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## IN THIS ISSUE

**NOT OUR OPINION** What Justice Elena Kagan had to say about the Janus decision. | Page 8

**CONTRACTOR CRACKDOWN** Surprise visits to 636 construction sites found 82 that were unlicensed. | Page 4

Meeting Notices p.6

Union election results p.9

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# Supreme Court delivers blow to union movement

Ruling 5-4 in *Janus vs. AFSCME*, the court says union-represented public employees don't have to pay anything to the union.

On June 27, five men in black robes decided that America's public employees don't have to pay anything to the unions that represent them — because such a requirement violates workers' First Amendment rights to freedom of speech. The ruling, in a case called *Janus v. AFSCME*, is the latest in a string of decisions in which a 5-4 majority of Republican U.S. Supreme Court appointees has sided against working people and unions.

The *Janus* ruling overturns 41 years of precedent. In 1977, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously in a case called *Abood v Detroit Board of Education* that for public employees who chose not to become union members, requiring them to pay for union



Just hours after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that public employees who choose not to join a union cannot be charged for the cost of collective bargaining, several hundred attended a "Union Strong" rally at Portland City Hall.

political activity would violate their First Amendment rights, but requiring them to pay a "fair

share" fee reimbursing union expenses to negotiate and enforce their contract would not.

Justice Samuel Alito, appointed to the Supreme Court by George W. Bush, has been

questioning the *Abood* ruling since 2012, seemingly inviting a case that would challenge it and give today's court a chance to overrule it. He got close in 2016 with the case *Friedrichs v California Teachers Association*, but the court deadlocked 4-4 on it after the death of Justice Antonin Scalia. Last year's confirmation of Trump appointee Neil Gorsuch gave Alito the fifth vote.

Fittingly, Alito authored the majority opinion in the *Janus* case: "Under Illinois law, public employees are forced to subsidize a union, even if they choose not to join and strongly object to the positions the union takes in collective bargaining and related activities. We conclude that this arrangement violates the free speech rights of nonmembers by compelling them to subsidize private speech on matters of substantial public concern."

Turn to Page 8

## TRADE

# Untangling Trump's trade policy

By Don McIntosh

A year and a half into his presidency, it's clear Donald Trump is starkly different from the last four presidents on trade policy. He's the first NAFTA opponent elected president since George Bush Senior signed NAFTA in 1992. And Trump has shown more willingness than his predecessors to threaten and impose tariffs on foreign imports.

But given Trump's habit of contradictory statements, tweeted policy announcements and reversals, and personal spats with foreign heads of state, it can be hard to keep up. To make sense of it all, here's a list of what Trump has actually done.

■ **Steel and aluminum tariffs** On March 8, 2018, the Trump Administration announced that a 25 percent tariff on steel and a 10 percent tariff on aluminum would start March 23. Then on March 22, the Administration said the

tariffs would start for Japan, but hold off til May 1 for others while the U.S. negotiated tariff alternatives such as quotas capping exports. After brief negotiations, South Korea, Brazil, and Argentina agreed to limit their steel exports to the United States via quotas. Korea's quota amounts to a 30 percent cut. Argentina's quota caps its exports at current levels. Australia got its tariffs suspended indefinitely without any concessions on its part. Following another extension, the tariffs took effect on the European Union, Mexico, and Canada June 1. For perspective, tariffs on steel and aluminum aren't unusual. President Obama imposed steel tariffs, and so did George W. Bush, but they did so with specific countries under "anti-dumping" provisions. Trump's steel tariffs were imposed across the board under a national security clause in a seldom-used trade law. The Trade Expansion Act of 1962 allows the Secretary of Commerce to investigate the impacts of any import on national security — and gives the president the power to adjust tariffs

accordingly. Trump ordered the Commerce Department to investigate steel and aluminum in April 2017. They were the first such investigations to take place since 2001. The report was sobering. It found that 10 U.S. steel furnaces have closed since 2000, and today the United States is the world's largest importer of steel. The report also found that there's huge excess capacity in the global steel market: China's excess capacity alone exceeds the entire capacity of the U.S. steel industry. In aluminum meanwhile, imports now account for 90 percent of total U.S. demand, up from 66 percent just six years ago. From 2013 to 2016, six U.S. smelters closed, and U.S. aluminum industry employment fell by 58 percent.

■ **Auto tariffs coming?** On May 23, 2018, Trump directed the Commerce Department to begin a similar investigation into imports in the auto and auto parts sector. That could lay the ground work for later tariffs on foreign-made SUVs, vans and light trucks, and

Turn to Page 3



At Providence Milwaukie hospital, organizing committee members Brea Underhill, Monique Bunnell, and Hannah Armstrong celebrate the union win.

## UNION ORGANIZING

# At Providence Milwaukie hospital, support workers go union

A group of 156 hospital support workers at Providence Milwaukie Hospital voted 92-54 to join Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 49 in ballots counted June 14.

The new bargaining unit is made up of workers in 26 job categories, including CNAs,

cooks, phlebotomists and ER techs. They voted to unionize in order to win wage increases, more affordable medical benefits, and more say over conditions in the workplace.

Local 49 represents similar workers at more than a dozen hospitals in Oregon and Southwest Washington.