

14 Charles Lane
New York, NY 10014
July 3, 1978

TO STEEL FRACTIONS, TRADE-UNION DIRECTORS, AND ORGANIZERS

Dear Comrades,

At the USWA District 31 conference held in Chicago June 16-17, a group of local union presidents announced an effort to win membership ratification of contracts at the September international convention. (See story in July 7 Militant.) The 350,000 workers in basic steel are denied this right, as are USWA members who are covered by other multi-employer contracts (aluminum, can, and others). The democratic right to vote on contracts has wide membership support and was a central issue in the Steelworkers Fight Back campaign of Ed Sadlowski.

Enclosed is the statement by Bill Andrews, president of Local 1010 at Inland Steel, announcing the right-to-ratify effort. With 18,000 members, Local 1010 is the largest in the USWA. Most of the signers are from District 31, but support was also announced from local presidents in other areas: Joe Samargia, Local 1938, Mesabi Iron Range; David Wilson, Local 2609, and Joseph Kotelchuk, Local 2610, Sparrows Point (Baltimore); Richard Whitwam, Local 2659, Detroit; and Ed Mann, Local 1462, Youngstown.

In his keynote speech to the conference, District 31 Director Jim Balanoff called for a membership fight to win the right to ratify and to end the no-strike Experimental Negotiating Agreement. The conference passed a resolution for the right to ratify (copy enclosed). The coal miners strike was referred to several times as showing the importance of the right to ratify.

These developments indicate that the right to ratify will be a big issue in the election of convention delegates in many locals and at the convention itself. Also, many supporters of the right to vote on contracts have stated that they will resist any moves at the convention to get rid of the referendum vote for international union officers.

It remains to be seen what further steps the initiating officers in District 31 will take to organize a membership campaign for the right to ratify. The Andrews statement only mentions soliciting signatures from local presidents. Nevertheless, the encouragement the District 31 leadership has already given to organizing around this issue opens some new possibilities.

As supporters of the right to ratify, we welcome any moves to organize a campaign to win this democratic right. We should do what we can to inform others of the District 31 motion and the local presidents' statement and join in the discussion in the USWA locals and districts where we have comrades or friends.

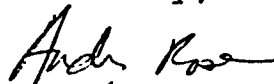
In some locals, delegate elections may be polarized around the right to ratify. Fractions should discuss and decide how to relate to these elections to best advance our overall goals in the union. By helping to campaign for candidates committed to the right to vote, fractions may be able to press forward the fight for union democracy. In locals where we have a comrade who has become known as a serious militant, fractions should consider having him or her run for convention delegate. (As we noted in our letter of May 18, the McBride officialdom has stated its intention to enforce restrictive eligibility rules for delegate elections.)

The Militant will continue to cover important pre-convention developments. Reports from our local fractions about discussions, delegate elections, or the right-to-ratify effort will be an essential part of that coverage. Minutes of fraction meetings should be sent promptly to the national office.


These developments in the union open up new opportunities for discussions with co-workers on our strategy for changing and strengthening the unions. Getting the Militant and the coal pamphlet into the hands of these workers will be an important part of this work.

We will have the opportunity to discuss all aspects of the party's work in steel at our national fraction meeting August 6. It would be helpful to know in advance how many steelworker comrades will be able to attend that meeting. Please fill out the coupon below and mail it in by July 15.

Comradely,



Andy Rose



Joel Britton
SWP National Office

August 6 National Steel Fraction

City _____ Number of comrades in steel _____
Planning to attend steel fraction meeting (list names):

Bill Andrews Opening Statement
at Chicago Press Conference 6/16/78

The presidents gathered here have all signed a statement saying we would welcome and support transferring the right to ratify the basic steel contract from the local presidents to the rank and file steelworkers covered by it. We hope to come into the Constitutional Convention in September with enough signatures to show that those presidents representing a majority of the nation's steelworkers would not object to such a change.

There are a few problems with the present method. Democracy is based on the principle of one person, one vote. Yet when I vote for my membership I have one vote for over 18,000 steelworkers. A local with 100 members carries as much voting power as my one vote. We feel this method of voting is unfair to the membership who must live under that contract.

Some people might say rank and file ratification is too costly or takes too long. Yet we are just about the only major union in this country who does not allow the membership to make the decision. Democracy is worth a few extra dollars and a few extra days. Decisions are always reached more quickly and inexpensively in dictatorships where only one man makes the decisions, but none of us in the trade union movement would want to trade democracy off for dictatorship.

I have a great respect for the intelligence and responsibility of our membership. I do my best to try and vote the way I believe they'd want me to. But I believe that the membership should vote on basic steel contracts. We local presidents are only a part of the union; the entire union is made up of every member. Major decisions such as voting on a contract or electing an International President and Executive Board should rest in their hands.

Membership ratification of national contracts would not only be more democratic, it will also help produce better contracts. Last summer, when we negotiated our local contract with Inland Steel, the members of the negotiating committee could have accepted the contract without going back to the ranks. We decided not to even though this was the way it had always been done in the past. We had two reasons: 1) we wanted the decision to be democratic, and 2) we believed that when the companies realized that they had to make this contract acceptable not just to a committee of eight or ten people but to the entire membership, they'd make more concessions. I think we were proved right since the 1977 local agreement was by far and away the best one ever negotiated at Inland.

We have all agreed that we will try and make the right to ratify a major question at this convention.

We feel that this will strengthen our union by involving all our members in making the decisions that will affect their working lives. This power rightfully belongs to the working members of our union.

(Copy--from resolutions book, USWA annual District 31 conference,
June 16-17, 1978, Chicago, Illinois)

passed

9

RESOLUTION

RATIFICATION OF CONTRACTS

WHEREAS: The United Steelworkers of America is by Constitution a Democratic Institution and,
WHEREAS: The Acceptance or rejection of a Collective Bargaining Agreement is one of the most important decisions a Union must make, and
WHEREAS: Membership Ratification of National Agreements is and has been guaranteed to the members of other large International Unions, notably the United Mineworkers of America,
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED: That the Constitution of the USWA be changed to provide that no Collective Bargaining Agreement be entered into without the approval of the Total membership by Referendum Vote.

William Andrews
Local Union President 1010

Maury M. Hopper
Recording Secretary

SEAL

Passed at Local Union Meeting of April 20, 1978