

Acknowledgments

Erin

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It’s difficult to put to words how formative my experiences have been learning in, with, and from the Twin Cities’ Industrial Workers of the World IUB, SJEM, and all those who grew the union to what it is today. In 2018, Brendan and I shared our preliminary thinking with IWW education workers from across the country at a gathering organized by SJEM. This experience, my participation in the SJEM summer reading group in summer 2021, and learning from SJEM members’ analyses and organizing during the 2022 MFT strike were critical sites of learning for me. Every time I have the pleasure of listening to and learning from Linda’s stories of her family’s union history in the 1934 Minneapolis general strike, I am inspired to reflect on the importance of storytelling in the labor movement and on my own family’s union history in Chicago. My Grandpa Henry met his union buddies for coffee at the McDonald’s on Archer regularly until his death at 85—we all develop lifelong friendships-in-struggle.

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● Brendan

First, I would like to acknowledge my fellow educator friends and comrades who, through their tireless efforts to improve the quality of public education in West Virginia, transformed the country. Standing alongside you all on the picket line or chanting outside of lawmakers’ offices during the 55 Strong strike has forever changed me for the better. Your wisdom and insight for a brighter future, your strategies for bringing together all education workers into this fold, and your work connecting everyday people into the labor movement will be forever insightful to those looking to begin organizing.

I am eternally grateful to the education workers and activists who gave deeply of their time to us. As a former teacher myself, I know all too well the struggles of keeping up with the workload educators have. Being so candid about the fight for stronger unions and stronger community responses to attacks on public education cannot have been easy, but we hope to tell your story as truthfully as we can. Your stories and your actions have helped shape the future, and it is our duty to record it accurately.

While there are countless educators I could list here, I want to personally thank a few who have shaped this work, both from their personal activism and their feedback. Jessica Salfia and Elizabeth Catte’s book *55 Strong: Inside the West Virginia Teachers’ Strike* cataloged the feelings, emotions, and personal stories of West Virginians so soon after the strike had ended. It is a perfect

time capsule of that moment in history, and one which Jessica, in addition to her teaching responsibilities, took up with gusto. Emily Comer's grassroots organizing experience that predates the strike, and her sit-in at Senator Manchin's office during the Kavanaugh hearings in late 2018, have been a personal inspiration to me. To my union mentor, David McQuain, who not only recommended me for my first teaching position, but who signed me up for my union, taught me how to be an effective building representative, shared deeply with me his own personal struggles as an educator-activist, and helped me feel confident when times were toughest as a first-year teacher. Lastly, Jay O'Neal's tireless efforts and journey—from teacher, to activist, to organizer—have been a guiding light for me over the past half decade and I am deeply grateful for his friendship. It was Jay who invited me to attend my first Labor Notes conference in April 2018, giving me a chance to speak about our collective struggle to a packed room of union supporters. Jay likewise invited me to help form the West Virginia United caucus and listened to my plans for how we could operate a cohesive group based on solidarity unionism and social justice. I am indebted to you for your comradery and commitment to the labor movement.

As a new teacher, I wanted to learn much within the realm of social-justice-minded pedagogy. Robert Haworth spoke with me during my first year as a struggling educator, hoping to retain some semblance of autonomy and critical pedagogy in my classroom. His insistence to me that I continue striving for a more democratic future remained at the forefront of my mind as I entered the 2017–2018 school year, not knowing what was yet to come but ready to do my part nevertheless. Becky Tarlau, associate professor at Penn State, provided an informative framework to me for how to interpret the content of this work. Her background on the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MST) and critical pedagogy allowed Erin and I to better analyze the relationship between the four surveyed states and their organizational approach to the state. Coming to West Virginia in the spring of 2019, Becky joined us at West Virginia's first Troublemakers School and participated in a joint union picket for National Nurses United in Greenbrier County. I am grateful to have known both of you from more than your research, but from your activism as well.

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I am likewise forever indebted to my co-author, Erin, for her brilliance, her insight, her scholarship, and her friendship. I met Erin virtually soon after the West Virginia strike ended so that I could speak with her students about the strike's impact on us and what her students could expect to see soon in Oklahoma. Upon being presented with the idea of writing the history of these strikes and their aftermath, Erin and I committed the next four years of our lives to ensuring that it came to fruition. Erin graciously brought me to the *Free Minds, Free Peoples* conference in Minneapolis in 2019 where we presented the initial findings in this work. Being in spaces where we could share our insights with similarly radical-minded educators was something I had yet to do at this scale. Our conversations there laid the groundwork for much of this book. Erin shared with me a vision for what this could be, provided innumerable edits, comments, and feedback for my sections, and helped me pursue this joint venture in a way that suited my writing sensibilities. I found my voice in this work because of your support.

Lastly, the work of writing a book of this magnitude could not have been possible without the continued love and support I received from my wife, Hilary. When it became clear in January 2018 that a strike was imminent and we were uncertain where our next paycheck would come from, Hilary and I were just a young family new to our careers in education. But, as she would later do when I told her I wanted to write a book cataloging the strike wave, Hilary offered her immediate support. And while my three children—Sophia, Aidan, and Brody—did not particularly enjoy my being away to work on this, I hope that this book will remind them of the power they have as they mature into young adults.