

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: “LABOR HAS A LONG MEMORY”:  
TRANSFORMATIONS IN CAPITALISM AND  
LABOR ORGANIZING IN CENTRAL  
APPALACHIA, 1977-2019

David Heim, Master of Arts in History, 2019

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In 1989 the UMWA went on strike against Pittston Coal. In response to declining union power and corporate anti-unionism, the UMWA embraced community members and women as participants in its striking strategy. Although sometimes reluctant to do so, the union accepted the involvement of non-miners in non-violent demonstrations and civil disobedience, and was successful because of the strategic shift. The victory against Pittston Coal in 1989 suggests that scholars cannot rule industrial unions as sites of resistance to capitalism after 1982. The union’s acceptance of community organizing in 1989 also suggests a link between the strategies and success of the Pittston Strike and more recent organizing victories in West Virginia—the West Virginia Teachers’ Strikes. More recent labor militancy in Appalachia has also built off of legacies of resistance dating back to events like the Paint Creek Mine War and the Battle of Blair Mountain in 1912 and 1921.

“LABOR HAS A LONG MEMORY”: TRANSFORMATIONS IN CAPITALISM AND  
LABOR ORGANIZING IN CENTRAL APPALACHIA, 1977-2019

by

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My research on Appalachia has been equal parts personal and scholarly. For many years I tried to use education to run away from my hometown, but my time at the University of Maryland taught me that the study of history could be used to understand my own identity and also empower the community I grew up in and have come to love.

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## Introduction

In the late summer of 1921, ten thousand coal miners donned red bandanas and faced down an estimated thirty thousand well-armed federal troops and private detectives in the hills of Southern West Virginia. This event would later become known as the Battle of Blair Mountain. These miners, who sociologist Wess Harris has affectionately referred to as the “red neck army”, put on a symbol of oppression, the red banana given to every miner by their employer, and transformed it into a symbol of freedom as they fought for their right to unionize.<sup>1</sup> Though considered a defeat for union efforts at the time, the legacy of Blair Mountain has been passed down through generation after generation of West Virginian laborers.

In 2018, West Virginia’s school teachers went on strike to protest poor wages. In her most recent book, *55 Strong*, historian Elizabeth Catte presents testimony from teachers across the state who took part in the strike. Every single teacher from the southern counties of West Virginia cited the legacy of miner militancy dating back to Blair Mountain as a motivator for their struggle in 2018. Katie Endicott, a high school teacher from Mingo County, wrote, “in our ‘neck of the woods’ we know how to stand with courage because we have watched our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents stand on picket lines. The willingness to stand is a part of our DNA...”<sup>2</sup> Brandon Wolford, a fellow Mingo County educator, remembers “sitting in front of the television for hours watching low-quality VHS tapes of the coal miners’ strikes that had occurred in Appalachia over a period of four years during the mid-1980s.”<sup>3</sup> For these teachers,

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<sup>1</sup> Wess Harris, *Written in Blood: Courage and Corruption in the Appalachian War of Extraction* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2017), 95.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Catte, Emily Hilliard, and Jessica Salfia, ed., *55 Strong: Inside the West Virginia Teachers’ Strike* (Cleveland, OH: Belt Publishing, 2018), 24.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

and many others across the state and the region, the legacy of miner militancy remains alive and well today.

From the late 1970s to the present, structures of capitalism have undergone drastic transformations. But labor organizing has also transformed to meet the needs of laborers and their working-class communities. The weakening of industrial labor unions by the early 1980s forced them to embrace women and communities as indispensable actors in labor protests. One of the most significant examples of industrial labor's embrace of communities in the post-war period is the Pittston Strike. Beginning in April 1989, the Pittston Strike was one of the largest strikes in the second half of the Twentieth Century. Instigated by Pittston Coal's revocation of retired miners' health benefits and working miners' pension benefits, the strike directly involved 1,500 miners, but involved up to 40,000 miners and community members who joined in strikes, boycotts, and protests across West Virginia, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Kentucky. Not only was the Pittston Strike one of the largest coal strikes in recent history, but it was also one of the most successful. The strike forced Pittston Coal to return benefits it had wrongfully taken from working and retired miners, and pushed the federal government to pass the Coal Industry Retiree Health Benefit Act, also known as the Coal Act, in 1992. The act required coal companies to provide health and retirement benefits for retired miners and also established a federal fund to assist in paying retirement and health care payments for any coal miner that retired before 1994.<sup>4</sup> Physical violence and violence through the removal of vital health benefits put countless

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<sup>4</sup> H.R. 4013 – Coal Industry Retiree Health Benefit Act of 1991, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/102nd-congress/house-bill/4013>. This bill provided the exact text of the act that would be passed into law the following year.

numbers of individuals, families, and communities at risk across Appalachia's impoverished mining communities.

Despite the relative invisibility of the Pittston Strike, both at the time and in the historiography, it is a significant event in the recent history of labor organizing. The Pittston Strike was one of the last major strikes conducted by the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA). The strike marked the end of a decade of instability in the coal industry linked to the globalization of coal management, a process mirrored in many American industries during the 1970s and 1980s. But the Pittston Strike also marks the moment when the UMWA officially sanctioned community-focused organizing alongside industrial strike tactics. The success of the UMWA in 1989 was due, in large part, to the actions of community members in raising money, participating in non-violent demonstrations and civil disobedience, and showing widespread solidarity for the striking miners. The participation of women was also crucial to the success of the strike. Women have always been important to protest and labor activism, but their acceptance by the UMWA in 1989, especially through the creation of women's auxiliaries, institutionalized the involvement of women in labor organizing. Since 1989, women have been instrumental in leading grassroots organizing efforts in Appalachia, focused especially on education and environmental protection. Despite the union's sometimes tepid acceptance of community actions alongside established strike tactics, the Pittston Strike would not have succeeded without the partnership between unionized miners and local communities. Many of these actions, and other forms of community-based activism have become influential in organizing resistance to global capitalism today.<sup>5</sup> Labor-community organizing has seen success in Appalachia, especially in the

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<sup>5</sup> Annelise Orleck, *"We Are All Fast-Food Workers Now"* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 254-259.

recent case of West Virginia teachers who successfully struck in both 2018 and 2019. New forms of labor-community organizing did not arise in opposition to industrial labor organizing, but rather emerged alongside it. Due to the changing circumstances of the coal industry in the 1970s and 1980s, by 1989 the UMWA had to accept women and communities as crucial to the future success of the union.

The Pittston Strike has been the focus of one monograph. Richard A. Brisbin, in *A Strike Like No Other Strike*, tracks the rise of legal structures that controlled labor-management relations throughout the post-war period. Within the context of politics and law, Brisbin argues that workers' resistance can offer some changes to workers' legal status, but ultimately resistance is "minimally effective and will, of necessity, have to be repeated if they are to force adaption of the subjection they confront."<sup>6</sup> Focused solely on the legal structures of labor-management relations, Brisbin fails to address broader contexts and outcomes of workers' resistance. Brisbin's failure to understand both the short-term material gains and the long-term cultural legacies of resistance portrays labor militancy as wholly ineffective. Other than Brisbin's monograph, the Pittston Strike has been the focus of a handful of articles attentive to the central, but complicated, role of gender in the strike.<sup>7</sup> My research relies on and builds off of the foundation of these scholars' work.

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<sup>6</sup> Richard A. Brisbin Jr., *A Strike Like No Other Strike: Law & Resistance during the Pittston Coal Strike of 1989-1990* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 298.

<sup>7</sup> These works represent the majority of articles written about the Pittston Strike. Mary K. Anglin, "Lessons from Appalachia in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Poverty, Power, and the 'Grassroots'," *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 2 (2002).; Karen Beckwith, "Collective Identities of Class and Gender: Working-Class Women in the Pittston Coal Strike," *Political Psychology* 19, no. 1 (1998).; Adrienne M. Birecree, "The Importance and Implication of Women's Participation in the 1989-1990 Pittston Coal Strike," *Journal of Economic Issues* 30, no. 1 (1996).; Karaleah Reichart, "Miners, Women, and Community Coalitions in the UMWA Pittston Strike," in *The*

The Pittston Strike's invisibility within labor and Appalachian historiographies has also obscured transformations in labor organizing in the 1970s and 1980s. Debates have raged over the decline of labor during the 1970s. Labor scholars have largely accepted the late 1970s and early 1980s to be the end of organized labor's power. The dominant narrative is that economic, social, and political changes in the United States weakened union power by the mid-1970s—setting the stage for the dramatic showdown between the air traffic controllers and Ronald Reagan in the 1981 Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) strike.<sup>8</sup> Growing political divisions over Vietnam, economics, and race, public support for anti-union measures, and conflict over workplace control created pressures that a united working class and their union leaders were unable to weather. Politicians, especially conservatives like Richard Nixon and Reagan also sought to exploit divisions and contradictions within the labor movement itself.<sup>9</sup> For these historians, labor's collapse was not just a result of anti-labor politics, but also of inherent weaknesses within organized labor.

More recently, scholars have pushed back against this idea. Rather than illustrating the weakness of American labor, labor's precipitous decline by the first years of the 1980s was a result of growing anti-unionism among America's corporate and political elite. Lane Windham

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*Anthropology of Labor Unions*, ed. Paul E. Durrenberger and Karaleah Reichart (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2010), 17-31.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph A. McCartin, "'Fire the Hell out of Them': Sanitation Workers' Struggles and the Normalization of the Striker Replacement Strategy in the 1970s," *Labor: Studies in Working Class History of the Americas* 2, no. 3 (2005).; Joseph A. McCartin, *Collision Course: Ronald Reagan, the Air Traffic Controllers, and the Strike that Changed America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).; Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: New Press, 2010).; Paul L. Butterworth, James T. Schultz, and Marian C. Schultz, "More than a Labor Dispute: The PATCO Strike of 1981," *Essays in Economic & Business History* 23 (2005).

<sup>9</sup> Jefferson Cowie, "Nixon's Class Struggle: Romancing the New Right Worker, 1969-1973," *Labor History* 43, no. 3 (2002): 281-283.

and Timothy Minchin both argue that industrial labor unions remained dynamic and poised for expansion in the 1970s.<sup>10</sup> Windham counters Cowie's argument that political debates around race and gender tore labor apart, arguing instead that political gains from the Civil Rights Movement and the women's movement reinvigorated organized labor with a younger and more diverse membership. Windham argues that although laborers continued to organize and be active in union activities, the growth of global competition, the decline in profits due to competition, and the switch to finance capital increased employers' resistance to unionization.<sup>11</sup> This resistance, which we also see in the coal industry, laid the foundation for rising income inequality that continues to define the United States to this day. Minchin looks more broadly at the role of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), the largest federation of unions in the U.S., and concludes that the AFL-CIO's ability to organize public displays of worker unity, such as the Solidarity March in 1981, and to support the continued election of Democratic politicians are indicators of the continued relevance and power of organized labor. What does it mean that an industrial labor union was able to successfully strike in 1989? Despite declining membership and power, how did industrial labor change in order to continue to push for workers' rights? The success of the Pittston Strike illustrates that despite organized labor's decline in the early 1980s it did not disappear. After 1981, industrial labor unions continued to organize and fight for workers' rights. Scholars cannot

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<sup>10</sup> Lane Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door: Union Organizing in the 1970s and the Roots of a New Economic Divide* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).; Timothy J. Minchin, *Labor under Fire: A History of the AFL-CIO since 1979* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> Windham argues that labor unions had become central to the functioning of the American welfare state. As profits declined, corporate elites attacked unions as the protectors of non-wage benefits like pensions and health care. Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door*, 189-192.

completely ignore the existence of industrial unions after 1981, and the victory at Pittston represents the continued possibilities and power of industrial unions.

Along with debate about changes in labor-management structures in the 1970s, economic and political changes in the decade are critical to understanding government and labor reactions to coal strikes through the late 1970s and 1980s. Judith Stein's *Pivotal Decade* is a crucial work in understanding the role of the federal government in the shift from manufacturing to financial capital, which led to the decline of American industrial capacity and the abandonment of the working class by the Democratic Party.<sup>12</sup> Everyone involved in the steel industry, from management and labor, to the government has been blamed for the collapse of American steel's competitiveness in the 1970s.<sup>13</sup> Jefferson Cowie's analysis of capital mobility begins in the 1920s, but his understanding of the interplay between labor demands, capital mobility, and communities is fundamental to changing labor-management relations in the 1970s and 1980s. Cowie argues that as labor unions' demands increased social and economic costs for management, capital physically moved to non- or anti-union communities and eventually out of the United States altogether.<sup>14</sup> The collapse of heavy industry in the United States raises many questions about what happens to rural communities whose existence relied on industries like coal mining. How are basic services provided for these post-industrial communities? Whose

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<sup>12</sup> Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010). Others have also blamed the federal government's unwillingness to protect the steel industry from foreign steel for the beginnings of deindustrialization, although Tiffany tracks these policy decisions to the late 1940s. Along with government policy, management errors, and labor demands also damaged the American steel industry. Paul A. Tiffany, *The Decline of American Steel: How Management, Labor, and Government Went Wrong* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>13</sup> John P. Hoerr, *And the Wolf Finally Came: The Decline of the American Steel Industry* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988).; Tiffany, *The Decline of American Steel*.

<sup>14</sup> Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 4.

responsibility is it to ensure that basic goods and services are received once the dominant industry declines? Do either the state or businesses have an obligation to provide for communities torn apart by deindustrialization? Many similar questions were important to the strikers protesting Pittston Coal's policies. If a coal company refused to pay health care for retired miners who was responsible? In the case of the Pittston Strike the federal government stepped in to ensure access to health care would always be available. This was not the end of the debate though. Despite access to both profits from coal mining and federal funding, many communities across Appalachia are now facing the removal of basic goods and services as coal mining's profits decline and production is shifted away from the long-mined hills of the region.

Finally, historians have debated the history of community organizing and the role of women in organizing, especially within Appalachia. Historians Robyn Muncy and Melanie Beals Goan have illustrated the importance of prominent female reformers like Josephine Roache and Mary Breckenridge in early reform and union activity in Appalachia.<sup>15</sup> Others, like Lane Windham and Dorothy Sue Cobble have argued that throughout the second half of the Twentieth Century, women were important actors within the labor movement as they invigorated the labor movement and championed labor issues unique to women.<sup>16</sup> Historians of Appalachia have argued, like Windham has, that the civil rights movement and the social upheavals of the 1960s invigorated community-based organizing within Appalachia.<sup>17</sup> I aim to build on this

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<sup>15</sup> Robyn Muncy, *Relentless Reformer: Josephine Roach and Progressivism in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).; Melanie Beals Goan, *Mary Breckenridge: The Frontier Nursing Service and Rural Health in Appalachia* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

<sup>16</sup> Lane Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door.*; Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> These monographs focus on Appalachian activism in the 1960s. Jerry Bruce Thomas, *An Appalachian Reawakening: West Virginia and the Perils of the New Machine Age, 1945-1972*

historiography and push this narrative into the 1980s and to the present. But I also argue that the Pittston Strike provided women opportunities in organizing they had never had before. The UMWA's shift to non-violent striking, the emergence of women as coal miners, and the creation of women's auxiliaries in 1989 altered their role within coalfield labor organizing. In their new roles as miners and UMWA-organized protesters alongside their traditional role as miners' wives, women were given broader space, both physically and intellectually, to challenge structures of oppression. This broader inclusion, but also the restriction, of women's voices in decades of reform, protest, and action raises many questions. How do narratives of Appalachian radicalism change if education, health care, and social justice are added to more-studied labor concerns such as wages? How can Appalachian radicalism be included in broader narratives of protest and reform in American history beyond the role of the UMWA? Have women and community-based organizing always been just as important, if not more important, as male miners and unions? This essay is part of a recent attempt to place women as central actors in the politics of Appalachian communities. Their involvement was crucial to the UMWA's success in 1989, and more recently they have led the way in fighting to protect West Virginia's public education system.

In this essay I attempt to place the Pittston Strike and UMWA activity in the 1980s within a broader narrative of labor and community change and activism within Appalachia up to the

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(Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2010).; David S. Walls and John B. Stephenson, *Appalachia in the Sixties: Decade of Reawakening* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1972).; Jessica Wilkerson, *To Live Here, You Have to Fight: How Women Led Appalachian Movements for Social Justice* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2019). Wilkerson focuses more specifically on the importance of women in social justice movements throughout the 1960s and 1970s.; Analysis has even linked the efforts of the Black Panther Party to "hillbilly nationalists" that had migrated to Chicago for better economic opportunities. Amy Sonnie and James Tracy, *Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power: Community Organizing in Radical Times* (New York: Melville House, 2011).

present day. Despite the decline of the UMWA throughout the latter half of the Twentieth Century, the Pittston Strike marks a transformation in relationships within the labor movement. Due to the declining power of the union, the UMWA embraced community-based, women-led organizing alongside traditional industrial striking. The reinvigoration of labor organizing thanks to this embrace has inspired more recent protests against global capital. Focused on protecting access to basic goods and services in the wake of deindustrialization, newer movements like 55 Strong are part of a larger transformation in labor organizing to combat the rise of global capital and protect communities left behind by the mobility of global capitalism. In the first chapter I track the rise of capitalism in Appalachia and the rise of the UMWA to protect laborers from early capitalism's excesses. Despite the actions of the UMWA, extractive industries caused massive economic, physical, and environmental harm to the region. But the decline of the coal industry has not been wholly positive, and has resulted in the rise of newer forms of post-industrial extraction. The second chapter focuses in on the 1977 Bituminous Coal Strike, the 1984 strike against A.T. Massey Coal, and the Pittston Strike in 1989. In the third chapter I focus on providing a space for Appalachian voices. Stories compiled by government employees in the late 1970s, personal memoirs, and letters written to West Virginia's governor during the Pittston Strike are combined in order to gain a sense of perceptions from West Virginians about the drastic changes that occurred in the period from 1977 to 1989. The conclusion then speculates about the connections between the Pittston Strike and the present-day teachers' strikes, environmental protests, and concerns over the persistence of poverty in West Virginia.

My narrative focuses on West Virginia for two reasons. First, West Virginia is the only state to be considered completely within Appalachia by the Appalachian Regional Commission

(ARC).<sup>18</sup> As the only state considered entirely within the region, it is uniquely positioned as a site to understand Appalachia-specific issues. Second, West Virginia is currently in the spotlight on the nation's political stage. The publishing of *Hillbilly Elegy* by J.D. Vance and Donald Trump's election as president, both in 2016, have been used by liberal elite to paint Appalachia as populated by conservative, backwards, ignorant people. Vance uses condescending phrases like a "crisis of masculinity", "young men immune to hard work", "hillbilly justice", and "hillbilly values".<sup>19</sup> Along with these phrases, Vance defines the region through honorable violence, prescription drug abuse, and poverty. Major news sources like *The Economist*, *National Review*, and *New York Times* have praised the book for shedding light on working-class poverty and dissatisfaction that fueled Trump's electoral victory. The West Virginia Teachers' Strike in 2018 has also catapulted the state into the national consciousness, and it helped spark other teachers' strikes across the country, as teachers fight for better wages and to protect the public-school system from charter schools and the privatization of education. Both of these images that have gained national prominence have sought to capitalize on differing images of West Virginians without understanding the deeper structural issues and history through which West Virginians and Appalachian communities understand themselves. By uncovering the longer intertwined history of labor organizing within West Virginia we can understand underlying economic and political issues that instigated a century-long fight for labor rights and community survival.

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<sup>18</sup> Appalachian Regional Commission, *Appalachian Region*.

<https://www.arc.gov/images/appregion/AppalachianRegionCountiesMap.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> J.D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* (New York: William Collins, 2016), 4, 7, 17, 21.

## Chapter 1: The Emergence and Evolution of Extractive Capitalism in Appalachia, 1863-2019

When scholars refer to the West Virginia Mine Wars, it is usually in reference to a period from 1912, when the first labor strike occurred in the state in Kanawha County, to the Battle of Blair Mountain in 1921. Mass violence between pro-union coal miners and coal companies across the southern counties of West Virginia forced the federal government to intervene on behalf of coal companies at Blair Mountain. Harris, in his book *Written in Blood* argues that “the Great Mine War of West Virginia has now raged for over a century.”<sup>20</sup> This long struggle between local laborers and capitalism has extracted natural resources and labor, produced waves of economic refugees to staff non-union jobs across the South, and caused widespread destruction in the name of increased profit.<sup>21</sup> Although a majority of communities across Appalachia owe their existence to the rise of capitalism in the region, they have pushed back against the destructive nature of capitalism’s rise.

### *The Problems of Industrial Capitalism in Appalachia, 1860s-2019*

Since the arrival of outside industrialists in the aftermath of the Civil War, coal mining and timber have become the dominant industries of West Virginia. The arrival of both union and confederate troops during the Civil War, and their efforts to survey southern West Virginia’s terrain resulted in a realization of the mass quantities of coal in the area. The creation of a West Virginia state government in 1863 expedited capitalism’s arrival in the new state. The new state government’s desire to exploit its natural resources produced a wave of contracts signed between themselves and outside industrialists to extend railroads into the state, introduce commercialized

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<sup>20</sup> Harris, *Written in Blood*, 1.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

logging, and build coal mines to fuel the nation's industrialization.<sup>22</sup> To control the laboring population, these industrialists built company towns, which created an outside monopoly over access to housing and goods.<sup>23</sup> The monopoly over access to goods and services and the unsafe, unregulated conditions in coal mines pushed laborers to unionize.

The UMWA was founded in 1890 against this backdrop of unregulated coalfield capitalism. Although it struggled to gain momentum in its first couple of decades, by 1920 it was one of the largest unions in the U.S. and had organized up to three-quarters of all coal miners across the country. The union had physically fought both coal companies and the federal government in order to unionize the region's miners, and despite major setbacks the union survived. Under the leadership of the shrewd and domineering John L. Lewis, the UMWA broke from the American Federation of Labor (AFL) to form the independent Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in 1938. Very shortly thereafter in 1942 the UMWA broke away from the CIO, leaving the UMWA an independent union for most of the post-war period. On the heels of World War II, the UMWA signed an agreement with coal operators that would provide some semblance of stability in labor-management relations in the coalfields for the next three decades.

The National Bituminous Coal Wage Agreement of 1950 negotiated between the Bituminous Coal Operators Association (BCOA) and the UMWA marked an important turning point in the history of the coal industry. First, Lewis accepted mechanization in coal mines in exchange for wage and benefit increases.<sup>24</sup> Although in the short-term Lewis succeeded in gaining benefits for miners, the ease with which mechanization was introduced into coal mines

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<sup>22</sup> Steven Stoll, *Ramp Hollow: The Ordeal of Appalachia* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2017), 127-140.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 173-175.

<sup>24</sup> Brisbin, *A Strike Like No Other Strike*, 44.

laid the foundation for a continually shrinking workforce in the mines. The rise of mountaintop removal mining<sup>25</sup> by the 1970s, a form of coal mining that relies on heavy machinery and limited numbers of skilled laborers, can be directly linked back to the ease with which mechanization was introduced into industry. Mountaintop removal mining has caused a decline in the number of employed coal miners in addition to widespread environmental damage, and has also raised concerns among medical professionals about its negative health effects to nearby populations. Second, the 1950 contract caused the formation of the BCOA. Following World War II, a series of strikes hit the U.S., including a strike by coal miners. In response to labor militancy and growing global competition, the largest coal operators in the U.S. formed the BCOA. Led by the largest coal company Consolidation Coal, operators sought to stabilize the coal industry by: fixing wage rates, supporting mechanization in order to increase coal output while reducing labor costs, and consolidating the coal industry within a small number of large coal companies.<sup>26</sup> The relationship between coal operators and the union, based on cooperation between the BCOA and the UMWA, helped to regulate the coal industry and cover up signs of instability in the industry until the 1980s. Finally, the 1950 contract established the UMWA's Health and Retirement Fund as a union-controlled social welfare fund to provide basic medical care for miners. This radical experiment, in the hands of UMWA president John Lewis and his close friend Josephine Roache, expanded medical access across Appalachia for miners by building hospitals and clinics. These clinics and hospitals provided medical care and helped to spread awareness and education about health concerns specific to the coal industry.<sup>27</sup> The fund would serve miners from 1950 to the 1977 coal strike, but the increasing costs of the fund became a major source of conflict between

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<sup>25</sup> Mountaintop Removal Mining (MRM) is also referred to as strip mining in this essay.

<sup>26</sup> Brisbin, *A Strike Like No Other Strike*, 46.

<sup>27</sup> Muncy, *Relentless Reformer*, 280-288.

the BCOA and the UMWA, and between rank-and-file miners and the union. Non-union sanctioned strikes, known as wildcat strikes, increased in regularity and began to cut productivity in the mines in the years leading up to the 1977 strike.

The 1950 contract was a success for both operators and the union, but Lewis's isolation of the UMWA from broader union structures and his heavy-handed suppression of dissent within union locals created corrupt non-democratic structures that weakened union power.<sup>28</sup> By the 1960s both Appalachian communities and the UMWA faced serious issues. Many communities remained steeped in poverty and in debt to the coal companies that employed them.<sup>29</sup> Lewis's resignation as union president and the election of William Boyle as the new president in 1963 paved the way for the murder of Boyle's political opponent Joseph Yablonski and his family in 1969. Yablonski headed the push by rank-and-file miners to democratize union structures. But the murder of the Yablonski family led to a federal investigation of the UMWA's leadership and the running of the Health and Retirement Fund, and deepened mistrust between miners and the union leadership.<sup>30</sup> Miners' mistrust for the union, coal companies, and the federal government, along with changes to the coal industry begun under Lewis's presidency created deep-seated issues within both Appalachia and labor-management relations by the 1970s.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Robert H. Zieger, "John L. Lewis and the Labor Movement, 1940-1960," in *The United Mine Workers of America: A Model of Industrial Solidarity?*, ed. John H. M. Laslett (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996): 152-163.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Salstrom, *Appalachia's Path to Dependency: Rethinking a Region's Economic History, 1730-1940* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994).; Ronald Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008).

<sup>30</sup> Joseph E. Finley, *The Corrupt Kingdom: The Rise and Fall of the United Mine Workers* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972), 280-296.; Muncy, *Relentless Reformer*, 227-246.

<sup>31</sup> Robyn Muncy, "Coal-Fired Reforms: Social Citizenship, Dissident Miners, and the Great Society," *The Journal of American History* 96, no. 1 (2009): 96-98.; James P. Ziliak, ed., *Appalachian Legacy: Economic Opportunity after the War on Poverty* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2012).; Lou Martin, *Smokestacks in the Hills: Rural-Industrial*

Despite the efforts of the UMWA and brief periods of intense federal intervention into the region, most notably during early industrialization, President Roosevelt's New Deal, and during President Johnson's War on Poverty in the 1960s, many of the underlying problems of the region's rapid industrialization and subsequent deindustrialization failed to be ameliorated. The poor health and economic wellbeing of the region's laborers, destruction to the environment, and the rise of post-industrial forms of extraction have threatened the survival of Appalachia's communities to the present day.

Although coal mining's importance has declined, West Virginia remains defined by its connection to coal. This connection continues to harm West Virginians physically, economically, and environmentally. Coal mining has always been a dangerous profession, and even with the passage of The Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act in 1969 and the Black Lung Benefits Act in 1972 it has remained a hazardous profession.<sup>32</sup> Black lung, a respiratory condition caused by the inhalation of coal dust, has been one of the most dangerous health hazards associated with coal mining. Knowledge of the medical condition dates back to early industrialization in Britain, and in 1899 vice president of the UMWA, Thomas Davis, along with others, testified in front of Congress about the issues of "miners' asthma".<sup>33</sup> But it would not be until the mid-Twentieth Century that protesters were able to push for government oversight of health and safety

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*Workers in West Virginia* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2015).; Huey Perry, *"They'll Cut Off Your Project": A Mingo County Chronicle* (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2011).

<sup>32</sup> Scholars has argued that general health care policy, coal safety and health policies, and broader Great Society reform were influenced by rank-and-file organizing by coal miners directly affected. Muncy, "Coal-Fired Reforms," 72-75.; Derickson, "Down Solid," 25-26.

<sup>33</sup> Alan Derickson, *Black Lung: Anatomy of a Public Health Disaster* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015): 4-14.

conditions linked to black lung. Despite the UMWA's efforts to increase mine health and safety regulations, conditions in the mines remained a major issue in the post-war decades.

Subsequently, health care remained an important issue at the heart of strikes throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. In 1969, 45,000 miners, led by the West Virginia Black Lung Association (WVBLA), walked out of the mines and demanded health coverage for black lung.<sup>34</sup> One of the largest occupation health strikes in United States' history, West Virginian miners succeeded in lobbying West Virginia's government for political change. On March 11, Governor Arch Moore signed legislation declaring black lung a compensable occupational hazard.<sup>35</sup> That same year President Nixon signed the Coal Mine Health and Safety Act, which provided federal oversight of health and safety regulations—including black lung issues—within all U.S. coal mines.<sup>36</sup> While miners applauded the federal government for the law's passage, they were often unable to reap the benefits of their protest. Bureaucratic red tape and misleading medical tests often left miners unable to obtain disability benefits for black lung.<sup>37</sup> Even with knowledge of the hazards of black lung, the U.S. Department of Labor estimated that from 1968 to 2014 more than 76,000 miners died from complications related to black lung.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Alan Derickson, "Down Solid: The Origins and Development of the Black Lung Insurgency," *Journal of Public Health Policy* 4, no. 1 (1983): 32.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>36</sup> "Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969," United States Department of Labor, <https://arlweb.msha.gov/SOLICITOR/COALACT/69actt1.htm#1>.; Derickson, "Down Solid," 34. Derickson argues that without wildcat strikes by miners across West Virginia, President Nixon would have likely vetoed the 1969 Coal Act.

<sup>37</sup> Wilkerson, *To Live Here, You Have to Fight*, 114.

<sup>38</sup> Mine Safety & Health Administration, "MSHA Issues Final Rule on Lowering Miners' Exposure to Respirable Coal Dust," April 23, 2014, <https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/msha/msha20140669>.

Along with the dangerous nature of coal mining, Appalachian communities have lacked equal access to health care. The expansion of large medical centers in urban centers and the failure to provide specialized care across the region has forced many to seek medical service outside of their local area, or the region.<sup>39</sup> Inadequate health services, high-risk employment, poverty, and a general lack of access to education about health issues—especially since the demise of the UMWA’s Health and Welfare Fund—have resulted in poor physical health for many working and retired miners.<sup>40</sup> In 2018 the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health estimated that nationwide 10% of coal miners who worked for more than 25 years had black lung. This number doubles when narrowed to Appalachia.<sup>41</sup> In Appalachia, 20% of coal miners that served over 25 years in the mines have black lung, and 5% are considered debilitated because of the severity of their symptoms.

Coal mining has not only taken a toll on the physical bodies of miners, but the rise of surface mining has drastically reduced employed numbers of coal miners. Lewis’s acceptance of coalfield mechanization in the 1950s allowed for the rise of strip mining, and it became popular among coal operators in the 1970s as a cheap and highly productive form of mining. As its use has spread throughout the region, local communities have sought to block its expansion. In 1977, the federal government passed the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act which sought to regulate strip mining, set standards for environmental protection, fund restoration of land and

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<sup>39</sup> Eller, *Uneven Ground*, 240.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Valdmanis, “A Tenth of U.S. Veteran Coal Miners have Black Lung Disease: NIOSH,” *Reuters* July 19, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-coal-blacklung/a-tenth-of-us-veteran-coal-miners-have-black-lung-disease-niosh-idUSKBN1K92W1>.

water resources in the region, and limit the impact of strip mining on populated areas.<sup>42</sup> Even with federal regulation, companies took advantage of the law's loopholes. Strip mining expanded, often with the aid of state regulatory agencies and the Corps of Engineers who viewed the flattening of mountaintops as vital to creating more productive and developable land in the region.<sup>43</sup> The "developable" land created by surface mining never led to any development, despite attempts to do so.<sup>44</sup> In his book *Ramp Hollow*, Steven Stoll quotes Julian Martin who has seen nothing but economic and physical destruction come from strip mining. "If you think strip mining is going to bring jobs, look where they've got strip mining in West Virginia and look where they've got the most unemployment. Mingo County. McDowell County. You go to the counties where they have strip mining – that's where they have the worst of everything."<sup>45</sup> In 2018 the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) declared both McDowell and Mingo Counties to be economically distressed. In McDowell County over a third of the population is considered impoverished, and in neighboring Mingo County a quarter of the population is deemed impoverished. The average income of the counties sits between \$13000 and \$16000.<sup>46</sup> Clearly the widespread presence of strip mining in these two counties has not been beneficial for local residents. Even outside of Mingo and McDowell counties, mountaintop removal has put unionized deep mines out of business and destroyed important timber resources. As these

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<sup>42</sup> "Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977," August 3, 1977, <https://legcounsel.house.gov/Comps/Surface%20Mining%20Control%20And%20Reclamation%20Act%20Of%201977.pdf>.

<sup>43</sup> Eller, *Uneven Ground*, 227.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 228. Efforts to develop flattened mountaintops resulted in the creation of one federal prison in Eastern Kentucky and one fabricating site that utilized timber removed from mountaintop mining sites.

<sup>45</sup> Stoll, *Ramp Hollow*, 264.

<sup>46</sup> Appalachian Regional Commission, "County Economic Status, Fiscal Year 2018: West Virginia," [https://www.arc.gov/reports/region\\_report.asp?FIPS=54999&REPORT\\_ID=71](https://www.arc.gov/reports/region_report.asp?FIPS=54999&REPORT_ID=71).

resources have been replaced by strip mining, Appalachia's unionized miners and loggers have been replaced by machinery and small numbers of highly-paid non-unionized strip miners.

The coal industry in general has also been detrimental to the region's natural environment. One activist said that "looking at those strip mining sites in the wintertime was a scar that you couldn't forget."<sup>47</sup> Thousands of acres of mountaintops have been destroyed, rubble has filled the valleys and creeks, explosions have created unusable unstable land, and water sources have been polluted or destroyed.<sup>48</sup> The physical space of Appalachia, so important to the lives and identities of local communities, has been destroyed in the quest for easily-mined coal and low-cost mining operations. Although strip mining has left the most visible signs of environmental destruction, it is not the only culprit in the degradation of Appalachia's physical environment. Traditional underground mining activity has also left its mark on the region and its people. Most well-known is the Buffalo Creek Disaster. On the morning of February 26, 1972, 132 million gallons of water and coal waste came rushing down the valley of Buffalo Creek Hollow, West Virginia, completely destroying sixteen coal mining settlements.<sup>49</sup> The owner of Buffalo Mining Company, Pittston Coal, declared the flood an "act of God," even though they had knowingly ignored coal dam construction regulations and failed to contact outside experts during the dam's construction.<sup>50</sup> The man-made disaster cost 125 people their lives, injured

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<sup>47</sup> Mary Beth Bingman, "Stopping the Bulldozers: What Difference did it Make?," in *Fighting Back in Appalachia: Traditions of Resistance and Change*, ed. Stephen Fisher (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1993), 19.

<sup>48</sup> Eller, *Uneven Ground*, 227.

<sup>49</sup> Brian Sewell, "Remembering Buffalo Creek," *The Appalachian Voice* February 12, 2012, <http://appvoices.org/2012/02/21/remembering-buffalo-creek/>; Kai Erikson, *Everything in its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976).

<sup>50</sup> Sewell, "Remembering Buffalo Creek."

another 1100, and left up to 4000 people homeless. But this was not the first, nor the last, time a disaster like this would occur.

On October 11, 2000, just across the West Virginia border in Inez, Kentucky, 250 million gallons of coal slurry, a mixture of coal and water, flooded out of a waste containment pond. Like in 1972, the owner of the pond and a subsidiary of Massey Energy, Martin County Coal, declared the spill to be an act of God.<sup>51</sup> The pond was built on top of an old mine, and when the mine collapsed millions of gallons of slurry were released. The slurry polluted over one hundred miles of nearby waterways with mercury, lead, arsenic, and copper. Along with killing aquatic wildlife, the spill dashed any hope for outside economic investment in the struggling community.<sup>52</sup> Despite increased regulations and oversight following the disaster, the slurry was slowly cleaned up and continued to contaminate the environment for over a decade. The disaster was repeated yet again in 2008 when over 1 billion gallons of coal slurry spilled from a Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) power plant in Roane County, Tennessee.<sup>53</sup> Deaths, lasting environmental damage, and a clear disregard for federal regulation have not been enough to protect communities from “acts of God” like these. The Trump administration has even begun to rollback many of the protections put in place after the most recent coal slurry spill in 2008.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Sewell, “Remembering Buffalo Creek.”

<sup>52</sup> Geraldine Sealey, “Sludge Spill Pollutes Ky., W. Va. Waters,” *ABC News* October 23, 2000, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=95285&page=1>.; Peter T. Kilborn, “A Torrent of Sludge Muddies a Town’s Future,” *The New York Times* December 25, 2000, <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/12/25/us/a-torrent-of-sludge-muddies-a-town-s-future.html>.

<sup>53</sup> Dylan Lovan, “After Decade, Still Signs of Coal Slurry Spill,” *The Washington Post* October 17, 2000, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/10/15/AR2010101507010.html>.; Samira J. Simone, “Tennessee Sludge Spill Runs Over Homes, Water,” *CNN* December 24, 2008, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/US/12/23/tennessee.sludge.spill/>.

<sup>54</sup> Brittany Crocker, “EPA Rolls Back Protective Regulation Enacted after 2008 Kingston Coal Ash Spill,” *Knox News* July 25, 2018, <https://www.knoxnews.com/story/news/2018/07/25/tva->

The capital of West Virginia was also the site of an environmental disaster in 2014. On January 10, the 300,000 residents of Charleston woke up unable to consume or use their tap water. The night before, 10,000 gallons of 4-methylcyclohexane methanol (MCMH), a chemical used in coal processing, seeped into the capital city's water supply.<sup>55</sup> An outside investigation concluded that the company that ran the chemical holding tanks, Freedom Industries, had withheld information about the severity of the leak, had failed to inspect the tanks within the past decade, and had failed to properly maintain pollution controls and secondary containment measures.<sup>56</sup> The pollution of the state capital's drinking water never became a major public issue. Steven Stoll even argues that the significance of the event is in how ordinary it was.<sup>57</sup> It was just another in a long line of man-made disasters caused by a failure of coal or coal-associated companies to maintain basic safety standards, and thus putting both the people and environment of Appalachia at risk.

*Decline of Coal and the Rise of Post-Industrial Extraction, 1950-2019*

Regardless of the catastrophes caused by extractive industries in Appalachia, the shift away from these industries has also created problems for the region's communities. In the wake of large-scale mine closures in the 1980s, the shift to strip mining, and a general decline in the

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[coal-ash-spill-kingston-epa-regulations/818006002/](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/12/22/coal-ash-spill/4143995/); Duane W. Gang, "5 Years after Coal-Ash Spill, Little Has Changed," *USA Today* December 23, 2013, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/12/22/coal-ash-spill/4143995/>.

<sup>55</sup> Gabriel Trip, "Thousands without Water after Spill in West Virginia," *The New York Times* January 11, 2014, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>56</sup> "CSB Releases Final Report into 2014 Freedom Industries Mass Contamination of Charleston, West Virginia Drinking Water; Final Report notes Shortcomings in Communicating Risks to Public, and Lack of Chemical Tank Maintenance Requirements," September 28, 2016, <https://www.csb.gov/csb-releases-final-report-into-2014-freedom-industries-mass-contamination-of-charleston-west-virginia-drinking-water-final-report-notes-shortcomings-in-communicating-risks-to-public-and-lack-of-chemical-tank-maintenance-requirements/>.

<sup>57</sup> Stoll, *Ramp Hollow*, 264.

profitability of the coal industry, communities and policymakers have sought other forms of investment and employment. In her book *What You are Getting Wrong about Appalachia*, Elizabeth Catte argues that coal miners are no longer the dominant working class of the region, but are rather more akin to a middle-class-salaried blue-collar profession.<sup>58</sup> Catte argues that “the *real* forgotten working-class citizens of Appalachia, much like the rest of the nation, are home health workers and Dollar General employees.”<sup>59</sup> Like the rest of the country’s deindustrialized regions, the service industry has become a major employer. Other industries have also risen specifically in Appalachia in what scholars have referred to as the creation of a New Appalachia or a New Economy. Most important are the rise of tourism and the prison industry.

Tourism has a long history in Appalachia. Dating back to the 1700s, writers, politicians, reformers, artists, and later, industrialists, traveled to the region to survey the natural beauty, extract natural resources, and investigate the region’s “odd” populace.<sup>60</sup> With the decline of extractive industries in the 1980s, tourism became an important industry for state and federal politicians’ efforts to prop up the region’s local and state economies. Throughout the 2000s and 2010s, ARC consistently invested in developing natural and cultural resources across Appalachia for tourism’s growth. Between 2005 and 2010, ARC spent \$10.8 million on tourism, cultural, heritage, and nature assets, and helped create 583 jobs, protected another 520 jobs, and created 55 new businesses.<sup>61</sup> Despite this small boost from federal funding, and the overall benefits of

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<sup>58</sup> Elizabeth Catte, *What You are Getting Wrong about Appalachia* (Cleveland, OH: Belt Publishing, 2018), 12.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Harkins, *Hillbilly*, 13-69. Harkins provides an oversight of perceptions of Appalachian people from the late 1700s to the 1920s in this section and tracks the rise and transformation in the hillbilly identity. In this way he also follows the tourism of various people to the region who eventually create this hillbilly identity from the outside.

<sup>61</sup> Appalachian Regional Commission, “Investing in Appalachia’s Future: The Appalachian Regional Commission’s Five-Year Strategic Plan for Capitalizing on Appalachia’s

tourism's economic effects, many have criticized the decision to position tourism as the region's predominant industry. Jean Haskell Spear argued that "parkway" tourism has helped to reify the hillbilly identity and its inherent contradictions. The existence of cultural and historical museums alongside Ripley's Believe It or Not museums and amusement parks, as well as tourists' ability to buy "hillbilly kitsch" have commodified the Appalachian identity while also distancing local populations from the national populace.<sup>62</sup> More recently, Stephen Paul Whitaker has argued that tourism in Appalachian Kentucky helped to: capitalize on the "character" of the region, perpetuate outside economic control through tax break incentives, and strengthen economic core-periphery relationships.<sup>63</sup> Rather than providing economic independence for small communities left behind by the coal industry, tourism has perpetuated many of the same extractive structures of power the coal industry created.

One of the other major economic remedies suggested by policymakers has been the construction of prisons. From 1990 to 1999, 60% of new prisons constructed, totaling 245 prisons, were built across the small communities of rural America.<sup>64</sup> At the exact moment as coal miners were being forced out of the mines, the U.S. government was intensifying the War on

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Opportunities," November 2015,

<https://www.arc.gov/images/newsroom/publications/sp/InvestinginAppalachiasFutureARCs2016-2020StrategicPlan.pdf>; Regional Technologies Strategies, Inc., Mt. Auburn Associates, and Appalachian State University, "Program Evaluation of ARC's Tourism, Cultural Heritage, and Natural Asset-Related Projects," September 2010, [https://www.arc.gov/assets/research\\_reports/TourismHeritageNaturalAssetProgramEvaluation.pdf](https://www.arc.gov/assets/research_reports/TourismHeritageNaturalAssetProgramEvaluation.pdf).

<sup>62</sup> Jean Haskell Spear, "'Hillbilly Sold Here': Appalachian Folk Culture and Parkway Tourism," in *Parkways: Past, Present, and Future* (Boone, NC: Appalachian State University, 1987), 212-218.

<sup>63</sup> Stephen Paul Whitaker, "A New Wave of Colonization: The Economics of the Tourism and Travel Industry in Appalachian Kentucky," *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 6, no. ½ (Spring/Fall 2000), 35.

<sup>64</sup> Robert Todd Perdue and Kenneth Sanchagrin, "Imprisoning Appalachia: The Socio-Economic Impacts of Prison Development," *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 22, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 210.

Drugs.<sup>65</sup> As Appalachia's policymakers sought solutions to the growing employment crisis, the rise of mass incarceration offered an economic lifeline to the region. As of 2014, West Virginia was home to more federal prison cells per capita than any other state.<sup>66</sup> Despite the belief among politicians that prisons would provide stable employment, prisons have been shown to have little to no positive effect on economic growth and job creation. In fact, prisons across Appalachia are situated in counties with the lowest per capita income and the highest poverty rates.<sup>67</sup> Rather than creating high-paying, secure jobs with benefits, prison jobs are primarily low-paying and lack non-wage benefits. The high-paying management jobs are instead given to people from outside the region.<sup>68</sup> The starting salary for correctional officers across Appalachia ranges from \$22,000 to \$26,000, which is a poverty level wage for a family of four.<sup>69</sup> McDowell County, West Virginia, the site of widespread strip mining, is also home to one of the newest federal prisons in the region, built in 2010. It remains one of the poorest counties in the country.<sup>70</sup>

On top of a failure to create growth, prisons have also created new structures of exploitation. The importation of primarily African American and Latinx prisoners to be guarded

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<sup>65</sup> Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

<sup>66</sup> Peter Wagner, "Why is West Virginia the Federal Prison Capital of the Country?" *Prison Policy Initiative* June 10, 2014, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2014/06/10/wv-prison-capital/>.

<sup>67</sup> Perdue and Sanchagrin, "Imprisoning Appalachia," 219.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid..

<sup>69</sup> Stephen T. Young and Brian Pitman, "Land of Extraction: How the Carceral Institution Settled in Central Appalachia," *Truthout* September 2, 2018, <https://truthout.org/articles/land-of-extraction-how-prison-industry-settled-in-central-appalachia/#>.

<sup>70</sup> In 2017 the Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) estimated that 31% of McDowell County's residents lived in poverty. This is almost double the statewide impoverished population (18%), and more than double the nationwide percentage (13%). "Poverty Rates Map," Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, United States Census Bureau, [https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/saipe/saipe.html?s\\_appName=saipe&map\\_yearSelector=2009&map\\_geoSelector=aa\\_c&s\\_year=2017,2009&menu=map\\_proxy&s\\_USStOnly=y](https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/saipe/saipe.html?s_appName=saipe&map_yearSelector=2009&map_geoSelector=aa_c&s_year=2017,2009&menu=map_proxy&s_USStOnly=y).

by white prison guards perpetuates Appalachia's largely invisible racial structures. White job creation at the expense of the freedom of people of color is hardly beneficial. The historic and cultural degradation of the region and its population has also benefited the prison industry which seeks to use the region as a dumping site for society's "waste".<sup>71</sup> The dumping of non-white prisoners in isolated rural communities has consolidated "the crises of urban and rural sacrifice zones" in a form of "organized abandonment."<sup>72</sup> The abandonment of both marginalized communities of color and poor white communities has been made invisible by their placement in isolated spaces far from the centers of political power. Employment and incarceration based on race have created poor populations in Appalachia that are hostile to one another and unable to participate in larger national economic and democratic communities.

Rather than providing economic opportunities, strategies for post-industrial economic development have solidified Appalachia's identity as a region used solely for extraction of wealth, resources, and labor. These developments fit Orleck's argument that Marx's proletariat has been replaced by a global precariat.<sup>73</sup> The exploitation of Appalachia's natural resources and human labor has created an impoverished class of labor. But as coal companies have decreased production in the region, the basic goods and services that these companies have provided for decades are being removed as well. Many counties and municipalities in the region rely on coal

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<sup>71</sup> Perdue and Sanchagrin, "Imprisoning Appalachia," 220.; Young and Pitman, "Land of Extraction."; Melissa Ooten and Jason Sawyer, "From the Coal Mine to the Prison Yard: The Human Cost of Appalachia's New Economy," in *Appalachia Revisited: New Perspectives on Place, Tradition, and Progress*, ed. William R. Schumann and Rebecca Adkins Fletcher (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2016).

<sup>72</sup> Sylvia Ryerson and Judah Schept, "Building Prisons in Appalachia: The Region Deserves Better," *Boston Review* April 28, 2018, <http://bostonreview.net/law-justice/sylvia-ryerson-judah-schept-building-prisons-appalachia>.; Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).

<sup>73</sup> Orleck, "We are all Fast-Food Workers Now", 8.

severance taxes. These taxes are paid by coal companies and directly connected to coal productivity. In 2012, Kentucky distributed \$32.2 million across the state from the coal severance tax; by 2018 that amount had dropped to \$12.4 million.<sup>74</sup> Coal companies have also been pushing state legislatures to decrease the severance tax. This year, West Virginia's legislature passed a \$60 million decrease to the coal tax.<sup>75</sup> These tax cuts will not only fail to make coal competitive in global markets that are increasingly switching to cleaner forms of energy, but are also damaging to local communities. Across Southern West Virginia and Eastern Kentucky, counties and towns are being forced to partially shutdown, lay off employees, and cut back on basic services like sanitation, road maintenance, and water.<sup>76</sup> These communities were created on the premise that their lives would be directly tied to extraction of natural resources. Although company stores and housing may no longer be the dominant form of control, many communities still rely on taxes and wages from the production of coal in order to survive. Without coal, and without viable alternatives beyond tourism, the prison industry, and retail, Appalachian communities will remain economically marginalized and left without basic goods and services from both private businesses or the federal government.

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<sup>74</sup> Mason Adams, “‘They’re Cutting Everything’: As Coal Disappears, Appalachians Lose Access to Basic Services,” *Southerly Magazine* February 27, 2019, <https://southerlymag.org/2019/02/27/theyre-cutting-everything-as-coal-disappears-appalachians-lose-access-to-basic-services/>.

<sup>75</sup> Chris Dorst, “Brushing off Concerns, WV House Passes Coal Tax Cut,” *Charleston Gazette-Mail* February 27, 2019, [https://www.wvgazettemail.com/news/legislative\\_session/brushing-off-concerns-wv-house-passes-coal-tax-cut/article\\_4c6ed766-4cd8-5d28-a33c-506387db5496.html](https://www.wvgazettemail.com/news/legislative_session/brushing-off-concerns-wv-house-passes-coal-tax-cut/article_4c6ed766-4cd8-5d28-a33c-506387db5496.html).

<sup>76</sup> Adams, “‘They’re Cutting Everything’.”

## **Chapter 2: Transformations in Coalfield Capitalism and Labor Organizing, 1977-1990**

From 1977 to 1990 the coal industry, labor, and the American economy underwent drastic transformations. During this period, the UMWA called for three strikes. The first in 1977 was a national strike in response to refusal of the BCOA to help fund the UMWA's Health and Retirement Fund. The second in 1984-1985 took place in Southern West Virginia and was a response to A.T. Massey Coal's strikebreaking tactics and refusal to work within the BCOA-UMWA bargaining structure created in 1950. Finally, the Pittston Strike in 1989-1990 was called in response to Pittston Coal's removal of benefits from retired and working miners.

It is possible to track transformations in the UMWA's striking strategy as it attempted to cope with drastic changes within the industry and within broader U.S. politics and economics. Declining union membership, globalization of coal ownership, and the breakdown of labor-management structures forced the UMWA to reconceptualize workers' resistance. National strikes gave way to targeted strikes against coal companies owned by global conglomerates that pushed non-union agendas, and miner-focused striking strategies expanded to incorporate union-sanctioned community efforts to raise funds, protest, and participate in non-violent demonstrations. By the end of the 1980s, the UMWA had been severely weakened, but it had also embraced forms of organizing that would become central to protesting the consequences of global capitalism's rise up to the present day.

### *The 1977 Strike and the President's Commission: Growing Anxiety in the Coal Industry*

Throughout the 1970s, the coal industry faced many of the same issues as other industrial sectors of the American economy—one of the biggest being a drastic decline in productivity. In response to underlying problems within American industry, laborers turned to wildcat strikes in order to protect their wages and benefits. This form of strike had been previously prohibited by

the federal government in 1947, and its resurgence in the 1970s caused anxiety among the nation's capitalist elite. This issue reached a breaking point in the coal industry in 1977. On June 30, the BCOA released a statement declaring that it would not agree to a reallocation of funds to the UMWA Health and Retirement Funds in order to make up for millions of dollars of profit lost due to wildcat strikes. The Health and Retirement Funds were based on coal productivity and profit, so as productivity declined so did the Funds. Thus, to reallocate funds would, in the eyes of the BCOA, only condone and subsidize wildcat strikes.<sup>77</sup> Essentially, the BCOA was attempting to destroy the health care system that had been put in place twenty-seven years earlier—all while blaming the miners for its termination. In the same statement, BCOA officials wrote that “the only real answer to the current problem is for the coal miners to reject once and for all the wildcat strike,” and that all effort needed to be made to “banish this discredited and destructive practice.”<sup>78</sup> The BCOA claimed that wildcat strikes had cost the fund a total of \$81.2 million, and in less than one year, wildcat strikes had cost the industry one million man days of labor.<sup>79</sup> Ten days prior to the BCOA statement, the coal operators had informed the UMWA that health and retirement funds would not be reallocated. Arnold Miller, president of the UMWA, responded by blaming wildcat strikes, the industry's stupidity, and the inhuman nature of coal and oil executives for the decision. Miller finished off his statement by stating that “innocent lives are jeopardized in a futile attempt to destroy a great union. The operators did not succeed in 1913, and they will not succeed in 1977.”<sup>80</sup> The statements from both the BCOA and the UMWA

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<sup>77</sup> BCOA Statement on Reallocation of UMW Health and Retirement Funds, June 30, 1977, Box 50, Rockefeller Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, WV.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid..

<sup>79</sup> Memo No. M-353 to BCOA Membership from President Joseph Brennan, June 28, 1977, Box 50, Rockefeller Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, WV.

<sup>80</sup> Statement by UMW President Arnold Miller, June 20, 1977, Box 50, Rockefeller Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, WV.

focused on the issue of wildcat strikes, but wildcat strikes were only one of many sources of anxiety within the coal industry in 1977. The leadership of the BCOA and the leadership of the UMWA were also not the only ones anxious about the future of the coal industry. Both rank-and-file miners and the federal government expressed growing concerns regarding the future of coal. As the national contract between the UMWA and the BCOA expired, Miller called for a nationwide strike on December 6.

The union entered the strike in a weakened position. Miller had won reelection as union president earlier in 1977 even though he had only received 44% of the vote and voter turnout had been under 50% of all eligible union voters.<sup>81</sup> Miller relied on support from the coal counties of West Virginia to win reelection, but his presidency proved weak. Along with conflict within the leadership of the union, the general position of the UMWA had been deteriorating for years. From 1972 to 1977 the percentage of coal produced by union miners dropped from 70% to 54%.<sup>82</sup> Wildcat strikes, declining union control over production, conflict among the leadership, and the ability of companies to build up reserves of coal in anticipation of strikes all placed the UMWA in a weak position as the national contract expired in December 1977.

Unionized coal miners targeted nonunion mines in an attempt to shutdown industry-wide production, but these actions failed to force coal operators to the negotiating table. Although transportation networks and nonunion mines were shut down, coal production only dropped by

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<sup>81</sup> Times Wire Services, "Miller Reelected in Bitter UMW Race," *Los Angeles Times*, June 16, 1977, pg. 14, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.; George Getschow, "Miller Reelected by UMW, but challenge by Runner-Up Patterson Seems Likely," *Wall Street Journal*, June 16, 1977, pg. 7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>82</sup> Helen Dewar, "Dissent Paralyzes United Mine Workers Union," *The Washington Post*, May 16, 1977, pg. A1, A22, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

52%, and the reserves in the industry made up for the losses incurred during the strike.<sup>83</sup> Intra-union tensions also made collective bargaining difficult. The rank-and-file miners proved uncompromising with the union's unpopular leadership, and they rejected multiple agreements put forth for ratification by the leadership. Before the strike had the opportunity to overwhelm reserve coal supplies, President Carter invoked the Taft-Hartley Act. The Labor Management Relations Act of 1947, known as the Taft-Hartley Act, restricted union activities and power and allowed for intervention by the federal government in labor disputes. With the UMWA leadership unable to push through ratification of an agreement, President Carter invoked Taft-Hartley on March 6, 1978. President Carter cited energy shortages, increasing unemployment, and the general health and well-being of the American public as reasons for government intervention in the dispute.<sup>84</sup>

The final agreement, ratified on March 19, 1978, provided coal miners a 37% wage hike, but labor-management tensions remained and the agreement created new problems that would plague the industry for the next decade. The agreement put in place disciplining of wildcat strikers, incentive bonuses for productivity, and the removal of the UMWA's health and retirement fund in favor of employer-operated health care plans.<sup>85</sup> The transformation of the UMWA's Health and Retirement Fund from a union-run medical program to a coal company-

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<sup>83</sup> Edwin Feulner, "Second Thoughts on the Costly Coal Strike," *Atlanta Daily World*, August 1, 1978, pg. 6, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.; Armand J. Thieblot, and Thomas Haggard, *Union Violence: The Record and Response by the Courts, Legislatures, and the NLRB* (Philadelphia, PA: Industrial Research Unit, Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, 1983), 97-110.

<sup>84</sup> Jimmy Carter, "Labor Disputes in the Coal Industry Remarks Announcing Invocation of the Taft-Hartley Act," The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/labor-disputes-the-coal-industry-remarks-announcing-invocation-the-taft-hartley-act>.

<sup>85</sup> Thomas E. Mullaney, "The Dire Long-Term Impact of the Coal Strike," *The New York Times*, February 26, 1978, pg. 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

controlled insurance program was a major blow to miners. The decision of the BCOA to cut funds in 1977, and the 1978 contract, imposed deductions and co-payments, cancelled medical retainers, and put in place a fee-for-service system. These changes not only raised health costs for miners, but they raised costs for clinics and hospitals that had been built during the previous two decades. These union-built clinics and hospitals were often the only options miners had for medical care, and their physical closure along with the termination of their medical education programs greatly reduced access to basic medical care that miners desperately needed.<sup>86</sup> The UMWA had won much needed wage hikes, but at the cost of benefits and rights that had been important to the lives of coal miners for decades. The loss of the UMWA's health care fund put miners at the mercy of their employers, and shifted anger over health care issues from the union towards coal companies. The 1977 strike gained very little for coal miners, and it did little to resolve problems and anxieties that had been growing in the coal industry for much of the 1970s.

The creation of the President's Commission on the Coal Industry mere months after the ratification of the national contract in March 1978 signaled that coal operators and miners were not the only groups concerned with the lingering problems in the coal industry. With the recent oil embargoes placed on the U.S., President Carter sought to establish coal as a viable alternative to foreign oil supplies. But that would prove difficult as productivity, environmental, and labor-management issues remaining unresolved.

Though the commission touched on a plethora of topics, its most interesting findings came from questionnaires sent out to coal miners. The questionnaires still sit in the National

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<sup>86</sup> George S. Goldstein, "The Rise and Decline of the UMWA Health and Retirement Funds Program, 1946-1995," in *The United Mine Workers of America: A Model of Industrial Solidarity?*, ed. John H. M. Laslett (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 258-261.

Archive covered in the coal dust-coated fingerprints of miners selected to take part in the government survey. Likely filled out during a break or after a long day underground, the questionnaires asked miners about employment stability, yearly salary, housing, consumption, and perceptions about the coal industry. I looked through nine boxes of questionnaires filled out by coal miners across the United States and picked out the 337 filled out by coal miners from West Virginia. On average, the annual salary of the coal miners ranged between \$15000 and \$20000, placing West Virginian coal miners on par with the national average income in 1979.<sup>87</sup> Miners were also asked a series of yes, no, or don't know questions including: "Would you like to have your child become a coal miner? Do you feel that the future of the coal mining industry will continue to provide you with a job? Are you satisfied with your decision to be a coal miner? Would you make that decision again?"<sup>88</sup> 86% of coal miners stated that they were unsure or did not want their child to become a coal miner. 36% of coal miners stated that they felt the coal industry would continue to provide them with a job, 16% said it would not, and 48% responded that they were unsure. Despite insecurities about the future, 73% said they were satisfied with their decision to become a coal miner, and 63% said they would make that decision again.<sup>89</sup> Along with these questions were two important yes or no questions. These questions were: "Were you laid off in the last year?" and "Do you think the American public has an accurate picture of how coal miners work and live?" If miners responded no to the public's perception of

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<sup>87</sup> Survey of Community Conditions in Coal Producing Areas, May-November 1979, Temporary Committees, Commissions, and Boards President (1977-1981 Carter), Boxes 25-32, President's Commission on Coal: Completed Questionnaires Relating to the 'Living Conditions Survey', National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.; Money Income of Households in the United States: 1979, Current Population Reports, U.S. Bureau of the Census, <https://www2.census.gov/prod2/popscan/p60-126.pdf>.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid..

<sup>89</sup> Ibid..

coal miners' lives, they were asked to choose whether they believed the American public viewed coal miners' lives as better or worse than they actually were. 32% of miners responded that they had been laid off in the last year. Despite all the other differences on the survey, miners resoundingly agreed that the American public did not fully understand the lives of coal miners. 90% of coal miners agreed that the public did not understand coal miners' lives, and of those who agreed to this statement, 74% said the American public viewed coal miners' lives as better than they actually were.<sup>90</sup>

Coal miners' responses on the President's Commission questionnaires shed light on the anxieties rank-and-file miners felt about the coal industry at the end of the 1970s. Satisfied with their own career choices, a majority felt unsure about their future employment, most did not want to see their children enter the workforce as miners, and a resounding majority felt a disconnect between their lives as coal miners and the broader American public. Changes within the industry in the late 1970s were changing family life, miners' incomes, health benefits, and the day-to-day lives of coal miners.

The President's Commission published their recommendations in March 1980 after almost two years of work. The commission recommended that the United States could, and should, replace foreign oil dependency with a greater reliance on coal. The oil crisis in 1973-1974 caused by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) had shocked the U.S. government and angered consumers. The ability of oil-producing countries to cut oil supplies, thus increasing the price of oil from \$3 to \$12 per barrel, exposed the United States' reliance on foreign energy markets. The Carter Administration remained concerned about the

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<sup>90</sup> Survey of Community Conditions in Coal Producing Areas, May-November 1979, Completed Questionnaires Relating to the 'Living Conditions Survey'.

U.S.'s dependency on foreign oil, and it looked to the coal industry as a solution. Federal anxiety about the viability of replacing foreign oil with domestic coal as an energy source was one of the major reasons for the creation of the President's Commission. Unsurprisingly, the commission's heavily pro-coal leadership assured the government that coal could once again become the U.S.'s main energy source. Along with general support for the industry, the commission suggested that efforts should be made to create cleaner burning coal plants, labor and management should reconcile their differences as industry profits were once again on the rise, and companies needed to be more attentive to the health and housing needs of their employees.<sup>91</sup> While on the surface these findings are what would be expected from a commission led by the governor of one of the largest coal producing states in the United States, a closer look at the findings on labor-management relations uncovers some interesting trends. The commission had found that in the decade prior to the 1977 strike: oil companies had begun buying up coal companies to the point where oil companies like Exxon and Gulf owned 41% of coal production. Coal production had also begun shifting west and towards strip mining, increasing the number of non-union miners while decreasing the overall number of miners needed to produce coal. Along with these shifts in ownership and geography, an influx of young and untrained miners in the 1960s had decreased safety standards and increased hostility between labor and management.<sup>92</sup>

In addition to the findings of the commission, an experiment aimed at creating labor autonomy within coal mines occurred in Pennsylvania from 1973-1977, and was included in the

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<sup>91</sup> Recommendations and Summary Findings, March 1980, Temporary Committees, Commissions, and Boards President (1977-1981 Carter), Box 12, President's Commission on Coal: Transcripts of Public Hearings and Other Printed Records, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>92</sup> Staff Findings, March 1980, Temporary Committees, Commissions, and Boards President (1977-1981 Carter), Box 12, President's Commission on Coal: Transcripts of Public Hearings and Other Printed Records, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

commission's files. This experiment helps to illustrate the tension and general mistrust between labor and management. Eric Trist, Gerald Susman, and Grant Brown from University of Pennsylvania and The Pennsylvania State University sought to create autonomous worker groups that would be overseen by a joint labor-management committee.<sup>93</sup> Backed by both coal operators and the UMWA, the experiment began in one section of a mine in Western Pennsylvania. Workers quickly expressed great concern that the management would snuff out the experiment before any progress could be made.<sup>94</sup> After data came back showing productivity improvements, management expanded the program to the entire mine. Upon expansion of the experiment, miners once again expressed concern about coal operators' intentions. Miners believed that "the autonomous experiment was a plot to break the local union."<sup>95</sup> Despite reassurances from management that the experiment was being done in good faith, the owner's history of union-busting blocked meaningful efforts at changing labor-management oversight. Although a small experiment in two mines in Pennsylvania, it illustrates a clear mistrust between miners and management who had been feuding for decades. Distrust had been sown into the fabric of labor-management relations within the coal industry, and the changes at the end of the 1970s only intensified that mutual distrust.

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<sup>93</sup> An Experiment in Autonomous Working in an American Underground Coal Mine, Temporary Committees, Commissions, and Boards President (1977-1981 Carter), Box 8, President's Commission on Coal: General Subject Files, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid..

<sup>95</sup> Staff Findings, President's Commission on Coal: Transcripts of Public Hearings and Other Printed Records.

*Changing Circumstances and Tactics: The 1984 A.T. Massey Strike and the Further Weakening of the UMWA*

Violent labor conflict was nothing new to the people of Mingo County, West Virginia in 1984. Matewan, a small town along the West Virginia-Kentucky border, was the site of a violent shootout between coal miners and Baldwin-Felts detectives in 1920 which left seven detectives dead. The shootout in Matewan was the cause of the infamous Battle of Blair Mountain. Though not on the same scale as the Mine Wars of the early 1900s, shots were fired once again in 1984 in defense of unionized coal mining. A.T. Massey Coal, a coal company owned by the Royal Dutch Shell oil company refused to join the national agreement signed between the BCOA and the UMWA in 1984. Many coal operators felt uneasy about the continuation of collective bargaining structures that had existed since 1950. The UMWA's declining membership and weakening grip over coal production left them severely weakened. By the 1984 strike, the UMWA no longer controlled a majority of coal production—greatly reducing the union's ability to cut off coal production during strikes. The rise of independent operators not dependent solely on coal profit also increased the unwillingness of many owners to adhere to the national bargaining structure that existed between the BCOA and the UMWA.

Like in 1977, the union once again entered the strike in a state of uncertainty and weakness. In 1978, coal miners across West Virginia were already concerned with future job prospects and employment volatility in the coal industry. Throughout the end of the 1970s and leading into the A.T. Massey Strike their fears would come to fruition. Unemployment had risen in West Virginia to 6.5% by the end of 1979.<sup>96</sup> It would only get worse though. During 1982, 30,000 unionized miners lost their jobs, and in West Virginia unemployment numbers hit a

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<sup>96</sup>Telegram to Ray Marshall, December 19, 1977, Ray Marshall File, Box 5, Rockefeller Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, WV.

national high of 21%.<sup>97</sup> By 1983, the West Virginia government was routinely requesting \$20-40 million a month to be transferred from the federal unemployment budget to West Virginia's state unemployment budget.<sup>98</sup> By the start of the Massey Strike, the UMWA's membership had shrunk from a high of 885,000 miners in 1923 to a total of 160,000 active members and 60,000 pensioners.<sup>99</sup> Continued mechanization, the closing down of mines across Appalachia, and anti-union policies had decreased union membership since the signing of the national contract in 1950, and these processes accelerated during the 1970s. Economic weakness and continued decline in union membership demanded a change in the union's presidency, and in 1982 Richard Trumka was elected president of the UMWA. Trumka, a young coal miner turned lawyer, expressed a tenacity and straightforward approach that union presidents since the revered John Lewis had been missing. Trumka immediately worked to empower the union's striking capabilities in anticipation of conflict with global energy conglomerates like Shell and Exxon. Trumka re-established the union president's ability to single-handedly call for a strike and established a strike fund that would enable prolonged strikes.<sup>100</sup> Trumka's rhetoric of re-employing miners, no steps backward, and no concessions promised miners a return to hard-

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<sup>97</sup> "Trumka ousts Sam Church as UMW President," *The Baltimore Sun*, November 10, 1982, pg. A10, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.; Letter to Albert Angrisami, May 2, 1983, Albert Angrisami File, Box 5, Rockefeller Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, WV.

<sup>98</sup> Letter to Raymond Donovan, August 16, 1983, Raymond J. Donovan File, Box 5, Rockefeller Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, WV.

<sup>99</sup> Kathy Sawyer, "President-Elect of Miners Union Hints at Conciliatory Approach," *The Washington Post*, November 20, 1982, pg. A2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>100</sup> Susan Carey, "Coal Industry, UMW Poised for Stiff Talks," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 23, 1984, pg. 1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

nosed bargaining tactics, but also increased concerns of coal operators who were already on edge from the past decade of wildcat strikes and declining productivity.<sup>101</sup>

The first test of Trumka's new leadership style came in 1984 with A.T. Massey's refusal to accept the national agreement ratified by both the BCOA and UMWA. Massey Coal had proven adept at keeping their coal production outside the control of both the BCOA and the UMWA through the use of large numbers of small subsidiary non-unionized coal mines scattered across Appalachia. Owned by the Shell Oil Company, A.T. Massey Coal kept direct control of the most productive mines under ownership of the Massey Coal Sales Company, while also buying up subsidiary "resource groups" that placed affiliated mines under indirect ownership.<sup>102</sup> These subsidiaries operated as nonunion mines, and Massey used the threat of transferring coal production from unionized mines to nonunionized subsidiaries to hold the UMWA at gunpoint during contract negotiations.<sup>103</sup>

Since at least 1980 Massey's management had been breaking union control of mines by selling mines to their non-union subsidiaries. The sale from one company to "another company", but still a Massey-owned company, voided the union contract. Within a day of the sale, non-unionized miners would be sent in to replace union miners.<sup>104</sup> Along with these underhanded tactics, A.T. Massey refused to accept the 1984 national contract negotiated between the UMWA and the BCOA. In light of this refusal to agree to a contract with the union, Trumka called for a selective strike against Massey and its subsidiaries on October 1, 1984. The strike began when

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<sup>101</sup> Susan Carey, "Trumka's Big Margin in Beating Church for UMW Post Tied to Leadership Style," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 11, 1982, pg. 14, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.; Sawyer, "President-Elect of Miners Union Hints at Conciliatory Approach."

<sup>102</sup> Brisbin, *A Strike Like No Other Strike*, 104.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid..

<sup>104</sup> Ibid..

2,600 Massey miners went on strike across southern West Virginia. From October 1984 to February 1985, Massey hired strikebreakers and security, raised barbed-wire fences, and increased surveillance around all mines.<sup>105</sup> The West Virginia Supreme Court struck down Trumka's efforts to categorize Massey's armed guards as unlawful, state troopers escorted coal trucks in and out of mines, and a Kentucky judge limited the number of strikers allowed on picket lines and referred to the UMWA's actions as "un-American mob action."<sup>106</sup> Simmering tensions had escalated into open violence between strikers and Massey Coal. Despite outright violence from both sides, Massey and its subsidiaries escalated their rhetoric. E. Morgan Massey, CEO of A.T. Massey Coal, and subsidiary owners such as Jim Slater and Don Blankenship<sup>107</sup> made statements such as: "union coal looks just like nonunion coal. It's all black and it all burns," "unions are communistic," "A.T. Massey doesn't recognize the union...the unions are putting this country out of business," and "[the UMWA] was the most violent union organization in the United States," which had enslaved miners and coal operators under their reign.<sup>108</sup> In December 1985 the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) ruled that the strike had begun in response to unfair labor practices, and it required that Massey reinstate all miners that had gone on strike.<sup>109</sup> Trumka was satisfied with this ruling and called for miners to return to work on

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<sup>105</sup> Brisbin, *A Strike Like No Other Strike*, 106.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-110.

<sup>107</sup> Don Blankenship has been found guilty of willfully ignoring mine safety standards, he has referenced global warming as a government lie, been found guilty of physically abusing a maid, and recently ran for the West Virginia senate seat in 2018 in order to further the coal industry's deregulation of health and safety standards.

<sup>108</sup> Brisbin, *A Strike Like No Other Strike*, 112.; William Serrin, "The Violent Coal Strike: Bitter 9-Month Struggle at Massey Mines Reflects Sharp Labor-Industry Pressures," *New York Times*, June 24, 1985, pg. A16, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.; William Serrin, "Miners' Strike in 9<sup>th</sup> Month is a Test of Union Strategy," *New York Times*, June 9, 1985, pg. A26, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.; "Six-Month-Old Coal Miners' Strike Grows Bitter," *New York Times*, April 2, 1985, pg. A10, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>109</sup> Brisbin, *A Strike Like No Other Strike*, 114.

December 31, 1985. Both Massey and Trumka declared the strike a success, but labor-management negotiations in the coal industry had drastically been transformed. BCOA-UMWA negotiations, which had been the dominant form of contract negotiating since 1950 had broken down. The decline of UMWA's control over coal production and the rise of global energy corporations' control had broken down traditional bargaining structures. The ability of owners like Shell and Exxon to buy up coal production and shift production to nonunion mines when threatened by organized labor helped to weaken the UMWA's bargaining position in the face of capital mobility—as Cowie has suggested.<sup>110</sup> Coal production could easily be shifted from union mines in southwestern West Virginia out west to Colorado and Utah or to different nonunion mine elsewhere in the state or Appalachia. Trumka failed his first test as president of the UMWA, but not all because of his own decisions. With declining control over production, the union could no longer put a dent in coal productivity in ways it was once able to. Trumka's hard-nosed striking tactics were unable to pressure new coal owners like he had hoped. It would take the union's embrace of community involvement in striking in order to gain a victory for the union.

*The Pittston Strike: The Victory of the UMWA-Community Partnership*

A.T. Massey had set a precedent for coal operators' action, and Pittston Coal tried to use these same tactics in 1988. Starting in 1984, Pittston Coal began to shift production away from union mines to a set of subsidiary mines outside of union control. By 1988 Pittston Coal had cut over half of its unionized mining jobs, had refused to sign a contract with the UMWA, and was considering leaving the BCOA.<sup>111</sup> It was not until Pittston Coal cut benefits to over 1,500 retired

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<sup>110</sup> Cowie, *Capital Moves*, 2.

<sup>111</sup> Anglin, "Lessons from Appalachia in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Poverty, Power, and the 'Grassroots'," 567-568.

and disabled miners in February 1988 that a strike was considered. After working for fourteen months without a contract, Trumka finally called for a selective strike against Pittston Coal on April 5, 1989.

The actions of both the UMWA and Pittston Coal opened the door for broader community involvement in the Pittston Strike. First, Pittston's decision to cut health benefits to retired and disabled miners raised the ire of miners, family members, and mining communities. Unlike in the 1950s and 1960s, the revoking of health benefits in 1984 caused increased anger with the company.<sup>112</sup> Whereas the union had previously controlled miners' access to health care, the switch to employer-controlled health plans after the 1977 strike made individual coal operators responsible for miners' health benefits. Pittston had revoked "the right of working people to organize, to use their right to strike to protect their safety, their standard of living and their families from poverty."<sup>113</sup> Many laborers deemed these rights crucial to the functioning of democratic society. One woman wrote into the UMWA Journal and asked, "is it not 'violent' to remove health benefits from retirees who have spent their lives in the mines and are very probably ill from black lung; from widows whose husbands died violent deaths in the mines; and from miners violently disabled in the mines?"<sup>114</sup> She continued on to say that "my uncle died a violent coal miner's death, and the absentee owner reaped the profit."<sup>115</sup> These communities, miners, husbands and wives, children, and neighbors had all sacrificed for the production of coal.

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<sup>112</sup> Even when the Fund was controlled by the UMWA, fluctuations in coal profits made miners' access to health care unstable. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the Fund's board was periodically forced to restrict health coverage. Muncy, "Coal-Fired Reforms," 88-89.

<sup>113</sup> Debbie Albano, *Coal Miners: A Strike for Human Rights*, Verticle Files, 1881-1999, Box 6, George Meany Memorial Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>114</sup> Dolores Booker Letter to the Editor, *UMW Journal* 100, No. 9, October 1989, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, WV.

<sup>115</sup> Dolores Booker Letter to the Editor, *UMW Journal* 100, no. 9, October 1989.

Pittston's revocation of benefits for those who no longer produced was an attack on the community as a whole. They felt entitled to a basic degree of benefits and security that had existed since the 1950 national contract. Like in the 1960s, miners once again protested the revocation of health benefits, but now coal operators were at fault. Second, the UMWA changed its tactics from the 1984 strike. The UMWA gained two advantages it had not had in the Massey Strike. The union waited fourteen months without a contract before calling a strike in order to acquire the NLRB's decision that Pittston had used unfair labor practices. This decision meant that Pittston could not hire strikebreakers like Massey had done in 1984. Alongside traditional striking tactics of cutting coal production, the UMWA also focused their efforts on non-violent resistance and civil disobedience. The union adopted mass protests, sit-ins, and non-violent pickets. Many of these tactics, first championed in the Civil Rights Movement, had proven successful for social movements throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The adoption of these strategies allowed for greater participation from non-miners in the strike.

Women have always been at the heart of the fight for rights and social justice in the coal fields of Appalachia. From the early efforts of unionization in the region's coalfields, women like Mother Jones and Josephine Roache worked within organizations like the Knights of Labor and the UMWA and led strikes, went to jail, and pushed for progressive reforms.<sup>116</sup> Women also pushed for reform outside of labor unions. Mary Breckinridge founded the Frontier Nursing Service (FNS) in 1925 and provided basic health care for women and children while also pushing for reform aimed at protecting the lives of those she cared for.<sup>117</sup> Even beyond the examples of these remarkable labor leaders and reformers, women in Appalachia "were part of

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<sup>116</sup> Elliott J. Gorn, *Mother Jones: The Most Dangerous Woman in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001).; Muncy, *Relentless Reformer*.

<sup>117</sup> Goan, *Mary Breckinridge*.

social movements, joined in ideological debates, offered fresh visions of democratic participation, and faced sometimes-crippling political struggles.”<sup>118</sup> Throughout the Twentieth Century, these women fought for welfare rights, social and health benefits, fought against poverty, and aided strikes as miners’ wives. Their unique and traditional role as caregivers not only provided the foundation for the reproduction of coalfield labor but also gave them a unique position in which to critique capitalism.<sup>119</sup>

By the time of the Pittston Strike, women were not only miners’ wives, but coal miners themselves. In 1973 women legally entered the mines alongside men for the first time.<sup>120</sup> Despite their small numbers, women played a crucial role in the functioning of rank-and-file democracy during the 1970s.<sup>121</sup> Despite quickly being pushed out as coal employment continued to decline in the 1980s, for their two decades in the mines, women helped challenge structures of patriarchy and capitalism within West Virginia’s coalfields.

Women’s activism was not new in 1989, but women’s relationship to the UMWA during the Pittston Strike represents something new. Because of the decisions on the part of both Pittston and the UMWA, women took on a new and crucial role in the success of the Pittston Strike. The most enduring image of women’s participation in the strike was the creation of a group called the Daughters of Mother Jones. On April 18, 1989, 37 women calling themselves

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<sup>118</sup> Wilkerson, *To Live Here, You Have to Fight*, 15.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>120</sup> Suzanne E. Tallichet, *Daughters of the Mountain: Women Coal Miners in Central Appalachia* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 5-6. Women had previously entered the mines during World War II due to labor shortages, despite resistance from the UMWA’s leadership.

<sup>121</sup> Tallichet, *Daughters of the Mountain*, 7.; Trish Kahle, “‘A Woman’s Place is in the UMWA’: Women Miners and the Struggle for a Democratic Union in Western Pennsylvania, 1973-1979,” *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History* 13, no. 1 (2016): 44-45.

the Daughters of Mother Jones occupied Pittston Coal's headquarters in Lebanon, Virginia. The sit-in was the most visible action organized and led entirely by women during the strike, but women, including miners, miners' wives, and community members, also played an important day-to-day role in strike activities. For the first time in the UMWA's history women's auxiliaries were formed, which allowed for greater union-sanctioned participation. Like men, women stood on picket lines, were shot at, participated in demonstrations, and were sent to jail. In fact, women exploited state troopers' initial unwillingness to arrest them and would stand at the front of picket lines and cause commotion when police tried to arrest male picketers.<sup>122</sup> Women were also given extra roles that male coal miners traditionally had not done, and this participation revolved around gaining community support for the strike. Women's grassroots work in obtaining and cooking food, soliciting cash donations, and stirring up physical signs of community support for the strike, gained union recognition.<sup>123</sup> Whereas women's activism had previously been ignored or unappreciated by union leadership, the weakening position of the UMWA in the 1980s forced the leadership to officially support women's involvement. Although this activism was not new, or even instigated by the union, it gained an official recognition it had previously lacked due to the declining power of the union.

Women's auxiliaries were new for the UMWA in 1989, but many of the tactics adopted by women during the Pittston Strike were similar to those used by women's auxiliaries in the coalfields of southern Illinois in the 1930s. Miners in southern Illinois broke away from the UMWA in 1932, angered by the decision of John Lewis to sign a contract they opposed. In

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<sup>122</sup> Birecree, "The Importance and Implication of Women's Participation in the 1989-1990 Pittston Coal Strike," 196-197.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 200-202. It has also been accepted that women played a crucial role in the Brookside Strike that took place in Harlan County, Kentucky in 1976, and is the subject of the documentary *Harlan County, USA*.

response, they formed the more radical Progressive Miners of America (PMA).<sup>124</sup> Women quickly formed independent female-run auxiliaries and took part in marches and strikes. In these auxiliaries formed in the 1930s, women created and shaped an identity as miners' wives.<sup>125</sup> During the Pittston Strike women pushed their political identities beyond that of miners' wives. They called for justice and took action as laborers, community members, and as daughters of a protesting tradition dating back to Mother Jones in the early 1900s.

The UMWA supported a role for women in the Pittston Strike they had never been formally given before, but women were also not allowed to continue independent action after the first sit-in by the Daughters of Mother Jones.<sup>126</sup> The UMWA's reliance on the rhetoric of "family" and "community", and the class-based identity of unions offered women little space to express gendered strike identities outside of traditional conceptions of wife and mother.<sup>127</sup> Even though women gained a sanctioned role within the Pittston Strike, their actions remained constrained by a UMWA leadership that was reluctant to provide women the physical and rhetorical space to express female gendered identities within the class-based struggle between operators and miners. The union's leadership, still dominated by men, remained invested in a

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<sup>124</sup> Stephane E. Booth, "Ladies in White: Female Activism in the Southern Illinois Coalfields, 1932-1938," in *The United Mine Workers of America: A Model of Industrial Solidarity?*, ed. John H. M. Laslett (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 373-374.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 392.

<sup>126</sup> Beckwith, "Collective Identities of Class and Gender: Working-Class Women in the Pittston Coal Strike," 165.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 158. Beckwith has also argued that the Pittston Strike, heavily conducted by men, still represented a shift in gendered identities of coal miners. The change from violent resistance to non-violent resistance constituted a broader shift in understandings of what made coal miners masculine, and how resistance without the use of violence could still be a representation of a masculine mining identity. Karen Beckwith, "Gender Frames and Collective Action: Configurations of Masculine Identity in the Pittston Coal Strike," *Politics & Society* 29, no. 2 (2001).

gendered strike narrative that failed to appreciate the major grassroots contributions of women both inside and outside of official union structures. Along with the disconnect between official strike rhetoric and women's day-to-day strike activities, participation by African-American coal miners and female coal miners was limited, and the general attitude of the UMWA's leadership remained exclusionary towards dissenting visions of who the union's identity could represent.<sup>128</sup> The union's reluctant acceptance of women's involvement in the Pittston Strike sanctioned the grassroots mobilization of women across Appalachia, but the rhetoric of the union failed to provide women with the political identity they fought for and deserved within the overarching narratives of, what was still considered, an industrial strike.

Along with the union's acceptance of women's participation, wildcat strikes across West Virginia disrupted production and demonstrated broader community support for the Pittston miners in Virginia and West Virginia. State troopers arrested demonstrators across West Virginia, the NLRB set picket limits on the UMWA, and a Judge in Southwest Virginia fined the UMWA \$64 million dollars, which was later upheld by the Virginia Supreme Court in 1992.<sup>129</sup> In July 1989, Trumka praised the union members and their supporters by saying, "from the coalfields to the halls of Congress, you have told government officials that the phrase 'with liberty and justice for all' should include American working people as well as giant corporations."<sup>130</sup> Finally five months later the Secretary of Labor Elizabeth Dole intervened in the strike. Yet the halls of Congress and the oval office remained silent about the plight of

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<sup>128</sup> Anglin, "Lessons from Appalachia in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century," 569.

<sup>129</sup> "Va. Judge Fines Miners Union \$33.4 Million for Strike Action," *The Washington Post*, December 9, 1989, pg. B2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.; "Va. Supreme Court Upholds \$52 Million in Strike Fines Against Coal Miners Union," *The Washington Post*, November 7, 1992, pg. B4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>130</sup> Telegram to UMW Locals from Trumka, July 14, 1989, Strike Letters, Box 166, Governor Caperton Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, WV.

workers at the hands of private business. Sources from within the Labor Department itself said that “this strike could have gone on for another four years and the White House wouldn’t get involved.”<sup>131</sup>

The strike ended on February 20, 1990, eleven months after it had begun. Once again both Pittston Coal and the UMWA claimed victory in the strike. The UMWA and its embracing of community action had protected the health and pension rights of retired, disabled, and working miners, but Pittston was given the right to run its mines seven days a week. Everyone involved had suffered greatly from the strike. Pittston Coal lost tens of millions of dollars in profit during the strike, and it was eventually bought up in 2002 by Alpha Natural Resources. The UMWA spent millions sustaining various forms of striking, and has continued to struggle with funds ever since as the union’s active membership has declined to an all-time low of 71,000 miners.<sup>132</sup> The rank-and-file miners and their families also suffered. The instability within the coal industry during the decade prior to the Pittston Strike left many miners with little to no cash reserves, and the prolonged strike did little to help the financial outlook for low-income Appalachian communities.

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<sup>131</sup> Frank Swoboda, “Risky Move in Coal Strike Succeeds,” *The Washington Post*, January 8, 1990, AFL-CIO Vertical Files, Box 12, George Meany Memorial Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>132</sup> The number of active coal miners in the union is unclear as the UMW also represents tens of thousands of manufacturing workers, public sector employees, health care workers, and retirees. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that there were 53,876 coal miners employed in the first quarter of 2016. With these numbers and the trend of employing non-union miners, it is hard to believe that active coal miners make up a large portion of the UMW’s membership anymore. UMWA Website, “Who We Represent,” <http://umwa.org/about/who-we-represent/>. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages: Private, NAICS 2121 Coal Mining, National, 2012-2016”, [https://data.bls.gov/cew/apps/table\\_maker/v4/table\\_maker.htm#type=20&from=2012&to=2016&qtr=1&ind=2121&size=0&supp=1](https://data.bls.gov/cew/apps/table_maker/v4/table_maker.htm#type=20&from=2012&to=2016&qtr=1&ind=2121&size=0&supp=1).

In financial and bargaining terms, it is difficult to call the Pittston Strike a success—maybe a mixed success at best. But, what the UMWA did do during the Pittston Strike was tap into the organizing capabilities of disgruntled Appalachian communities that felt left behind and ignored by coal operators and the federal government. Rather than just an industrial strike, the Pittston Strike represents the UMWA’s effort to bolster its declining power through the acceptance of women and community members, as well as positioning non-violent protesting alongside efforts to cut non-union coal production. Although Trumka failed to fully utilize the resources that communities offered, the groundwork was laid for a new relationship between unions and the communities that support them.

### Chapter 3: Voices from the Hills and Coalfields

Hand-in-hand with the rise of capitalism in Appalachia in the late 1800s arose cultural depictions of the region's residence as backwards and threatening to American civilization.<sup>133</sup> This depiction of the region's inhabitants supported the creation of company towns and made outside writers, politicians, and industrialists the dominant voice in outlining what Appalachia and its people needed. The hillbilly/white trash stereotype, prominent in popular culture in shows and movies like *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *Deliverance*, and most recently, Trump's many visits to West Virginia, has shaped outside perceptions of the region more often than the voices of those who actually reside there.<sup>134</sup> Despite the dominance of non-Appalachian voices in shaping policy making and perceptions of the region, in moments of crisis and change Appalachian voices have often been heard through both actions and words. In the 1910s and 1920s West Virginians shaped national labor policy through direct conflict with the federal government on Blair Mountain. In the 1960s, miners once again made their opinions clear to Washington D.C. through the threat of widespread violence.<sup>135</sup> From the late 1800s throughout the Twentieth Century, coal miners went on strike time after time to fight for wage increases, increased safety standards, and many other benefits. In those moments of physical confrontation, Appalachian citizens also made their voices heard. This is no different in the late 1970s and the 1980s. As communities across the region struggled with poverty and changes in the coal industry, individuals combatted these changes with both actions and words. To understand resistance to neoliberalism's rise we must not only record the actions of Appalachians, but also the stories and statements they used to fight for their rights and benefits. Voices can be recorded in many forms.

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<sup>133</sup> Harkins, *Hillbilly*, 33-45.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-11.

<sup>135</sup> Muncy, "Coal-Fired Reforms."

Coal miners, their families, and their communities made themselves heard through stories mediated through government reporters, letters to politicians in Charleston, singing at the physical sites of Pittston Coal's control, and interviews.

*The President's Commission Interviews and Government-Mediated Voices of Protest*

In 1979, the President's Commission on Coal sent interviewers out across the mining counties of the country. In conjunction with the less-personal surveys discussed earlier, the President's Commission hoped to "give miners and their families the opportunity to be heard at the highest level of policymaking in Government, and to be heard in public."<sup>136</sup> While the surveys targeted coal miners, government interviewers specifically targeted coal miners' wives and families with "at home" interviews focused on issues like housing, schooling, health care, and consumption.<sup>137</sup> These "at home" interviews often made it into the reports of the field teams as full stories about individual miners and their families.

Health concerns, especially black lung, were central to many of the stories that coal miners told the President's Commission interviewers. Robert Hunt, Sr., a 63-year-old coal miner from Raleigh County, West Virginia, could not retire even though he wanted to. After the passage of the Black Lung Benefits Act in 1972 Hunt walked into multiple doctors' offices in order to be deemed eligible for black lung benefits. He was diagnosed with three advanced stage

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<sup>136</sup> Committee Conditions Study: Project Outline, March 26, 1979, Temporary Committees, Commissions, and Boards President (1977-1981 Carter), Boxes 24, President's Commission on Coal: Completed Questionnaires Relating to the 'Living Conditions Survey', National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>137</sup> Manual for Field Team Members on Study of Living Conditions of Miners and Their Families, pg. 21, April 18, 1979, Temporary Committees, Commissions, and Boards President (1977-1981 Carter), Boxes 24, President's Commission on Coal: Completed Questionnaires Relating to the 'Living Conditions Survey', National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

coal-related diseases and was judged seventy percent disabled.<sup>138</sup> But seven years later Hunt remained employed. Because he had been denied benefits, he had gone back to work in order to provide for his family, and had worked ever since. In the interview with President's Commission interviewers, he said that he could not quit his job because if he was out of work for more than thirty days "then you has to git a physical—and the doctors have already told me there's no way I could pass one again."<sup>139</sup> As her husband slowly died in the mines, Mrs. Hunt told interviewers that she did not care about the money from the black lung benefits, but that she "would rather it bought him a little more time alive."<sup>140</sup>

Robert Armstead, a black coal miner who worked in northern West Virginia for forty years, lived his life in the shadow of black lung. In his memoir *Black Days, Black Dust*, Armstead reveals the widespread problems of black lung. In 1976 his father James Henry passed away from black lung complications.<sup>141</sup> Like many, Armstead's father never received compensation for his physical impairment. In the final years before Armstead's retirement in 1987, he worked as a safety inspector in Robinson Run No. 95 Mine in Harrison County, West Virginia. Along with refusing to wear respirators unless told to do so by safety inspectors, miners tampered with machines built to test the levels of coal dust in the air.<sup>142</sup> These machines, called dust pumps, contained filters that measured respirable levels of coal dust. Despite their

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<sup>138</sup> Appalachian Field Team II Field Report, May 7, 1979, Temporary Committees, Commissions, and Boards President (1977-1981 Carter), Boxes 24, President's Commission on Coal: Completed Questionnaires Relating to the 'Living Conditions Survey', National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid..

<sup>140</sup> Ibid..

<sup>141</sup> Robert Armstead and S.L. Gardner, *Black Days, Black Dust: The Memories of an African American Coal Miner* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 189.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 212-213.

importance as a safety device, some miners were convinced that the samples taken by the machine were used by coal companies in order to deny miners black lung benefits.<sup>143</sup>

Armstead visited doctors in 1996 due to a constant shortness of breath. Before he received a diagnosis, he knew what the issue was. Armstead knew that “black lung was inevitable for me. It’s a hazard of the job...”<sup>144</sup> He was diagnosed with 5% reduced lung capacity. Two years later he went back and was diagnosed with 15% reduced lung capacity. He passed away later that year from a cold prolonged by black lung.

Other, much younger, miners also dealt with safety concerns. Jerry Cline, a miner in his mid-20s, was just one of many members of his family to work in the mines. Every single one of them had experienced injuries, and his brother had even been electrocuted to death on the job.<sup>145</sup> Although he tried to hide safety issues from his wife, Sue, she confronted him and forced him to tell her the truth about his work.<sup>146</sup> Sue was like many other miners’ wives. Although they never entered the mines, fear of accidents and long-term health problems plagued their everyday lives—just like their husbands.

Issues of black lung and larger safety concerns went hand-in-hand with a mistrust of the federal government. John Taylor, another Raleigh County miner, began his career in the mines in 1973. Taylor resented state and federal mine inspectors who made work in the mines difficult because of, what he argued were, excessive safety regulations.<sup>147</sup> His resentment for federal employees extended to the President’s Commission field team. Upon their arrival Taylor asked

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<sup>143</sup> Armstead and Gardner, *Black Days, Black Dust*, 212.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>145</sup> Appalachian Field Team II Field Report, May 7, 1979, Temporary Committees, Commissions, and Boards President (1977-1981 Carter), Boxes 24.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*.

“what’re they down here spying on now? Wonder what they want us to do now?”<sup>148</sup> Many of the miners interviewed in Raleigh County resented the federal government because of delays, denials, and revocations of black lung benefits. Many, like Robert Hunt, Sr. and Robert Armstead’s father, had been denied black lung benefits despite their obvious symptoms. Many others lost their black lung benefits when they went back to work, and were often forced to pay back the benefits they had received.<sup>149</sup> It had taken direct action to gain black lung benefits in 1969, and in 1979 miners continued to voice their anger about federal programs that were meant to benefit them but had failed to do so.

### *The Voices of the Pittston Strike*

Ten years later in 1989, miners and their families once again rose their voices in protest, but this time in response to the actions of Pittston Coal. Early on, it took the form of letters of support for the strike sent to the West Virginia governor. The most emotional letter in the archive was written to Governor Caperton by an anonymous coal wife. She asked the governor, “how can a wife talk her husband out of suicide, because he can’t provide for his family?”<sup>150</sup> Many others used both the wider politics of the Cold War and state and national patriotism to support the rights of the miners to strike. The Coalition of Labor Union Women wrote to Governor Caperton saying that “the use of force against unions and for the powerful sounds very much like what is happening in Poland, Russia, and China.”<sup>151</sup> They were not the only ones to reference the Communist states of Eastern Europe in favor of union organizing. Many wrote into the UMWA

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<sup>148</sup> Appalachian Field Team II Field Report, May 7, 1979, Temporary Committees, Commissions, and Boards President (1977-1981 Carter), Boxes 24.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid..

<sup>150</sup> Letter from Anonymous Coal Wife, July 17, 1989, Strike Letters, Box 166, Governor Caperton Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, WV.

<sup>151</sup> Letter from Coalition of Labor Union Women, July 14, 1989, Strike Letters, Box 166, Governor Caperton Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, WV.

journal clearly confused by the praise Presidents Regan and Bush had for Eastern European labor unions alongside their disdain for American labor unions.<sup>152</sup> Donna Jones, from Mt. Nebo, West Virginia, complained of President Bush's praise for Polish and Russian workers while workers in the United States were treated, "worse than rapists and murderers."<sup>153</sup> Ms. Jones had a fair point. While President Bush catered to labor unions fighting Communist control, like Solidarity in Poland, he completely ignored the protests and concerns of workers in his own country.

Ms. Jones went further and complained about the violence meted out to peaceful protesters. Juanita Brooks, a coal miner's wife, even compared the violence to that of Nazi Germany. She wrote that "men are being treated like the Jews were in World War II," and compared the silence of the federal government to the German peoples' denial of the Holocaust.<sup>154</sup> Although obviously not comparable events, the anger of those who wrote into the Governor was palpable.

Along with written voices, the voices of miners and protesters were heard at both Pittston Headquarters and at Pittston's Moss 3 Facility in Southwestern Virginia. As the Daughters of Mother Jones began the strike by taking over Pittston's headquarters in Lebanon, Virginia, they sang "We Shall not be Moved", a famous African American spiritual that had gained popularity during the Civil Rights Movement. Due to the UMWA's growing use of non-violent protest, singing and the raising of voices became an important symbolic act of resistance.

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<sup>152</sup> UMW Journal, letters to the editor, Vol. 200, no. 6, 9, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, WV.

<sup>153</sup> Letter from Donna Jones, August 2, 1989, Strike Letters, Box 166, Governor Caperton Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, WV.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.; Letter from Junita Jones, August 1, 1989, Strike Letters, Box 166, Governor Caperton Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, WV.

Like the Daughters of Mother Jones' sit-in, singing was crucial to the UMWA's takeover of the Moss 3 Facility. On September 17, 1989, protesters entered the Moss 3 Facility in Russell County, Virginia. Moss 3 was Pittston Coal's largest coal preparation facility at the time, and its takeover was crucial to halting Pittston's productive capabilities. The takeover was peaceful, and that night supporters gathered outside of the facility to chant and sing in celebration of the takeover.<sup>155</sup> Following the takeover, the plant was transformed from a site of extraction to a site of jubilee. Pro-union bumper stickers and other signs of support were visible throughout the nearby town of Cleveland. One of the strike organizers, Jim Sessions, called the area, "a giant cultural event, something like a cross between a bluegrass festival, a turkey shoot, and an old time revival."<sup>156</sup> Although these actions were not instigated by the union, the union's acceptance of this kind of popular support by the community made the Pittston Strike successful where previous strikes in 1977 and 1984 had failed. On the night of September 19, members of the union's recently formed student auxiliary arrived at Plant 3 and led the crowd in singing "we shall not be moved" and "which side are you on?," a famous Appalachian labor song dating back to labor conflict in Eastern Kentucky in the 1930s.<sup>157</sup> The takeover of the Moss 3 facility was a turning point in the Pittston Strike. Not only did it reaffirm the union's new strategy of non-violence, but it "delivered a dramatic message to Pittston about the miners' seriousness and the depth, breadth, and militancy of their community support."<sup>158</sup> The communities of Appalachia

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<sup>155</sup> Jim Sessions and Fran Ansley, "Singing Across Dark Spaces: The Union/Community Takeover of Pittston's Moss 3 Plant," in *Fighting Back in Appalachia: Traditions of Resistance and Change*, ed. Stephen Fisher (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University, 1993), 209.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

had raised their voices against the policies of Pittston Coal, and even if the federal government did not hear them then, their voices could not be ignored forever.

Lissa Lucas, like the protesters at Moss 3, realized the power of raising one's voice when she was dragged from the State Legislature in Charleston in 2018. On February 9, Lucas arrived in Charleston to read a list of campaign donations made to West Virginia's politicians by oil and gas companies. After listing off only two names, Lucas's microphone was cut and she was dragged out of the room. As she was dragged out of the room, she yelled the state motto of West Virginia "Montani semper Liberi"—which means mountaineers are always free.<sup>159</sup> Like those who protested before her, Lucas used her voice to challenge the politics and policies that have harmed laborers and Appalachian communities. Just like before, those in power have attempted to silence these voices of resistance.

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<sup>159</sup> Avi Selk, "She was Naming Lawmakers who Took Oil-and-Gas Money – So They Barred Her from the Public Hearing," *The Washington Post*, February 12, 2018, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

## Conclusion: From Pittston to 55 Strong

In his book *Fighting Back in Appalachia: Traditions of Resistance and Change*, Stephen Fisher tracks the emergence of resistance in Appalachia based on the idea of New Populism. New Populists argue that rather than basing resistance on class consciousness, people draw on traditions, culture, and folkways to form a defensible community.<sup>160</sup> New populist scholars argue that community represents a network of individuals both spatially and intellectually that through complex social relations are bound together tighter than the broader national society.<sup>161</sup> Although often not radical in nature, these traditions and folkways—the community—“can provide the commitments and categories out of which radical protest will emerge.”<sup>162</sup>

During the 2018 West Virginia Teachers’ Strike, *The New York Times* interviewed Katie Endicott, a high school teacher down in Mingo County along the Kentucky border. Endicott, head of her school’s Prayer Club, told *The New York Times* of her inability to pay the bills, as well as widespread discontent among teachers over poor pay and feelings of invisibility to the state government.<sup>163</sup> When asked how the strike was part of a broader history of protest in West Virginia, Endicott referenced the Mine Wars of the early 1900s. She said that “we have pride and we love this state. We come from an area that is known for standing up for what they believe in... We believe the movement was started years ago through the mine wars. We’re just reviving the movement that was started years ago.”<sup>164</sup> This history of exploitation, invisibility, and

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<sup>160</sup> Stephen Fisher, *Fighting Back in Appalachia: Traditions of Resistance and Change* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1993), 317-318.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 318.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

<sup>163</sup> Jess Bidgood, “‘I Live Paycheck to Paycheck’: A West Virginia Teacher Explains Why She’s on Strike,” *The New York Times*, March 1, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/01/us/west-virginia-teachers-strike.html>.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*.

resistance has helped to maintain activism from the 1980s to the present, despite the weakening of organized labor and the rise of wealth inequality. The traditions and history of exploited communities across Appalachia laid the foundation through which radical protest against global capitalism has emerged in the Twenty-First Century.

*Labor-Community Organizing and the fight against Economic Precarity*

Against this backdrop of growing precarity and the growth of global capitalism, community-based organizations have risen to empower Appalachia's communities in new ways. Although there is no evidence to directly link the success of the UMWA in 1989 to the most recent teachers' strikes, these efforts represent a growing acceptance of broader community participation in labor strikes. Organizing efforts like Appalachian Voices and 55 Strong have sought to organize Appalachian citizens in defense of their own economic, political, and environmental interests. These organizing efforts are unique to Appalachia, but they are also part of a larger movement to combat the injustices of global capitalism.

Appalachian Voices was founded in 1997 as a newspaper published in Boone, North Carolina that focused on environmental issues in Appalachia. Since its inception, Appalachian Voices has consistently pushed for increased regulation, documentation of corporate disregard for state and federal law, and sought legal reparations for environmental damage.<sup>165</sup> Appalachian Voices has also pushed for a New Economy for the region. They have advocated for community engagement, economic diversification, land restoration, and the growth of the clean energy sector as central to the economic improvement of the region.<sup>166</sup> Although many of their recommendations are similar to ARC and other federal policymakers, their efforts differ in the

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<sup>165</sup> "Over 20 Years and Counting," <http://appvoices.org/20years/>.

<sup>166</sup> "A New Economy for Appalachia," <http://appvoices.org/new-economy/>.

centrality they provide to local communities. Appalachian Voices has worked to center communities and democratic oversight at the heart of their efforts. They have used the internet to democratize oversight and reporting that federal agencies have been either unwilling or unable to thoroughly do. In conjunction with an environmental oversight group, Appalachian Voices created a website called “Appalachian Water Watch” where citizens can report spills and environmental hazards caused by coal and other industries.<sup>167</sup> These reports are then compiled and used to create an interactive archive of environmental damage caused by extractive industries. One of their most innovative ideas is the reclamation of unused coal mines as sites of solar energy facilities and sustainable agriculture. Their efforts have seen reclamation bills introduced in state legislatures across the region, as well as in Congress.<sup>168</sup> Appalachian Voices has also partnered with other community-based organizations across West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Virginia to create a region-wide network of organizations dedicated to community empowerment and environmental protection.

The most visible actors for change in recent years have been West Virginia’s educators.<sup>169</sup> Although the teachers’ strike in 2018 spread like wildfire around the country, it was not the first time West Virginia’s educators went on strike. The first strike dates back to 1990—mere weeks after the end of the Pittston Strike. On March 7, 1990, educators across forty-seven of West Virginia’s fifty-five counties formed picket lines in front of their schools. Called by the

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<sup>167</sup> Appalachian Water Watch, <http://appalachianwaterwatch.org/>.

<sup>168</sup> “Investing in Appalachia,” <http://appvoices.org/new-economy/investing-in-appalachia/>.

<sup>169</sup> Jon Shelton, *Teacher Strike!: Public Education and the Making of a New American Political Order* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2017). Shelton argues that teachers’ strikes in the 1970s took place within the broader scope of changes to the labor movement. These changing contexts also transformed the way education was seen in relation to the state and society. His focus is on urban education and does not touch on the relationship of rural educators and education to poor rural-industrial communities.

West Virginia Educators' Association, teachers demanded wage raises. In 1990 West Virginia's educators made on average \$21,900, placing their wages only above Mississippi teachers.<sup>170</sup> Politicians opposed the state's first ever teachers' strike by every means available. Governor Caperton, who had been willing to mediate between Pittston Coal and the UMWA months earlier, declared the strike illegal and argued that West Virginia law prohibited collective bargaining by teachers.<sup>171</sup> Teachers on picket lines were arrested for blocking buses, administrators promised to fire anyone who took part in the strike, and legal injunctions were introduced to the West Virginia Supreme Court in an effort to force teachers back to work.<sup>172</sup> Coal miners took action alongside the state's teachers, and bolstered picket lines across Southern West Virginia.<sup>173</sup> Against all odds the teachers persevered. On March 18, eleven days after the strike began, teachers declared victory. Teachers were promised a \$5,000 pay increase over the following three years, wage incentives were put in place for teachers who obtained graduate degrees, and the public employee insurance fund was fully funded.<sup>174</sup> The partnership between coal miners and teachers suggests that the victory at Pittston may have invigorated teachers' desire to strike in 1990. But even if not, the first few months of 1990 proved fruitful for the future of labor militancy in the state.

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<sup>170</sup> B. Drummond Ayres Jr., "Thaw is Hinted in School Strike in West Virginia," *The New York Times* March 10, 1990, 7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>171</sup> "Teachers Voting on Ending Strike: West Virginia Group Weighing Governor's Plan to Reopen Negotiations on Pay," *The New York Times* March 11, 1990, 28, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>172</sup> "In West Virginia, Some are Told to End Strike," *The New York Times* March 17, 1990, 8, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.; Drummond Ayres Jr., "Thaw is Hinted in School Strike in West Virginia."; Michael Mochaidean, "The Other West Virginia Teacher Strike," *Jacobin* April 9, 2018, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2018/04/west-virginia-teachers-strike-1990-unions>.

<sup>173</sup> Mochaidean, "The Other West Virginia Teacher Strike."

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*; "W. Va. Teachers Vote to Return to Class Today," *The Baltimore Sun* March 19, 1990, 3A, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

The teachers' strikes in 2018 and 2019 are successors to the 1990 strike in some ways, but they also illustrate new forms of organization. In 1990 the strike was called by the teachers' union, but in 2018 the strike was a grassroots effort beginning in Southern West Virginia. On February 2, teachers from the heart of coal county in Mingo, Logan, and Wyoming Counties walked off the job and traveled to Charleston to protest. Angie Butcher, a teacher in Logan County, said, "we're here because we are the coalfields. We've been taught since we were little not to put up with this kind of treatment."<sup>175</sup> In response to early calls for pay raises, Governor Jim Justice argued that rather than investing in education the state should invest in tourism because the return would be larger; then that surplus could be invested in education.<sup>176</sup> Rather than invest in the actual communities and children of West Virginia, the governor sought to boost outside investment and travel to the state.

Almost three weeks later, on February 22, teachers and staff from across the state's fifty-five counties walked out. Statewide protest was not pushed for by the teachers' union, but rather was the result of online organizing by teachers on Facebook.<sup>177</sup> Rallying around the slogan 55 Strong, in reference to statewide unity of the state's fifty-five counties, teachers began to realize their common frustrations with the state government. At a massive protest on February 26, teachers donned red shirts, hats, and bandanas, mimicking the attire of militant coal miners at The Battle of Blair Mountain in 1921, salvaging the militant labor roots of the term redneck in

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<sup>175</sup> Caity Coyne, "Teachers from the Southern Counties Flood Capitol in Protest," *Charleston Gazette-Mail* February 2, 2018, [https://www.wvgazettemail.com/2018\\_wv\\_teachers\\_strike/teachers-from-southern-counties-flood-capitol-in-protest/article\\_b8d62317-df75-5586-9e22-3d0a74b4c398.html](https://www.wvgazettemail.com/2018_wv_teachers_strike/teachers-from-southern-counties-flood-capitol-in-protest/article_b8d62317-df75-5586-9e22-3d0a74b4c398.html).

<sup>176</sup> Ibid..

<sup>177</sup> Rick Hampson, "'Any Talks of Striking?': How a West Virginia Teacher's Facebook Post Started a National Movement," *USA Today* February 20, 2019, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/education/2019/02/20/teacher-strike-west-virginia-school-closings-education-bill/2848476002/>.

the process. At this rally, the teachers listened to a speech by Cecil E. Roberts, current head of the UMWA. Roberts called for statewide working-class unity and declared striking a religious and patriotic duty.<sup>178</sup> Roberts also declared that teachers were exercising their right to petition the government as citizens of both West Virginia and the United States. Roberts employed conservative ideas like: stubbornness, dedication, patriotism, religion, and family, but he also employed the long militant history of West Virginia and the United States through figures like Mother Jones, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Jr., and John L. Lewis. Roberts told the teachers, “It’s not how long you live, but what you do with your life while you’re here.”<sup>179</sup> Roberts and the teachers viewed themselves as part of a longer history of labor militancy, civil rights activism, and patriotism dating back to the late 1800s. Once again, coal miners came to the support of West Virginia’s teachers, suggesting a shared history of labor militancy.

After nine days of having schools closed, teachers received a 5% pay raise.<sup>180</sup> Despite the small raise, it was a victory for teachers. But the victory would not have been possible without support from the community. Across the state, communities rallied to support the strikers in Charleston. A GoFundMe raised over \$20,000 to help feed strikers in Charleston, students in Boone County protested in solidarity with their teachers, and community centers provided food and “after-school” programs for children who usually relied on their schools for those

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<sup>178</sup> “UMWA President Cecil E. Roberts at WV Teacher Strike 2.26.18,” <https://soundcloud.com/shakenbake-1/umwa-president-cecil-e-roberts-at-wv-teacher-strike-2262018>.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid..

<sup>180</sup> Phil Kabler, “Funding for 5 Percent WV Employee Pay Raises to Come From Budget Cuts,” *Charleston Gazette-Mail* March 6, 2018, [https://www.wvgazettemail.com/news/legislative\\_session/funding-for-percent-wv-employee-pay-raises-to-come-from/article\\_35f834ec-2c97-561a-b8a6-8a0618181f25.html](https://www.wvgazettemail.com/news/legislative_session/funding-for-percent-wv-employee-pay-raises-to-come-from/article_35f834ec-2c97-561a-b8a6-8a0618181f25.html).

services.<sup>181</sup> This community support highlights how important education is within impoverished rural communities. For many, schools and teachers are the focal point of services that state and federal governments fail or refuse to provide.<sup>182</sup>

The centrality of schools to rural communities was also showcased in the one-day teachers' strike in February 2019. Teachers went on strike on February 18 to protest a bill that would approve the creation of charter schools in the state as well as provide vouchers for private education. Politicians, in anticipation of teachers' resistance, included a pay raise in the bill to try and appease the state's educators, but teachers still went on strike. Teachers viewed the bill as undermining West Virginia's public schools.<sup>183</sup> Like in 1990 and 2018, the UMWA once again stood with the teachers. Roberts called the bill, "anti-education, anti-family, and anti-worker."<sup>184</sup> Undermining the state's public schools would also undermine communities and help businesses

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<sup>181</sup> Max Garland, "Fundraiser Pays for Hundreds of Pizzas to Feed WV Teachers at Capitol," *Charleston Gazette-Mail* March 6, 2018, [https://www.wvgazettemail.com/2018\\_wv\\_teachers\\_strike/fundraiser-pays-for-hundreds-of-pizzas-to-feed-wv-teachers/article\\_2bf8a8d0-a19a-51e5-9c1a-9c846798cdf2.html](https://www.wvgazettemail.com/2018_wv_teachers_strike/fundraiser-pays-for-hundreds-of-pizzas-to-feed-wv-teachers/article_2bf8a8d0-a19a-51e5-9c1a-9c846798cdf2.html); Caity Coyne, "Boone County Students Organize Rally, March for Teachers, Employees," *Charleston Gazette-Mail* March 2, 2018, [https://www.wvgazettemail.com/2018\\_wv\\_teachers\\_strike/boone-county-students-organize-rally-march-for-teachers-employees/article\\_e0617a96-d82a-5bfb-90c1-48d81a35d67a.html](https://www.wvgazettemail.com/2018_wv_teachers_strike/boone-county-students-organize-rally-march-for-teachers-employees/article_e0617a96-d82a-5bfb-90c1-48d81a35d67a.html); Caity Coyne, "Community Groups Looking out for Kids during WV Teacher Strike," *Charleston Gazette-Mail* February 23, 2018, [https://www.wvgazettemail.com/2018\\_wv\\_teachers\\_strike/community-groups-looking-out-for-kids-during-wv-teacher-strike/article\\_b64cdd49-9983-5933-8335-f1040d903279.html](https://www.wvgazettemail.com/2018_wv_teachers_strike/community-groups-looking-out-for-kids-during-wv-teacher-strike/article_b64cdd49-9983-5933-8335-f1040d903279.html).

<sup>182</sup> Benjamin Wallace-Wells, "The New Old Politics of the West Virginia Teachers' Strike," *The New Yorker* March 2, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-new-old-politics-of-the-west-virginia-teachers-strike>.

<sup>183</sup> Nicole Sganga, "West Virginia Teachers' Union is 'Re-Evaluating by the Hour,' says Union President," *CBS News* February 19, 2019, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/west-virginia-teachers-strike-will-continue-another-day-2019-02-19/>; Matthew S. Schwartz, "West Virginia's Education Bill Dies as Teachers Strike," *NPR* February 19, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/02/19/695856032/w-va-teachers-go-on-strike-over-state-education-bill>.

<sup>184</sup> Cecil E. Roberts, "UMWA Walking the Picket Lines with West Virginia School Personnel Again," *UMWA*, February 19, 2019, <http://umwa.org/news-media/press/president-roberts-statement-on-west-virginia-public-education/>.

form a less educated, more agreeable workforce.<sup>185</sup> Within a day of the strike's declaration, legislators tabled the bill.

*Conclusion: Transformations in Capitalism and Labor Organizing*

Over the past five decades, structures of capitalism have undergone drastic transformations, but labor organizing has also transformed to meet the needs of labor and working-class communities in the face of global capitalism's rise. These strategies and organizations are not completely new, but are rooted in a transformation in the relationship between industrial and agricultural labor unions and the communities that support them. In her letter to Governor Caperton during the Pittston Strike, Donna Jones wrote that despite how poorly striking miners were being treated by police and coal operators, "labor has a long memory."<sup>186</sup> Strikers in 1989 sang resistance songs harkening back to both the early labor struggles and the more recent civil rights struggles. In 2018 striking teachers donned the red bandanas originally worn by coal miners fighting for unionization at the start of the twentieth century. The conflicts, strategies, and history of the American labor movement have not been forgotten by communities across Appalachia.

In *Fighting Back in Appalachia*, Richard Couto argues that strikes represent free spaces. These spaces "foster the discovery of new democratic potential," and fashion "memories of past democratic efforts...into tools to renew those efforts in different times and circumstances."<sup>187</sup>

The Pittston Strike relied on tools the UMWA had used for decades, but it also embraced tactics

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<sup>185</sup> Roberts, "UMWA Walking the Picket Lines with West Virginia School Personnel Again."

<sup>186</sup> Letter to Governor Caperton from Donna May, August 2, 1989, Strike Letters - Pittston Strike, Box 166, Governor Caperton Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, WV.

<sup>187</sup> Richard A. Couto, "The Memory of Miners and the Conscience of Capital," in *Fighting Back in Appalachia: Traditions of Resistance and Change*, ed. Stephen Fisher (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1993), 165-166.

derived from the successes of the civil rights movement. These tactics, mainly non-violent sit-ins, created “free spaces” that not only challenged the authority of coal operators, but also created spaces of autonomy.<sup>188</sup> These autonomous spaces allowed for the creation of wider networks of labor solidarity. Couto argues that despite the formation of these spaces that linked the UMWA with broader communal and labor organizations, the unique relationship between coalfield capital and the surrounding communities will not be replicated in broader labor struggles.<sup>189</sup> My research, along with other recent scholarship, has proven Couto to be incorrect about this.

The Pittston Strike illustrates what could be accomplished through a partnership between organized labor and communities. Despite the declining power of the UMWA throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the Pittston Strike proved that industrial labor could still defend the benefits of its members. But the UMWA’s success also relied on the support of local communities. Most important to these efforts was the changing relationship between women and the union. The union’s acceptance of women as prominent actors in the Pittston Strike foreshadowed the centrality of women in leading environmental organizations, the recent teachers’ strikes, and labor militancy in the retail and service sectors. Despite the defeat of organized labor in the early 1980s, the Pittston Strike shows that industrial labor could, even if briefly, shift its strategies to embrace important actors it had previously ignored. We, as historians, must not ignore this broader labor coalition either—industrial labor has not disappeared, and could still prove effective in combatting capitalism alongside community-based activism.

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<sup>188</sup> Couto, “The Memory of Miners and the Conscience of Capital,” 180-181.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

These transformations have also been seen in labor organizing outside of Appalachia. The decline of industrial capital and the rise of retail capital, especially in the United States, has relied on the “flexible, low-wage labor of women.”<sup>190</sup> As women’s labor has grown in importance to the functioning of global capital, they have become the crucial link between organizing both labor and communities. Efforts like Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE) and Orange County Communities Organized for Responsible Development (OCCORD) have fought to create policies that benefits not only laborers, but the entire community.<sup>191</sup> These organizations, like other retail-focused labor unions, rely heavily on the militancy of women. Women across the world, like the teachers of West Virginia, have been inspired by those who came before.

This study has also raised many questions about what the changes in both capitalism and labor organizing will mean specifically for the people of Appalachia. With the mutual decline of coal and rise of other extractive industries like tourism and the prison industry, how will rhetoric and organizing be used to defend the basic rights and services that the coal industry has primarily funded for the past century? Will organizing continue to base its ideals on traditional folk culture and a history of labor militancy in the region, or will it adopt a more radical anti-capitalist stance? How can economic development be controlled by local communities in the face of global capital control?

Appalachia contains a long history of militancy towards the growth of capitalism in the region. Declaring the region an overwhelmingly conservative pro-Trump populace obscures

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<sup>190</sup> Nelson Lichtenstein, “Supply Chains, Workers’ Chains, and the New World of Retail Supremacy,” *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 4, no. 1 (2007): 20.

<sup>191</sup> Orleck, “*We are All Fast-Food Workers Now*”, 254-258.

strains of labor organizing and militancy—past and present—that have fought for wage increases, safety standards, health care, and the defense of basic goods and services for impoverished communities. From coal miners and teachers to retail workers, home health care employees, incarcerated populations, and the citizens of Affrilachia<sup>192</sup>, the invisible precariat of Appalachia cannot be ignored forever.

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<sup>192</sup> Affrilachia was a term first coined by the poet Frank X Walker in 1991. The term has been part of a recent effort by scholars and Black Appalachians to understand their lives in a region in which race and black communities have largely been made invisible in both the past and present. William Hobart Turner, and Edward J. Cabbell, *Blacks in Appalachia* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1985).; Frank X Walker, *Affrilachia: Poems by Frank X Walker* (Lexington, KY: Old Cove Press, 2000).

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