

How and Why SEIU Lost 2,300 Members at the University of Massachusetts

by Ferd Wulkan

Introduction

This is a case history of why and how 2,300 SEIU members who work for the University of Massachusetts left SEIU in 2005, at virtually the same time that SEIU was leaving the AFL-CIO. These two departures are not causally linked, but are not unrelated either. The strangest part of the saga is that SEIU preferred that these workers leave SEIU rather than have them be part of a progressive and democratic SEIU local. The story is being written and shared in such detail in the hope that it – together with hoped-for commentary from others -- can be used to better understand SEIU's direction and actions on both the local and the national level.

I was actively involved in some of the history I write about, and played a key role at certain times, but this is not meant to be autobiographical. I refer to my own involvement only in so far as it is directly relevant to the story. This has been written very close – both temporally and emotionally -- to the events it describes; a better history would no doubt benefit from greater distance.

2,600 UMass members on 4 campuses, in 10 bargaining units, had until 2003 been represented by 4 different SEIU locals. Following a reorganization of SEIU locals in Massachusetts (described below), all these bargaining units were represented by the newly created SEIU Local 888¹.

UMASS Bargaining Units in SEIU Local 888

Location	# of Members (approximately)	Type of Membership	Previous SEIU Local (before 888)
Amherst and Boston	1,500	Professionals	509
Amherst	40	Blue Collar Supervisors	509
Boston	350	Clerical/technical/Blue Collar	285
Boston	50	Survey Research*	285
Boston	15	Survey Research Supervisors*	285
Dartmouth	100	Blue Collar	5000 (NAGE)
Lowell	300	Professionals	254
Lowell	50	Clerical	254
Lowell	110	Grant Funded	509
Lowell	100	Blue Collar	5000 (NAGE)

* no 1st contract yet

¹ For a chart showing the composition of Local 888, see Appendix 1

SEIU's 2003 Reorganization in Massachusetts

SEIU's Massachusetts reorganization, not unlike others under SEIU's New Strength Unity Plan (NSUP), aimed to group workers with similar interests (same employer or same industry) in the same locals. The NSUP, not seen as terribly controversial at the time, was adopted by delegates to SEIU's 2000 convention. While some aspects of the plan continued to be widely supported, others proved very contentious. These included the combining and elimination of locals, the increasingly frequent use of international trusteeships of locals, and heavy-handed interference in the functioning of previously-autonomous locals.

SEIU had, in the past, been known for local autonomy – positive from the perspective of democratic unionism and member control, negative in that there was often no coordination of locals' organizing and political programs. [This was particularly true in Massachusetts where SEIU's state body was non-functional and different locals endorsed opposing gubernatorial candidates.]

In Massachusetts, some sort of reorganization made sense. Four different locals represented state workers, and in some municipalities up to four different SEIU locals represented people who worked for the same town. The proposed reorganization in Massachusetts, announced in March 2003 after fairly perfunctory jurisdictional hearings, eliminated a number of small locals, and focused the larger ones in certain designated sectors. To many, it appeared as a "made in DC" decision, with some minimal input from leaders of the affected locals. So for example, Local 509, which had included the largest of the UMass units, would now solely focus on human services (both public and private); Local 2020 (a merger of Locals 285 and 767) would represent exclusively health care workers. What was common to other reorganizations was the reduction in the number of locals; what seemed peculiar was that it involved the creation of a brand new public sector local – SEIU 888, even though there were already two locals (509 and 5000) which represented large numbers of public sector workers.

The plan was announced in March 2003 with a mail ballot scheduled to go out in June. All Massachusetts SEIU members would vote, and all the votes would be tallied together, not unit by unit or local by local. Even members who would not be directly affected would vote on the plan. Most people saw it as a done deal, knowing that the International would (and did) apply tremendous pressure on local leaders to advocate for ratification. Large sums of money were spent on a slick centralized organizing campaign, which included automated home phone calls as well as glossy mailings. Some locals educated their members; some did not.

The largest of the UMass units represented 1,500 professional workers on the two largest (Amherst and Boston) campuses. This was not just the largest unit; it was also the one with the most involved membership, the best and most innovative contract, and very high standards of democracy and member control. This unit, as well as two much smaller ones, were part of the 10,000 member SEIU 509, one of the most active, democratic, and progressive locals in the Massachusetts labor movement.

This unit, together with all others at UMass, were slated to go into the newly created SEIU Local 888. While new and unknown, two discouraging things were known about

this local. The bulk of its members would be in over 200 mostly very small municipal units, and the appointed Interim President was Susana Segat, a long-time SEIU functionary with few admirers. Most recently, Segat had been Deputy Trustee of SEIU Local 254, a large, conservative local that had for decades been run as a fiefdom by two generations of Eddie Sullivan (father and son). Local 254 would no longer exist after the reorganization, and Local 888 was built upon its infrastructure – offices, some staff, benefits, and Trustee/interim President.

UMass Members' Reaction to the Reorganization

Leaders in many of the UMass units were very concerned about the proposed reorganization. They worried about not having a community of interest with municipal workers.² They worried that their long-time trusted staff might not get hired. They worried about the viability of a local with so many small units. They worried about Segat, whose reputation ranged from ineffectively bureaucratic to actively anti-democratic. But most of all, they were concerned about whether they would be able to continue the democratic structures and traditions they were used to from Locals 509 and 285.

They, together with representatives from a few other non-UMass groups going into Local 888, formed an informal group with the unfortunate name of “The Posse” to strategize and organize their activities. In early May 2003 the Posse drafted a proposed “Bridge to the New Local” (Appendix 2) which received no positive response from SEIU officials.

The professional unit Chapter Executive Boards on both the Amherst and Boston campuses, representing a majority of the UMass members, decided to withhold an endorsement of the reorganization until they could get satisfactory answers to their concerns.

Prior to the vote on the reorganization, a number of meetings were held between UMass activists and Segat; they also spoke with Anna Burger, SEIU’s Secretary-Treasurer, and currently chair of the “Change to Win” federation. The officials were reassuring in general terms, but unwilling to put anything in writing, and unwilling to guarantee any specifics. The concrete issue which ultimately became the key to an endorsement was the process by which Local 888’s constitution would be written, and specifically whether units would be allowed to select their delegates to a drafting group. On the eve of the vote (May 27, 2003), two officers of the large professional unit -- Kathy Rhines (Vice President of the UMA chapter) and Tom Goodkind (Grievance Secretary of the UMB chapter) -- met with Segat and Treasurer-designee Gail Nicholson. Segat said that she was “*absolutely committed*” to soliciting and respecting unit leadership recommendations of who would serve on a committee to guide the constitutional process (in units where established elected leadership bodies existed). While not in writing and still somewhat vague, this was the bare minimum needed for the Boston Executive Board and half the Amherst Board to recommend an affirmative vote on the reorganization plan.

² SEIU argued that since many municipal workers worked in elementary and secondary education, there was a commonality with UMass workers.

Segat and Burger were clearly angry, as evidenced by comments they made in various settings, that members were raising questions, and they did not see their activism and democratic spirit as strengths to be nurtured and appreciated. Segat and Burger believed at the time, and to this day still hold the opinion, that the UMass workers were being encouraged and pushed to raise questions and take an oppositional stance by the President of Local 509. They could not comprehend the idea that rank and file activists, many of whom had decades of experience in the labor movement and other social movements, would on their own fight to maintain democratic practices in the new local they were being moved into.

I had helped organize the UMass units into Local 509, and had been the Local 509 field representative for the Amherst and Boston units for 13 years. I was respected and trusted by the members, and was invited to one of the pivotal “Posse” meetings in May 2003. By that point, I had been approached by Segat and had agreed to work for the new local as the Higher Education Coordinator. I, like many others, was wary of her, but excited about the potential power that could be mobilized by uniting all the UMass units from the various locals. I supported the reorganization, and urged members to support it as well. I was still employed by Local 509 but tried repeatedly to contact Segat to discuss ways that my presence at the Posse meeting could be used to build bridges, build support for the reorganization, and satisfy the members’ demands. She returned none of my phone calls – a pattern that was to become all too familiar in the months ahead; this was not merely a missed opportunity – it was a sign of things to come, and resulted in my being branded as “*siding too much with the members*,” as Segat was soon to accuse me. To the extent that the questioning members were guilty in the eyes of Segat and Burger, I was guilty by association. It seemed at this and several future points that they could not envision members acting on their own and not led or manipulated by staff.

Early Signs of Trouble

The new local was officially constituted in August 2003. Very soon, there were disturbing incidents that increased the suspicions and discomfort of the UMass members. Among others:

- ? I was grilled about who in the UMass leadership had supported the reorganization and who had not.
- ? I was explicitly told by Segat that the job of the union is to provide good services but that members should not be concerned about how they get them.
- ? Simon Keochakian, another Local 509 Field Rep for UMass and former UMA chapter President, who had been hired at Local 888, was told he had in fact never been hired³.

³ As a result, Keochakian sued the local for breach of contract. There was a last minute settlement on the eve of the case going to trial.

- ? Fall regional meetings, the promised first steps toward drafting a constitution, were not held.
- ? Various proposals and suggestions for how to bring the UMass members together were ignored. I was not allowed to do many of the functions of my position – such as set foot on campuses other than Amherst. These prohibitions undermined the very rationale for the reorganization. The whole point was to unite the various units in the same local so their work could be coordinated.
- ? UMass members and staff were not encouraged or invited to help in organizing a residual unit at UMass. A potentially winning campaign was sacrificed rather than encourage contact between the new members and the dissidents.
- ? The Local shunned the statewide coalition of public higher education unions (Higher Ed Unions United) that had been coordinating the campaign to secure legislative funding for the previously negotiated 2001-04 contracts. This was the single most critical issue facing the UMass unions, and success depended on unity among all the unions, not just the ones in SEIU.
- ? Segat was unresponsive to invitations and questions from the UMass units despite the fact that UMass members constituted 20% of the local, and the professional unit was by far the largest unit in the local. The one and only time she (and other Local staff) attended a membership meeting at UMass Amherst, they abruptly walked out when 100 members grilled her mercilessly about the various broken promises and the treatment the chapter was experiencing from the new local.

It was becoming clear to more and more members on all the campuses that the promises implicit in New Strength Unity were being undermined by the Local's appointed leadership.

The crisis came to a head in January 2004 when rank and file leaders called a meeting of representatives from all the UMass units. The goals of the meeting were to coordinate bargaining and the contract funding campaign, and more generally to increase collaboration and use the power and economies of scale implicit in the New Strength Unity Plan. Staff had numerous times suggested bringing the UMass leaders together, but Segat had refused to allow staff to organize such a meeting. When members took it upon themselves to do so, I was severely reprimanded. I had been spending much of my energy trying to steer a course that was not insubordinate to either my boss or to the members I served. After a mere six months, I concluded there was no way to do both, and I resigned.

My resignation in February 2004 was seen as the final straw by many members and sparked a storm of protest. With only a modest organizing effort, 1,000 people on 3 campuses (including 600 at UMass Amherst) signed a statement entitled *Broken Promises: A Declaration of "No Confidence"* (see Appendix 3). It specifically declared No Confidence in Segat's "*willingness or ability to unite the membership around a set of core principles that all can support, in a manner that honors all*

members' rights to meaningful participation, in order to create the kind of democratic SEIU union local that our members expect and deserve."

The letter was sent to officials of the International and there was never any direct response. The indirect response, however, was that soon thereafter Susana Segat was appointed to SEIU's national Executive Board. While the members had no confidence in her, apparently others did.

After my resignation⁴, Local 888 sent a squadron of organizers onto the Amherst campus with instructions to avoid the leaders, talk with members, ascertain their feelings, and identify a cadre of people who could be cultivated to work with Segat. They found that the "average members" supported their leaders and former staff, and were not ready to forgive or forget. When the Local hired a new UMass rep, his first order was not to have any contact with his predecessor. He quickly grasped the situation and became an ally of the members until Segat accused him of being a bad union rep and suspended him for 90 days in July 2005.

My resignation was the first, but hardly the last, among staff who saw the promise of a vibrant, powerful, and democratic local undermined by Segat and her misguided priorities. Among the people who left because of conflicts with Segat and/or displeasure with how the Local was functioning were my successor as Higher Education coordinator, the Policy and Research Director, Segat's executive assistant/staff director, and at least two field reps⁵. The fact that only one of them had secured another job before leaving illustrates the severity of the situation. The fact that several of these people were in leadership positions and spoke with people in the International about what was happening also proved significant.

A Dissident Movement Coalesces

A more promising consequence of my resignation and the organizing that went into the No Confidence petition was the coalescing of a small group called the Friends which initiated the Local 888 Members' Democracy Campaign. The original purpose of the group was to democratize Local 888. The initial goals, besides improving the situation at UMass, were to do outreach to the rest of the Local, to coordinate efforts to write a democratic constitution, and – when elections were finally held – to vote in a democratically-minded leadership.⁶

A treasury, database, and website (www.888democracy.org) were set up. The group was very conscious that being based primarily at UMass was a weakness, and made it a priority to make contact with leaders of other sectors of the local. This

⁴ Segat too was apparently obsessed with my resignation. Almost a year later, she took two full afternoons out of a presumably busy schedule to attend hearings in a futile effort to deny me unemployment benefits.

⁵ As this paper was finalized, the Local's attorney and organizing director also resigned.

⁶ A progressive victory in 888 would have had larger ramifications. Control of SEIU's Massachusetts State Council (with its money and political clout) had long rested with the conservative locals – formerly NAGE and 254, now NAGE and 888. Locals 285 (later Local 2020) and 509, and later 615, were constantly frustrated and would have welcomed a change in Local 888's leadership.

was done primarily through cold phone calls, and had mixed success. The group quickly learned that many units and leaders had major problems in the new local – mostly issues of servicing and finances. There was lots of residual anger from both the content and process of the reorganization. Even though people’s experiences and issues were different from those at UMass, it seemed like fertile ground on which to organize. The requisite organizing, however, did not happen. The main reasons for this were that

- ? calling people cold was very daunting, so there were too few people – all very busy – doing the calls
- ? successful calls required in-person follow-up and this was very labor-intensive
- ? there was insufficient money for a paid organizer
- ? there were other pressing priorities – organizing the base at UMass, the day-to-day battles with the employer, and engaging in the constitution process.

The group also began to reach out beyond Local 888 and put their situation in context. A meeting was held with leaders of Local 36 in Philadelphia, who had successfully beaten an International-imposed trustee (also a Burger loyalist) in a recent election. Contact was made with the Association for Union Democracy. On-line discussions began with others involved in or following what was happening in SEIU. The group began to understand that what it was dealing with was unique in some ways but had a national context.

The Absent Constitution

Local 888 being a new local, there was no constitution and there were no elected officers. Appointed Interim President Segat had total power in the local. Under the Landrum Griffin Act, the law governing union democracy, a new local had 3 years from its inception before it had to have elected officers⁷. Segat has taken full advantage of this weak law.

Creating a democratic constitution was always seen as key to democratizing the local. The Friends had extensive discussion among themselves and with others about what were the key elements of a democratic constitution – what would maximize the chances that large numbers of members would be involved in all aspects of union activity and decision-making. While the group was split about whether term limits for officers was a good idea, there was consensus on the following points:

- ? A powerful elected executive board
- ? Chapters and councils with their own elected leaders and power to set local policy
- ? No limits on numbers of stewards
- ? A strong member bill of rights
- ? Union staff not eligible to vote or hold office

⁷ Unlike a trusteeship which must be ended, and new elections held, within 18 months.

The Local made several false starts toward writing a constitution, but after over two years there was still not even a draft.

In the earliest quasi-negotiations between UMass leaders and SEIU, a key point was who would draft the Constitution. In Spring 2003, prior to the reorganization vote, SEIU International Vice President Burger and Segat assured rank and file members that the Union has a commitment to an open, participatory process leading to the adoption of a democratic Local constitution and bylaws. Segat said that she was “*absolutely committed*” to respecting unit leadership recommendations of who would serve on a committee to guide the constitutional process.

As early as September 2003, Segat announced to 888 staff that the process for developing a Constitution and Bylaws for Local 888 would begin at regional meetings that November. These did not take place, and in January 2004, Segat surprised the first meeting of the Local 888 Higher Education Council by saying that there already existed a Temporary Constitution, and that the Local’s goal was to hold elections before the International Convention in July. The document mandated that there be a permanent Constitution in place by June 30. It was sent to a very few people who demanded it shortly afterwards, but it was never publicized or distributed.

In February 2004, a group of about 30 members, selected in secret by Segat, were asked to attend a retreat in Braintree, but not told the purpose of the retreat. It was in fact to begin discussing principles, structure, and governance for the Local. The dissident UMass leaders, having been excluded, found out about it at the last minute, and were furious. Their fury increased when they found out that two UMass leaders (from the Boston clerical unit and the Lowell professionals) had been selected to represent the entire group – in direct contradiction of the promise that had been made by Segat and Burger before the reorganization vote. A number of them took time off from work, crashed the meeting and were allowed to participate. Their participation was useful in that they brought with them some thought-out points of consensus from the Friends. But they also alienated some people with their complaints about process and exclusion. The discussions were promising, and the group met again in May and reached consensus on some important points. The announced plan was for a subgroup to then draft language over the summer, for regional meetings to be held in the fall, and for a constitution to be adopted by membership vote soon thereafter. None of this happened, but it was later discovered that the temporary constitution, which had been amended 12/15/03, was amended again, removing language mandating a permanent constitution by any specified time. That was the last anyone heard of a constitution for a very long time.

The person brought in to facilitate the initial phase of the short-lived constitutional process was a well-respected labor educator, Hal Stack. He offered to mediate the dispute between Segat and the UMass units. The Friends discussed at great length whether to accept. They had little optimism that it would prove successful – the political gulf was too wide – but they didn’t want to be the ones to reject the overture, and they did truly believe that improved relations were in the best interests of the members. Efforts to arrange a facilitated conversation went on for a long time, but ultimately it became clear that Segat was not interested. It never took place, and Stack disappeared from the constitutional process as well.

The Changing Options

Three things converged to make the UMass activists reorient their focus away from reforming Local 888 and toward leaving it. A constitution and elections seemed ever-more distant. Building a local-wide democracy campaign seemed too overwhelming. And pressure from the members to get out of 888, always present, was growing and was harder to ignore.

By this time, the core group – helped by Segat’s impossible behavior vis-à-vis UMass -- had successfully reached out and incorporated leaders of most of the other UMass units in the Higher Ed. Council⁸. The Council was originally formed by members (and opposed by Segat) to coordinate bargaining strategy, share resources, and collaborate where appropriate. It turned into the body that ensured that at least most of the units stayed on the same page through the many twists and turns that followed. Thanks to brilliant and patient diplomacy on Tom Goodkind’s part, a true new strength unity developed – but in opposition to Local 888. The group consistently had meetings, usually on the weekend, of 20 people representing most of the units. The transformation of the Friends into the much more representative Council was a significant turning point, and laid the foundation for an ultimate resolution. No longer would it be possible to isolate the dissidents as unrepresentative ex-509 radicals being manipulated by Local 509’s president.

The options being discussed, besides staying in Local 888 and continuing to fight, were:

1. Negotiate for the creation of a separate Massachusetts higher education local in SEIU
2. Negotiate for a transfer to SEIU Local 509
3. Decertify and affiliate with the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA)
4. Decertify and form an independent union

The Friends agreed that the bottom line principles were that:

- ✍ All Higher Ed units should stay together, and operate collaboratively
- ✍ The Higher Ed units should be adequately staffed and able to control some resources
- ✍ Their union should have a democratic, representative, participatory structure

The MTA was a very appealing option, especially on the Amherst campus, because it represented so many workers in public higher education: faculty on 3 UMass campuses and the state and community colleges, clericals at UMass Amherst, and professionals in state colleges. It had a proven track record, a powerful presence in the State House, and provided the opportunity for on-campus cross-class collaboration.

Some people, however, much preferred to remain in SEIU -- because of history, in the hope that the progressive aspects of SEIU would prove more influential than the

⁸ There was also an unsuccessful attempt to involve the two small non-UMass higher ed units in Local 888 – one at Brandeis and one at B.U.

undemocratic ones, and in order to remain in the AFL-CIO⁹. Equally important, this group was very wary of a bitter decertification election fight – with a ballot that would have “No Union” as one of the choices.

And some people, more and more fed up with the traditional labor movement, were drawn to the idea of going independent, believing they would be financially well off with all the autonomy in the world. Others were very fearful of this option, feeling the need for a large and experienced union to deal with an increasingly hostile employer and state bureaucracy.

Options 1 and 2 were acceptable to the whole core group, especially after a rough budget was drafted that seemed to show that an independent SEIU local would be (just barely) financially viable.

In September 2004, the International held another jurisdictional hearing in Massachusetts to decide the fate of the public sector units, still divided among 3 locals: Local 888, Local 509, and Local 5000 (NAGE). Rumors were rampant about whether Local 509 would survive, be merged, or merely weakened. It was clear that even though 509 did almost everything the International asked (e.g. large-scale organizing campaigns, political mobilizations, sending volunteers to other campaigns), the International deeply resented 509's deeply rooted democratic traditions – including term limits for officers.¹⁰ The UMass activists were looking for any opportunity to bring their plight to the attention of SEIU officials. So even though they were not invited to the hearing, they used the opportunity to offer compelling testimony about their situation and what they thought ought to happen. [See Appendix 4 for testimony.]

All this took place in an atmosphere of growing desperation, unrest, and agitation by members who felt like some change needed to happen soon. Local 888 was paying less and less attention to day-to-day problems, and the desire to get out was growing stronger and more widespread. Talk of decertification grew louder and more widespread in some of the units, and SEIU (the International) finally started paying attention.

SEIU Takes Notice

A well-respected former SEIU national staffperson, with personal and political ties to some of the UMass leaders, contacted Anna Burger, SEIU's Secretary-Treasurer, urging her to pay attention to the complaints of the UMass members. Against the backdrop of a potential decert and complaints from respected 888 staff who quit, he was able, after some time, to convince her to look into the situation in December 2004. 1,000 members could be ignored just a few months before, but now Burger agreed that an investigation of the UMass situation was warranted. In fact, getting reports from various quarters, she must have known this was a local in disarray. Besides high staff

⁹ SEIU's departure from the AFL-CIO was not yet on the horizon.

¹⁰ Local 509's President, John Templeton, had sponsored various democratic amendments and resolutions at the 2004 SEIU Convention, was featured in an article in Labor Notes, and had briefly placed his name into nomination for President of SEIU. This did not add to 509's popularity with the International.

turnover, there were constantly changing lines of supervision, no effective strategy to deal with long-expired contracts with the City of Boston or the unfunded contracts at UMass, no leadership development, micromanagement of staff, an unwillingness or inability to work in coalitions, energy spent fighting a staff union, deteriorating relationships with the rest of the labor movement, and a failing organizing program.

There was no way Burger would abandon her protégé (Segat), but she did ask two people to investigate the UMass situation and to report back. They were:

- ? Bill Fletcher, President of Trans Africa, former SEIU and AFL-CIO Education Director, and former aide to AFL-CIO President Sweeney
- ? Joe Buckley, 35+ year SEIU staffer from Massachusetts whom the International has used as trustee and troubleshooter in many situations. He had worked a lot with Segat in the past and, more recently, as her mentor in Local 888.

To help prepare the investigators for this meeting, two of us prepared an 85 page dossier of well-catalogued evidence. [See Appendix 5 for the 3 page summary/introduction.] The investigators actually read the materials and were very prepared for a January 2005 meeting with 20+ leaders representing most of the UMass units. The leaders were equally prepared and gave eloquent, well orchestrated, and specific testimony about the variety of problems related to servicing, disrespect, lack of democracy, mismanagement, and undermining of local leadership. In conclusion, the activists said there were three acceptable resolutions within SEIU:

1. creation of a separate Massachusetts SEIU higher education local
2. a transfer of all units to SEIU Local 509
3. the democratization of Local 888 – involving the removal of Segat, a transition team that included rank and filers, a speedy democratic constitutional process, and elections as soon as feasible.

Fletcher and Buckley were very respectful, asked some pointed questions, and promised they would, after meeting with Local 888 leaders, make a report and recommendations to the national SEIU leadership. We have every reason to believe their report to Anna Burger was accurate and scathing.

The response to the three options, which they brought back after a few weeks was: “No, No, and definitely No,” along with a suggestion that if the UMass units were unhappy in Local 888, SEIU would be happy to transfer them to NAGE (SEIU Local 5000). This suggestion was met with universal anger and derision, since NAGE (National Association Government Employees) was known as a very top-down, undemocratic, and conservative union that didn’t cooperate with other unions and avoided mobilizing its members. It had recently emerged from trusteeship with a new president -- David Holway – with very close ties (rumored to include romantic involvement) with Susana Segat. Nonetheless, despite the fact that news reports were circulating about Holway’s financial mismanagement at NAGE, no stone was left unturned. A small group was delegated by the Higher Ed Council to meet with Holway; they came away no more impressed than before.

The Options Narrow

By March 2005, what had seemed like many possible options had been reduced to very few. And they were soon to be fewer yet. With all viable options within SEIU seeming to be closed, the argument to join the MTA gained in popularity. A decertification drive, seen by many as something to be avoided at all costs, seemed inevitable.

The MTA was approached, with the help and support of the leaders of the UMass Amherst faculty and clerical MTA locals. It took frustratingly long to get an answer to seemingly simple questions: would the MTA accept these units, and, if so, would the MTA provide resources in a decert campaign. Finally, and to most people's surprise, the answer came back: another "No." The basic reason was that the MTA, even though it and its parent union, the NEA (National Education Association), are not in the AFL-CIO, its leaders were unwilling to do anything that might appear to be raiding. The MTA dearly valued its relationship with the state AFL-CIO, at least in part because they often coordinated legislative activity, and in part because the NEA and AFT affiliates work fairly well together in this state. (It later turned out that the AFL-CIO did not value its relationship with the MTA nearly as much).

Now what? Not enough energy to fight within 888. No viable option within SEIU. No entry into the MTA. No other viable union on the horizon. The only remaining option was to go independent. This view had already gained ground when a long-time respected organizer met with some of the Amherst leaders and argued persuasively that the control of vast resources would overcome any shortcomings of being independent. In effect, they could have the best reps, lobbyists, and lawyers that money could buy, while creating the model union and becoming a shining democratic example to the rest of the labor movement. With the OK of the group, a few people began investigating the formation of an independent. They met with an attorney with relevant experience and expertise, and came back quite encouraged.

Last Ditch Effort

Some were happy with where things seemed to be headed, but others weren't. For them, the idea of a decert and an independent union were just too risky. Being part of an established union and the organized labor movement seemed both safer and politically more advantageous. A small group got the ok from the Higher Ed. Council to fly to Washington if they could get an appointment with Burger. Tom Goodkind (UMB), Kathy Rhines (UMA), and Tony Koumantzelis (UML) succeeded in getting an appointment and flew down for what was billed as the last ditch effort to salvage something other than an ugly decertification drive and the creation of an independent union.

The meeting had a surprise result. Burger and others explained that a separate higher ed. local went against SEIU's belief in forming larger locals; they were extremely critical and dismissive of Local 509; they again pushed hard for a transfer to NAGE. Burger

explained that there was an SEIU committee studying the idea of multi-state mega-locals (like NAGE) and that they considered them efficient in their use of resources¹¹.

But another option was also put on the table, although not encouraged: an uncontested transfer to the MTA. After some quick consultation, the UMass leaders accepted this final option.

SEIU apparently was not ready to be dragged through the mud in a hopeless decert. On May 6, 2005, Andy Stern and Anna Burger each signed letters (to the MTA and to the UMass Leadership Council, respectively) confirming that *“SEIU supports the desire of our UMass members currently represented by SEIU Local 888 to join the Massachusetts Teachers Association”* and that lawyers from the two unions would work together to make it happen. The public explanation would be that SEIU acknowledged that higher education is not one of its core industries, and, consistent with the arguments it was putting forward in the national debates, workers should be in the union with the most power in their industry.

New Obstacles

This seemed like a very good solution. There would be no need for a decertification election with accompanying risks and intra-union fights. The MTA’s objections to accepting the units melted away once SEIU said it was not opposing a transfer. Workers would be in a union with experience and power in public higher education whose structure supports democracy and autonomy. There would be many opportunities for cross-class collaboration and solidarity on the campuses.

It took a while for the lawyers to work out details, and SEIU was very cooperative as the complicated process unfolded. By late summer, however, there were a few glitches, some of which were directly related to the split in the AFL-CIO. With SEIU (and other unions) leaving the federation, certain unions felt free to intervene. The Teamsters appeared in Lowell (where they represented the campus police), and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) intervened in Dartmouth. The president of the state AFL-CIO apparently encouraged unions to jump in, fearing the loss of a large group of members. [Of course, with SEIU leaving the federation, the UMass members and their dues were gone anyway.]

The Dartmouth situation was fairly easily resolved. The AFT represented most of the other workers on that campus, and the MTA represented no-one. The 888 members and the two unions, with a generally good relationship between them in recent years, easily agreed it made more sense for the AFT to represent the blue collar unit of about 100 people.

Lowell was much trickier because of a long history of feuding and mistrust among the four units there. The clericals and professionals had been in the old SEIU 254, had

¹¹ There is – or should be -- a national debate over SEIU’s desire for such locals. They increase workers’ power by being more able, in some situations, to coordinate battles in national or trans-national industries; they decrease workers’ power because their size and scope make it almost impossible for rank and file members to be involved in running their own unions. In fact, however, nowhere else in SEIU does a multi state, public sector local exist. Such locals are primarily in the Health Care and Building Services divisions where locals are up against multi-state and multi-national employers and building owners.

terrible contracts, and were historically unwilling to work with any other group; the blue collar workers had been in NAGE; the grant-funded staff had most recently been organized into Local 509 after a brief foray in Local 254 which ended when 7 of their members were arrested in the Local 254 office, attempting to meet with Sullivan to object to 254 being in bed with management. Now, a couple of the officers of the professional unit feared losing control in the transfer and welcomed the intervention of the Teamsters. The election campaign would be fierce and bitter only on this campus. Even after the Teamsters melted into the background, one of the officers of the professional unit ran a classic anti-union campaign – scaring and confusing people with lies and half-truths. Whether she was in cahoots with management or any particular union was unclear, but in the absence of any history of member involvement in the union, it had the desired effect.

And then the University, which had been quietly enjoying and taking advantage of the weakening of the unions, made its move. It said it would not commit to recognizing the results of the upcoming election unless the MTA agreed to split the UMA-UMB professional unit into two separate bargaining units – one containing those people who supervise others in the unit¹², one for everyone else. This division was one that the University administration had tried unsuccessfully to achieve in bargaining, and it angered members with its irrelevance to the union selection process. The votes were counted on November 10, 2005.

Location	# of Members (very approximate)	YES (=MTA)	NO (=SEIU)
Amherst + Boston	1,500 Professionals	561 + 226 = 787	28 + 5 = 33
Amherst	40 Blue Collar Supervisors	20	1
Boston	350 Clerical/technical/Blue Collar	195	5
Boston	15 Survey Research Supervisors	5	0
Lowell	300 Professionals	79	86
Lowell	40 Clerical	16	9
Lowell	110 Grant Funded	52	4
Lowell	100 Blue Collar	63	0

All the units, except the Lowell professionals, voted overwhelmingly to join the MTA. The Lowell professionals voted by a narrow margin to remain in SEIU, a union that said it no longer wanted to represent UMass members. In retrospect, it is easy to see that the MTA underestimated the danger in this unit and failed to put sufficient resources into a good organizing campaign.

After a few weeks of tense discussions, the University finally backed off, and on December 2, 2005 posted its intention to recognize the MTA in all the units that had voted Yes.

Conclusion

¹² Supervisors are covered by Massachusetts public sector bargaining law

Segat's insistence on total control, her pathological mistrust of others, and her consequent antagonism toward self-motivated, active members steered Local 888 onto very rocky shoals. When the UMass members, finding themselves in a very hostile situation and unable to reform the Local, chose to leave, SEIU made remarkably little effort to persuade them otherwise. SEIU rejected numerous proposals that would have avoided a defection, and Anna Burger herself suggested the transfer to the MTA.

The national leadership of SEIU -- Secretary Treasurer Burger in particular -- was aware of the UMass situation from start to finish. Susana Segat was Burger's protégé, and it seemed like no matter what Segat did, she would be protected from any consequences. While Segat kept making blunders, Burger gave them the International's stamp of approval. This was made abundantly clear with Segat's appointment to the International Executive Board.

So why does SEIU keep supporting Segat despite her obvious incompetence? Why did SEIU prefer to lose a large group of members (and their dues) rather than see them happy in a democratic SEIU local?

Some people have characterized SEIU as a progressive union with a blind spot when it comes to democracy. SEIU President Andy Stern, on his blog and elsewhere, has argued that you can't have real democracy without power, and that the priority for the survival of the labor movement has to be increased density at all costs. Democracy and member control of locals have to be sacrificed if they might possibly result in anything less than the unity necessary to defeat powerful corporations.

While there is certainly a kernel of truth in this argument, it misses the other half of the equation. The labor movement also can't have power without massive numbers of self-motivated members actively committed to their unions. An essential prerequisite for this is that the unions are democratically run by their members who feel and act like the union is *their* institution, not a separate 3rd party as employers always claim.

The story of SEIU Local 888, highlighted by the struggles of the UMass members, illustrates what happens when these two ideologies clash. SEIU (principally in the persons of Segat and Burger) could not accept a situation where members might successfully challenge the wisdom of the national (or nationally appointed) leadership. Whether this comes from a belief in their broader vision, pure arrogance, or a jealous hold on power doesn't really matter. It meant that member-driven reform of Local 888 was unacceptable; the rewarding or strengthening of Local 509 was similarly unacceptable; and the creation of a new dissident local was out of the question. There was no response by SEIU until a decent seemed inevitable. At that point, a quiet uncontested transfer to another union -- especially one not in the AFL-CIO -- was the only option for SEIU.

APPENDIX ONE

SEIU Local 888 members are:

Municipal workers	8,160	64%
UMass workers	2,600	20%
Other state workers	1,520	12%
County workers	310	2%
Private sector workers	320	2%

SEIU Local 888 members work in:

Boston	4,030	31%
Boston municipal area	2,960	23%
Western Massachusetts	2,010	16%
North Shore, Merrimac Valley	1,550	12%
South Shore, Cape Cod	1,270	10%
Central Massachusetts	1,070	8%

SEIU Local 888 members were previously in:

SEIU Local 285	4,900	39%
SEIU Local 5000 (NAGE)	3,010	23%
SEIU Local 254	2,200	17%
SEIU Local 509	1,670	13%
SEIU Local 3FO	530	4%
SEIU Local 159	350	3%
SEIU Local 454	120	1%
SEIU Local 492	60	< 1%
SEIU Local 540	50	< 1%

For a graphical representation, see <http://www.888democracy.org/page16.html>

APPENDIX 2

May 6, 2003

PROPOSED BRIDGE TO THE NEW LOCAL: AGREEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

We look forward to shaping the future and the democratic principles of our new local with members from all the affected bargaining units. We also think that it is entirely appropriate to display public solidarity on the coming changes, but we must first confirm to our members that their concerns have been met. We will get out the vote and support a yes vote for restructuring if Susana and JJ agree and sign off on the following:

- ? The International will immediately put resources and political capital into getting the Higher Ed contracts funded and pending and expired contracts at the cities and towns negotiated. The parties commit themselves to maintaining adequate services and support to the members of our bargaining units, with current levels of such services and support at a minimum.
- ? A transition team selected by the current leadership of the affected bargaining units and fairly representing the affected bargaining units will immediately begin working with the trusteeship to set up the new local.
- ? The new local's constitution and bylaws will be written by a representative group whose members will be selected by the current leadership of the affected bargaining units.
- ? There will be no interference by the International or the trusteeship with the adoption of such democratic structures and practices as the constitution and bylaw-drafting group may propose. Examples of such structures and practices may be:
 - o a vote of the membership on the Constitution,
 - o a chapter structure,
 - o an elected representative body with real policy-making authority,
 - o direct election of officers by the membership,
 - o election to office limited to members, as defined in the Local 509 Constitution (Article III, Section 1), the Local 285 Constitution (Article 3, Section 2) or other language with similar intent.
- ? The trusteeship will immediately issue a written statement of neutrality regarding staff unionization.

From the Ad Hoc Leadership Posse
Local 285, City of Boston
Public Health Commission
Department of Neighborhood Development
Local 285, UMass Boston
Local 509, UMass
Amherst
Boston
Lowell
Local 254, UMass Lowell
NAGE, UMass Lowell

APPENDIX 3

BROKEN PROMISES: A DECLARATION OF “NO CONFIDENCE!”

In order to gain our support for the SEIU reorganization plan which created Local 888, Appointed Provisional President Susana Segat made many promises to UMass union members and leaders. Some of the most important were **continuity of staff and services, fair treatment of field staff, and—above all—a commitment to an open, participatory process leading to the adoption of a democratic Local constitution and bylaws.** Yet almost as soon as the vote occurred, the breaking of promises began, leading to the current crisis.

- ? Segat prevented field staff from bringing together the leaderships of the UMass units, thereby undermining the purpose of the reorganization and SEIU’s “New Strength Unity Plan”;
- ? Segat consistently undermined long-time UMA, UMB and UML field representative Ferd Wulkan, making his position untenable and finally driving him to resign;
- ? Segat reneged on her promise to retain trusted UMA field representative and former *Chapter President* Simon Keochakian;
- ? Segat has hidden the existence of a “Temporary Constitution” as well as her own plans for a hasty, superficial process and quick election; meanwhile, she has taken no steps in seven months towards an inclusive procedure to develop a permanent constitution.

Susana Segat has betrayed the trust of those who have spent many years building strong unions with an activist membership at the University of Massachusetts. **We therefore declare “NO CONFIDENCE” in Susana Segat as our appointed provisional president. We have no confidence in her willingness or ability to unite the membership around a set of core principles that all can support, in a manner that honors all members’ rights to meaningful participation, in order to create the kind of democratic SEIU union local that our members expect and deserve.**

NAME (Please print) CAMPUS PHONE E-MAIL

APPENDIX 4

SEIU MASSACHUSETTS JURISDICTIONAL HEARING
TESTIMONY OF TOM COISH
Chapter President, UMass Amherst
September 28, 2004

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

My name is Tom Coish, and I have worked at the University of Massachusetts Amherst campus for almost 20 years. I come from a working-class, immigrant, union family, and I have been involved in the labor movement in one form or another for over 25 years.

I was an original member of the organizing committee which chose to be represented by SEIU Local 509 in 1987. Together with our UMass Boston sisters and brothers, we won an overwhelming victory in our representation election in 1989, and we formed a chapter on our campus which currently includes about 1,100 professional and administrative staff on our campus. I was an elected member of our Chapter Board and the Local's Joint Executive Board from the beginning, and in 1997 I became president of the UMass Amherst Chapter. Our two-campus bargaining unit includes over 1,500 members.

Our organizing history is quite unusual. When we decided to organize a union, we interviewed 10 different unions before choosing to go with SEIU Local 509. We were particularly attracted by its open and democratic structure, and its effectiveness in representing many other state workers in Massachusetts. Since then, we have negotiated very good contracts with our UMass Boston colleagues, and helped organize new units on the Amherst and Lowell campuses. We have worked in effective coalitions with other UMass and public higher education unions, and we have developed very good relations with our local and state public officials. We have developed into a very successful chapter over the years.

We've also been an active and respected chapter within Local 509 and SEIU. When we sometimes disagreed with other local leaders, and supported the losing slate in local elections, we never experienced any hint of reprisal or other repercussions for doing so.

Until the past year, we have been proud, active members of SEIU. I was a delegate to the 2000 convention in Pittsburgh, and I voted in support of the New Strength Unity Plan.

I testified at the hearing last year on restructuring locals in Massachusetts. I advocated for remaining in Local 509 because of our history in choosing them, but also because it represented many state workers like us. I believed that the other UMass units should have joined us in Local 509, as we already had more than half of all SEIU members in public higher education in Massachusetts. We looked forward to joining our SEIU sisters and brothers at the Lowell and Dartmouth campuses.

We were very surprised to learn that we had all been placed in a new local, 888, with an appointed president who to our knowledge has never been a rank and file member. Almost all of the other units in 888 are municipal units of workers in cities and towns, which do not have the same bargaining process or environment as us, which to this day seems inconsistent with NSUP.

We met with SEIU officials, including the appointed president, and we sought assurances from them concerning openness, democracy and continuity of staff and services in the new local. I for one told others that I believed we could work with them. We were very surprised when our requests for such assurances were ignored for several weeks, until the International stepped in and gave us some general assurances. This, and the outcome of a last-minute meeting between two of our leaders and the appointed president, allowed us to recommend a Yes vote to our members in the election to ratify the restructuring decision.

Shortly after the new local was established, we learned that one of our staff at UMass Amherst, who happened to be our first president prior to his retirement from the University, was not rehired after accepting an offer of employment. When we questioned this, we were falsely told that the offer had never been made, and that they had never agreed to continue our current staff.

A few months later, the other UMass Amherst field representative resigned his position as higher education coordinator, because he felt he could not work for a union which tried to divide members from staff and from each other. Consistent with the whole purpose of New Strength Unity, we had tried to set up meetings with other leaders from UMass units and establish a UMass/higher education council within the Local. The Local only begrudgingly allowed us to have our first meeting last January, and has not cooperated in any way since to foster communication and unity within the UMass units. Instead, they have played us off against each other, while keeping us apart. For example, when we scheduled a meeting at UMass Lowell last spring, Local leaders declared that it was not a real union meeting, and used a management email network to urge members on that campus not to attend!

We have also been isolated from the municipal units within 888. We have been unable to contact their leaders, who have been told that we are “troublemakers” who are out to dominate the local, which is totally false. Top local staff are playing the role of self-proclaimed “protectors” of smaller units from the “gorilla” units at UMass.

Another tactic that has been used to isolate us is late or no notice of meetings and events. I was invited to a meeting to begin the process of developing a local constitution (which has gone nowhere for several months), but I only received two days’ notice for a two-day event. We receive no notice of local events, or such short notice that it makes it hard to actually attend or participate. When I inquired about attending the 2004 convention in San Francisco in June several weeks in advance, I heard nothing until just before the convention, when I was told that I could not attend. The Local sent 38 people to the convention at Local expense; no one from the largest unit with almost 10% of the Local membership was invited. We were not even notified about this hearing by the Local, even though the notice is addressed to the membership.

As a result of this isolation and violations of agreements and understandings, our chapter has been greatly damaged. Many members have lost faith and confidence in their union. When about 1,000 members signed a petition to the International raising their serious concerns about what was happening, they heard absolutely nothing from anyone in response. With the renegeing by the state on our ratified contracts from three years ago and relentless attacks from Governor Romney, many feel that we are under siege from all sides, including our own union! There is a serious threat that a decertification campaign may begin, and it might very well succeed.

Again, we have been proud and active supporters of SEIU and NSUP, but what we've experienced over the past year has created weakness and disunity instead. While we sympathize with our brothers and sisters in the other units of Local 888, the situation has become intolerable for us.

We are proposing that we be allowed to establish a higher education local in Massachusetts. This local, with almost 3,000 members on four campuses, would be larger than others in SEIU. It would actually take us a long way towards realizing the goals of New Strength Unity: it would unite higher education workers in one Local for greater strength and unity in bargaining and political action. Our bargaining and political environment is unique in Massachusetts; we bargain with the Board of Trustees, although the governor and legislature must ratify and fund our contracts. Our issues and activities are different from other state workers, and very different from municipal workers. We have the talent and ability to make this an effective and successful local; we just need the opportunity to make it happen.

We urge you to work with us to make New Strength Unity a reality for our members and others in Massachusetts. Contrary to false statements that have been made about us, we have always been willing and ready to work constructively with the International and other SEIU leaders to make this happen. We want to be involved in an open and honest dialogue about our future and that of SEIU in Massachusetts.

Please contact us at your earliest convenience, so that we can have a new beginning for our common interests in New Strength Unity, and our members at UMass can once again be proud to be part of SEIU.

Is This “New Strength Unity”?

Testimony delivered at SEIU Hearing on Jurisdiction in Massachusetts

Tom Goodkind, Grievance Secretary

Speaking on behalf of the UMass Boston Chapter Board, SEIU Local 888

September 28, 2004

My name is Tom Goodkind. I’ve been a machinist at UMass Boston for 19 years. Currently serving as our grievance secretary, I’ve been an elected board member of our SEIU chapter for close to fifteen years. I was a member of the organizing committee which started in 1987 and eventually brought SEIU to the UMass Boston professional staff in 1989, winning our election with 86% of the vote on our campus. When that organizing committee started its work, we investigated nearly a dozen unions and interviewed at least half of them before settling on SEIU Local 509. We sought out and chose SEIU largely because it seemed to us the most forward-looking, democratic, creative, and energetic union out there. And for fourteen years, we were not disappointed. Under the leadership of a field representative who stayed with us through thick and thin, we negotiated a series of excellent contracts and built up a strong SEIU chapter with elected leaders trusted and respected by our members.

I’m speaking today on behalf of a unanimous elected chapter board, representing 450 SEIU 888 members. We are now part of the largest bargaining unit in SEIU Local 888, which includes more than 1500 professional staff members at UMass Amherst and Boston. When we were informed of the looming reorganization in the spring of 2003, we had a number of hopes and fears. We recognized that it would be a great advantage to finally have all UMass SEIU workers in a single local—it never made sense to have Locals 509, 285, 254, and NAGE all representing groups at the University. At the same time, we were concerned about moving from a local that was overwhelmingly composed of state workers like ourselves, into one that would be largely composed of municipal workers. We knew that 90% of our battles have to do directly with the Governor and the Legislature, and we questioned what sort of community of interest would exist with the municipals. Finally, we were extremely concerned about losing the open, participatory and democratic life that we had prized in 509, and which was a large part of our decision to join that local in the first place.

After discussions with 888 leaders which finally led to a number of clarifications and several important promises, we felt that the benefit of bringing UMass together in a single local was worth the risks, we were excited to be working with our brothers and sisters at UMass Lowell and Dartmouth, and we publicly supported the reorganization.

While we went into Local 888 with some optimism about the possibilities for a united SEIU presence at UMass, with some hope that we would create a common culture with the municipal units, and with an honest desire to build the new local, we are extremely sorry to report fourteen months later that the experiment has failed.

It is certainly possible that the lack of a community of interest between UMass and the municipal units could have been overcome, had the Local leadership been devoted to overcoming it. But it has been just the opposite. When the City of Boston workers were engaged in their bitter battle with the mayor, not once were UMass 888 members working just down the street organized to support them. Nor have the City of Boston workers been organized to help the

UMass Boston classified staff in their lengthy contract funding struggle. We have to ask: is this “new strength unity”?

In general, lateral communication is discouraged in the Local. Keep in mind that for fourteen months there has been no executive board whatsoever, so contact among the various bargaining units is sporadic and disorganized. For UMass workers, the real saving grace of the new Local was the promise of unity among the SEIU UMass units at Amherst, Boston, Lowell and Dartmouth. Yet the Local balked at bringing those units together, and when the elected leaderships finally insisted on doing it ourselves, every attempt we made to establish a consistent, staffed Higher Ed Council has been opposed and undermined. Far from organizing the various campus units to support each other in their struggles, united action among units—even on a single campus!—has been discouraged and subverted. Is this “new strength unity”?

Despite being promised that our elected leaderships would be invited to choose our own representatives to a broad, open, and democratic constitutional process, we have been discouraged from full participation in what ultimately has been a narrowly constructed and tightly controlled procedure. And after fourteen months we are still operating under a temporary constitution which most members have never seen, without even a draft permanent constitution in sight. Is this “new strength unity”?

The loss of trusted staff—including the second resignation in six months of our Higher Ed division head—has been devastating to our bargaining unit. We’re now facing the prospect of hard-working but overburdened field reps responsible for 2700 UMass workers in nine bargaining units plus municipals, with no leadership or coordination from above. The Local’s alleged commitment to a Higher Ed division has turned out to be a farce; in practice we have seen a clear determination to prevent any united team from ever developing. Overall, and despite many promises to the contrary, we at UMass Boston have far less service than we had in Local 509—and that was never enough. Just consider: we’ve had fifteen years of an agency shop, with a strong and active SEIU chapter, yet today dues collection is at an all-time percentage low, simply because our Local has devoted no resources to orienting and signing up new bargaining unit members. Is that “new strength unity”?

After fifteen years in SEIU, after all the work bringing SEIU in, building it and maintaining it, we really couldn’t believe what was happening to this thing we cherished. The experience has been new, all right, but far from being one of new strength unity, the last fourteen months have been an eye-opening and painful experience of division, disorganization, and deceit. The result—something we never thought we’d see—is that we are now facing the grave danger of a deceit campaign. Immediate and drastic action on the part of SEIU is absolutely necessary.

I have to say that some of us were amazed last spring when the International—presented with 1,000 UMass signatures expressing a lack of confidence in our Local leadership—did not make a single phone call to find out what might be going on up here. Instead, all we received were some young and innocent purple-shirted shock troops who were explicitly directed to “avoid the leaders,” and who were quickly sent packing by our members. That was a missed opportunity for someone to get their hands dirty and intervene to reestablish this Local on a sound footing.

While that opportunity has passed, there is one more before us right now, and we urge the International not to let this one slip away. We chapter leaders want to remain in SEIU. We are reaching out today to the International, to the other SEIU state-worker locals, and to our own Local 888, to say that a solution must be found right away, and it must be drastic.

We believe that SEIU should immediately charter an independent Higher Education local consisting of all the UMass and other higher ed SEIU units. This would create a local of 2700 to 3,000 members, with a clear community of interest, and with a large body of experienced and respected leaders who would be determined to help SEIU get it right this time. No, we would not be a huge local, but we'd be large enough to survive and grow, and the unity we'd be able to build on this new foundation would quickly magnify the effect of our numbers. We are convinced that an independent SEIU Higher Ed Local would be our best avenue to creating true "new strength unity."

Certainly others may have different ideas. If you do, then please talk directly to us. We're ready to listen, and we're ready to talk. We are the elected and—we believe—the trusted leaders of our members. We and our members will not be demobilized, distracted, divided, or deceived. We understand that some may see us as just another pain in the ass, but it's really not what we ever set out to be. If there were ever a time when we needed a strong union, it is now. We would much rather be fighting Romney and the growing anti-union tide in this state and country, than fighting our own union—and we are frankly astonished to even imagine ourselves having to make a choice like that. For fifteen years we've been a vibrant, active part of SEIU. We urge you, Brother Balanoff, and you, sisters and brothers in all our Massachusetts SEIU locals: do what is necessary to enable us to play that role again.

APPENDIX 5

BACKGROUND INFORMATION CONCERNING UMASS AND SEIU LOCAL 888 December 2004

This packet contains background material that we hope will result in a deeper and more productive discussion on January 11. While hardly exhaustive, this documentation should make clear the origins, content, and current status of the difficulties Local 888 members at UMass have had in their new local. We have tried to arrange materials in a logical order, with a short introduction to each section. We look forward to meeting with you in the new year.

1. Early History

Prior to the vote on the reorganization plan, UMass activists (and others) had some concerns. While supportive of the New Strength Unity Plan's principles, we wanted basic assurances concerning service and democracy. It was frustrating how hard it was to get any sorts of commitments. Ultimately, based on specific promises from President-designee Segat, most leaders of the UMass units recommended a Yes vote. Three important points emerge from a review of these documents and subsequent history:

1. UMass unit leaders tried desperately to "get to Yes."
2. Promises were made, and those promises were never kept.
3. The simple fact that questions were asked resulted in deep suspicion on the part of the new Local 888 leadership toward the UMass units and staff.

2. No Constitution

Had promises made in the early history been honored, and had a timely and inclusive process to develop a structure and constitution for the local been undertaken, many problems could have been avoided. Despite numerous promises made, timelines announced, and temporary constitutions secretly amended, very little has happened, and after 1-1/2 years there is still no constitutional process, no constitution, and no fair election in sight.

3. New Strength Unity Plan Tossed Aside

The refusal or inability of the Local's leadership to implement the principles of the New Strength Unity plan led to staff defections and member dissatisfaction, and has left the new local on shaky political ground. While staff and activists consistently made proposals about how to leverage the potential power of the 2,600 UMass members, the Local's leadership insisted on keeping members and their natural allies apart from each other. For example,

* There was opposition to bringing leaders, or even staff, of the different UMass units together (and anger when members arranged it themselves).

* Members and knowledgeable staff were not allowed any role in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to organize a residual unit at UMass.

* The Local shunned the statewide coalition of public higher education unions (Higher Ed Unions United) that had been coordinating the contract funding campaign.

* Interim President Segat has consciously and explicitly attempted to drive wedges between UMass units, and between UMass as a whole and the rest of Local 888.

4. Unresponsiveness and Unavailability

There were countless times that Interim President Segat did not respond to staff and chapter leaders' questions, pleas, invitations, and issues. A few are documented in this packet. UMass Amherst comprises almost 10% of the local, yet Segat has been there only once in the almost 1-1/2 years since Local 888 was chartered. The one time she and other local staff attended a membership meeting, they abruptly left when the questioning became intense. At UMass Boston and UMass Lowell, repeated requests for sufficient staffing have been effectively ignored. In apparent pursuit of her own narrow agenda, Segat has acted as if it is in the Local's interest to weaken the UMass chapters as much as possible—even at the cost of uncollected dues which could otherwise pay for more UMass staffing.

5. Members Express Their Anger

Members expressed their dissatisfaction in numerous ways, but everything seemed to fall on deaf ears. Many members complained about the lack of response to phone calls or emails to the Local. 1,000 members signed a petition that went to the Local and the International. Dozens wrote in great detail how they perceived their fortunes decline in the new local.

6. We Keep Trying

Leaders of the UMass units kept trying to mend the breach in many ways. Chapter leaders tried to get Segat to return to UMass Amherst and to meet with them to resolve misunderstandings. At one time, labor educator Hal Stack volunteered to mediate between the two sides. Unit leaders welcomed his proposed intervention and made repeated attempts to set dates for a facilitated discussion. However, Segat never seemed available. Finally the idea appears to have been shelved by the Local's leadership.

7. Ultimately – We Need a Separate Higher Ed Local

After a year and a half of constant frustration, for all the reasons referenced in this packet, members have concluded that remaining in Local 888 as it is currently led and constructed is not a viable option. While many members are calling for a complete exit from SEIU, most unit leaders prefer to remain in SEIU in a newly chartered higher education local. Pres. Segat, in response, has maneuvered to try and again redivide the UMass units into different SEIU locals. Completely violating the New Strength Unity principles, this has angered even more leaders of all of the UMass units.