

Letters on the trade unions in the US

1 August 2005

The following is a selection of letters received by the World Socialist Web Site on the American trade unions.

On “The split in the AFL-CIO and the organization of the unorganized”

You made an excellent critique of the AFL-CIO split. I will use it as I debate with other workers and honest union staffers I have contact with.

The only thing I might add as a further indictment of Stern and SEIU is that I believe a good portion of their 900,000 membership growth in the last decade was not even from signing sweetheart contracts—that, at least it could be argued, was a product of organizing that brought new workers into the “house of labor.” Rather, a good portion of “growth” came from mergers, that is gobbling up other AFL-affiliated, unions, such as 1199, and formerly independent public employees associations.

JA

28 July 2005

On “A falling out within the US labor bureaucracy: Service workers, Teamsters split from AFL-CIO”

I wish the following wasn’t so right on the money but it is! The split has the character of a falling out within the union bureaucracy over the allocation of dwindling financial resources. The steady and protracted decline in membership has emerged as a threat to the bloated salaries and privileges of the bureaucrats themselves.

KS

Duluth, Minnesota

26 July 2005

On “An exchange with an Ohio auto worker”

You’re so right. Everybody has been busying themselves with declaring the death of socialism, but there’s no way you can kill an ideal or whatever you want to call it, and as you said, it’s just like the thirties. We’ll have to start all over again, and it can only be done by the people.

LPS

19 July 2005

Did the letter from Brother LS hit home! We are subjected to the same kind of class collaboration and betrayals with SEIU bureaucrats. Our grievances are regularly undermined, often before we’ve assembled all the evidence to present against contract violations. We are told that the union only wants “mass grievances.” Whatever happened to “a strike against one is a strike against all”? Now that we’ve got a mass grievance going, we are being told that the provisions of the contract really don’t protect workers against our bid and seniority rights being violated. Management’s goal is to be able to move us around like pawns regardless of bid and seniority rights—as they move toward the privatization of public transit. The contract is a pro-boss piece of betrayal with language so vague that it suits the boss and the bureaucracy because they interpret it all in favor of upper management, and we workers are left out to twist slowly in the wind. Not to mention that the chief steward gave away our cost-of-living increase years ago while upper management gets a 10 percent raise a year. The results of these betrayals are for co-workers to be either very angry or to become passive. But don’t let the passivity fool you—there is a yearning to get what is rightfully ours. Not seeing a mass movement on the horizon is very demoralizing for many who would like to act but don’t know how.

GC

19 July 2005

Thanks for your reply. We are currently under attack for filing too many grievances. The company calls it “operation crackdown.” They can crack all they want. Our general mood right now is “bring it on baby. I was looking for a job when I found this one.” Eventually, they will cross the point of no return, or they will install a revolving door for convenience. I may just stick it out so I am present when the doors are permanently closed. The butt-kissers and the backstabbers will be job hunting like the rest of us, and the company people will

move on to other plants to destroy. I was a UAW member 17 years prior to coming here, and I don't wear my shirts and hats with pride any more. Maybe the old days will come back, where you took pride in your work, stood behind your brothers and sisters, and stood united on issues. The saying now is UAW stands for "usually aren't working." If staying here 20 more years, or job hunting becomes a choice ... I'll opt for the latter.

LS

Greenville, Ohio

On "The split in the AFL-CIO"

As a man who spent 20 years as a steward and officer of the American Federation of Government Employees, I agree with your analysis of the AFL-CIO. The main purpose of that organization is to provide career vehicles for the union cadre. The rank and file are secondary. I also agree that the interest of people of the United States is not served by the two-party system. A labor party is a good idea, if done right.

AH

Aurora, Illinois

13 July 2005



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