

Former president of Local 509 asks: Time for SEIU to change direction?

--By John Templeton

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The author of the letter below was president of SEIU Local 509 in 2004 and was required to step down by its bylaw on term limits. Recent events may explain what prompts his letter at this moment: Change to Win, which Andy Stern led out of the AFL-CIO in 2005 to found a new labor federation, hoping to revive the labor movement and change America, is collapsing, not with a bang, not even with a whimper; it is fading away. The Carpenters pulled out two years ago. Unite/Here left to rejoin the AFL-CIO a few months ago. And now the Laborers union just broke away, also to get back in the AFL-CIO. Anna Burger resigned as SEIU secretary treasurer and as chairwoman of Change to Win after the SEIU executive board rejected her candidacy to succeed Andy Stern as SEIU president. And so Templeton asks, "Change of direction?"

Andy Stem, former president of the Service Employees International Union, has jumped ship. A new day has dawned for SEIU members; right? Wrong!! The terribly damaging constitutional changes that Stem engineered at the 2000 SEIU convention remain festering in this nearly 2 million-member union. Previously, locals could be trustee only for corruption or serious malfeasance. But after the changes in 2000, Stern could trustee locals at his whim. He answered to no one, least of all to those two million members. He controlled the international executive board absolutely and all his decisions were rubber stamped by them. [Editor's note: That changed once Stem announced his resignation. E-board members spit the bit, rejected his choice for successor, and elected Mary Kay Henry.) Unless changes are made to the trustee sections of the constitution, another president can run amuck as easily as Stem.

Back in 2004, I led Massachusetts Local 509 to SEIU's convention. We presented constitutional amendments that, if ratified, would have reduced Stem's power to trustee locals. We also submitted an amendment to have all international officers, including the president, elected by the rank and file membership. Our amendments were overwhelmingly rejected. If the amendment to limit trusteeships had been adopted, the SEIU and Stem would have avoided the tragic results of the unwise trusteeships that Stem established, like the politically motivated trusteeship imposed on the 150,000-member healthcare local in California

which provoked the battle by the National Union of Healthcare workers to decertify and replace the SEIU.

In order for SEIU to regain its credibility and luster in the eyes of its own members, the union movement, and the nation, it needs to make drastic changes like the amendments I described above. If any member or local is interested in organizing to make these changes at the SEIU 2012 convention, contact me at johnboy11@verizon.net and I will forward a copy of those proposed amendments. The last words of advice to my international is something I learned a long time ago. "No one is smarter than all of us."