

# Workers Are Pawns in AFL-CIO Power Struggle

## *If Union Bigwigs Can 'Disaffiliate,' Why Can't Union Rank & File?*

This month, top officials of 57 national and international unions will assemble in Chicago for what is expected to be Organized Labor's most rancorous convention since United Mine Workers chief John L. Lewis left the American Federation of Labor (AFL) to form the Congress of Industrial Organizations in 1935.

Several bosses of powerful AFL-CIO-affiliated unions have publicly made it clear that they believe, nearly 10 years after former Service Employees International Union (SEIU) President John Sweeney took over the union conglomerate, it's time to give someone else a chance.

But Mr. Sweeney has refused to step aside.

And barring a sudden, unexpected development, he will muster sufficient votes in the AFL-CIO oligarchy to secure another four-year term at the Chicago convention.

### **'Reformist' Union Bosses Happy That the AFL-CIO Is 'A Voluntary Organization'**

However, insurgent leader Andy Stern, the current SEIU president, and his cohorts have publicly indicated they are ready to break their unions off from the AFL-CIO and form a new coalition.

The insurgents won't be deterred merely because Mr. Sweeney has majority support within the AFL-CIO convention.

As one explained to virulently pro-forced unionism editor and columnist Harold Meyerson last month, "Sweeney loses by winning. He can win the vote at the AFL-CIO convention, but so what? It's a voluntary organization. We can leave."

The irony of this anonymous union boss's proudly asserting the insurgents' right to take their unions and their forced dues-paying members out of the AFL-CIO after they lose an election was apparently lost on both the boss himself and on Mr. Meyerson.

Big Labor-crafted federal and state labor laws deny workers who disapprove of how their unions are being run, but aren't able to oust the people in charge, the right to "disaffiliate" from the union.

If workers try to do so by resigning and withholding all their dues and fees, Big Labor bosses have the legal power to get them fired!



RICHARD AVEDON

**Union "reformers" like UNITE HERE's John Wilhelm (left) and Bruce Raynor treasure their right to stop**

**sending dues to the AFL-CIO, but reject the individual worker's right to stop paying UNITE HERE dues.**

Anti-Sweeney labor bosses style themselves as union "reformers" who have a viable plan to greatly increase the AFL-CIO's membership, and the estimated \$9 billion AFL-CIO-affiliated unions annually collect in forced dues and fees.

But even some generally sympathetic observers like New York teacher union militant Leo Casey can't see how their "strategy for new organizing is all that different from that of the AFL-CIO leadership."

The fact is, AFL-CIO insurgents like Mr. Stern, UNITE HERE (the apparel and hotel workers union) co-rulers Bruce Raynor and John Wilhelm, and Teamster czar Jim Hoffa are thirsty for more power rather than truly zealous to reconfigure the AFL-CIO.

### **John Sweeney: Promoting Health And Safety Is 'Less Essential' Than Partisan Politicking**

"If union bigwigs have a right to take a union out of the AFL-CIO, why shouldn't a worker have the right to take himself or herself out of the union?" asked Mark Mix, president of the National Right to Work Committee.

"So-called 'reformist' union bosses' unstated answer to this question is obvious: They view themselves as free agents, but workers as pawns in a power struggle over who will command Organized Labor in America.

"Of course, John Sweeney and his loyalists are equally contemptuous of the individual worker's rights.

"With no apparent consultation of rank-and-file unionists, Mr. Sweeney and his close allies recently decided to cut 'less essential' functions in the AFL-CIO's forced dues-funded budget so that they could spend even more money on politics.

"Among the 'less essential' programs gutted by the Sweeney crowd were the AFL-CIO's worker health-and-safety division!

"The reorganization of the AFL-CIO is intended to help Mr. Sweeney maintain full-time, year-round union political operatives in electoral battleground states, rather than deploy them for just six months prior to each election.

"Yet a nationwide independent poll of union members last year found just 11% thought their union was spending 'too little' on politics. Union members were three times as likely to think their union was already spending 'too much' on politics.

"The sad truth is, whether the Sweeney camp or the Stern camp prevails in the ongoing AFL-CIO power struggle, independent-minded workers will lose.

"Every day this struggle continues, it strengthens the case for congressional approval of the National Right to Work Act [H.R.500 and S.370], which would prohibit all compulsory union dues and fees." 