



LABORERS' INTERNATIONAL UNION OF NORTH AMERICA

GREAT LAKES REGIONAL OFFICE

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April 2, 2009

Mr. Andrew Stern
President
Service Employees International Union
1800 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Sir and Brother:

The internal dispute besetting UNITE HERE challenges the entire labor movement. A merger between two proud organizations undertaken in good faith appears to be floundering. The potential injury is made all the greater by the public nature of the breakup. While the entire labor movement is concerned about the implications of this dispute, it is now more important than ever that other organizations honor the right of UNITEHERE to address its problems without outside interference.

In the comments I made to the BCTD, to which you referred in your letter, I criticized SEIU's involvement in the UNITE HERE dispute on two grounds. First, SEIU intruded into the political affairs of UNITE HERE. Second, SEIU became a participant in the dispute, declaring that the internal UNITE HERE dispute should be settled by either one or both of the sides merging into SEIU. The fact that SEIU may have approached UNITE and HERE with similar offers five years ago does not justify its doing so now, when both times and circumstances have changed. Worse yet, SEIU is now undertaking a major organizing effort outside its core jurisdiction, violating an important principle you have long championed. That organizing effort targets instead what was the core jurisdiction of HERE before the merger.

While I agree with you that the public nature of the UNITE HERE dispute is damaging to the entire labor movement, SEIU's actions, in my opinion, have only increased that injury at a time when the labor movement needs to be unified in working with a new, pro-worker Administration to improve the lives of working families, including our collective efforts to secure the passage of the Employee Free Choice Act and other critically important, progressive legislation.

You ask that in fairness I also criticize HERE's interference in SEIU's affairs. I have talked to John Wilhelm, who denies engaging in any interference. Your claim to the contrary is based on two brief e-mails dated November 1, 2008, which you believe show that John was interfering in the affairs of SEIU by collaborating with Sal Rosselli while he was still an SEIU officer. John responds that he cannot recall meeting with Sal other than the November 1 meeting referred to in the e-mails; that the meeting was in Nevada, not California; and that it was in conjunction with a multi-union effort to support the Obama campaign. That explanation appears to be entirely consistent with the e-mails and eminently believable given that the date of the e-mails is so closely aligned with the date of the national presidential election.

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Feel The Power!

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Last week, Workers United affiliated with SEIU. The summary of the affiliation agreement describes Workers United as a successor to the UNITE family of unions (not HERE) and grants exclusive jurisdiction to the Workers United conference of SEIU in the textile and manufacturing sectors in which UNITE long operated. But, that summary goes on to claim jurisdiction for both SEIU and Workers United in the gaming, hospitality and food service sectors in which HERE has historically held jurisdiction. The Workers United press release takes clear aim at this HERE sector, declaring that "SEIU and affiliates of Workers United have already begun working together through a vigorous campaign to organize food service workers." This conduct is justified only by the claim that hospitality workers outside high-end properties "have been left to fend for themselves," a bitterly ironic characterization in light of the decades-long decline in union density that unfortunately has been felt by many.

Workers United has publicly justified its organizing activities in the gaming, hospitality and food service industries on the ground that 40,000 members who were formerly a part of HERE have now joined Workers United. UNITE HERE claims that these workers are members of HERE local unions that joined Unite joint councils as part of the 2004 merger and that almost all of those former HERE local unions are in the process of leaving the disaffiliating joint councils. I have no independent knowledge of the facts. However, given the speed with which Workers United was formed and affiliated with SEIU, it seems unlikely that 40,000 HERE members have affirmatively voted to join a group describing itself as a successor to Unite. If, as UNITE HERE asserts, their claimed inclusion in the Workers United membership is only on the basis of the affiliation of their local unions into the disaffiliating joint councils, that happenstance, in the absence of any affirmative action on their part to remain affiliated with the successor organization to UNITE, will strike no one in the labor movement as justifying the claim that they support the new Workers United organization.

I continue to have the utmost respect for SEIU and for your service as a dynamic labor leader driving change in the labor movement. Unfortunately, as I told you when we discussed this issue, on these matters we have a substantial difference of opinion and we must agree to disagree. I appreciate the time you have taken to respond to my concerns. Unfortunately, it seems to me that your response raises more questions than answers. I continue to hope that through further discussions among all involved, a solution can be found that will leave us free to focus our efforts on passage of the Employee Free Choice Act, other progressive legislation and on objectives vital to working men and women throughout the entire labor movement.

With kind regards, I am

Fraternally yours,



TERENCE M. O'SULLIVAN
General President

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cc: ✓ John Wilhelm, President, UNITE HERE
Bruce Raynor, President, UNITE HERE