

## Prologue: Country Roads Shut Down a State

As the first state to strike in the spring of 2018, the actions of West Virginia rank-and-file educators served to inspire Kentucky, Oklahoma, Arizona, and many other states and districts across the US to collective direct action mere weeks and months following. We foreground our study of the 2018 so-called “red state” education strikes within a narrative constructed by Brendan via his own participation as a high school social studies teacher in West Virginia and interviews he conducted with fellow education workers across the state. The story begins just after rank-and-file educators pressured their local and state unions to undertake what started as a discrete two-day action and eventually culminated in a wildcat strike. Against the wishes of their state union leaders, school boards, and state officials, who called for schools to re-open prior to substantive guarantees for increased wages and a halt to rising health insurance costs, rank-and-file education workers across all fifty-five of West Virginia’s counties struck for an additional seven days to secure their gains. This groundswell moment of widespread refusal to accept a handshake agreement between state union leaders and the governor helped to ignite a resurgence in education worker militancy across the southern and southwestern US and beyond.

### The Beginning

On Thursday, February 22, 2018, West Virginia’s first day out on what was meant to be a two-day strike was as invigorating as it was frightening. An estimated five thousand individuals met at the capitol to protest the mediocre reforms to educators’ and public employees’ insurance that had been put forth by state legislators and the dangerous pro-school privatization measures that were still being considered. Protesters demanded long-term funding for the state’s Public Employees Insurance Agency (PEIA) and a larger raise for all public employees. Kym Randolph, West Virginia Education Association (WVEA) director of communication, recounted the long lines at the capitol, with some waiting for more than two hours to make it inside the capitol building to make their voices heard. “The place was packed,” Randolph said. “It was very loud. That is by far the largest crowd inside the Capitol in a long, long time” (Larimer). Rallies became so intense that even the state attorney general, Patrick Morrissey, who had called the strike “illegal” one day prior, barricaded his office with a large taxidermized black bear, supposedly to prevent assembled teachers from breaking down his door. For Jessica Salfia, a high school English teacher from the Eastern Panhandle, the feeling of going on strike was otherworldly. “For me, I had a sense of being part of something historic,” Salfia explained to Brendan in 2018. “There was no doubt we were doing the right thing. . . . I had been organizing

my county, being one of the loudest and most powerful voices of dissent. I had been advocating that we needed extreme action. So, I rolled up my sleeves and kept talking to folks and explaining what we could accomplish by following the southern counties.”

As Thursday rolled into Friday, a smaller crowd assembled. Disheartened by the lackluster response to what was supposed to be the second and final day of the walkouts, posters on the rank-and-file-created and -moderated West Virginia Public Employees UNITED Facebook group (WVPEU) wondered whether or if any tactical changes would be made to win their strike. Prior to the February 17 announcement by WVEA and American Federation of Teachers-West Virginia (AFT-WV) for a statewide strike, information from a union leader meeting in Flatwoods was leaked on the page that county union leadership would be directed to disseminate the benefits of a rolling walkout to members. Rolling walkouts prevent indictments—legal requirements to return to work on the threat of arrest, fines, or a combination of the two—by only shutting down a particular industry long enough to force the legal process to begin. Once an indictment has been filed, workers return to work just as another group of workers go on strike.

This process slows down management’s ability to control their workers if they must rely on the state to enforce their demands. Workers circumvent the legal power of their state government while shielding their members from fines and incarceration. A rolling walkout would have had five counties go on strike all at once. Their teachers and service personnel would be expected to go to the capitol or attend an impromptu picket. If an indictment was filed, teachers would already be back to work. Then, the following day, another five counties would be on strike until another indictment was filed, and so on throughout the legislative session until demands were met.

One WVPEU poster expressed reservation about this leaked proposal. “When we went on strike in 1990, we had our counties go out all at once. You either go out together or not at all.” The defined timeline of the initial two-day strike coupled with the leaked proposal led to public education workers’ general uncertainty about the duration of and plan for the strike and whether the rolling walkouts would be effective. Some wondered: Would the walkouts simply be a two-day break? On the second day, many education workers did not attend the capitol rally but maintained picket lines and continued food services for low-income children in their local counties. With fewer bodies gathered centrally at the capitol, momentum appeared to wane.

Amidst the uncertainty, Republicans seemed to believe they could test the resolve of teachers and support staff once the weekend had ended. After striking for two days, Thursday and Friday, Governor Justice announced that he would hold a three-school tour of the state that Monday in the hopes of gaining some insight into the grassroots anger that was fueling this struggle. Miscommunication between union officials and members led to confusion about what this meeting would entail. Would it be a town hall open to the public? A private meeting with local union representatives? These questions were not resolved

until early Monday morning as Justice, a billionaire who owns more than fifty coal mines and businesses, had already begun to fly, via helicopter, to his first destination of the day. Some wondered if this was intentional, sowing mass confusion in the lead up to the meetings to drive down turnout. Whatever Justice's intentions, teachers showed up in full force.

## ● The Coal Baron and the “Rednecks”

At his first stop in Wheeling, Justice was greeted by a crowd of teachers who at first remained largely silent and deferential to the governor. Over time, however, the crowd began to push back on Justice's insistence that he was a champion of public education. Justice's proposal was simple—a task force would investigate the concerns for PEIA premiums, and he would call for a special legislative session to address issues of taxing oil and natural gas industries to pay for these changes. The proposed PEIA task force would travel the state and engage with community members to learn which proposals citizens would like to see implemented to pay for halting increases to PEIA. Yet, Justice's olive branch of peace was tinged with a paternalistic overtone. “I love you,” Justice told those assembled in the performing arts center at Wheeling Park High School. “But I'm not happy with you. You should be appreciative of where you are.” Justice insisted that while teachers were making their voices heard, “You need to be back in the classroom. The kids need to be back in the classroom.”

Tensions grew worse after a speaker shouted at him that he should put as much pressure on legislators as he does teachers. Justice's response: “I can be the town redneck, too,” was met with angry boos from the crowd. His elitist tone continued throughout the Wheeling town hall. Justice suggested a natural gas severance tax to fund PEIA was simply impractical and may not pass the legislature. At this point, teachers began to walk out of the event in protest. On stage, Justice was visibly frustrated, stating, “I didn't have to come here.”

One audience member, Gideon Titus-Glover, a sixth grader from a local middle school, used his time at the microphone to question why Justice, a billionaire who owned one of the largest tourist destinations in the state, would push for a larger tourism budget instead of higher teacher wages or benefits (Novotney). As Justice attempted to get out of the awkward situation, Gideon interrupted and said, “If you're putting money into public schools and making smart people, that's a smart investment” (Novotney). Justice would later quote Gideon's business advice the following day during a press conference officially calling for an end to the walkouts. The hashtag #GideonForGovernor began trending for the rest of the day.

After arriving at his first stop almost an hour late, Justice left Wheeling to travel to his second destination, Martinsburg, again delayed. At Spring Mills High School, in the eastern part of the state, Justice opened by posing the rhetorical question, “Nobody's going to shoot at me or anything, are you?” Many felt this was in poor taste, considering the then-recent Parkland school shooting in

Florida which had claimed seventeen lives. Audience members responded with boos and sighs to the governor's poor attempt at humor before Justice added, "Okay, you don't have to promise" (Da Silva). It became clear to many teachers who had viewed Justice's first stop on social media that this was little more than a promotion tour. Indeed, Justice's statement that, "I didn't have to come here," was possibly the most truthful thing he said that day. What had begun as a poor attempt at finding some common ground turned into a hostile back-and-forth between public employees and their governor.

Justice is West Virginia's first billionaire governor. He is the first governor to not hold prior elected office and to have made most of his wealth in coal and large agribusiness. He initially ran for office as a Democrat but switched to the Republican party soon after his election. As the wealthiest person in West Virginia, he positioned himself as a working-class champion. The widespread negative response to these meetings chipped away at his cultivated public image. When he was still a Democrat in April 2017, Justice called a press conference to announce his veto of the state legislature's recently unveiled annual budget. On a white-clothed table in front of him, he lifted the lid of a silver serving tray to reveal a large pile of actual bull manure. "We don't have a nothing burger today," Justice told the crowd, referencing a popular Republican analogy. "And we don't have a mayonnaise sandwich. What we have is nothing more than a bunch of political bull you-know-what" (B. Murphy). At the time, the West Virginia American Association of Retired Persons State Director Gaylene Miller said that Justice's theatrics weren't offensive. "That's just how the governor is. That's what we've come to expect. He's a homespun kind of guy and I think his honesty is refreshing" (Jenkins, "Justice Vetoes Budget").

Now, West Virginia's wealthiest citizen was touring the state in a private helicopter to belittle and deride public employees for having the tenacity to ask for slightly better pay and no increases to their already bloated health insurance. The irony was not lost on teachers.

## ● Empty Promises

As the governor fled Martinsburg for his final destination, teachers were watching his tour with bated breath. Education workers in Morgantown, where the third town hall was held, had just wrapped up their shift on the picket lines when they flooded into the auditorium of University High School. Unlike the previous two destinations, the auditorium was packed; so much so that not all who wanted to attend could get inside. When Justice shuffled on stage, he was greeted with no applause or adoration. The silent tension of the moment was palpable.

Audience members demanded that Justice increase public employee salaries five percent—which translates to \$2,000 annually—for the next fiscal year. In addition, teachers demanded that PEIA be fully funded through a combination of tax increases on oil and natural gas industries and legalizing and taxing marijuana. Justice pushed back on these proposals by suggesting that he had already

made the same case to the legislature the previous year. “Did I not last year, at the state of the state, say that the severance tax on gas and coal should be tiered and it should go up and down, with the prices and if we would have done that, we would have been clear sailing like you can’t believe,” Justice told his audience (Hudock). The governor may have made these proposals to his audience and at his state of the state address, but it seemed clear that these were empty words. A host of oil and natural gas industries donated to key Republican legislators in the past to ensure severance taxes would remain at comically low levels year after year. The third day of the strike ended with Justice wrapping up his publicity tour and little else. Justice informed educators that he admired them for standing up for their students and for exercising their freedom of speech. This appreciation was couched within a threat, however. If teachers did not return to work the following day, punitive actions might be taken to force them to comply.

That Tuesday afternoon, the walkouts continued into their fourth day. Each of the state’s fifty-five counties shut down once more. State union leadership from WVEA and AFT-WV announced that they arranged with Governor Justice a tentative deal to increase public employee pay by five percent alongside a sixteen-month freeze on insurance premiums. The PEIA task force that Justice said he was keen on creating would be developed a few weeks later. Flanked by state leadership from the main education unions, Justice stated that this deal was contingent upon teachers returning to work after a “cooling off” day on Wednesday. “The long and the short of it is just this: We need our kids back in school,” Justice said. “We need our teachers back in school. They want to be back in school” (Larimer). Attempting to appeal to a sense of community togetherness, Justice presented a kinder side than he had shown publicly only the day prior. “I’ve said many times we ought to look at education as an economic driver. But maybe I was looking at it as what is the prudent thing to do and not necessarily looking at education as an investment” (Raby and Virtanen). One problem—a bill to increase teacher pay at this point in the year would have to go through committee, dominated by hostile Republican lawmakers, or passed during a special session. The handshake agreement was not binding. Ending the strike before passing the legislature would mean that if a pay raise bill failed to pass, then educators may lose the momentum to strike again. What had been touted in national media as the end of the teachers strike turned out to be its apex.

Teachers had a different opinion of the supposed deal.

## ● West Virginia Educators Go Wildcat

West Virginia public employees do not have the right to collectively bargain. What little leeway they do have to negotiate contracts is limited, and certainly no legislature would need to honor any deal with teachers simply because the governor said he had struck a bargain with union leaders. It seems that most public employees were aware of this fact. A crowd arrived at the capitol that evening of the fourth day of the strike, furious at the compromise and chanting,

“We won’t back down,” as their unified voice rang out in collective opposition to the handshake agreement.

Weakening the power of unions over the past several years seemed to backfire on unwitting Republican lawmakers. Introducing anti-union right-to-work laws and continuing to block collective bargaining for public employees meant that rank-and-file workers’ only recourse was to take the deal into their own hands. State unions held a vote of authorization two weeks prior to the strike. The vote of authorization only said, “I hereby give authority to the state associations to call a statewide action.” Mass actions leading up to the wildcat strike had provided education workers a taste of collective power, a power that emerged from their own relationships and labor within their communities and at the capitol. Public education workers came to realize they did not have to agree unilaterally with the terms of the Justice deal; they could refuse it.

Wednesday, February 28 was meant to be a “cooling-off” day yet had become the most anxiety-provoking day of the strike. Emily Tanzey, a middle school English language arts teacher, recounted to Brendan that she was driving back from Charleston to Morgantown that day, pulling over at each rest stop to check her phone and see if she should go home “or return to the Capitol to raise hell.” Tanzey chose to return home, only to find that a secret meeting was soon to take place at an old mall that could serve as a central meeting point for her county’s educators. At this meeting, “teachers demanded our local union leadership and region reps to wildcat.” The informal gathering had been posted on one of the several secret Facebook groups set up by Monongalia County educators, which was replicated throughout other West Virginia counties in various formats. “I honestly felt that the state union leaders had conceded, and I was skeptical of us actually making the progress that had been promised [without a wildcat],” Tanzey said.

A wildcat strike is a strike that is undertaken by workers without explicit authorization from union leadership or a formal vote of authorization. Wildcat strikes tend to happen during periods of union complacency. They are often localized because a large member base is difficult to organize into a single action without the support of union leadership and its infrastructure. In West Virginia, the wildcat strike was not called from a central leader or voice so much as members found the power within one another to stay out to remain united.

On the WVPEU Facebook group, video began circulating of state and regional union officials pleading with members at these informal, rank-and-file organized meetings across the state to accept the deal and return to work. Pleading turned to hostility as members openly defied their unions, yelled back in protest, and walked out of their state and county union meetings. Other counties that held secret meetings, like Monongalia County educators’ secret mall meeting, during that supposed “cooling off” day were also likely recorded and sent around on social media, providing access to the tenor of the general mood for those not in attendance. Impromptu organizing efforts spread across the various secret pages and back channels that teachers and service personnel had set up during the walkouts to

ensure all workers maintained open lines of communication. Rank-and-file meetings were set up in schools and churches so that teachers and service personnel could determine whether they would accept the deal as it stood or if they would inform their superintendent there would not be enough staffing for the following day.

By late afternoon on the “cooling off” day, three counties—Wayne, Cabell, and Mingo—announced they would not reopen the following day. Posters on the WVPEU page shared the state map of striking counties as it gradually turned red once more, with independent updates on what their own county planned to do in response. Watching the map galvanized those who felt they had been betrayed by their union leadership but were in no position to fight back. “I remember staying up late and watching the map turn red, first a few counties, then all at once,” said Joshua Russell in an interview, a social studies teacher from Preston County. “The last counties to go were in the Eastern Panhandle, and we all watched to make sure we were 55 united for one more day.” The concept of remaining united created an atmosphere whereby teachers lived out the old labor adage that, “An injury to one is an injury to all.”

Many WVEA and AFT-WV state and county leaders were fearful and displeased with members’ militancy and the prospect of a wildcat. Earlier in the strike, the Preston County WVEA president, for example, called a meeting at a local auditorium with teachers, service personnel, and the county superintendent in attendance. She began chastising those who argued in favor of continuing the walkouts beyond the initially planned two days in front of the county superintendent and board of education. “It was clear from that meeting that [she] was listening to leadership, but ignoring the masses,” Russell said. “We knew at this point the teachers across the state had it together.”

County superintendents who had previously sent out automated phone calls to parents informing them that students would be back in school on Thursday, March 1 were forced to rescind those statements soon after. In Monongalia County, Superintendent Frank Devano informed parents that he was “proud to announce that school would be in session for a normal school day” on Thursday. A few hours later, an exasperated Devano called parents and guardians back to say he was “unsure when they [the schools] would reopen.” By 6:00 that evening, six counties had announced closures after the “cooling off” day, with an additional two counties on two-hour delays, no doubt an attempt to see if enough workers would report to duty for schools to legally be in session. By 7:30 p.m., sixteen counties had closed and four more were on two-hour delays. As each successive hour passed, it was becoming clearer and clearer that whatever the “cooling off” period was intended to resolve, it failed. It was at 10:30 p.m. that all schools had announced closures indefinitely, and state union leaders were left uncertain of their position. What good was a union if the legislature couldn’t rely on union leaders to bargain a deal to end this strike. With whom could they bargain?

Wildcatting turned out to be the right call. On Hoppy Kercheval’s popular statewide radio show, Talkline, Wednesday afternoon, state Senate leader Mitch

Carmichael declared that he would not bring a vote to the floor on public employee pay. Senate Republicans claimed that a five percent pay raise plan would need to be developed further before they could commit to vote (Jenkins, “Some Education Workers Return”). The Senate had adjourned Wednesday evening without passing a pay raise and reports from educators began coming into the WVPEU page that the Senate’s attorneys were allowed to go home early so they could be prepared to read over the bill Thursday morning. When Kercheval asked Carmichael if the pay raise had a chance of passing, Carmichael stated that it was unlikely that there were enough votes to make it happen.

Social media began exploding out of anger. Brendan made a post to the West Virginia Industrial Workers of the World Facebook page explaining that the Senate was unlikely to pass the pay raise. At the time, the page had only around one thousand followers, yet the post reached more than 130,000 viewers and more than one thousand shares. One poster commented, “Then the unions should tell everyone to walk out tomorrow. That was the deal that they made with Justice.” Another poster stated he had seen “Mitch Carmichael through the doors at the Capital [sic] today laughing at the crowd at the end of the session. This is no laughing matter. Thousands of workers are fed up. Thousands of families worried about their future and this guy is laughing. . . . These guys are abusing the position and hurting hard working WV people!!! It’s time to get involved. Enough is enough!”

## ● More than Wages and Insurance

It was at this moment that thousands of rank-and-file educators’ organizing efforts came to fruition. Wednesday became more than a wildcat; it was an awakening. Education workers online and in-the-field independently organized themselves since the previous summer. On Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, a month prior to the strike, independent rank-and-file educators with WVPEU had organized a lobby day to bring education workers to the capitol and plead with lawmakers to make the necessary changes to state funding. The outpouring of anger directed towards PEIA policy makers was first birthed online, as thousands read the tragic stories of their fellow workers having to go without medical care for fear it would lead them into inescapable debt. It was community members and local volunteers—churches, businesses, sports teams, and activists—who organized food drives to keep students from going hungry. It was the average worker who offered car rides and chartered buses to attend rallies at the capitol, sometimes more than four hours away. If the workers could bring the state legislature to their knees on their own, then why shouldn’t it be the workers who chose when to accept any deal?

“I thought the wildcat was absolutely necessary,” Russell said to Brendan. “Union leadership was not listening. During the ‘cooling off’ day I was happy at the prospect of getting back to work, but the legislature began to screw around with the five percent and our local leaders told us we needed to go back to work



as a ‘good faith’ gesture.” Staying out to stay united was critical to the continuation of the strike. “We watched as the more militant counties led the way by closing,” Russell explained. “At this point, my opinion was that if one county closes, we all close.” While some county representatives from WVEA tried to persuade others to return to school, to accept the deal as it was in good faith while waiting to see what the Senate did, militancy ultimately won out. Russell illuminated how rank-and-file pressure ensured the continued strike: “Our school was about 50/50 when it came to continuing the strike, so there was a lot of worry that if we stayed out, school would still be open. One by one, though, teachers in the group chat started taking sick days. Eventually, the WVEA representative got the point, called our superintendent and he had to call off school.”

The rising of class-consciousness flourished as a direct result of the strike turning into a wildcat. “One huge change I noticed is that I became closer to my co-workers, especially those who also had ancestors who had been involved with other labor movements,” Tanzey said in an interview, reflecting on when the strike turned into a wildcat. “I think for many teachers at my school, there was a sudden awareness that education is also an occupation that needs protections, is also disenfranchised.” Many educators who had previously eschewed politics, electorally or otherwise, began to post political statements on their personal social media pages. Those who had previously been afraid to share their views, or were unaware of what they were, now no longer hid their views. Tanzey said, “I think that many teachers realized they are part of a larger labor movement that is happening in the US and globally. Workers hold the power. It’s about time we make our bosses see this!”

The wildcat strike positioned state lawmakers as the “bosses,” shifting the balance of power away from local boards of education or even administration. Workers wanted investment in education through progressive taxation. “Workers in the capitol were chanting, ‘Tax our gas!’ and my coworkers at school were suddenly talking about gas companies exploiting us, stealing our resources, and making a profit while our state is left with nothing,” said Emily Comer, a Spanish teacher in Kanawha County, in an interview with Brendan. Taxing these natural gas companies would mean the difference between a teacher working a second or third job after school just to make ends meet. It meant the difference between being able to hire and retain experienced educators who otherwise could teach in any surrounding states and make on average around ten thousand dollars more. It was the difference between being able to retire knowing that necessary medication would not increase precipitously, eating away at what little retirement teachers received.

As the walkout progressed, the Senate continued to drag its feet. Meanwhile, the state map continued to turn red day after day. Educators were fighting back.

## ● Sparking the Fire of Rebellion

By Friday, March 2, it became clear that nothing short of an occupation would

suffice. Carmichael had stalled on putting forth a five percent pay raise bill that the House had voted overwhelmingly to approve, sending it to the finance committee where it stayed as members of the committee debated the merits of four or five percent raises. When the Senate was planning to adjourn early Friday afternoon, Jay O'Neal, a social studies teacher in Kanawha County, posed the following on the WVPEU group: "It's going to take added pressure to make sure our demands are met. There has been some talk at the capitol about not leaving the building until they meet our demands. Would you support this?" In 2011, Wisconsin public employees had followed a similar path when they occupied their capitol building in Madison. Protestors refused to leave, creating a fully functioning community inside, with a sleeping area, food station, and information relay center—an event that some suggest served as a precursor to the Occupy Wall Street Movement later that year (Buhle and Buhle). The occupation of Madison's capitol building had lasted more than two weeks, and in that time, protestors had gathered and directed anger towards Republican lawmakers in full force. As tensions escalated, and rifle ammunition was found nearby the capitol building, Dane County Circuit Judge John Albert ordered the removal of union protesters.

Occupying Charleston would mean an increased potential for violence and state repression. Some posters worried that there were few resources for teachers who had traveled hours for what they had assumed was simply another large rally before the weekend. "If this happens, I think it should happen Monday," posted Matt McCormick, a Mercer County teacher. "The Senate will adjourn for the weekend soon and won't feel appropriate pressure if it starts today." Others worried that mass arrest would take place if an occupation did occur. "So far we have acted peacefully," stated one WVPEU member. "This will force the police to physically remove us." Jake Jarvis, a reporter for the Charleston Gazette-Mail, had reported only a week earlier that the House of Delegates had voted to give Capitol police authority to break up "riots and unlawful assemblage" while preventing them from being held liable "for the death of persons in riots and unlawful assemblages." The message was clear—the state would only tolerate so much from their public employees before pressing down hard against them with the full weight of the militarized police force. Only the day before, the legislature passed a bill that increased the pay for law enforcement officers by five percent for the next fiscal year. During the summer health care sit-ins, too, Capitol police arrested protesters, including an Episcopalian priest who many assumed would be immune to state arrest given his position. Educators' fears of potential arrests or violence were not unfounded.

The occupation had been put on hold until a critical mass could mature around the idea. The weekend would determine whether such action would be necessary at all. In what might have been the most widely watched West Virginia Senate Finance Committee meeting in history, committee members met over the weekend to discuss whether to approve the five percent pay raise bill as it stood. Some back-and-forth occurred when Senator Greg Boso began to argue that a five percent raise across the board would be too costly for the state,

instead amending the original House bill to four percent so that all state employees would see a raise, a noteworthy stall tactic. The Senate eventually took up the four percent pay raise bill and passed it later that evening, only to realize that they had unintentionally passed the original five percent pay raise bill. Senate Majority Leader Carmichael recalled the bill and passed it with the amended language before it was rejected by the House.

The weekend's standoffs continued until the following Tuesday when West Virginia public employees ultimately won their strike, maintaining momentum despite anger, resentment, and exhaustion. On Tuesday, March 6, after much delay, Senate Republicans finally passed a five percent pay increase for all public employees and members accepted the legislature's conditions. PEIA premiums and deductible increases would be frozen for sixteen months as a statewide task force was set up with the mission to find a dedicated source of long-term, sustainable revenue for the insurance plan. Seniority was kept in place and legislation that would enable charter school creation in the state was taken off the table for the rest of the session.

West Virginia public employees had won tangible, material gains in their strike. Yet, in another sense, the strike had won something bigger than itself. "Outside of West Virginia," teacher Adam Culver shared, "I hope our story continues to inspire other teachers and workers to fight for what should be theirs. As much as this story is about classism, capital accumulation, and social movements, it's also just about keeping promises and taking care of the people who are taking care of your world. . . . It takes everyone to make this world work, and no one who is contributing should be struggling." Indeed, the fire of rebellion that had been sparked by West Virginia educators would not be contained. What had started as a fight over insurance and low wages, as we explore in more depth throughout the book, became something greater than any had anticipated.