

LABOR LYCEUM SUMMARY REPORT

Saturday, March 3, 2018 Lyceum: JANUS V. AFSCME: LABOR AT A CROSSROADS

Despite the previous day's snowstorm, the program on JANUS V. AFSCME: LABOR AT A CROSSROADS went ahead on schedule with sixty union and community members in the audience. Special thanks to the presenters and to NYSUT for making the hall available and accessible.

Moderator Linda Donahue convened the program at 10 AM, introduced panelists individually before their presentations, and called on the audience during the Q&A.

HARRY BRONSON Esq., (member, New York State Assembly) summarized the case and explained the legal issues raised by the case. Last week the U.S. Supreme Court heard argument on the claim brought by AFSCME member Janus that having to pay union dues violates his rights. If he wins, unions will have to represent both workers who pay dues and those who don't. Bronson expects that the Court will rule soon in Janus's favor. How such a ruling will affect unions, he suggested, will depend on how narrowly or broadly the Court defines speech, the worst case scenario being defining payment of union dues itself as speech.

Leaders of several local unions then described what their unions are doing to maintain members despite a ruling for Janus.

KENNY MONTGOMERY, (President, National Association of Letter Carriers Branch 210), noted that as an open shop federal union, NALC already lives in the anticipated post-Janus world and described his local's program to organize and retain 98% of members:

- Empower members to understand their rights and responsibilities
- Educate members on what their union does for them
- Entertain members, making meetings and union activities enjoyable
- Embody union values

TOM GILLETT, (just-retired Regional Director, New York State United Teachers), handed out a NYSUT pamphlet "Union Proud, Union Strong: Answers to your questions about pending changes for unions and their members," which is being used in the union's campaign to re-engage and educate members. The campaign involves meetings and discussions with members and the collection of recommitment cards.

ROBERT LEONARD (Labor Relations Specialist, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees), described the AFSCME STRONG outreach and education program involving one-on-one conversations with members as well as small meetings, house visits, and phone calls. The effort also involves contacting members in the workplace and listening to as well as informing them. Additionally, members are asked to recommit by filling out new membership cards.

BESS WATTS, (President, Civil Service Employees Association Local 828 and President of the Rochester-Finger Lakes chapter of Pride at Work), described CSEA's outreach NEVER QUIT program involving mailings and door-to-door visits to members, and new member orientations. The program especially targets members who vote in primary elections. Members are encouraged to think of union dues as "workplace insurance."

JIM BERTOLONE, (former president, Rochester Labor Council), addressed the broader context of the Janus case, placing it in the context of the history of attacks on unions, the recurrence of racism and fascism, the rise of global inequality, and related social, economic and political developments. Bertolone warned that President Trump is not an anomaly that will end with his time in office. These issues are fueling the rise of extreme right wing so-called populism, even in Europe.

Following the presentations there was a very lively Q&A as members from nearly twenty affiliates rose to put questions to the presenters or to describe their unions' response to Janus. Among the issues raised during the Q&A were the impact of Janus in sectors of the labor movement beyond the public sector, Janus as a manifestation of class struggle, and members' participation in their unions' education and recommitment campaigns.

The moderator declared the program adjourned at 12 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon Garlock, Education Committee Chair