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The Bases and Challenges of Employer Collective Action

Don't mourn, organize.
—Joe Hill, telegram to William “Big Bill” Haywood

The concluding dinner of the 1897 reunion of the commercial clubs of Boston, Chicago, St. Louis, and Cincinnati was a grand affair. Held at the palatial mansion of the oil tycoon Alexander MacDonald, the six-course dinner had begun with lucines orangées (hard clams) accompanied by Clos Blanc de Vougeot, proceeded through chapon toulousaine (capon, i.e., castrated rooster) paired with an 1864 Château Lescours, and concluded with sorbet Moscatel, Camembert cheese, and glasses of Veuve Cliquot Brut and liqueurs. The nearly 150 guests at the dinner included such well-known names as the railroad magnate Melville Ingalls; the president of the Pullman Palace Car Company, George M. Pullman; and the department store innovator Marshall Field. Not everyone was a businessman: there were also other men of rising importance, such as the lawyer Charles Nagel (later to become President William Taft’s secretary of commerce) and the head of the newly organized Associated Press, Melville E. Stone. The assembled guests had enjoyed two days of outings, luncheons, and entertainments ranging from viewing military parades to running humorous races (the potato race was won by St. Louis, while victory in the sack race went to Boston).¹

As speakers throughout the reunion made clear, however, the reunion had a larger purpose than to entertain. It was a manifestation of the conviction among the nation’s businessmen that their similarities surpassed their differences and that their guiding hand would keep the country on the right track. As Jerome Jones, the president of the Commercial Club of Boston, told the dinner guests, “We are all alike in seeking to solve, intelligently, the commercial problems of the day; and there is nothing in any of these that
should divide businessmen.” His sentiments were echoed by the next speaker, the
director of the Commercial Club of Chicago, John J. Glessner, who re-
mined the listeners that “the delightful social contact is but a means to an
end,” namely, “the cultivation of civic pride, the advancement of civic interest
and prosperity, not along narrow lines, but over a field wide as commerce
itself.” Men of commerce were particularly needed in such a task, Glessner
told his audience, because “commercial life tends to high morality, a keen
sense of honor, a detestation of fraud; and when associated in bodies like
this, it makes a potent force for truth and justice and right throughout the
world.”

As reunions like the one in Cincinnati indicated, by the turn of the twenti-
eth century, the salience of many nineteenth-century divisions (manufacturer
vs. merchant, North vs. South, East vs. West) was receding, and businessmen
were finding common ground socially and to some extent also politically.
Meanwhile, class divisions were gaining in significance: developments like the
growth of factory size and the rise of railroad suburbs produced a wider gulf
between employers and their workers. Yet such broad shifts in cultural and
economic patterns did not in and of themselves produce a commonality of
interest that was actionable. Even when businessmen agreed that as employers
they had shared interests, for example, that agreement did not always suf-
fice to sustain collective action over individual self-interest. Just as workers’
common interests as workers did not automatically translate into solidarity
or successful united action, employers, too, needed to both articulate their
common interests and to develop strategies to maintain collective action.

This chapter starts with an overview of how broad economic and social
developments in the late nineteenth century had created a firmer common
ground for employers to stand on. It then offers two case studies. The first
one, on St. Louis, draws on social network analysis to explore the local land-
scape of upper-middle-class society and to demonstrate the multiple con-
nections between businessmen. The second, on the printers’ strike of 1905–6,
examines a case where open-shop employers attempted to build a united
multiemployer front against a strong union and suggests that the failure of
that effort underlines the limits of employer solidarity.

What Employers Shared

Over the course of the late nineteenth century, many of the older divisions
between industrialists, financiers, and merchants lost force. Regional fault
lines remained but were less and less salient, markets stretched over ever
longer distances, economic interests became increasingly intertwined, and
challenges from below alerted industrial and financial elites to what they shared rather than what set them apart. Interest conflicts hardly disappeared, but many strands connected businessmen to each other in ways that facilitated joint action and a common purpose—especially when it came to labor.

Most obviously, the end of Reconstruction had set white businessmen from different sides of the Mason-Dixon Line well on the way to reconciliation. Indeed, businessmen had lobbied for achieving the Compromise of 1877, which ended Reconstruction, and implicitly accepted the displacement of elected Reconstruction governments that white southern “redeemers” had achieved through violence. Sacrificing the basic rights of African American citizens and sidestepping the centrality of slavery and emancipation to the war, these businessmen promoted soothing narratives of the honorable pursuit of reconciliation, the romanticism of the Old South, and the valor of soldiers on both sides (with African American veterans largely written out of the story). Soon, southern boosters envisioning a New South, economically thriving and industrially modernized, could remain unrepentant and still receive a favorable reception from their northern brethren. For instance, an 1886 speech at the New England Society of New York by the Atlanta businessman Henry W. Grady was received with enthusiastic cheers, despite Grady’s insistence that “the South has nothing for which to apologize.”

Other regional lines (West and East, but also to some extent city and country) that had divided businessmen were also fading. The incredible postbellum growth of railroads meant faster and easier transportation of goods and people, expanding markets, and improving interregional connections. What the railroad was accomplishing for physical goods, the telegraph and faster mail service were doing for information about goods’ availability and prices. Railroads had another effect as well: as an investment opportunity, they fused together the capital and the interests of merchants, bankers, and manufacturers. Meanwhile, manufacturing grew rapidly and boosted the economic and social position of industrialists, partly fueled by the enormous profits of the Civil War years, which had made manufacturers less dependent on merchant capital. Perhaps most significantly, the turn-of-the-century merger movement intertwined financiers and manufacturers as never before: in just a few years, consolidations swallowed over eighteen hundred firms. The growth in size of industrial corporations made them a more attractive investment, while profits from manufacturing involved industrialists in increasingly diversified portfolios. Economic convergence promoted social convergence. By the 1880s manufacturers were increasingly accepted in institutions previously reserved for merchants, such as the New York Chamber of Commerce and prestigious social clubs. At the same time, the sheer number of commercial
associations—trade associations, boards of trade, chambers of commerce—mushroomed in the 1880s and 1890s.\(^7\)

As the worlds of different kinds of businessmen drew closer together, their social distance from their employees grew. In the antebellum working world, while conflict was certainly not absent, ideas about a republican community of producers and faith in social mobility had encouraged the containment of conflict in expected and even ritualized channels of at least some give-and-take. In specific trades, especially engineering, identities based on skill and craftsmanship had given proprietors and craftsmen common ground in, for example, mechanics’ institutes. By contrast, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, these conflict-mitigating identities fractured. One can read that fracturing directly in, for example, a set of obituaries commissioned by Cincinnati’s chamber of commerce. As Jeffrey Haydu demonstrates, whereas those obituaries in the 1870s often praised their subjects’ civic uprightness as a “mechanic and manufacturer,” by the 1890s they described the deceased’s civic contributions as related to his role as a businessman, “a category that excluded even skilled manual labor while encompassing proprietors and managers, employers from different industries, and capitalists from both manufacturing and commerce.”\(^8\) One can also see it in organizational shifts: mechanics’ institutes declined, while the new-style “engineer-entrepreneurs,” as David Montgomery has termed them, formed a clique knit together locally by polytechnic institutes and nationally by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers.\(^9\) Instead of craft traditions, these proprietors extolled progress and efficiency; more and more explicitly, they came to see their workers’ customary rules about the content of a “fair day’s work” as impeding both their business profits and the nation’s progress.\(^10\)

Residential patterns mirrored the workplace: there, too, the distance between employer and worker lengthened as the middle and upper classes drew away from city centers to the proverbial leafy suburbs. The decades surrounding the Civil War witnessed the rise of a number of residential developments designed to highlight their contrast to the city, with parklike, quiet surroundings from which work was conspicuously absent. At first, only the upper crust could achieve such physical and experiential separation from the city while maintaining access to it for business purposes; these early developments included such iconic neighborhoods as Llewellyn Park in New Jersey (about fifteen miles from Manhattan), Riverside outside Chicago, and Chestnut Hill outside Boston. With the rise of the railroad suburb in the latter third of the century, however, the suburban haven became accessible to the next level of commuter, the reasonably affluent businessman and his family. Demographics between railroad suburbs varied, but generally some 30–50
percent of households fit this characterization. Another third or so of the households in these suburbs consisted of the people required to provide the services required by these families aspiring to healthy country living—the gardeners, the maids, the cooks.\textsuperscript{11} Work and workers could not, then, be entirely banished from upper-middle-class lives. Still, a new physical distance had grown between those who produced manufactured goods and those who designed them or planned their marketing or financing.

Further widening the gap between manufacturers and workers was the fact that the working classes were becoming quite literally more foreign. The growth in immigration and the shift in sources of immigration to southern and eastern Europe brought in great numbers of new arrivals from Italy, Poland, and Bohemia; soon, major cities seemed to teem with a medley of tongues, cultures, and religions. Many of these immigrants were Catholic or Jewish, and native-born Americans viewed them with at least as much wariness as had greeted upon the Irish immigrants arriving in the 1840s and 1850s. The America these new arrivals entered was also different. It was an America of factories and cities, a place where the middle class had at least in part replaced the antebellum religious hopes about the perfectibility of the world with new, darker ideas about evolution and the dangers of biological degeneration. By the 1890s representatives of the old Anglo-Saxon Protestant elite had begun to portray the new immigrants as imperiling the racial fabric of the nation. Citing studies demonstrating declines in the native birth rate, these elites argued that native-stock Americans were committing “race suicide”: they did not reproduce because their children would have to compete “with those they did not recognize as their own grade and station.”\textsuperscript{12} Even some of those who did not attribute the declining native-stock birth rate to immigration worried that the end result would be a shift in the genetic quality of the nation.\textsuperscript{13}

At the turn of the twentieth century, however, worries about the economy and class conflict were much more acute than the brewing fears of racial degeneration through immigration. For employers, in any case, immigration was a double-edged sword. Many employers, while they worried about immigrant radicals, also welcomed immigrants as an important addition to the labor pool, one whose presence employers believed helped them keep wages down and unions at arm’s length.\textsuperscript{14} Employers feared workers bent on challenging upper-class rule more than they feared immigrants. And such grassroots challenges abounded in the post–Civil War decades. In 1877, just as the end of Reconstruction was promising new sectional unity, a massive railroad strike witnessed tens of thousands of workers in dozens of cities walking off the job and proceeding to burn thousands of railroad cars, profoundly
unsettling the elites in whose eyes the masses of citizens impoverished by the severe 1870s depression already looked very much like a threatening “dangerous class.” The 1880s saw the rise of the Knights of Labor and widespread agitation for the eight-hour day, as well as the Haymarket Affair, in which a bomb exploded at a Chicago labor rally, killing several and resulting in the trial of eight anarchists. The 1890s witnessed another severe depression, spectacular clashes between workers and private as well as public security forces, and the rise of a potential political challenge to established elites from the People’s Party, a serious third-party challenger that built a broad political movement across especially the South and the West.\(^{15}\)

The elites’ response to these challenges was to involve themselves more and more intensely in civic associations. These associations reflected businessmen’s desire for a well-run society with more efficiency and less corruption, as well as their growing conviction that they were specially equipped for decision-making not only in the field of commerce but also in the civic and political fields.\(^{16}\) Such a “search for order,” as Robert Wiebe termed it in his classic work, formed a conspicuous theme in turn-of-the-twentieth-century American society. As Wiebe recognized and as others have elaborated upon, for the well-heeled this search for order was closely related to a fear that democratic politics might shift the balance of power toward ordinary people, and much of their response was directed toward insulating institutions of local governance against popular influence.\(^{17}\)

In these business-led local organizations, the line between the classes burned much brighter than the divisions between businessmen. For example, the Committee for Public Safety, which crushed the 1877 general strike in St. Louis with mass arrests and threats of violence, united businessmen across industrial, ethnic, and sectional lines while also reflecting a worry about the lower classes potentially uniting across the divide of race. The committee included merchants, financiers, manufacturers, professionals, and smaller businessmen, many of them of German or Irish origin. Its leadership explicitly transcended the sectional rift: it included men born in both southern and northern states and even two ex–Civil War generals, one from each side. Meanwhile, the press zeroed in on the presence of “brutal” and “dangerous-looking” African Americans among the strike marchers.\(^{18}\) In other cities, the threat from below elicited similar responses. The elites of New York reacted to demands of economic redistribution in the 1870s by supporting an amendment to the state constitution that would have transferred questions of municipal taxation, expenditures, and debt to a board of finance elected only by citizens of considerable means. The 1877 upheaval prompted them to call for military force to be applied against the strikers.\(^{19}\) In Chicago, where the crush of the 1870s depression was
exacerbated by a fire that destroyed a sizable portion of the city, the city’s leading businessmen formed the Citizens’ Association (CA) to promote efficient government and order. The CA hoped to concentrate power in the hands of the mayor, his appointees, and newly created positions within the executive while diminishing the influence of ward-elected aldermen and the elected police board. The CA also funded a businessmen’s militia and worked to strengthen the police. The Chicago police department succeeded in suppressing the 1877 protests with considerable efficiency (not to mention brutality), which the CA took as evidence of the benefits of its efforts. Accordingly, the CA reaffirmed its support for the police, purchased more weaponry (including a Gatling gun, a forerunner of the modern machine gun), and, in the words of historian Sam Mitrani, “expanded to virtually shadow the elected government.”

The civic and political unity of businessmen got an additional boost from the nomination of William Jennings Bryan as the Democratic Party’s presidential candidate. Bryan, whose rhetorical gestures toward labor and farmers secured him the endorsement of the People’s Party, scared the nation’s leading businessmen. His call for an end to the gold standard alarmed financial elites who perceived the gold standard as the key to economic stability, growth, and the integration of US and British financial markets, and it dismayed industrial elites whose investments spanned an increasingly broad scope. As a result, many former Democrats transferred their allegiance to the Republican Party; as one scholar has put it, “Money flowed like water” into the Republican campaign coffers to elect William McKinley and defeat Bryan.

To be sure, businessmen in the early twentieth century continued to be divided over a variety of issues, and open-shop activists sometimes warned each other to make clear to potential members that cooperation was expected on “labor matters, and labor matters alone.” Especially the question of the tariff caused friction. There was general agreement that while tariffs were a good thing (the NAM declared itself “unalterably opposed to free trade”), reform was also necessary. Yet any concrete proposals for reform risked conflict. Purchasers of raw materials (such as small manufacturers) resented raw material tariffs that benefited steel and other raw material trusts, while producers with older plant and equipment feared competition from the modern facilities that new competitors might be induced to set up if tariffs kept prices high, but all of them also had their pet tariffs.

Yet if conflicts remained, the developments of the late nineteenth century had nevertheless done much to smooth cooperation between businessmen. Collective action on specific issues was further facilitated by the many tangible interconnections among businessmen through residential patterns, business activity, and leisure pursuits.
St. Louis as a Case Study

The National Association of Manufacturers and trade-based employer organizations aspired to shape labor relations and state policy on labor on a national scale. However, their power largely derived from the organizations and networks they built on the local level, and they invested considerable energy in exhorting employers to build local associations and in converting those local-level connections into the foundation of their national influence. It is therefore informative to inquire into the local connections that formed the basis of employer collective action at the grassroots level.

There were multiple ways in which local ties facilitated employer collective action. For one, local ties meant that much of the groundwork of establishing trust and credibility had already been performed. One was much more likely to listen to a proposal for, say, political action if it came from someone whom one already knew as a neighbor, a fellow member of a social club, or a colleague on a philanthropic association board. Second, local ties formed a ready-made network for dissemination of information about things like a proposed organized response to a labor problem or a planned lobbying effort against a state or national labor law. Third, the existence of local networks inspired confidence in employers that their actions would be efficacious: social clubs, bank directorates, fancy neighborhoods, and philanthropic organizations enrolled a variety of social notables whose support would likely significantly help any project. These links afforded employers significant pull in the community, which could then be translated into political influence on regional and national scales. The significance of this last point for the NAM’s lobbying efforts is taken up in the next chapter. For now, the focus is on the web of connections that institutional, residential, and social affiliations spun around the business and political community at the local level.

To explore that web of connections, this section delves into the social and political scene of St. Louis, a useful case study for a number of reasons. First, it was a central locale for the National Association of Manufacturers: the NAM had over one hundred member companies in St. Louis, and its president from 1906 through 1908 was the St. Louis stove manufacturer James W. Van Cleave. The NAM also got involved in local strikes: in connection with a shoeworkers’ strike in 1907, the NAM covertly investigated strikers and unionists and paid workers to gather information on strikers and to try to persuade strikers to return to work. It also sponsored a branch of an “astroturf,” or fake grassroots, workers’ organization in St. Louis (the Workingmen’s Protective Association) and worked hard to create the St. Louis Citizens’ Industrial Association, a multi-industry league against unions.
St. Louis was also the site of major confrontations between employers and unions—confrontations that were sometimes quite literal and physical, such as during a 1900 streetcar strike, when businessmen joined an armed sheriff’s posse that, among other things, fired into a crowd of strikers, leaving three strikers dead and fourteen wounded. Finally, St. Louis was firmly in the Northeast–Midwest industrial corridor, which supplied a large portion of the NAM’s members, but at the same time it was a city with strong inter-regional ties, mirroring the presence of southern and western businessmen in the NAM’s ranks.

St. Louis also has the added benefit of being the subject of two digitized editions of a biographical compendium (The Book of St. Louisans [BSTL], first edition 1906, second edition 1912) and a digitized directory of social clubs with their membership lists (Gould’s Blue Book for the City of St. Louis, 1913). These provide a glimpse of the landscape of the city’s notable and seminotable residents, their connections, and their residential patterns and allow a number of computational analyses of their characteristics and interconnections.

The City of St. Louis

Founded by French fur traders in the years immediately following the Seven Years’ War when nobody really knew who governed the massive swath of land termed Louisiana, St. Louis remained a settlement of a few hundred Europeans and a shifting number of Missouri and Peoria Indians for most of the eighteenth century. Its European American population had barely surpassed one thousand when the Louisiana Purchase transferred it from Spanish to American ownership in 1803. The town’s population growth and prominence, though, began a steady upward climb with Missouri’s statehood in 1820—and, perhaps more importantly, with the coming of the steamboat in the 1820s, a development that firmly linked St. Louis into a transportation network stretching east to the great seaboard cities and south to New Orleans. Because the upper Mississippi and the Missouri could not accommodate vessels as heavy as those that plowed the lower Mississippi, St. Louis became a significant unloading and reloading point, and the low cost of steam transport made the city an important transfer point for shipping agricultural products from the surrounding areas to eastern cities. St. Louis also became a hub for the increasingly lively Santa Fe trade, which brought significant quantities of Mexican silver to St. Louis in exchange for manufactured goods. Stimulated by such developments, as well as by the growth of the US Army’s projects in the West—especially the Mexican War in 1846–48—and the wave
of Irish and German immigration beginning in the late 1830s, the population of St. Louis had by 1840 passed sixteen thousand. It had soared to more than seventy-five thousand by 1850, of which nearly half had been born in Germany or Ireland. The population also included a few thousand enslaved and free African Americans, though these numbers belied the significance of slavery for St. Louis: in the 1850s, the city became a major slave trading post, with agents for more than two dozen slave dealers.31

These antebellum developments prefigured the post–Civil War nature of St. Louis in many ways: though increasingly eclipsed by its main rival, Chicago, the city remained a nexus between East and West, as well as between North and South. Its population, culture, and economy reflected the manufacturing and immigration patterns of the Northeast, the raw materials focus and admiration of ruggedness of the West, and a sympathy for southern viewpoints. Southern sympathies had established a strong foothold in the 1850s as a consequence of growing commercial ties with the South; despite Missouri’s decision to remain in the Union, these ties intensified during the war due to a blockade of the Mississippi that made those ties practically the only ones available.32 The early, sizable, and sustained German immigration also left its mark on the city’s elite, as well as its working class, even if the crème de la crème continued to bar the door of the highest levels of high society to the immigrant or second-generation men of wealth, “no matter how many German princes they knew.”33

The post–Civil War era brought a slew of efforts to reform city government and services, which the decades of semichaotic growth had left in a rather haphazard state. It also brought further growth in both population and especially manufacturing. As the downtown businesses expanded, the city’s elite began to withdraw from the hustle and bustle. The central Washington Avenue, the fashionable address of the 1860s, shifted from elite residences to garment manufacturing. The luster of Vandeventer Place, the exclusive West End address of the 1880s, began in the 1890s to give way to the even more westerly new private streets, or “places”—prime among them Westmoreland Place and Portland Place—on the edge of Forest Park. Many, such as Westminster Place and Kingsbury Place, were designed by notable architects and came complete with sculptures and arched entrances. The leafy surroundings were complemented by services catering to persons of means, such as exclusive decorators, doctor’s offices, and clubs.34 Though some of the older neighborhoods remained desirable, in the early twentieth century power and prestige “were concentrated within a half-dozen blocks of Lindell and Kingshighway.” This area plus Vandeventer Place represented “the city’s economic power, wealth, and social elite”—as is clear in that more
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than 90 percent of the members of the city’s most exclusive social club, the St. Louis Country Club, had their residences there. Meanwhile, some of the great names of St. Louis preferred country estates both as summer homes and as permanent residences, facilitated by the laying of narrow-gauge railways from the 1870s onward.35

Like the fancy neighborhoods, the social clubs of the city reflect an elite that was closely interconnected if somewhat divided by ethnicity.36 Thanks to directories like the Gould’s Blue Book and an early twentieth-century enthusiasm for local biographical compendia, one can extract enough information to computationally construct a social network of St. Louis clubs. The network is based on shared membership between clubs: many individuals belonged to three or more clubs both because clubs had different domains (country clubs for recreation, business clubs for work) and because more memberships offered more networking opportunities. Figures 4 and 5 show two versions of the network, with figure 4 providing an overview and figure 5 highlighting the particularly closely interconnected clubs. Both networks indicate the links, divisions, and hierarchies in the city’s elite: who associated with whom, as well as, to an extent, who was climbing their way up. Everyone in the clubs was firmly in the middle or upper middle class: occupationally, the club men were presidents, vice presidents, managers, and secretaries of a variety of financial and manufacturing establishments; manufacturers and merchants; and lawyers, physicians, and architects (and some simply listed their position as “capitalist”). But some, of course, were a little more elite than others.

The city’s top dogs hobnobbed in ten clubs that form a closely interlinked cluster (these clubs are depicted with a darker border in figure 4 and in gray in figure 5). Especially the central quintet formed by the St. Louis Club, St. Louis Country Club, Racquet Club, Noonday Club, and Commercial Club demonstrates the many overlapping connections between the city’s political and commercial elites. About 50–60 percent of the members of the exclusive Commercial Club, with a membership limited to some one hundred, also belonged to the other prestigious clubs of St. Louis, such as the St. Louis Club, the Noonday Club, and the St. Louis Country Club. Similarly, nearly half of the top-echelon members of the St. Louis Country Club also belonged to the Noonday Club, a club aiming to educate and entertain its members while advancing their commercial and business interests and offering them a well-appointed locale with the requisite billiards, dining, and library spaces at the top of the downtown Security Building.37

In addition, a number of the members of the core clubs also belonged to one or both of the two clubs that were so exclusive they only had a handful of members: the Log Cabin Club and the Cuivre Club, with a partially
Figure 4: St. Louis social clubs. Connections are based on shared membership. Edge weight (the thickness of the connecting line) represents the percentage of shared membership between two clubs, calculated as

\[
\frac{\text{number of shared members}}{\text{Club A members} + \text{Club B Members} - \text{shared members}}
\]

This varies from just over 27 percent for the edge between St. Louis Club and Noonday Club to 0.03 percent for the Missouri Athletic and Cuivre Clubs. Size of node (circle marking club) indicates total membership of the club, ranging from a high of 2,718 for the Missouri Athletic club to a low of 20 members for the Log Cabin Club. The triad at the upper edge of the image (Morning Choral, Wednesday Club, and St. Louis Woman’s Club) shows women’s clubs. Central clubs that enrolled much of the city’s elite are marked with a darker border. Network drawn in Cytoscape using the default Prefuse Force Directed Layout.
overlapping membership between them. The Cuivre Club was a hunting club for “wealthy amateur sportsmen of ample leisure and means” with a membership limited to twenty, an initiation fee of $500, and an annual membership fee “not to exceed” $200 (some $15,700 and $6,300, respectively, in 2020 dollars). \(^{38}\) The Log Cabin Club likewise limited the number of its members to twenty-five and provided them with a nine-hole golf course.

Membership in these core clubs was usually accessible only by nomination, often required a long waiting period, and came with a price tag that ensured one’s financial, as well as one’s social, standing. \(^{39}\) However, the club scene also accommodated the lesser rungs of the elite and shifted in response to new power centers. Some clubs, such as the Missouri Athletic Club, were open to a large swath of the middle-class population of St. Louis. As one can see in figure 4, it had a large membership that was not strongly connected to the core clubs that enrolled the elite. Others provided avenues of social mobility, reflected the rise of new elites, or delineated ethnic-religious divisions within the upper rungs. The Glen Echo Country Club, on the somewhat less
fashionable but up-and-coming north side of town, apparently provided something of a route for the city’s upwardly mobile businessmen into the more established elite. As one can see in figure 5, it formed a link between the Mercantile Club, an exclusive but not-quite-so-exclusive club with a business-oriented membership and a penchant for civic involvement, and two central clubs, the St. Louis Club and the Automobile Club. The Sunset Hill Country Club, on the other hand, had its roots in “new money” economically as well as ethnically. It was founded in 1909 by August A. Busch, the son of the German-born brewing magnate Adolphus Busch; the story goes that August was galled by years of being refused membership in the St. Louis Country Club, whose elite members looked down their noses at the fantastically wealthy but in their view crude and flashy Busch family. In the club network, one can see how it remained slightly off-center from the older elite clubs, though it shared significant membership with the Racquet Club and the two small exclusive clubs, Log Cabin and Cuivre. Yet it was much better connected than the city’s two major Jewish social institutions, the Westwood Country Club and the Columbian Club. These were linked to each other by a significant shared membership, and though they were not entirely isolated, they stood somewhat apart, as many of the city’s clubs either explicitly or implicitly refused Jewish members.

Membership in the lower-tier clubs was not insignificant—club life could provide important networking opportunities, especially if one could afford multiple memberships. Membership in the top-tier clubs, meanwhile, was exclusive enough that they potentially offered a real means of forging connections with (other) influential people. The Noonday Club, for example, had a membership of a few hundred and numbered among its members many of the top businessmen and top politicians of the city (although there was a strict prohibition, a contemporary history noted, against discussions of “any political or religious questions”). And the smaller clubs especially vividly illustrate the links between the business, political, and opinion-making elites of St. Louis: the Log Cabin Club, for instance, enrolled a prominent St. Louis newspaper editor and publisher, a former Republican candidate to the US Senate, and the mayor of St. Louis, besides a variety of bankers, stockbrokers, and top-echelon businessmen.

Manufacturers and Organized Businessmen in the St. Louis Social Map

By 1900 the population of St. Louis had reached nearly six hundred thousand, and manufacturing employed nearly 40 percent of the city’s workers. Where, then, did organized employers fit in the city’s socially, economically, and
culturally interconnected landscape? And did such employers demonstrate the kinds of multiple connections to each other that characterized much of the city’s top echelon? In other words, what connections and social resources could employers draw on when crafting a collective response to labor?

*The Book of St. Louisans* lists 472 men who represented a company belonging to the NAM and/or belonged to one or more of the local business organizations: the Businessmen’s League, the Manufacturers’ Association, and the Citizens’ Industrial Association. Many of these men had a strong foothold in the St. Louis elite: 149 of them belonged to one of the city’s core clubs, displayed in figure 5. A further 71 belonged to the Mercantile Club or to one or more of the significant second-tier country clubs: Glen Echo, Algonquin, and Normandie Golf. Nearly half, then, held membership in one or more of the top-rung or near-top-rung clubs. They also lived in the “right” areas of town. Figure 6 shows the residences of the men who represented NAM’s St. Louis member companies and who appear in the BSL. They, like

![Figure 6: St. Louis NAM members’ residences, n = 87. Westmoreland, Portland, Westminster, and Kingsbury Places were all within the dashed-line square. Addresses were extracted from The Book of St. Louisans and geolocated with the US census geocoder. Map created with MapBox. For data and discussion, see https://github.com/vhulden/bossesunion/](image)
the city’s other middle-class residents, mainly kept to the area west of South Grand Boulevard, which divided the industrial parts of the city from its more comfortable residences. Most NAM members lived in two particularly nice areas: a corridor extending from South Grand Boulevard to North Skinker Boulevard, concentrating in Central West End, east of Forest Park; and the square mile or so flanked by Tower Grove Park to the south and Missouri Botanical Gardens to the west. Both areas consisted of large, fine, single-family residences and private “places,” many of them newly built in the late nineteenth century. In the hierarchy of St. Louis society, then, organized employers in St. Louis placed mainly in the tier just below the top, though with a solid foothold in the most exclusive circles.

Equally importantly, organized businessmen were also well connected to each other, even regardless of the organizations they built for themselves. The network in figure 7 shows that of the 472 organized businessmen in the BSTL, more than half (242) also either lived near or belonged to the same clubs as another member of these business organizations.

As always with networks, it is of course important to keep in mind what the network actually represents. In this case, the network shows those members of the businessmen’s associations active in St. Louis (the Business Men’s League [BML], the Manufacturers’ Association, the Citizens’ Industrial Association, and the National Association of Manufacturers) who can be found in the BSTL and who can be connected to each other on the basis of residence or shared membership in social clubs (not including the business organizations listed). There are 242 such individuals. The connections—or “edges,” in social network parlance—are based on two types of links between the businessmen: close residence and membership in the same clubs. So if Benny Businessman and Ernie Employer lived close to each other, that would be a link between them. If they both were members of the St. Louis Club, that would also be a link between them. If they both also belonged to the Mercantile Club, that would be another link. If both further belonged to the Glen Echo, that would be one more link (and so on for as many shared club memberships as they possess).

Note that these types of links mean that an edge connecting two businessmen in the network is not direct evidence of personal interaction between the two people connected; it is merely something that makes such interaction possible or likely. To mitigate the uncertainty inherent in this, the network in the figure is built with fairly restrictive requirements. First, an edge between Benny and Ernie based on shared club membership is drawn only if they belonged to at least three of the same clubs—so above, they would be connected if both belonged to St. Louis and Mercantile and Glen Echo. Second, an edge based on residential proximity is only drawn if Benny and Ernie lived
Figure 7: Network of members of BML, CIA, MFA, and NAM in St. Louis, $n = 242$. Each node represents an individual. Network based on shared membership (edge drawn if the linked nodes are members in three or more of the same clubs) and on geographic proximity of residence (edge drawn if the distance between the nodes’ residences <0.1 mile). Dashed edges are on the basis of residential proximity, solid edges are on the basis of shared club membership, and vertical slash edges are on the basis of both. Diamond-shaped nodes are NAM members, and round nodes are members of BML, CIA, or MFA (but not NAM). Size of node indicates number of connections (degree), varying between one and seventy-three. Network drawn in Cytoscape using the Allegro Fruchterman-Reingold layout. Note the size of the interconnected network ($n = 187$) and how its center is tied together by multiple connections.
within 0.1 mile of each other as the crow flies, that is, about the distance of one or two blocks. These restrictions would seem to make it fairly likely that they would have at least a passing acquaintance with each other. Moreover, the network implies the availability of secondary connections: residence or three shared club memberships connect 187 of these men into a single network (the rest are represented in the triads and dyads at the bottom of the image). Indeed, 117 of these men (more than one in four) shared a club or residential connection with at least 5 other organized businessmen and often many more. That indicates that even if Benny Businessman had not personally met Ernie Employer, they might well have had one or more mutual acquaintances and therefore be at least semiknown quantities to each other. And at the very least, residential and social club ties would have served as a basis of recognition of shared membership in the “better classes.”

Beyond residential patterns and club memberships, the manufacturers of St. Louis were also of course often welded together by business connections, industry, and common work histories. Business connections could come in many forms: buying from and selling to each other, subcontracting, being hired by one firm and then leaving to set up one’s own business, and so on. These are more difficult to extract computationally from the data and have therefore not been analyzed. However, skimming The Book of St. Louisans gives one the impression that these interactions were quite numerous and thus further bolstered the interconnectedness of St. Louis businessmen.

Connections through social clubs, residential patterns, and business ties were further cemented by social and family ties, often not isolated from the ties of business. The marriage ties of the Busch family, makers of Budweiser, illustrate such multiple links. The storied wedding of Anna Busch and Edward Faust raised Faust from a well-to-do restaurateur to the very top of the wealth (if not social) pyramid: as the son-in-law of Adolphus Busch, he became the second vice president of the massive Anheuser-Busch Brewing Association. In doing so, he joined a firm that had itself been solidified by marriage, as Adolphus Busch had married Lilly Anheuser, the daughter of his partner, Eberhard Anheuser (in a double wedding in which Adolphus’s brother Ulrich also married Lilly’s sister Anna). A few years after Anna’s wedding to Edward, Lilly Anheuser Busch’s nephew married Stella Nicolaus, the eldest daughter of Henry Nicolaus, formerly associated with E. Anheuser & Company but by then president of the St. Louis Brewing Association, a local brewery “trust” of sorts. Industrial ties, then, intermingled with ethnic ones (all these families were of German origin), which in turn were cemented by marriages.

All these ties mattered: building an organization out of strangers would have been a far more challenging proposition than building a movement and pursuing organizational goals within a network of people who, besides
being like-minded, also occupied a similar social rung, met each other in a variety of contexts, and already knew many of the same people.

Clubmen as Street Fighters

There were, then, multiple ties that bound the businessmen of St. Louis together. The city’s labor movement, though, was also a force to be reckoned with. Indeed, joint action to blunt the impact of workers’ movements had repeatedly brought St. Louis businessmen together not only in social clubs but also in sheriff’s posses. The upheaval of the great strike year of 1877, to the surprise of the city’s elites, was felt strongly in St. Louis: although the protests remained admirably nonviolent, they were that much more comprehensive. Beginning with railroad and transit workers on July 22, the strike spread rapidly to practically all industries, so that within two days, nearly all shops, saloons, and manufacturing plants were closed, and within three, the strikers had taken over a number of factories and the railroad depot and had de facto control of the city. Despite press reports that painted the strikers as “rabble” and as “tramps,” with particularly harsh words reserved for African Americans among the protesters, the strike was led by local skilled workers, who also represented a significant portion of the overall strike movement. The “better elements” of the city, though, were determined to retake command: by the fifth day of the strike, the police force and a posse comitatus composed of six hundred merchants, manufacturers, financiers, professional men, and others with ties to business moved on the strikers. With orders to shoot to kill, this posse arrested more than 150 strike leaders. The strikers surrendered more peaceably than anyone had expected, but the episode had demonstrated what the working classes were capable of, and the city’s elites shuddered at the thought of what might have been.

The suppression of the 1877 strike did not bring an end to labor agitation. In the 1880s dozens of Knights of Labor locals formed in St. Louis, and the city witnessed significant strike activity throughout the decade among a wide variety of the city’s industries, from brewing to street railways to railroads to construction. When another citywide labor disturbance arrived in the form of a streetcar strike in 1900, then, St. Louis businessmen were determined to take a more active stance from the start, even if the strike itself developed out of business rather than union intransigence.

The roots of the streetcar strike were in the city’s lackluster streetcar service, made no less lackluster by a politically aided consolidation in 1899 of the city’s various lines into a near monopoly in the St. Louis Transit Company, headed by the banker and broker Edwards Whitaker (residence: Westmoreland Place, clubs: St. Louis, Cuivre, Noonday, etc.). After the consolidation, the new company made it clear that workers would be expected to fall into
line: workdays were further increased from an already hefty twelve hours, and the company hired a notorious foe of unions, George W. Baumhoff, as the general manager. The union, after failed attempts at negotiation, finally called a strike on May 7, 1900. The company rapidly brought in replacements and provided them with basic accommodations and meals at no charge. The streetcar company was widely unpopular, and strike supporters engaged in a number of provocations, ranging from blockading the tracks with massive boulders to physically dragging both passengers and replacement workers off the cars and manhandling them, sometimes quite severely. In an effort to maintain a respectable image, the union condemned violence and destruction of property, assigned strike committees to maintain order, and attempted to dissociate itself from any destructive acts that did occur, instead focusing on a show of mass support in the form of a parade of ten thousand unionists on May 20. Meanwhile, the president of the Board of Police Commissioners, Harry B. Hawes (member BML; clubs: St. Louis, Jefferson, etc.), though a good friend of Whitaker’s, was constrained in devising a police response by the popularity of the strike. Instead, he devolved the responsibility for peacekeeping to the city’s Republican sheriff, John A. Pohlman, who on May 30 was charged with calling up a posse of a thousand men (quickly increased to twenty-five hundred).

By June 4 over six hundred men were armed and drilling; two days later, recruits had reached over twelve hundred. The leadership of the posse quickly decided not to accept union members into the posse, ostensibly because they hampered mobilization by refusing to ride on the streetcars (which the strike sympathizers boycotted, first informally and later by union decree). Instead, companies were formed from the city’s lawyers (Company 23), its businessmen (Companies B and F) and generally its “very best element.” Some volunteered for duty; one businessman even refused to take a leave offered for the completion of out-of-town business. Many were drafted, too; according to the St. Louis Republic, there was some genuine anxiety about having to serve on the posse but also plenty of “good-natured joshing,” and the paper’s tone generally implied that at least the younger men of the business elite treated the whole thing as a bit of a lark, even if not an entirely welcome one. For example, August “Gussie” Busch (residence: Busch Place; clubs: St. Louis, Mercantile, Noonday, Racquet, Liederkrantz, etc.), the son of the beer magnate, Adolphus Busch, was handed a conscription notice on a Sunday morning visit to his brother-in-law Edward A. “Eddie” Faust (residence: Portland Place; clubs: St. Louis, Glen Echo, Mercantile, Union, Noonday, Liederkrantz, etc.), one of the first to be drafted. The same fate befell a number of other young gentlemen that day, causing the Republic to chuckle that “Sheriff Pohlman caught the flower of the flock for his posse
comitatus” as a result of the young gents’ ignorance of the fact that “warrants could be made out on a Sunday.”

The “flower of the flock” was in for some real enough confrontations—which, it seems, many were quite eager for. In its Sunday, June 10, issue, the *St. Louis Republic* praised the “amazing cheerfulness with which men summoned to the posse have performed their duties.” It continued: “Men of affairs and prominent in the community have left their business interests without complaint to assist in restoring order, leaving comfortable homes and accepting the hardships of sleeping on narrow cots, eating at haphazard and walking four and five hours a day with shotguns on their shoulder without protest. Some even have persisted in serving, although incapacitated by sickness, after the first two days’ experience.”

The very same day as this story ran, these “cheerful” servants of the public good were rewarded with “thrilling encounter[s]” with protesters. One group of possemen ordered protesters yelling insults at replacement workers to keep quiet and stop their vehicle; when the protesters ignored those orders, the possemen pursued them for several blocks, firing shotguns at their buggy and receiving fire in return. In the end, the possemen killed the horse drawing the buggy, but the men riding in it escaped.

More serious incidents the same day resulted in a higher human toll. In one case, the posse, pursuing men who had tried to stop a streetcar from running, shot and killed an old man who was a bystander to the action. In another incident, which became known as the Washington Avenue Massacre, three strikers lost their lives, and many more were wounded. While some confusion surrounds the sequence of events, apparently a procession of strikers was ordered to disperse but refused and instead tried to take over a streetcar. They were fired upon by members of the posse who had been stationed deliberately to await the strikers’ return from a picnic demonstration in East St. Louis. According to a posse captain, on their way to East St. Louis that morning the strikers had “jeered at the possemen as they passed,” and thus, fearing “there would be trouble when they returned,” the posse captain “ordered all the deputies to load their guns and be ready for any emergency on a moment’s notice.” The *St. Louis Republic* called the confrontation a “riot” by the strikers, but it seems clear from the captain’s statements that the possemen were expecting a confrontation, and while shots fired by the strikers were also reported, strikers themselves denied any “rioting.” The only ones left dead or wounded were strikers.

The strikers and their sympathizers were by no means innocent of violent actions: rowdy jeering and physical attacks on the replacement workers driving the streetcars occurred throughout the strike. It was clear, though, that one standard applied to strikers and another to posse members: for example,
the same issue of *St. Louis Republic* that reported the killing of strikers by possemen also reported that forty-three posse deputies were discharged. However, these were not the possemen who had engaged in excessive violence; rather, these men were let go for being union members and refusing to ride on the streetcars.\(^68\)

In the wake of the violence, the union set up its own horse-drawn bus line, and the effective boycott of the streetcars temporarily succeeded in bringing about an agreement with the transit company. The truce only lasted a week before the union, charging that the company had violated the agreement, reinstated the strike. Backed by the city’s political establishment, though, the transit company had little incentive to conciliate, and by the fall the strike had fizzled out.\(^69\)

For the city’s business elite, the lessons of the strike were somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, serving on the posse comitatus had provided businessmen an opportunity to demonstrate their masculine prowess in addition to their public-spiritedness. On the other, the violence inflicted on the strikers was widely condemned.\(^70\) In the wake of the strike, and hoping to avoid disruptions during the Louisiana Purchase Exposition (better known as the St. Louis World’s Fair), St. Louis moved in a more conciliatory direction: as noted in chapter 4, the city’s leading lights established a local Civic Federation to smooth things over with the unions. The conciliatory mood, however, passed with the end of the world’s fair, after which St. Louis businessmen returned to a more confrontational stance.

The case of St. Louis illustrates both the multiple local connections between businessmen and the willingness of such businessmen (and other elites) to put those connections into action when confronted with a challenge from below. Through building multiple organizations with a variety of civic and social aspirations and through direct confrontation—even violent confrontation on city streets—they positioned themselves as the guardians of law, order, and civic virtue while securing each other’s economic interests. Such local connectedness and common purpose formed a basis on which to build national cooperation.

**Antiunion Unity? Employers and the Printers’ Strike of 1905–1907**

When the International Typographical Union (ITU) called a strike in 1905, the NAM saw an opportunity to cement ties with an important ally, the employing printers. Besides being major employers in an important industry, the employing printers had the means—their print shops—to produce and
distribute material designed to sway public opinion.\textsuperscript{71} The employing printers, the NAM contended, “are apt to be well acquainted and influential men; many have publications or are interested in them; and all feel the same way about the excesses of labor unions.” This was a slight exaggeration for effect (not all employing printers were particularly antiunion), but it highlights the NAM’s hopes that printers could become strong partners in the NAM’s efforts to build a coalition against labor on both workplace and political questions.\textsuperscript{72} If the employer side emerged victorious in the printers’ strike, the conflict would showcase the ability of interindustry employer unity to defeat a powerful union and thus bolster the NAM’s prominence and reinforce its message that if employers only stood together, they would prevail.

The printing industry was roughly divided into two branches: newspapers and book and job (or commercial) printing. Each had its own employer association: the master printers in book and job printing were organized in the United Typothetae of America (UTA), while the newspapers were represented by the American Newspaper Publishers Association (ANPA). Both employer associations had a history of negotiating with the ITU, which was not divided by branch but enrolled printers in both newspaper and book and job printing. The printers’ strike that began in the fall of 1905 and dragged on into late 1907 concerned the book and job printing industry and thus involved only the UTA. Formed in an attempt to strengthen employers in the face of the ITU’s demand for the nine-hour day in 1887, prior to 1905 the UTA had maintained a pragmatic attitude rather than repudiating relations with the union entirely. It continued the practice of the local Typothetae of negotiating with the union while keeping up a search for ways to undermine union power. Indicative of this double-pronged strategy, the same year (1898) that it concluded its first national agreement with the ITU, the UTA also initiated a campaign against the union label, which was a potentially highly significant device in cementing a union’s position, especially in printing. Most unions using the union label produced consumer goods popular especially among workers (hence allowing a worker to show solidarity by buying goods that could be identified as union-made), and this was of course also true of newspapers. But printers had an additional lever of power: in the last few years of the nineteenth century, the ITU had succeeded in getting several municipalities and some states to adopt a requirement that all public printing (abundant in this era) had to display the union label.\textsuperscript{73}

Despite its original negotiatory stance, then, the UTA continued to look for ways to strengthen its position against the union. By 1905 a growing number of local Typothetae, many of which were becoming involved in the open-shop movement, had begun to promote combative policies. This was
particularly true of the Typothetae in the midwestern states, where employer organizations were growing rapidly; for example, the St. Louis Typothetae in 1903 instructed its members to cooperate with the NAM to lobby Congress against an eight-hour workday bill promoted by the American Federation of Labor. The open-shop advocates within the UTA had been preparing the organization for a confrontation with the union over the course of several years. The printing trade journal, *American Printer*, had begun to exhort employing printers to organize and to stand firm against unions, running stories that purported to show how this would pay off for one and all. More tangibly, the UTA had created both a substantial emergency fund built from mandatory member contributions and a strict centralized policy requiring member adherence to the stated positions of the organization.

The concrete spark for the strike came from the ITU call for an eight-hour day. The ITU had announced that any employer that did not grant the eight-hour day by January 1, 1906, would be struck. In September 1905 employing printers in Detroit, San Antonio, and Chicago decided to precipitate the conflict by hiring nonunion men and posting notices stating that in the future they would run on an open-shop basis. In response, ITU members in the affected shops walked out and initiated the fight for the eight-hour day. Since it suspected that employers were trying to choose the weakest cities as the first battleground, the ITU decided to lend support to the workers already on strike by calling out all locals except those whose contracts with the Typothetae or individual employers were still in force. On the original D-Day of January 1, 1906, the strike spread further; most importantly, that was the date when the contract of the New York Typographical No. 6 expired, thus allowing it to join its considerable force to the ranks of the strikers without breaking its contract with the employers.

The NAM swung into action as soon as the strike began. It promised to “stiffen up manufacturers and employers generally” against the ITU in the cities affected by the strike. It encouraged its members to purchase printing from the open shops and refrain from enforcing contract clauses providing that print jobs were to be delivered on time even in strike conditions. It also told them to use their influence as advertisers to get publishers on the side of the employing printers (something that carried weight in an era when much of book printing consisted of catalogs and directories that contained quite a lot of advertisements for local businesses). It reminded employers in other industries that they might well be the next target if the ITU was successful. And it gave the employing printers prominent support in articles and editorials in the NAM trade journal, *American Industries*. The NAM secretary also wrote to the daily papers in the name of the manufacturers
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(“many of them advertisers and friends of yours”) with a letter asking for their “considerate interest” in the cause of the employing printers; he also contacted advertisers with pleas to aid the printers by, for instance, running their largest advertisements without changes (changes, of course, would cause problems when compositors were on strike).

Throughout the fall and winter of 1905–6, the NAM worked hard in the employing printers' cause. When the UTA set up a trade school to secure its future access to skilled printers without having to rely on union-controlled apprenticeships, the NAM gave the school its patronage by having \textit{American Industries} printed there. To further help the print shops continue operations, the NAM attempted to help struck printers find replacement workers. It also hoped to help the UTA spread its antiunion convictions to the newspaper publishing business: the NAM and the UTA drafted plans (which, in the end, failed) to create a new organization to replace the ANPA, which continued to negotiate with the ITU and had not joined the open-shop crusade (although the ANPA did contain some open-shop advocates, whom the NAM had supported from the beginning). If newspapers were to join the struggle, this could result in a potential publicity coup: newspapers embroiled in active disputes with unions tended to take an antiunion stance in their reporting as well. So, for instance, the \textit{Philadelphia Inquirer}, which had been the target of an ITU organizing drive, strike, and boycott since the summer of 1904, consistently gave ample space to the views of the Philadelphia Typothetae in the eight-hour fight and headlined its stories in ways that favored the employing printers.

The NAM also got involved in the UTA’s fight at the grassroots level, sending its operative Martin M. Mulhall into the field almost as soon as the printers’ strike started. Mulhall, who had once been a labor union member himself and who regularly conducted political campaign work of various degrees of covertness for the NAM, apparently worked in several cities, but his main field of activity was in Philadelphia in the spring and summer of 1906. Philadelphia was probably chosen partly because of Mulhall’s labor contacts in that city and partly because Philadelphia’s numerous nonunion printers weakened the strike there.

Mulhall’s work in Philadelphia involved both open persuasion and stealthy methods. Openly, Mulhall was appointed one of a committee of three manufacturer representatives, which met with three representatives of the Philadelphia Central Labor Union to discuss the situation. This committee also took a number of union members on a tour of struck Philadelphia plants in an effort to show them that the strike would certainly fail, as the plants were operating regardless of it, and to get them to report this unhappy state
of affairs to the ITU. The following June, Philadelphia ITU members were taken on a similar tour of New York shops to convince them that despite the greater power of the New York local, the strike was failing there as well. Neither effort appears to have achieved its aim, as the unionists insisted that what they had seen had merely convinced them that the strike was indeed succeeding.86

An undercover operation supported these aboveboard efforts. Mulhall later claimed that he had worked in Philadelphia on and off for over a year and spent an average of $300 a week on undermining the strike while there, money that he got in part from the Philadelphia Typothetae and in part from the NAM. Mulhall had a propensity to exaggerate the finances he had control of, so his claims have to be taken with caution, but even a fraction of such a sum would have been serious money. In the course of a year, $300 a week adds up to $15,600; the equivalent in 2020 dollars would be over $470,000. Another point of comparison is that in 1910 the average wage in the printing and publishing industry was around $12 a week, so $300 a week would have amounted to the weekly salary of twenty-five printers.87 With the aid of this budget, Mulhall said he bribed striking workers to return to work and paid weekly salaries to a number of members of Philadelphia unions so that they would act as spies in their unions. As documents beyond Mulhall’s own statements corroborate, these spies reported to Mulhall what happened at union meetings, what the general atmosphere was among the membership, and what strategies the union was planning to use; Mulhall then relayed this information to the Typothetae. In addition, the men on Mulhall’s payroll worked to put a damper on initiatives among the Philadelphia unions to collect funds for the striking printers or to start sympathetic strikes in support of the ITU.88

There was, then, nothing half-hearted about the effort mounted by the NAM and the UTA. They meant business, and they meant to win. Repeatedly, the UTA expressed confidence in its impending victory, stressing its members’ determination and preparation, citing the number of strikebreakers those members had managed to recruit and the number of union men they had convinced to return to work, and claiming that all orders were proceeding on time as usual.89 But it seemed that the ITU had more grounds for its equally insistent optimism: soon, newspapers began reporting defections from UTA ranks and running stories of strikebreakers who were lured away from the shops by the union or decided to join the strike because conditions failed to match the claims made by the employers.90

Company after company decided to abandon the struggle and negotiate with the union. By late 1907 the ITU had succeeded in getting several smaller
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cities completely on the eight-hour basis, and nationally over 80 percent of union members had achieved the eight-hour day. By contrast, the ranks of the UTA were depleted. The UTA’s strict requirement that members should abide by the association’s official policies meant that as soon as a member felt obliged to give in to the union in order to get his men back to work, that member had to resign from the UTA. As a result, the UTA lost nearly half its members. In 1908, in acknowledgment of its inability to keep most employing printers in the antiunion camp, it removed the objection to the eight-hour day from its declaration of policy, decided against excluding union-shop employers, and explicitly affirmed that its members and local Typothetæ “shall be at liberty to make contracts with local unions.”

To be sure, many large book and job printers in major cities became non-union even if they conceded the eight-hour day, partly supporting the UTA’s claim that on the crucial point of ending the practice of closed-shop unionism the Typothetæ had prevailed. Nor did the ITU come out of the fight unscathed: according to one source, the union lost over two thousand of its roughly forty-five thousand members between 1905 and 1907. In Philadelphia it seems that Mulhall’s efforts paid off: no sympathetic strikes emerged, nor did the union have much success in convincing Philadelphia employers to negotiate. But the employing printers themselves admitted that gauging the success of Mulhall’s tactics was difficult. Philadelphia had been known to be a weak point for the union, and in most cities the ITU fared much better: for instance, by late 1907 nearly all major New York shops, including the shop owned by the secretary of the New York Typothetæ, had acceded to union demands.

The striking printers enjoyed a number of advantages in their struggle. First, they were mostly native-born and white, and printing was a respectable craft. Even many employers had sympathy for their men: employers and workers often shared an ethnic as well as a trade background, and many master printers could still remember their journeyman days. At least as importantly, public opinion was fairly well-disposed toward a strike of upstanding native-born craftsmen, especially as the printers were careful to avoid any semblance of violence. The New York Times even contended that the men gathered at strike headquarters seemed so courteous that “the outsider would have never taken them for strikers in the accepted sense.” Second, printers were exceptionally well-organized and cohesive: the roots of the ITU stretched back to the 1850s, and there was a strong tradition of cooperation among the different printing crafts even as they remained organized in different unions. Third, there was no division by branch of industry. Thus, while the employing printers were divided into book and job printers (the
Typothetae) and the newspaper division (the ANPA), the ITU represented all typographers. This was a distinct advantage in the eight-hour workday strike: the ITU’s strike assessments covered its whole membership, but the strike itself only concerned the book and job industry. In other words, the securely employed newspaper compositors could help fund the struggle of the book and job compositors.98

The printers’ strike, then, was perhaps an unusually well-organized, well-funded strike under unusually favorable conditions for the union. In less propitious circumstances, the employers’ unity strategy might well have succeeded. Nevertheless, the outcome of the fight demonstrated to organized employers that nationwide employer solidarity in a strike situation could not be counted upon. As a consequence, the UTA turned away from labor issues, ensuring its survival by focusing on topics less controversial among its members.99 The NAM kept its focus firmly on labor, but it is hard to imagine that its faith in employer solidarity remained unshaken. It had sunk considerable effort—not to mention money—into creating a united front against the ITU, and even if some individual employing printers successfully instituted open shops, losing the national fight was embarrassing.

The printers’ strike was the only time that the NAM publicly and prominently engaged in a fight that was premised on employers’ ability to hold the line against unions. This did not mean that in the wake of the strike the NAM softened its line. It did not back down from its intransigent position, nor did it let up on its efforts to facilitate and lead a cross-industry antiunion movement. On the contrary, it continued to devise ways to make use of the networks of camaraderie and economic interconnection that the St. Louis case study illustrates and to transform those local networks into national webs of influence. But it steered clear of strategies that required individual members or allies to withstand union pressure at a potential cost to themselves. Instead, in the years after the printers’ strike, the NAM redoubled its efforts in politics and publicity, which offered wider views—while putting less pressure on individual members’ pocketbooks. Solidarity, it turned out, could be too risky.