

Social and Economic Justice

REPORT SUMMARY

june 2004



Service Employees International Union, CTW, CLC

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Social and Economic Justice 2004 Convention Resolution2

Summary of Social and Economic Justice Report.....4

Progress and Challenges5

Recommendations8

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE 2004 CONVENTION RESOLUTION

When it comes to SEIU and social and economic justice, we have made important progress:

- SEIU is the most successful organization in North America at uniting working women and men of all races and backgrounds to improve their living standards.
- Since the union's International Convention in 2000, SEIU members have become recognized as a major political force not just for our own self-interest but for the broad social and economic justice concerns of all working families.
- We continue to expand efforts to develop leadership teams and strategic plans in a variety of local unions with diverse memberships.
- Our International Union has the most diverse leadership team and staff of any major union.
- Our union has made progress on many of the recommendations adopted by the 2000 Convention as part of the New Strength Unity plan, including recruiting worksite leaders, member organizers, and member political organizers who reflect the diversity of the membership; producing more communications materials in the languages members speak; and providing a diverse range of cultural activities through the SEIU Greenhouse/Bread and Roses cultural program.

On the other hand, we continue to face major challenges:

- Our union still reflects the society we live in, and we continue to need progress on ensuring that our leadership reflects our membership, creating an environment that fosters inclusion and removes barriers to participation, encouraging local unions to develop their social and economic justice work, and communicating with members on social and economic justice issues.
- Our coalitions with other community groups, while stronger than ever before, are still not adequate to win on the broad range of issues that concern working people.
- Our corporate and political opponents have launched a determined attack against us and the very foundations of democracy, community, and social justice in the name of "security" or "patriotism."
- The political strength of all working people in the United States is undermined by the fact that millions have been robbed of the right to vote either because they are immigrants who face obstacles to achieving citizenship or because they have a criminal record, even if they have completed their sentences.
- Many women, people of color, and immigrants must become involved in the labor movement if we are to rebuild our strength work in the expanding nonunion service sector.

Therefore be it resolved:

The SEIU 2004 Convention adopts the recommendations contained in the report of the Social and Economic Justice Committee.

SEIU should take concrete steps toward removing organizational barriers and creating opportunities for increased involvement and sharing decision-making power within our own organization. Those steps should include ...

- Conducting a survey of SEIU members by gender, race, and other factors and maintain this data base on an ongoing basis so that we can identify needs, talents, barriers, opportunities, goals, and progress made.
- Focusing SEIU's leadership development programs to ensure diversity at all levels of the union.
- Producing periodic reports on local union efforts on diversity, equity, participation and decision-making to help share best practices and increase mutual accountability.
- Developing training and education programs that local unions can use to help individuals and the organization as a whole identify and change patterns of racism and other forms of discrimination and imbalances of power at the workplace, in society, and within our union, and to develop a broader and more inclusive pool of leadership talent.
- Encouraging and supporting several local unions in establishing social and economic justice or diversity programs that can test what works and what doesn't.
- Encouraging collaboration with community-based groups and constituency organizations engaged in education and organizing on social and economic justice issues and supporting their efforts to become self-sustaining and committed to workers' rights as a priority.

The convention also reaffirms the importance of the SEIU caucuses that improve communication, broad-en participation, and build diversity. Each caucus should be encouraged to develop specific, measurable goals and objectives that advance SEIU's goals and the New Strength Unity plan.

Uniting our strength to win big also requires building a broad social justice movement that makes union issues community issues and vice versa. Recognizing that social and economic justice issues are a key to inspiring increased political participation and to uniting working people across the lines that our opponents use to divide us, we should involve union members, retirees, and not-yet-organized workers in overarching campaigns on major issues such as health care affordability and access and immigration reform that affect us all.

In the same way, SEIU members and retirees should be encouraged to engage with local chapters of the labor movement's constituency groups to help strengthen their political and organizing agenda and involve them in work on immigration, health care, and other issues.

SUMMARY OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE REPORT

Building a stronger and more united movement that can win for working people requires SEIU to strengthen our work on issues of social and economic justice through ...

- Concrete steps toward removing organizational barriers and creating opportunities for increased involvement and sharing decision-making power within our own organization.
- Stronger ties to community issues and community organizations in a way that builds a broad social justice movement and that makes union issues community issues and vice versa.
- Greater efforts to find common ground and link the diverse concerns of SEIU members and other working people.

After delegates to the 2000 SEIU Convention adopted the New Strength Unity plan that called, among other things, for greater member and retiree involvement, more efforts to draw strength from our diversity, and closer links with community allies, President Andrew L. Stern appointed a Committee on Social and Economic Justice to advance our union's thinking and get broad membership input. The committee, consisting of 22 leaders and activists from within the union, included representation from Puerto Rico, Canada, and across the United States. The committee was asked to explore ways that social and economic justice activity gets integrated into the overall work of the union and to propose standards and accountability for structures in the union that do social and economic justice work. In addition to meetings and discussions with outside speakers, the committee took part in regional social and economic justice conferences that involved hundreds of members and local leaders. As social and economic justice issues have their own history and dynamics in Puerto Rico and Canada, this report is confined to recommendations concerning the United States and leaves it for members in those societies to address appropriate issues there.

The Committee on Social and Economic Justice reviewed progress that SEIU has made, addressed current challenges facing our union and concluded its work by presenting a set of recommendations as listed in this report summary. The committee's final report and report summary were approved by SEIU's International Executive Board. Delegates to the 2004 SEIU Convention adopted a resolution that embodies the recommendations made by the Committee on Social and Economic Justice and also adopted this report summary. Both documents reinforce SEIU's commitment to building a broad movement for social and economic justice that can rebuild communities and win for working families.

PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

When it comes to SEIU and social and economic justice, we have made important progress:

- **SEIU is the most successful organization in the United States at uniting working women and men of all races and backgrounds to improve their living standards.** Since 1996, we have helped more than 755,000 workers to join us, including workers in property services, security, nursing homes, home care, hospitals, child care, and many other public agencies and private companies. By uniting the strength of 1.8 million members, we do more than any other organization in America to help working people win higher pay, more affordable health care, respect on the job, and better staffing and other improvements that allow us to provide a service we can be proud of.
- **Our campaigns succeed when we link diverse groups and concerns to build unity on common social and economic interests.** Many of our organizing, bargaining, and political campaigns unite workers who face injustice on the basis of class, race, gender, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation, or physical disability.
- **Since the union's International Convention in 2000, SEIU members have become recognized as a major political force not just for our own self-interest but for the broad social and economic justice concerns of all working families.** We are widely recognized, for example, as having played a major role in the decision by all the major Democratic presidential candidates to commit to plans for affordable health care and in the competition among all candidates for president to propose immigration reforms. SEIU members are also a key force at the national and state levels for public services working people can count on.
- **We continue to expand efforts to develop leadership teams and strategic plans in a variety of local unions with diverse memberships.** Those efforts include the Institute for Change, leadership roundtables, collective bargaining training, organizing training at multiple levels, worksite or member leadership development, and staff trainings of many kinds. In addition, multicaucus work to develop and implement an education program that addresses immigration, race, and citizenship is a major breakthrough in how we define leadership development.
- **Our International Union has the most diverse leadership team and staff of any major union in the nation.** The International Executive Board, made up of local union leaders, is 40 percent female, nearly double the 22 percent in 1992, and the percentage of people of color on the Board is 26 percent—up from 17 percent in 1992. More than 37 percent of International vice presidents are people of color, up from 15 percent in 1992.
- **Our union has made progress on many of the recommendations adopted by the 2000 Convention as part of the New Strength Unity Plan,** including recruiting worksite leaders, member organizers, and member political organizers who reflect the diversity of the membership; producing more communications materials in the languages members speak; and providing a diverse range of cultural activities through the SEIU Greenhouse/Bread and Roses cultural program.

On the other hand, we continue to face major challenges:

- **Our union, despite the progress we've made, still reflects the society we live in.** To build real unity on our common interests, our individual and organizational practices must ensure equitable participation at all levels of activity and decision-making and must take into account real differences in power and privilege so that we do not replicate inequalities and barriers found for centuries in the larger society. Some areas where we must continue to make improvement include ...
 - ◆ Ensuring that our leadership reflects our membership.
 - ◆ Creating an environment that fosters inclusion and removes barriers to participation.
 - ◆ Encouraging local unions to develop their social and economic justice work.
 - ◆ Communicating with members on social and economic justice issues.
- **Our coalitions with other community groups, while stronger than ever before, are still not adequate to win on the broad range of issues that concern working people,** such as health care, education, housing, transportation, civil liberties, and public safety.
- **We face elected officials at the federal level and in many of the states who consistently serve corporate special interests at the expense of working people.** The wealthiest in our society have received the largest tax breaks in history—resulting in funding cuts for working family services, coupled with major increases in local and state taxes and fees.
- **Many of the attacks we face particularly hurt and further marginalize people who already face discrimination and inequity in our society**—making existing gaps in living standards and power even worse. For example, African American workers average 19 percent less income and Latinos 30 percent less than the national average. African Americans are twice as likely and Latinos three times as likely as whites to be without health coverage. On average, African Americans live nearly seven years less than whites and suffer heart disease rates that are 40 percent higher and cancer death rates 30 percent higher. People of color—African American, Latino, and Asian American—are less likely to complete high school or attend college. Native Americans suffer lower rates of employment and higher rates of poverty, infant mortality, and illness. These differences reflect the ever-increasing power imbalance that divides Americans economically, politically, and socially into haves and have nots. At the same time, globalization is being carried out in a way that drives down living standards and working conditions in all countries, including the United States, and further widens the gap in wealth and income along racial and gender lines.

- **Our corporate and political opponents have launched a determined attack against us and the very foundations of democracy, community, and social justice in the name of “security” or “patriotism.”** They continue to try to “divide and conquer” us—whether by appealing to racial and ethnic prejudices or exploiting issues related to religion, immigration, or sexual orientation. This strategy is not new—racism and other forms of discrimination and control have been key factors in maintaining power in the hands of a dominant few throughout American history and continue to be reinforced, consciously or unconsciously, in many of our society’s structures and practices. SEIU has both a need and a responsibility to play an active role in helping all working people recognize divisive strategies and find common ground.
- **Huge parts of the population have been robbed of the right to vote.** Nearly 4 million U.S. citizens are permanently barred from voting because they have criminal records, including more than 1 million who have already completed their sentences. Millions of hardworking, taxpaying immigrants cannot vote because they face obstacles to achieve citizenship. In addition, many citizens in America do not vote because of barriers that could be removed by same-day voter registration and other reforms. The prevention of voting by millions of people in the United States has a devastating effect not just on those individuals but on the political strength of all working people.
- **The labor movement continues to decline, so that nine out of 10 workers in the private sector do not have a union.** Many workers in the expanding nonunion service sector are women, people of color, and immigrants—people who must become involved in the labor movement if we are to rebuild our strength.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognizing that the social and economic environment constantly changes, the committee recommends a framework for collective analysis and actions rather than a fixed blueprint.

Building a Broad Movement for Social and Economic Justice

A. Real change depends on uniting a majority of working people in effective political action not only at the ballot box and in the halls of government but in the streets, at workplaces, and in our communities. We must build a movement that can engage in effective issue campaigns, defend and expand democratic rights, consistently win elections, and hold elected officials accountable. Increasingly, our efforts to unite more workers with us and to win better contracts and pro-worker laws depend on the political process. Funding and standards for nursing homes, hospitals, and home care; laws that affect building owners and security companies; and budgets and policies that govern the work lives of public employees—all these depend to a large extent on political action.

While working people have the numbers to be an electoral majority, too often we don't vote and don't stick together behind candidates based on common interests. In 2000, only half of low-income people were registered and only 34 percent of those voted, compared to 82 percent of people making more than \$75,000 who were registered and 75 percent who voted.

B. Social and economic justice issues are a key to inspiring the increased participation and unity we need. To help unite working people across the lines that our opponents use to divide us, we must concentrate our energies to involve union members, retirees, and not-yet-organized workers in overarching campaigns on major issues that affect us all.

In 2001, the SEIU International Executive Board adopted a Social and Economic Justice report which said that priority issues should be chosen because they ...

- Involve the core values of SEIU members.
- Are important to members and will inspire them to get actively involved.
- Are important to improving our society for all working people.
- Will help us unite more workers in our union.
- Will help strengthen alliances with other constituency groups and communities.

C. Two issues stand out as meeting those tests for this union: health care and immigration reform. We are both the largest union of health care employees and the largest union of immigrant workers. Both issues involve fundamental human rights and affect all of us—health care because we all need it for our families and because many of us are caregivers ourselves, and immigration because none of us has the bargaining and political power we need as long as some of us are denied citizenship and the right to organize and bargain collectively. Both issues provide opportunities to reach out to unorganized workers in health care, public services, and property services. Both give us the chance to build stronger partnerships with key potential allies in our society.

Our work on health care as a social and economic justice issue ought to go beyond the question of health coverage to more broadly address the need for healthy communities. Low-income communities and people of color can be drawn to campaigns that deal with the whole range of inequities that affect their health, including lack of proper health care facilities, poor housing, deliberate placement of sources of toxic pollution near their neighborhoods, and lack of public safety.

D. Progress on issues like these requires a broad-based social justice movement. We cannot survive, grow, and win unless we link “labor issues” and “community issues” and help build a movement that fights not only for union members but for the broader community.

The movement for social and economic justice has been weakened by an assault by a global economic and political elite. At a time when the gap between the rich and everyone else has expanded dramatically, it is more important than ever that we help build a united movement against runaway corporate power.

We must respect the validity of various sectors of the social justice movement, find intersections across issues and communities, globalize our common efforts, and help build a movement where all contributors share responsibility and power. In doing so, the labor movement must be respectful of community-based organizations’ make-up, origins, issues, and strategies. While in some cases there are longstanding successful relationships, in others there are barriers and tensions to overcome. With shared values and a common vision, we can pool resources, work in joint campaigns, and draw on a diverse range of home-grown tactics and strategies. We believe that health care and immigration reform, because of their overarching nature, provide a good place to start.

E. SEIU and other unions ought to help community groups build sustainable movements that do not depend on corporate or foundation funding. These groups should not be constrained by limits on political activity for groups with nonprofit tax status. This requires innovative strategies that do not, in turn, make those groups dependent on union funding.

Drawing Strength from Diversity within SEIU

As we build a broader movement for social and economic justice, we also must strengthen participation, unity, and equity within SEIU. We need to create an environment in which points of tension and disagreement can be brought out in the open so we can find common ground. We also need a sustained effort to remove barriers that prevent some members from full participation in union activities and decision-making—whether those barriers are obvious or the subtle, unintended result of organizational practices and structures. Our goal is not to put aside differences but to put them to work for us, harnessing a broader range of talents and experiences, improving our strategies and tactics for different situations, and linking issues and coalitions to make a stronger movement. Social and economic justice and diversity concerns must be treated not as their own area—separate from our organizing, political, and bargaining work—but as part of everything we do.

Concretely, that means such steps as the following:

- A. Continue to focus most of our organizing work on helping workers at the bottom of the economic scale in our core industries**—often women and people of color—to unite their strength with us, and help other unions to do the same in theirs.
- B. Increase our participation in building strong community alliances** not only so other groups will support our specific campaigns but so people in various communities will value SEIU and the labor movement as part of a broad movement for social and economic justice.
- C. Conduct a survey of SEIU members by gender, race, and other factors and maintain this data base on an ongoing basis** so that we can identify needs, talents, barriers, opportunities, goals, and progress made.

- D. Develop training and education programs** that local unions can use to help individuals and the organization as a whole identify and change patterns of racism and other forms of discrimination and imbalances of power at the workplace, in society, and within our union, and to develop a broader and more inclusive pool of leadership talent.
- E. Encourage and support several local unions in establishing social and economic justice or diversity programs that can test what works and what doesn't work.** That approach has worked in recent years in other areas such as leadership development and worksite communication—with a few locals serving as proving grounds that can inspire and inform others. Local unions would be more likely to carry out the New Strength Unity plan's recommendation to develop diversity plans if they had real-life experiences of other locals from which to learn. These pilot programs would encourage innovation among our locals in a field that has few models or precedents.
- F. Encourage collaboration with other community-based groups and constituency organizations** that engage in education and organizing on social and economic justice issues.
- G. Produce periodic reports on local union efforts on diversity, equity, participation and decision-making** to help share best practices and increase mutual accountability.

Caucuses

SEIU has a number of caucuses that provide forums for the vast and rich diversity of the union. A caucus can ...

- Provide its members with a voice within the broader union, improving two-way communication between members and leaders.
- Identify, nurture, and develop leaders.
- Serve as a bridge with groups outside the formal union structure.
- Broaden member participation and build diversity within the organization.
- Support union activities, while at the same time challenging the union to rethink its programs, policies, and practices when necessary.

SEIU Guidelines

The Committee recommends that the Guidelines for caucuses adopted by the SEIU International Executive Board in 1997 be updated, reflecting the following revisions and refinements:

A. Goals

Caucuses exist within the International Union to serve, among others, the following goals, as stated in the SEIU Guidelines (No. 1):

- promote diversity in SEIU membership;
- develop, advocate and monitor issues identified by constituents;
- serve as a resource to the International; and
- promote and advance leadership development.

Each caucus should be encouraged to develop specific, measurable goals and objectives that advance SEIU's goals and the New Strength Unity plan.

B. Caucus Formation

The Committee recommends that ...

- The Women's Caucus should be added to the list of caucuses officially recognized by the International Union for the purpose of participating in International Union activities and receipt of International resources.
- Alternative designations should be used other than "First Americans" (No. 2): "Native Americans" for the Western Region or "First Nations" or "Aboriginal Peoples" for Canada.
- There should be an organized structure for communication and coordination among the caucuses.
- There should be an inventory of how many caucuses are in operation and their type of activities.

C. Facilitating Dialogue/Communication and Reporting Procedures

- The Committee recommends that the SEJ Committee (or its successor) fulfill the role of the former Civil/Human Rights Committee as a vehicle for caucus communication with the Union leadership. Item III.B of the Guidelines should be rephrased as follows:

"Each national caucus can refer all recommendations and resolutions relating to SEIU policies to the Social and Economic Justice Committee of the International Executive Board."

- Item V-A and V-B should be amended to reflect the same type of change (i.e., SEJ Committee instead of Civil and Human Rights Committee).
- The biennial Civil and Human Rights Conference should be reinstated and renamed Social and Economic Justice Conference.
- While the Committee recognizes the right of the International Union to ensure consistency of communications, item III-D should be reworded so as not to imply undue limits are being imposed on caucus communication. (III-D)

The Committee also makes the following recommendations:

D. Funding

- The caucuses should be autonomous and self-sufficient in operations and funding.
- Caucuses should be able to apply for financial support in the form of "seed money" or reimbursement for services rendered. When possible, services that can be obtained from a caucus should be obtained in that way rather than from an outside agency. Like all union expenditures, this support should require a specific proposal and work plan and provide for financial accountability for how the money was spent.

The Committee recommends that guidelines or mechanisms be provided to establish the following practices:

- A consistent funding cycle or application/approval timelines.
- Increase minimum amounts (e.g., regional caucuses from \$2,000 to \$5,000; national caucuses \$5,000 to \$7,000) that caucuses are assured of receiving (which would not preclude the caucus from receiving additional "in-kind" support from the International).
- Accountability or reporting procedures for money received.
- Project-specific funding.

E. Leadership Development

Leadership development is essential to achieving SEIU's New Strength Unity goals and to further diversifying the make-up of our leadership and involvement of all members.

Leadership development is primarily the responsibility of the union itself, beginning with the local unions. Caucuses should assist those efforts by helping to identify needs and talents; potential participants, resource people, facilitators and mentors; and specific education models that have a strong tradition in these communities and constituency groups.

A precise targeted program should be developed to increase diversity in leadership development program content and participation, with a timetable, strategy, and dedicated resources. Opportunities to participate need to be broadened and increased, not just in terms of who attends, but also in terms of who plans, designs, helps implement, and evaluates these programs. Better and wider distribution of information about these programs is needed. Greater participation will mean greater diversity in educational content, issues that are explored, and approach to developing leaders to ensure respect for different cultures and life situations.

Constituency Groups

Within the larger labor movement, SEIU has historically supported and many SEIU members, retirees, and local unions participate in organizations that function in many ways like SEIU caucuses. They are known collectively as "AFL-CIO Constituency Groups." AFL-CIO Constituency Groups are the focus point for inter-union solidarity. They are the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA), A. Phillip Randolph Institute (APRI), Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU), Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA), and Pride at Work (PAW).

SEIU members' experiences with these groups vary greatly from group to group and among local chapters. Some committee members felt strongly that their local chapter was strong, vital, and viable—others felt just as strongly the opposite way. Some groups are older and better established—while others are newer and are still "under construction." Each constituency group has its own history and political context.

The Committee recommends that SEIU members and retirees be encouraged to engage with local constituency group chapters to help strengthen their political and organizing agenda and to involve them in work on immigration, health care, and other priority issues.

SEIU's Social and Economic Justice Committee

The Social and Economic Justice Committee of the International Executive Board should be charged with developing, coordinating, and advising the IEB and the officers regarding the social and economic justice agenda of the union.

The Committee recommends that it be made clear that the SEJ Committee and the SEJ Conferences fulfill the role of the former Civil/Human Rights Committee and Conferences.



Service Employees International Union, CTW, CLC