

April 17, 2008

Marchel Smiley, President
SEIU National AFRAM Caucus
1673 Columbia Road NM #100
Washington, DC 20009

RE: SEIU Exploits African American Women and Children at Labor Notes Conference

Dear President Smiley:

In Dearborn, Michigan on Saturday, April 12, 2008, SEIU staffers invited African American SEIU members, mostly women and children to a "rally." However, it was not a rally. It was a dinner, featuring the executive director of the C.N.A. as a guest speaker.

These SEIU members and their children were led into the hotel where violence erupted at the initiation of SEIU staff. Why were these women and children put in harms way? Why weren't they told the truth about their presence at this conference? Why were there only African Americans and their children invited, with the exception of the SEIU staffers? Why would SEIU create an environment of hostility rather than encourage and participate in the debate over differences.

We do not condone actions of the CNA raiding of Unions; nor do we condone raiding from any organization! We certainly do not and will not condone using children in violent, ill advised protests for any cause.


As African Americans, we are offended by any organization that would expose children to violence! The actions exhibited by SEIU staff at the Labor Notes Conference sent a terrible message to the labor movement and the community at large. Violence in attacking freedom of speech must be strongly condemned. Any attempt to deny the right of free speech threatens the foundation of our movement and the future of all working people.


There was one fatality that evening, Mr. David Smith, an African American Homecare Worker and member of SEIU Healthcare Michigan collapsed and died-obituary attached.


We hold SEIU Leadership, executive vice president, Mary Kay Henry accountable! The SEIU press release quoted Mary Kay as saying, "Tonight, SEIU members stood up for the future of the labor movement and called on the California Nurses Association to stop fighting with other unions and start helping us build a stronger labor movement to help all workers reclaim the American Dream." Another SEIU leader, Thomas V. De Bruin, President, SEIU Healthcare Pennsylvania, is quoted in an email he sent on April 13, 2008 as saying, "An important victory for our Union and the labor movement." This is not responsible leadership! This was an abuse of power!


President Smiley, as National AFRAM President of SEIU, we request you to publicly denounce these deplorable actions from the leadership of SEIU at the Labor Notes Conference.

Sincerely,


Sonia Askew, Vice President
AFRAM Western Region


Jesse Smith, President
SEIU UHW AFRAM


Angela Glasper, Treasurer
AFRAM Western Region


Lover Joyce, Vice President
SEIU UHW Executive Board

David Smith Obituary

In memory... <http://www.seihealthcaremi.org/Default.aspx?p=in_memory>

David Smith was part of the 40,000 home care workers who joined SEIU in 2005.

He immediately took an interest in the Union and in the contract campaign we launched after the organizing drive ended. Initially however, David was unsure of how to get involved because he was illiterate and couldn't read the newsletters and other union information mailed to his house.

One of the first times we had the pleasure to meet him, he had come into our office. We had recently mailed out a survey to all of our home care members asking them to identify the issues that were most important to them (wages, healthcare, providing the best care for their clients).

David couldn't read the survey well enough to respond but wanted his voice to be heard none the less. So he brought the survey into the office with him and asked one of our organizers to read it to him so he could respond.

Soon after, David was one of the first students to enroll in the education and training center that we had just launched. He was determined to not only learn to read, but to earn his GED.

Around the same time, David became a Member Organizer working in the office part time. He helped greet visitors and made the office welcome for members who were coming in. Soon enough, we saw him in the office early for his shifts with the New York Times spread out in front of him.

No matter if it was a geometry home work or an essay project for class, David gave it his all. His progress as a student was amazing and inspirational.

David continued on as a Member Organizer and earned a reputation as a legend on the phones and the doors. It was amazing to watch him make turnout calls or talk to workers in their homes, galvanizing them to become involved in their union. That's how engaging he was, how passionate he was about his union and how powerful he was as a human being.

Before long, David had created a huge network of home care providers in Detroit. The member picnic he hosted at his house last summer was a truly remarkable event.

David never let anything get in his way of his advocacy for workers rights, his strong belief in improving our communities or his sense of humor that could brighten even the darkest days.

David passed away doing what he loved, being involved in our continued struggle for improving the lives of workers and their families, during a rally for to give healthcare workers the right organize in Ohio.

He has set the example for dedication, conviction and the indomitable spirit to leave this world a better place than we found it.

He will always truly be with us in heart, mind and spirit.

In the days ahead, we'll be discussing ways to honor his life and his dedication to his fellow workers. If you have thoughts on how we can honor him, please feel free to post it here.

In Solidarity Forever,

SEIU Healthcare Michigan