



CENTER FOR LABOR  
& A JUST ECONOMY

# YEAR IN REVIEW 2023

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# A Letter *from* the Executive Director

Dear colleagues,

Wow — 2023 was a year like none I can remember in my career as a labor lawyer. We have witnessed workers in motion to organize companies thought not so long ago to be “unorganizable” and to strike to demand their fair share of the value they help to create and for their vision of the future. And the public has cheered them on in historic numbers. All of this activity has translated into remarkable gains for working people across the economy. Yet workers still face significant barriers to forming a union and bargaining for better wages and working conditions. We can still say — it shouldn’t be this hard! But this moment presents a critical opportunity to shape and make progress towards a fairer future for workers.

Over the past year, the Center has responded in numerous ways to meet the moment – starting with our announcement in January that after nearly two decades as the Labor and Worklife Program, we have evolved into the Center for Labor and a Just Economy (CLJE). Beyond changing our name to more fully embody our mission, the refresh marked a new chapter for our work in advancing strategies to empower workers to build a more equitable economy and democracy. We’ve brought people together who don’t usually find themselves in the same room and fostered their best efforts to come up with new strategies to build power. And then we’ve used our vast network to move ideas to action — like the work we’ve done to support new sectoral bargaining efforts that are becoming reality across the country. Our experts have testified in congressional hearings on union-busting at Starbucks and child labor laws, and are called on across an array of media outlets to weigh in on key developments – from strikes at corporate giants to growing concern over AI ethics in the workplace.

In addition, we have:

- Launched CLJE:Lab, a new policy and legal innovation lab through which we are pursuing projects that directly engage and support the community of pro-worker advocates
- Hosted convenings that gathered an exceptionally diverse group of labor leaders, activists, practitioners, policymakers, academics, and advocates, to cut across movement silos which resulted in rich discussion and productive, action-oriented outcomes

- Brought labor leaders from around the world to campus for the Harvard Trade Union Program, which reached its 81st and most popular year yet
- Published reports, articles, and briefs on some of the most pressing topics facing workers today, like the intersection of racial, worker and environmental justice; innovations in worker power at the state and local level of government and strategies to end wage theft

We'll have more to share soon on our big plans for making change in 2024, but I can't help offering a little tease. We're so thrilled that Michelle Miller, co-founder of Coworker.org, is joining our team in January to ensure we're on the cutting edge of strategizing how to give workers a meaningful voice in the future of AI. We are grateful for the partnership of our collaborators, and are excited to start the new year as we continue to innovate together in 2024.

**Sharon Block**  
Executive Director  
Center for Labor and a Just Economy

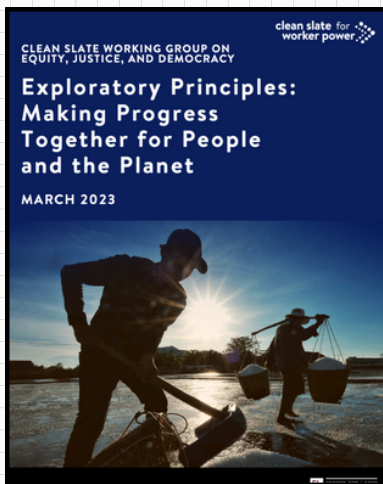


# REPORTS

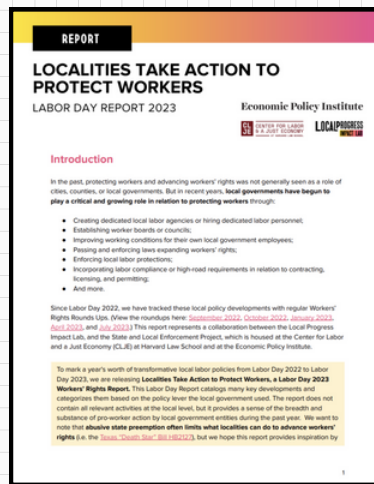


The Center produced a number of reports this year, on topics ranging from innovative enforcement programs combating wage theft to approaches to responsible investment to efforts at the state and local level to build worker power.

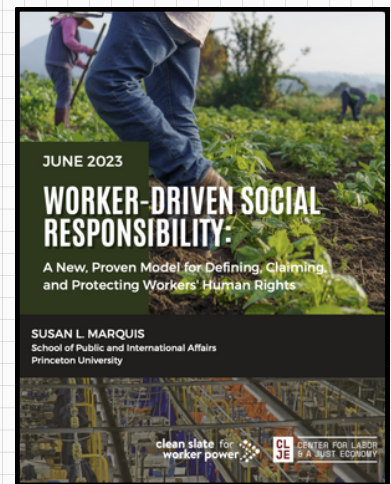
## Exploratory Principles: Making Progress for the People and the Planet



## Localities Take Action to Protect Workers: Labor Day Report 2023



## Worker-Driven Social Responsibility: A New, Proven, Model for Defining, Claiming, and Protecting Workers' Human Rights



## Racial Equity as a Topic for Responsible Investment *why and how investors should engage*



## Power in partnership *How government agencies and community partners are joining forces to fight wage theft*



## Innovating from the Ground Up: State and Local Grants Program *SUMMARY REPORT 2020-21*



## Racial Equity as a Topic for Responsible Investment

## Power in Partnership: How government agencies and community partners are joining forces to fight wage theft

## Innovating from the Ground Up: State and Local Grants Program, 2020-21



# CLJE in the News



In 2023, CLJE experts were featured in **100 news stories** in over **60 different media outlets**. Below is selected coverage of top labor stories our experts weighed in on.

## The State of the Labor Movement

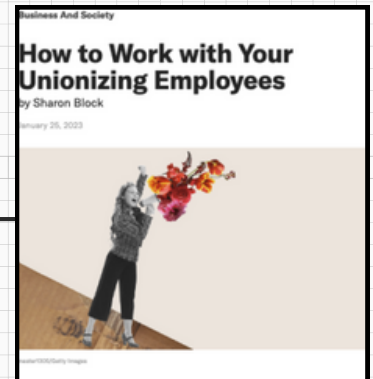
- [Workers are striking and unionizing as labor movement gets bolder | The Boston Globe](#)
- [Why a Harvard labor law expert is optimistic about unions' strength right now | Harvard Law School](#)
- [How 'strike culture' took hold in the US in 2023 | BBC Worklife](#)
- [Why fast-food workers, ride-hail drivers, and nail technicians are fighting for this new form of labor organizing | Fast Company](#)

**"The courage and resiliency of [organizing workers] gives me a kind of optimism that I haven't had in years... we may be starting to see transformative change, both in the labor movement, and as a result of that change, in our economy and our politics more broadly."**

- Prof. Benjamin Sachs, CLJE

## How to Work with Your Unionizing Employees

In *Harvard Business Review*, Sharon Block makes the case for an alternative to the anti-union playbook that companies have followed for decades.



## The Supreme Court

This summer, the Supreme Court issued an anti-union majority decision on a case involving the Teamsters and a construction supplies company, Glacier Northwest. The decision took issue with the Teamster's right to strike, and therefore had major implications for the future right to strike across United States organizations.

- [Supreme Court Backs Employer in Suit Over Strike Losses | The New York Times](#)
- [Glacier and Justice Thomas' Preemption Breadcrumbs | OnLabor](#)
- [Supreme Court rules against union over strike liability | SCOTUSBlog](#)
- [The Supreme Court sided with corporations over workers—again | Economic Policy Institute](#)

## Wages

- Food delivery workers minimum wage hike in New York City: Why Uber and DoorDash are against it, and why they're wrong. | Slate
- Advocates Say Wage Theft Fight Needs Community Orgs | Law360
- Millions of additional salaried workers could get overtime pay under Biden proposal | NPR

## Child Labor

- Child labor in USA: How did migrant teenagers end up working making General Mills, Hyundai, and Quaker products? | Slate
- Business Groups' Reflexive Anti-Worker Demagoguery | The American Prospect

## BRIEF: Understanding Growing Child Labor Risks in the U.S.

We have seen an uptick in child labor exploits this year, culminating in high profile DOL investigations into giants like Tyson and Perdue. Worker's Capital Program Director Erin Shackelford wrote in a brief an overview of the growing issue, why investors should be concerned, and how they can take action.



## Congressional Testimony: Terri Gerstein

In “Ensuring the Safety and Well-Being of Unaccompanied Children,” Terri Gerstein testified before the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary on the growing child labor crisis in the U.S. and the need to for robust labor law enforcement: “[w]ith focused attention on this problem, sufficient resources, and law reform, we can again make oppressive child labor a thing of the past.”

## #DEMOCRATIZINGWORK

Why do only those who provide capital have the right to decide on a restructuring or the reinvestment of profits? Strategic decisions are completely beyond the control of workers: they must implement them, but their consent is not requested. **This lack of democratic freedom is serious. As a place where power is exercised, the company is a political entity. It must be democratized.**

- **Senior Research Associate Isabelle Ferreras** in “The company is a political entity that must be democratized!” | Le Monde (EN) (FR)

## 2023 in Strikes and Organizing

### Autoworkers' Strike

- What a UAW strike could mean for labor | Vox
- Autoworkers union pushes for 32 hour workweek | Marketplace
- Biden to make history by hitting UAW picket line | Axios

### UPS Contract Negotiations

- Opinion: The UPS strike authorization vote is about more than just pay | CNN
- UPS deal raises the bar for worker demands | Axios

"There are... similarities in some of the workers who are organizing who are working in sectors where there has been a lot of change... having a union is a way to have a voice in how that change plays out and to make sure the change is happening with you, not just to you."

- Prof. Sharon Block

### Hollywood on Strike

- Walking Out of the Dream Factory | NY Magazine
- Hollywood Writers, Studios Reach Deal That Could End Strike | Law360

### Starbucks Organizing

- Starbucks Pride Strike Highlights Murky Rules for Labor Walkouts | Bloomberg Law
- Starbucks Workers Are Racking Up Wins In Union-Busting Cases | HuffPost Impact



## Congressional Testimony: Sharon Block

In March 2023, Sharon Block testified before the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions on the hundreds of labor law violations committed by Starbucks over the course of its aggressive anti-union campaign. In **"No Company is Above the Law: The Need to End Illegal Union Busting at Starbucks,"** Block maintains that "[i]t is a bedrock of our democracy that the law applies to everyone, including the most powerful. I believe that labor unions play an important role in protecting that bedrock principle."



For the first time since the pandemic, the Center hosted a number of major events at Harvard Law School this year. We were excited to bring together practitioners, academics, labor leaders, workers, movement leaders, and journalists for convenings that sparked lively, insightful discussions and raised key questions for further exploration.



## State and Local Worker Power Policy

In our first major in-person convening since the pandemic, we gathered nearly 100 leaders from labor, policy, advocacy, and academia to explore the possibilities for lawmaking at the state and local levels to advance worker power. Our two-day convening covered topics including:

- Innovative worker board models
- Strategic co-enforcement options
- Post-Glacier Northwest strategies to protect unions from tort liability claims

New ideas and anticipated challenges that surfaced from our discussions will inform the next iteration of our policy toolkit, which we intend to be of practical use for organizers, policymakers, and others interested in building worker power at the state and local levels.



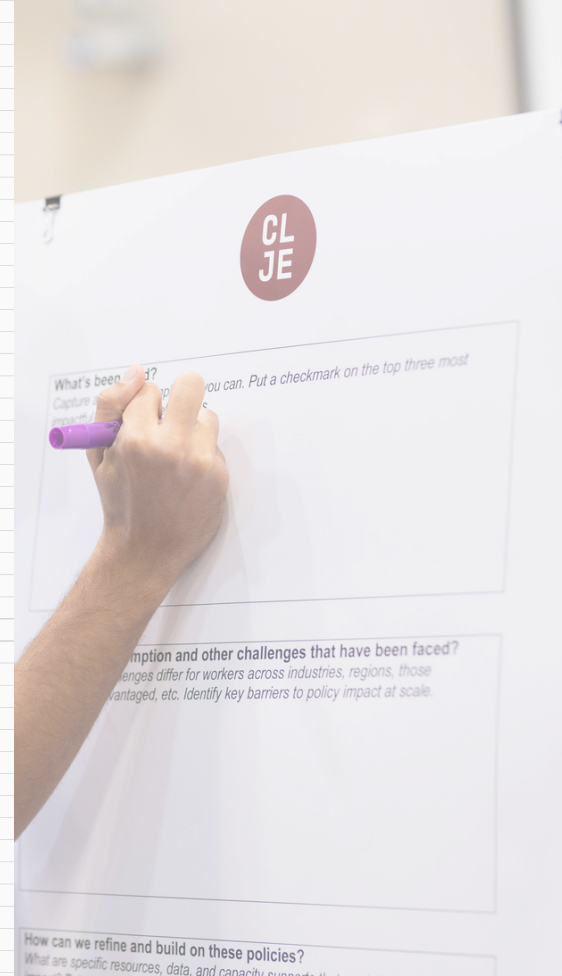


# Union, Workplace, and Political Democracy

In partnership with the Harvard Kennedy School's Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, we hosted a convening that gathered scholars, labor leaders, and practitioners to discuss the role that the labor movement can play in strengthening and protecting our country's commitment to democracy. Key topics included:

- The relationship between union membership and voter participation
- The role of labor in building racial solidarity
- The impact of recent reform movements on democratic practices within unions

The insights surfaced from these conversations will frame a research agenda and policy strategies focused on building the capacity of workers and their organizations to advance democratic values, promote equality, and shape a more just society.



## Radcliffe Institute: Countervailing Power Workshop

In December, we convened organizers, movement leaders and advocates in addition to academics of multiple disciplines to dive into an exploration of innovative approaches to remedying the crisis of economic and political inequality: using law to facilitate organizing by the poor and working class, not only as workers, but also as tenants, debtors, welfare beneficiaries, and others.

Professors Benjamin Sachs and Kate Andrias (Columbia Law School) framed this approach in their groundbreaking article in the Yale Law Journal, "Constructing Countervailing Power: Law and Organizing in an Era of Political Inequality." In the workshop, we developed strategies for answering critical questions for building stronger mass power building movements, including:

- How to define "countervailing power,"
- How to measure inequalities in power,
- Which power imbalances most affect the quality of life for low wage and working class people, and
- What we can learn from labor law to inform strategies in other domains.

We received a strong endorsement from movement leaders that our approach will add value to their organizing efforts.

# PROGRAMS



## CLJE:Lab

This year, the Center is proud to have launched CLJE: Lab, the new home for our policy and legal innovation work. In pursuit of our mission to foster creative and innovative approaches to empowering working people, we pursue projects across our programs that generate and test new ideas for advancing worker power and strengthening democracy. Our ongoing projects include compiling a policy toolkit for building worker power at the state and local levels and crafting recommendations for including worker input and voice in regulating the use of AI in workplaces.



*"We maintain the belief that fundamental restructuring of power in our economy and democracy is necessary to achieve a fair and just country. The work of the CLJE:Lab is to innovate ways to move us closer and closer to that north star."*

Read more about CLJE:Lab in: [onlabor](#)



## Harvard Trade Union Program

The Harvard Trade Union Program is an intensive 5-week executive training program designed for trade union leaders. Comparable to the advanced education that Harvard University offers to executive-level individuals in business, government and law, HTUP teaches the essential skills for the management and leadership of unions, as well as providing a unique opportunity to explore key issues for the labor movement.

2023 marks the Trade Union Program's 81st year. It remains a unique opportunity to learn alongside union leaders from across the country, share ideas that will shape the future of union membership, and build lasting relationships with your cohort. The 2023 cohort was the first after the pandemic, and the strong response to the HTUP's return demonstrates the critical role it plays in supporting the next generation of labor leaders. We've seen a high rate of engagement with the program this year, and were excited to report that we reached full capacity at the earliest date in our history. We look forward to hosting the class of 2024 in January!



## Workers' Capital Project

The Workers' Capital Project creates a framework for studying responsible investment and labor's capital and how they have been deployed in efforts to resist shareholder primacy, short-termism, and the social harms of financialization. Through research, programmatic convenings, and on-going engagement with practitioners, this project acts as a home for innovative work related to investment practices, fiduciary regulation, and the developing landscape of ESG investment, especially focused on labor and work. This year, we have:

- Launched a peer mentoring program for labor trustees on pension boards. This program matches new labor trustees with experienced trustees to build one-on-one relationships in a community of practice to support their leadership development. The first cohort of 16 participants got started this fall.
  - Participants are working together to become more effective advocates for their members and communities in their roles in investment decision making and board governance.
- Supported work by labor organizations internationally and domestically to engage investors on freedom of association for workers.



## Labor Organization Innovation

The Labor Organization Innovation Initiative is working with the National Education Association (NEA) to fundamentally rethink the nature and operations of unions. The key is to transform, rather than reform, the institution. This year, we have:

- Launched a peer mentoring program for labor trustees on pension boards. This program matches new labor trustees with experienced trustees to build one-on-one relationships in a community of practice to support their leadership development. The 16 union pension trustees in our first cohort are working together to become more effective advocates for their members and communities as they make investment decisions
- Hosted a cross-disciplinary team of union leaders, advocates, academics, educators, policy leaders, and researchers to discuss the impact of the pandemic and increasing mistrust of social institutions such as media, public health institutions, and democratic bodies, as well as labor organizations and education systems. The conversations included nuance around dimensions of trust and belonging, including economic, political, and civil rights perspectives, and the role of labor organizations in navigating and addressing these dynamics.

## State & Local Enforcement Project

The State and Local Enforcement Project studies, supports, and catalyzes the untapped potential of state and local government to protect and enforce workers' rights, with a special focus on enforcers new to labor issues. This year, we have:

- Presented at a number of national conferences and symposia on a range of subjects including the role of localities in advancing and protecting workers' rights, child labor, new approaches to enforcement, and more.
- Continued facilitating monthly convenings of three groups of labor enforcers: those from state AG offices; from DA and prosecutors offices; and local labor standards agencies. Every month, almost 100 enforcers from around the country attended these convenings.

## Democratizing Work

Democratizing Work is a global research initiative built around three goals: democratizing work, decommodifying labor, and decarbonizing the economy. Since May 2020, we have mobilized more than 6,000 researchers from more than 750 universities and academic institutions around the world. The goal of this program is to help society, particularly labor leaders, climate and human rights activists, progressive business leaders, and public servants harness the power of research to lead on implementing the three principles. This year, we have:

- Published *Hé Patron !* with Hélène Landemore from Yale, Sanjay Pinto from Rutgers and Cornell, Ben McKean from OSU, and a team of artists and scholars seeking to popularize the urgency of democratizing firms in order to address the democratic crisis, the future of work, and the climate crisis.
- Organized a monthly global workshop series to explore actions and experimentations around the three principles of the #DemocratizingWork manifesto.
- Launched the Centre for Democratising Work, the UK national chapter for the Democratizing Work initiative, in partnership with Common Wealth.

