

Dear AFL-CIO General Board Member:

Over the next few weeks, I will be sharing with you my reactions to the issues now confronting the American Labor Movement. Much of the debate so far, particularly the public debate, has been terribly one-sided. And I believe that to be both unhealthy and undemocratic.

The AFL-CIO is a federation of unions, governed by a constitution and led by men and women who have spent their careers committed to bettering the lives of their members. We're democrats – with an emphasis on the small d – who lead unique organizations created to battle unrestrained power. We are proud of the battles won, independent in our thoughts and approaches to the battles that must be waged and completely autonomous in deciding what is in the best interests of our own unions.

And that's why the latest set of proposals from some of our colleagues – the Nupsters, for lack a better term – bothers me so.

On May 16<sup>th</sup>, the Nupster's released a document entitled *Restore the American Dream*. It came with a patriotic red, white and blue logo. Its preamble was upbeat, hopeful and optimistic. Its five point agenda contained reassuring words like unite, incentives, leverage, growth, accountability and leadership.

And yet, *Restore the American Dream* masks some of the most autocratic ideas the American Labor Movement has ever encountered. Those ideas – to concentrate unrestricted power in the hands of a few unions – were cleaned up, toned down or simply deleted in the publicized version of *Restore*. It was a masterful piece of public relations puffery.

*Restore* contains the following sentence under the section called New Standards for Accountability and Governance:

“First, democratic change requires the creation of a streamlined Executive Committee comprised of the largest unions that represent most AFL-CIO members ... with several additional rotating seats to ensure diversity.”

*Restore*'s draft language calling for a “streamlined Executive Committee” circulated about the same time as a UFCW draft proposal called *A Labor Movement for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Proposal to Restructure and Revitalize the AFL-CIO*. That four-page document details what can only be described as a naked power grab.

In *Restructure and Revitalize*, the UFCW proposes to create an Executive Committee that makes the current AFL-CIO Executive Council totally irrelevant.

“An executive committee shall be comprised of the chief executive officers of the 13 largest unions or the minimum number of unions necessary to represent the majority of affiliate members.”

Please note that the minimum number of unions now required to “represent the majority” is six! SEIU, Teamsters, AFSCME, UFCW, Teachers and CWA constitute 51.8 percent of the AFL-CIO's per capita payment members.

Consequently, the UFCW proposed Executive Committee could consist of 13 members or as few as 6 members.

*Restructure and Revitalize* explains how a few more names could be added:

“A number of additional executive committee seats shall be established to represent other unions, constituency groups and trade departments. Those seats will rotate on a biannual basis and will be determined through a majority vote of the non-rotating members.”

In practice, as few as four to seven union presidents would pick the diversity slots on the UFCW’s proposed Executive Committee.

And what power would those four to seven union presidents exercise over other AFL-CIO affiliates? *Restructure and Revitalize* raises more questions than it answers. But the UFCW’s new Executive Committee:

- can encourage mergers of unions “unable to effectively perform these functions.” Who decides which functions matter? Who sets the standards for performance? Those same four to seven unions.
- has “executive authority” over all programs and budgets, core jurisdictions, organizing rebates, jurisdictional disputes and coordinated bargaining? Who exercises that authority? Just four to seven union presidents.
- will “consolidate the power” of ULLICO, the Housing Investment Trust and Union Privilege? Who does the consolidation? Why those same four to seven unions, of course.

Very similar, if not identical, language covering the power of this streamlined Executive Committee appears in the Nupsters’ *Restore* document. At least, *Restore* conveniently explains that “the Executive Committee should meet four times a year; the AFL-CIO’s Executive Council should meet two times a year.”

When the power to decide the future of the AFL-CIO and its affiliated unions is vested in so few hands, one must ask two questions:

Why is such unprecedented power required?

What checks and balances exist to prevent the arbitrary, capricious and corrupt use of such power?

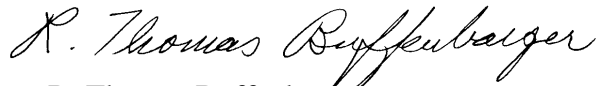
History is filled with examples of how absolute power corrupts absolutely. Does *Restore the American Dream* mask an insidious grab for absolute power? I believe it does.

Is *Restructure and Revitalize* what’s really in store for the American Labor Movement? I certainly hope not.

Fortunately the AFL-CIO is not yet an autocracy – an organization ruled by a select few. It's a federation of fifty-seven independent and autonomous unions that can decide what is in their own best interest.

And that's what we must do in Chicago. Let's use our power. Let's strip away the public relations puffery and focus on what is real, what is really at stake in this debate.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R. Thomas Buffenbarger". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

R. Thomas Buffenbarger  
INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT