

Working People Across Connecticut Respond to Supreme Court Decision on Janus v. AFSCME Council 31

Teacher, firefighter, paraeducator, janitor and other workers denounce judicial attack on freedom to negotiate a fair return on their work

A teacher, firefighter, paraeducator, janitor, administrative assistant, and other workers stood on the steps of the Connecticut Supreme Court on Wednesday to denounce a judicial attack on their freedom to negotiate a fair return on their work.

LORI PELLETIER: President of the Connecticut AFL-CIO

“From brave first responders to dedicated public school teachers to life-saving nurses, our community is strong because of those who answer the call to public service,” said Lori Pelletier, President of the Connecticut AFL-CIO. “These public service workers are able to serve their communities better because they are union workers, and together as a union, they have the freedom to speak up together to help make our communities strong and safe.”

“The billionaires and corporate CEOs who supported the Janus case are attempting to divide working people and limit our power in numbers,” Pelletier continued. “They know that unions give workers a powerful voice in speaking up for themselves, their families, and their communities.”

KATE DIAS: Math teacher at Manchester High School and President of the Manchester Education Association

“The Supreme Court’s attempt to erode the body of the union is at best disappointing and at worst the work of the privileged to suppress workers,” said Kate Dias, math teacher at Manchester High School and president of the Manchester Education Association. “The union has long been the vehicle for workers, like teachers, to gain power in their workplace – to give voice to those who otherwise might be drowned out by sounds of economic imbalances. As teachers, we know the importance of power in the workplace to effect change and promote ideas that encourage not only our own growth and power, but that of the people we serve – students and families.”

“Unions provide a place for workers to grow and have power,” said Dias. “I know that sentiment is not always well received, but what kind of power are we really talking about? The power to negotiate a living wage, the power to influence working conditions, the power to address conflict, the power to speak for our students and fight for more funding for our public schools, the greatest social equalizer this country has ever had.”

TAFFY WOMACK: Administrative assistant at the Secretary of the State’s Office and President of AFSCME Local 704

“It’s obvious this court case has nothing to do with helping workers,” said Taffy Womack, administrative assistant at the Secretary of the State’s Office and President of AFSCME Local 704. “It’s about CEOs and billionaires spending their money and influence to rig the economy in their favor. The forces behind Janus want to destroy the freedom of workers to come together and improve their lives by joining a union. I refuse to let them win!”

“I am a proud union member,” said Womack. “Union jobs have historically been a path to the middle class for people of color. African-American union members today earn nearly 15% more than their non-union counterparts and Latino union workers earn nearly 22% more than their non-union counterparts. My AFSCME union is a voice for fair pay and equal treatment of women in the public sector.”

“There’s a famous saying that a rising tide lifts all boats,” said Womack. “Unions are the rising tide for thousands of workers who are part of Connecticut’s middle class. I’m here to tell you: The forces behind Janus are not going to sink us. Not today, not tomorrow, not next year, not ever.”

RICHARD HART: Firefighter in Waterbury and member of IAFF Local 1339

“As a firefighter, it is critical to have the ability to collectively bargain for pay, health care, and retirement benefits as compensation for an extremely dangerous occupation,” said Richard Hart, a firefighter in Waterbury and member of IAFF Local 1339. “More importantly, it is vital to the safety of our members and the public we are sworn to protect, that we are able to bargain for workplace protections that allow us to safely complete our mission. The public’s safety and protection is paramount to our mission,

and without the ability to bargain for equipment, tools, apparatus staffing, personal protective equipment, and training, we cannot protect those who cannot protect themselves.”

“This decision by the Supreme Court of the United States grossly undermines our ability to protect the citizenry of the United States, places them at greater risk, and should be of grave concern to all,” said Hart.

CIRO GUTIERREZ: Cleaner at UConn Hartford and member of 32BJ SEIU

“Nothing’s going to stop my co-workers and I from standing with our union,” said Ciro Gutierrez, a member of 32BJ SEIU and cleaner at the UConn Hartford Campus. “With my union job, my wife and I were able to send our three children to college. With our union jobs, my coworkers and I can provide the best service possible to the staff and students at the University of Connecticut. This attack on unions is an attack on that service and it’s an attack on our families. But we are not afraid. We’re proud to stand strong with our brothers and sisters across Connecticut against the powerful interests that want to divide us. Together we rise!”

SHELLYE DAVIS: Paraeducator at Moylan School in Hartford and co-president of AFT Local 2221

“For more than a century, solidarity is what drove our labor movement to make sure that capitalism actually works for working people — not just the top 1%,” said Shellye Davis, a paraeducator at Moylan School in Hartford and co-president of AFT Local 2221. “Through it all, our unions have faced unrelenting attacks by the rich and powerful whose aim has been to keep the economy rigged against the rest of us. We see that continuing today, in the assault by a network of dark money donors who weaponized the courts to try to take us down. They’re the ones who pushed the Janus lawsuit, specifically to weaken unions like mine — and silence the voices of all paraeducators, classroom support staff and millions of other public employees.”

LYNELL BROWN: Mental Health Associate at Capitol Region Mental Health and member of 1199 SEIU

“The special interest groups who funded Janus aren’t interested in the rights and best interest of union members,” said Lynell Brown, a worker at

DMHAS and member of 1199 SEIU. “They're only interested in taking away the power of working people by stripping us of our rights to negotiate a better future. These attacks on state employees are bad for the Connecticut economy and the middle class. We're not going to let a court case keep us down. We are the union – a group of workers, black, brown and white, using our power in numbers to demand change. Standing tall to protect our families, our clients and our communities.

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[Click here](#) to read the AFL-CIO’s memo to the press explaining the facts of the Janus case.

To set up separate interviews with the workers or leaders quoted in the press release, please contact the respective communications staffer:

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