

Today's labor movement is looking for charisma

By BENTLEY GILBERT
OSEA Publications Director

CHICAGO -- The labor movement today in America lacks an emotional appeal; there's little to rally around, and no charismatic leader to fill the void.

This is the contention of Ed Sadlowski, a south Chicago leader of the United Steelworkers Union and, last year, an unsuccessful candidate for the presidency of the giant industrial union.

Sadlowski, 39, was just a youngster during what he considers the hey-day of the labor movement in the '30s and '40s. Hanging on his office wall is a photograph of John Llewellyn Lewis, the autocratic but popular president of the United Mine Workers from 1921 into the 1950s. Next to that is a photo of one of his own campaign supporters with a flexed arm surrounded by campaign literature, banners and buttons. And beyond those walls lies the south

"There's a certain degree of blanket acceptance by the American public when we look at the lawyer, businessman, politician and used car dealer and say that is the way the game should be played," he said when asked why a similar poor image doesn't accrue to them as a result of their sins which have been exposed in the past few years.

"Why was Nixon allowed to walk off into the sunset?" he asked. "The guy should have been prosecuted. Labor has to be above suspicion like Caesar's wife."

"There's a lot of crap that our membership is fat with speedboats and lots of cars," he said. The basic steelworker is the highest paid member of the union, but, at that, he's just above the median income line as determined by the federal government. "Most are up up to their necks in hock," Sadlowski said.

Unions today must become more concerned with non-economic issues, Sadlowski believes. "There must be changes in industry's attitude to

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Chicago-Gary steel industry, the scene of some of the most bloody organizing campaigns in the '30s and '40s.

"How did this guy do it?" asks Sadlowski, pointing to the photo of the bushy-browed UMW leader. "We'll see a replay of the whole thing that will stimulate the ranks to join unions," he predicts.

Judging from his presidential campaign and the statements he made in an interview with The OSEA News, Sadlowski blames the age, the conservatism and the high-handedness of many current union leaders for the dropping membership, the organizing problems and lack of interest on the part of younger union members today.

"Why did five million workers join the CIO overnight in the '30s and '40s?" he asks. "There was something there emotional offering a degree of hope. Where does labor project that today? There's (AFL-CIO president) George Meany. But what does he mean to the 19-year-old?"

"Organized labor must rally around social goals," Sadlowski says. "You've got to have something more than tangible goals. You have to garner emotions."

He remains a steady believer in the labor union movement because it's "the only viable institution in the country working for the people for social and economic change."

However, he does use a broad definition of union to include organized groups such as welfare rights organizations.

It can be said, however, that some younger folks of today have had a taste of that kind of moral certitude stemming from the civil rights movement and the peace movement. The women's movement of today provides the same kind of emotional appeal.

Perhaps the women's movement can be looked to as a movement with emotional appeal which emerged, died down and since has re-emerged. The women's suffrage movement and an earlier equal rights amendment were issues around the turn of the century. Now ERA is back and women want a chance fully to participate in their affairs of their country, not just elect men to office.

For the labor movement, it may be a little dry for a while.

Sadlowski believes that labor's poor image has contributed to the decline in the percentage of the labor force which is organized. It has an image of corruptible fat cats, guys out to bleed private industry and the taxpaying public. "Nothing could be further from the truth, but labor has that image," he says.

the worker. There is no industrial democracy. The rights we have on the street corner don't go into the plant. There's more respect for property rights than for human rights," he said.

Sadlowski believes the same goals and the same problems apply to public employees and to public sector unions. "A worker is a worker is a worker," he says. He credits classroom teachers and AFSCME president Jerry Wurf with leading public employees to that point of view.

Sadlowski's view, however, is not held by all private sector labor leaders. An unidentified industrial union leader was quoted in the Dec. 12, 1977, Newsweek magazine saying, "There's no longer the brotherhood of the oppressed. Everybody wants his and to hell with everybody else. If the teachers and the cops and the firemen and the street cleaners think the steelworkers and the coal miners are going to support them everytime they get a case of the gimmees, they're crazy. Who the hell do they think pays their salaries?"

The same might be said of private sector workers. There is a body of public opinion that holds that high salaries in the private sector contribute to the high prices we all have to pay. Additionally, this person ignores the fact that public employees pay taxes too.

Sadlowski had seen the quotation and had an idea who the unidentified speaker might be. This narrow-minded, Neanderthal view of the labor movement was one of the problems Sadlowski was trying to combat with his Steelworkers presidency bid. When asked why this attitude appeared and divided private sector unionists from those in the public sector during the municipal workers' strike in San Francisco, he laid the responsibility at the feet of public management.

"Why should the honchos of the public sector act any differently than honchos in the private sector?" Answering his own question, he said, "You don't see many housewives, street cleaners or bus drivers on public boards."

Sadlowski started work and joined the Steelworkers at 18. But his introduction to the labor movement came much earlier. He was born and raised in south Chicago. His bedroom window was across the street from the union hall, which was just up the street from its present location. He was immediately active in the business of Steelworkers Local 65 at U.S. Steel's South Chicago Works. First as an assistant grievance man and up through secretary of the grievance committee, he was elected local president and almost, but not quite, president of the international union.

Ground rules set rights for bargaining members

Collective bargaining ground rules and established practice set the rights of bargaining team members which may, if allowed by the ground rules, permit a bargaining team member to be away from his or her work for bargaining sessions and for research to support the bargaining proposals. For management to deny this right could become an unfair labor practice.

Don Larson, a member of the bargaining team of OSEA's affiliated Marion County Employees Association (MCEA/OSEA), was charged by his employer for being absent without leave at a time when he was doing research relative to the contract negotiations which still are under way. At the time, he had

informed his supervisor that he would be out for most if not all of the afternoon for the purpose of negotiations.

When the county charged Larson with being "AWOL" he came to OSEA Employee Representative Gordon Webb for help. Webb informed the county management that they were courting an unfair labor practice. He told them that he had asked Larson to do some research and to go over some bargaining proposals after the day's negotiating session had been cancelled. He had told the rest of the committee to go back to work because there was no further need of them that day.

The county accepted Webb's rebuttal on Larson's behalf and the charge was withdrawn.

Meeting set to sort class confusion

A Jan. 24 meeting has been set to sort out the confusion resulting from changes in classification of some employees in the Employment Division.

OSEA Employee Representative Gordon Webb and Classification Analyst Eleanor Meyers, will meet with Anita Leach, Division personnel officer, to discuss interim procedures for promotion of employees in interviewer aide and manpower specialist positions.

The problems surfaced after

three new state classifications, job services representative, employment specialist and employment adjudicator, were established. The negotiated effective date of the new classes is Dec. 1, 1977, but they will not go into effect until approved by the Legislative Emergency Board. What happens in the meantime is the issue.

"The division's current interpretation takes away advances that have been earned under the old classification system," according to Meyers.

Some employees who have received promotions under the old system have been told they will be rescinded and that the salary increase must be returned. In other cases, promotions that would have been granted under the old system have been denied.

Meyers said persons who may be affected should contact their OSEA job representative or employe representative. An update on the situation will be printed in the Feb. 9 issue of the OSEA News.

Labor firsts

The first complete wage scale was presented by the Franklin Typographical Society of New York City in 1799.

Department heads management

PORTLAND -- Academic department heads at Portland State University are management, said the Employment Relations Board, in a two to one decision recently.

That decision came as a result of a unit determination hearing. The date for a bargaining unit representation election will be set Jan. 20 in a pre-election conference. OSEA will be on the ballot.

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