

To: UNITE HERE Family
From: Tom Snyder, Chief of Staff
Date: March 16, 2010
Re: John Sweeney reacts to SEIU tactics

Two weeks ago UNITE HERE President John Wilhelm gave a speech to the AFL-CIO Executive Council about SEIU's divisive role in the labor movement. AFL-CIO President Emeritus John Sweeney asked President Trumka to be recognized as a point of personal privilege. To a hushed room, President Sweeney said he agreed with President Wilhelm's comments and called the behavior of Stern's SEIU "despicable." This came after President Sweeney recounted his 50 years paying dues to SEIU, his pride in rising through the ranks of SEIU to become its President, and the fact that he originally hired Andy Stern. President Wilhelm's speech is below:

John Wilhelm Speech

In early 2009, at the beginning of our fight, we thought we had an internal struggle on our hands; and that like any internal difference inside a union, we had democratic procedures and a Constitution to resolve them. At that time, we had no idea that our fight was in fact secretly hatched by SEIU and Andy Stern. We now know from documents that SEIU and Bruce Raynor hatched this plot at least as early as July 2008.

We now know that at the heart of that plot was an SEIU plan to hijack UNITE HERE's hotel, gaming, and food service jurisdictions and to capture our Union's financial assets, driven by SEIU's deficit spending spree.

It turns out that SEIU has a long record going back to the year 2000 of raiding smaller unions, something we didn't realize at the time. UNITE HERE was the first entire international union that Stern made a grab for, and if he were to succeed, we wouldn't be the last.

Thanks in no small measure to the support from most of you in this room today, I am confident in reporting to you that SEIU has failed and we are doing very well, although our battle with them is far from over.

I am so grateful to you for welcoming UNITE HERE, and me personally, back into the House of Labor.

But there is a large issue that must be addressed. Who speaks for the American labor movement? What is our labor movement all about?

If you listen to Andy Stern, he speaks for labor.

When you look at the pattern of SEIU activity it becomes very clear that we cannot let SEIU define or speak for the labor movement. First we see a disturbing pattern of corruption. Repetitive scandals have broken out in SEIU's Southern California

organizations involving hand-picked Andy Stern officials. Corruption scandals have spread to the Midwest, and there is more to come.

Second, SEIU has managed to create a myth around its organizing program that does a disservice to the labor movement. The reality is that SEIU has utterly failed to organize in the private sector. Yes, they have done well in the public sector and with taxpayer-funded jobs and that's a good thing. I support public sector organizing. But in the private sector--hospitals, nursing homes, and even their signature janitorial campaign--they have utterly failed to organize their industries, achieving at best about 10 percent density in each of those core SEIU jurisdictions.

Politically, under Andy Stern, SEIU has become a willing participant with Democrats who engage in divide and conquer. Stern provides cover for gutting our key priorities. Health care reform was knocked off the rails right from the beginning when Stern bargained deals first with the hospital industry and then helped with Big Pharma. Having thus walled off two of the most profitable players, is it any surprise that the Administration went looking for other sources of money to pay for reform, and found taxing our members' health plans?

How about card check? Stern gave the ok to strip our card check bill of card check before the rest of us even discussed that.

Now he represents labor on the Deficit Commission?

What's happened so far is bad enough on its own terms, but most significant of all is California. In United Health Care West, SEIU had a local union to be admired. It had powerful contracts, it had organized to become enormous, it was effective politically, it was a beacon of solidarity. Why go after such a great organization?

Stern's scorched earth tactics in California have kicked up a swelling backlash throughout California labor and the progressive community. SEIU is blackmailing Central Labor Councils across the state. They even threatened California Democratic Party Chair John Burton, an icon of labor and all progressives in California, really California's equivalent of the late Ted Kennedy.

What SEIU has started in California is not yet well understood in Washington DC. The struggle of the National Union of Healthcare Workers, and NUHW's broad support from workers, labor, and progressives, will determine whether SEIU will grow as a divisive force or whether unity will be restored.

I began in the labor movement 41 years ago. It took me a while to accept that our union had to focus on this destructive force in the union movement. But if one of the final chapters in my career is to help stop this attempted takeover of the American labor movement by SEIU, I will be content to see it through.