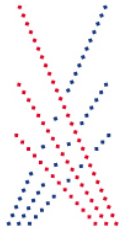

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Late Nineteenth Century Strikes and the Origins of the Law-and-Order Leagues in the United States

By Chad Pearson

Anti-union ideas and actions developed at roughly the same time that unions themselves emerged. Yet, anti-union organizers and activists have expressed anti-unionism in different ways. We can see this by examining the late nineteenth century, when labor's opponents, led primarily by employers representing various-types and sizes of industries, became national, influential, and largely effective. Basic organizational questions confronted the architects and beneficiaries of anti-union associations: What types of individuals were eligible to join? How should members relate to non-employers, including clergymen, lawyers, journalists and politicians? What should they call their organizations? How should they define the so-called "labor problem?" How should they confront this problem? How should they use public relations?

Seeking ways to solve to the so-called labor problem, which commentators defined by outbreaks of boycotts, picketing, strikes, and demands for union recognition, concerned many members of the middle and upper classes in the years after the American Civil War.[1] This problem was especially pressing during work-stoppages, and US authorities often resorted to repressive actions. Throughout the nineteenth century, private sector organizations such as the Pinkerton detective agency and public forces, including national guardsmen and federal troops, helped to quash major industrial disturbances. This was true during intense coalmine, factory,

[1] For a sampling of important sources, see David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Shelton Stromquist, *A Generation of Boomers: The Pattern of Railroad Conflict in Nineteenth Century America* (Urban: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Walter Licht, *Industrializing America: The Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 166-196; John P. Enyeart, *The Quest for 'Just and Pure Law': Rocky Mountain Workers and American Democracy, 1870-1924* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Bruce E. Kaufman, *Managing the Human Factor: The Early Years of Human Resource Management in American Industry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

railroad, and streetcar strikes. Employers typically enjoyed a favorable legal environment: judges often granted injunctions, and local police departments almost always acted in management's interests during industrial disputes.[2]

Despite the presence of an overwhelmingly advantageous legal landscape, some employers and elites sought to fight laborers directly by organizing with one another and arming themselves during industrial disputes. Indeed, the US has a long history of vigilantism, which has found sharpest expression in the West and South, where groups such as the Montana Vigilantes, the Wyoming Stock Growers Association, and the Ku Klux Klan regularly harassed, beat, and sometimes killed members of the so-called "dangerous classes." Some vigilante organizations were explicitly anti-labor. This was clear in the mid-1880s when numerous "law and order" leagues, the subject of this essay, emerged. The Law and Order Leagues, which first formed in Sedalia, Missouri in 1886 before spreading to other parts of the nation, consisted of the most privileged members of society and presented themselves as chiefly concerned with protecting private property and themselves from the onslaught of labor unrest. This paper explores the origins and characteristics of the Law and Order League movement. By shedding light on this movement, this paper asks us to consider the enduring importance of elite forms of thuggery during periods of labor unrest.

J. West Goodwin

Few labor opponents did more to establish and shape the Law-and-Order Leagues than J. West Goodwin. Born in Watertown, New York in 1836, the Union veteran and newspaper editor and owner helped build this movement while living in the modest-sized Missouri city, Sedalia. As a print shop owner and life-long networker, Goodwin had the advantage of helping to shape

[2] Sidney L. Harring, *Policing a Class Society: The Experience of American Cities, 1865-1915* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983); and Sam Mitrani, *The Rise of the Chicago Police Department: Class and Conflict, 1850-1894* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

the opinions of numerous people, consistently professing a desire to protect the interests of law-abiding Americans against what he considered the dangers of unchecked union power and what he called in 1905 "the mediocre majority, which is clamorous for the closed shop and the eight-hour workday."[3]

Goodwin is a worthy subject of study for many reasons. The owner and editor of the *Sedalia Bazoo*, a newspaper that he launched in 1869, was an enthusiastic champion of economic growth in Sedalia.[4] He passionately defended the interests of business owners, and, when necessary, the right to employ violence against members of the working-classes responsible for threatening those interests. In 1870, he was one of the most outspoken voices calling for the development of a Board of Trade, which Sedalia's businessmen established two years later with the goal of advancing "the commercial, manufacturing and general interests" of the city.[5] In that year, the growing city had a population of roughly 4,500, a respectable number of residents but far smaller and less economically dynamic than nearby Kansas City. The Board of Trade coordinated with investors both in and outside of Sedalia, and job-seekers flooded into the city from rural parts of the state. One of the most important developments overseen by the region's business community was the establishment of the manufacturing shops of the Missouri Pacific, which produced sleeping, passenger and freight cars.[6] Even before the formation of the Board of Trade, Goodwin showed an interest in helping the city grow and modernize. He was a fervent advocate of railroad interests, which found expression in several ways, including in the form of a

[3] J. West Goodwin, "Why Printers Want the Closed Shop: Why Employers and People Can't Have It," *American Industries* 3 (September 15, 1905), 5.
[4] William B. Claycomb, *Pettis County Missouri: A Pictorial History* (The Donning Company Publishers, 1998), 28.
[5] "Constitution and Bylaws," February 20, 1873, Sedalia, MO Board of Trade Proceedings, 1872-88, Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri. On Sedalia's Missouri Pacific shops, see Michael Cassity, *Defending a Way of Life: An American Community in the Nineteenth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 62.
[6] The city had given the Pacific Railroad Company roughly twenty acres of land and $40,000 in bonds to run operations in Sedalia. *The History of Pettis County*, Missouri, (NP: 1882), 374.

236-page guide he produced in 1867 about the economic importance of railroads in Kansas and Missouri.[7]

As an owner of a printing business, Goodwin was in a good position to help promote businesses in Sedalia and beyond. In 1879, he printed the entire proceedings of the Missouri Bankers' Associations annual meeting for free.[8] It is likely that Goodwin offered this free service to generate publicity for himself and his paper, recognizing possible sources of advertisement revenue for his business. Banks, like factories, emerged in Sedalia following the development and expansion of the railroad system.

While Goodwin appreciated how railroads contributed to Sedalia's economic growth and modernization, he expressed concerns that this same mode of transportation brought an assortment of drifters, including former slaves, into the community. Footloose men of all races, he complained in 1879, led to a rise in crime and punishment, which typically meant lengthy stays in incarceration facilities. This was, Goodwin maintained, an excessive burden on taxpayers: "The expense of maintaining these criminals in our county jails comes directly from the pockets of our people—every dollar of it. For it must be remembered that the county jail never produces a dollar in any shape, manner or form. On the contrary, the grounds, the building, the salaries of the officers, the food, clothing, and medicine of these criminals must be paid for, and paid by honest people—not criminals." Goodwin's solution, adopted from the most common form of punishment on slave plantations, seemed rather draconian: "society must be protected, and crime must be punished. The *Bazoo* unhesitatingly advocates THE WHIPPING POST!"[9]

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[7] J. West Goodwin, *Pacific Railway Business Guide and Gazetteer of Missouri and Kansas* (Saint Louis, NP, 1867).
[8] *Proceedings of the Convention of the Missouri Bankers Association Held at Sweet Springs, Mo., July 9th, 10th, and 11th, 1879* (Sedalia: J. West Goodwin, Steam Printer, 1879).
[9] "The Lash," *The Sedalia Weekly Bazoo*, January 7, 1879, 4.

This advocacy suggests that Goodwin, a ceaseless booster of capitalist development in Sedalia, found inspiration from one of the brutalist features of the antebellum South. At first glance, one might think that it is odd that a former Union soldier had made such an ardent case for the re-introduction of this vicious form of punishment, but Goodwin held positive views about the subject of slave management, believing that it had once helped to properly discipline a workforce--one that, in his view, had become far too disobedient in the post-Civil War years.[10] As he put it, "Liberated from the restraints which held them in wholesome subjection and which made them producers instead of consumers, a very large proportion of them became consumers instead of producers, and threw an additional burden upon society."[11] The whipping post, a rather primitive type of discipline, he insisted, helped those concerned about both the immorality of criminal activities and what he considered the unfair use of taxes to house the incarcerated. The whipping post had an additional advantage: it was a public form of punishment.

This pitiless method of punishment, he reasoned, would likely deter the so-called "dangerous classes" from visiting Sedalia. Yet his position on this matter was out of sync with the views of many others; many mid and late nineteenth century reformers believed that any form of corporal punishment threatened the norms of a moral and enlightened society.[12] Yet Goodwin clearly did not share the same perspective, believing that direct violence against unlawful individuals was necessary to lessen the financial burden on taxpayers while promoting

[10] Goodwin's advocacy of using slave management methods to supervisory activities in the post-slave era illustrates the importance of connecting these two periods, a point that historian Caitlin Rosenthal explains has been largely overlooked by scholars. See Caitlin Rosenthal, *Accounting for Slavery: Masters and Management* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 4.

[11] "The Lash," *The Sedalia Weekly Bazoo*, January 7, 1879, 4. Goodwin's views on this form of punishment appear consistent with the outlook of southern members of the ruling class. As Richard White put it, "The South regarded the lash—the great symbol of coerced labor—and even more extreme violence as the necessary tools of order and prosperity. Without coercion, that would be only poverty and chaos." See Richard White, *The Republic for Which it Stands: The United States during Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865-1896* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 76.

[12] Myra C. Glenn, *Campaigns Against Corporal Punishment: Prisoners, Sailors, Women, and Children in Antebellum America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984).

law-and-order in Sedalia. In short, Goodwin believed that economic development and old-fashioned forms of physical discipline were perfectly compatible.

The Labor Question and the Rise of the Law-and-Order Leagues

Questions related to law-and-order were very much on Goodwin's mind during a series of labor struggles in the mid-1880s. In this period, two massive Knights of Labor-staged strikes broke out, temporarily crippling Jay Gould's extensive railroad operations. The first one, in March 1885, started with roughly four hundred workers from Sedalia's railroad shops and spread to roughly forty-five hundred railroaders in Arkansas, Kansas, Texas and Missouri; it was sparked by a wage cut and, according to most accounts, was a relatively peaceful affair.[13] This protest, which enjoyed a considerable amount of public support, led to victory and a huge increase in the number of KOL members.[14]

Of course, sizable members of the business community, both those connected to the Guild system and others, including merchants and manufacturers, frustrated that they were unable to deliver or receive goods, opposed this disruptive job action. Unsurprisingly, Goodwin was one of the most critical voices, complaining that strikers were responsible for creating a series of economic "hardships" throughout the Southwest.[15] Locally, he and his colleagues were prepared for labor-instigated violence. In Sedalia, they received help from 30 Pinkertons, the private security company that methodically monitored the streets to protect property and threatened to suppress any acts of working-class militancy.[16] Shortly after the KOL's victory, members of the business community nationally expressed frustration at the growth, confidence,

[13] Theresa A. Case, *The Great Southwest Railroad Strike and Free Labor* (College Station: Texas A and M University Press, 2010), 6, 45-46, and 108-126; and Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the making of Modern America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011), 292.
[14] Melton Alonza McLaurin, *The Knights of Labor in the South* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978), 47.
[15] "Labor's Legions," *Sedalia Weekly Bazoo*, March 10, 1885, 1.
[16] "Standing Firm," *Memphis Daily Appeal*, March 11, 1885, 1.

and successes of the labor organization. According to a report in a Wisconsin newspaper, "Employers throughout the country are showing considerable feeling against the Knights of Labor organization."[17]

We should hardly be surprised by this response. Formed in 1869, the Knights of Labor was a highly inclusive, though largely de-centralized, organization with a mixed record on questions of race. It opened membership to all types of workers and small businessmen, but barred lawyers, corporate leaders and the Chinese.[18] Its members believed that producers needed to have more control over the labor process and bemoaned the growth of industrial monopolies, powerful economic forces that undermined their desire to promote the "nobility of toil."[19] Unlike most labor organizations, the KOL ran political candidates in local elections and held regular meetings in dozens of communities. It was a labor, fraternal and political organization that counted over 700,000 members following the successful 1885 strike.[20]

The second KOL-led strike was sparked after a manager of the Texas and Pacific, then under receivership of the federal government, fired C. A. Hall, a carpenter from the company's Marshall, Texas shop, in February 1886. In response, KOL leader and Sedalia-based Martin Irons—the person most responsible for directing the mighty District Assembly 101--demanded that the company re-hire the discharged man. The manager refused, which led to a massive strike on all the Gould lines, including roughly 700 in Sedalia.[21] But the reasons for the strike

[17] "General Labor Notes," *Wood Country Reporter*, April 9, 1885, 1.
[18] In the mid-1880s, its members were involved in violent anti-Chinese riots in parts of the West. Beth Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 118.
[19] Unnamed KOL member quoted in Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 9.
[20] Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 45.
[21] Maury Klein, *The Life and Legend of Jay Gould* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 358; Craig Phelan, *Grand Master Workman: Terence Powderly and the Knights of Labor* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2000), 171-225; and Theresa A. Case, *The Great Southwest Railroad Strike and Free Labor* (College Station: Texas A and M University Press, 2010), 168.

were deeper than this individual firing. The mobilization of railroad men from practically all occupations in multiple states--led by those annoyed that the Missouri Pacific had not raised pay for many workers as it had promised to after the 1885 strike, frustrated by an inadequate grievance system, angered by the use of convict labor, fearful that Gould wanted to destroy the union, and upset by the Marshall firing--illustrates that they took seriously the famous proclamation that "an injury to one is an injury to all." Fundamentally, this was a class struggle, one that had little to do with the anti-Chinese activism that characterized the KOL in the western states around the same time. During the dispute, a delegation of strike leaders attempted to meet with the company, but the St. Louis-based general manager of the Missouri Pacific Railway Company and former abolitionist, H. M. Hoxie, refused.[22]

Gould and his management team had no tolerance for instances of working-class solidarity and militancy. Managers fired strikers, and officials called the protestors insulting names. Speaking from his vacation in Charleston, South Carolina, Gould denounced the role of what he called a "mob." Goodwin, seeking to amplify Gould's message, published part of his speech in the *Bazoo*: "At present it is only a question of the dictation of a mob against law and order."[23] Such dramatic language should not surprise us. Gould sought to discredit the workers' grievances by belittling them. But the workers' conduct was far from peaceful, and Gould must have learned about many disturbing activities in numerous parts of the nation, including in Sedalia. During March and April of that year, angry Sedalians, reinforcing the militancy of

[22] Missouri Bureau of Labor Statistics, *The Official History of the Great Strike of 1886 on the Southwest Railway System* (Jefferson City: Tribune Printing Company, 1886), 49; Shelton Stromquist, *A Generation of Boomers: The Pattern of Railroad Labor Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 32; and Theresa A. Case, *The Great Southwest Railroad Strike and Free Labor* (College Station: Texas A and M University Press, 2010), 155-158.
[23] Quoted in "Jay Gould on the Situation," *The Sedalia Weekly Bazoo*, March 23, 1886, 1.

strikers throughout much of the southwest, organized meetings, pressured scabs to leave the community, sabotaged trains and tracks, killed engines, and even burned homes.[24]

The violence created widespread discomfort in middle-class circles, but most critics were more concerned with the strikes' economic impact than with its troubling immoral dimensions. Hoxie warned that "some 4,000,000" would be forced to do without "their customary supplies and the necessities of life."[25] The strike, in other words, was not simply a contest between labor and management; rather, the public, simply interested in going about their daily routines, were its primary victims. The disruptive stoppage meant that merchants and consumers were denied access to income and goods, a burdensome punishment that had far-reaching consequences. In the wake of these developments, the company had little difficulty in securing injunctions, and state troops worked to ensure that trains ran uninterruptedly. Missouri Governor and Confederate veteran, John Marmaduke, had proclaimed his opposition to the work action, warning "all persons, whether they be employes or not, against interposing any obstacle of any kind whatever in the way of said resumption." Marmaduke, who had resisted calls to send in troops a year earlier, was fully behind Gould, declaring that he would unleash "the whole power of the state" to break the strike.[26] In Sedalia, law enforcement agents arrested some of its leaders, including Hugh Fitzsimmons, Chairman of the city's labor executive committee.[27]

Goodwin, believing that police actions were not enough, reinforced the "power of the state" in at least two ways. First, he used his paper to promote Gould's interest. The *Bazoo*

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[24] Missouri Bureau of Labor Statistics, *The Official History of the Great Strike of 1886 on the Southwest Railway System* (Jefferson City: Tribune Printing Company, 1886), 54; and Michael Cassity, *Defending a Way of Life: An American Community in the Nineteenth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 144. Eugene Debs addressed Sedalia's strikers in April. See Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialis*t (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 69.

[25] Hoxie quoted in Missouri Bureau of Labor Statistics, *The Official History of the Great Strike of 1886 on the Southwest Railway System* (Jefferson City: Tribune Printing Company, 1886), 20.

[26] Quoted in "Routed," *The Sedalia Weekly Bazoo*, March 30, 1886, 3.

[27] Missouri Bureau of Labor Statistics, *The Official History of the Great Strike of 1886 on the Southwest Railway System* (Jefferson City: Tribune Printing Company, 1886), 35.

blamed strikers and their leaders, including Irons, with seriously damaging labor and community relations. In fact, Goodwin's attack on the strikers continued in the years after the confrontation. According to the late historian Ruth Allen, Gould paid Goodwin $1000 each year after the strike to write columns condemning its leadership. It is unlikely that this money influenced Goodwin's underlying view of labor-management matters, but it probably motivated him.[28]

Second, Goodwin and numerous privileged Sedalians, many of whom were active in the city's Board of Trade, helped railroad and their own business interests by organizing an explicitly anti-strike organization, the Law and Order League. Its membership, allegedly consisting of roughly 1000 of the city's businessmen and politicians, sought to complement public police forces, not compete with them, by confronting strikers directly.[29] Presumably tolerated by official authorities, including the police department, the Law and Order League's leadership consisted of Sedalia's most prominent men, including the future mayor and Confederate veteran, E. W. Stevens. Bankers, owners of real estate companies, merchants and manufacturers stood as a united class, which presumably intimidated strikers and their supporters. Goodwin used lively words to describe the protestors' reaction to the organization's formation several weeks after the strike's start: "Had a bomb-shell been thrown into the ranks of the strikers and the Knights of Labor and exploded, it could not have caused greater consternation."[30]

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[28] One wonders if the money from Gould motivated Goodwin to help build Sedalia's Law and Order League. If so, we must reject historian Richard White's statement that the businessmen involved in it "were not, in their minds, coming to the aid of corporations—although they pledged to protect railroad property—but instead trying to steer antimonopoly back onto a more conservative track. They tried to persuade workers to join them in attracting other railroads to Sedalia to break the Missouri Pacific's and Gould's hold on the town." Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the making of Modern America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011), 340.

[29] *St Louis Globe-Democrat*, May 1, 1886, 2, in folder 1, Box 2E303 Labor Movement in Texas Collection, The Eugene C. Barker Texas History Center, the University of Texas at Austin.

[30] "The Law and Order League," *The Sedalia Weekly Bazoo*, March 30, 1886, 3.

The members of the Law and Order League had ostensibly struck fear in labor union circles partially because they were strategic: they called clandestine meetings, secured arms, and confidently confronted members of the so-called "dangerous classes." But the members of this anti-strike force did not seek to punish all Sedalians. They instead drew distinctions between troublemakers and the community's hardworking railway employees, those temporarily misled by what an unidentified spokesperson called "the ill-advised utterances of a few individuals who seek to turn the necessities and desires of industrious men to their personal profits."[31] In a series of intimidating actions, these gun-carriers guarded trains and escorted scabs to worksites. They did not through bombs, but, according to one source, "bands of armed men" mobilized their forces "night and day."[32] These anti-strike activists, seeking to uphold court decisions, ultimately prevailed, leading to what the *Bazoo* called in April "the enforcement of law and order and sequent public prosperity."[33] Their dramatic actions showed much, including the realization that they did not need to rely on private anti-labor security companies like the Pinkertons for their labor problems. These empowered men, seeing little need to rely on outsourcing, had essentially cut out the middle man, recognizing the usefulness of their own direct actions.

Sedalia's dramatic law-and-order campaigns consisted of colorful individuals firmly embedded at the top of Sedalia's economic pyramid. Powerful bankers, traders and politicians joined Goodwin, determined to liberate businesses from organized labor's hold and re-establish economic prosperity. Consider the case of mayor Stevens. It is very possible that he was motivated in part by his previous experiences. After all, his early adult years were filled with

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[31] Unnamed Sedalian quoted in Missouri Bureau of Labor Statistics, *The Official History of the Great Strike of 1886 on the Southwest Railway System* (Jefferson City: Tribune Printing Company, 1886), 26.
[32] "Martin Irons," *Alexandria Gazette*, May 7, 1888, 1.
[33] "Lines from Lamonte," *The Sedalia Weekly Bazoo*, April 20, 1886, 8; and Michael J. Cassity, "Modernization and Social Crisis: The Knights of Labor and a Midwest Community, 1885-1886," *Journal of American History* 66 (June 1979), 58.

loss; his father owned a large farm that had employed 175 slaves. The younger Stevens had sought to defend this labor system as a Confederate leader, though he was obviously on the losing side and most of his soldiers died in a series of agonizing battles. Given these defeats, it is very likely that Stevens harbored a considerable amount of bitterness and even rage in the post-Civil War years, though he succeeded in his business pursuits during this time. He was, for instance, the state's most successful horse and mule trader, which involved shipping hundreds of animals to buyers throughout the Southwest. Like others, he was determined to protect his affluence, demonstrating a willingness to fight any threats to it, including the disruption of train service. As one of the heads of the Law and Order League, Stevens was obviously determined to avoid additional economic disruptions.[34]

Anti-labor individuals in other regions, observing the successful activities of Sedalia's Law and Order League, developed their own similar, elite-led combative organizations. *The Nation* magazine, a nationally-circulated source, reported on the importance of what it called "The Sedalia League" in late April. The magazine was impressed by the assistance that the league offered to Gould and Hoxie, reporting that the it "has sent word to Mr. Hoxie that he need give himself no further pains to insure the protection of life and property there—that they will be responsible for such protection hereafter." *The Nation* called on labor union critics and advocates of law-and-order in other cities to follow the "Sedalia example."[35]

Indeed, many emulated "the Sedalia example," which was, Goodwin later acknowledged, "the first of its kind."[36] It was not the last, and Goodwin traveled around the state, helping to form similar law-and-order leagues in medium and large-sized Missouri communities. De Soto,

[34] M. L. Van Nada ed., *The Book of Missourians: The Achievements and Personnel of Notable Living Men and Women of Missouri in the Opening Decade of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: T. J. Steel & Co.), 98.
[35] "The Week," *The Nation*, April 22, 1886, 329.
[36] J. West Goodwin, "Sedalia's Citizens' Alliance and Others," *American Industries* 1 (August 1, 1903), 13.

Wyandotte and St. Louis developed chapters and, as Goodwin explained years after their formation, "all of them had the same telling effect—putting down lawlessness and restoring peace to the communities and compelling the due observance of property rights."[37] This broad-based movement was not restricted to Missouri. Roughly 350 Kansas City, Kansas businessmen, so-called "responsible men," formed a branch in their city.[38] Further South, in Richmond, Virginia and Thibodaux, Louisiana, union-hating elites established their own Law and Order Leagues, which employed various forms of intimidation and violence to break multiracial mobilizations of working-class activists led by the KOL.[39]

Goodwin and his colleagues believed that cities with even a small-sized KOL presence needed the protection of businessmen-led Law and Order Leagues. For example, the KOL established a branch of fifty-five in the small Missouri town of Montrose in April 1886. In response to learning the news of the labor organization's presence, an unidentified Sedalia spokesperson suggested that "a law and order league is needed there and Sedalia will help organize it."[40] Presumably, some of Sedalia's wealthiest residents had shown an eagerness to meet privately with members of Montrose's modest-sized business community to discuss labor problems and possible coercive solutions. The message was clear enough: property owners from

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[37] J. West Goodwin, "Sedalia's Citizens' Alliance and Others," *American Industries* 1 (August 1, 1903), 13. Chicago's Commercial Club developed their own "Committee of Safety" in the period just before the Haymarket confrontation in May 1886. It is unclear if these privileged warriors were inspired by "the Sedalia example." Jacqueline Jones, *Goddess of Anarchy: The Life and Times of Lucy Parsons, American Radical* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 129. They were especially vocal in championing the killing of anarchist Albert Parsons. His widow recognized the class that was most fervent in its call for "law and order." In her words, "Albert R. Parsons surrendered his sword to the wild mob of millionaires when he walked into Court and asked for a fair trial by a jury of his peers. Yet the proud State of Illinois murdered him under the guise of 'Law and Order'." Lucy Parsons, *Life of Albert R. Parsons: With Brief History of the Labor Movement in America* (Chicago: Mrs. Lucy E. Parsons, Publisher and Proprietor, 1903; 1889), viii.

[38] Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 122.

[39] On Richmond, see Peter J. Rachleff, *Black Labor in the South: Richmond, Virginia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 187. In Thibodaux, sugar plantation owners violently fought a KOL-organized strike in 1887. They called their organization the Peace and Order Committee. See Rebecca Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba After Slavery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[40] "Henry Needs No Guardian," *The Clinton Advocate,* April 15, 1886, 1.

communities of all sizes needed their own armed counter-labor organization. And in 1886, this meant appealing to the politics of law-and-order while stigmatizing labor organizations such as the KOL. Goodwin and his comrades spread a simple message: elite organizing at the first sign of labor activism was the most effective way to protect business interests against hotheaded and lawless activists.

Elites in both small and large-sized cities internalized that message. Supposedly consisting of "20,000 gentlemen," the largest Law and Order League was based in St. Louis, a KOL stronghold and Hoxie's home base. The business community here, many of whom were active in the city's Mercantile Club, expressed annoyance at the presence of a blockade created by strikers and their supporters to prevent trains from leaving the city during the 1886 confrontation. M. J. Lippman, a banker and a spokesperson for the city's business community, announced their organization's willingness to remove the blockade "peaceably if possible, forcibly, if necessary."[41] This law and order league, proud of their accomplishments during this class struggle, continued to meet after the strike, but we know only few details about it. The work of an inquisitive St. Louis newspaper reporter, who witnessed one of their "secret" meetings, attempted to get more information but faced serious obstacles: "No amount of questioning solicited any information of what the League was doing or proposed to do or who composed it." "After the meeting adjourned," he reported, "the gentleman dispersed as secretly as they had met." But the investigator had nevertheless found useful information: "a glimpse through a part of the door gave a view of an assembly of the best-known men of St. Louis. Members of the Merchants' Exchange, proprietors of the largest business houses, leading professional men and well-known state and city officials composed the body of the meeting and

[41] Lippman quoted in Missouri Bureau of Labor Statistics, *The Official History of the Great Strike of 1886 on the Southwest Railway System* (Jefferson City: Tribune Printing Company, 1886), 56

were the leaders and directors of its deliberations."[42] Based on this anecdote, we can safely conclude that this was hardly a fringe movement led by a handful of labor-haters from a minority of worksites; instead, it was a sizable class-based campaign consisting of St. Louis's most powerful men from both the public and private sectors.

These elite communities of secret societies helped cement the class unity necessary to confront the labor problem. In Goodwin's view, the self-activity of the ruling-classes in St. Louis, Kanas City, Sedalia and elsewhere led to meaningful triumphs. Their willingness to organize demonstrates that they did not think it was enough to rely on private security forces or on state activities—injunctions, the mobilization of troops--to enforce their interests. They believed in punishing their opponents directly, which meant getting their own hands dirty in the process. They had proudly adopted the methods employed by vigilantes in the post-Civil War South and Mountain West. After all, these strategies worked, and Gould, Hoxie, Goodwin and the entire law-and-order fraternity emerged from the 1886 strike victorious. Gould remained obscenely wealthy, Hoxie retired to Iowa where he soon died, and the members of Sedalia's Law and Order League had put their guns down, sharing a collective optimism about the future. Meanwhile, strike leaders, including Martin Irons, endured years of financial instability generated by a multi-employer-enforced blacklist. But this was meant to be a time for community celebration, and Goodwin frequently reminded readers of what he considered the organization's indispensability, writing in in 1889 that it "was the most important factor in" ending the strike. Raw power exercised by these men destroyed this strike and ultimately led to

[42] "Law and Order League in St. Louis," *St. Louis Globe Democrat*, June 30, 1886, 2, folder 6, Box 2E303 Labor Movement in Texas Collection.

the KOL's loss of workplace and political influence in both Sedalia and throughout much of the nation.[43]

Movement spokespersons emphasized that the law-and-order movement was community-spirited and defensive, necessary in the face of excessive labor troubles. This was apparent at the organization's first multi-chapter meeting held in Sedalia in late June 1886. Delegates, led partially by St. Louis's John Lightner and Anthony Ittner, H. L. Powell of Belleville, Illinois, and Sedalia's Goodwin, Stevens, A. P. Morey, L. C. Glessner, B. G. Wilkerson, and Judge John A. Lacy, planned for a future of industrial peace, prosperity, and class-based companionship. Lacy, an 1871 University of Virginia law school graduate, set the mood, explaining that the creation of the leagues was "not a project that we willingly undertook. It was forced upon us. We had hoped that the good judgement and the enlightenment of the American people were sufficient to protect life and guard the sacred rights of property." But, Lacy lamented, "they were not." Ordinary Americans, were, in Lacy's judgement, unwilling or unable to confront labor-related militancy. Of course, breaking strikes was not a job that most ordinary Americans voluntarily performed. And it is noteworthy that Lacy said nothing about Sedalia's police force or private security services such as the Pinkertons. For this reason, the most privileged members of society—bankers, factory owners, merchants, lawyers, judges—had felt the need to play a central role in restoring industrial peace and ruling-class hegemony. Pleased with the outcome of the 1886 confrontation, Lacy reported that "It was a hard road to get out of the difficult place,

[43] *The Sedalia Weekly Bazoo*, October 1, 1889, 2. Historian Theresa Case places more emphasis on the role of state forces in ending the 1886 strike. See Theresa A. Case, *The Great Southwest Railroad Strike and Free Labor* (College Station: Texas A and M University Press, 2010), 152. Goodwin's interpretation for the 1886 strike's collapse contrasts sharply with Michael Cassity's analysis. While not ignoring the role of the Law and Order League or violent state forces, Cassity believes that this strike, unlike the 1885 one, went down in defeat for the workers because it lacked community support: "What was particularly significant about these strikes was that the first held the support of the workers and the community while the second collapsed because precisely that support was absent." Michael Cassity, *Defending a Way of Life: An American Community in the Nineteenth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), xii. It is worth asking a simple question: why did the ruling-class organize Law and Order leagues if the strength of anti-strike public opinion was enough to end the conflict?

but it was the only alternative." Lacy--who offered no details about the types of weapons or methods of attack he and his comrades used--was proud to welcome fellow warriors to Sedalia, "the birthplace of the order."[44] They had enjoyed success in both defeating the strike, strengthening bonds with one another, and showing off the successes of Sedalia's far-sighted business community.

The full meaning of the strikebreaking and union-busting campaigns led by Lacy, Goodwin and the others in the Law and Order movement was echoed by their opponents on the other side of the class struggle. According to a union source, "The Missouri Pacific shops at this point are full of scabs, and the so-called Law and Order League are boycotting the Knights on all occasions."[45] The takeaway was clear enough: what benefited the business community ultimately harmed organized labor.

But the dominant narrative-creators such as Goodwin had no interest in showcasing class divisions. Establishing favorable public relations remained a critical part of the campaign. This was especially true in Sedalia, where those behind the Law and Order's League's formation felt the need to perform damage control in a community where Martin Irons had called the disastrous 1886 strike. Sedalia's bankers, real estate company owners, and newspaper men like Goodwin continued to promote a pro-business image of the city, hoping to entice investors. This meant more wealth for the community. Outbreaks of labor unrest threatened an image of Sedalia—one of a properly ordered and peaceful community where its residents respected property rights and despised all forms of criminality--that its boosters sought to depict to outsiders. For this reason, Sedalia's business community believed it was important to remind observers of two critical

[44] Lacy quoted in "Law and Order League," *Iron County Register*, July 15, 1886, 4.
[45] Long Primer Jim, "A Letter Written by One Who Is Known in Sedalia," *The Sedalia Weekly Bazoo*, August 10, 1886, 1.

points. First, that members of Sedalia's business community were pioneers in this movement. Second, that the movement was resoundingly successful.

Yet while Sedalia had enjoyed industrial stability after the Law and Order league had helped to quash the 1886 strike, elites in other cities continued to confront labor problems. Indeed, the Law and Order league movement did not solve the labor problem altogether. Workers throughout the nation continued to harbor grievances and attempt to resolve them through collective actions such as strikes and boycotts. Many employers, some of whom may have previously turned to state forces for help, now organized on their own. Goodwin certainly continued to hold this view, and in 1890, during railroad strikes in Evansville and Terra Haute, Indiana, he recommended that that city's best citizens rise up and follow the "Sedalia example": "it is quite evident that the organization of a Law and Order League is needed at Evansville and Terre Haute to put the wheels of commerce in motion."[46] Goodwin had self-interested reasons for promoting the development of a strike-suppression forces: railroad strikes had the potential to disrupt business in communities throughout the nation, including those in Missouri. Sedalia was home to plenty of labor-fighters willing to share their experiences with their ruling-class colleagues outside of the state.

Law and Order League members participated in some of the most meaningful labor conflicts in the years after the great 1880s railroad strikes. This was the case during an extraordinary mine strike in northern Idaho in 1892, when Mine Owners' Association members, seeking to complement the work of state and federal troops as well as Pinkertons, formed their own Law and Order league. The northern Idaho organization was determined to, as a Seattle newspaper reported in mid-July, "keep out the lawless element of the mines."[47] These

[46] *The Sedalia Weekly Bazoo*, January 7, 1890, 4.
[47] "Arresting Them All," *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, July 17, 1892, 1.

businessman-led militias, organized and led by William H. Clagett and W. W. Woods, sought to establish branches in every community in the district. They eventually reached a membership of roughly 800, which consisted of the region's most privileged members, including mine owners, lawyers, merchants, and newspaper editors.[48] What started in the Midwest had spread to parts of the South and West, illustrating its geographical importance. Sedalia's business community must have looked on with pride.

Conclusion

This paper has underlined the ways US managers and their elite allies got organized and used coercion at a time when police forces, national guardsmen and private security services had already established themselves as reliable union-fighters. The Law and Order League movement begin in the Sedalia and spread throughout the South and West, providing relief and greater peace-of-mind to employers while intimidating organized labor. By focusing on this movement and the colorful individuals behind it, including J. West Goodwin, we must acknowledge the continuity of management-generated direct violence at a time when many employers had developed workplace-based incentive programs and welfare management schemes. Employers and their allies never abandoned a desire to inflict violence on their opponents. For this reason, we must recognize the enduring relationships between vigilantism and management.

[48] Robert Wayne Smith, *The Coeur d' Alene Mining War of 1892* (Oregon State University Press, 1961), 94.