

# ... By every measure, the West Virginia teachers strike stands out

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increased public education funding. And all of them were inspired by the example of 19,000 West Virginia teachers who struck for nine days, shutting schools statewide from Feb. 22 to March 6, and giving 277,000 students a lesson in union power.

And what an inspiring example they set. By any measure, the West Virginia teachers strike stood out: the overwhelming unity of the strikers, the broad public support they found, their reasonable demands, and their stunning success. And all the more remarkable, the strike took place in a state where teachers and other public workers had no legally recognized right to strike, nor even any process for collective bargaining.

The West Virginia teacher strike started when the state Leg-



**CAN YOU HEAR US NOW?** Teachers completely filled the Kentucky Capitol building April 2, furious about a law cutting their retirement benefits.

islature decreed inflation-trailing raises of 2, 1, and 1 percent for the next three years — after four straight years of no raises — in a state that already ranked fourth from the bottom in the nation for

teacher pay. And even those paltry raises looked likely to be gobbled up by increased health insurance contributions.

And what a cast of villains they were up against. Republi-

can Gov. James C. Justice is a billionaire coal baron — and a tax delinquent whose coal companies owe millions in back taxes. The state's Republican-led Legislature had for years cut taxes on oil and gas companies while telling teachers to tighten their belts.

On the fifth day of the strike, unions and the governor announced a deal: a 5 percent raise and a task force to come up with ways to reduce health costs. But rank-and-file teachers weren't in a trusting mood, and resolved overwhelmingly to stay out on strike until the Legislature passed it into law. They were right to be leery: State Senate President Mitch Carmichael, his campaigns funded by gas companies, balked at the deal, and then tried to cut the raise to 4 percent. But teachers continued to stand firm, and stayed out on

strike. Carmichael buckled.

The Legislature, which had earlier said it couldn't afford more than 2 percent, now gave 5 percent, and not just to teachers, but to all state workers, at a cost of \$110 million a year. If that was intended to send a message that teachers would not get special treatment for striking, it flopped: It sent an unintended message that all public workers are in it together, because state workers knew they wouldn't have gotten the raise if the teachers hadn't struck.

In an era when the strike seemed all but dead in America, the West Virginia teachers strike is a reminder to working people from coast to coast just how much power they can wield by stopping work.

American workers were once

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**7th ANNUAL HEALING the HEALTHCARE BLUES**

INNER CITY

# Blues Festival

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- I&I Band Reunion w/Newel Briggs & OB Addy
- Ken DeRouchie Band
- King Louis Pain Quartet & LaRhonda Steele
- Kings of the Blues Guitar Tribute with Peter Dammann, Michael Osborn & Kenny Blue Ray
- Mad as Hell Doctors, Nurses & Interns
- Michael Crenshaw
- Bloco Alegria ~ drum & dance procession
- Shoehorn Sax-Tap man
- Steve Cheseborough
- Terry Robb
- Tevis Hodge Jr. & Bill Rhoades

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## QUESTION: WHAT DID YOU THINK OF THE WEST VIRGINIA TEACHERS STRIKE?



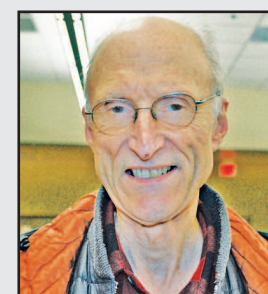
**"T**hey really stood up, all of them, whether they were Republicans or Democrats. School teachers and their families stuck together and made up their mind that no matter

how long it would take, they were going to stay out on strike. I hope it sends a message nationwide."

— Ed Barnes, retired IBEW Local 48 business manager (and native West Virginian)

**"W**est Virginia shows how, even without collective bargaining rights and in the face of opposition from union leadership, rank-and-file mobilization can win huge victories."

— Jamie Partridge, retired member, Letter Carriers Branch 82



**"I**t's time for people to stand up and take action. That might be the recipe across the country."

— Will Lukens, Machinists District Lodge W24 organizer