

**SUBSCRIBE TO FIGHT BACK! /
¡LUCHA Y RESISTE! NEWSPAPER**
NEWS AND VIEWS FROM THE PEOPLE'S STRUGGLE

A bilingual (English-Spanish) newspaper that comes out 5 times a year

\$5.00 for 5 issues

Name _____

Address _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

*Mail subscription request
and payment to:*

Fight Back
P.O. Box 582564
Minneapolis MN 55458

Subscribe to
the online
Fight Back News Service

WWW.FIGHTBACKNEWS.ORG



THE ROAD FORWARD



FOR LABOR

Articles
from
Fight Back!
on the Split
in the
AFL-CIO

June / July 2005

Debates Shake the Labor Movement: End of the Sweeney Era

Analysis by Joe Iosbaker

Ten years ago, John Sweeney was elected president of the AFL-CIO. Supporters of his New Voices slate rallied to oust the stale leadership of his predecessor, Lane Kirkland. Under Kirkland, workers had seen 20 years of declining wages, benefits and working conditions. For 20 years, attacks by the capitalists had come down, and the defenses put up by the unions failed to turn them back. In fact, most unions hadn't fought at all.

Of course, there were always workers willing to fight. Those workers were excited that a new period in labor was being ushered in by Sweeney's rise to power. Sweeney promised to turn things around. He called for organizing millions of new workers into unions and getting workers to register and vote so that the politicians couldn't ignore unions. He also called for building coalitions and taking action against abusive bosses. Where Kirkland wanted to build bridges with management, Sweeney said, "I'd rather block bridges than build bridges."

Today, the Sweeney/New Voices period is coming to an end. Judged by the goals that were declared at the outset - to end the decline in wages, benefits and working conditions for U.S. workers and to turn around the decline in the membership and influence of unions here - Sweeneyism has failed. Less than 8% of private sector workers are in unions and only 12% of employed workers overall. While many new workers have joined unions, the union leaders have not been able to stop the de-unionization of manufacturing.

Reform Proposals Spark Debate

By now, everyone in the AFL-CIO agrees that there is a crisis, and

todos aquellos sindicatos locales que han abandonado la AFL-CIO.

Todo parece indicar que Sweeney apoya el plan de acabar con las organizaciones laborales locales.

El futuro

La situación presente conlleva retos pero también ofrece nuevas oportunidades para todos aquellos que deseen apoyar el movimiento laboral. Lo fundamental es construir un movimiento laboral de y para los trabajadores. La colaboración con la administración ha conducido al movimiento al estado de crisis en que se encuentra hoy.

En cuanto al problema del sindicalismo de lucha de clases, Joe Iosbaker señala: “Los sindicatos que en las últimas décadas han seguido la senda del sindicalismo de lucha de clases, aún cuando lo hayan hecho de forma pasajera, (como los trabajadores Staley, los trabajadores de los periódicos en Detroit a mediados de la década de los noventas, los trabajadores de las minas de carbón de Pittston al principio de los noventas así como los de Local P en Hormel en los años ochentas, los empleados de UPS, o los Cinco de Charleston de la Asociación Internacional de Estibadores), todos ellos han ido marcando la senda hacia la renovación del movimiento sindical. El único camino hacia adelante es el camino hacia un movimiento laboral militante y con conciencia de clase.” ★

that the unions must organize new members faster or die. A new debate has emerged in the federation in response to a proposal for drastic changes. The reform proposal comes from union leaders who believe the decline in labor can be stopped (despite the Republican Party’s domination in politics today), but only if unions change their structure and strategy, merging to create bigger unions in each part of the economy.

The defenders of the current set-up say the answer is more political efforts. They want to increase money spent on supporting Democrats running for office, in hopes of getting changes in labor law that would make it easier to get union recognition in organizing drives.

You could say that the old leadership emphasizes changing the external environment, while the challengers see changes to the internal workings of labor as a key to labor revival.

The two sides can’t be described as left vs. right. Each side has some correct ideas and some wrong ones.

The reformers see an entrenched group of union ‘fiefdoms’ that are resisting change. The defenders have criticized the upstarts as arrogant and undemocratic. The charge of being undemocratic comes from the old leadership saying that individual unions must have autonomy about where to organize and whether to merge or not. Also, lower level officials who are supporters of the current state of the Federation defend some of its structures, especially local labor councils, civil rights caucuses and departments, and the expanded executive board, which includes more union officials that are Black, Latino and women.

The reformers include some of the more liberal unions: SEIU, UNITE-HERE (garment and textile workers and hotel workers) and the Laborers, but they also include the pro-Bush Carpenters and the notoriously corrupt Teamsters.

The defenders include president Sweeney, AFSCME (American Federal, State, County and Municipal Employees), the USW (recent merger of Steelworkers and PACE, the Paper and Chemical workers) and the Machinists.

Sweeney’s main antagonist in the debate, Andy Stern, like Sweeney himself, comes out of SEIU, my own union. It makes sense

that it would fall to Stern to challenge Sweeney, who preceded him as president of SEIU, as SEIU has been the most successful union in the country in the last decade. They have grown more and added more new union members than any other union in many years.

This debate is intense. SEIU has said it will leave the AFL-CIO if there isn't reform along the lines proposed.

It is exciting that there is a debate going on. When a rank-and-file worker says, "The union leaders have failed us," it is commonplace for serious union activists to dismiss it as cynicism. When frustrated unionists declare, "Union officials are in bed with management," the standard response is, "What choice do they have but to make concessions?"

But when a president of a union of 1.8 million workers says, "[The AFL-CIO] has no enforceable standards to stop a union from conspiring with employers to keep another stronger union out - or from negotiating contracts with lower pay and standards than members of another union have spent a lifetime establishing," this reinforces what militant unionists have argued. The fact is that most leaders of the international unions in the U.S. see themselves as partners with management. As the corporations and politicians have demanded concessions, most union leaders have gone along, 'conspiring with employers.'

What's Missing from the Debate: Class Struggle Unionism

There are big problems with President Stern's "New Strength Unity" plan. A lot has been written about his arrogance and about union democracy having no role in the big plan. Also missing is a commitment to the national struggles of African Americans, Chicanos and other oppressed nationality peoples against racism and oppression. Another argument has been made in some places that organizing in the service industry isn't the same as organizing in basic industry, because service industries don't face production moving away or out of the country.

But mainly what's missing from Stern's proposal is class struggle.

ciones para alcalde de Nueva York. De manera similar a la utilizada por Dennis Rivera de SEIU 1199, la estrategia "de ir por su cuenta" para apoyar al candidato republicano para gobernador de Nueva York, sólo beneficia a los intereses egoístas de un sindicato en particular por encima de los intereses de los demás sindicatos.

Una acción política independiente, en favor del trabajador, y que abogue por los intereses de los oprimidos no está en los planes de los bandos de Stern o Sweeney.

Quedó claro en el debate que precedió a la convención que Stern hace hincapié en la organización de los trabajadores no organizados como un paso hacia adelante, mientras que muchos sindicatos en el bando de Sweeney enfatizan más bien un cambio en el clima político.

Unidad laboral

El fin de la tradicional AFL-CIO representa algunos retos para los militantes del movimiento laboral, particularmente para todos aquellos en los Consejos Laborales Centrales (Central Labor Councils o CLCs).

En un memorándum del 28 de julio John Sweeney manifestó que "hay que rechazar todos los esfuerzos que se hagan por definir los términos en que se dará la colaboración y el apoyo. Lo que estos sindicatos están proponiendo es no comprometerse ni con apoyo económico ni de ninguna otra naturaleza para con la AFL-CIO nacional, ni responsabilidades ni obligaciones bajo la constitución de AFL-CIO, pero sí una forma muy selectiva de participar en los organismos centrales laborales de su preferencia". En otras palabras, aquellos que abandonen AFL-CIO deberán ser despedidos de los consejos laborales locales y de las federaciones estatales.

Por otra parte, a Stern no le interesan los consejos estatales aunque el sabía perfectamente que los desacuerdos podrían derivar en una ruptura.

En varias ciudades donde los consejos laborales han devenido en importantes puntos de lucha para los militantes y progresistas, se están desarrollando diversas gestiones para defenderlos. Lo principal es defender el derecho de afiliación a los consejos laborales para

trabajadores de esta generación serán los primeros en tener una calidad de vida inferior a la que tenían sus padres. Para poder detener esa caída en los salarios, los sindicatos han sido una fuerza anti-competitiva, proteccionista. Sin embargo los salarios deberían ser como la electricidad, que permite a los usuarios (empleadores) funcionar más eficientemente con una mejor calidad”.

En varios artículos y discursos, Stern explica su convicción de que las corporaciones deberían aceptar a los sindicatos ya que el sindicalismo les ayudaría a ellos en sus planes de negocios. El bando de Sweeny mantiene la misma perspectiva; sin embargo, la vida laboral proporciona pruebas de que ellos están equivocados.

Acción política

Los 200 millones de dólares que se gastaron en apoyar a los demócratas en las pasadas elecciones ha sido motivo de decepción para muchos en el movimiento laboral. Algunos progresistas en los sindicatos esperan que con la reciente ruptura y la nueva coalición por el cambio será posible romper con el partido demócrata que apoya los intereses de las grandes corporaciones. Es probable que mas bien esta crisis conduzca a una forma de bipartidismo, por medio del cual se le brindará apoyo a republicanos o a demócratas por razones meramente oportunistas.

En una entrevista a la prensa libre de Detroit (Detroit Free Press), el líder de la convención Jimmy Hoffa Jr habló de su apoyo a los candidatos republicanos. Tradicionalmente los Teamsters han apoyado a candidatos republicanos como Richard Nixon y Ronald Reagan. Anteriormente, Hoffa apoyó la iniciativa republicana de perforar el Refugio Nacional de Vida Silvestre en Alaska para obtener petróleo. Otra maniobra de Hoffa fue la de sacar poder y dinero gracias a la membresía de los trabajadores en los sindicatos. La idea era de que Hoffa usaría a los Teamsters en favor de las corporaciones y el gobierno, pero dicho plan fracasó.

Por su parte, la Federación Americana de Empleados de Condados, Municipales y Estatales (AFSCME), uno de los pilares del bando de Sweeney-AFL-CIO – está invirtiendo medio millón de dólares en la campaña del candidato republicano en las elec-

In a Jan. 30 New York Times piece, “The New Boss,” Matt Bai wrote this about Stern:

“He came to embrace a philosophy that ran counter to the most basic assumptions of the besieged labor movement: the popular image of greedy corporations that want to treat their workers like slaves, Stern believed, was in most cases just wrong. ‘What was good for G.M. ended up being good for the country,’ Stern says.”

In various articles and speeches, Stern explains his belief that corporations should accept unions because unionization will aid them in their business plans.

This is wrong. It is wrong historically - taking the G.M. example, it took a fighting workers movement at General Motors to win basic advances for workers there. Even when G.M. was at its peak in the post-war era, when the ruling class was honoring a social pact with big labor, working in auto factories still shortened workers lives and made the bosses wealthy while the worker’s family earned a decent living - nothing more.

Stern is wrong strategically. He negates the old adage in the trade union movement that, “What management gives with a teaspoon, they take away with a shovel.” In fact, in the recent period, the working class has been on the defensive, engaging in sporadic and limited battles against a sharpened employer onslaught. The temporary acceptance of unions by some employers can’t be seen as anything more than a concession to certain strengths in specific markets.

Stern is wrong fundamentally. The future holds nothing but more struggle between workers and the ruling class. The way forward for the labor movement isn’t ‘market density.’ The way forward, as it has been in every historical advance for workers, is class-struggle unionism. Those unions which in the last decade or two have started down this road, however fleetingly, such as the Staley workers, the Detroit newspaper workers in the mid-1990s, the mineworkers at Pittston coal in the early 1990s, and Local P9 at Hormel in the 1980s, have shown us the path to a renewed labor movement. In these examples, the workers fought all-out, militant battles against the bosses. They rallied workers across the land to support them. Without these kinds of tactics, and even going further, like stopping

production, there's no hope of turning back the attacks on us.

Class struggle unionism means broadening the outlook and demands of the unions - a return to solidarity unionism. That means organizing and mobilizing the membership to fight management and support other struggles. Our demands and our slogans should reflect class demands. We should draw as sharply as possible the lines between the workers and the bosses in our work. Hormel, Pittston, and Staley – these are the models we need to emulate.

Transform the Unions

There are some who say that the debates in the AFL-CIO are not important. Some class struggle unionists [like Tom Laney, a militant from the United Auto Workers - see letter to editor] argue for unionists to leave the AFL-CIO unions or start new unions that are founded on class struggle, not class collaboration.

To them, I'd point out another ten-year anniversary this year. In February 1995, the Staley workers of Decatur, Illinois charged into the AFL-CIO executive meeting in Bal Harbor, Florida. They were there to ask why the hell the richest union federation in the world couldn't help them defeat a corporation from Britain that was destroying their lives. Their protest got them on the front page of the New York Times. The Staley workers, members of the Paperworkers union, together with other striking workers from Decatur (Rubber Workers at Bridgestone and UAW workers from Caterpillar), exposed Kirkland, and helped to compel him from office. This helped open the way for Sweeney to come to power later that year.

A militant minority of rank-and-file workers learned a key lesson from the War Zone of Decatur. By getting the masses of workers involved in an all-out battle for their felt and urgent needs, we build a fighting workers' movement that can transform the unions.

The Staley workers took advantage of the debates among labor leaders to advance their cause. We should do the same. The developments in labor create better conditions for building a fighting workers movement. New organizing is positive. Market density will, to a degree, help workers bargain and union leaders that want

una revuelta en el palacio. No hay mucho que decir sobre las ideas expresadas por ambos frentes en este debate Sin embargo, el debate mismo nos ofrece la oportunidad de discutir la necesidad de cambio en los sindicatos. Los sindicatos tienen que llegar a ser organizaciones participes en la lucha de clases; organizaciones que luchan en contra de la clase corporativa dentro del país y en contra del imperialismo estadounidense en el extranjero”.

“Algunas personas dicen que el camino futuro debe conducir a la democracia. Nosotros de hecho apoyamos el sindicalismo democrático. Luchamos por un sindicalismo democrático en el cual sean los trabajadores los que dirijan las organizaciones, para así poder llevar a cabo de manera más efectiva la lucha de clases (no luchamos solamente para que haya reglamentos más justos que reemplacen a un grupo de burócratas con otro grupo de burócratas).

Iosbaker agregó que “el camino futuro del movimiento sindical implica revivir el sindicalismo de la lucha de clases. Necesitamos sindicatos que sean organizaciones de lucha y no máquinas de recolección de cuotas. Hay que revivir las tácticas de las viejas generaciones, aquéllas de los años 1910 y los 1930s. Durante esa época, los trabajadores no se contentaban con irse a la huelga y con levantar pancartas. Ellos usaban todas las tácticas a su disposición, desde plantones hasta paros en las plantas de producción, llevando su lucha hasta abarcar todas las industrias o clases en general. El sindicalismo de lucha de clases también significa un sindicalismo solidario, donde los participantes se dediquen de lleno a apoyar las luchas importantes que vayan surgiendo.

Iosbaker además indicó que el movimiento laboral debe hacerle frente a la discriminación que sufren los afroamericanos, chicanos, latinos, asiáticos, y todos aquellos trabajadores oprimidos. Si no se le hace frente a la discriminación, será imposible construir un movimiento sindical que refleje la composición actual de la clase trabajadora de los Estados Unidos.

Stern, Sweeney, así como otros líderes sindicales en ambos frentes del debate piensan que la cooperación con la administración no sólo es posible sino que es positiva. En la publicación de abril de HRO Hoy (HRO Today), revista que promueve la fuga de empleos, Andy Stern indicó que “a consecuencia de la caída de los salarios los

del movimiento sindical provee el telón de fondo para la ruptura que recientemente tuvo lugar. En la actualidad, menos de un 8% de los trabajadores del sector privado trabaja con contrato sindical.

A pesar de que muchos de los delegados de la AFL-CIO a la convención estaban conscientes de la situación que se avecinaba, no dejaron de expresar su enojo y sorpresa cuando cuatro de los sindicatos más importantes del país se negaron a participar. En la ciudad de Chicago las estaciones de radio en las comunidades afroamericanas y latinas se vieron inundadas con llamadas telefónicas de parte de trabajadores que se preguntaban si en adelante trabajarían o no bajo acuerdos colectivos sindicales. A lo largo de todo el país, en recintos sindicales y centros laborales, los trabajadores se preguntan de qué manera los afectará esta situación. Y es que dicho debate nunca incluyó a todos los miembros del sindicato, sino que estuvo restringido a un selecto grupo de altos oficiales.

A pesar de discutirse desde una perspectiva tan limitada, los asuntos que se debaten son de suma importancia para todo aquel que se interese en la dirección que está tomando el movimiento sindical. Uno de los frentes -la “Coalición Cambiar Para Ganar” - está dirigido por Andy Stern, quien funge como presidente de SEIU. El otro frente está dirigido por John Sweeney de AFL-CIO, quien fuera presidente de SEIU.

El problema de la organización de los trabajadores que no están organizados, de la reestructuración de los sindicatos, así como del papel y la naturaleza de la acción política son asuntos que preocupan a todos los trabajadores. Desafortunadamente, el 90% de los trabajadores ni siquiera tenía idea de que dichos debates estuvieran llevándose a cabo.

Sindicalismo de lucha de clases

En la víspera de la convención, el líder sindical de Chicago, Joe Iosbaker, dirigente de la comisión laboral de “Freedom Road Socialist Organization” (Organización Socialista Camino de la Libertad) se dirigió a un auditorio repleto de activistas solidarios y líderes sindicales que lo escucharon con atención.

Iosbaker indicó “los fracasos de Sweeney nos han conducido a

new members have to take a fighting pose at times.

And as mentioned above, the debates bring out the failures of the labor bureaucrats and get many more involved in debating which way forward. For sure, the current debate doesn't go far enough, and doesn't involve the masses of current union members, let alone the majority of workers not yet in a union. We should help spread the debate.

A Fighting Workers' Movement

Workers and our allies who want to see the cause of the unions advance remember the old song, “Solidarity Forever.” At many labor rallies, this is dusted off. Many know the first verse, which raises the banner of power through a union. Like many old songs, far fewer people know the second verse:

*Is there aught we hold in common with the greedy parasite –
Who would lash us into slavery and would crush us with his
might?*

*Is there anything left to us but to organize and fight -
For the union makes us strong.*

We face a “greedy parasite” that proves every day he is willing to “crush us with his might.”

What the labor movement needs is to develop fighting unions – unions that break beyond the bounds of the current ways of doing things and engage in all-out fights against the bosses. Like the founders of the CIO in the 1930s, we need militant picket lines, sit-downs and class-on-class battles. Like the Staley workers ten years ago, we need to unite with the reformers in the labor leadership, while pushing forward rank-and-file struggle and organization toward our strategic goal of transforming the unions. To John Sweeney and Andy Stern, we say, “Yes, let's organize, but organize to fight.” ★

Joe Iosbaker is a well-known trade unionist in Chicago and a member of the Labor Commission of Freedom Road Socialist Organization.

Union Federation Comes Apart

Analysis by Staff

Chicago, IL - A dramatic split rocked the U.S. trade union federation, the AFL-CIO, as it convened its 25th Convention, July 25-28. Four major unions stayed away: The International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Service Employees International Union, United Food and Commercial Workers and UNITE HERE.

As *Fight Back!* goes to press, the Teamsters (IBT), Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) have quit the AFL-CIO.

For now, UNITE HERE, which combines needle trades, hotel and food service workers, will not leave and continues paying dues to state federations and local labor councils.

The departing unions are part of the 'Change to Win Coalition,' which also includes the Laborers, UNITE HERE, the United Farm Workers and the Carpenters Union. The Carpenters Union left the AFL-CIO long before the convention.

The breakup puts about one third of organized labor outside of the AFL-CIO.

The Debate That Wasn't

The ongoing decline of the size and influence of the trade union movement provides the backdrop for the split. In the private sector, less than 8% of workers now work under union contracts.

Though many AFL-CIO convention delegates watched it unfolding, their disbelief and anger filled the convention when four of the largest unions remained outside. Chicago radio stations in the African American and Latino communities were flooded with calls from workers wanting to know if they would still work under collective bargaining agreements. Across the U.S., workers in union halls and workplaces are asking what this means. Workers are left

Análisis: Ruptura en el seno de AFL-CIO

Por Redacción

Chicago, Illinois – Una dramática ruptura estremeció a la federación estadounidense de sindicatos, AFL-CIO, durante su vigésima quinta convención que tuvo lugar del 25 al 28 de julio de este año. Al margen de la convención se mantuvieron cuatro importantes sindicatos como son La Hermandad Internacional de "Teamsters", la Unión de Empleados de Servicios (SEIU), la Unión de Trabajadores Comerciales y de Alimentos (UFCW, además de UNITE-HERE. Tanto los "Teamsters", como SEIU y la Unión de Trabajadores Comerciales y de Alimentos se han separado definitivamente de la AFL-CIO.

El 13 de septiembre UNITE-HERE -agrupación sindical compuesta por los trabajadores de la industria del vestido, empleados de la industria hotelera y de servicios alimenticios- anunció su separación de la AFL-CIO.

Los sindicatos que se han separado de AFL-CIO conforman actualmente la "Coalición Cambiar Para Ganar", que además incluye a "Los Jornaleros", UNITE-HERE, la Unión de los Trabajadores del Campo y la Unión de Carpinteros. Este último abandonó la AFL-CIO antes de celebrarse la convención. El 27 de septiembre los sindicatos que integran la "Coalición Cambiar Para Ganar" se reunieron en San Luis, Missouri y fundaron una nueva federación laboral.

Esta división deja aproximadamente un tercio de los sindicatos fuera de la AFL-CIO.

El Debate que no Tuvo Lugar

El deterioro sistemático en cuanto a la proporción y a la influencia

defend them. The key is to defend the right of affiliation to the CLCs for the local unions that have left the AFL-CIO.

The Future

This new situation presents challenges and opportunities for those that want to advance the labor movement. The main thing however, is to build a labor movement that is of and for workers. Collaboration with management has gotten the movement where it is today – facing a crisis in the face of an employer offensive.

On the issue of class struggle unionism, Joe Iosbaker points out, “Those unions which in the last decade or two have started down this path of class struggle unionism, however fleetingly - such as the Staley workers, the Detroit newspaper workers in the mid 1990s, the mineworkers at Pittston coal in the early 1990s, and Local P9 at Hormel in the 1980s or the workers at UPS, or the Charleston Five of the International Longshoremen’s Association – have shown us the path to a renewed labor movement. The path of a militant, class-conscious labor movement is the only road forward.” ★

wondering, because the debate preceding the convention was restricted to a small layer of top union officers. The debate never reached the rank-and-file union members.

Though narrow, the issues debated are important to everyone who is concerned about the direction of the labor movement. One camp, the Change to Win Coalition, is led by SEIU’s President Andy Stern. The other camp is headed by the AFL-CIO’s John Sweeny, a former president of SEIU.

The problems of organizing the unorganized, union restructuring and the role and nature of political action are common concerns of all workers. Unfortunately, 90% of union workers had no idea these debates were taking place.

Class Struggle Unionism

On the eve of the AFL -CIO Convention, Chicago trade unionist Joe Iosbaker, leader of the Labor Commission of Freedom Road Socialist Organization, spoke to a packed hall. Labor and solidarity activists from across the U.S. listened closely.

Iosbaker stated, “Sweeney’s failures have led to a revolt in the palace. There is not much to say about the ideas on either side of this debate. But the debate itself provides an opening to raise the need to transform the unions. The unions need to become organizations of class struggle; they need to oppose the corporate class at home and U.S. imperialism abroad.”

“Some people say the way forward is democracy. We certainly support union democracy. We fight for union democracy in order to have worker-run organizations and to more effectively wage class struggle - not just to have fairer rules for replacing one set of bureaucrats with another.”

Iosbaker added, “The way forward for the labor movement is to revive class struggle unionism. We need unions to be fighting organizations, not dues collection machines. It means reviving tactics of earlier generations - of the 1910s and the 1930s. During those periods, workers did not content themselves with going on strike and holding up picket signs. They used every tactic in their arsenal, from sit-down strikes to shutting down production at the

plant gates or to taking the fight industry or class wide. Class struggle unionism also means solidarity unionism, where unionists go all out in support of key struggles when they break out.”

Iosbaker also noted that labor movement needed to take on discrimination faced by African American, Chicano, Latino, Asian and other oppressed nationality workers. Unless this is done it will be impossible to build a labor movement that reflects the actual composition of the U.S. working class.

Stern and Sweeney, as well as the other union leaders on both sides of this debate think that labor management cooperation is not only possible, but good. In an April issue of HRO Today, a magazine that promotes outsourcing, Andy Stern stated, “The sum total of the wage race to the bottom is that this generation of American workers will be the first ever to have a worse quality of life than their parents. To try to stop the wage drops, unions have been an anti-competitive force, protectionist. But what union wages should be is like electricity, which allows their users [employers] to operate more efficiently with better quality.”

In various articles and speeches, Stern explains his belief that corporations should accept unions because unionization will aid them in their business plans. The Sweeny camp holds the same view, but life itself proves them wrong.

Political Action

The \$200 million spent backing Democrats in the last elections is a source of dismay for many in the labor movement. Some progressives in and around trade unions are hoping the Change to Win split will lead to a break with the pro-big business Democratic Party. More likely it will lead to ‘bi-partisanship,’ meaning supporting Republican and/or Democratic candidates for narrow opportunistic reasons.

In a post-convention interview with the Detroit Free Press, Teamster head Jimmy Hoffa, Jr. speaks of supporting Republican candidates. Historically the IBT has a track record of backing Republican candidates, such as Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan. Hoffa supported a Republican attempt to drill oil in the Alaska

National Wildlife Refuge. It was Hoffa’s ploy to gain power and money through union membership. Hoffa would run the Teamsters’ hiring hall for the corporations and the government. The plan failed.

For its part, the American Federation of State County and Municipal Workers (AFSCME), one of the pillars of the Sweeny-AFL-CIO camp, is spending a half million dollars to back the Republican candidate in New York City’s mayoral race. Similar to an earlier ‘go it alone’ approach by Dennis Rivera of SEIU 1199 in supporting a Republican candidate for governor of New York, these strategies only benefit the narrow interests of one union over the others.

Independent political action that is consistently pro-worker and advances the interests of the oppressed is not on the agenda of the Stern or Sweeny camps.

That said, it was clear in the pre-convention debate that Stern placed more stress on organizing the unorganized as a road forward, while many of the unions in the Sweeny camp stressed changing the political climate.

Labor Unity

The end of the AFL-CIO as it was presents some challenges for militants in the labor movement as it is - particularly for those active in Central Labor Councils (CLCs).

In a July 28 memo John Sweeney orders, “We must reject efforts to pick and choose the places and terms of ‘partnership’ and support. These unions are proposing a form of free ridership: No financial or other support for the national AFL-CIO, no responsibilities or obligations under the AFL-CIO Constitution, but selective buy-in at central labor bodies of their choosing.” In other words, those who quit the AFL-CIO are to be kicked out of local labor councils and statewide federations.

For his part, Stern could care less about the CLCs and knew full well that the split was likely to tear them apart.

In a number of cities where the CLCs have become a rallying point for militants and progressives, moves are being made to