

10 Issues On Labor's Future (July 11, 2005)

## **Labor Leaders Still Offer Empty Rhetoric As Exodus of Good-Paying Jobs Grows**

**By Harry Kelber**

*(Ninth in a series of ten articles)*

The loss of hundreds of thousands of good-paying American jobs to low wage regions is continuing, not only in manufacturing, but in high-tech and data-processing jobs. And the grim news is that the drain on U.S. jobs is expected to accelerate.

American employers are planning to move about 3.3 million white-collar service jobs, amounting to about \$136 billion in lost wages, overseas in the next 15 years, up from \$4 billion in 2000, according to Forrester Research Inc., a corporate consulting firm.

Those are frightening statistics. So what do our national labor leaders propose to do about this problem?

We've sent tons of e-mails and faxes to Congress and made thousands of phone calls to our legislators in Washington, just as our leaders have urged us to do. We've showed up at dozens of rallies to raise hell against the greedy multinational corporations.

We've gotten a deaf ear from Washington. In fact, the Bush administration has publicly stated that the export of jobs is good for the country. So what else can we do? What further course of action do our leaders propose?

AFL-CIO President John Sweeney, in his "Winning for Working Families," offers a single new proposal. He says we must "build on the broad global reach of the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center to increase support for connecting the struggle of workers in other countries and the work of affiliate organizing campaigns with multinational employers here."

What Sweeney does not say is that Solidarity Center gets 90% of its annual budget money from U.S. government agencies and only 2% from the AFL CIO. Does any union member believe that the Bush administration is investing millions of dollars annually in Solidarity Center to promote international labor solidarity?

Solidarity Center has offices and staff in some 40 countries, including Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Croatia, Paraguay, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Venezuela and Zimbabwe, countries that have no real connection with American labor. In fact, most union members have never heard of Solidarity Center and have no idea what it is doing in those countries, except to serve the needs of the Bush administration's foreign policy and U.S. corporate interests.

Andy Stern, president of the Service Employees Union, who heads a group of five international unions that are threatening to quit the AFL-CIO, has his own prescription of how to deal with the globalization problem.

In SEIU's "Unite to Win," Stern says: "U.S. unions must join with others around the world to form a global labor movement that unites workers by industry,

sector, and craft to have the strength to win for workers for common employers.” He cautions: “Friendly relationships between national labor federations, along with occasional expressions of support are not enough.”

Stern knows, of course, that most union members are totally uninformed about what’s going on in the labor movements of the rest of the world, due to the blackout of foreign labor news by the AFL-CIO’s International Affairs Department and the Sweeney administration these past ten years.

So who is going to take the lead in establishing the global labor movement that Stern speaks of? If Stern can’t rally more than 5 of the 57 AFL-CIO unions for his restructuring program, how is he going to unite world labor?

The problem is that labor leaders in both the Sweeney and Stern factions have been too complacent and cautious about responding aggressively to the continuing transfer of American jobs to overseas locations. We should be attacking these greedy corporations by name; provide the public with details of their un-American business practices; hold mass demonstrations and picket lines in front of their company headquarters and plants; harass their CEOs and board directors, and perform dozens of other actions to show what they can expect from us, if they’re thinking of making extra profits by abandoning American workers.

If we don’t have the guts to really fight for our jobs, maybe we deserve to lose them.

**Article 10: The Historic Convention (To be posted Monday, July 18)**

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