

# SEIU president goes to the extreme

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Andy Stern, president of the powerful Service Employees International Union, seems hellbent on using classic corporate raider tactics to bring a huge portion of the U.S. labor movement under his absolute control.

The latest proof of Stern's audacious methods surfaced this weekend in Philadelphia, at the founding convention of Workers United, a splinter group from UNITE HERE, the national union that represents clothing, hotel and restaurant workers.

Workers United claims to represent about a third of UNITE HERE's 450,000 members. Most of them belong to clothing and laundry locals that merged with the hotel workers five years ago, but then had a change of heart and voted to secede during the past few weeks.

Within a day of Workers United being formed, its newly elected president, Edgar Romney, announced it would affiliate with Stern's SEIU.

Stern, in effect, used the enormous resources of his 2 million-member union to encourage the breakup of a major mainstream union, then rushed to grab control of a piece.

According to the 13-page affiliation agreement, a copy of which the *Daily News* has obtained, SEIU is also providing huge subsidies to the new group.

Stern's union will provide legal, staff and financial assistance to defend Workers United "against any and all challenge from other labor organizations, including any challenge arising from its affiliation with SEIU," the agreement states.

That alone could cost millions, because both factions of UNITE HERE are fighting in federal court over control of the Amalgamated Bank, the only union-owned bank in the country.

In addition, the affiliation agreement allows Workers United to pay as little as \$7.65 in monthly per capita dues to SEIU over the next four years.

Since the splinter locals were paying a whopping \$16.05 in monthly per capita to UNITE HERE, the discount alone will save the new group more than \$60 million.

"The savings will allow us more money to organize new members," Romney said yesterday.

"There's never been anything like this in the modern history of labor," says John Wilhelm, the co-president of UNITE HERE and the man who still has the support of two-thirds of his union's members.

"Stern is simply paying to grab control of part of our union and the Amalgamated Bank," Wilhelm says. "It's a breathtaking form of imperialism.

SEIU spokeswoman Michelle Ringuette rejected such charges.

"The reasons for the split in UNITE HERE are well-documented and have nothing to do with SEIU," Ringuette said. The split is "member-driven," because the original merger "was not working," she said.

This is not the first time Stern has tried to grab a fellow union's members out from under its leaders.

One year ago, in the midst of a major labor dispute between the government of Puerto Rico and the island's teachers union, SEIU suddenly announced a campaign to win representation of the island's teachers.

Former Gov. Anibal Acevedo Vila tacitly supported the SEIU effort. He decertified the Puerto Rico Federation of Teachers after a hard-fought strike. But the island's 40,000 teachers then voted handily against the SEIU as their bargaining agent, thus rejecting the Stern tactics.

The teachers are now nonunionized.

After years of claiming the mantle of labor reformer, Stern has shown himself to be an old-fashioned union boss, using snazzy new tactics and rhetoric to achieve absolute control.

When will the progressive wing of organized labor call him out for what he is?