

Gerald W. McEntee

AFSCME INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT

TO: AFSCME MEMBERS

FROM: GERALD W. McENTEE
International President

RE: AFL-CIO Convention This Week in Chicago

DATE: July 26, 2005

As you may have seen in recent news reports, the service employees (SEIU), the Teamsters, the textile and hotel workers (UNITE-HERE), and the food and commercial workers (UFCW) announced they are boycotting the AFL-CIO Convention. Their entire so-called “Change to Win Coalition” – which includes the Farm Workers and the Laborers – has also said they will resign their positions on the Federation’s Executive Council. And, on Monday, both SEIU and the Teamsters announced they have disaffiliated from the AFL-CIO.

What caused this?

For the past year, there has been a spirited debate within the AFL-CIO over proposals to reinvigorate the labor movement. It was a necessary debate because working families and our movement are under unprecedented attack and we need to change.

Both sides put forward different proposals. President Sweeney, working with all of the unions in the Federation, developed a comprehensive set of reforms that represent real change – and reflect the best ideas of everyone who has participated in the debate about the future of the labor movement. Sweeney’s plan will dramatically step up organizing, create strategic Industry Coordinating Committees to unite workers and their unions who do similar work in similar core industries, and create a year-round member education and mobilization program that won’t just focus on national politicians, but on elections at every level, along with issue campaigns.

While there were still some differences, they were few. In the end, the Change to Win effort was simply a transparent attempt at a power grab. They wanted to replace President Sweeney but they did not have the votes. So they left.

Our reform agenda is based on four important principles: worker power; real unity; real change; and democratic decision-making.

- **Worker Power.** We stand for helping workers build power to change their lives while Change to Win is only about power for themselves. It turns out they were more interested in taking over the AFL-CIO than reforming it.
- **Real Unity.** We stand for unity and solidarity – they’re for division and “my way or the highway.” We made genuine attempts to compromise – they bargained in bad faith.



- **Real Change.** We stand for changing workers' lives – they're simply about changing the leadership of the AFL-CIO and getting back their dues. In fact, they are delinquent in paying their dues to the AFL-CIO, totaling \$8.5 million. We stand for organizing workers – they're for subsidizing large affiliates. We embraced real reforms but their bottom line was naming the officers.
- **Democratic Decision-Making.** We stand for democracy and bottom-up organizing – they want a small group of decision-makers and top-down control. They only want the biggest unions to make the big decisions – no matter who that excludes, including women and people of color.

I'm sure many of you want to know where we go from here. First, we have to continue to make organizing and politics our top priorities. That's why AFSCME has always worked to elect pro-worker politicians and hold them accountable. And that's why AFSCME has organized more than 250,000 public and private sector workers in the last five years. We've doubled our spending on organizing, and we now have one of the most vigorous and focused organizing programs in the labor movement.

Second, we have to do everything to involve our members and make our union as strong as it can be at every level. We should always do this. But now, we have to be prepared for raids of our members by Change to Win unions, as well as competition for prospective members during organizing campaigns.

We all know what we have to do. We must grow our ranks and our political power. We will make greater progress growing the labor movement when we have more political power, and we'll have more pro-worker elected officials – at every level of government – when we've organized more workers into unions. Through organizing and through politics, we will make the labor movement stronger than it's ever been.

We are sorry to see SEIU and the Teamsters leave. They're weaker without us; we're all stronger together. But make no mistake – we are going to strengthen AFSCME and the Federation, grow our membership, build worker power and win real victories for working families.

Enclosed is a background document to give you more information about the debate.