

Business

Infighting at SEIU leads to 'collapse of leadership,' removal of top officers



SEIU Local 73 members picketed outside Oak Park's village hall in 2012. The local's top leaders were removed by the Service Employees International Union due to infighting. (Chuck Berman / Chicago Tribune)

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The Service Employees International Union announced Wednesday that it had removed the top leaders of a large Chicago local and imposed an emergency trusteeship because of a "crisis of governance and collapse of leadership" that put members' interests at risk.

The action was taken at Local 73, which represents about 28,000 workers in Illinois and Northwest Indiana, including crossing guards, school cafeteria workers and others primarily in public service and publicly funded positions in school districts, municipalities and social service agencies. Recently Local 73 has added nontenured faculty at the University of Chicago and Loyola University to its rolls, and it is in the midst of union drives at other private Chicago universities.

The SEIU, which nationally has about 2 million members, said in a news release that "incessant infighting" between top elected officers at Local 73 had seriously disrupted operations and functioning at the union. The local was unable to conduct a July 15 executive board meeting or hold a membership meeting scheduled for the next day.

Local 73 President Christine Boardman and Secretary-Treasurer Matthew Brandon, plus four other officers, were removed from office. Boardman and Brandon "each challenge the basic legitimacy of the other's authority to hold office or lead the Local, resulting in a debilitating dysfunction of the Local's governance process as well as causing instability and confusion within the Local and its membership," the SEIU said in the release. Among the subjects of the fighting was the "contested suspension of its secretary-treasurer and allegations that the local president can no longer serve due to a previous announcement of retirement."

Operation of Local 73 is now temporarily in the hands of Eliseo Medina, a former SEIU secretary-treasurer, who was appointed trustee. Dian Palmer, president of SEIU Healthcare Wisconsin, and Lenore Friedlaender, an officer from SEIU Local 32BJ, which operates primarily in the Northeast, were appointed deputy trustees.

The union will be returned to local governance as soon as is reasonable, a spokesman said, but there is no timetable.

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