

# “What Is ‘Special’ About SEIU-West?”

## “What Does It Stand For?”

### About SEIU-West

Service Employees' International Union (SEIU) was founded in 1921 when building janitors in the United States formed the Building Service Employees International Union. Since that time, workers from diverse countries and backgrounds have opted to join the SEIU family. This diversity is also reflected in the membership as workers employed in the private, public, and industrial sectors have chosen SEIU as their representative Union. The SEIU currently has approximately 2.1 million members across North America.

In Canada, SEIU represents approximately 100,000 members. SEIU represents members who work for school boards, home care agencies, hospitals, special care homes, retirement homes, property services, emergency services, social services, and municipalities, among many others.

SEIU members include education workers, clerical staff, caretakers, group home workers, addictions counselors, licensed practical nurses, special care aides, day care workers, health care workers, ambulance personnel, bus drivers and janitors to name a few.

SEIU-West is affiliated with the Canadian Labour Congress, the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, and various labour councils within the province.

### How SEIU-West was born

SEIUWEST.ca was created through a merger in 2008 of 3 strong Locals:

**Local 299**, based out of Moose Jaw, was established in 1946 and consisted of approximately 2,000 members who are school board employees in both the Public and Catholic school systems, as well as employees in the health care sector and in a variety of other industries.

**Local 333**, based out of Saskatoon, was the largest Saskatchewan Local, with 8,200 members. St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon was the first hospital organized by SEIU in 1946. The majority of members who were affiliated with this local, worked as health providers in the health-care sector, community-based organizations, private care homes and group homes.

**Local 336**, based out of Swift Current, was chartered in 1947. Its founding members were employed primarily in the health care sector. This local broadened its representation to

include education workers, caretakers, office and clerical workers, crisis service workers, and municipal workers. It consisted of approximately 1,200 members.

Since the 2008 merger, SEIU-West has become a force to be reckoned with in the Labour movement. With the best membership in the country SEIU-West is the example of Stronger Together!

## **Our Mandate:**

The mandate of SEIU-West is to improve the lives of working people and their families, and lead the way to a more just and humane society. We stand for economic and social justice, for dignity and respect, for having a voice on the job and in society, and for a secure job with the opportunity to advance.

We encourage members to participate in the Union through attendance at workplace meetings, involvement as stewards, participation on Committees, and through education and training sessions. Regular elections occur which enable interested members to be nominated for a position on their Executive Board.

In addition, SEIU-West employs administrative, research, communications, education and field staff representatives, to enhance our members' working life.

In 2011, SEIU-West has launched it's very own Member Resource Centre (MRC) in order to more efficiently respond to our members. For more information regarding SEIU-West, please call us at 1.888.999. 7348 extension 2249 or 2226.

We look forward to hearing from you and remember we are Stronger Together.

## **SEIU Mission Statement**

We are the Service Employees International Union, an organization of more than one million members united by the belief in the dignity and worth of workers and the services they provide and dedicated to improving the lives of workers and their families and creating a more just and humane society.

We are public workers, healthcare workers, building service workers, office workers, professional workers, and industrial and allied workers. We seek a stronger union to build power for ourselves and to protect the people we serve.

Women and men of every race, ethnicity, religion, age, physical ability and sexual orientation, we are the standard-bearers in the struggle for social and economic justice begun nearly a century ago by janitors who dared to dream beyond their hardships and to organize for economic security, dignity and respect.

Our vision is of a society:

Where all workers and their families live and work in dignity.

Where work is fulfilling and fairly rewarded.

Where workers have a meaningful voice in decisions that affect them.

Where workers have the opportunity to develop their talents and skills.

Where the collective voice and power of workers is realized in democratic and progressive unions.

Where union solidarity stands firm against the forces of discrimination and hate and the unfair employment practices of exploitative employers.

Where government plays an active role in improving the lives of working people.

To achieve this vision:

- We must organize unorganized service workers, extending to them the gains of unionism while securing control over our industries and labour markets.
- We must build political power to ensure that workers' voices are heard at every level of government to create economic opportunity and foster social justice.
- We must provide meaningful paths for member involvement and participation in strong, democratic unions.
- We must build coalitions and act in solidarity with other organizations who share our concern for social and economic justice.
- We must engage in direct action that demonstrates our power and our determination to win.
- We must bargain contracts that improve wages and working conditions, expand the role of workers in workplace decision-making, and build a stronger union.
- We must develop highly trained and motivated leaders at every level of the union who reflect the membership in all its diversity.

To accomplish these goals we must be unified – inspired by a set of beliefs and principles that transcends our social and occupational diversity and guides our work.

- We believe we can accomplish little as separate individuals, but that together we have the power to create a just society.
- We believe unions are the means by which working people build power – by which ordinary people accomplish extraordinary things.

- We believe our strength comes from our unity, and that we must not be divided by forces of discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age, physical ability, sexual orientation or immigration status.
- We believe our power and effectiveness depend upon the active participation and commitment of our members, the development of our leaders, and solidarity with each other and our allies.
- We believe we have a special mission to bring economic and social justice to those most exploited in our community – especially to women and workers of colour.
- We believe our future cannot be separated from that of workers in other parts of the world who struggle for economic justice, a decent life for their families, peace, dignity and democracy.
- We believe unions are necessary for a democratic society to prevail, and that unions must participate in the political life of our society.
- We believe we have a moral responsibility to leave the world a better place for our children – and everyone’s children.
- The international labour movement has been built on national traditions of workers’ organizations and solidarity. The legacy of our movement reflects our common global cause based upon these unique national histories and strategies. However, the globalization of capitalism has brought new challenges for the labour movement throughout the world. It has become increasingly difficult to advance or defend the welfare of workers within the boundaries of a single nation. International labour co-operation and solidarity have become ever more essential.
- We re-affirm our commitment to international solidarity and record our desire to further advance the cause of SEIU Canadian members within and through a strong democratic and progressive international union.
- To such end, we the Canadian SEIU Locals chartered by Service Employees International Union have founded this Canadian Council and their membership within Service Employees International Union and have adopted the following Constitution intended to be consistent with the SEIU International Constitution.

## “Have Unions Outlived Their Usefulness?” Yes, No and Why

Here are eight big advantages Unions bring to a workplace:

	<b>UNION</b>	<b>NO UNION</b>
Wages, benefits working conditions	Protected by legal contract	At the whim of management
Wages	Spelled out in the contract	Secret. Negotiated individually by management.
Raises	Bargained for everyone. All workers vote on the settlement.	Favouritism can determine individual raises.
Discipline	The Union will defend you.	Lots of luck. You're on your own.
Promotions	Awarded fairly according to the negotiated agreement.	Favouritism, romance, blackmail, you name it.
Vacations, shifts, layoffs	Based on the negotiated agreement.	See above.
Problems	Union will work with members to solve problems.	It's Management's way or the highway
Give people a voice in the political arena.	Work for laws that protect working people and their families.	Take away or weaken all laws that protect workers, i.e., health and safety, overtime, etc.

# BACKGROUND SHEET

## “Have Unions Outlived Their Usefulness?”

Yeah But... Responses To Some Frequently Voiced Reactions about the Union

<b>Objection:</b>	<b>“I don’t like the people running the union.”</b>
Response:	The union is a democratic institution – if you don’t like the people running the union you can elect new people. Getting involved in the union is the best way to get the kind of leadership you want.
<b>Objection:</b>	<b>“I don’t believe in unions. They are too strong and too powerful to suit me.”</b>
Response:	Unions are just associations of people joining together for mutual protection and a voice on the job.  Did you realize that doctors have a union? It’s called the Saskatchewan Medical Association. Lawyers have a union. It’s called the Canadian Bar Association. Even bankers have their union, the Canadian Banking Association. If unions are OK for these people, why aren’t they good for working people like us?
<b>Objection:</b>	<b>“I don’t need a union; the employer is fair. I get along fine with my boss.”</b>
Response:	The employer’s fairness is ensured when there is a union to make sure the contract is adhered to. You may get along with your boss now, but you can’t depend on that. That boss may leave and you may get someone who would make your life miserable if there wasn’t a union.
<b>Objection:</b>	<b>“I can’t afford to strike. How can I be sure I won’t be out on strike? I don’t believe in strikes.”</b>
Response:	Strikes are very rare. Our union settles about 98 percent of its contracts without a strike, so it’s really a false fear. The main thing is that <b>you and your co-workers</b> decide whether you strike or not. No one else decides that for you.

## **BACKGROUND SHEET**

### **“Have Unions Outlived Their Usefulness?”**

#### **Before Unions Were Established The Word Was “No”**

<b>NO</b> seniority	<b>NO</b> long-term disability benefits
<b>NO</b> job security	<b>NO</b> paid vacations
<b>NO</b> representation	<b>NO</b> jury duty pay
<b>NO</b> grievance procedure	<b>NO</b> bereavement leave
<b>NO</b> promotional opportunities	<b>NO</b> life insurance benefits
<b>NO</b> job classification benefits	<b>NO</b> sickness and accident
<b>NO</b> health and safety programme	<b>NO</b> medicare protection
<b>NO</b> protective equipment	<b>NO</b> severance pay
<b>NO</b> preference of shift	<b>NO</b> prescription drug coverage
<b>NO</b> relief periods	<b>NO</b> dental plan
<b>NO</b> uniform pay scale	<b>NO</b> shift premiums
<b>NO</b> guaranteed wage increases	<b>NO</b> paid holidays
<b>NO</b> cost-of-living raises programs	<b>NO</b> employee family assistance
<b>NO</b> overtime pay unemployment benefits	<b>NO</b> supplemental

## **Some Highlights of SEIU History in Canada**

- 1943** First SEIU Local in Canada was chartered; Local 244 in Vancouver represented office building custodians and window cleaners. The workers, most of them women, earned 35 cents per hour.
- 1946** SEIU was the first union to organize hospital workers. The first hospital was the Toronto General Hospital.
- The legendary Elsie Hannon became President of her local at St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon, a post she would hold for the next 31 years.
- 1948** SEIU successfully negotiated an eight-hour day contract.
- 1951** SEIU introduced the practice of Joint Collective Bargaining for regional hospitals.
- 1959** Local 600 was chartered to represent Native Canadian hospital workers in The Pas, Manitoba.
- 1966** SEIU began to organize nursing home workers.
- 1972** International President Hardy launched a program to establish regional conferences in the U.S. and Canada.
- 1975** Isobel Gutoskie, business agent for Local 478, made history by having a copy of a collective agreement translated into Cree for the First Nations members of SEIU who worked in the Moose Factory Zone Hospital.
- 1976** Medical staff at the Port Arthur Clinic in Thunder Bay walked off the job. The key issues for the 77 striking women were wages, a hospital benefit plan and union security. The strike captured national attention and turned out to be one of the longest and largest all-women strikes of its time.
- 1997** Centralized Health Care bargaining in Saskatchewan between the three (3) SEIU Locals and Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations (SAHO) resulted in one (1) collective bargaining agreement for members employed in Acute and Long Term Care sectors.
- 1999** In the follow-up to the Dorsey Commission and the reorganization of health care to Health Districts in Saskatchewan, the three (3) SEIU Locals and SAHO reached one (1) collective bargaining agreement for members employed in Acute Care, Long Term Care, Home Care & Community/Public Health services. This Collective Bargaining Agreement included provision for the Provincial Joint Job Evaluation program.

**2000** In February, delegates at the ACWCC Canadian Convention ratified an all-Canadian solution that proposed a new Canadian Constitution and a Canadian Council that includes Quebec.

**2000** In April, delegates at the International SEIU Convention in Pittsburgh voted unanimously in favour of the Canadian self-determination resolution.

In May, the presidents of SEIU Canada locals from coast to coast approved the new Canadian Constitution. It is a document that unites our members in Quebec and the other provinces as never before. It prepares the ground for a new unity, a new strength.

Sharleen Stewart is the first woman elected as the International Canadian Vice President.

**2005** In February, the Executive Board of the Breweries, General and Professional Workers Union voted to merge with SEIU.

**2006** The first provincial health care provider collective bargaining agreement was reached by the Coalition of Unions (SEIU, CUPE & SGEU) in Saskatchewan.

**2008** In May, the three (3) former Saskatchewan Locals (333, 299 & 336) conducted a vote of the general membership to approve the merger of these Locals into one new, strong local – SEIUWest.ca.

In July, the first meeting of the SEIUWEST. ca Executive Board occurred.

**2009** On March 22, Workers United affiliated with Service Employees International Union (SEIU) creating the Workers United Conference of SEIU.

**2011** June 14/15 – SEIU-West held its Founding Convention, adopted a constitution and elected their officers and Executive.

**2013** June 17, 18, 19 – SEIU-West 2<sup>nd</sup> convention election of officers and executive.

**2015** June 3, 2, 4– SEIU-West 3<sup>rd</sup> convention election of officers and executive.