TOWARD A 21ST-CENTURY RECONSTRUCTION FOR MULTIRACIAL DEMOCRACY



JOBS with JUSTICE

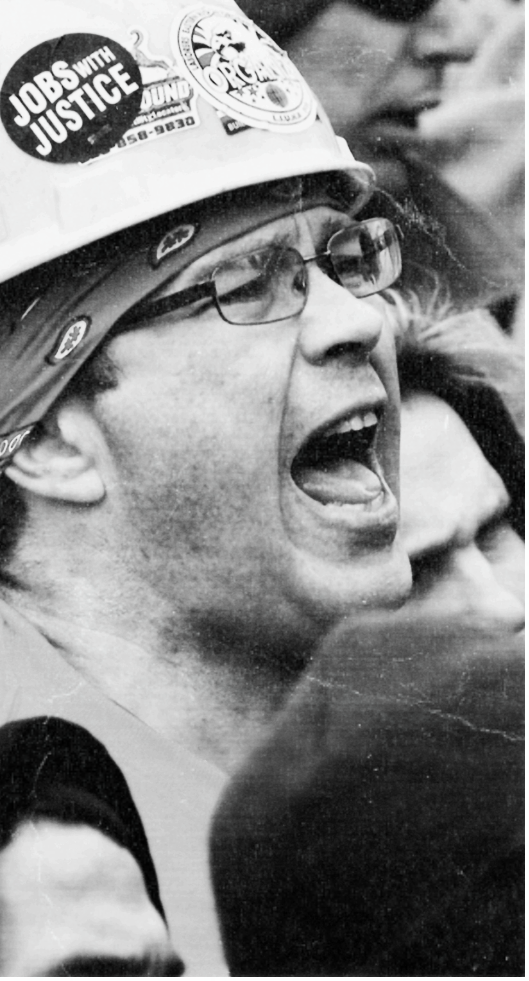


OUR MISSION

Our current economic and political institutions are being systematically dismantled by billionaire-aligned interests, leaving the foundations of democracy in peril. The demise of 20th century systems demands a 21st-century Reconstruction that finally fuses economic justice with civil and political rights. Jobs with Justice proposes a bold framework for multiracial democracy in which power is exercised not only at the ballot box, but through the daily governance of our workplaces, communities, and economic lives. By aligning local "stepping-stone" victories like 'just cause' employment protections and co-enforcement partnerships with federal structural milestones such as a constitutional right to organize, a national jobs guarantee, and an explicit affirmative right to vote, we seek to strip power from predatory corporations and place it back into the hands of the people.

This framework is explicitly and unapologetically oriented towards dismantling white supremacy, patriarchy, and the paternalistic logics of American capitalism that have historically concentrated power among a narrow elite while systematically excluding workers, women, Black people and people of color, justice-impacted communities, immigrant and undocumented communities, indigenous peoples, and low-income families from the rights, resources, and governance structures that shape their lives.

Our mission is to embed economic, political, and civil rights directly into the architecture of our legal system while building the worker and community governance necessary to make those rights real, enforceable, and durable in a multiracial democracy.



HOW TO USE THIS FRAMEWORK: DEFINING VICTORY, TESTING STRATEGY, AND BUILDING TOWARD STRUCTURAL CHANGE

This document should be understood as one layer of a broader strategic architecture. Jobs with Justice has articulated a baseline theory of change in The Future We Need, which outlines the labor path to democracy and the central role of worker governance. This framework applies that theory to the current political and economic crisis, offering a strategic lens for evaluating the fights unfolding in this moment. It is also an alignment tool, a strategic test, and a guide for evaluating which fights, reforms, and governing experiments move us closer to multiracial democracy. It allows organizers, advocates, and policymakers to evaluate whether specific proposals move us toward structural democratic transformation.

Jobs with Justice has long argued that the struggle for democracy must include the struggle for collective bargaining power and worker governance. As Erica Smiley and Sarita Gupta argue in The Future We Need, building a healthy democracy requires expanding worker power beyond traditional shop-by-shop bargaining and centralizing the fight against white supremacy and gender oppression within that project. The task is not only to win better wages or protections, but to build forms of collective negotiation and governance that allow people to shape more aspects of their lives.

Within this framework, victory is not defined only by whether a policy passes, or a harmful proposal is stopped. Victory must also be measured by whether a fight expands the governing power of working people, weakens concentrated corporate control, builds durable public or worker oversight, strengthens multiracial solidarity, and creates new institutional terrain on which larger structural demands can be won. In that sense, a campaign win is not only an outcome, but also a test of whether we are building the power, narrative, relationships, and democratic infrastructure required for 21st-century Reconstruction.

This framework is also intended to function as a theory-of-change test. It allows us to ask of any proposal: Does it move decision-making power downward and outward, into the hands of workers and communities? Does it create enforceable rights rather than symbolic promises? Does it build workers' governing capacity? Does it reduce racialized exclusion and deepen multiracial solidarity? Does it shift power in the economy, not only soften its harms? If the answer is no, then the intervention may still matter tactically, but it will not bring about structural change.

From that perspective, today's fights matter because they are not isolated reforms. They are interventions that can build the conditions for bigger wins. Just cause protections introduce due process into the workplace. Co-enforcement creates shared public enforcement capacity rooted in worker organizations. Worker boards and sectoral rulemaking expand who gets to set standards in the economy. Corporate accountability measures discipline extraction and assert public authority over capital. Each of these fights can function as a stepping-stone when it both improves conditions now and expands the capacity of working people to govern, enforce, and bargain over the systems shaping their lives.

STRATEGIC CHECKLIST: WHAT COUNTS AS AN ALIGNED INTERVENTION?

- Shifts decision-making power from corporations, unaccountable employers, or elites to workers, tenants, communities, or the public.
- Builds governance, not only voice—creating structures where working people can help set, enforce, or oversee the rules.
- Creates enforceable rights with real implementation, oversight, and consequences.
- Expands bargaining power, including sectoral, social, or public forms of bargaining.
- Strengthens multiracial solidarity by confronting racialized exclusion, white supremacy, and differential vulnerability.
- Builds durable organization and leadership, especially among workers and communities most excluded from governing power.
- Creates new institutional footholds that can scale, replicate, or support broader structural demands.
- Weakens extractive business models and increases democratic control over investment, subsidy, labor, or public goods.
- Connects immediate wins to long-term transformation, making clear how the fight now prepares us for the next fight.

Material relief matters. But without building power, governance capacity, or multiracial solidarity, relief alone does not constitute a reconstruction strategy.

THE NORTH STAR: MULTIRACIAL DEMOCRACY

Our North Star, then, is not simply inclusion within existing institutions, but the democratization of the institutions that govern work, public life, and the economy itself. Those institutions have been shaped by centuries of white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalist extraction that treated the labor of Black, indigenous, immigrant and low-income peoples as a resource to be exploited rather than a foundation to be honored. Our vision of a multiracial democracy is therefore not a restoration of a flawed past, but a genuine transformation building new governing structures that center those systematically excluded and harmed. In a true multiracial democracy, the people hold real political power, economic, and civic power. People would freely choose political leaders while also holding real decision-making power over the economic conditions that shape their lives, including through the right to organize, bargain collectively, and enforce the standards and agreements that govern work, care, and public life.

IN PRACTICE, A MULTIRACIAL DEMOCRACY MEANS:

- Every worker has the right to organize, join a union, bargain collectively and sectorally, and enjoy guaranteed rights to just cause, health and safety, free speech, privacy, and representation in disciplinary proceedings.
- Every person has access to housing, energy, water, transit, and public goods governed by the public interest and accountable to the communities they serve.
- Environmental stability is not secondary; clean air, water, and land are fundamental workers' rights, protected alongside wages, hours, and working conditions.
- Political participation free from barriers rooted in race, wealth, or immigration status, backed by reparative policies for communities historically excluded from full democratic participation.
- Economic democracy that extends beyond the workplace through community ownership of key sectors, participatory budgeting, and democratic control over investment decisions.
- Enforceable rights backed by constitutional guarantees and worker and community oversight bodies with real binding authority.

THE CONDITIONS FOR 21ST-CENTURY RECONSTRUCTION

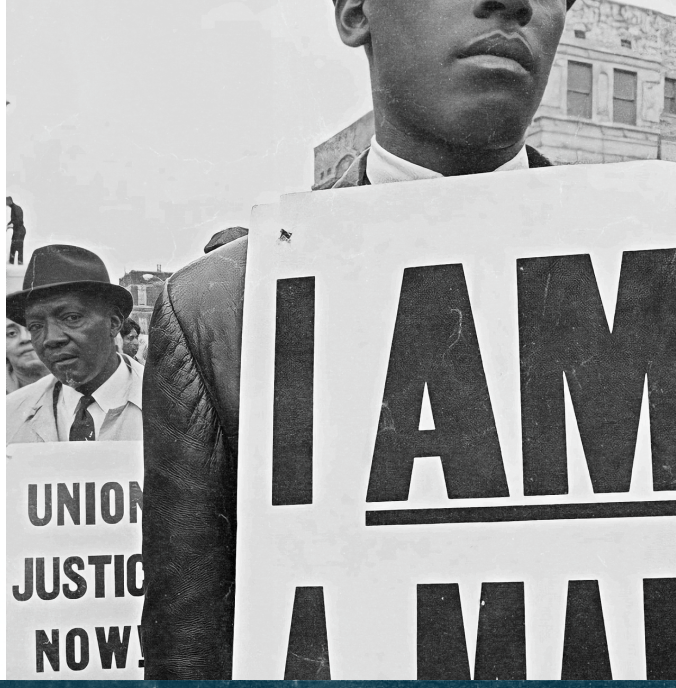
This year marks the 250th anniversary of the country's founding and the 150th anniversary of the election of 1876, which effectively ended Reconstruction. This is a critical moment to advance a bold framework for a 21st-century Reconstruction that can build a true multiracial democracy.

- Working people are demanding radical change, creating both opportunity and risk. The economic, civic, and political institutions shaped by the New Deal and the 20th century civil rights movement, while transformative for many, had serious shortcomings that anti-democratic forces have been able to exploit.
- Trump and his billionaire allies are actively dismantling 20th century institutions. The question before us is not whether the old order is under attack, but whether we will simply defend it, rebuild it, or reimagine it for a new era.
- Democracy—what it means, who it serves, and who gets to participate in it—is now part of the national conversation in a way it has not been in generations. **Polling shows** deep dissatisfaction with how democracy is functioning in the United States, especially among young people. At the same time, one of Trump's first acts in office was an attempt to narrow the definition of who counts as a citizen, directly threatening one of the bedrock rules of democratic inclusion.
- Core democratic principles embedded in the country's founding promises are under threat, including the idea that all people are created equal and entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
- Opponents of democracy have spent years building the political, legal, and ideological infrastructure for this moment, from Project 2025 to long-term efforts for a constitutional convention. Their strategy is organized, resourced, and durable. Our democratic response must be equally serious.



20TH CENTURY INSTITUTIONS: FROM THE GREAT DEPRESSION TO TRUMP 2.0

The 20th century institutions that shaped modern U.S. democracy and linked economic, civil, and political rights emerged across two distinct eras and through pressure from different constituencies.



The 1930s

In response to the Great Depression, the federal government enacted a series of economic reforms as part of the New Deal, including:

- The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), which protected the right to organize, form a union, and bargain collectively with employers. Before its passage, around 11% of the nation's workers belonged to a union. Within 10 years of passage, the number of unionized workers **had tripled** to a high of 34%.
- The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) setting minimum wage and maximum hour rules;
- The Social Security Act (SSA), guaranteeing workers some money in retirement.

These systems were structured primarily around the interests and status of white male wage earners. Both the NLRA and FLSA excluded agricultural and domestic workers, fields in which most non-white people and women worked. The Social Security system was built around the assumption that a male head of household would provide a single-family wage, a model whose gendered assumptions continue to shape policy today.

The 1960s

During the Civil Rights era and into the 1970s, movement leaders pressured the federal government to enact a series of laws aimed at confronting civil, political, and workplace inequality, most notably the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Fair Housing Act of 1968, the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, and the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1970.

These laws interacted with the New Deal laws in important ways. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed discrimination on the basis of race or gender, which expanded workers' opportunities beyond just agriculture and domestic work, specifically for Black workers and women, on a large scale. The Occupational Safety and Health Act further established the principle that safe and healthy working conditions are a fundamental right, embedding workplace safety into federal labor standards, while the creation of the EPA marked a recognition that environmental conditions such as clean air, water, and land are essential to both public well-being and workers' lives.

Taken together, these two eras transformed U.S. democracy, but neither fully delivered multiracial democracy. The New Deal expanded economic protections while preserving racialized exclusions; the civil rights era expanded formal inclusion without fully democratizing economic power. A 21st-century Reconstruction must do both.

Institutional Erosion

The 20th century institutions created to protect economic, civil, and political rights have been systematically weakened—often without meaningful consequence—by the Trump administration and an increasingly aggressive conservative judiciary. While many of these institutions have been eroding for decades, the current administration has accelerated that erosion dramatically.

This erosion extends beyond formal institutions to include a broader assault on migrants and those perceived to be migrants. The rapid expansion of federal immigration enforcement capacity, is used to instill fear in migrant communities, and the Supreme Court's decision in Noem v. Vasquez Perdomo, which permits racial profiling of both noncitizens and citizens in immigration enforcement, function as a structural suppression of many working communities' ability to organize, assert rights, and participate fully in democratic life. These dynamics reinforce efforts like the attack on birthright citizenship, collectively narrowing those who can safely live, work, and engage in civic and political processes.

- **The National Labor Relations Board spent almost all of 2025 without a quorum after Trump fired one of the board's members in direct contradiction to the NLRA, leaving the board unable to protect workers trying to organize their workplaces.**
- **In April 2026, the Supreme Court continued its process of undoing the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by dismantling the right Black and other minority voters held under the law to elect representatives of their choice to Congress and state and local legislatures.**
- **The Trump administration has essentially declared that it will not enforce the Fair Housing Act of 1968.**
- **In one of his first acts in office, Trump attempted to change the definition of who counts as a citizen, threatening one of the bedrock rules of who gets to participate in our democracy.**

With so many democratic institutions and rights under attack, this is the moment to advance a broader definition of democracy beyond simply casting a ballot every two or four years—one that can engage people alienated from the concept of democracy and strengthen our collective ability to govern our lives. Across the country, democracy is being contested not only through federal institutions but also through state-level fights over aggressive redistricting, attacks on voting access, and restrictions on ballot initiatives that undermine direct democracy. Many of these are fights the Jobs with Justice network is already engaged in, and they underscore the urgency of expanding our understanding of democracy beyond periodic elections toward structures that allow people to meaningfully govern the conditions of their lives.

STRUCTURAL MILESTONES FOR 21ST-CENTURY RECONSTRUCTION

To fully realize multiracial democracy, some changes must ultimately be secured at the highest level of law, including through amendments to the U.S. Constitution. These structural milestones point toward a society in which everyone has both meaningful governing power and the material resources needed to thrive.

Amending the Constitution will not be easy. This long-term vision requires democratic forces to build power and win reforms wherever possible—at the local, state, and federal levels—while preparing for constitutional transformation when the political conditions allow. That work requires alignment, discipline, and strategic readiness.

This framework points toward a set of structural guarantees that should ultimately be embedded in constitutional law. Some of these reforms could be enacted by statute in the near term, but without constitutional grounding they would remain vulnerable to judicial attack, administrative rollback, or repeal.





Thirteenth Amendment: Labor Rights

Some labor reforms could be enacted without constitutional change, but the long-term demand for constitutional protection remains essential:

- A reinvigorated right to organize that gives working people the power to bargain with those who control the conditions of their economic lives. Broad reforms outlined in reports such as the Harvard Law School Center for Labor and a Just Economy's **Clean Slate for Worker Power report** would make an enormous difference in the lives of workers today, as would the **Richard L. Trumka Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act.** Billionaires and their allies in the courts and other branches of government have been able to significantly weaken our current labor law under the National Labor Relations Act. Ultimately, a constitutional guarantee of the right to organize may be necessary to secure labor protections against continued erosion by courts and employers.
- A jobs guarantee that makes full employment a public commitment.
- A federal just cause standard that protects all workers from arbitrary termination, regardless of immigration or work authorization status.
- A pension and retirement system that ensures people have economic security in old age.
- With the current legal system, other milestone reform proposals that would likely need a constitutional amendment:
  - The redistribution of wealth through measures that prevent the consolidation of a permanent billionaire class.
  - A constitutional framework that rejects corporate personhood claims used to distort democracy, including the claim that money in politics is protected speech.
  - Expanded forms of collective and democratic ownership over capital.

Fourteenth Amendment: Citizenship Rights and Civil Rights, including Due Process and Equal Protection

Examples of milestone reforms that could be advanced by statute, even though they would remain more vulnerable without constitutional protection, include:

Federal Guarantee of Procedural Due Process Involving Basic Human Needs

Federal due process standards requiring just cause and a meaningful hearing before a person can be stripped of essential government benefits.

- Congress could pass a "Civil Gideon" act or similar legislation to ensure that the "Due Process" clause is meaningful for those facing life-altering civil actions.
- Universal access to counsel in civil cases involving basic human needs, such as eviction, deportation, foreclosure, or child custody.

At present, the Supreme Court's development of the immigration plenary power doctrine allows for diminished procedural protections in immigration contexts, often limiting review to a highly deferential standard. Strengthening statutory due process protections in these areas would directly challenge this unequal application of constitutional principles.

A New Civil Rights Act for the 21st Century

While the 1964 Act was a milestone, a "Reinvigorated Equal Protection Act" could address modern systemic inequalities.

- A legal standard that allows plaintiffs to challenge racially discriminatory outcomes without having to prove malicious intent. Federal legislation allowing plaintiffs to prove Equal Protection violations based on "disparate impact" (outcome) rather than having to prove subjective "intent" or "malice" by a government actor.
- National standards prohibiting discriminatory policing and racial profiling. Using federal funding levers to mandate standardized use-of-force policies and the elimination of racial profiling nationwide.
- The New Civil Rights Act could explicitly prohibit discrimination based on citizenship status, especially given that citizenship status discrimination functions in practice as a proxy for racial and national origin discrimination.

Federal Statutory Protection for Birthright Citizenship

- While birthright citizenship is grounded in the Fourteenth Amendment, Congress can clarify and strengthen it through the Immigration and Nationality Act.
- Legislation explicitly prohibiting federal agencies from revoking or questioning birthright citizenship based on the immigration status of a person's parents, thereby preempting executive-level attempts to narrow the definition of "jurisdiction."

Given the current judiciary's originalist orientation, some transformative civil rights protections would likely remain vulnerable unless the Constitution itself is amended. These statutory reforms point toward a set of structural guarantees that should ultimately be embedded in constitutional law.

Recognition of Affirmative Rights to the Conditions People Need to Live and Participate Fully in Democracy

The U.S. Constitution is largely viewed as a document of "negative rights" (what the government cannot do to you). An amendment would likely be needed to establish "positive rights."

- Explicitly amending the Constitution to recognize a fundamental right to an equitable, federally funded education for every child.
- A "Green Amendment" ensuring every person has a right to a clean environment and a stable climate under the Equal Protection of the law.

Ending Qualified Immunity for Government Actors Who Violate Constitutional Rights

The Supreme Court created the doctrine of "qualified immunity," which protects government officials from liability for violating a person's constitutional rights unless the right was "clearly established."

- An amendment stating that no government actor shall be immune from civil liability for violations of the Due Process or Equal Protection clauses, effectively overriding decades of judicial precedent.

An Equal Rights Amendment and Explicit Constitutional Protection Against Gender Discrimination

While the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection clause has been used to fight sex discrimination, the "level of scrutiny" applied by courts is lower than that applied to race.

- Formally enshrining the Equal Rights Amendment to ensure that gender-based discrimination is subject to "strict scrutiny," the highest legal hurdle for the government to overcome.
- Parallel constitutional clarification that classifications based on citizenship or immigration status are subject to heightened or strict scrutiny, directly challenging the immigration plenary power doctrine and aligning equal protection jurisprudence with the spirit of the Reconstruction Amendments.

Fifteenth Amendment: Voting Rights

Examples of major voting rights reforms that could be enacted by statute include:

The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act

- Creating a new, modern formula to identify jurisdictions with a history of discrimination and requiring them to get federal approval before changing election laws.
- Explicitly banning practices that have a disparate impact on minority voters, such as specific types of voter ID laws, polling place closures in minority neighborhoods, and the reduction of early voting.

Universal and Automatic Voter Registration

Congress could pass a federal law shifting the burden of registration from the individual to the government.

- A national automatic voter registration system requiring states to register eligible citizens when they interact with government agencies, unless they opt out.
- Mandating that all states allow citizens to register and vote on the same day for federal elections, removing the "registration deadline" barrier.

Federal Baseline Standards for Election Administration

Using the Elections Clause to create a uniform "floor" for how federal elections are run.

- Mandating at least two weeks of early voting and no-excuse mail-in balloting for all federal elections to ensure "Equal Protection" of the ballot regardless of geography.
- A ban on partisan gerrymandering through independent redistricting requirements for congressional maps. Federal legislation requiring independent redistricting commissions for Congressional maps to prevent the "dilution" of votes.

Under current Supreme Court precedent, the federal government's power to interfere with "state sovereignty" over elections is limited. These milestones would likely require a formal amendment.

Establishing an Explicit "Affirmative Right to Vote"

The U.S. Constitution does not contain an explicit, affirmative statement that every citizen has a right to vote—only that the right cannot be denied on specific grounds (e.g., race, sex, age).

- An amendment stating: *"Every citizen of the United States... shall have the fundamental right to vote."* This would shift the legal burden so that any state law burdening a voter (like a strict ID law) would face "strict scrutiny" in court.

Abolishing the Electoral College

Because the Electoral College is explicitly outlined in Article II and the Twelfth Amendment, it cannot be removed by simple federal law.

- Ensuring the President is elected by the total national popular vote, effectively fulfilling the "one person, one vote" promise of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments at the highest level of government.

Ending Felony Disenfranchisement

While some argue this could be done via the Fourteenth Amendment's "Equal Protection" clause, the Supreme Court has historically allowed states to strip voting rights for criminal convictions (Richardson v. Ramirez).

- Explicitly prohibiting the denial of the right to vote based on a criminal record, ensuring that citizenship and the franchise are inseparable.



STEPPING-STONE REFORMS: WHAT WE CAN BUILD NOW

Structural milestones set the scale of transformation required for multiracial democracy. But we don't win those changes all at once, and we don't win them starting at the top. They must be built and legitimized in the arenas where governing power can be exercised now, by exercising power where we already are.

Working people build democracy by exercising power where they are, through campaigns that change material conditions, deepen organization, and create new governing roles for workers and communities. These are the stepping-stone fights happening in our workplaces, cities, and states. The point is not only to protest unjust arrangements, but to replace them with durable forms of shared governance that can accumulate into structural transformation. State and local fights are where we build the scaffolding for larger transformation. Through model policies like expanded bargaining, worker boards, co-enforcement systems, and corporate accountability measures, we create new ways for working people to participate directly in governance. These wins are not merely incremental; they improve people's lives while also testing structural change, building governing muscle, and normalizing democratic authority over economic life.

These fights are only possible because of coalition. No single group of workers wins these changes alone. It takes alignment across unions, worker centers, community organizations, and broader movements to build enough power to take on corporations and the political systems that protect them. Coalition-building is not an add-on, it is the strategy that allows local fights to scale, sustain, and connect to something larger than a single campaign.

When workers win just cause, we're not just gaining job security—we're establishing that employers don't have total control over our livelihoods. When we build co-enforcement, we're not just improving enforcement—we're creating ways for workers to help enforce the law. These fights begin to shift who has power and who gets to make the rules. And that matters because the system is designed to prevent that shift. Policies like preemption laws and so-called "right-to-work" have been used to block local progress, weaken unions, and stop local wins from scaling into broader change. They are designed to keep power concentrated and limit what working people and coalitions can build together.

We cannot win milestone reforms in isolation or all at once. Each stepping-stone policy victory should therefore be judged not only by the protection it delivers today, but by whether it builds the power, governance capacity, narrative coherence, and democratic infrastructure necessary to make broader transformation possible. These fights are how we push back. Winning what is possible now while building the strength, alignment, and coalition needed for bigger changes.

The strategic question is not only whether a fight is worth winning, but whether winning it leaves working people more capable of governing the next terrain of struggle and more connected to the coalitions that make larger structural wins possible. Step by step, fight by fight, we expand what's possible until larger transformations like federal labor rights, constitutional protections, and real economic democracy become achievable and durable.

Why "Just Cause" Is a Critical Policy Priority in This Moment

In most of the United States, workers can be fired without explanation, making job loss a constant threat that chills organizing, whistleblowing, and civic participation. When speaking up about safety, discrimination, environmental hazards, or public policy can cost someone their livelihood, democracy becomes fragile. Just Cause protections intervene by requiring employers to provide legitimate reason and proof for termination, follow progressive discipline, and allow for neutral review. This shifts termination from unilateral managerial discretion to a governed process shaped by public standards. In doing so, Just Cause embeds due process inside the workplace, one of the most concentrated sites of private power in American life. It transforms job security from a privilege into a regulated right. As more jurisdictions adopt these protections, they normalize the idea that workplace power should be governed by democratic rules rather than unchecked employer discretion. Just Cause is therefore both immediate stabilization and a building block toward sectoral bargaining and stronger labor rights.

The accompanying Just Cause one-pager shows how this demand is already functioning as a practical stepping-stone reform in current campaigns.

Disciplining Corporate Harm

Many corporations profit by paying wages so low that workers rely on public benefits, effectively shifting labor costs onto taxpayers. This model concentrates wealth while destabilizing public budgets and weakening democratic accountability. A Bad Business Fee, or similar corporate accountability mechanism, responds by conditioning subsidies, tax incentives, and public contracts on compliance with labor standards. Companies that underpay workers or suppress bargaining rights must either raise standards or contribute financially to the public systems sustaining their workforce. This directly links fiscal policy to worker power and democratic accountability. Rather than treating taxation and labor regulation as separate arenas, it integrates them into a single governance strategy. The policy disciplines extractive business models while expanding public authority over corporate conduct. Over time, it helps build the political and institutional capacity for broader redistributive and structural reforms.

Further detail on revenue design, implementation models, and current campaign examples is provided in the accompanying Bad Business Fee one-pager.

Co-Enforcement as a Strategy for Rebuilding Democratic Infrastructure

Labor and civil rights laws frequently fail not because they do not exist, but because enforcement systems are under-resourced and disconnected from workers' lived realities. This gap erodes trust in democratic institutions and leaves violations unaddressed. Co-enforcement addresses this failure by formalizing partnerships between government agencies and worker organizations to identify violations, conduct outreach, and shape enforcement priorities. This model builds on long-standing precedents in workplace safety enforcement under the Occupational Safety and Health Act, where limited numbers of federal inspectors have required reliance on workers and unions to report hazards and trigger enforcement. In practice, OSHA has functioned as an early prototype of co-enforcement, with workers acting as frontline monitors of compliance. Unlike many civil rights frameworks that rely on individual complaints, workplace safety has often been enforced as a collective right, demonstrating how shared enforcement can strengthen both compliance and worker power.

Expanded case studies and implementation frameworks are available in the accompanying Co-Enforcement one-pager.

Governing the Economy: Worker Boards and Sectoral Rulemaking in Practice

Workplace-by-workplace bargaining leaves many industries fragmented and weakly regulated, limiting worker power and enabling corporations to compete by driving standards downward. Worker boards and sectoral governance bodies offer an alternative by creating formal public institutions where workers help set industry-wide rules. These structures bring worker representatives, employers, and public officials into shared standard-setting processes. Rather than petitioning individual employers, workers participate directly in defining wage floors, safety rules, environmental standards affecting their communities, scheduling protections, and enforcement mechanisms. This shifts workers from isolated negotiators to co-governors within public rule-making systems. It embeds democratic participation inside the architecture of economic governance. Over time, such bodies build administrative capacity and normalize sectoral standard-setting. They serve as laboratories for deeper reforms that expand collective bargaining beyond single worksites. These bodies matter not only because they improve standards, but because they expand who gets to govern the economy and make democratic decision-making more real in sectors long defined by exclusion and exploitation.

Detailed models and current examples of worker boards are summarized in the accompanying Worker Boards one-pager.

REIMAGINING WORK, VALUE, AND FREEDOM

We stand at a crossroads in our national story, where the dismantling of old systems has opened space to build a more inclusive and democratic future. By embracing a 21st-century Reconstruction, we are doing more than defending past gains; we are claiming a future in which economic dignity, civil equality, and political power are woven into the structures that govern everyday life. The journey from local stepping-stone victories to transformative structural milestones is not just a policy agenda; it is a commitment to build a society that finally honors the inherent worth, agency, and power of every person.

This proposed 21st-century Reconstruction offers a roadmap for structural change, but these milestones should be understood not as the endpoint, but as the foundation for an even bolder reimagining of our collective life. We must also look beyond the immediate legal and political horizon to confront the ways our lives are constrained by systems that prioritize profit and productivity over human dignity.

Our ambition cannot be limited to repairing a broken system; it must include moving beyond the narrow 20th-century logic that defines human worth primarily through economic output. We should imagine a future in which labor law moves beyond regulating employment and instead helps value work according to its social contribution, not only its market price. We must consider what it would mean to decouple economic security entirely from traditional jobs, enabling greater leisure, creativity, and community-oriented work. These proposals should open the door to a broader conversation about a world in which the rights to life and the pursuit of happiness are lived realities supported by care, ecological stability, safe and healthy working conditions, and genuine collective ownership. We must envision a democracy that serves not only the economy, but humanity itself. That is the deeper promise of multiracial democracy: not only inclusion within existing systems, but real freedom, shared power, and collective self-government.

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www.jwj.org
1150 Connecticut Ave NW Suite 200
Washington, D.C. 20036