

## The Labor Movement Won Big Victories in 2024. Now It Must Fend Off Trump.

Unions are preparing to beat back Trump's pro-business agenda through worker solidarity across all backgrounds.

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A Starbucks employee pickets outside of a closed Starbucks store during a strike on December 23, 2024, in New York City.

ADAM GRAY / GETTY IMAGES

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In recent years the labor movement has witnessed a resurgence in organizing, and 2024 was no different. Tens of thousands of workers fought for pay raises, increased job protections and union representation. Workers across the United States also linked their domestic struggles with Israel's assault on Palestine, demanding an arms embargo and an end to the genocide in Gaza. While the labor movement undeniably gained ground in 2024, union organizers now face the looming return of Donald Trump's pro-business agenda. However, unions are preparing to fight back.

## Wage Gains

Thousands of workers achieved wage gains (<https://www.epi.org/blog/a-review-of-key-2024-ballot-measures-voters-backed-progressive-policy-measures/>) through organizing, whether that be through state-level ballot campaigns or strikes and union negotiations. Ballot initiatives in Alaska (<https://labor.alaska.gov/news/2024/news24-26.htm%23~:~:text=Nov.&text=JUNE%20%25E2%2580%2594%2520The%2520Alaska%2520minimum%2520wage,the%2520minimum%2520wage%2520for%2520inflation,>) and Missouri (<https://www.stpr.org/government-politics-issues/2024-12-30/missouri-minimum-wage-increase-january-1>) led to voters boosting the states' minimum wages in November. The ballot question approach also established paid sick leave in Missouri, Alaska and Nebraska.

"If you can put it on the ballot, people love to vote for a raise," Fairness Project Executive Director Kelly Hall told *Truthout* (<https://truthout.org/articles/people-love-to-vote-for-a-raise-three-states-gear-up-for-minimum-wage-vote/>) shortly before the election. "This strategy has resulted in raising the wage every time it has gone on the ballot. It's been a very effective tool for helping to separate common-sense issues like raising the wage from the partisan politics that keep these highly popular issues locked up in state houses."

After a three-year campaign, American Airlines employees negotiated a five-year deal in September that includes back pay from their 2019 contract expiration and an immediate 20 percent pay hike. The new contract also makes them the first flight attendants to have pay during boarding time guaranteed in a union contract. (Delta, which has fended off several unionization campaigns from flight attendants, was the first to pay flight attendants during boarding.)

"The coolest thing is I had people from so many different unions across the country texting me congratulations," a Chicago attendant told *Labor Notes* (<https://labornotes.org/2024/09/strike-threat-wins-boarding-and-retro-pay-american-airlines/>). "You know, a win for one is a win for all."

The Transport Workers Union (TWU) secured (<https://skift.com/2024/04/24/southwest-flight-attendants-score-new-contract/>) a new four-year contract for Southwest flight attendants, giving them a 22.3 percent raise by May 2025, and Delta Air Lines raised (<https://www.hrdiver.com/news/delta-raises-starting-pay-union-push/714181/>) its starting wages to \$19 in response to a union-organizing campaign.

A seven-week strike earned (<https://www.cnbc.com/2024/11/04/striking-boeing-machinists-vote-new-contract.html>) Boeing machinists a 38 percent wage increase over the next four years, 401(k) contribution increases and new signing bonuses.

A three-day strike initiated (<https://www.npr.org/2024/10/03/nx-s1-5139450/dockworkers-port-strike-deal>) by the International Longshoremen's Association resulted in a 62 percent pay increase over six years for thousands of dockworkers.

## Union Campaigns

From October 1, 2023, to September 30, 2024, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) received (<https://www.nlr.gov/news-outreach/news-story/union-petitions-filed-with-nlr-double-since-fy-2021-up-27-since-fy-2023>), 3,286 union election petitions, which was up 27 percent from the 2023 fiscal year.

Overall, union petitions doubled (<https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/union-election-petitions-have-doubled-since-biden-took-office-nlr-says-2024-10-15/>) during the Biden years, thanks in no small part to the pro-labor bent of the administration's NLRB. Through a number of decisions, such as Cemex Construction Materials Pacific (<https://www.nlr.gov/news-outreach/news-story/board-issues-decision-announcing-new-framework-for-union-representation>), which established a new framework for bargaining, the board made the process easier for workers and undid many of the restraints that were instituted during Trump's first term. Union petitions haven't just increased; the win rate (<https://ericdirnbach.medium.com/u-s-union-election-wins-surge-in-fiscal-year-2024-cbcc3fd63c92>) for union elections has risen (<https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/union2.pdf>) over the last few years.

Seventy-three percent of the employees at a Volkswagen factory in Chattanooga, Tennessee, voted (<https://apnews.com/article/volkswagen-union-vote-united-auto-workers-chattanooga-51544590d8a06efddfa2f6ac7db00fbc>) to join the United Auto Workers (UAW). The massive victory came after unionization efforts narrowly failed at the plant in 2014 and 2019.

Nearly 10,000 nurses at Corewell Health of Southern Michigan voted (<https://www.cbsnews.com/detroit/news/corewell-health-nurses-teamsters-union-vote/>) to join the Teamsters in one of the biggest NLRB elections in decades, despite a robust union-busting campaign from their employer.

“Health care workers like Corewell Teamsters were praised as heroes during the COVID-19 pandemic, but their employer has had little to no appreciation for them since,” said Director of the Teamsters Public Services Division Peter Finn in a press release after the victory. “Nurses are tired of being disrespected, paid poverty wages, and denied access to the same high-quality care that they provide.”

Thousands of public school employees voted to unionize in Virginia's Fairfax County, in a victory ([https://www.huffpost.com/entry/fairfax-public-schools-union\\_n\\_66674ebae4b04a7f054ae1a9](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/fairfax-public-schools-union_n_66674ebae4b04a7f054ae1a9)) that affects over 27,000 workers. The win came just four years after the state's assembly passed legislation overturning a law prohibiting public employees from unionizing.

The unionized editorial staff at *Forbes* went on a strike in December to protest the business magazine's slow-walking contract negotiations. It was the first work stoppage in the history of the 107-year-old magazine.

“We formed this union to protect the standards of a professional newsroom and create a more inclusive and transparent workplace, as well as for job security, equity in pay and opportunity, and accountability,” said (<https://newsguild.org/new-york-daily-news-journalists-walk-off-the-job-in-one-day-protest-over-hedge-fund-owners-slashing-of-resources/>), *Forbes* Statistics Editor Andrea

Murphy in a statement. “Management’s only interest is to delay, stall and obstruct, as well as try to block our members from protected union action. We are taking this unprecedented step to show that we will not allow such disrespectful behavior towards our negotiations to continue.”

They walked out again (<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2024/dec/03/forbes-union-strike>), in December, purposely timing it to coincide with the release of the magazine’s popular 30 Under 30 lists.

The ongoing, high-profile labor battles at Amazon and Starbucks continued. Thousands of Amazon workers went on strike (<https://www.cnn.com/2024/12/26/business/amazon-strike-teamsters-warning/index.html>), for days at the height of the holiday season. “Make no mistake the Teamsters will never let up and workers will never stop fighting for their rights at Amazon,” said a union representative after the work stoppage ended. “Stay tuned.”

December also saw a five-day strike (<https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/starbucks-workers-union-strike-friday-la-chicago-seattle-2024-12-20/>) from Starbucks workers across multiple cities after contract talks broke down. The organizing effort got a boost from the NLRB in 2024, as it determined (<https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/nlr-starbucks-case-lowers-bar-proving-anti-union-threats-2024-11-08/>) that the company had broken the law by informing workers at its flagship Seattle store that they would lose benefits if they unionized.

## Gaza Solidarity

The domestic struggles of 2024 occurred amid Israel’s genocidal assault on Gaza, which has been fully supported and funded by the Biden administration. Many workers understandably view the struggles as interlinked.

“The agricultural worker in Idaho may not realize it, but the chickpeas he harvests may be sold to Sabra (<https://swarthmorephoenix.com/2018/03/29/more-than-hummus-renewing-the-call-to-boycott-sabra/>), — jointly owned by PepsiCo and the Strauss Group, Israel’s largest food and beverage manufacturer,” wrote (<https://inthesetimes.com/article/labor-israel-war-genocide-gaza-capitalism-union-ceasefire-strike-manufacture>) Illinois union plumber Paul Stauffer for *In These Times*. “Penn Hospital is partly funded by donors to the University of Pennsylvania, some of whom have threatened to pull their donations because they think school officials haven’t done enough to quiet pro-Palestinian voices on campus. The bulldozers that crushed displaced Palestinians as they hid in their tents in Gaza were Caterpillar D9Rs, manufactured in East Peoria ([https://www.cat.com/en\\_US/by-industry/mining/surface-mining/surface-equipment/lg-dozers/D9R-25-years.html](https://www.cat.com/en_US/by-industry/mining/surface-mining/surface-equipment/lg-dozers/D9R-25-years.html)),”

Massive labor unions like The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) (<https://mondoweiss.net/2024/01/seiu-calls-for-ceasefire-in-gaza/>) and the UAW (<https://uaw.org/uaw-statement-israel-palestine/>) publicly called for a ceasefire, but rank-and-file members of those organizations are pushing for more action.

Purple Up 4 Palestine ([https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/purple-up-for-palestine-seiu-members-staff-call-for-leadership-support-to-end-the-genocide?source=direct\\_link&](https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/purple-up-for-palestine-seiu-members-staff-call-for-leadership-support-to-end-the-genocide?source=direct_link&)), a collective of SEIU workers organizing against imperialism, criticized their union for endorsing Biden amid the carnage. The group is calling on SEIU leadership to call for an end to the genocide, an end to the siege on Gaza, an end to U.S. military support for Israel, and support for the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement.

Within the UAW, a group of rank-and-file members are pushing [\(https://mondoweiss.net/2024/11/uaw-members-push-their-union-to-divest-from-israeli-genocide/\)](https://mondoweiss.net/2024/11/uaw-members-push-their-union-to-divest-from-israeli-genocide/) the union to divest from Israel bonds.

## Trump's Return

Donald Trump's return to power signals more tax cuts for the wealthy and corporations. It also means the restoration of a pro-business labor board. Any hope of the NLRB maintaining a Democratic majority during a portion of Trump's second term was extinguished after the Senate blocked [\(https://truthout.org/articles/inexcusable-khanna-explains-how-democrats-failed-to-trump-proof-labor-board/\)](https://truthout.org/articles/inexcusable-khanna-explains-how-democrats-failed-to-trump-proof-labor-board/) President Biden's renomination of board chair Lauren McFerran. Trump will be able to immediately nominate two pro-business Republicans to the vacant seats and is expected to quickly dump the board's current general counsel, Jennifer Abruzzo.

Many pundits have suggested that Trump's victory represents a realignment of the working class, but it's safe to assume that Trump won't exhibit any of the public nods to organized labor like those from the White House over the past four years. Biden became the first U.S. president to walk a strike picket line, when he joined  [\(https://aflcio.org/2023/9/27/service-solidarity-spotlight-biden-becomes-first-president-walk-strike-picket-line-joins\)](https://aflcio.org/2023/9/27/service-solidarity-spotlight-biden-becomes-first-president-walk-strike-picket-line-joins) UAW workers in Michigan in 2023. During the aforementioned dockworkers strike [\(https://prospect.org/blogs-and-newsletters/tap/2024-10-04-bidens-amazing-win-settling-dock-strike/\)](https://prospect.org/blogs-and-newsletters/tap/2024-10-04-bidens-amazing-win-settling-dock-strike/), Biden refused to intervene despite mounting pressure from Republicans and business groups, despite using his authority to block a strike [\(https://www.reuters.com/world/us/biden-signs-bill-block-us-railroad-strike-2022-12-02/\)](https://www.reuters.com/world/us/biden-signs-bill-block-us-railroad-strike-2022-12-02/) from rail workers back in 2022.

Additionally, many immigrant workers face a potential threat during a Trump administration, as he has vowed to launch a massive deportation program.

Organized labor is currently preparing to fight back. Just a week into 2025 the SEIU announced that it was rejoining the AFL-CIO to help fight Trump's anti-worker agenda. The two unions have been unaligned for almost 20 years.

In remarks made at a roundtable discussion shortly after the decision, AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler stressed the need for solidarity among workers.

“We just finished an election cycle where one party spent the entire time telling working class people across this country, ‘Look how different you are from each other,’” said Shuler [\(https://minnesotareformer.com/2025/01/09/seiu-and-afl-cio-join-forces-ahead-of-expected-trump-anti-worker-agenda/\)](https://minnesotareformer.com/2025/01/09/seiu-and-afl-cio-join-forces-ahead-of-expected-trump-anti-worker-agenda/). “‘He’s an immigrant. She’s transgender or they worship differently than you do’ and it worked to some degree, right? We watched it. The scariest thing in the world to the CEOs, to the billionaires in this country and the folks like Donald Trump who do their bidding, is the idea that we might one day see through that. That there is a barista and an airport services worker and a fast food worker and a home care worker and a teacher and a warehouse worker and a cook and an electrical worker, all of them together saying, ‘Your fight is my fight.’ It terrifies them.”

Despite Trump's victory, enthusiasm for unions remains high. A recent [Gallup poll](https://news.gallup.com/poll/12751/labor-unions.aspx) found that disapproval for unions is at 23 percent, the lowest level in almost 60 years. Support for them is at 70 percent — just one point under their highest rating ever.

### **WE'RE NOT BACKING DOWN IN THE FACE OF TRUMP'S THREATS.**

As Donald Trump is inaugurated a second time, independent media organizations are faced with urgent mandates: Tell the truth more loudly than ever before. Do that work even as our standard modes of distribution (such as social media platforms) are being manipulated and curtailed by forces of fascist repression and ruthless capitalism. Do that work even as journalism and journalists face targeted attacks, including from the government itself. And do that work in community, never forgetting that we're not shouting into a faceless void — we're reaching out to real people amid a life-threatening political climate.

**Our task is formidable, and it requires us to ground ourselves in our principles, remind ourselves of our utility, dig in and commit.**

As a dizzying number of corporate news organizations — either through need or greed — rush to implement new ways to further monetize their content, and others acquiesce to Trump's wishes, now is a time for movement media-makers to double down on community-first models.

At *Truthout*, we are reaffirming our commitments on this front: We won't run ads or have a paywall because we believe that everyone should have access to information, and that access should exist without barriers and free of distractions from craven corporate interests. We recognize the implications for democracy when information-seekers click a link only to find the article trapped behind a paywall or buried on a page with dozens of invasive ads. The laws of capitalism dictate an unending increase in monetization, and much of the media simply follows those laws. ***Truthout* and many of our peers are dedicating ourselves to following other paths — a commitment which feels vital in a moment when corporations are evermore overtly embedded in government.**

Over 80 percent of *Truthout's* funding comes from small individual donations from our community of readers, and the remaining 20 percent comes from a handful of social justice-oriented foundations. Over a third of our total budget is supported by recurring monthly donors, many of whom give because they want to help us keep *Truthout* barrier-free for everyone.

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On Bluesky? We created a starter pack (<https://bsky.app/starter-pack/truthout.org/3lawibu3ufd2i>) to make it easy for you to follow Truthout folks there.

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