



COMMUNIQUE

CWA LOCAL 1180'S FIRST TOWN HALL MEETING Q&A WITH PRESIDENT GLORIA MIDDLETON

By Marci Rosenblum, Local 1180 Communications Director

Local 1180 held its first-ever Live Town Hall Meeting on August 2, with the hour-long event being broadcast in real time on Facebook.

President Gloria Middleton took the stage in front of 100-plus members in the audience, with hundreds more watching live on social media. The event was an opportunity for Middleton to directly answer member questions from the audience and from social media.

“Our live Town Hall was another way that our union is keeping up with the changing times of disseminating information to members in the most time-sensitive manner possible,” she said. “We realized so many of our members were contacting the union with the same questions, so we planned this live town hall to reach as many members as we could.”

City Council Member I. Daneek Miller, a huge supporter of the labor movement and Local 1180, was the guest speaker, answering several audience questions himself. The event drew extremely positive feedback, with members requesting additional Town Hall meetings before the night was even over.

Following the broadcast, audience members discussed amongst themselves the issues that were talked about at the event. What follows are some of the questions and answers from the evening. To watch the entire Town Hall, visit the union’s YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plnBMZS7dwY>.

Q: When do we start negotiations for a new contract?

A: DC37 holds the bargaining certificate for the Citywide contract, which is why they go to the bargaining table first. Their contract expired October 2017. They signed their new contract in July 2018. Our contract expired May 2018. There are some issues we still have to resolve from the old contract and then we will send notice to the City that we are ready to negotiate a new contract. We are sending surveys to the members

and we set up committees. However, know that the pattern has been set. There will be other issues of importance to members that will be part of our negotiations.

Q: What steps are being taken to get the members of CWA Local 1180 more engaged and interested in Union activities, rallies, etc.?

A: It’s all about our members talking to other members. We are holding one-on-one conversations at all our worksites. We are teaching members how to talk to and engage other members. It all comes down to us working together to get more engagement. When you come to an event or activity, bring along a few friends and coworkers. Show excitement and energy and it will spread.

Q: Why are non members who no longer pay dues entitled to certain benefits?

A: Unions receive money from the City for our benefits funds, money that is used to provide various benefits to members. Any benefit that was in place prior to the Janus decision remains, but any new benefits the Union is able to provide outside of the Collective Bargaining Agreement will be for dues-paying members only.

Q: What can we do as a union to educate our communities of the benefits of becoming union members? How can we educate people on various union jobs within our communities that are part of union membership and the added benefit it provides to the community as a whole?

A: Local 1180 saw the need to not only be amongst our own members, but to expand ourselves into the communities. We established Borough Community Coordinating Committees where members can come, bring their families and friends, and learn about unions, what Local 1180 is doing, and work together on community issues. The CWA triangle is labor, community, politics. They all go together. These give us a chance to get out our message and better the communities in which we live. Spreading the word about jobs is up to all of us. The first three letters in the word “union” are u-n-i. I don’t do this by myself, you don’t do this by yourself. We do this together. Nothing beats one-on-one communication. We must talk to one another.

Q: Jane McAlevey (union and community organizer) writes that the labor movement has not been able to effectively challenge inequality because unions are not organizing “ordinary people to understand their potential power and participate meaningfully in making strategy.” Instead, unions rely on paid staff to talk to politicians, negotiate contracts, and mobilize members to turn out for actions that the members were not involved in planning. Do you agree with this critique, and if so, what is the best way to organize the members of CWA 1180 who work for the City of New York?

A: Post Janus, labor has had to rethink our strategy about communicating with members. Local 1180 has instituted a membership brigade whereby our retired members visit sites to have one-on-one conversations with members about the importance of being in a union, as well as having members complete surveys regarding how they feel about our union. We are also training Shop Stewards and activists on how to organize their workplace around issues that come up in the workplace. Having a presence among the rank and file is essential.

Q: What and how will you convey to the members of Local 1180 that the union will still stand in spite of nay-sayers such as Mark Janus and how will the ruling of the Janus case affect Local 1180?

A: We have been working diligently to make sure we get the message out to all our members that this was happening. We have been talking to our members ever since the Friedrich’s case where there was a threat to have agency fee payers no longer pay dues. We had to do business differently. We had to reboot ourselves because Janus was around the corner, being funded by the 1%. We started talking to members one on one. As part of that strategy, Local 1180 has more than 94% membership. There are anti-union groups who got a hold of some members’ work emails and tried to get them to opt out. But we are standing strong and we will continue to have one-on-one conversations with our members.

Q: What happens now and in the future to unions, ours in particular, in light of the Janus decision?

A: We have to stay strong. We have to persevere. We have 700,000 members in CWA across the country. CWA is used to having to go to members and collect dues because in several right-to-work states there is no dues checkoff but they still have 95% membership. Locals have to go to each member and ask them to pay dues directly. This is not anything new for CWA. We are looking at their model. New York and other states are now basically in the same situation. We have done everything in our power to make sure members know what the problems are. We are talking together with other unions and labor organizations. Governor Cuomo signed legislation that if you are not a dues-paying member, then we do not have to represent you in the disciplinary process. It’s going to take a lot of work. We have to do things differently. It’s a new day. We need each other right now.

Q: The main concern of the majority of the members is how the Janus decision will impact unions. If members opt out of paying union dues, how will it affect their health benefits?

A: What is so dangerous about Janus is that as long as members are in the collective bargaining agreement in a title that we hold, their health benefits will not change. That’s what the anti-union people will tell you, but they are wrong. If we have no union to collectively bargain, if we

don’t have the support of our members as we sit at the bargaining table to talk about health benefits, we will all lose. In the last round of bargaining with the City, they wanted us to start paying premiums. If it wasn’t for the collective action of all the City’s unions who were able to hire attorneys to talk to the City and come up with a plan that didn’t require us to take more money out of our pockets, that’s exactly what we would be doing. This is why you need a union, this is why you must pay dues, this is why you need to support your union.

Q: What will happen to Retiree Chapter Membership now that the Janus case has finished?

A: The Retiree Chapter membership is a volunteer organization. Janus has no affect on this.

Q: Now that we got the verdict on the Janus vs. AFSCME case, if an employee choose not to pay union dues and need legal representation in court regarding a landlord/tenant issue, will the union attorney represent that employee in court just like a real dues paying member?

A: Any benefits we provided before, we cannot stop those benefits. Health benefits, the benefits we provide through legal comes from the welfare fund and we get money from the City for it. A non union member will have that same opportunity. That’s why we need people who will sit with our union and keep us strong. We are working on benefits that will be available only for due-paying members, such as some insurance benefits, scholarship programs, and other union-member only benefits.

Q: The decision to disassociate from the Working Families Party, although said to be for our benefit, came off very unilateral. And the recent victory by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez who our union did not support, and now uses for public speaking engagements, shows that grassroots mobilization can work. So how can we as a local have proper input and autonomy on such political decisions?

A: The WFP was initiated with the help of CWA. The decision to not engage with them in this election was a hard decision and it came from the top. We got a call from District 1 asking us on behalf of the Governor not to participate in the WFP convention. The Governor has done many things for CWA. He helped us with the Verizon strike; he signed legislation that says we don’t have to represent members in disciplinary hearings; he signed legislation that when new members come in, the Agency has to let us know who they are and where they work. Politics is very complicated and involved. We have candidate screenings that give members an opportunity to talk to candidates and give recommendations on endorsements.

Q: What measures, if any, are being taking to ensure that the wide salary range of the Administrative Manager title is not exploited? Ex: Keeping most Administrative Managers at the low end of the spectrum while giving huge raises to those who have curried favor with management. Why is the starting salary so low for Administrative Managers? Many PAAs may be able to earn more than an AM with less responsibility, so what is the incentive to get promoted, especially when management can give you the responsibilities without significantly boosting your salary to match?

A: Our EEO case for Administrative Managers is about the starting salary that has been suppressed. As soon as minority women starting passing the Civil Service tests that Local 1180 insisted the City start giving when

we gained the right to represent them, there were more white males in that position and that's why there's such a range of salaries. When minority women started passing the test, the City didn't change the starting minimum salary because there was no union to fight for the Administrative Managers and make sure their salary goes up like for the PAA. Based on our initial arbitration case, we got the salary increased from \$52,000 to \$64,000, which it is now. Once we are finished with the current EEO case, that minimum will start to come up. In the EEO decision we make way for those at the lower level to have a stepping process to get a raise, but we have to settle the case.

Q: I have read the decision of Janus. Is Local 1180 and other affected unions in the State of New York preparing for any type of appeal of this case?

A: Supreme Court decisions are the law of the land. There is no appeal process. Labor is working with pro-labor politicians to create legislation that will protect labor, such as not have to represent a non-member in disciplinary proceedings.

Q: How can the union ensure that a new Shop Steward is placed at a particular work site when the prior Shop Steward was promoted to another union, left the location, or retired?

A: When you are missing a Shop Steward in your workplace, it's up to members to call the Union and let us know. It's then up to members to organize that workplace and find another Shop Steward. We don't appoint Shop Stewards, they are elected by the members at the worksite. You need to find the person who isn't afraid to stand up to management, who isn't afraid to speak up, and that's who you push to run for the position.

Q: When the union sits down to negotiate contracts, why can't we get raises of 7% or more?

A: Collective bargaining raises are based on what the City says it can afford. They have to allocate a certain amount out of their budget for collective bargaining raises, and there are about 300,000 City workers covered under the collective bargaining agreement. They allocate 1%, but that goes up based on negotiations.

Q: Why does it seem like it takes so long for the Union to get in touch with newly hired CWA 1180 members?

A: Prior to Janus, it was very difficult when new members came in to find out where they were, unless they came off a list. Once they went to that pool, it was hard to track them. Based on legislation that Governor Cuomo signed earlier this year, when new members come into the City, they have to notify the Local that represents that person's title. It was hard before, but we will find them now.

Q: Post Janus, if an employee chooses not to pay union dues and needs legal representation in court regarding a landlord/tenant issue, will the union attorney represent that employee in court just like a dues-paying member?

A: Yes for now. We are looking at ways to have member benefits vs. non-member benefits for promotion and prevention; and strengthened information systems, evidence and research.

Until all of these objectives are met, America's mental health epidemic will continue. After all, mental health problems tend to be under-researched, under-treated, and over-stigmatized. They are not, however, solely a United States problem.

All of these mental health issues are not confined just to the United States. The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, William and Kate, have made it their top priority to advocate for the mental health of children everywhere, not just in England.

"The mental health of our children must be seen as every bit as important as their physical health," the Duchess wrote in a personal essay. "For too long we have been embarrassed to admit when our children need emotional or psychiatric help, worried that the stigma associated with these problems would be detrimental to their futures. We hope to encourage [our children] to speak about their feelings, and to give them the tools and sensitivity to be supportive peers to their friends as they get older."

And if the future King and Queen of England are trying their hardest to erase the stigma surrounding mental health issues, so should we all.

Society tends to ignore the hard truth about suicide: saving a life cannot be solely the responsibility of the person at risk. There must be more emphasis on early intervention when someone seems "off" in order to curb suicides — a responsibility that lies with everyone.