

## A major victory for workers, strong unions on Friedrichs

David Groves

### *Split Supreme Court turns back right-wing Friedrichs attack on labor*

WASHINGTON, D.C. (March 29, 2016) — The U.S. Supreme Court today [announced](#) a 4-4 tie decision in *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*. It's a major victory for organized labor and advocates for collective bargaining in a case brought by right-wing conservatives that threatened to weaken public-sector unions by promoting "free riders" who pay nothing for representation.

Without setting precedent, the decision leaves in place the lower court's ruling in favor of unions, which maintains the fair-share fee system for public employees that's been in place for 40 years. Under this system, workers can choose to withdraw from the union and not pay full dues, but still must pay their fair-share fees to help cover the costs of bargaining and enforcing their contract.

Labor leaders declared the decision a major victory for all workers and resolved to keep fighting legal attacks that are intended to make it harder for workers to speak up together.

Here are some of today's statements in response to the *Friedrichs* decision.

AFL-CIO President **Richard Trumka**:

"Today, working people have persevered in the face of another attack on our rights. All over the country working people are showing that we won't allow wealthy special interests or their politicians to stand in our way to join collectively and make workplaces better all across America. In the face of these attacks we are more committed than ever to ensuring that everyone has the right to speak up together for a better life."

**Lee Saunders**, president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME):

"AFSCME members are more resolved than ever to band together and stand up to future attempts to silence the voices of working families. As public service workers learn more about the *Friedrichs* case, they are shocked to hear about such a political attack through the Supreme Court, and



**Richard Trumka**

more motivated than ever to step up, get involved, and organize. It's never been clearer that our most basic rights are at stake."

U.S. Senator **Patty Murray** (D-Wash.):

"This is good news for workers, unions, families, and the economy. With the lower court ruling being affirmed by a deadlocked Supreme Court, this latest assault on the ability of teachers, nurses, and other public servants to organize and make their voices heard in the workplace has been beaten back.

"The economy is only truly strong when it is growing from the middle out, not the top down — and unions are key in making that happen. When unions are strong, workers can fight for higher wages, more opportunities, and greater economic security for themselves and their families. Many Republicans are going to keep working to tilt the scales in favor of the biggest corporations and the wealthiest Americans by making it harder for workers to band together and fight to improve and protect their wages and benefits. But as a nation, we should not turn our backs on empowering workers through collective bargaining and making sure that workers have a strong voice at the table—and this decision today upholds that principle.

"While a deadlocked Supreme Court happened to result in a positive outcome in this case, this is one more reminder that we need a fully functioning Supreme Court to protect the rights of workers, women, and families across the country. Now that the President has nominated Judge Merrick Garland, Senate Republicans should do their jobs by giving him all due consideration, a hearing, and a vote."



**Lee Saunders**



**U.S. Sen. Patty Murray**

**Jeff Johnson**, President of the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO:

"Given the 4-4 decision in *Friedrichs*, longstanding law remains in place. Since the *Abood* decision in 1977, workers not wanting to join the union have paid fair share fees to cover the cost of the union bargaining and administering contracts that protect all workers under the contract. This was fair then, and remains fair. The silver lining of the *Friedrichs* threat is that we are more proactively reaching out to our members to talk about the union, and as result, are making our unions and the labor movement stronger."

Statement by **America Works Together**, a coalition of teachers, nurses, firefighters, and other public service workers and their allies:

"Today, the Supreme Court left standing nearly four decades of precedent and sound law that has worked for public employers and working people alike. This marks a significant defeat for the wealthy special interests who want to hijack our economy, our democracy, and even the United States Supreme Court. Millions of teachers, nurses, firefighters, and other public service workers will continue to be able to band together in a union in order to speak up for one another, improve their communities, and hold the wealthy and powerful accountable.

"The Constitution, the law, and the facts are on our side, and we remain confident that we will continue to prevail against the onslaught of baseless litigation from those focused on trying to silence working people in order to benefit themselves at the expense of the rest of us.

"Today's decision sends a strong message to our opponents that the Supreme Court is not open to do the business of right wing organizations seeking to win through judicial decree what they have been unable to win through the



**Jeff Johnson**

democratic process. Our courts should be reserved for legal disputes, not political agendas.

“This case provides a vivid illustration of what’s at stake when it comes to the Supreme Court. That is why the same wealthy special interests who manufactured this attack on working people are also trying to prevent President Obama from fulfilling his constitutional responsibility to fill the vacancy on the Court. It’s time for conservatives to stop playing games with the Supreme Court.”