Sadlowski Loses USW Election

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 AFL-CIO Director of Labor Affairs, and prominent Sadlowski pick, I.W. Abel. The official result won’t be announced until sometime in March. The official tally has McBride the winner by some 50 to 75,000 votes.

The election turnout was heavy, with between 650 and 900,000 steel workers casting ballots, but not heavy enough for Sadlowski. Layoffs in basic steel as a result of the steel shortage held down the vote to a number of key eastern districts. Since Sadlowski drew much of his support from younger workers with low seniority, the layoffs reduced his margin 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’s forces were scattered and poorly organized north of the border while McBride rode to a Canadian and international triumph. An official on his state, had the solid backing of the district and local leadership. In the South, McBride forces had relied heavily on red baiting, apparently without success.

Meanwhile, Sadlowski did not carry some of the Big Steel centers by the margin he carried in Pittsburgh. For example, he won by a very close margin, taking only a little more than half the vote. In the closing stages of the 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 closing 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 steel industry that branded Sadlowski as a tool of the “Ban the Can” environmentalist lobby. The leaflet was undeniably 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’s election for the Director of District 31 two years ago.

Part of the problem in this election was the unionization of the Sadlowski organization. When Sadlowski forces were strong, they were able to place observers at the polling places, which kept the election relatively free of tampering.

Even in these areas tampering went on, as in the District 31 area local where Sadlowski observers found that the ballot box had been opened a half hour earlier than the official time and that the rank and file were allowed to talk to the workers. Where there were no observers, as in Canada and much of the South and West, particularly in the smaller, non-unionized districts, 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.


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

“Outsiders” Alded 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 for a more radical ranks actively supported Sadlowski.

However, McBride tried to make this an issue, hypocritically raising the specter of outsiders invading the union while he himself throughout the whole of his union career.

The strength of this spontaneous rank and file movement is illustrated by the case of the District 6, Rank and File Committee. They 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 support of the Steelworkers and rank and file movement is illustrated by the case of the District 6, Rank and File Committee. They 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.

FINLEY MAKES DONATION TO McBRIE

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 wrong in proper in his own fundraising for McBride. Finley had the gall to claim his support was for McBride’s having 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 his own campaign for McBride was an “outstanding labor leader and American”, Finley said he “did not know either McBride or Sadlowski.”

The ACTWU Rank & File Committee, a 45,000-strong body of rank and file workers, has been fighting to democratize the ACTWU since 1971, giving 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 Sadlowski and Grotjahn. What we never expected is the support 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 workers, and immigrants 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 himself has been raising money with money from bureaucrats like Finley and Shaker, head of the Steelworkers union. He believes it is clear that the whole labor movement has a stake in the outcome of this election — it is a contest between the workers and the top management for the control of the employers’ social, political and economic organizations. We want to make it clear that Murray Finley does not speak for the ACTWU. 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.”