

## 10 Issues on Labor's Future

# Heads of 15 Largest Unions Plan Scheme To Take Permanent Control of U.S. Labor

By Harry Kelber

*(Eighth in a series of ten articles)*

Whether the AFL-CIO remains united or is deeply split because of the exodus of a half dozen international unions to form a rival labor federation, top-level leaders in both the Sweeney and Stern-Hoffa factions are in agreement that the presidents of the 15 largest unions shall have permanent seats on the Executive Committee, which will be reduced in size from 25 members to 17 or 18 and will wield extraordinary power over the organization's policies and decisions.

The net effect of these "reforms" is to turn the Executive Committee into an exclusive, all-powerful corporate board of directors, stripping lower echelon labor leaders of their authority and treating union members as shareholders who have no role within the labor movement.

And since 14 of the top 15 international unions are headed by white males, women, who comprise 43% of the total AFL-CIO membership, have no voice on the power-wielding Executive Committee, whose policy decisions can affect the lives of their female constituencies. The same difficulty afflicts minorities, who also represent a significant percentage of union members.

To deal with the problem of diversity, Sweeney would "require the AFL CIO Executive Council as well as state federations and central labor councils to develop plans to achieve targeted levels of diversity by the 2009 Convention." Some solution! The Constitution of the Change to Win Coalition does not mention diversity at all.

Here is what Sweeney's "Winning for Working Families" proposes on the issue of governing the AFL-CIO: "Reduce the size of the AFL-CIO Executive Committee to 18, plus the president of the AFL-CIO, with the two other officers serving in an ex-officio, non-voting capacity. The largest 15 unions in size would have permanent seats, and the AFL-CIO president would appoint three additional members from other unions for terms of one year to provide *broad representation*." (My emphasis — HK)

The insurgent "Change to Win Coalition" states in its constitution that the Executive Committee "shall be the principal governing body of this organization." It reduces the size of the Committee from 25 to 17, with 14 seats, currently set aside for the "principal officers" of the largest 14 international unions. The three at-large members would be chosen by a majority of the Committee.

To overcome the lack of diversity, both groups allow for several openings on the Committee to be filled by four women and minorities, at most, but those who are selected would have no influence and would serve as mere window dressing.

Since officers and members of state federations, central labor councils and local unions are permanently barred from seeking a seat on the Executive Committee, it creates a freeze on new leadership that may extend far into the future. Indeed,

there is no need for holding elections for top leadership positions, because hardly anyone would qualify as a candidate.

Forget about accountability. Since members of the Executive Committee would have permanent status, they would feel no obligation to report what they are doing to the AFL-CIO membership. And they can't be removed, even if they perform poorly.

Both the Sweeney and Stern factions favor continuing the AFL-CIO Executive Council, even expanding it, while reducing its powers in favor of the Executive Committee. all of its authority to the Executive Committee.

If the international union presidents win convention approval to run the AFL-CIO like a private corporation with them acting as its board of directors (they certainly have the convention votes to make it a reality), trade unionism, as it has been practiced since 1886, will cease to exist. We will become shareholders, with only a remote connection in a "modernized" labor movement.

**Article 9: Globalization (To be posted Monday, July 11, 2005)**  
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