



A renewed spirit of activism

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UNIONS across the nation let out a cheer on March 29 when they learned the U.S. Supreme Court deadlocked 4-4 in the *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association* case.

The ruling was a relief because the anti-labor case aimed to cripple public employee unions financially and undermine their ability to represent their members in the workplace and at the bargaining table. If the decision had gone the other way, public service workers across the country faced the possibility that their benefits, workplace protections and collective bargaining rights would be gutted.

But while we were pleased with the split vote, we must also be very clear: The *Friedrichs* deadlock is only a temporary victory.

At this time, more than 20 other lawsuits that similarly seek to harm public employee unions are being heard in federal courts around the country. This threat is not going away. It points to the importance of our vote for the next president, whose appointments of new justices will determine the direction of the U.S. Supreme Court for many years.

The war on labor

The lawsuits are a key component of the Right’s heavily-financed war against labor.

Wealthy conservatives are targeting the union movement because they know we are the last powerful institutional barrier in the country standing against their agenda of privatization of government services, deregulation, political domination, tax breaks for the rich and solidifying a low-wage economy with powerless workers.

Ultimately, the goal of the lawsuits is to quash the political power of public employee unions and to establish right-to-work laws in all 50 states. We must prevent this cancer from spreading.

Today, a majority of states have right-to-work laws. Right-to-work laws allow workers in unionized workplaces to opt out of paying

union dues. That means workers don’t have to contribute their fair share for union services, such as negotiating for wage increases and benefit improvements.

In one sense, *Friedrichs* has been a blessing for the union movement. It made the depth of the attack on us very apparent. Right-to-work activists are now knocking on the doors of workers to try to convince them to drop their union membership.

Specifically, the threat of *Friedrichs* gave unions a wake-up call on the need to build up our presence in the workplace, encourage members to become more active and step up our political work. Today, we have a more vigorous labor movement in the United States.

At DC 37, we have launched a union-wide campaign to inform members about the value of unionism. As many of you know, we are carrying out this action plan with the support of our national union, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, which is helping affiliates around the country become stronger.

The purpose of the DC 37/AFSCME Strong campaign includes informing members about services and benefits, suggesting ways they can get more involved in union activities and learning about their expectations of the union.

Last year’s successful campaign to secure millions of dollars in extra funding for the city’s three public library systems and the current fight to win a contract for our 10,000 members at the City University of New York reflect the new spirit of activism and militancy that we are trying to build at DC 37. Our organizing of a few thousand new members, winning pay increases for low-wage school workers and putting the brakes on the outsourcing of information technology work are other examples.

If you are not already involved in the union, we encourage you to join our network of activists. DC 37’s strength depends on the participation of our members.

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