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Statement by AFL-CIO President John Sweeney

On Developments in the SEIU-CAN Dispute
April 15, 2008

For several weeks I have been working to bring the Service Employee International Union (SEIU) and the California Nurses Association/NNOC (CNA) together to resolve their escalating dispute over representation of nurses. Unfortunately, the deplorable events of the weekend set back the progress we hoped to make.

There is no justification – none – for the violent attack orchestrated by SEIU at the Labor Notes conference in Detroit. While there may well be multiple sides to any dispute, violence in any form is reprehensible. 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 working people.

No union should understand the corrosive effect of violence better than SEIU, which was founded by courageous janitors in the face of employer violence in the 1920s and 1930s. I call on the leaders of SEIU to condemn what happened in Detroit.

Likewise, I call on the leaders of SEIU to withdraw their recent appeal to their local unions across the country to withhold dues from AFL-CIO state federations and central labor councils as a pressure tactic in their dispute with CNA. These organizations are not involved in the controversy in any way, and withholding resources at a time when we face the greatest political challenges in our history is a damaging affront to the determined, united efforts of the entire labor movement.

It is time for the escalation to stop. Our responsibilities as leaders demand that we rise above our differences and disagreements for the greater good. Last week the leaders of CNA agreed to meet with SEIU to discuss these issues.

Today I am renewing the call for both parties to come together and resolve the issues that divide them.

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