

UNITE HERE, Service Employees resolve major dispute

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and UNITE HERE announced July 26 that they have put an end to a bitter 18-month dispute.

UNITE HERE was formed in 2004 with the merger of the Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees (UNITE) and Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE). The presidents of both international unions — Bruce Raynor of

UNITE and John Wilhelm of HERE — negotiated to maintain leadership positions within the newly merged union. In 2005, UNITE HERE withdrew from the AFL-CIO and joined the Change to Win coalition.

The conflict started when Raynor and Wilhelm couldn't agree on strategy for the union's future. Then-president Raynor split away part of the UNITE membership when he saw that Wilhelm was likely to win the presidency out-

right in elections scheduled for 2009. Raynor formed Workers United and joined with Andy Stern, then president of SEIU, one of the largest unions in the country and an affiliate of Change to Win.

When Stern unexpectedly resigned a few months ago, newly elected SEIU president Mary Kay Henry — who defeated Stern's pick as his successor — made settling the dispute a top priority of her administration.

"Despite the tensions that have existed between our unions over the past

months, John Wilhelm, Bruce Raynor and I have worked together to find common ground, and we've been able to put our differences behind us," Henry said in a statement to the press. "We agree that we cannot be spending our time fighting one another over workers who are already represented when there are far too many people who want and need a voice on the job. Our resources and our attention must be put toward solutions for the crisis

workers face right now.

"We need to drive change for people in this country. None of us can go it alone. Moving forward, SEIU plans to link arms with our allies in labor and the progressive movement and forge stronger relationships with communities to be a more aggressive force pushing for the demands that help working people on the job, at the bargaining table, and with public policy makers all around our country."

Wilhelm credited Henry for making the settlement possible, telling In These Times magazine, "No question, if Andy Stern were still president, we'd be still combating with SEIU. His departure and her ascension made a big difference."

In a press statement, Wilhelm said "UNITE HERE is proud that the agreement preserves its exclusive jurisdiction to organize in the hotel and gaming industries. It also lays out a level play-

ing field for both unions in the food service industry.

"And it restores to UNITE HERE the bulk of the financial assets that have been tied up in federal court, including the Manhattan real estate. UNITE HERE and SEIU agreed to seek approval from federal regulators to transfer ownership of the Amalgamated Bank to SEIU-affiliated Workers United."

The New York Times put the value at \$75 million in cash and \$70 million for the 28-story office building on Seventh Avenue in New York.

Amalgamated Bank reportedly has \$4.5 billion in assets.

Under the agreement, UNITE HERE will have exclusive jurisdiction to organize in the hotel and gaming industries in the U.S., Puerto Rico or Canada.

Workers United, the faction that left UNITE HERE and joined SEIU, will

keep the needle trades and laundries, with the exception of those in the New England region of old UNITE, which chose to stay with UNITE HERE.

According to In These Times, the two unions either agreed to compete for some types of food workers or carve out jurisdictions, such as granting UNITE jurisdiction over business and industry food service and SEIU over health care industry food workers.

The unions set up procedures to decide where another 11,000 still-contested workers will go.

UNITE HERE represents more than 250,000 workers throughout the U.S. and Canada who work in the hospitality, gaming, food service, manufacturing, textile, laundry, and airport industries.

SEIU has 2.2 million members in the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico.

Former SEIU leader Andy Stern takes job at Georgetown

Andy Stern, former president of the Service Employees International Union, has taken a job at Georgetown University's public policy school as a research fellow.

Stern will coordinate research at Washington, D.C.-based Georgetown on wage reform, labor policy and retirement security.

Stern, 59, surprised the labor movement last May when he announced his retirement. Stern headed the SEIU for 14 years. He led five unions in leaving the AFL-CIO, then joined with the Teamsters and Carpenters unions to form the Change to Win labor federation. The Carpenters have since left Change to Win, as has UNITE HERE.

Stern is also a member of President Obama's deficit commission.

Oregon Service Employees locals endorse John Kitzhaber

Members of Services Employees International Union (SEIU) voted to endorse Democrat John Kitzhaber for governor of Oregon. Along with the endorsement, they also pledged to campaign actively on his behalf.

SEIU represents more than 50,000 workers in state and local government, homecare, child care, adult foster care and the state universities, as well as thousands of workers in the private sector including hospitals, nursing homes and property services.

The endorsement was recommended by the union's political action committee and affirmed by SEIU's Oregon State Council following a participatory process open to all candidates who responded to a question-

naire, appeared before members, and agreed to spend a day shadowing a member in the workplace.

"We were impressed by Kitzhaber's grasp of the issues, sincerity and candor," said Barbara Casey, a social services worker from Portland and chair of the SEIU Local 503 CAPE (Citizens Action for Political Education) committee. "But more than anything else, we believe he shares the values of our members and Oregon's working families."

Union officials said Republican nominee Chris Dudley, a former officer of the NBA players union noted for finding ways around management efforts to cap salaries, spurned a chance to compete for SEIU's endorsement.



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