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"Justice for All" or "Control for Just Us?"

**A First Look At SEIU's Plan to Centralize Decision-Making Power
and Financial Resources at the Expense of Union Democracy
and Strong Organization Among SEIU Members**



Executive Summary

In early June, SEIU will hold its quadrennial convention in Puerto Rico where delegates will set the union's direction for the next four years. In advance of the convention, SEIU leaders are distributing their proposed plan for the coming years, which they have given the high-minded title "Justice for All."

The plan, which has important implications for the future of SEIU, deserves careful evaluation and discussion. This discussion paper provides a first look at a number of key questions related to the plan, including:

- Who produced the "Justice for All" plan?
- What are the plan's main programmatic elements?
- Where would the "Justice for All" plan lead our union?
- What are alternative proposals?
- What are the key differences between these competing proposals?

An initial review of the "Justice for All" plan reveals that like many other of SEIU's recent public relations efforts, it masks a process and a product that are virtually the opposite of what they purport to be. Instead of "Justice for All," the plan aims primarily at "Control for Just Us," a radical centralization of decision-making power and financial resources at the expense of union democracy and strong organization among SEIU members.

Key findings include the following:

- The process by which the Justice for All Plan was created and reviewed was tightly controlled and heavily dominated by International staff.
- If adopted, the plan's key programmatic elements would further centralize resources and decision-making power in the hands of International Union officials in Washington D.C. The plan would redirect tens of millions of dollars of members' dues by requiring each local union to pool the entirety of its mandated organizing budget – fully 20% of local union dues revenues net of per capita payments to SEIU – under the control of SEIU's Industry Divisions, radically limiting the role of local unions and union members in the development of organizing strategies and control of organizing campaigns, and potentially gutting the independent local organizing capacity that has accounted for a significant portion of SEIU's growth. Furthermore, the plan would further centralize decision-making power over collective bargaining and employer relationships by eliminating key decision-making bodies and replacing them with structures that are significantly less democratic. For example, an International Union staff person who represents no members would have the same voting power on newly created "National Bargaining Teams" as would a representative from a local union with 20,000 affected rank-and-file members.
- Other elements of the plan are designed to undermine members' capacity to engage employers directly at the worksite and to erode the political leadership structure of local unions. The plan would establish remote telephone call centers to respond to members' workplace problems and would redirect local union field organizing staff to member mobilization on external projects. Rather than increasing members' involvement in their union and providing them additional support to pursue their interests with their employers, these call centers are designed to dispense with workplace conflict administratively and re-construct the union as an issue advocacy organization to pursue priorities and execute campaigns in which workers would have little say.
- The plan also would centralize local unions' back-office services, such as accounting, dues processing, list management, financial reporting, management, data storage and information technology. By 2012, a new, centralized administrative-services organization would provide administrative services to a majority of SEIU members across North America. While administrative efficiency is desirable, the centralization of these services is largely a means of reducing the political independence of local unions by

stripping them of meaningful control over core areas of their organizational infrastructure.

- The plan establishes goals for improving membership participation, organizing growth, leadership development and political participation by SEIU members, but provides few details about the strategy, funding or plans to accomplish these objectives. Certain goals, such as the ones associated with leadership development, are contradicted by other objectives of the plan, such as reducing the power of rank-and-file members in key decision-making structures. Moreover, all of the plan's goals are merely quantitative and, shy of sloganeering, are bereft of any qualitative content regarding the analytical, ideological, and cultural work necessary to develop and support worker leaders capable of directing and engaging in the massive upsurge of membership activity necessary to achieve these objectives.

In sum, the main programmatic features of the "Justice for All" plan represent a rehash of Change to Win's failed fixations on "structural solutions" to the crisis of the labor movement and a continuation of the even more dangerous direction established in SEIU over recent years: increasing centralization of resources and decision-making power in the hands of International Union officials in D.C. With this increased power, the SEIU leaders are increasingly pursuing a top-down, employer-oriented unionism that seeks to expand the union through short cuts and concessionary deals rather than methodically building a bottom-up union that empowers workers, enables them to control their union and arms them with the tools and organization to win meaningful improvements in their lives.

In contrast to the Justice for All Plan, the Executive Board of SEIU United Healthcare Workers – West (UHW) has crafted a set of constitutional amendments and action resolutions for the SEIU Convention that is designed to protect members' rights, strengthen our International Union's democratic structure and improve workers' ability to coordinate bargaining and organizing campaigns across local unions. These constitutional amendments and action resolutions – providing the specific prescriptions to achieve the principles of UHW's "Platform for Change" – would make SEIU stronger, more democratic and more effective at improving the lives of workers across North America.

To date, SEIU leaders have refused to debate these proposals on their merits. Instead, they have sought to deliberately mischaracterize the terms of the debate by contrasting their Justice for All Plan with a frightening alternative: "Just Us" unionism, which is not actually being advocated by anyone inside SEIU. "Just Us" unionism is simply a straw man designed by International Union leaders to distract attention from the real debate facing our union, and is in fact the exact same straw man trotted out to discredit any opponent of their arguments for splitting the Change to Win unions from the AFL-CIO.

Our union stands at a critical moment in its history. More than ever, we need a serious debate about the future structure, direction and vision of our union. We hope you will join us in this important debate by reading this initial discussion paper, evaluating its arguments and debating its conclusions. The following sections examine a number of key questions related to the Justice for All Plan and summarize the Platform for Change.

I. Who produced the Justice for All Plan?

According to SEIU leaders, the Justice for All Plan (hereafter called the "Control For Just Us Plan") grew out of a lengthy participatory process involving thousands of SEIU members and elected leaders.

"Over the past few years, thousands of SEIU members and elected union leaders have met in committees and larger groups... Based on their research, much debate, extensive discussion about our future vision in each SEIU industry division, town hall meetings with members of local unions in every region, and input from SEIU members, the following are their recommendations to the elected local delegates to the 2008 SEIU Convention." (p. 9)

A closer look at the planning and review process offers a very different picture.

The Control For Just Us Plan was created by nine committees whose composition and leadership were heavily dominated by staff of the International Union.

- The International Union appointed all of the members of each committee.
- The chairpersons of every committee were individuals on the International Union's payroll.

- Of the 134 seats on the nine committees, there were only 79 different people (meaning many people served on multiple committees). Of these 79 individuals, nearly half (35) were International Union staff members. An additional 24 members were from locals whose leadership was appointed by President Stern.

Other claims about the participatory character of the review process are equally questionable. For example, SEIU leaders tout a series of "town hall meetings with members of local unions in every region" as a key part of a review process involving thousands of SEIU members. The reality is very different. SEIU leaders sharply restricted membership participation in the seven "town hall meetings" they conducted across the United States during the spring of 2008. In 2004, any SEIU member was permitted to participate in the town hall meetings that reviewed the draft plan for that year's convention. In 2008, SEIU leaders limited participation to only seven individuals from each local union, who were required to pre-register for the meeting. Each local union was permitted to send representatives to only one town hall meeting. In the meetings, each local union was provided 30 seconds to make a statement to all of the meeting's participants.

In sum, the planning and review process was so tightly controlled and so heavily dominated by International staff as to raise obvious questions about whose opinions are really reflected in the Control For Just Us Plan.

II. What are the Justice for All Plan's main programmatic initiatives?

SEIU leaders unveiled the plan amid great fanfare, with SEIU Spokesperson Andrew McDonald calling it "the most ambitious and far-reaching proposal to change America any union has ever considered."¹ SEIU President Stern describes it in equally dramatic terms: "SEIU is proposing new and far-reaching reforms that are paradigm shifting for a labor union. They are a threat to entrenched power and individual interests. They make clear that the status quo is no longer an option."²

What, then, are the plan's major elements?

As in any organization, the most important organizational questions are those that pertain to resources and decision-making power. Given that the development of the plan was so dominated by International Union staff, it should come as no surprise that the Control For Just Us Plan calls for further consolidation of the International Union's control over resources, organizing, collective bargaining and politics. The plan is far from "paradigm-shifting" and "a threat to entrenched power." In fact, it would have precisely the opposite effect by continuing along the path already charted by the current administration. The plan, by consolidating more resources in the hands of International Union officials in D.C., would in fact expand the entrenched power of these officials.

The following is a review of the plan's major programmatic initiatives:

A. Directing More Local Resources to D.C.: The plan proposes shifting tens of millions of dollars from local unions to SEIU's Industry Divisions. According to the plan, "Every local union will set aside 20% of its post per capita budget to organizing in a separate fund. These local union resources will be blended with the Division's dedicated Unity Fund of at least \$12 million as the primary resources to carry out a Division's plan." (p. 10)

This dramatic redirection of resources is a continuation of previous initiatives that have already shifted massive resources from local unions to the International Union during the past decade.

- In 1996, the SEIU Convention authorized a plan that raised SEIU members' dues over a four-year period in order to provide increased funding for local unions and the International Union.
- In 2000, the SEIU Convention adopted "the New Strength Unity Plan" that included the creation of "Unity Funds" – nationally controlled funds for breakthrough organizing campaigns and coordinated bargaining that are created from local union members' dues monies.

These two financing initiatives dramatically expanded the resources that local unions provide to the International

¹ SEIU, "Statement of SEIU Spokesperson Andrew McDonald," PR Newswire, April 8, 2008.

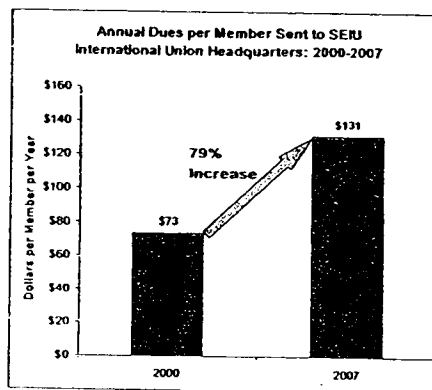
² Andrew Stern, "The Moment for Change," Huffington Post, posted April 25, 2008 at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/andy-stern/the-moment-for-change_b_98548.html

Union. Each month, every local union sends to the International Union a net per capita tax of \$7.65 per member as well as an additional tax of \$5 per member for a Unity Fund to help finance national union organizing priorities. In 2007, the International Union's D.C. headquarters received approximately \$140 million in per capita taxes from local unions as well as \$110 million in Unity Fund contributions.

These two financing initiatives have sharply increased the International Union's membership revenues, which reached nearly a quarter billion dollars in 2007. On a per-member basis, annual dues contributions to the International Union nearly doubled from \$73 in 2000 to \$131 in 2007.

Growth of the International Union's Revenues: 2000-07		
	Per Capita Tax Receipts	Per Capita Tax Receipts per Member
2000	\$100.9 million	\$73.43
2007	\$248.9 million	\$131.27

Source: SEIU Forms LM-2



Despite this sharp increase in funding to the International Union during recent years, the Control For Just Us Plan seeks to transfer additional resources from local unions to D.C. The plan would require each local union to pool its mandated organizing budget – fully 20% of local union dues net of per capita payments to SEIU – under the authority of Industry Divisions, which would then determine how the monies are allocated. The SEIU Constitution already provides for local unions to transfer unspent organizing funds to Industry Divisions in order to fund needed organizing campaigns. However, requiring every local union to place its organizing funds under the control of Industry Divisions has serious shortcomings:

- The mandatory transfer of local unions' organizing budgets to Division control could undermine initiatives approved by prior SEIU conventions – namely, to require each local union to fund and create its own organizing program in order to build power in its industries. Mandatory reductions in local unions' organizing budgets would undercut member and staff capacity to carry out effective organizing campaigns.
- By its own admission, the International Union's success with organizing campaigns has declined substantially. The Control For Just Us Plan states that "while we have doubled spending on organizing in four years, we have not doubled results." Elsewhere, the plan notes: "Our spending to help each new worker join us has increased greatly, which jeopardizes our ability to unite more workers faster." Given this performance, does it make sense to centralize more organizing monies in Industry Divisions?
- It is not clear how this expanded funding would be used. For example, in recent months the International Union launched a nationwide "breakthrough" campaign to organize bank tellers. While bank tellers deserve a union, the banking industry does not fall within SEIU's industrial focus and is a better industrial match for another union that has an ongoing commitment to organize this huge and complex industry. Furthermore, dedicating millions of dollars to organizing other industries, like the banking industry, means fewer resources for building power in SEIU's core industries of health care, public sector and property services.

The bank teller campaign highlights important questions about the decision-making and accountability structures connected to centralized funds. Do International Union leaders have too much authority if they are able to use millions of dollars of union members' dues money to conduct what might reasonably be described as "hot shop" organizing outside of SEIU's industries? How can members hold International Union leaders accountable for building our union's power in our core industries?

- If more dues money is being centralized in Washington D.C., is the International Union simultaneously creating effective, democratic systems for managing the money and holding leaders and staff in D.C. accountable for how members' dues are spent?
- Perhaps most importantly, the work of local union members and leaders to develop and execute long term strategies to build union density in their geographies, by painstaking work to make unionization an ongoing option for not-yet-union workers in their jurisdictions could be jeopardized or entirely scuttled by this radical centralization of resources and direction. Not only has much of SEIU's organizing success been achieved exactly through the development of robust, empowered local union organizing programs, but these programs provide the everyday, concrete focus on organizing as a top priority that is necessary to harness all of the union's power in bargaining and in politics toward the goal of growth. The commitment of time and money and the willingness to make sacrifices and take risks that will be necessary to achieve the next wave of growth in our industries depends upon a local nexus that integrates the priority of organizing into every aspect of union life. The International Union's fixation on structure at the expense of conscientious organization building threatens the very basis for our success.

B. Centralizing Decision-Making Power: During the past decade, our International Union has been reshaped by both external industry forces as well as internal organizational changes. First, the increasing size of our employers has required SEIU locals to conduct more coordinated bargaining and organizing campaigns to take on the multi-billion dollar corporations that increasingly dominate our industries. Secondly, the SEIU funding initiatives described above have substantially centralized more resources and power in our International Union. For example, by 2007 the International Union's annual revenues had grown to a quarter billion dollars – more than double its 2000 budget. This change has shifted the center of gravity of our union away from local union halls and into the offices of our International Union's D.C. headquarters.

These twin changes present important challenges to our union's system of decision making and require sensible reforms of its national and divisional structures – namely, more democratic and transparent governance processes as well as an improved system of checks and balances to ensure that members' dues money and power is accountable to them.

While the Control For Just Us Plan embraces the language of democracy, it offers few guarantees that the International Union will implement the kinds of reforms needed to achieve it. The following are several examples of recent problems that highlight the need for change:

- **Suspending Unity Council:** In February, President Stern unilaterally suspended the Catholic Healthcare West (CHW) Unity Council, which was adopted by CHW rank-and-file leaders and approved by the International Executive Board pursuant to the SEIU Constitution and Bylaws. The CHW Unity Council was established by SEIU Nevada, SEIU Local 121RN and SEIU UHW to coordinate the activities of the three local unions representing 16,000 CHW workers. President Stern suspended the Unity Council just three weeks before 15,000 SEIU members were set to begin negotiating a successor collective bargaining agreement with CHW in California.
- **Employing Undemocratic Pooled Voting System for Mergers:** Inside SEIU, there is no uniform practice for conducting votes on whether to merge local unions. Some merger votes are conducted by using a "local-by-local" voting system, which requires each local to separately approve a merger before a merger can take place. Many local unions' affiliation agreements with SEIU require this sensible and fair voting system.

During recent years, however, the International Union has conducted merger votes using a "pooled" voting system that is significantly less fair. Under this system, votes cast by the members of each local union are combined into a single pool, with the majority of these pooled votes determining the election outcome for all of the involved locals. Recently, mergers were conducted in both California and Canada using such a pooled voting system. The pooled voting system is especially unfair when mergers are conducted between multiple local unions and local unions of vastly different sizes, as members of large locals who believe a merger to be beneficial can effectively vote to merge into them the members of smaller locals without the distinct voice of these members ever being heard.

- **Blocking Members from their Bargaining Table:** In 2006 SEIU Local 121RN, the Florida Healthcare Union and SEIU UHW began joint negotiations with Tenet for successor contracts covering 7,000 members, as well as a renewal of our national organizing agreement. During the bargaining process, International staff leaders prohibited Local 121RN's and UHW's elected rank-and-file bargaining committee from participating in negotiations with their employer. International staff leaders secretly reached tentative agreements with management, including an agreement to permit Tenet to subcontract 12% of union members' jobs. During meetings of the Tenet Unity Council, International officers and attorneys attempted to unfairly manipulate the rules of the Unity Council in order to achieve an outcome they sought. Upon completion of the Tenet contract negotiations, bargaining team members requested that President Stern assign a neutral party to review the numerous concerns of rank-and-file members regarding the Tenet bargaining process. This review was completed six months ago, but International staff leaders have refused to release copies of the report.

These recent actions exemplify the kinds of problems encountered in our union's national and divisional decision-making structures. And they underscore the need for democratic reforms that guarantee members' right to control their union. The Control For Just Us Plan, rather than democratizing our union's decision-making structures, would further centralize decision-making power in the hands of International Union officials by making the following changes to key decision-making bodies.

✓ **Division Leadership Structure:** The Control For Just Us Plan would eliminate the current Division leadership structures and would replace them with new leadership structures whose rules could exclude local leaders from participating on them. Currently, the Healthcare Division is governed by a "Council of Presidents," which guarantees every healthcare local union a seat on this council. The Control For Just Us Plan would eliminate this key decision-making body and replace it with a new structure called a "Division Leadership Board." Each Division Leadership Board would be composed of "representatives elected to the International Executive Board (IEB) at the SEIU Convention, and those subsequently filling a vacancy as a Vice-President or International Executive Board member." These board members could decide to expand the Division Leadership Board by submitting "recommendations for expansion to the International President for approval by the International Executive Board." (p. 19). However, without such a plan and IEB approval, the board would consist only of IEB members.

✓ **Multi-Local Coordinating Structures:** The Control For Just Us Plan would also make profound changes to the multi-local coordinating structures responsible for decisions regarding bargaining, organizing and employer relations with shared employers. The plan would eliminate the existing multi-local coordinating structures (Unity Councils) and replace them with new structures that would erode the power of rank-and-file leaders.

Following the 2004 SEIU Convention, the Health Systems Division established Unity Councils as a means of improving coordination among local unions with shared employers. The International Executive Board debated and approved at least a half dozen Unity Councils. These Health Systems Unity Councils have generally permitted local unions to carry out effective joint planning and coordinated actions to enhance members' power. As noted in Section IV of this discussion paper, UHW has submitted a proposal to the 2008 SEIU Convention that is aimed at formalizing the procedures and structures of Unity Councils as practiced in the Health Systems Division, so they can serve as effective coordinating structures across our International Union. The Long-Term Care Division also has established Unity Councils, but their structure and practices are significantly less democratic, resulting in a centralization of power in the hands of International Union leaders rather than expanding the members' power in their union.

The Control For Just Us Plan would replace Unity Councils with new coordinating structures called "National Bargaining Teams" and "National Bargaining Councils." The following are some of the key shortcomings of these proposed new coordinating structures, which are less democratic than Health Systems Unity Councils in both their make-up and decision-making systems:

- **Composition of National Bargaining Teams:** The make-up of National Bargaining Teams would differ substantially from the Health Systems Division's Unity Councils. Unity Councils are led by representatives from local unions, with Industry Division staff in supportive roles.

In contrast, SEIU Industry Division staff could occupy a majority of seats on many National Bargaining Teams. The composition of National Bargaining Teams is complicated, with their make-up varying according to whether employers are considered to be in "high union density," "low union density" and "virtually no union density" settings. Bargaining teams in "low density" and "high density" settings are supposed to be specially designed "to assure [sic] that the voice of members is heard." (p. 25) However, the rules provide no guidelines regarding the relative mix of team members in "low union density settings." Even for high density employers, the rules do not guarantee that representatives of local unions would occupy a majority of voting seats. Instead, the rules state that "The number of division representatives shall not be greater than the number of team members appointed from the local unions." (p. 25)

- **Selection of National Bargaining Team Members:** Currently in Health Systems Unity Councils, each local union selects and appoints its own representatives to each council, subject to approval by the International President. In contrast, members of National Bargaining Teams – including representatives from local unions – would be appointed by the International President, not their local union. Presumably, these bargaining team members could also be unseated by the International President, although this power is not specified in the proposed guidelines.
- **Selection of Chair and Employer Representative:** Under the current practice of Health Systems Unity Councils, the local union that represents the largest number of workers at a given employer is designated as the lead employer representative and serves as the "point person" for managing relations with the employer on behalf of the group of local unions. There is no such requirement for National Bargaining Teams. Instead, the International President would appoint the Chair, who also would serve as the team's chief spokesperson.
- **Decision-Making System:** The decision-making rules for National Bargaining Teams are less fair and democratic than the ones governing Unity Councils. In Unity Councils, members rely on a per capita voting system to decide issues that cannot be resolved through consensus decision making. Many union decision-making bodies, such as SEIU State Councils and the SEIU Convention, use per capita voting to fairly apportion decision-making power according to the number of affected members.

National Bargaining Teams would discard per capita voting and instead use a system of one committee member/one vote in "low union density settings." This system would produce extremely undemocratic circumstances. For instance, an SEIU Industry Division staff person representing no members or a local union representing 100 affected workers would have the same voting power as a bargaining team member representing 10,000 affected workers. In "high union density settings," issues not resolved through consensus would be decided by one committee member/one vote or an alternative voting structure proposed by the Division Leadership Board and approved by the International Executive Board.

Health Systems Unity Councils vs. National Bargaining Teams

	Health Systems Unity Councils	National Bargaining Teams
Who are the members?	Representatives of local unions	Representatives of local unions and International Union staff
Who appoints the members?	Local unions	International President
How are decisions made if consensus cannot be reached?	Per capita vote	One committee member/one vote
Who is the Chair?	Representative from the local union with the largest number of workers at the particular employer	Appointed by International President
Who is the lead representative with the employer?	Representative from the local union with the largest number of workers at the particular employer	Appointed by International President

C. Collective Bargaining and Employer Relations: The Control For Just Us Plan recognizes the need for “developing a collective bargaining program that will win [higher] standards at the bargaining table.” (p. 22) However, the plan fails to propose any steps towards creating a more effective and vigorous bargaining program for our union. Its silence on these questions speaks volumes, making clear that there is no meaningful plan for collective bargaining other than to turn over more and more authority for employer relations to the International Union, which will then be free to pursue its chosen path of low-road, top-down deals without sufficient membership involvement in decision-making or sufficient opportunities for members to build and use power to secure improvements for themselves and the people they serve while also creating organizing opportunities for not-yet-union workers. If SEIU had been serious in the slightest about building the union’s collective bargaining program, it could have taken a series of simple steps, such as the following:

- requiring Industry Divisions to adopt Division-wide minimum bargaining standards;
- lining up the expiration dates of local unions’ contracts to enhance members’ power at the bargaining table;
- creating systems of better coordinated and pattern bargaining across regions or nations;
- providing collective bargaining training and mentoring to staff; and
- joining SEIU’s various Industry Divisions in creative campaigns aimed at shrinking the substantial gap in compensation and employment standards between SEIU members who do the same work in different industries and sectors (for example, janitors who work in commercial office buildings, nursing homes and hospitals).

D. Member Call Centers: The Control For Just Us Plan proposes that local unions establish call centers to respond to members’ job-related problems and provide them with “high quality member representation.” Under this model, SEIU members would phone a remote call center, where staff would advise them over the phone on how to interpret their facilities’ contract and resolve workplace problems. The Control For Just Us Plan recommends implementing call centers “across the union” after conducting pilot projects. (p. 13) By 2012, enough call centers would have been created to serve a majority of SEIU members across North America. The plan also calls for a program to “retrain and redirect local union field organizing staff,” yet provides no details regarding what sort of retraining would be provided or what sorts of work the field organizing staff would conduct upon being “retrained.”

This proposal raises profound concerns about the future role of members in their union as well as the direction of our International Union. Throughout SEIU’s history, we have learned that powerful unions require trained and effective workplace leaders, strong shop floor organization and a culture of solidarity and action among members. On a more practical level, strong unions require stewards and member leaders who can organize their co-workers, interpret and defend their contract, conduct issue fights, handle grievances and resolve problems. This combination of people, skills, organization and culture allows members to build worker-led unions that take responsibility for directing and leading their relations with employers and guiding the direction of our union.

We believe that SEIU's call center plan is actually designed to undermine this sort of engaged shop-floor organization which is essential for building the power necessary to challenge employers. Instead of increasing members' involvement in their union and providing them additional support to pursue their interests with their employers, these call centers are designed to dispense with workplace conflict administratively and re-construct the union as an issue advocacy organization to pursue priorities and execute campaigns in which workers would have little say.

The plan closely tracks a branding study, commissioned by SEIU from the Silicon Valley-based firm IDEO, that arrived at the following conclusions:

- SEIU is directed from the top down and there is limited member engagement;
- Membership engagement must be built on values and issues that are widely held and deeply felt;
- Workplace issues and pursuit of workers' interests directly with employers are not important enough to SEIU members to provide the most effective basis for building member engagement;
- Therefore, SEIU should displace its employer relations work from the center of its membership activity, outsourcing worksite grievances to call centers and other employer relations matters to top union officials and coordinating mechanisms; and
- Field staff and member activists should be remade as "membership engagement specialists" and "mobilizers" orienting much more of their work to external issue priorities that are aligned with members' values.

At its worst, this analysis and the plans that follow from it could literally be understood as a strategy to abandon the core purpose of the union in favor of using the employment nexus as an efficient means of securing dues check-off, mailing lists, phone lists, and e-mails, and a voter file that SEIU – emulating AARP, MoveOn.org, and mega-churches – can use to become the biggest, strongest, and best-funded issue-advocacy organization in America and the world, without worrying any longer about being an organization of workers, by workers and for workers.

Even in its less sinister versions, the call center proposal conflicts with our basic theory about the leadership of unions. Throughout our history, we have recognized that the core leadership of our union is composed of stewards and worksite leaders – the rank-and-file leaders who are directly engaged with their employers. Worksite steward structures and workplace leaders are the foundation upon which our entire union is constructed. In other words, our union is literally built from the bottom up. Call centers, rather than empowering our union's leadership base, would divest them of a key organizational role that provides them with political agency inside our union. It would turn our long-standing organizational theory on its head.

Finally, on a more practical level, we are concerned that call centers would remove needed staff support, training and other resources from members in their worksites. The Control For Just Us Plan briefly mentions this redirection of resources away from worksites and into other areas when it notes plans to "retrain and redirect local union organizing staff." (p. 12) However, the plan provides few details.

- How much would it cost for local unions to operate call centers?
- Would local unions be required to eliminate worksite-based organizers in order to fund the operation of call centers?
- How many worksite-based organizers would be "redirected" to other purposes?

Rather than empowering SEIU members to build a strong, member-led union, call centers would strip away needed support, reduce the core functions of the union to "customer-service" and undermine members' engagement and ownership of their union.

E. Consolidate Back-Office Services: The Control For Just Us Plan proposes consolidating the back-office functions of local unions such as dues processing, data storage, list management, accounting, financial reporting, management and information technology. By 2012, a new, centralized administrative-services organization would provide administrative services to a majority of SEIU members across North America. (p. 13) The plan does not indicate whether local unions' transfer of their back-office services to this centralized organization will be mandatory or voluntary.

On its face, this proposal appears innocuous and may be more cost-efficient than the current arrangement, in which each local union is responsible for its own back-office functions. However, the centralization of these services would sharply reduce the independence of local unions from their International Union. Local unions would lose some substantial measure of control over core areas of their organizational infrastructure, ranging from their finances and membership lists to their website and IT system. This proposal reflects the centralizing thrust of other initiatives contained in the Control For Just Us Plan, with obvious political implications that must be carefully considered. Furthermore, if local unions' administrative services are centralized, there is a very real chance that they could be used as a mechanism to impose political discipline on local unions that have disagreements with the International Union.

For example, in recent months International Union leaders have used UHW's membership lists to wage an aggressive campaign of misinformation via direct mail, telephone calls and emails to UHW members. If local unions' back-office services were centralized, what would prevent International Union leaders from using these services as a tool to wage campaigns against dissenting local unions? How might leaders use their access to local unions' dues-processing and financial systems? Without iron-clad checks and balances, it would be dangerous to place all financial, IT and other operations under the control of International Union leaders.

F. Organizing: Although the Control For Just Us Plan proposes a goal of increasing the union's membership by 500,000 members during the next four-year period, it offers no clear plan to accomplish this objective.

- Does the organizing plan for 2008-12 propose to follow the same organizing strategy that the International Union pursued from 2004-08, which fell far short of its goals?
- If the Control For Just Us Plan proposes a different organizing strategy different, what are the differences?
- Will the organizing plan be guided by building power for workers in core industries (healthcare, property service and public sector) where 90% in healthcare and property service and 66% of the public sector workers are without a union?;
- Will the organizing plan strategically target industry sectors that will help us to protect and advance standards for our existing membership?
- Will the push to organize 500,000 workers move us to organize what is easiest regardless of any strategy to build power and improve workers' lives, or are we prepared to dig in and do the work necessary to build strategically in the private sector and in the south and southwest?
- What will be the impact on building a national organizing program if the voice of members in democratic decision making and participation through their local union in bargaining, politics and organizing is lost in the new decision making structures proposed in the Control For Just Us Plan?

Without concrete details about strategies and plans, the numerical goals described in the Control For Just Us Plan are merely numbers on a page.

Likewise, other elements of the organizing proposals lack sufficient detail to permit a clear and honest evaluation. For example, the plan proposes "involving far more members and other activists in campaigns." While building a member organizing program is necessary for growth, there needs to be a discussion and a plan that is based on best practices that helps us develop the vast member potential that exists. This should include a nationally coordinated member-organizer recruitment and development plan, as well as member organizing programs within local unions, so member organizing meets strategic growth needs.

In order to grow strategically we need to build a movement where members are organizers of the unorganized. That will occur only when members are the critical decision makers in their union.

G. Membership Training and Leadership Development: The Control For Just Us Plan announces various goals aimed at raising "member action and participation" to "a whole new scale" in order to "unleash members' skills and talents." (p. 12) For example, the plan states that by 2012:

- "at least 10% of SEIU members should play a leadership role in the union," and
- "a majority of members should be involved in working to achieve our core goals."

While leadership development and membership training must be a primary goal of our union, it is unclear whether this proposal is a serious one. It offers no information about the strategy, funding, staffing or calendar for accomplishing its objectives. Furthermore, the campaign's goal – empowering rank-and-file leaders – is contradicted by another key element of the Control For Just Us Plan: reducing the power of rank-and-file members in key decision-making structures such as Unity Councils.

H. Politics: The Control For Just Us Plan sets out ambitious policy and electoral goals which we share, as well as quantitative objectives related to COPE, voter registration, member volunteer recruitment, infrastructure development and other political activities. Many of these objectives are sensible expansions and extensions of longstanding union programs. Other proposals sound sensible, yet lack substance and consequently are difficult to assess. For instance, it is hard to decipher what the Control For Just Us Plan means when it calls for developing a community strength program in which "members are provided training and encouragement to deepen and expand their leadership role in the community." (p. 18)

What these proposals share in common, and share with the Control For Just Us Plans' prescriptions for other areas of union work, is that they lack sufficient attention to systematic leadership development, most often accomplished within local unions, which is the key ingredient for building a successful political program.

In order to meet its lofty objectives, one might have expected the Control For Just Us Plan to advance measures that would more concretely focus the union's political work in support of organizing drives and contract campaigns; give members more structured and more meaningful input in the vast political expenditures that SEIU will be undertaking and the ambitious legislative agenda it will be pursuing; and outline a real plan to provide the issue education, skills development and ongoing communications workers need to lead these efforts, but it is silent on these matters.

In sum, beyond the bold pronouncement of "Justice for All" the main features of the Control For Just Us Plan reveal a program of "Control for Just Us", a deepening of the direction established in the International Union during recent years: increasing centralization of resources and decision-making power in the hands of International Union officials in D.C. Not only would the Control For Just Us Plan centralize more dues money, it would make key decision-making bodies less democratic and would establish call centers and centralized back-office services covering a majority of SEIU members by 2012.

Recent actions in the Healthcare Division offer insight into how the International Union's drive towards centralization is likely to evolve. At a hastily convened jurisdictional hearing in February of 2008, International Union officials unveiled a proposal to create a national committee appointed by the International President that would assume wide-ranging powers over organizing, bargaining and employer relations with all Catholic healthcare providers in North America. Under this proposal, local unions would no longer be permitted to organize Catholic workers in the name of their local union. The national committee would approve collective bargaining agreements, conduct employer relations and even transfer union members from one local union to another under certain circumstances. While the hearing officer's recommendation on this proposal has been postponed, the proposal nonetheless reveals a vision of a more centralized union held by International leaders. It offers a glimpse at how leaders would dramatically redraw the relative powers of local unions and the International Union.

III. Where would the Justice for All Plan lead our union?

In order to fully evaluate the Control For Just Us Plan and understand where it would lead our union, it is necessary to consider the plan within the larger context of SEIU's recent historical development.

During recent years, our entire union has achieved some important successes. A strong commitment of resources to organizing has allowed thousands of new members to join our union. We have also become a powerful political force and waged many successful electoral campaigns. Lastly, many corrupt and ineffective SEIU locals have been transformed. These are progressive victories worth celebrating.

However, in recent years SEIU leaders have begun pushing a strategy that fails to empower workers and instead seeks to accommodate - and in some instances, perpetuate - the entrenched interests of corporate America. The current administration's path is characterized by the following elements:

- A centralization of our union's resources and decision-making power in the hands of International Union officials in D.C.;
- A membership growth strategy that mainly relies on (1) reducing employer opposition

to organizing by putting employers' interests first and accepting long term limits on workers' voices and standards of compensation, and (2) targeting organizing resources at publicly funded services that offer less resistance to unionization but provide few solutions to our union's need to organize the private-sector companies in our industries.

- The merging of many locals into mega-locals, which has helped the current administration to assemble a bloc of loyal supporters on the International Executive Board, the union's chief decision-making body; and
- A failure to pursue strategies - such as leadership development, aggressive bargaining and member engagement in decisions like employer agreements - that systematically empower workers and provide them greater control of their union.

In sum, SEIU leaders are increasingly pursuing a top-down, employer-oriented unionism that seeks to expand the union through shortcuts and concessionary labor/business deals rather than methodically building a bottom-up union that empowers workers and enables them to win meaningful improvements in their lives.

This style of unionism is reflected in a recent article, in which President Stern contrasts his vision for American unions with that of unions in the 1930s, when workers won large improvements in their wages and working conditions and challenged the political status quo. According to Stern, "almost all labor issues in the 1930s pitted American unions against American businesses. The relationship was almost always adversarial. Today, America needs to act more as a team and create a new plan to compete in a global economy."³ Elsewhere, Stern describes his principles for "effective twenty-first century unions," including: "Employees and employers need organizations that solve problems, not create them."

This vision for twenty-first century unions ignores the underlying economic realities and power dynamics that shape our society and our workplaces. The hope that corporations will somehow be persuaded to forfeit some of their core business priorities without a fight is misguided. Worse yet, this vision will severely undermine our union's effectiveness when it's used to guide our union's strategic orientation, priorities and future development. Top-down, employer-oriented, "customer service" unionism will shrink our union's power by undermining its core strength and main basis of power - organized, engaged members who are empowered to make decisions for themselves.

This approach seeks a quick fix to the decades-long decline in union density by pursuing concessionary organizing agreements with employers. While it may produce large numbers of new members in the short term, it will ultimately undermine our strength if it locks workers into substandard contracts and constrains their ability to build effective unions to respond to workers' needs.

At the end of the day, says Dan Gallin (former General Secretary of the International Union of Foodworkers), building unions "cannot be done by smoke and mirrors and by branding exercises." They must be built "in the way genuine trade unionism is built anywhere: by education and organization from the bottom up, by organizations that are accountable to their membership."⁴

Our union stands at an important moment in its history and must carefully evaluate the direction embraced by SEIU leaders' brand of unionism. The Control For Just Us Plan would accelerate SEIU's current trajectory by allowing leaders of the International union to impose their vision with greater ease. It would do this by centralizing decision making power in the hands of International Union officials and systematically dismantling workers' shop-floor power as well as their role in inter-local coordinating structures like Unity Councils and other key decision-making bodies.

Does this style of trade unionism build real power that enables workers to produce meaningful improvements for workers and their families, for our share of the corporate interests that dominate our economy? Or does it reflect a misreading of the forces at play in our society and of the requirements for building power?

IV. What are alternative proposals? What are the key differences between these competing proposals?

In contrast to the Control For Just Us Plan, UHW has an alternative plan called "The Platform for Change" that will make SEIU stronger, more democratic and more effective at improving the lives of workers across North America. UHW's 100-plus-person Executive Board submitted a set of proposals to the 2008 SEIU Convention that are designed to protect members' rights, strengthen our International Union's democratic structure and improve workers'

³ Andy Stern, "Labor's New Deal," *The Nation*, April 7, 2008.

⁴ Dan Gallin, "Looking for the Quick Fix: Reviewing Andy Stern," 2008, p. 19. Available at http://www.globallabour.info/en/2008/04/looking_for_the_quick_fix_revi.html

ability to coordinate bargaining and organizing campaigns across local unions.

These proposals respond to the twin forces that are reshaping our International Union: (1) the centralization of power and resources in our International union, which threatens to erode individual members' rights and powers and (2) the growing need for coordination among local unions to take on the large employers that increasingly dominate our industries.

UHW's proposals, which will be presented to the Convention in the form of amendments to SEIU's constitution, would make a set of sensible reforms aimed at democratizing our union and setting it on a course to build an effective and durable workers' organization that can win the improvements desperately needed by so many workers across North America.

Rather than debating the competing proposals on their merits, International Union leaders have sought to deliberately confuse and mischaracterize the terms of the debate. International Union leaders have urged SEIU members to embrace its "Justice for All" platform because it stands in such stark contrast to a frightening alternative: a "Just Us" form of unionism that they allege is being advocated in certain corners of SEIU. This begs the question of who, exactly, is advocating a "Just Us" form of unionism? SEIU does not name anyone specifically, although it is implied that UHW is in favor of "Just Us" unionism.

These claims are entirely untrue. **UHW is the fastest growing union in SEIU.** Since 2001, UHW has organized more than 60,000 workers and has dedicated huge numbers of staff and member organizers, as well as tens of millions of dollars of UHW members' dues money, to assist organizing drives in a half dozen states across the U.S. We have also used our substantial power with key employers like Catholic Healthcare West, Tenet Healthcare, HCA and Kaiser Permanente to extend organizing rights to other states and to help raise wages and workplace standards at other SEIU locals.

"Just Us" unionism is simply a straw man designed by International Union leaders to distract attention from the real debate facing our union. SEIU leaders have sought to deliberately mischaracterize UHW's Platform for Change and accompanying Constitutional amendments in an effort to avoid having an open and honest discussion about the important challenges and opportunities facing our union.

The following table provides a side-by-side comparison of the two platforms' positions on various issues.

Justice for All vs. Platform for Change

	Justice for All Plan	Platform for Change
Develop a strategy to organize the unorganized?	Yes	Yes
Require each local union to pool its annual organizing budget with Industry Divisions	Yes	Local unions would transfer only the funds from their organizing budget that they fail to use
Direct election of SEIU's president and officers	No	Yes
Create national strike fund	No	Yes
Guarantee members' right to decide mergers on a local-by-local vote rather than a pooled voting system	No	Yes
Guarantee members' right to elect their bargaining committees	Leaves decision to local unions	Yes
Guarantee members' right to approve any agreement that affects wages and working conditions	No	Yes
Guarantee members' right to approve contract proposals	Leaves decision to local unions	Yes
Require each Industry Division to democratically establish minimum contract standards and program to win	No	Yes
Maintain Unity Councils and formalize procedures and structures to coordinate multi-local bargaining	No	Yes
Replace Unity Councils with less democratic National Bargaining Teams	Yes	No
Establish objective criteria and use independent fact finders for merger hearings	No	Yes

