

## Is the Service Employees International Union Right for UW Faculty?

Even those who believe that unionization of the 6,000 diverse members of the University of Washington faculty is appropriate at this point in time should consider whether the Service Employees International Union is the right labor organization to represent us and negotiate on our behalf.

An email from a leader of the UW chapter of the American Association of University Professors titled “Why SEIU?” makes it clear that the choice is controversial even among supporters of unionization, and that SEIU was the only labor organization willing to fund and staff the UW unionization campaign, making it the only pragmatic choice.<sup>1</sup>

### SEIU’s scale

SEIU is a major North American labor union. In 2014, SEIU membership was roughly 1.9 million and revenue was roughly \$310 million.<sup>2</sup>

### SEIU’s focus

SEIU describes its membership as working in Healthcare (“caregivers in hospitals, health centers, nursing homes, in-home care and in our communities”), Property Services (“janitors, security officers, maintenance and custodial workers, stadium and arena workers, window cleaners, and other workers who provide important services”), and Public Services (“local and state government workers, public school employees, bus drivers, and child care providers”).<sup>3</sup> SEIU’s experience representing higher education is limited (and its experience representing tenure-track faculty at research-intensive universities of UW’s stature is non-existent).<sup>4</sup>

### SEIU Local 925

The 6,000 members of the UW faculty would be represented by SEIU Local 925. According to its website, Local 925 represents nearly 20,000 workers<sup>5</sup> including 7,000 classified staff at UW, the UW Medical Center, and Harborview Medical Center,<sup>6</sup> 12,000 family child care providers,<sup>7</sup> and smaller numbers of workers in public schools, local governments, and non profits.<sup>8</sup> Local 925 has no experience representing higher education faculty. (AAUP and

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<sup>1</sup> Email from Amy Hagopian to the UW AAUP listserv:

[http://www.uwexcellence.org/uploads/6/2/7/4/62746481/amy\\_hagopian\\_email.pdf](http://www.uwexcellence.org/uploads/6/2/7/4/62746481/amy_hagopian_email.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Service\\_Employees\\_International\\_Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Service_Employees_International_Union)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.seiu.org/cards/these-fast-facts-will-tell-you-how-were-organized/what-type-of-work-do-seiu-members-do/p1>

<sup>4</sup> Additional information appears in an email from Sarah Culpepper Stroup to the UW AAUP listserv:

[http://www.uwexcellence.org/uploads/6/2/7/4/62746481/stroup\\_re\\_seiu.pdf](http://www.uwexcellence.org/uploads/6/2/7/4/62746481/stroup_re_seiu.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.seiu925.org/files/2014/02/2014\\_SEIU-LOCAL-925\\_LegAgenda\\_English.pdf](http://www.seiu925.org/files/2014/02/2014_SEIU-LOCAL-925_LegAgenda_English.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.seiu925.org/category/worksite/university-of-washington/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.seiu925.org/category/early-learning/>

<sup>8</sup> According to its most recent LM-2 filing with the US Department of Labor (<http://www.optouttoday.com/sites/default/files/SEIU%20925%202014%20LM-2.pdf>) Local 925 has only 14,405 members, vs. the “nearly 20,000 workers” claimed on its website

AFT have experience representing higher education faculty – although not tenure-track faculty at research-intensive universities of UW’s stature. AAUP and AFT declined to fund and staff the UW unionization campaign.)

## SEIU’s Use of Member Dues

The transparency of SEIU has been the subject of attention nationally<sup>9</sup> and locally. Under the Landrum-Griffin Act, detailed financial disclosure is required. According to its 2014 LM-2 filings,<sup>10</sup> SEIU 925 in that year collected \$8.1 million in dues and fees from its members. Of this, \$1.85 million (23%) went to support SEIU’s headquarters in Washington DC; \$1.25 million (15%) was spent locally on political candidates and causes (incidentally, in October 2015 the Office of the Washington State Attorney General filed a complaint in Superior Court alleging campaign finance violations by SEIU 925 and its associated PAC<sup>11</sup>; in February 2016 a fine was imposed<sup>12</sup>); \$0.3 million (4%) was paid to private attorneys; and \$0.3 million (4%) was paid to union-affiliated non-profits in Washington. Despite having between \$3 million and \$4 million in cash on hand throughout the year, SEIU 925 increased the maximum dues amount it could charge each member.

## SEIU’s Pressure Tactics

SEIU’s organized use of aggressive public and private pressure tactics is documented in its 84-page *Contract Campaign Manual*,<sup>13</sup> made public via disclosure in a lawsuit against the union in 2011. A relatively mild example can be seen below: four display ads adjacent to an article in the online *Seattle Times* on October 6, 2015, linked to website with the headline “It’s time for UW Medicine to put patients first.”<sup>14</sup>



<sup>9</sup> <http://uniontransparency.com/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.optouttoday.com/sites/default/files/SEIU%20925%202014%20LM-2.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.atg.wa.gov/news/news-releases/ag-files-campaign-finance-complaint-against-seiu-925>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.atg.wa.gov/news/news-releases/seiu-925-pay-nearly-32000-after-ag-lawsuit-over-campaign-finance-reporting>

<sup>13</sup> <http://ia700403.us.archive.org/27/items/gov.uscourts.vaed.264094/gov.uscourts.vaed.264094.1.8.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <https://fixuwmedicine.wordpress.com/>

## **The Bottom Line**

We hold no animus toward organized labor or toward SEIU. Realistically, though, does SEIU have the experience or the temperament to represent UW's 6,000 faculty members? Even those who believe that unionization of the 6,000 diverse members of the University of Washington faculty is appropriate at this point in time should consider whether SEIU 925 is the right labor organization to represent us and negotiate on our behalf.