recent election as director of District 31 came only as a result of a four year struggle which included petitioning the Labor Department for a new election in 1973 because of mass vote fraud. He was elected in 1974 by a large margin, despite active opposition from Abel's machine.

Clear, Sadlowski's major weakness is his failure to maintain a strong program against racism and sexism. However, to the extent that his campaign and his strength is more dependent upon the support of the rank and file, to that extent he will be forced to develop this area.