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Conflict Between 2 Unions Intensifies

By Steven Greenhouse
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The A.F.L.-C.I.O. president, John J. Sweeney, denounced on Tuesday what he said was “a violent attack orchestrated” by the Service Employees International Union against members of other unions at a conference on Saturday in Michigan.

The service employees’ union sent busloads of members from Ohio to the labor conference in Dearborn to confront leaders and members of the California Nurses Association. The service employees say the nurses sabotaged a major service employees’ unionizing drive last month.

Others at the conference said the fighting began when service employee members and officials tried to barge into the conference in a hotel banquet hall. Chris Kutalik, editor of Labor Notes, a magazine sponsoring the conference, said a retired member of the United Automobile Workers was pushed, banged her head against a table and was taken to a hospital for a head wound.

“There is no justification, none, for the violent attack orchestrated by S.E.I.U.,” Mr. Sweeney said in a statement. “Violence in attacking freedom of speech must be strongly condemned.”

The service employees union said the hundreds of bused-in members were not trying to push in. Rather, it said, nurses’ union members and others at the conference used violence to keep out several of its members.

The service employees voiced dismay with Mr. Sweeney’s statement, saying he should focus instead criticism on the California Nurses Association for sending organizers to Ohio, where it does not represent workers, to undermine the service employees’ three-year-long effort to unionize more than 8,000 nurses and other hospital workers at Roman Catholic hospitals.

“John Sweeney has the power to solve this problem,” Andrew Stern, the service employees’ president, said in a statement. “He should stop making excuses and protect workers.”

Labor leaders said it could be awkward for Mr. Sweeney to condemn the tactics of the nurses’ union, which belongs to the A.F.L.-C.I.O., in its battle with the service employees, which left the labor federation three years ago.

The nurses’ executive director, Rose Ann DeMoro, defended her union’s efforts to prevent a service employees’ victory, saying that nurses should be in a separate union from other workers and that the service employees had negotiated a sweetheart deal with the Ohio hospitals.

The nurses’ tactics were so disruptive that the service employees moved to cancel the unionization vote.

Referring to the nurses’ leader, Tom Balanoff, the top service employees official in Illinois, said, “Rose Ann used the exact same tactics as corporate America in stopping Ohio workers from organizing.”

Mr. Stern is also battling the president of his union’s giant health care local in California, Sal Rosselli. Mr. Rosselli says Mr. Stern is undemocratic and uses top-down methods.

On Tuesday, a spokesman for Mr. Stern, Andrew McDonald, said Mr. Rosselli violated federal law by allowing just shop stewards and other union officials run to be delegates to the union convention in June. Doing so excluded 95 percent of the members of the local, United Healthcare Workers-West, from running.

The local issued a statement on Tuesday saying it would hold a new election for delegates and acknowledging that it had made a mistake in not letting most members run.