

Growing Pains: SEIU Campaigns Against Other Unions

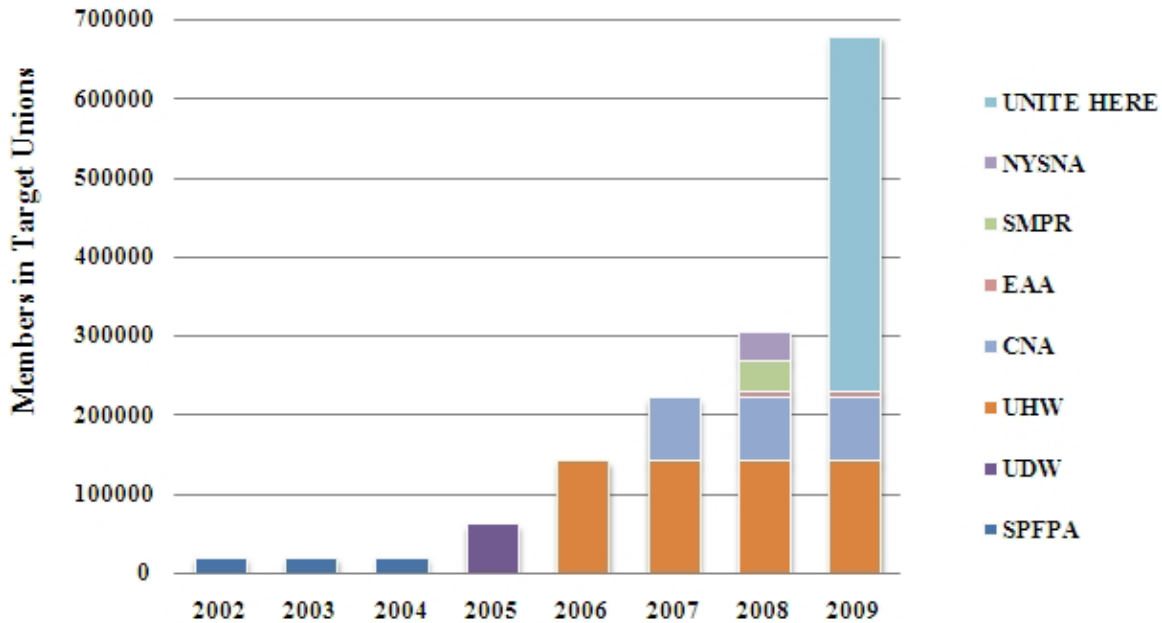
In his February 20, 2009 column about the current struggle within UNITE HERE, NY Daily News writer Juan Gonzalez highlighted SEIU’s active role in the dispute. “SEIU is fast becoming the Roman Empire of the labor movement,” Gonzalez said. “Stern is forever on the prowl for new workers to absorb into his empire and he doesn't much care how he does it.”¹

Stern’s current attempt to absorb UNITE HERE’s 450,000 members while ignoring UNITE HERE’s constitutional process is unprecedented in its audacity and scope. However, actively campaigning against fellow members of the labor movement is not new to SEIU, and the tactics they are employing against UNITE HERE follow a now-familiar pattern.

But this latest attack on a sister union is unique: it is the biggest conquest Stern has pursued to date.

Timeline of Takeover

Under the direction of Andy Stern, SEIU has found itself in an increasing number of inter-union battles involving a growing number of union members. While the following timeline is not exhaustive, it demonstrates SEIU’s growing tendency to initiate these internecine fights.



Recent Campaigns

Target Union	Involved Workers	Program Elements
UNITE HERE 2009	Hospitality, Food Service, Gaming, Laundry, Textile 450,000 members ²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEIU propagates that the “solution” to UNITE HERE’s internal disputes is to merge part or all into SEIU.³ • Raynor group seeking to illegally merge affiliates into SEIU.⁴ • Andy Stern’s friend, Steve Rosenthal, runs the campaign⁵ against those not aligned with Raynor, including union-busting website, mailers attacking leaders.⁶ • Robo-calls and Peter Hart poll to members asking about problems with the union, desire to lower dues, etc.⁷ • SEIU dispatches staff to pressure hotel workers.⁸ Direct Organizing Group assists in attempted Toronto raid.⁹
United Healthcare West (UHW) 2006-2009	Healthcare workers 140,000 members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempt to reorganize CA long term care jurisdiction to strip UHW of a large part of its membership, break up local. • Removal of leadership from key posts and altering of bargaining structures.¹⁰ • Accuse UHW of disloyalty, colluding with rival unions & not doing enough to support organizing.¹¹ • Accuse UHW of anti-democratic measures as well as financial and legal misconduct, then send mailers to UHW membership and SEIU staff detailing accusations.¹² • Trusteeship.
California Nurses Association (CNA) 2007 - 2009	RNs 80,000 members ¹³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEIU campaigns to get CNA nurses to decertify union.¹⁴ • SEIU staff, members disrupt Labor Notes conference in MI where CNA president was speaking.¹⁵ • Calls, visits to CNA members criticizing union leadership.¹⁶ • “RNs for Change” campaign focused on electing pro-SEIU directors to run for CNA executive board.¹⁷
Engineers and Architects Association (EAA) 2008-2009	Engineers and Architects 8,000 members ¹⁸	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2008 SEIU filed a petition to decertify the EAA as bargaining representative of approximately 8,000 L.A. city employees.¹⁹ • EAA has complained of robo-calls, home visits, and mailings to its members.²⁰ • SEIU has launched a website critical of the EAA, unitedforla.org.²¹
Federacion Maestros de Puerto Rico (FMPR) 2008	Teachers 40,000 members ²²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking advantage of a government decertification of the teachers union, SEIU filed to represent the FMPR teachers in early 2008.²³ • News reports allege that SEIU officials met with the Governor of Puerto Rico to talk about filing to represent the teachers and possible financial backing of the Governor, charges SEIU denies.²⁴ • When teachers protested at SEIU’s annual convention, SEIU reportedly called in the police who allegedly beat some of the protesters.²⁵
New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) 2008 ²⁶	RNs 36,000 members ²⁷	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decertification efforts during contract bargaining.²⁸ • Leaflets and petitions at worksites.²⁹ • Website www.nurseunity.org directs to SEIU 1199 page attacking NYSNA.
United Domestic Workers	Home Care Workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AFSCME sought to trustee financially-troubled local, UDW.³¹

(UDW) 2005	60,000 members ³⁰	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEIU tried to cut a deal with soon-to-be-ousted local leaders to disaffiliate and join SEIU just weeks before trusteeship. A federal judge blocked the attempted affiliation with SEIU.³² • SEIU sent mailings to workers, brought in organizers to visit workers to block contracts, decertify units.³³ • The AFL-CIO ruled that SEIU had violated the AFL-CIO constitution by soliciting members in the UDW.³⁴ • AFSCME and SEIU agreed to put workers in disputed counties in local to be run by Tyrone Freeman of SEIU.³⁵
Security Police Fire Professionals of America (SPFPA) 2002-2004	Security Officers 18,000 members ³⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEIU tried to limit geography, industries in which SPFPA could organize and represent security officers.³⁷ • www.exspfpa.com website critiqued union, encouraged members to decertify, deauthorize SPFPA and instead choose SEIU or its front organization, NUSP.³⁸ • SEIU, Prewitt Organizing Fund set up front union, the National Union of Security Professionals (NUSP).³⁹ • NUSP sought to decert SPFPA at multiple sites.⁴⁰ The SPFPA claimed that its members had received phone calls and unwelcome home visits, anti-union videos and propaganda.⁴¹

The Hostile Takeover Playbook

Initial Offer

SEIU campaigns often start with the carrot before progressing to the stick. Union leaders and members are promised improvements to member representation, union growth, and political and legislative power as benefits of a merger. Some examples:

- In 2003, SEIU Local 1 President and International Vice President Tom Balanoff sent a letter to the Security, Police and Fire Professionals of America (SPFPA) along with other security officer unions announcing the idea of a federation of security unions. The SPFPA reportedly met with SEIU representatives multiple times and came to a “no raid” or jurisdictional agreement. But SEIU allegedly presented the SPFPA with a written agreement that looked very different and subsequently launched a campaign in which SEIU and the Prewitt Organization targeted SPFPA members with phone calls, unwelcome home visits, anti-union videos and propaganda.⁴²
- In February 2009, SEIU President Andy Stern invited all of UNITE HERE to join SEIU as a quasi-independent, self-governing affiliate. He argued that there was great potential for growth for UNITE HERE industries in such a structure because of the overlap in ownership between our respective major employers. Stern has since thrown his support to the breakaway faction led by Bruce Raynor, openly calling for the breakup of the union and offering critical assistance to Raynor in his efforts to divide UNITE HERE.⁴³

When the carrot did not yield the desired outcome, SEIU has not hesitated to resort to the stick – an aggressive campaign to pressure the targeted union into agreement.

Emerging Patterns: SEIU Tactics

While SEIU’s campaigns against other unions have varied in context and scope, there are a variety of tactics that appear to be used regularly.

	UNITE HERE	UHW	FMPR	NYSNA	CNA	EAA	UDW	SPFPA
Front Group	Y ⁴⁴				Y ⁴⁵			Y ⁴⁶
Robocalls or live calls to members	Y ⁴⁷	Y ⁴⁸			Y ⁴⁹	Y ⁵⁰		Y ⁵¹
Agitational Mailings to members	Y ⁵²	Y ⁵³			Y ⁵⁴	Y	Y ⁵⁵	Y ⁵⁶
House visits					Y ⁵⁷	Y ⁵⁸	Y ⁵⁹	Y ⁶⁰
Worksite visits	Y ⁶¹			Y ⁶²	Y			Y
Attack Website	Y ⁶³	Y ⁶⁴		Y ⁶⁵	Y ⁶⁶	Y ⁶⁷		Y ⁶⁸
Leader Smear Campaign	Y ⁶⁹	Y			Y ⁷⁰			Y ⁷¹
Decertification	Y ⁷²		Y ⁷³	Y ⁷⁴	Y	Y ⁷⁵	Y ⁷⁶	Y ⁷⁷
Interference in union democracy	Y ⁷⁸	Y	Y ⁷⁹		Y ⁸⁰		Y ⁸¹	
Union-busting consultant	Y				Y ⁸²	Y		Y ⁸³

Front Group:

- **“National Union of Security Professionals”** – In order to raid security unions like the Security, Police and Fire Professionals of America (SPFPA), SEIU worked with the Prewitt Organizing Fund to set up the National Union of Security Professionals (NUSP)⁸⁴, a fake security union. NUSP proceeded to try to decertify several SPFPA-represented worksites.⁸⁵
- **“RNs for Change”** – For its CNA takeover bid, SEIU has reportedly brought staff from around the country to impersonate RNs for phone banking. Under the "RNs for Change" banner, SEIU has sent multiple smear mail pieces, e-mail alerts, and robo-calls soliciting recruits.⁸⁶

Calls to members:

- **United Healthcare Workers-West** – UHW accused SEIU of hiring McGuire Research Services to conduct a telephone survey of UHW members. The calls allegedly asked union members if they feel they get their “money’s worth” from paying dues, if there are particular conflicts they have heard of, and if they agree with statements about UHW providing misleading information to members and not focusing on negotiating contracts.⁸⁷

- **UNITE HERE** – In February 2009, UNITE HERE members began receiving both robo-calls and live calls trolling for UNITE HERE member complaints and shifting member opinion through “push-polls.” One call, for example, noted UNITE leaders’ desire to join SEIU, asking members to “choose the two best reasons for joining SEIU?” (including SEIU’s “strong ethical standards”).⁸⁸

Mailings to members:

- **UNITE HERE** – In late January 2009, UNITE HERE members began receiving general mailers regarding the economic situation and supporting President Obama that sought to collect contact information from members. These were followed up in late February with much more negative mailers attacking UNITE HERE leaders⁸⁹ and a local union.⁹⁰
- **California Nurses Association** – Similarly, CNA reported that in 2008, its members began receiving high-road mailers from “RNs for Change”, an SEIU front group, regarding healthcare reform. The mailings reportedly changed to attacking CNA and CNA leaders.⁹¹

Member visits:

- **United Domestic Workers** – When SEIU sought to decertify the United Domestic Workers in several California counties, it brought in organizers from around the country to wage a door-to-door sign-up campaign. A UDW attorney alleged that SEIU solicitors misrepresented themselves as UDW agents and distributed literature that gave the false impression that the UDW was working with the SEIU to encourage the membership switch.⁹²
- **UNITE HERE** – SEIU staff has begun going into UNITE HERE hotels and asking UNITE HERE members to join with SEIU.

Attack Website:

- **Exspfpa.com** – Launched in 2002, exspfpa.com was purportedly a product of the “Association of Former Members of SPFPA,”⁹³ although at least two of the “former members” quoted on the website were actually staff of SEIU Local 1.⁹⁴ The site critiqued the SPFPA, alleged connections to organized crime, and provided information to SPFPA members on how to decertify or deauthorize their union, recommending the SEIU or its front union, the NUSP.
- **Seiufactchecker.com** – For the duration of the conflict leading up to UHW’s trusteeship proceedings, SEIU maintained a website critical of UHW.⁹⁵
- **Fixourunion.org** – Stern’s longtime friend, Steve Rosenthal has developed an attack site aimed at the former HERE portion of UNITE HERE. Its allegations of purported corruption outdo the basest attacks generated by the most vicious anti-union employers.

Leader Smear Campaign:

- **California Nurses Association** – In 2008, SEIU sought to attack the reputation of California Nurses Association President Rose Ann DeMoro by sending staffers and members to take over the Labor Notes conference where she was speaking. While SEIU has disputed allegations of violence at the

conference, AFL-CIO president John Sweeney said that “There is no justification, none, for the violent attack orchestrated by SEIU.”⁹⁶

- **UNITE HERE** – In February 2009, Andy Stern’s friend Steve Rosenthal launched a smear campaign including a union-busting website, fixourunion.org, aimed at smearing UNITE HERE leaders,⁹⁷ critiquing dues increases, alleging resistance to the Employee Free Choice Act,⁹⁸ and alleging that leaders from the former HERE were squandering members resources.

Decertification:

- **United Domestic Workers** – After AFSCME’s United Domestic Workers local was trusted in 2005, SEIU sought to decertify it in fourteen California counties where it was negotiating contracts.⁹⁹ The AFL-CIO ruled that SEIU violated the AFL-CIO constitution by soliciting UDW members.¹⁰⁰
- **FMPR** – In 2008 SEIU ran in an election to represent Puerto Rico’s teachers after the existing teachers union – the FMPR – was decertified by the Puerto Rican government. The FMPR organized a “vote no” campaign and, faced with choosing between SEIU’s affiliate and no union teachers decisively voted against SEIU.¹⁰¹

Interference in union democracy:

- **California Nurses Association** – Recently, SEIU has run an aggressive campaign under the banner “RNs for Change” to unseat CNA leadership, recruiting pro-SEIU CNA members to run in internal CNA elections. “We have absolutely been talking to them about their internal process and urging people to run for the board,” an SEIU spokesperson admitted to the SF Bay Guardian.¹⁰²
- **UNITE HERE** – In advance of UNITE HERE’s June 2009 convention, SEIU has supported a breakaway faction led by Bruce Raynor and has openly called for a breakup of the union and the merger of all or part of UNITE HERE into SEIU.¹⁰³

Union-busting Consultant:

- **Prewitt Organizing Fund/ Direct Organizing Group** – SEIU has used Duane Stillwell’s Prewitt Organizing Fund and its affiliate, the Direct Organizing Group, to assist on multiple union-takeover campaigns, including SEIU’s campaigns against the SPFPA,¹⁰⁴ the Engineers and Architects Association,¹⁰⁵ and the California Nurses Association.¹⁰⁶ Direct Organizing Group staff played a role in staffing a failed January 2009 decertification attempt of UNITE HERE in Toronto.¹⁰⁷
- **Steve Rosenthal/ The Organizing Group** – A longtime friend of Andy Stern’s,¹⁰⁸ former AFL-CIO political director and America Coming Together founder and CEO Steve Rosenthal has played a central role in the fight to break up UNITE HERE, setting up the campaign’s attack website fixourunion.org¹⁰⁹ and otherwise advising Bruce Raynor.¹¹⁰

Moving Forward

In all of the efforts outlined in this report, SEIU has sought to expand its potential membership regardless of cost to allies or respect for basic union democracy. There are signs that the union's thirst for new jurisdictions is far from quenched. A 2008 senior staff retreat in St. Louis included a presentation about declining teachers' union density and charter school opportunities. In an EFCA-related exercise at the retreat, teams were assigned to brainstorm new jurisdictions SEIU might enter.¹¹

It is unconscionable that, while there remain millions of unorganized workers in SEIU's own core jurisdictions such as healthcare, Andy Stern chooses to wage destructive, resource-intensive battles within the labor movement. UNITE HERE is his most recent and by far his largest union target. The majority of UNITE HERE is also committed to preserving and exercising its democratic, constitutional process free of outside interference.

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