

# Budd Worker

Vol. 2, No. 5

Oct.-Nov. 1976

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 fightback 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 DENOUNCE SADLOWSKI

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

"Ed Sadlowski in the USWA... has latched onto and even developed caucuses as instruments for derailing and suppressing the genuine rank and file rebellion at 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 collaborationist Abel machine is being forced to face a serious challenge to its policies, spontaneous discontent is being organized and is finding a voice, and the OL calls for a boycott of the elections to protect the purity of some mythical "pure" revolutionary workers movement!

Instead of looking for reasons to boycott this tremendously important mass movement, communists and radicals must join actively in the Sadlowski campaign. They must dedicate themselves to the task of consolidating rank and file organizations spontaneously formed around the campaign, and they must fight for the adoption of ever more advanced programs by these same committees.

The rank and file organization must provide both the basis of support necessary to Sadlowski to carry out his promises and the pressure to insure that he remembers them. As Sadlowski himself has pointed out repeatedly to his supporters, the only way to insure that the membership will receive honest and responsible union leadership is to "keep your foot up my butt"! It is up to the activists and the left wing to make sure that the rank and file makes this suggestion a reality.

*Bruce Bodner is a worker and activist at the Budd Co. Red Lion Plant. He is a member of the steering committee of the Blue Ribbon Group, a rank and file caucus within UAW Local 92.*

*Bruce's answers to the Organizer's questions reflect his own views, and are not the official views of the Blue Ribbon Group.*

**Organizer: What is the Blue Ribbon Group?**

Bruce: Well, the Blue Ribbon Group is a rank and file caucus within the UAW at the Budd Red Lion plant. Actually, the caucus got started in September of 1973, a year in which our union was negotiating a contract. A small group of workers came together and tried to influence the demands that our local would fight for in that contract. At that time we were called the Concerned Members of Local 92. This was the beginning of the rank and file movement at Red Lion.

The Blue Ribbon Group came into existence two years later when there was a plant wide election for union office. All of the Concerned Members of Local 92 merged or allied themselves with a number of other workers who were interested in running in that election. So we changed the name of the caucus to the Blue Ribbon Group.

**Organizer: What does the name stand for? How did you choose that name?**

Bruce: Well, the name was chosen by one of our members and I think that his logic for calling it the Blue Ribbon Group was because it was the name of a winner.

**Organizer: Number one.**

Bruce: Yes, number one.

**Organizer: Were you involved with this from the beginning?**

Bruce: Yeah, I was involved from the beginning. I was hired at the Budd Co. in May of 1973, but prior to having worked at the Budd Co. I was involved in the anti-war movement and to some degree with the civil rights movement. I was influenced a good deal by those two

struggles—one fighting against an unjust war and the other against inequality and social injustice. And prior to working at the Budd Co., I did do some work for another union.

**Organizer: Did you get involved in unions because you felt they could produce some of these changes?**

Bruce: Yes, my involvement in the local was not just because of the particular problems that workers face at Red Lion, of which there are many. Like I said, prior to having been hired at Budd, I was involved with these other movements and I had come to realize, I think, that the only way to really end war, eliminate poverty, and end the inequality which exists in our society, it was necessary for the working people, who are after all the victims of these injustices, to take a stronger role in these movements. And a natural way for them to do this would be through strengthening their labor movement.

**Organizer: I know that the BRG has been involved in the basic shop struggles, for more democracy, better working conditions, and a better contract. In what ways do you feel it has contributed to the development of these broader political movements?**

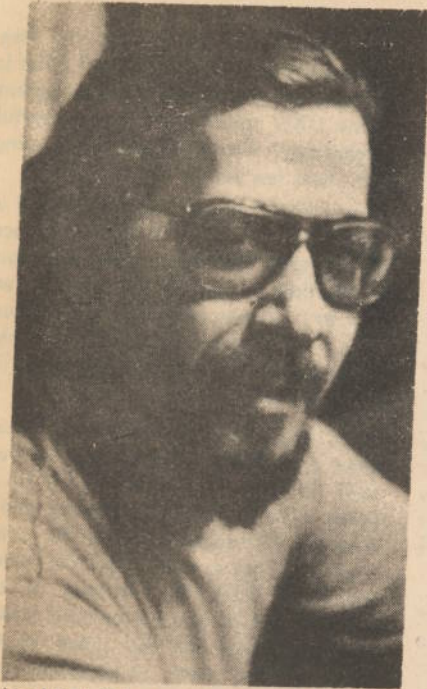
Bruce: Well I think that at this point, we've only been around for three years, our caucus has not yet been able to develop a program that speaks to these broader issues in our society. I think that our focus up til now has been to deal with the particular problems faced by autoworkers in the U.S. Of course now, even within this limited framework, we are organizing against racism, which is very prevalent in the auto industry.

**Organizer: How do you go about doing this? What has the caucus done to build the fight against racism?**

Bruce: In our first effort to organize at Red Lion, around the '73 contract, we thought that we had to develop some kind of program that would speak to the basic needs of Red Lion workers. We got together about ten people who had recognized from their own experience that the



# Talks About Organizing



local bargaining committee and the international leadership was not likely to produce the kind of contract that reflected the needs of the workers.

We sat down and worked out our program. It focussed on production rates, health and safety, and the fight against discrimination. And so from the very beginning we did recognize that it was necessary to include the struggle against racism in our program and in our work. We wanted to build unity between Black and white workers. But we understood that to make this unity lasting and strong it had to be on the basis of the struggle against discrimination and not just on the basis of wages and working conditions.

**Organizer:** Well let me ask you this. Do you feel that the Blue Ribbon Group has succeeded in building a strong caucus of Black and white workers? What's been your experience along these lines?

**Bruce:** Well, this has been one of our main difficulties. The main weakness of our caucus is that we have not been able to recruit enough white workers as active members. We do have some very strong white workers in the Blue Ribbon Group, but not enough. The caucus is made up primarily of Black workers.

Now, it's important to understand that the Budd Co. has long practiced a divide and conquer policy among the workers. Budd's hiring and upgrading practices have been *consciously* designed to keep Black workers out of many skilled and semi-skilled jobs. And this has had the effect of driving a wedge between Black and white workers, not just because we remain isolated from each other in different parts of the plant, but also because along with the skilled or semi-skilled job goes a higher wage, more job security, and better working conditions. All of this undercuts the militancy of the white workers, even though the living standards, working conditions, and job security of *all* workers are now under attack.

On top of this we have to consider the constant barrage of propaganda that we have been fed all our lives about Black people and other minorities. Racist ideas take many forms but those of us who have been trying to unite workers have seen, that, for example, many white workers are reluctant to attend a meeting if it is held in an integrated community; many white workers are hesitant about voting Black workers into union office and many distrust the Blue Ribbon Group because we raise the issue of discrimination against the Black workers.

Many white workers just do not yet realize that racism is a poison being exploited by the company to weaken and hold down *all working people*. But the struggle of the rank and file at Red Lion is beginning to teach people that racism hurts all workers and that the white worker has as much at stake in the fight against racism as the Black worker.

One thing that opened people's eyes, I think, was the recent struggle against a Budd speed-up campaign. Production workers are paid on an incentive basis and for years there has been a cap or daily maximum quota set on production in the automotive division. The company reasoned that if it could remove this cap it could get greater production from automotive and by focusing its speed-up campaign on one division it could exploit the divisions between the mainly Black automotive workers and the mainly white railcar and skilled trades workers

Many white workers, especially those affected by the speed-up in automotive were able to see exactly what the company was doing. So, through our campaign against the removal of the cap and now in our fight for a good contract a lot of white workers are coming to see that it is the Blue Ribbon Group that really is fighting for the interests of all workers -- Black and white -- at Red Lion.

In fact, we have been able to mobilize a good number of people in the past few months. Many white workers have supported the Blue Ribbon Group in the fight against removing the cap, many have signed petitions at different times about various issues and recently many white workers demonstrated their support for a Black shop steward who belongs to our caucus when he was suspended for 30 days by the Company. So we are making progress.

The problem that still persists is that not enough white workers are active in the day-to-day work of building the Blue Ribbon Group. What seems to hold back many of these workers is the social pressure that their fellow workers are able to impose on them if they become directly involved with the caucus. This kind of pressure intimidates people for a while, but it won't last long. I feel confident that we will soon overcome this problem.

**Organizer:** So your thinking is that as the workers gain understanding of the struggle against racism in the shop the caucus will be able to generalize this into the struggle against racism in other areas of the society, like school desegregation, for example?

**Bruce:** Yeah, I think this is true not only about the struggle against racism, but about all the issues which our caucus has taken up. Because, the more experience we get in the rank and file movement, and the more we learn about the history of our labor movement, the more we come to realize that we cannot really deal with the problems we face as workers in the plant and as citizens in the community if our focus is too narrow, if it is limited to the struggle against the Budd Co.



Like, I have no more bones to pick with the Budd Co. than with any other big corporation. In my opinion, the Budd Co. is no better and no worse than most big corporations. But what I do think, is that the problem is that the big corporations, Budd included, are in control of all of the major economic and political decisions that are made in our country. And what has to change is that working people have to have the say. Working people, who are the majority, should have control over their lives and I think that that's what the struggle of the rank and file movement is eventually going to be all about. That's really the only way we can really safeguard and advance our interests.

**Organizer:** Some people would say that sounds like communism. Do you have any trouble with that? Have you been red-baited?

**Bruce:** To tell you the truth, we've been red-baited from the very first time we opened our mouths. Like the first time we put out a leaflet in 1973, which was a very innocent piece of literature. It only dealt with simple shop problems. But at our union meeting that month, the Chairman of our Grievance Committee, Joe Robinson, who now is an international rep for the UAW in this region, attacked us as being communists and he said that the workers should beware because communists were on the move in 1973.

So we have had to take up the issue of red-baiting from the very earliest stages of organizing a caucus. The fact that we had to deal with this from the beginning, before ever having raised broader issues, speaks to how red-baiting is used against the workers. It's used as a tool to discredit all militancy among the workers. And whether or not you're a communist, if you dare to criticize local leaders, or if you dare to raise the issues that face the working people, or dare to try to organize struggle against the company, you're going to be red-baited. There's no way around it.

**Organizer:** Does the BRG allow communists in the caucus?

**Bruce:** Well, the position of the BRG is that we believe in trade union democracy and that anybody, no matter what their political beliefs should be able to participate, not only in the Blue Ribbon Group, but in the UAW. We discussed this in the caucus.

I think that what has helped many of us to understand, not only that red-baiting is a trick, a tool, against all militant workers, but what's helped us understand the need to defend the rights of communists to participate in the caucus is the history of our own union, the UAW.

I thought the history of the UAW you did in the *Organizer* really helped us in this. Many of us in the caucus read and discussed these articles. Many of the caucus members had never realized before that it was the communists in the 1930's who played a leading role in the organization of the UAW. Had it not been for Wyndham Mortimer and Robert Travis, both communists and leaders of the Flint sit-down strike, I can't be too sure we would have a union today.

**Organizer:** Speaking of the *Organizer*, that leads me to ask, do you feel the *Organizer* can be used to build the rank and file movement at Red Lion and in auto?

**Bruce:** Yes, I do. I've found many articles in the *Organizer* that could be of great use to workers interested in having a stronger union.

See, I don't believe we can go just on our experience. I don't think that this experience teaches us all we have to know. To organize successfully we need to know how to develop a program. To do this, for example, it may be necessary to know something about economics. We may need to project whether the next few years will bring unemployment in our industry if we are to deal with this issue in a program.

We also need to know about tactics, how best to fight the company. We need to know about how to build organization, and how to build unity in the trade unions. We should know how other workers have successfully or unsuccessfully organized in similar situations. This is the kind of knowledge essential to the successful organizer and leader, in any plant. And this is what is so important about the *Organizer*. It has this kind of information.

You know, because of red-baiting and because of anti-communism many workers are reluctant to take the *Organizer* when its being passed out. To me this is a crime because the *Organizer* is not forcing anybody into believing anything. People can read it and form their own opinions. But because of anti-communism, some people feel that its going to take them over, seize their minds or something. And so they refuse to read it.

You know, I myself, like most other people, was brought up on a heavy diet of anti-communism. In fact when I was 18 or 19—I think this shows you how absurd anti-communism is—I met some people who were organizing a food co-op, for poor people. When I heard what they were doing I assumed that they were communists. This was the way I grew up. Imagine, I even thought of reporting them to the FBI. Crazy. Go to the FBI because they were helping poor people.

Now that I know better I feel almost ashamed to tell this story. But I do feel that telling the story is important because it does show that all of us to some degree or another have been, at one time, anti-communist. It's a prejudice which only holds back our own development and it is entirely destructive to the cause of working people. The *Organizer* which is a communist paper, has a lot to offer workers at Red Lion. Yes, I think it does.

**Organizer:** Where do you see the Blue Ribbon Group going from here? What is the future of the rank and file movement in the UAW where there is a powerful bureaucracy? Where do you see it going in the next few years?

**Bruce:** Well right now we are engaged in organizing for the 1976-77 contract. What's really significant about our work at this time is that for the first time we have been able to establish close connections with autoworkers at other plants, especially the Hunting Park Plant here in Philadelphia.

For a long time we recognized the importance of building unity beyond our own local, because we realized we are up against a very powerful company and a powerful bureaucracy within the union itself. Its not so much the local leaders that hold back the struggle of the workers, but its the international leadership that holds the real power in the UAW. Behind every conservative local leader you will find the shadow of the international bureaucracy.

In the last six months or so we made two breakthroughs in extending our contacts beyond the local. First, last May we established a relationship with Pete Kelly, Jordan Sims, and Erwin Baur, all members of the United National Caucus, who have been organizing within the union for many years. Recently, through a joint newsletter, we established ties between ourselves and Hunting Park workers.

Now what we see is that during this contract period we have a real opportunity to build unity between Hunting Park and Red Lion workers and between workers in Philadelphia and workers in Detroit. We hope that, no matter what our effect on the contract, whether we win some of our demands or not, that we will come out of the contract struggle with a higher degree of unity with these workers.

If we can achieve that, we will be able to lay the foundation for a strong national organization of rank and file workers in auto. And perhaps next year at the UAW convention, or perhaps three years from now when our next contract is negotiated, we'll be in a much stronger position and much better able to influence the outcome of the negotiations.