

Has the Change Led to Wins?

Not yet, but organizers from the seven unions that split from the AFL-CIO have big plans

BY DAVID MOBERG

WHEN A BLOC OF unions broke away from the AFL-CIO two years ago to form the Change to Win labor federation, their leaders appeared to have lit a fuse on a bomb—but nobody knew what kind. Would the already weak labor movement blow up amidst debilitating fragmentation and squabbles? Or would the explosion unleash a new organizing fervor?

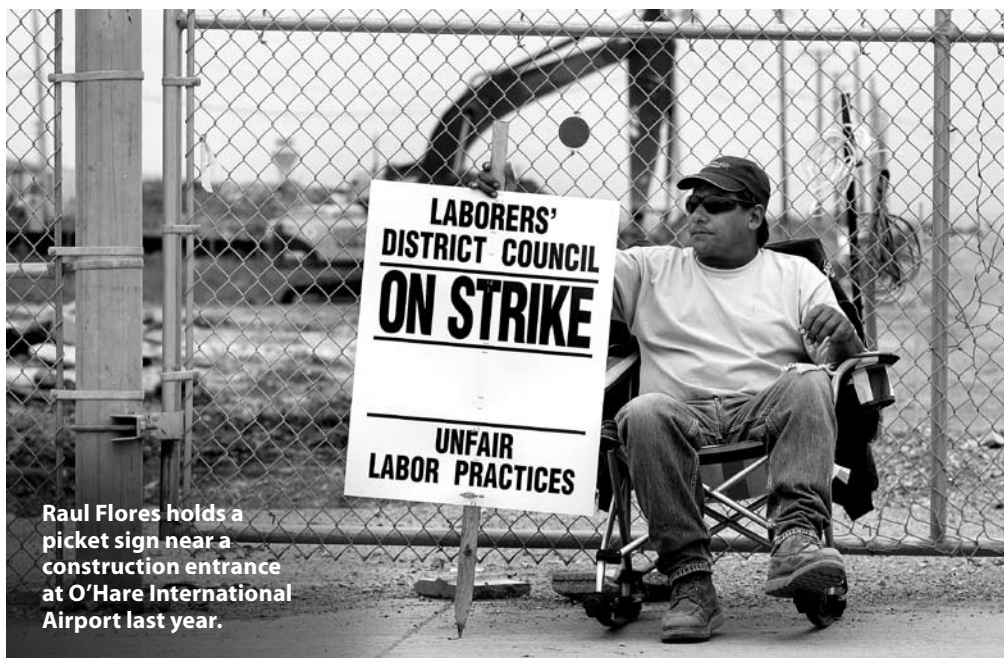
Two years later, the fuse is still burning. But two things are clear. Despite lingering rivalry, the two federations and their affiliated unions are working together surprisingly well, most obviously on politics. Divisions—old and new, between and within the two federations—flourish, as they did before the split. But at the local level, they want to work together.

And despite Change to Win's argument that it split from the AFL-CIO to organize on a vast new scale, the labor movement has continued to organize at the same rate, with the same unions showing the greatest success.

From 2004 to 2006, net membership increased slightly for the 10 million-member AFL-CIO unions and declined slightly for the six million-member Change to Win unions, which includes the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and UNITE HERE! (hotel, apparel and service sector workers), the only two affiliates to grow, as well as the Teamsters, United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), Laborers, Carpenters, and United Farm Workers.

Some of the Change to Win unions like the Teamsters, Laborers, and UFCW, which had not been organizing effectively, say they have made ambitious alterations in how they operate. And last year within the AFL-CIO, six unions announced they were increasing their annual organizing budgets by a total of \$150 million.

Those changes could pay off if the po-



Raul Flores holds a picket sign near a construction entrance at O'Hare International Airport last year.

litical and legal environments shift. A new pro-labor Democratic president and Congress would likely enact the Employee Free Choice Act, making it easier to form unions when a majority of workers sign union membership cards.

Ironically, when they split, Change to Win leaders criticized the AFL-CIO for spending too much on politics. Both sides now agree that unions must use political clout to help organizing efforts.

"I can't argue with the numbers," says Joe Hansen, president of UFCW. "If I didn't think we'd significantly changed UFCW, I'd say that we'd made a mistake. But we have [changed], and a lot of that is due to Change to Win. We haven't had immediate success and I can't say how fast that will come." But Hansen hopes UFCW, which currently has around 1.3 million members, will organize 2 million more workers in the next decade, starting with organizing drives at regional super-

market chains and in packinghouses.

Change to Win still sees explosive growth on labor's horizon. At the federation's second convention, held in Chicago in late September, SEIU President Andy Stern reminded delegates that the labor movement grew by 1 million members a year for five years after Congress passed the National Labor Relations Act in 1935, tripling the share of the workforce in unions. "We're at the beginning of another historic moment," he told delegates. "We have changed our unions. If we pass the Employee Free Choice Act, these unions will grow by 1.5 million members a year, not just for five years but for 10 to 15 straight years."

Yet, so far, recruitment results have not been dramatic.

"Did the split cause changes?" asks Cornell University labor studies Professor Kate Bronfenbrenner. "I think Change to Win has been good for the Teamsters, UFCW and Laborers' International Union

of North America. Has it been good for the labor movement as a whole? No. It hasn't hurt the labor movement, but it hasn't been good. Without a common vision, you're not going to change. When the CIO formed, it stood for something. It was a movement. This isn't a movement."

But Change to Win does have a strategy, and it partly reflects their argument during the split that unions should concentrate on large-scale organizing of their core industries. "We said there are these 50 million workers...[in] jobs that are overwhelmingly low paid, and only six million of the 50 million are organized," says Tom Woodruff, the SEIU vice-president who directs the Strategic Organizing Center, which helps unions develop better organizing strategies and coordinates a few of its own organizing efforts. "The obvious purpose to organize is to create a chance for the new American Dream, a middle-class life. Manufacturing and auto used to be the worst jobs, and workers organized and made them the best."

To work, this strategy requires intense research and more organizers, but also greater use of political clout, pension fund power, global labor cooperation and public campaigns against corporate employers.

SEIU and UNITE HERE! have long used such strategic, comprehensive approaches, as have AFL-CIO unions like the Communications Workers.

Today, all seven Change to Win unions have annual growth plans in their key industries and, as a group, they review each union's progress more rigorously than they did when they were a part of the AFL-CIO. "All of the unions have better staff, research departments, much more sophistication in developed campaigns designed to win," says Woodruff.

The seven union presidents and three other Change to Win officials are part of a leadership group, chaired by Anna Burger of SEIU, that meets monthly. Change to Win itself is small—only about 35 employees—and three-fourths of its \$16 million budget goes to the Strategic Organizing Center. In addition, some of the affiliated unions loan staff for long-term work with Change to Win. Rather than operating as a traditional, centralized organization, Change to Win sees itself as a coalition that puts decision-making in the hands of affiliate leaders and leaves much work, like policy research and lobbying, to individual unions.

WHEN CHANGE TO Win split off, local unions and leaders of citywide and state labor federations made it clear they wanted to continue to cooperate. The two federations agreed that Change to Win's local unions could obtain "solidarity charters" with the AFL-CIO local structures. And unions from both federations agreed to

part of Change to Win. Neither President Doug McCarron nor any detectable carpenter delegation attended the convention, and rumors persist that the union will soon leave the new group.

CHANGE TO Win's future hinges on its ability to undertake broad organizing campaigns. So far, the

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work together on elections, referenda and other political work. The AFL-CIO, however, rejected a Change to Win proposal to create an overarching body to coordinate this cooperation.

Change to Win unions may have agreed on overall strategy, but differences between member unions still exist.

On immigration reform, SEIU, UNITE HERE! and the United Farm Workers supported the Kennedy-McCain bill, while other Change to Win unions—like the AFL-CIO—opposed it because of its guest worker provisions. UNITE HERE! President Bruce Raynor says his group supported the bill because it included key reforms, not because the group supported the guest worker plan. Many of the unions are now energetically working together on immigrant workers' rights.

And in February, after SEIU's Stern met with Wal-Mart CEO Lee Scott to promote a health care coalition, UFCW's Hansen was so upset that he wrote Stern that such developing conflicts were "a threat to the existence of Change to Win." Wal-Mart has been the UFCW's chief nemesis. Hansen said that Stern's meeting "severely damages the campaign" the union was waging against Wal-Mart. The dispute contributed to the cancellation of a Change to Win project to cooperate on policy issues, such as trade and health care, according to one insider.

The disputes have hurt, says Hansen, but, he adds, "right now, Change to Win is stronger than a year or two ago." However, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, who left the AFL-CIO long before the 2005 break-up, may not remain a meaningful

group has promoted campaigns that originated before Change to Win existed, but that kind of delay is not surprising since such campaigns typically require several years to succeed.

For example, the Teamsters, taking advantage of global union groundwork by SEIU, have organized several thousand school bus drivers. UNITE HERE!, implementing a strategy developed over many years but also aided by other unions, in the past two years has organized 6,686 hotel workers and has won employer neutrality for organizing drives at new hotels in six big cities.

Change to Win organizers, working with Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE), have helped the Teamsters' campaign organize 60,000 truck drivers at the nation's ports. Classified as independent contractors who can not legally form a union, even though they usually work for only one firm, the workers earn meager wages and pollute the environment as they inefficiently idle long hours with their ill-maintained trucks. Organizers have broadened the campaign to include community residents and environmentalists in pushing for reform of port operations. In Los Angeles-Long Beach, they are close to persuading the port commissions to change employment arrangements so they can unionize, as they have long been ready to do.

This fall, Change to Win is launching two new campaigns. UNITE HERE! and UFCW will begin organizing the nation's 440,000 drug store workers, only 8 percent of whom are unionized. The drug store campaign started with a shareholder initiative organized by Change

to Win that forced the CVS pharmacy chain to pay \$3 billion more than it initially offered to buy Caremark, a mail-order pharmaceutical firm, and forced one public director to resign. “CVS is a large anti-union employer and one of the least unionized of drugs companies,” Raynor says. “The message is clear: Unions have the ability to influence things near and dear to these giant corporations. It makes labor a factor in their decisions.”

Having greatly expanded their research and organizing staff and drawn on Change to Win resources, the Laborers are also starting a drive to organize more than 50,000 residential construction workers in the Phoenix, Las Vegas and the “Inland Empire” region near Los Angeles. “We could not have tackled this without the presence of Change to Win,” says Laborers President Terry O’Sullivan. The union has also boosted organizing funds and reorganized internally. “We’re not where we want to be or need to be,” O’Sullivan says, “but we’re moving in the right direction.”

CHANGE TO WIN has so far mainly affected how the national union leaders and staff organize their work, not the work of local unions and their leaders, many of whom remain skeptical.

“I’m not a big fan of splitting the labor movement,” one official of a Change to Win affiliate said. “I’m not quite sure what’s been offered beyond the rhetoric.” And a close observer of UFCW’s long-running campaign at the Smithfield pork processing plant in North Carolina argues that state AFL-CIO organizations have mobi-

The debate about whether the Change to Win unions could have accomplished many of its goals while staying in the AFL-CIO is now moot. The split has occurred and the two camps will not reunite soon. The important thing for labor is that unions develop more ambitious, comprehensive organizing campaigns with vigor-

The increasingly centralized decision-making of Change to Win’s leadership caused one delegate to grumble that it was beginning to act like the All China Federation of Trade Unions.

lized more useful support for those workers than Change to Win or its affiliates.

Lower-level leaders and members have also criticized the increasingly centralized decision-making of Change to Win and those member unions undergoing transformation. After Change to Win leaders told the convention that the Leadership Council had a month earlier revised the constitution to eliminate the required rotation of leaders and then re-elected the entire Leadership Council, one delegate grumbled that the organization was beginning to act like the All China Federation of Trade Unions.

ous worker participation at all stages. Also, whatever their federation, unions need to cooperate as much as possible on both organizing and political action.

In the future, after President John Sweeney retires at the AFL-CIO, the labor movement may come together again, but if organizing finally does surge, the reunified labor movement may look much different. “Some day I really believe there will be one labor federation again,” says Hansen, “but it won’t be what the AFL-CIO is now or what Change to Win is now.”

Labor supporters hope it will be much bigger and much stronger. ■



Teamsters rally for improved worker benefits at the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach on April 27, 2006 in Los Angeles, Calif.

DAVID MCNEW/GETTY IMAGES



JACOB WHEELER

Birthday photos of Antonia Cubillas' children suggest better days, before the desperate Guatemalan woman sold five of her 10 children into adoption.

Banana Republic to Baby Republic

Guatemala could shut down its massive adoption industry

BY JACOB WHEELER

ON ANY GIVEN DAY in Antigua, a touristy colonial town in Guatemala, as many as a dozen American couples can be seen lounging with their soon-to-be-adopted Mayan children in the Parque Central or dining nearby in posh restaurants.

The couples enjoy the leisurely Latin American lifestyle—constant spring-like temperatures, drooping bougainvillea plumage and stunning views of Volcán de Agua to the south. But lately, fear has set in among the Guatemalan adoption industry. The Guatemalan government is threatening to wrestle control of adoption away from the private sector and either slow it to a crawl or shut it down completely.

Last year, at fancy Antigua hotels or in the lobby of the Marriott in Guatemala City's upscale Zona 9, Guatemalan foster mothers or adoption attorneys passed many of the 4,135 babies adopted

from this country into the eager arms of teary-eyed couples from *El Norte*. In other words, one percent of all babies born in Guatemala in 2006 ended up in American cribs.

Guatemala is the only Latin American country that doesn't exercise stringent state control over international adoptions. Adoptions there fall under the notary system, which means they are essentially privatized and run by attorneys who, critics claim, traffic in impoverished, malnourished and sometimes stolen babies.

Adoptive parents can spend approximately \$25,000 to \$30,000 to adopt from Guatemala, and most of them leave days or weeks later with their little ones cradled in their arms, and with no questions asked as to how the attorneys acquired their babies.

But this trade in babies could soon be shut down. Led by outgoing First Lady Wendy Berger, an American-educated aristocrat, many in the Guatemalan gov-

ernment view the current adoption system as a baby-selling industry, in which unscrupulous lawyers recruit, coerce and bribe desperate women into giving up their infants. These lawyers often make tens of thousands of dollars "selling" them to American couples.

Berger's concern is shared by UNICEF, which believes that abandoned or orphaned children should remain in their villages with extended family members or be adopted by other Guatemalans. UNICEF views international adoption as an unfavorable last choice.

"Our focus is on the best interests of the child," says Dora Giusti, a UNICEF assistant program specialist previously based in Guatemala. "Only as a last resort do we look to international adoption if there's no other alternative. We think international adoption is a good option ... if it's well regulated."

As the most open and vocal critic of international adoption from Guatemala,