

SEIU Using Intimidation To Expand Membership Rolls

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Union membership has declined steadily for decades, but don't think unions are going away. The Service Employees International Union, for one, is trying to reverse the trend by waging an aggressive war against business.

While SEIU's expansion to more than 1.8 million members from 625,000 in 1980 is largely due to the shift from manufacturing to services, SEIU now seems to depend more on corporate intimidation rather than recruiting.

When Advocate Health Care refused to give SEIU access to its 24,000 employees, two busloads of protesters from SEIU-affiliated activist group demonstrated at the suburban Chicago home of Advocate's executive director in the summer of 2003. The demonstration wasn't about pay or labor conditions, but unrelated allegations of price gouging and predatory collection practices, according to the magazine Health Leaders.

"SEIU began what Advocate and other health care observers are describing as an aggressive corporate campaign to malign the 10-hospital system's reputation until it cried uncle and gave unfettered access to employees, their home phone numbers and addresses," Health Leaders reported.

Commenting on SEIU's motives in the January issue of Chicago Hospital News, labor attorney K. Bruce Stickler suggested that by organizing Advocate's employees, the union would gain annual dues of more than \$10 million. SEIU has succeeded in similar campaigns against Kaiser Permanente, Catholic Health Care West, and Tenet Healthcare.

In its campaign to unionize the security firm Wackenhut, SEIU used an April report by the National Research Council calling for a security assessment of nuclear power plants to attack Wackenhut's reputation by releasing an alarming report, "Homeland Insecurity: How the Wackenhut Corporation is Compromising America's Nuclear Security." Despite this, Wackenhut became the first contract security service approved by the Department of Homeland Security.

SEIU even attacked Wackenhut indirectly through one of its federal contracting partners, Alutiiq Security & Technology, a native Alaskan-owned corporation. Though Alutiiq doesn't control Wackenhut's labor policies, SEIU lashed out at Alutiiq based on its special federal contracting status as a native-owned business.

Attacking Alutiiq is simply a pressure tactic against its real target, Wackenhut, but SEIU doesn't mind the victims it leaves in its wake, including the indigenous people of Alaska, who benefit from dividends, cultural programs, and scholarship funds that depend on profits from businesses like Alutiiq's.

The biggest prize for SEIU is Wal-Mart's 1.4 million employees. SEIU President Andrew Stern leads a nonprofit organization called Five Stones, whose self-described mission is to raise awareness about the "Wal-Marting" of the economy.

Teaming with other left-wing activist groups, Five Stones launched a campaign called Wal-Mart Watch to force the company to capitulate to the unions, which, by the way, are routinely rejected by company employees whenever organizing is voted on.

The SEIU even attacked the Congressional Black Caucus for its working relationship with Wal-Mart, the largest employer of African-Americans. SEIU chastised the CBC for giving Wal-Mart "an opportunity to fashion a false image as a friend of African Americans and of working people generally." SEIU supports an aggressive expansion of the AFL-CIO's "capital strategies" program to harness union financial power to become Wall Street's largest voting bloc. But while the AFLCIO's goal is only directed at "worker friendly economic and business development," SEIU's Mr. Stern wants to focus the program on increasing shop organization. "Look at [real estate investment trusts] and find a way [to bring pension fund pressure] to organize markets, construction sites, office buildings, and hotels," Stern said.

SEIU seems bent on unionizing workers whether they want or need it, and, apparently, will say and do almost anything to make that happen, regardless of who gets hurt.