

The SEIU Loyalty Oath: What's Wrong With That?



On its face, SEIU's democracy pledge appears to be thoughtful and fair-minded. SEIU appears to embrace a number of noble values and model organizational practices, such as constructive discussion, democratic decision-making and member participation. **Who could be against that?**

However, because it fails to recognize the stark difference between SEIU's rhetoric and the reality of its practices, the pledge is better seen as a Loyalty Oath designed to paper over serious organizational divisions. These differences deserve focused debate, not platitudes. A quick review of recent SEIU history offers evidence of the issues SEIU members are face every day which the pledge completely ignores.

| The Loyalty Oath Embraces | What's the reality in SEIU? |
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| #1 "Respect for democracy" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tenet Unity Council: In 2007, SEIU officers tried manipulate votes in the Tenet Unity Council in an unsuccessful attempt to force workers to accept a seven-year contract without the right to strike. • California State Council: In 2007, SEIU officers manipulated voting procedures to depose the democratically elected president of the California State Council to be replaced by a Stern-appointed local union leader. • Merger Votes: SEIU conducts votes for mergers by pooling votes among voting locals, without letting each local union vote on its own to approve or reject a merger. For example, if a 5,000 member local and a 25,000 member local were merged, every one of the members of the 5,000 member local could vote against the merger and it would still pass if 5001 people in the 25,000 member local voted to approve. |
| #2 Increased member participation to create a union in which "more workers, lead, participate and decide" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barring SEIU Members from the Bargaining Table: In 2007, SEIU officers prohibited rank-and-file leaders from Locals 121RN and UHW from participating in negotiations with Tenet Healthcare. In these secret negotiations, SEIU officers gave Tenet the right to subcontract out up to 12% of the bargaining unit, without the consent of the members. • Abolishing the CHW Unity Council: Just before bargaining was scheduled to begin in 2008, SEIU President Andy Stern unilaterally abolished the rank-and-file decision-making body that was democratically established by the International Executive Board and tried unsuccessfully to name an outside consultant to lead negotiations. • Top-Down Deals with Employers: SEIU leaders have reached a number of top-down deals including the Washington Nursing Home Alliance Agreement and agreements with large multinational subcontractors Aramark, Compass and Sodexo without worker input and which severely restrict workers' rights on the job. |
| #3 "Constructive discussion" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undemocratic Organizational Culture: Rather than encouraging open discussion, alternative opinions are met with hostility. • Creation of "Skunk Team": In order to stifle opposition, media reports confirm that SEIU officers have created a "skunk team" in order to attack political opposition and ensure that only supporters of the Stern team are elected as delegates to the International Convention. |
| #4 A "responsibility to respect decisions made by democratic majority" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majority of International Executive Board Members are Stern Appointees or Staff: Out of 67 members of the International Executive Board, well over half are either SEIU International Union staff, or local leaders who were originally appointed into their leadership position in their local by Stern, rather than being elected by their members. • Opposition to Direct Election of International Officers: Stern opposes allowing every member to vote on who the leaders of their international union should be. • Use of Trusteeship: Since he was first elected president of SEIU, Stern has placed approximately 60 local unions in trusteeship, about 30% of all SEIU local unions. |

Our Challenge

Making our union stronger and more democratic is not about what leaders say or some piece of paper they sign, it's about the actions they carry out every day. At the SEIU convention this June, delegates will have an opportunity to debate and vote on changes to our Constitution to make our union truly democratic. UHW has proposed several constitutional amendments to guarantee that members have real participation in real democratic decision-making processes. These proposals include:

- The right for members to adopt bargaining proposals, elect bargaining team members, participate in the bargaining process and ratify contracts.
- The right for members in multi-local bargaining situations with the same Employer to participate in a Unity Council that guarantees one member, one vote.
- The right for members to vote on their elected International Union officers.
- The right for members in each local to vote local by local on mergers, rather than having their votes undemocratically pooled.

We believe that all SEIU members - not just a handful of "leaders" in Washington DC - have a right to make meaningful decisions in our Union. *To that we pledge our support.*