

Short Version of Sadlowski Evaluation for Branch Discussion

The following is an abridged version of IS in the Sadlowski Campaign: Evaluation by the national steel fraction steering committee. It attempts to make the main political lessons of our activity clear; it does not pretend to go into detail. Comrades should read the longer evaluation for further information.

The situation of the IS in steel at the beginning of the campaign was that of a politically raw fraction and fraction leadership with some hopeful but limited openings in the mills.

In Gary we had won a fight for women's washhouses, but the women's group was destroyed by sectarianism.

In Pittsburgh a women's washhouse group had developed into a rank and file with a newspaper (Steelworkers Stand UP--SSU). The paper was well-received, but had very shallow roots and few connections with shop-floor or local union struggles.

In Cleveland, where we had the greatest experience, we had attempted through a tabloid paper to have a broader network of ties on a district-wide basis, but the core remained the local work at Republic.

The Sadlowski campaign was a chance to make real gains in all areas of our work. But this would only occur if we could break with fraction reluctance to vigorously and unashamedly support an obvious reformist. For our small, weak, and isolated fraction to use this chance, we had to work with clearly opportunist forces in the union, and fold our work into a broader, more powerful movement.

Our predictions and perspectives for the campaign were essentially that we expected that Sadlowski's campaign could mobilize the mass rank and file dissatisfaction, especially in basic steel, and that large numbers of rank and filers could be brought to Fight Back (the campaign organization) meetings, rallies, plant leaflettings, etc. We thought the campaign would generate local Fight Backs, or create an atmosphere in which they could easily be built, and that the groups could do shop-floor and local-union struggles, as well as the campaign, through meetings, newsletters and so on.

Having no roots or forces, "independence" for the IS could only mean an independent program--in other words, sectarian commentary.

Instead we entered the campaign as full but critical participants and builders--as part of the Fight Back movement. Exposure of Sadlowski was not our main task: building the movement was, and our criticisms would be within that framework.

We set ourselves limited goals for our participation:

1. To use the campaign to build rank and file activity, particularly on the mill and local-union level as the basis for on-going organization.
2. To break out of isolation, become known, establish connections with militants and union activists and to gain an understanding of the political life of the locals (and districts).
3. To overcome an internal tendency of work to see ourselves as commentators rather than full participants.
4. To develop an understanding of the issues (ENA, consent decree, imports) as well as ~~limited~~ united front work in the labor movement.
5. To establish an IS presence in steel through Workers Power, establish a periphery, establish open IS members in steel.

and leaflettings, for centering discussions on issues raised in the shop (ENA, Penthouse interview, etc.) for literature on local issues and plant-gate candidate appearances.

We joined the Rank and File Club (this was black oppositionist and CP led), ran a Sadlowski benefit party, pushed a newsletter, etc.

We helped build the District 31 Women's Caucus (CP at district level), emphasizing local work.

We built up one of our members through Sadlowski stickers, through becoming the main information source on the campaign and gained a reputation as activists.

At Cary our experiences then were from isolation and rawness, to credibility, some experience, the beginning of a base, a reputation as activists, and a small IS periphery. We have achieved a fragile unity of oppositionists within the mill.

In Cleveland, the ending of Fight Back meetings by New Years made the campaign difficult to function in, and emphasized its ad-hoc nature. But local work at Republic grew--slowly, but perhaps with a less fragile basis than in other places.

The national fraction steering committee took the first steps of establishing a national leadership in the steel work, but--as a body--was unable to keep on top of all the local work in the campaign. A good deal of the direct political help and guidance was therefore provided by JW, the EC member assigned to the work.

The fraction steering committee was able to give an overall political direction its ~~task~~ responsibility for WP coverage. The production and line of WP articles and the regular evaluation of their use and effect became, in a real sense, the organizing method of the fraction.

The WP coverage itself emphasized not the dangers of "illusions in Sadlowski", but the dangers of the illusion that "you can't do anything". We attempted to contrast the actual campaign with what it ~~was~~ ~~actually~~ ~~could~~ ~~become~~--but not with some perfect, pure campaign of sectarian mythology.

We mistakenly aimed ~~at~~ our coverage too much at "Fight Back activists", rather than at a broader rank and file which--while not active--was becoming involved in political discussion through the campaign. WP should have been aimed at convincing these rank and filers to become activists in the campaign.

The use of WP was limited because our inexperience and lack of roots was reflected in our coverage, because we over-estimated the extent of r & f involvement and participation, and because there was more resistance in the fraction than we expected to selling WP, becoming identified with it, etc. This last factor was largely overcome during the course of the campaign.

But the use of the paper nonetheless pointed a direction, as did the functioning of JW, on how the resources of a national organization can begin to make up for lack of specific experience. The evaluation of our role in the Sadlowski campaign is similarly to add that set of experiences to the knowledge of the organization.

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