

OSA's LABOR HERO OF 2010: CHARLES ENSLEY

The municipal labor community lost one of its true heroes earlier this year when Charles Ensley, the former president of Social Service Employees Union Local 371 passed away.

Brother Ensley began his City career as a caseworker for the Department of Social Services in the 1960's.

He became an on-location activist for his union and, later, worked as an excellent grievance representative for several years before he was asked to assume a new role as traveling representative of the SSEU Local 371 Welfare Fund. He visited hundreds of locations, holding meetings, alerting members to their benefits, and solving Welfare Fund problems as they arose.

By 1982, Brother Ensley had been elected president of the union and he remained in that role for over a quarter of a century. During his presidency, SSEU's membership grew from 9,000 to 17,000.

SSEU Local 371 is an extremely active and socially conscious union and Brother Ensley encouraged that activism and social consciousness.

We cite a few high points of his presidency. Brother Ensley was always a strong supporter and defender of the Civil Service Merit System. At first, he strongly favored David Dinkins for mayor. Then, when Dinkins permitted the Human Resources Administration (HRA) commissioner to act unfairly towards staff, he became the mayor's most energetic opponent.

An exam had been given for Supervisor II and III Wel-

fare. The HRA commissioner complained that candidates who passed the exam were, in her opinion, too male and too white. Since HRA had historically possessed the most diverse workforce of any City agency, the commissioner's actions were both offensive and shocking.

Brother Ensley took up his members' defense and, when the mayor was not responsive, he took on the mayor as well. Eventually, the wrong was made right.

Around the same time, Mayor Dinkins ordered the layoff of 1,100 Child Welfare workers. In this case, Brother Ensley worked closely with Child Welfare Commissioner James Little and the courts were used as a weapon to reduce the layoffs to 400.

As a DC37 vice-president, he was equally impressive. It was Brother Ensley who publicly questioned the results of DC37's vote in favor of the famous five year contract that started with two zeros.

The fact that he turned out to be right in his concerns led to much upheaval for a time within DC37 but, ultimately, an improved union.

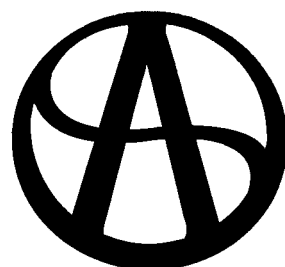
When the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees placed DC37 into receivership for an extended period, Brother Ensley was one of two key players who were eventually able to end the receivership.

Charles Ensley came to New York and chose to work in a low-paid job that helped others. He began to help his fellow caseworkers through his union activity and he ended up helping ever more people as his career progressed.



He was a leader and a good one. We are fortunate that he was here among us for a while, and we are forever diminished by his loss.

For these reasons and more, the Organization of Staff Analysts is proud to name the late Charles Ensley as our labor hero of 2010.



ORGANIZATION OF STAFF ANALYSTS

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