



COMMUNIQUE

THE FUTURE OF LABOR UNIONS & BEYOND

By Marci Rosenblum, Local 1180 Communications Director

Union leaders, scholars, and activists came together in November for a one-day conference to discuss the implications of the upcoming U.S. Supreme Court case *Janus v. AFSCME* and how it will impact unions not only in New York, but across the country.

"The attacks on labor don't stop. This forum gave us all an opportunity to discuss possible immediate outcomes and strategic options for combatting the attack on public sector unionism," said Local 1180 President-elect Gloria Middleton. She was joined at the event by First Vice President Gina Strickland, President Arthur Cheliotis and dozens of 1180 members and activists. Local 1180's Deborah Valentin was Mistress of Ceremonies.

Throughout the country, labor is facing a real challenge. From the recent Constitutional Convention proposition on the November ballot to the previous Supreme Court cases, labor is emerging stronger than ever as it fights back the attempts to dismantle its power. The key to continued success, however, is member engagement and making sure all dues-paying members stay as members, and agency-shop payers become dues-paying members.

"We have faced plenty of opposition before and we will face it again. As long as we stand united and our membership understands all the ways they benefit from union membership, we will emerge stronger than ever," Middleton said.

The day's speakers included Janella T. Hinds, Secretary-Treasurer of the NYC CLC; Tony Utano, President of Transport Workers Union Local 100; Council Member Daneek Miller, Chair of the City Council's Civil Service and Labor Committee; and John English, New York Regional Director, AFSCME (formerly a labor leader in Wisconsin).

English spoke about life after Wisconsin passed Act 10, also known as the Wisconsin Budget Repair Bill. This so-called budget repair was done by stripping away most of the collective bargaining rights of public sector unions, only leaving them the right to bargain pay raises capped by inflation. Workers no longer have free health care, but instead pay premiums of \$400 or more per month, and they also have increased pension contributions. Unions must win recertification votes every year to represent workers, and that recertification must be by majority. In addition, English talked about how all ballots that are not returned are considered as votes against union representation.

The future of the labor movement as its known today will change in the blink of an eye with the likely Supreme Court decision all but guaranteeing that the whole public sector will become "right to work" next year, barring another miracle at the Supreme Court.

Once the conservative majority rules in *Janus v. AFSCME*, likely sometime toward the end of the session when the largest decisions are announced, life will change for unions in the 23 states that until now have rejected right-to-work laws, including New York. Public sector unions in these states will no longer be able to collect "agency fees" from workers they represent but who choose not to join their locals. It is estimated that agency fees, charged to non-members to cover the cost of bargaining and representation, are typically at least 90 percent of union dues, and in some cases are equal. But under *Janus*, non-members will pay nothing and will be freeloaders.

English said that in addition to talking to new members and agency fee payers about the benefits of a union, unions realize that current members are also at risk of quitting and that a more ambitious engagement strategy is needed. Middleton whole-heartedly agrees.

"We need to develop record levels of activism," she said. "It's about members talking to members, about getting involved and staying involved. It's about having important conversations with current members, new members, potential members, all in the name of our survival. Members need to be reminded of what life was like prior to the union movement. No one wants to return to that."

As with other unions, Local 1180 is reaching out to the entire membership, one on one, to answer questions and talk about the *Janus* case and its implications.

It's all about "The Union Difference." What are wages and benefits like for comparable jobs in right-to-work states? What are contracts like? Research shows weaker contracts, lower pay, and fewer job rights. Middleton said that once members have the knowledge, they will have the power. "The attacks on labor don't stop. This forum gave us all an opportunity to discuss possible immediate outcomes and strategic options for combatting the attack on public sector unionism," said Local 1180 President-elect Gloria Middleton. She was joined at the event by First Vice President Gina Strickland, President Arthur Cheliotis and dozens of

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