

The Baughman Boycott and its Effect on the Richmond, Virginia Labour Movement, 1886-1888

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Labour historians have labelled the mid-1880s as "the great upheaval." The period was characterized by nationwide strikes, violence, widespread use of the boycott, and the emergence of labour class-consciousness. The impressive labour victories over the Union Pacific railroad in 1884 and Jay Gould's Southwestern railway system in 1885 encouraged aggressive unionism. As the chief beneficiary of this success, the Noble Order of the Knights of Labor attracted an additional 500,000 members between 1 July 1885 and 30 June 1886.¹ In Virginia, the increased membership of the various Knights of Labor District Assemblies was accompanied by the proliferation of trade unions. The number of Virginia trade unions tripled from 1884 to 1886.²

Struggling to improve their condition or simply retain their position, labourers employed strikes and boycotts as two basic means of confronting the disproportionate power of their employers. The concerted refusal to work for an employer, or to purchase that company's commodities were considered by labour leaders to be their most viable course to black-listing, wage reduction, and harsh management practices. During the 1880s, the boycott was especially employed by the Knights of Labor. Labour historian, Leo Wolman, noted that there were three distinct periods of boycotting under the Knights. From 1881 to 1885, boycotts were unorganized and local efforts. Boycotting came under centralized control from 1885-1892 and was marked by careful execution. After this period, the Knights declined in stature, centralization and organization broke down and the administration and execution of the boycott devolved solely upon the various local unions.³

Following the first "wave" of boycotts which swept the United States in 1885, an investigation of the use of the boycott was published

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¹ Norman J. WARE, *The Labor Movement in the United States: 1860-1895* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1929), pp. 66-67.

² George Talmadge STARNES and John E. HAMM, *Some phases of Labor Relations in Virginia* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co.,: 34), p. 88; See Appendix A, tables 1 and 2 adapted from tables XVIII, XIX, and X in STARNES, *Labor Relations*, pp. 85-95.

³ Leo WOLMAN, *The Boycott in American Trade Unions* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1916), pp. 25-28.

in *Bradstreet's* in which it was stated: "It is noticeable that the typographical unions have resorted to the use of the boycott in excess of all others."⁴ Faced with the threat of the widespread use of non-union labour in the city of Richmond, Virginia, The Richmond Typographical Union supported by the District Assemblies of the Knights of Labor resorted to the boycott as a means of preserving their position in the local printing trade. The boycott was centrally controlled and carefully executed from its inception in February of 1886. As a test of strength and principle, the boycott became a *cause célèbre* for the labour movement in Richmond.

Controversial issues arising from the National Convention of the Knights of Labor held in Richmond created further tensions. In 1887, the *New York Times* was to report that Richmond was "the very hotbed of 'organized labor' all through last year," and that the National Convention "did a good deal to make it hotter."⁵

Cooperating closely with the Knights, the Richmond Typographical Union, No. 90, was the strongest local in the city. By early 1886, every city printing office had been unionized except that of Baughman Brothers. The union appointed three of its members, William F. Crump, Joseph M. Shelton, and G. Waddy Wilde, to meet with the owners. Heading the committee, William Crump wrote to Baughman Brothers on 11 January requesting that his committee be given the opportunity to discuss with the owners the possibility of unionizing their shop.⁶ E.A. Baughman replied on the following day that Crump was to "reduce to writing anything [he] may wish to say."⁷

Within the next six days, eight letters were to pass between the two parties. The committee claimed that the Baughmans' printing office was able to underbid the other printing concerns in the city by employing non-union workers, and reasoned that therefore the employment of non-union labour was both an injustice to the Typographical Union and to the other printers of Richmond.⁸ The Baughmans' final rejection of the union demands fell on the 22nd of January, one week prior to the monthly union meeting. On behalf of the committee, Chairman Crump concluded the "pleasant correspondence" stressing the committee's desire not to be placed in a "false position before the public."⁹

Union members walked out on the Baughman firm on 1 February. Four days later, following a discussion of the committee report at its monthly meeting, the Typographical Union voted to boycott Baughman

⁴ *Bradstreet's*, 1885, Vol. 12, pp. 394-97.

⁵ *New York Times*, 14 January 1887, p. 3 col. 3.

⁶ William F. CRUMP, Correspondence Committee Chairman, to Baughman Brothers, Richmond, 11 January 1886, Drawer 120, Records of the Hustings Court of Richmond, Circuit Court of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

⁷ Baughman Brothers to W.F. Crump, 12 January 1886, Drawer 120.

⁸ Crump to Baughman Brothers, 13, 14 January 1886, Drawer 120.

⁹ Crump to Baughman Brothers, 23 January 1886, Drawer 120.

Brothers products and organize a secondary boycott of anyone dealing with the "rat" printing office.¹⁰ Crump, Shelton, and Wilde were then appointed to a Boycott Committee which would coordinate the boycott. The Executive Council of the Richmond Knights of Labor District Assembly, No. 84 immediately endorsed the boycott and offered the services of its weekly newspaper, the *Labor Herald*. On 4 February 1886, the Boycott Committee circulated notices asking customers of the Baughman Brothers printers to withdraw their patronage. These customers were also notified that on 13 February the *Labor Herald* would publish a list of those who did not comply "for the guidance of our friends."¹¹

Boycotts were not new to Richmond. In 1880, the workers of the Liebermuth and Millhiser Cigar Co. instituted a boycott against their employer.¹² This marked the first application of a boycott in the city. In 1885, Richmond workers next tried the boycott against the huge Haxall-Crenshaw flour mills, the largest purchaser of convict-made barrels in the city. Leaving no room for compromise, Knights of Labor District Assembly 84 demanded that the company use barrels made by free labour.¹³ The boycott remained in force for nine months in consequence of the mills' refusal to yield on this point. Testifying as to the effectiveness of the boycott, at one point the mills' manager published the following notice in the *Richmond Dispatch*:

WANTED, President and Secretary of the Knights of Labor, to STOP BOYCOTTING ME, or they must take the consequences. I mean business. No fooling.¹⁴

In December of 1885, the Haxall-Crenshaw mills finally yielded to the Knights of Labor demands and furthermore agreed: "We will not discriminate against the Knights of Labor, as such, in selecting our employees."¹⁵ The Knights had presented Richmond labor with a grand victory through boycotting, or as Richmond Knights leader William H. Mullen wrote "by quickly withdrawing our patronage."¹⁶

Before the victory over the Haxall-Crenshaw mills, a correspondent to *John Swinton's Paper* wrote that, "trade unions are not in a very flourishing condition in the city... the Typographical Union has allowed the job office of Baughman Bros. and the *Richmond Whig* to be run by rats without protest."¹⁷ District Workman Mullen had previously written in 1884 that there were several "rat" printing establishments in Richmond that District Assembly 84 intended to "put down" and that he was "making preparations to open the battle..."¹⁸ Having been distracted by the flour

¹⁰ Minutes of local meeting, 5 February 1886, Minute Book, Typographical Union, No. 90, Richmond, Virginia.

¹¹ Copy of printed circular, Drawer 120.

¹² *Cigar Maker's Official Journal*, 23 March 1880.

¹³ *John Swinton's Paper*, 12 April 1885, p. 2.

¹⁴ *Richmond Dispatch*, 11 October 1885, p. 4.

¹⁵ *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, 22 December 1885, p. 1.

¹⁶ *Richmond Labor Herald*, 17 October 1885, Mullen editorial, p. 2.

¹⁷ *John Swinton's Paper*, 4 October 1885, p. 2.

¹⁸ *Journal of United Labor*, 25 November 1884, pp. 848-9.

mill boycott, Mullen and the Knights now encouraged Typographical Union, No. 90 into instituting a boycott against the Baughman Brothers.¹⁹ It was at this point that the Typographical Union decided to walk out on the Baughman firm.

Mullen announced in the *Dispatch* that Knights of Labor patronage would be withdrawn at the store and the ballot box. In response to hostile reaction from the Chamber of Commerce, Mullen stated the tenets of his boycott policy. "Beyond the power of our patronage we never go, and we are of the opinion that if the Bill of Rights guarantees anything at all, it guarantees the right to spend our money where we please."²⁰ The business community had generally gone to great length to preserve peaceful relations with the Knights. However, they now seized upon this issue as a means to stop the Richmond labour movement in its tracks. Led by William Royall, Richmond business interests began a protracted campaign against both the Knights and Typographical Union, No. 90.

A "Businessmen's Committee" was formed in order to deal with the "Boycott Business" following a hastily organized meeting of Richmond merchants.²¹ The committee subsequently called all parties concerned to take part in a mass meeting at Saenger Hall in Richmond. The resultant "Saenger Hall Resolution" was essentially a condemnation of boycotting.²² Later that month, Royall and a group of businessmen met with Judge Christian of the Hustings Court. As a result of the meeting, Judge Christian declared that boycotts were illegal and that he encouraged the prosecution of labour organizations involved.²³ The Knights and the Typographical Union were temporarily taken aback by this concerted opposition and cautiously postponed the publication of the boycott list and suspended the use of the boycott circulars. The *Labor Herald* charged that the merchants were attempting to "frighten into disruption those composing our organization by quoting obsolete English laws."²⁴

On 5 March, the Typographical Union resumed their secondary boycott.²⁵ The Richmond Cigar Maker's Union, No. 133 pledged their support. The Boycott Committee ran notices in the *Richmond Dispatch* informing these customers that the boycott would be exercised "with all possible vigor" and that their names would be printed in the next issue of the *Labor Herald*.²⁶ Meanwhile, union members secretly followed the Baughman delivery wagon in order to determine which merchants continued to patronize the firm. The Baughmans hired a "detective"

¹⁹ Richmond International Typographical Union No. 90, Minutes of Local Meeting; Meeting of 5 February 1886 from Minute Book, Typographical Union No. 90, Richmond, Virginia.

²⁰ *Richmond Dispatch*, 17 February 1886, p. 1.

²¹ *Richmond Dispatch*, 12 February 1886, p. 1.

²² *Richmond Dispatch*, 2 February 1886, p. 1.

²³ *Richmond Dispatch*, 23 February 1886, p. 1.

²⁴ *Labor Herald*, 12 March 1886, p. 2.

²⁵ Minutes of 5 March 1886, Meeting of Typographical Union No. 90.

²⁶ *Richmond Dispatch*, 10, 11, 12 March 1886, p. 2.

who also followed the wagon along its delivery route. At one point, the driver, J.H. Schonberger, met with William Crump and proceeded to the basement of the *State* newspaper office where he revealed the names and addresses of Baughman customers. The detective immediately reported the incident. Later that afternoon upon the driver's return to the shop, he was compelled under threat of legal action to sign a written confession admitting to the deed and was summarily discharged.²⁷

Initially, the published "Black List" was quite small. The initial list included only four names. However, fifty more names were added by the end of June.²⁸ The numbers soon grew to a point where the *New York Times* reported that the boycott had "crippled" industry in Richmond and "told (sic) seriously on the year's trade."²⁹ One of the immediate results of the boycott and union walkout was that it caused Baughman Brothers to default on its government contract to print the documents and proceedings of the Virginia House and Senate. In consequence of the walkout, the printing was denuded of its journeyman printers. Thus the firm was denied the capability to conduct any business other than job printing.³⁰

Meanwhile, the Knights were scoring victory after victory over labour issues. On 10 March, labour pressure instructed the state legislature to pass a convict labour bill which restricted the employment of prisoners to public works and railroads.³¹ Richmond cigar manufacturer Charles Millhiser, a long-standing opponent of the Cigar Makers' Union, announced a week later that he would employ "only Union Cigar Makers and Knights of Labor", in his factory. Furthermore, his company would rename his two brands of cigars which would now be called "Mullen's Pets," and "Labor Herald."³²

In the municipal election held eighteen days after the much publicized Haymarket Square riot, Richmond elected an overwhelming majority of the "Reform Ticket" nominated by the Knights of Labor. Surprisingly enough, Boycott Committee Chairman William F. Crump was elected to the post of City Alderman. Joseph M. Shelton, also of the Boycott Committee was elected City Clerk. Twenty-one "Reformers," five Democrats, and four men who appeared on both tickets were elected to the City Council. Seven "Reformers," seven Democrats, and two Republicans along with two others listed on both Reform and Democratic tickets were elected to the Board of Aldermen. Thirteen out of eighteen justices of the peace elected were "Reformers."³³

²⁷ *Labor Herald*, 20 March 1886, p. 2; Appendix B, #3 for a copy and typescript of the Schonberger confession, note that the confession was written by the Notary Public and simply signed by Schonberger.

²⁸ *Labor Herald*, 12 March, 17 July 1886.

²⁹ *New York Times*, 14 January 1887, p. 3.

³⁰ *Richmond Dispatch*, 23 February 1886, p. 2.

³¹ *Richmond Dispatch*, 11 March 1886, pp. 1-2.

³² *Richmond Dispatch*, 16 March 1886, p. 2.

³³ *Richmond Dispatch*, 28 May 1886, p. 1; and *Labor Herald*, 29 May 1886, p. 2.

At the same time, District Assembly 84 leader, William Mullen was appointed to the General Executive Board of the Knights of Labor at a special session of the General Assembly held in Cleveland. Mullen's regional duties would now include the entire south.³⁴

During the initial stages of the boycott, membership in Typographical Union No. 90 increased by 38 percent. Feeling extremely confident in their efforts, the Typographical Union turned its attention to printers in Alexandria, Lynchburg, and Petersburg, helping them to organize local unions.³⁵

Despite the unrelenting pressure from the boycott and the recently gained political strength of labour in Richmond, the Baughmans refused to succumb. On 17 July, the *Labor Herald* triumphantly announced: "The old 'rat' establishment is about to cave in. Let it fall with a crash that will be a warning to all enemies of labor in the future."³⁶ The announcement was premature. With the advice of William Royall, a customer of Baughman Brothers, who had been placed on the *Herald* "Black List," petitioned for an injunction to prevent that newspaper from printing the list. On 23 July, the day before the next issue of the *Labor Herald* was to appear, Judge Hugh L. Bond of the federal circuit court in Baltimore issued the injunction. The *Herald* promptly complied with the ruling. Nevertheless, the boycott remained in force.³⁷ Following the injunction, the official Boycott Committee of the Typographical Union resigned, and were replaced by a secret boycott committee, which continued the battle against Baughman Brothers.³⁸

The Baughmans then entered a civil suit in Richmond Circuit Court against the members of the Typographical Union on a plea of trespass claiming \$30,000 in damages.³⁹ The injunction coupled with the civil suit brought against the Typographical Union brought the Richmond labor offensive to a halt.

On 28 September, at the Hustings Court of Richmond, a grand jury brought two criminal indictments against the members of the Boycott Committee and the proprietors of the *Labor Herald* including editor William H. Mullen who was the Knights of Labor candidate for the upcoming Congressional election.⁴⁰ The first indictment charged that the defendants "unlawfully but not feloniously did injure and destroy personal property,"

³⁴ *Record of the Proceedings of the Special Session of the General Assembly of the Knights of Labor*, 25 May — 3 June 1886 (Cleveland: Knights of Labor, 1886).

³⁵ *Report of Proceedings of the 34th Annual Session of the International Typographical Union* (Pittsburgh: June 1886), pp. 142-3.

³⁶ *Labor Herald*, 17 July 1886, p. 1.

³⁷ The trial of Tracy R. Wyles vs. *Labor Herald* and Boycott Committee was set for 11 October 1886.

³⁸ Minute Books of Typographical Union No. 90, 6 August 1886.

³⁹ *Richmond Whig*, 15 September 1886, p. 4 (Citation of the case-Baughman Brothers vs. Askew, et al.).

⁴⁰ Hustings courts were municipal courts established in Virginia cities of over 5,000 inhabitants.

while the second indictment charged, in proper nineteenth-century Virginia legalese, that the entire memberships of both Richmond Typographical Union, No. 90 and Knights of Labor District Assembly, No. 84 "with force, and arms... did unlawfully and maliciously, wickedly, corruptly, knowingly, and intentionally combine, conspire, and confederate together to injure, ruin, break up, and destroy" the Baughmans' printing business.⁴¹ In his charge to the jury, Hustings Judge Thomas S. Atkins asserted that boycotting was an illegal conspiracy and that the defendants were to be found guilty if this conspiracy was proven to have "unjustly and wrongfully molest[ed] and injur[ed] good citizens of the community" as well as interfered with the conducting of business in Richmond.⁴²

The attorneys of the indicted men were C.V. Meredith, who had previously gained notoriety from the much publicized Cluverius murder trial, and John S. Wise. Later, John Wise was replaced by George D. Wise, the recently elected Democratic Congressman from the 3rd District who had defeated Mullen in the November election.

It is not surprising that Mullen was not at all pleased with the selection of Wise as his defence attorney. As a result, two attorneys were retained. Friction between Mullen and the Typographical Union, No. 90 had been increasing throughout the summer of 1886. In fact, two of the members of the Boycott Committee, Shelton and Wilde, bolted the Reform party and became avid Wise supporters. On 24 September, Shelton was elected chairman of the "Democratic Knights of Labor Committee."⁴³ To avoid a Republican victory, Mullen withdrew from the race three days prior to the election and bitterly threw his support to the Democrat, Wise.⁴⁴

On 12 November, the two attorneys entered a demurrer on behalf of the defendants in which it was argued that the indictment "charges no act that is a crime at common law or by statute." C.V. Meredith cited precedent to argue that the indictment "should show positively that the means intended to be used were unlawful," and that his clients intended to influence the patrons of Baughman Brothers "by lawful means only, such as competition."⁴⁵ On 7 February 1887, Judge Atkins overruled the demurrer with the reassertion that boycotting was indeed a crime under English common law and thus the defendants stood guilty as charged.⁴⁶ On that same day in Richmond Circuit Court, Judge B.R. Wellford, Jr. overruled a similar demurrer presented in the civil case of Baughman Brothers vs.

⁴¹ "Bearding the Boycotters," *Richmond Whig*, 29 September 1886, p. 4.

⁴² Thomas S. ATKINS, "The Criminality of Boycotting: Charge to the Grand Jury of the Hustings Court of Richmond, Va., 28 September 1886," *Virginia Law Journal*, X (December 1886): 707-8.

⁴³ *Richmond Dispatch*, 25 September 1886, p. 1.

⁴⁴ *Richmond Dispatch*, 2 November 1886, p. 3.

⁴⁵ *Richmond Dispatch*, 13 November 1886, p. 1; and *Richmond Whig*, 23 November 1886, p. 4.

⁴⁶ Thomas S. ATKINS, "The Law of Conspiracy: Boycotting-Opinion Delivered in the Hustings Court of Richmond, Va., 7 February 1887," *Virginia Law Journal*, XI (June 1887): 324-31.

Askew, *et al.*, which involved a suit for \$30,000 in damages.⁴⁷ At both trials, E. A. Baughman had testified that the boycott had caused his firm to lose the patronage of from 150 to 200 persons. He estimated that a loss of approximately \$10,000 in net profits and expenses were incurred during the duration of the boycott (ten months).⁴⁸

Throughout the various boycott trials, Richmond was the scene of continued labour activities. The Knights of Labor National Convention held in the city from 4-20 October 1886, displaced the attention the press had previously given to Baughman Boycott. The pleas of the Richmond Typographical Union for Master Workman Terence *vs.* Powderly and the Convention to discuss the use and legality of boycotting were lost amidst the controversy created by the "Ferrell incident," in which an uproar was created over the appearance at the local theatre of Frank Ferrell, a black man from New York delegation.⁴⁹ In defiance of local reaction, Ferrell was given the honour of introducing Powderly at the convention.⁵⁰

Adding to the numerous trials emanating from the boycott controversy was the Hustings Court trial of Commonwealth *vs.* Crump. Retaining the counsel of C. V. Meredith, William F. Crump chose to be tried separately from his brethren in the trial of Commonwealth *vs.* Shelton, *et al.* The primary evidence used in the trial was the material submitted to the court by the Baughmans, the most important of which were copies of the *Labor Herald*. Judge Atkins overruled the defence objection that the inflammatory language of the *Labor Herald* was not that of the defendant and therefore should not be used as evidence of the defendant's intent.⁵¹ Prior to the verdict of the jury, an agreement was made between Meredith and the Commonwealth's Attorney, William L. Royall. It was agreed that if the judge's instructions to the jury were decidedly against boycotting, the defence would allow the Commonwealth's Attorney to ask for a fine of \$5.00. This was done in order to allow the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals to make a final decision upon "the question of the right to boycott."⁵² The instructions given to the jury by Judge Atkins were as had been anticipated. The agreement between Meredith and Royall to use the issue as a test case was fulfilled and the case was subsequently appealed.

One year later in the case of Crump *vs.* Commonwealth the Supreme Court of Appeals unanimously affirmed the judgement of the lower court and Judge Atkins' instructions to the jury. To William Crump, the verdict

⁴⁷ B. R. WELLFORD, Jr., "The Legality of Boycotting: Opinion Delivered in the Circuit Court of Richmond, Va., 7 February 1887," *Virginia Law Journal*, XI (April 1887): 196-202.

⁴⁸ E. A. Baughman, Testimony for the Commonwealth, ms. in Drawer 120, Records of the Hustings Court of Richmond.

⁴⁹ Allen Wesley MOGER, "Industrial and Urban Progress in Virginia from 1880 to 1900," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 66 (1958), p. 324; see also *Richmond Dispatch*, 9 October 1886, p. 2.

⁵⁰ *Record of Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Knights of Labor, Richmond, Virginia, October 4-20, 1886* (Richmond: Knights of Labor, 1886).

⁵¹ Objections of the Defense, ms. in Drawer 120.

⁵² *Richmond Dispatch*, 14 May 1887, p. 1.

meant his conviction of a misdemeanor and a \$5.00 fine. To organized labour in Virginia, the judgement was a declaration that the right to boycott was "incomparable with the prosperity, peace, and civilization of the country."⁵³ This crucial ruling denied the Knights of Labor and existing Virginia trade unions the use of their most effective peaceful means of equalizing the power of the employer. The most dramatic victories for labour in Richmond can be traced to the successful implementation of non-violent boycotting which allayed public fears of radical labour violence as exhibited in other parts of the United States. This goes a long way to explain the pro-Richmond labour election results in the face of the Haymarket Square publicity.

The "Crump" ruling defining boycott as a criminal conspiracy was to remain the rule in Virginia, without statutory precedent or clarification, as late as 1916.⁵⁴ Thus, the Virginia labour movement joined the ranks of other movements which were denied the use of the boycott as a legal mechanism in their struggle against the disproportionate power of the employer. The ruling's immediate result was the inability of the Typographical Union to enforce a closed shop on Richmond printers. Typographical Union efforts in Petersburg, Lynchburg, and Alexandria virtually ceased, following the court's final decision. The failure of the Baughman boycott coupled with the resultant conflict between the Typographical Union officials and William Mullen sounded the death-knell for the Knights of Labor in Richmond.

⁵³ *Crump vs. Commonwealth* (24 May 1888), 84 Va., Hanbrough 9, p. 946.

⁵⁴ LAIDLER, *Boycotts and the Labor Struggle*, pp. 418-9.