

Mutiny in the Mountains

West Virginia Public Workers 1969–2019

Gordon Simmons

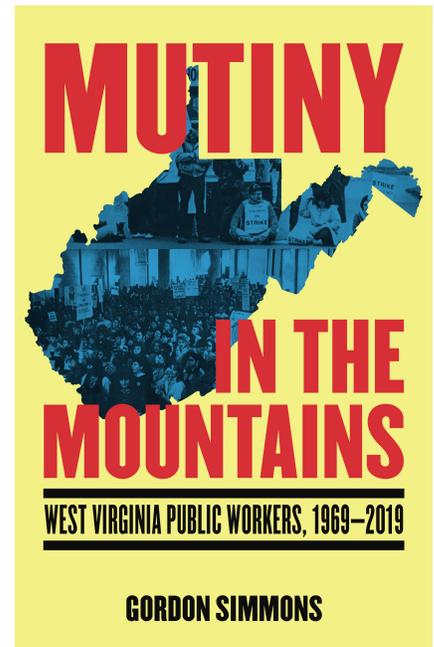
Mutiny in the Mountains uses labor history to show the way forward for millions of workers struggling in an age of uncertainty.

In 1969, thousands of West Virginia state highway workers went on strike in fear that they faced impending loss of their jobs as they were excluded from civil service protection. Although the walkout coincided with one of the most severe winters to affect road conditions, the newly elected governor fired the strikers. The 1969 State Road Strike inaugurated a half decade of public sector organizing and protest that culminated in the historic public-school strikes of 2018–19 that shut down all schools across the Mountain State and inspired a wave of public education strikes in Arizona, Oklahoma, Kentucky, and beyond.

Beginning with the nation's first general strike in 1877, that started with railroad workers in Martinsburg, West Virginia, and including the early coal strikes in 1912–13 and an armed insurrection in 1921, most treatments of the state's labor history have focused on the private sector. This is the first comprehensive history of the struggles waged by state and local government workers in West Virginia. The involvement of numerous unions and interventions of the state legislative and executive branches is traced in order to provide context for those struggles. Relying on journalistic sources, legislative enactments, court decisions, and participant interviews, *Mutiny in the Mountains* accounts the fifty-year struggle of West Virginia's public sector workers to assert power without the benefit of significant collective bargaining rights or political leverage.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gordon Simmons is a retired union organizer and is president of the West Virginia Labor History Association. He is now employed as a public defense investigator and an adjunct professor at Marshall University. He lives in Huntington, West Virginia.



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