



San Francisco's Alternative Online Daily January 13, 2009

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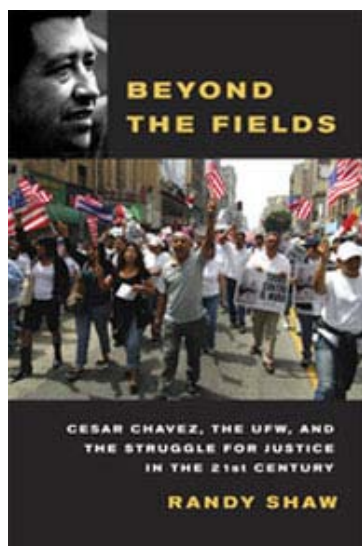
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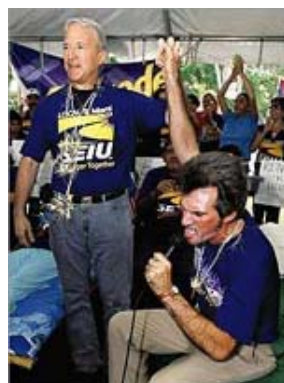
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SEIU President Andy Stern

SEIU Launches National Campaign for "Change That Works"

by Randy Shaw, Jan. 08, 2009

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The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) announced at a press conference yesterday that it is launching a 35-state grassroots campaign to implement President-elect Obama's agenda on health care, economic stimulus, aid to working families and the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA). SEIU has already set aside \$10 million for the effort, and 100 senior staff will in the field implementing the program next week. The union has set up a "Change That Works" war room in its DC headquarters, and has already hosted house parties on health care across the country. Replying to a question from the *Washington Post* over whether the union's [internal struggle](#) with SEIU-UHW would interfere with its ambitious national campaign, SEIU President Andy Stern responded that it would not, as "differences of opinion are common in any healthy democratic organization."

After spending \$85 million in the November elections, SEIU is now launching a multi-million dollar effort to both implement Barack Obama's agenda and hold politicians accountable for their promises to working people. The ambitious plan could ultimately see as much as 30% of the union's total resources go toward implementing progressive change, creating an election-type mobilization environment around a national legislative program.

Hosted by SEIU President Andy Stern and its Secretary –Treasurer, Anna Burger, the January 7 media event also featured Elena Delgado, one of 5300 Houston janitors whose successful unionization drive with SEIU has raised their wages from \$5.15 to \$7.25 per hour and who now has access to health care and a medical clinic. Delgado highlighted the importance of health care to her fellow janitors, previewing the type of "common person" testimony that insurance companies used to defeat the Clinton health care bill in 1993 but which progressives are now using to pass the Obama measure.

Stern was adamant that passing EFCA would be a priority for President Obama, and noted that corporate America was currently hunkered down at a resort planning its opposition strategy. He refuted suggestions that Obama and Congress's eagerness to pass a pay equity bill---overruling the Supreme Court's terrible Ledbetter decision---meant that work on EFCA would be delayed.

Stern also refuted a suggestion by a Washington Post reporter that the international union's battle with California's United Healthcare Workers local would interfere with the national campaign. Stern noted that the union's campaign involving 100,000 SEIU member around the November election had not been slowed by the dispute, and that the

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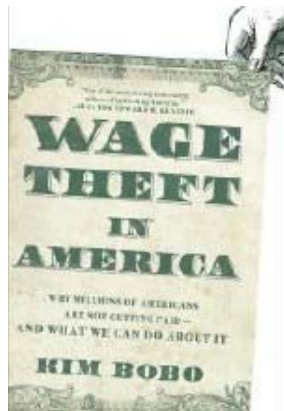
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same would be true in this case.

The query from a Washington Post reporter about the SEIU-UHW conflict comes on the heels of concerns raised about the dispute made by New York Times labor reporter Steven Greenhouse on KQED's Forum on January 5. This means that the California-based conflict could soon go national and become fodder for EFCA and health care opponents, though, as Stern pointed out, said opponents bash unions and progressives regardless of any connection to reality.

Randy Shaw is the Editor of Beyond Chron and the author of the newly-released [Beyond the Fields: Cesar Chavez, the UFW and the Struggle for Justice in the 21st Century](#) (University of California Press)

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