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Between the years 1910 and 1914, the Brotherhood of Timber Workers (BTW) — a broad-based, radical union of southern lumber workers — battled the southern lumber trust in the woods and mill towns of Louisiana, Texas, and the South. By its very existence the Brotherhood merits the attention of those seeking to recover a radical tradition in the United States; as Melvyn Dubofsky notes, “Southern labor history has always been something of a puzzle. Few studies have been written about labor organizations or of working-class discontent below the Mason and Dixon line.” It is the nature of the Brotherhood’s existence, however, that assures its place in a tradition of humane and courageous U.S. radicalism. To begin with, the BTW built blacks, whites, Chicanos and other groups into a united front against the southern lumber trust. Perhaps one-half of the BTW membership was black, and included among these members were union leaders such as William Henry, D.R. Gordon, and J. Bonier. Chicanos also participated in, and vigorously supported, the union. When, during the conflict, the American Lumber Company attempted to identify all its employees by race and union status, the note “Presumably Union (All Mexs. are)” was placed beside the name of one M. Salinas, and comments such as “Big Union Negro” and “Strike Originator” beside the names of various black employees.
Women were likewise accorded full membership in the BTW, and filled key leadership roles in the critical Merryville strike. Under the guidance of strike-leader Fredonia Stevenson, women picketed at the mill and train station, ran the BTW soup kitchen, and carried on the battle against scabs and other anti-BTW forces after male BTW members were deported from the town. In addition to racial minorities and women, the Brotherhood included the region's population as a whole in its struggle. It brought farmers and small merchants into the union, and incorporated both these groups and various progressive organizations in a wide ranging network of support. This concern for building an inclusive radical union was shared with the larger organization with which the BTW affiliated in 1912: the Industrial Workers of the World. The Brotherhood shared with the IWW another key characteristic as well: a propensity for innovation, courage, and humor in battling economic, legal, and ideological repression. Although this article touches on BTW's inclusive character, it does so in context of this final thrust: BTW's development of bold and innovative strategies and tactics in response to pervasive legal repression.

Background to Struggle

The battle between the Brotherhood of Timber Workers and the southern lumber trust grew out of a national social setting dominated by labor/capital conflict. Under the leadership of the IWW and other labor organizations, miners were striking against coal companies in West Virginia, Arkansas, and Colorado; railroad workers were battling major railroad lines; the steel and textile industries of the North were being aggressively organized; "free-speech fights" were erupting throughout the country; and lumber workers were engaged in major strikes throughout the Northwest. Regionally, the organization of the BTW in 1910 built upon a foundation laid in a previous decade of hostility between much of the area's population and the lumber corporations intruding upon it. Virtually since the first movement of Northern (and Southern) lumber companies into the region prior to the turn of the century, resistance developed, not only in the form of strikes and other organized activity, but in a more generalized antipathy towards the large companies by workers, farmers, and small business people. During the period of the Brotherhood's battles, the region also saw numerous strikes by railroad workers and longshoremen, and an IWW-led strike of maritime workers in New Orleans.

The conflict between the BTW and the southern lumber trust evolved also in the context of the trust's systematic control of its workers, and workers' rebellion against such control. Workers faced long hours of dangerous work, during which the lumber companies utilized "scientific management" and other techniques to produce maximum efficiency and control. For this labor, workers were paid irregularly, and most often in company "scrip" which could be spent at the company store or cashed at a discount. In fact, by holding paydays months apart, the companies forced their workers to accept interim payments in scrip, channelling workers' purchases to the company commissary. Paychecks were further decreased through a series of forced deductions. Away from the job, workers lived in carefully controlled "company towns" or camps, which were often fenced and patrolled by a company police force. Here, they paid exorbitant rent for company housing, sent their children to company schools designed to socialize children into efficient and complacent work roles, and attended company controlled churches and YMCAs which taught similar lessons. As the BTW began to focus workers' rebellion against these systems of control, the lumber companies responded by further "stockading" towns, and increasing their force of guards and gunmen. The legal repression examined in this article can be understood only in light of these broader systems of control, and workers' responses to them.

As this complex and often violent five year conflict between the BTW and the southern lumber trust developed, it became increasingly intertwined with the region's criminal justice system. In response to the Brotherhood of Timber Workers' organization in 1910 and growth through early 1911, the southern lumber trust worked through the Southern Lumber Operators' Association (SLOA) to
begin in April 1911 the use of "yellow-dog" contracts — contracts in which lumber company employees pledged that they were not, and would not become, BTW members — and blacklisted any employee refusing to sign or otherwise found to be a BTW member. Despite this, the Brotherhood continued to grow, not only in Louisiana and Texas but throughout the South, and in July 1911 the SLOA began a general shut-down of lumber company mills in which Brotherhood members were employed. From July to November 1911 the mills remained closed, and, although unemployed Brotherhood members suffered physically and financially, BTW agitation and influence continued to spread. In November 1911 the owners began a three-month process of reopening the mills and, with effective "yellow-dog" hiring procedure and extensive blacklist, claimed the death of BTW. During May 1912, however, the Brotherhood held its second annual convention, began the process of affiliating with the Industrial Workers of the World, and launched a new round of organization, agitation and strikes, including a strike against the Galloway Lumber Company at Grabow, Louisiana.

Increasing hostility between BTW members/supporters and lumber company thugs and officials during June and early July, 1912, climaxed with the Sunday, July 7, "riot" at Grabow. Returning to DeRidder from a meeting at Carson, Louisiana, a crowd of BTW members and supporters led by BTW president A.L. Emerson stopped at the Galloway Lumber Company mill at Grabow. As Emerson began to speak, shots were fired — apparently at him and into the crowd from the company buildings — with members of the crowd returning fire; a number of those present were killed or wounded. Following the "riot," Emerson and approximately sixty BTW members and supporters were arrested and indicted for murder, and jailed at Lake Charles, Louisiana. Brotherhood members and sympathizers protested the opening of their trial on October 7 by boycotting work as part of the "union holiday." Approximately a week after the defendants’ acquittal on November 2, the mill owners forced a strike at the American Lumber Company in Merryville, Louisiana, a BTW stronghold. In what the media called the "First American Soviet" and "The Commune of Merryville," the Brotherhood had built a network of support which included merchants, farmers, and workers in other industries. Despite this, the company reopened its mills in January 1913 with scab labor, and in conjunction with the local Good Citizen’s League and deputy sheriffs began a series of beatings, arrests, and deportations which culminated in mob violence against striking BTW members on February 15-19. That April, A.L. Emerson was also attacked and beaten by a mob at Singer, Louisiana, and in May submitted his resignation to the Brotherhood's third annual convention; by July, the Merryville strike was lost. The Brotherhood's final attack on the southern lumber trust — the "Sweet Home Front" strike near Pollock, Louisiana — was begun in December, 1913, and ended in August, 1914.

The Structure and Process of Legal Repression

The criminal justice system played a major role in the battle between the southern lumber trust and the Brotherhood of Timber Workers, and legal repression a major role in the trust's
attacks upon the Brotherhood. The trust's manipulation of the region's legal system took a variety of forms. Lumber companies' domination of "company towns" was complete, and rooted in both economic and political power. An investigator for the United States Commission of Industrial Relations, David J. Saposs, found that the companies controlled not only private and public property in the towns, but public office-holders and the voting process as well, and concluded that

Anyone desiring to exercise the simplest right, which in ordinary peaceful American communities is regarded as natural and unquestioned (such for instance, as the use of public streets), must fight for them in these industrial towns. . . . The form of government in these communities is avowedly absolutistic.

Another investigator reported that, at Pineland, Texas, "the company store is the only one permitted to do business . . . on a large scale," and that "land, houses, hotels, churches and schools are owned by the company, and its will is above the law." He thus concluded that "the lumber communities of the Lone Star State are as far removed from freedom and democracy as though time had rolled back to the days of Ivanhoe." Even a lumber industry journal acknowledged in 1912 that, at Bogalusa, Louisiana, the Great Southern Lumber Company's general manager "is the law and order, except where some violent breach of law occurs, then a deputy sheriff is called to maintain the peace.""

An important component in this legal and political hegemony was the extensive participation of southern lumber trust members in political institutions. Between 1900 and 1915, for example, members of the trust served as aldermen or councilmen in Texarkana, Beaumont, and Orange, Texas, and Alexandria, Louisiana; as the mayors of Alexandria, Bogalusa, Vivian, and Zwolle, Louisiana, Orange and Beaumont, Texas, and Fourche, Arkansas; as state representatives or senators in Texas, Louisiana, and Kansas; as the governor of Kansas; as U.S. Congressmen from Illinois and Michigan; as U.S. Vice President; and in a variety of positions ranging from county attorneys and supervisors to university regents, state board of education members, and presidents of state and national conservation organizations. These lumbermen thus not only dominated local politics, but influenced state, regional, and national affairs; they sponsored pro-lumber industry legislation, influenced regulatory efforts, and worked with the governors of Louisiana and Texas and other political figures. This work resulted, for example, in the Louisiana state militia being sent to the aid of the lumber companies three times during the 1910-1914 conflict.

This legal and political power of the lumber companies in their "company towns" and in the region as a whole resulted in a number of specific abuses. As noted above, access to "company towns" — often in their entirety the private property of the lumber companies — was controlled not only through police power, but by fencing sawmills, workers' housing, and entire towns. This "stockading" of towns was reported throughout the region, with even the United States Post Office enclosed and controlled by the company in one case. Saposs reported that

Some of these towns are not even incorporated so that they are the private property of the company. Almost invariably the residence quarters are unincorporated and fenced in. This, it was admitted by the officials, enables the company to deny admittance to those that it cannot control. By owning the ground and buildings the company has undue power over the inhabitants, no matter who they are.

A resolution sent from the 1912 BTW convention to the Governor of Louisiana likewise reported,

Particularly, we call your Excellency's attention to the conditions existing at the towns of Fullerton, Rochell, Elizabeth, Fields, Oakdale, and Cravens, La., and which system is being rapidly spread over the entire State, where the timber and lumber workers in many places are being practically held as peons within barbed wire enclosures [and] where there is no law except the will of the Lumber Trust's imported thugs and gunmen. . . ."}

This "stockading" was utilized, of course, to deny BTW organizers access to the commun-
ities, and the workers who resided in them. To further retard BTW organizing efforts, officials in Merryville, DeRidder, Carson and other Louisiana towns prohibited street gatherings and public speaking. Where board fence and barbed wire stockades and legal prohibitions failed to keep out BTW organizers, workers were held in their quarters by company guards during the BTW meetings, and threatened with dismissal and blacklisting if they attempted to attend. If despite these many controls workers were found to have become union members or activists, they then faced summary eviction from their company housing.

Perhaps the most significant legal abuse by the lumber companies was their direct involvement with local police forces. This involvement took two forms. First, the lumber companies often appointed and paid local police forces, which in turn served the companies by herding men to work, harassing independent merchants, intimidating citizens, and even circumventing arrests so as not to deplete the labor force. Second, lumber company guards and gunmen were deputized throughout the region during the conflict period. Early in the strike at Merryville, for example, a local sheriff deputized American Lumber Company gunmen, and an American Lumber Company list of employees included one H.H. Swindell as a company "Planer Grader" and "Deputy Sheriff, who made Grabow arrests." The Kirby Lumber Company even received regular reports from one of its paid spies who was also a local sheriff. A BTW resolution thus correctly referred to "Sheriffs, who are either owned by the Lumber Trust, or are themselves officers of the organization, deputizing hundreds of thugs in the name of the State of Louisiana."

In dealing with the BTW, of course, these "company" police and deputized company guards enforced the law in a most remarkable fashion. Throughout the conflict, BTW members were arrested and jailed for violation of a plethora of local, state, and federal statutes; among the charges were "intimidating labor," "being a dangerous and suspicious character," "obtaining money under false pretenses," embezzlement, vagrancy, and murder. The charge of "intimidating labor" was common, often in conjunction with battles between BTW members and scab laborers. Also common were attempts to enforce segregation laws so as to shatter black/white solidarity within the BTW; the BTW faced the threat of injunction against an integrated convention, attempts to jail black BTW members for "unlawfully meeting in the same hall with white men," and intimidation from local sheriffs. For the leadership of the BTW, legal harassment was
As might be expected, the vigor of the local police in harassing the BTW was complemented by police inattentiveness to the crimes of the southern lumber trust. During the conflict there surfaced innumerable reports of beatings, floggings, shootings, attempted lynchings, and "water cures" — the pummelling of a restrained man with a high-powered jet of water. In addition, the assassination of H.G. Creel was attempted; A.L. Emerson was severely beaten; and Emerson, Covington Hall, and other BTW leaders received numerous death threats, all with little or no police response. In fact, company gunmen in many cases clearly instigated such violence to achieve two goals beyond simple intimidation: to direct the blame for the violence towards the BTW, as a justification for legal suppression; and to goad BTW members into retaliation, which would then precipitate further violence and legal sanctions. Moreover, local police were utilized to protect the operations of the southern lumber trust during the conflict. At a July 4 Brotherhood gathering, for example, Covington Hall reminded the crowd of the company spies present, and A.L. Emerson noted

that southern lumber trust leader John H. Kirby 'spends too much money in paying Sheriffs and Deputy Sheriffs to protect these spotters.' At that very gathering a Kirby Lumber Company spy posing as a photographer was found out; in his report to the company, he noted that he was in fact protected from the angry unionists by one Sheriff Stevenson. In another case, Kirby instructed one of his associates to "get in touch with the Sheriff of Newton County and see that suitable deputies are detailed" to protect a Kirby Lumber Company barbeque.

The Brotherhood’s Response

In battling the lumber trust, then, the Brotherhood of Timber Workers thus faced not only the vast economic power of the trust, but a vast array of social and political controls. In this context, the BTW survived to fight the southern lumber trust aggressively throughout a five year period. To do so, the Brotherhood developed a number of broad strategies in dealing with the trust and its legal power. Central among these were secrecy and deception, and practical and ideological confrontation.

Secrecy and deception enabled the Brotherhood to minimize both economic and legal repression; to the extent that secrecy could be maintained, the Brotherhood could circumvent both the firing, eviction, and blacklisting, and the concomitant legal harassment, of union members. The BTW therefore worked "in the silent, quiet ways of the forest and swamps."

The BTW’s Constitution and By-Laws, for example, provided for the "secret work of the order," including various "guardians" and passwords. The importance of these passwords to the Brotherhood was evidenced in the following handwritten oath, entered as evidence in the Grabow trial of 1912:

I do hereby swear to my God and fellow man. That I will hold forever sacred the vow that I am about to tak [sic]. And I will hold forever secret the signs, grips, tokens, and passwords. I will never wrong a brother by giving his name to any one not belonging to the order. And I will never wrong a brother by taking his place from which he has walked off for more money or better [sic] conditions. But will stand by him and protect him as long as he is in the right as long as life lasts. So help me God. [signed] D.E.

As can be seen in the oath, the Brotherhood was likewise careful to keep its membership rolls secret. Two survivors of the conflict — the first a BTW member, the second not — recalled distinctly this feature of the Brotherhood’s approach:

Mr. Smokey: We all, I believe all of here is in it, in the Union.
Ferrell: Was there any chance of getting fired for joining the Union?
Mr. Smokey: Yes, sir; oh, yea; you had to join it and keep it hid...
Ferrell: Well, so ... all you gentlemen were members of the union but you had to keep it quiet?
Mr. Smokey: Had to keep it quiet, yea; couldn’t tell.

Ferrell: Did some of the men you worked with ... were they in the union, or was it other places in the state?
Duplissey: Well, you couldn’t tell any, in other words, if you belonged to it and all, you mustn’t tell, and keep all that a secret — that’s one thing I didn’t like at all.

The BTW tactic could also be seen in the reports of company operatives, which noted, for example, that at one camp “there are several Union men ... but one cannot tell who they are,” and that at another, “the foreman ... is reported as having all union men working for him and sending in their dues secretly.”

In the day-to-day process of organization and recruitment secrecy also protected the organizers, who travelled and worked in disguise. During the Brotherhood’s formation, A.L. Emerson and Jay Smith travelled “in the guise of book agents, insurance solicitors and the like,” and worked undercover at area mills. Similarly, a company operative reported pointedly that a Mr. LaFollette, whom he had met at a Lee’s Mill union meeting, “told me he was selling soap, but he did not try to sell any at Lee’s Mill.” In November, 1912, the IWW’s Industrial Worker even published a detailed account of union tactics which included posing as
Gabotaqe means to push back, pull out or break off the fans of Capitalism
W.D.Haywood

Sabotage means to push back, pull out or break off the fans of Capitalism
W.D.Haywood

A gambler (with one's winnings helping to finance the union), a company informant (who could then have non-union men fired), and an evangelist. The newspaper elsewhere reported that the union's Grand Lodge officers, as well as organizers, were taking measures to avoid entrapment.

Many of the union's meetings were also clandestine. "Night meetings" were held not only for the convenience of lumber workers, but to take advantage of privacy afforded by darkness outside the stockaded towns. An anti-BTW letter published in Southwest scolded Brotherhood members who "meet in the dark, on bridges and crossroads, [and] hold secret tryouts," and later reports from company spies substantiated this claim. In one, an operative reported that the BTW "had a private meeting Thursday night in the country for the purpose of getting the brethren together," and in another, it was reported that A.L. Emerson "held a private meeting with BTW members of Lee's Mill only... and it was private; no one except members employed at Lee's Mill being admitted."20

Interestingly, the BTW was able to utilize secrecy and deception to counter the economic and political power of the southern lumber trust in yet another way. During the conflict, A.L. Emerson noted that a BTW emissary sent to inspect certain "County Records" dealing with Emerson's arrest and fining "was able to get hold of the books by reason of his friendship for some of the Janitor's people...." Similarly, Covington Hall recorded the "valuable information and tips" received by the Brotherhood not only from persons within the head offices of the lumber companies, but from within "the principal offices of the National Lumber Trust." Even H.G. Creel — the union sympathizer and speaker — "got employment as a bookkeeper with the Iron Mountain Lumber Company" during the Sweet Home strike, "and passed out information when another crew of strikebreakers might be due, where it was to go, and where guards were posted."21

As Hall concluded, the BTW was everywhere and nowhere. It was ubiquitous and unseen... [a] semi-secret organization, with the usual passwords and grips so dear to Southerners... [The owners] never knew exactly how many "red-card men" remained on the job.22

At times the Brotherhood emerged from its secretive avoidance of legal repression to confront such repression practically and ideologically; as the five year conflict wore on, such confrontation became more and more common. In the preamble to its 1911 Constitution and By-Laws, the BTW was careful to note that while demanding our rights, we, at the same time concede, that the employer is entitled to, and we promise him, an absolutely square deal in every sense which this implies... Violence, in all its forms, shall be discouraged. Property rights shall be respected.... At all times, and in all things, we shall be glad to meet and counsel with those who employ us, and by the arts of reason, justice, and persuasion, try to convince them of the righteousness of our cause.23

In the following years, however, such moderation was often abandoned in both word and deed. An IWW leaflet circulated in the region, for example, urged unionists to force mass arrests by violating injunctions, thus crippling both the legal system and employers.24 More common was the advocacy of violence in
response to legal and extra-legal repression. Hall, for example, reported that "... there was much talk of guns. Both sides indulged; we published a cut showing two crossed rifles, with this caption: 'The only argument a gunman undersands.'" Moreover, BTW leaders at times counseled violence. The most militant BTW leader, Ed Lehman, argued that "to commit murder you have first to kill a human being, and a gunman or Burns' detective is not a human being." He further argued against the efficacy of non-violent tactics ("the might of folded arms") in response to the types of legal repression noted above:

These lumber towns are being stockaded, and gunmen put at their gates to keep the union out. As long as the gunmen stay there, the Union will stay out. It is up to the militant union men to see that the gunmen do not stay there. To hell with the might of folded arms!"27

These attitudes found expression both in threats of violence and in actual confrontations. The threats themselves, of course, constituted a tactic of counter-intimidation even when not fulfilled. In May 1912, Covington Hall reported that "the boys in the forest and mills have notified the gunmen that they could shoot just as quick and straight as any gunmen ever did..." 28 A more direct threat was received by John H. Kirby late in the conflict. The threat — boldly but unevenly hand-lettered and mailed from New Orleans May 20, 1915 — was evidently in reference to the jailing of BTW organizer Charles Cline in San Antonio:

Gov. J.H. Kurby [sic]

Get Klyne [sic] out or get ready for Hell. I have been sworn for this and its [sic] you or me. Liberty [or] death.29

During this same period — as the conflict dissolved into an "underground war... industrially and politically" — The Lumberjack even advertised a firm recommended by Mother Jones, which sold "a fine rifle for only $3.50!" 30 Reports of incidents of violence throughout the conflict indicate that at least some of these threats were fulfilled.

Perhaps the Brotherhood's clearest and most thoroughgoing counter-attack came not through violence and threats of violence,
Following the lead of the IWW, the Brotherhood emphasized "direct action" in the workplace, rather than political action or other indirect means outside of work. Developed from the French anarcho-syndalists, and integrated with the IWW's notion of revolutionary industrial unionism, this "direct action" entailed a number of specific tactics, including various forms of temporary and on-the-job strikes, and intentional work inefficiency. The most controversial component of "direct action," however, was sabotage — workers' violence against owners' property. Utilizing symbols such as the black cat (the "Saba-Tabby Kitten") and the wooden shoe (French workers supposed fouled machinery by tossing their sabots, or wooden shoes, into it), BTW and IWW leaders at times openly advocated sabotage, but most often urged such action through more indirect and elusive methods. During the conflict, a lead editorial in the *Industrial Worker* read:

"... To hell with the statutes and with laws,
Made but to strangle Labor's cause!

"... To hell with courts, in crime grown old!
To hell with justice bought and sold!
(from Covington Hall's "The Fight Is On")

An officer of the law is a walking delegate of Capitalism.
(William D. "Big Bill" Haywood)

Damn the laws of the ruling class. We will have none of them. Capitalist law and order means law forced upon the workers by order of the capitalists. (*Industrial Worker*)

Thy deputies, gunmen and militia, they [are] after me;
Thou preparest a court martial for me
In the presence of mine enemies
(from "The 23rd Psalm")

Now if you fellows want to arrest me just do so and put me in jail. If you arrest me without a cause then we will see about it. I am not going to take any foolishness at all. I am going into these places and if you want to arrest me pop your whip. You can kill me but you can't scare me. Now if you fellows want Mr. Kirby to know this write him. I want him to see it. (A.L. Emerson)"

The confluence of these two broad responses to legal and economic repression — secrecy and deception, and defiant confrontation — could be seen in a third BTW response: sabotage. During the Merryville strike, the *Industrial Worker* published a similarly constructed notice:

Scabs!
Attention
Brother of Timber Workers
On strike at Merryville, La.
Take warning!
American Lumber Co.
Going crazy.
Everybody's doin' it!

In addition, *The Lumberjack* published a poem — "Saw Mill 'Accidents,' By The Wooden Shoe Kid" — which detailed "accidents" with saws, engines, and pumps. Most remarkable was the following "warning to wayward lumberjacks," pointedly entitled
"Don't Do It, Boys," and published in the Industrial Worker:

We are sure that no self-respecting lumber worker would ever resort to that terrible thing called sabotage. We wish to warn all workers against it.

You don't know what sabotage is, you say? Well perhaps it is best to tell you so that you may take warning.

Sabotage in the woods might mean working slow on the job. You wouldn't do that would you? Never. It is against the interest of Weyerhauser, Clark, Kirby and Long. You love these gentlemen, don't you?

Sabotage may mean misplacing the tools where they are not easily found. Promise us that you will never do that. . . .

Sabotage may mean that logs are cut shorter than the required size. . . .

Sabotage may mean the driving of spikes into the logs or even into the trees. . . . Terrible! No good, honest, Christian, gentlemanly logger would do anything like that. It isn't good for mill saws.

Sabotage means lots of other things. We may mention them from time to time as a warning to wayward lumberjacks. We know that sabotage does not appeal to you. . . .

Vote if you may, pray if you must, arbitrate if you will, and even strike—in the dull season after stockpiling and giving due notice—but never, never, use sabotage.

All loggers who will agree not to use sabotage please say "Aye." Thanks. Now all saw mill workers who won't use sabotage kindly hold up your hands. Your whole hands, please, Beg pardon! We forgot that saw mill workers don't have whole hands. But you won't use sabotage either, will you? Splendid! . . .

For the love of your boss and the glory of your soul don't use sabotage.12

When such instructive "warnings" led to sabotage, the BTW and IWW reported these activities, but again in the language of innocence. In a report to the Industrial Worker, for example, Covington Hall noted that "many strange and wierd things are happening throughout the timber belt."

For instance, the log cutters made a demand for 60 cents per thousand feet and when it was refused all special bills in some mysterious manner ended up three inches short and the work had to be done all over again; trees began to show a tendency for absorbing spikes into their interior against which the saws protested by going up in the air; then, in backing up the log carts, the nuts would run off the spindles and fall in the creeks and other places where they could never be found, so that everything on the job had to come to a standstill; the flanges on the car would break off on the curves and all the logs go back into the woods instead of going to the mills as they should; fly wheels became mentally unbalanced and [would] jump their jobs; and many other strange and mysterious things happen, why, no one knows.

During the Merryville strike, the Industrial Worker headlined further "Strange Actions in the Souther Lumber Camps," and recorded as well their effects:

A logging engine . . . decided to dodge a deep curve which skirted a deep, wide barrow pit, and take a short cut across the field. But the engine failed to put its train hep to this flank movement and on account of this lack of solidarity, an injury to one proved an injury to all, and in a few moments engine, cars and logs were soon a mass of tangled wreckage. . . . An engine, with a few cars of scabs and gunmen, was proceeding lawfully on its ladylike way from the woods to town, one raw and gusty evening . . . when lo! and behold, a giant pine at side of the tracks suddenly grew tired of standing, and resolved at this psychological moment to utilize the slowly moving engine directly under it as a pillow, which it did, amid rending of iron and steel. . . . We strikers are at a loss (?) to account for all these immoral, not to say unladylike, actions on the part of the bosses' sacred property. How sad it is, when even inanimate machines strike on their generous (?) employers. It's a damn shame?13

The sabotage of lumber company property, then, embodied both the Brotherhood's orientation towards secrecy and deception, and its determination to defy and confront the southern lumber trust. While sabotage was clearly a defiant attack on the southern lumber trust — and clearly illegal — it was both advocated and carried out in such a way as to minimize detection and subsequent legal prosecution. Sabotage — which IWW leader "Big Bill" Haywood labeled "the law of the workers" — was designed to circumvent the
Two additional strategies which were part of the Brotherhood’s overall battle with the lumber trust were also useful in countering legal repression. First, as previously noted, the BTW maintained and utilized throughout the conflict a widespread network of support which included farmers, small merchants, workers in other industries, and progressive organizations and publications. More than once, this network aided the Brotherhood in its legal battles. In the spring of 1912, for example, E.F. Presley was elected mayor of DeRidder, Louisiana, on a joint BTW/Socialist ticket. Following his election, he attempted to protect BTW members and socialists in the area, and fought area lumber companies. Later in the conflict, when three BTW members were on trial following the Sweet Home strike, “farmers and lumberjacks poured into Colfax [Louisiana] ... [and] proceeded to hold a mass meeting in the street [and] denounced in hot terms the ‘arrest and persecution of our boys,’ as they styled it.”

Second, the BTW taught its members independence from “leaders” and “bossism,” and encouraged in members “the art of thinking and acting for themselves.” In “A Parable,” for example — composed by IWW/ BTW organizer E.F. Doree, and circulated throughout the region — a mill “boss” warns a union spokesman that “I can have [the union’s] leaders sent to jail,” and the spokesman replies, “I think you will find that we are all able to lead and for every man you sen[d] to jail . . . you make a hundred union men who never thought of it before.” In the aftermath of the Grabow “riot” — with part of the union’s leadership in fact “sent to jail” — the BTW was forced to employ this strategy, as well as the other strategies outlined above, in an effort to survive the most severe episode of legal repression it would face during its five year existence.

**Grabow and Its Aftermath**

The southern lumber trust’s initial strategy for breaking the BTW involved closing sawmills where the BTW was strongest, reopening them with only those workers who signed non-union pledges, and blacklisting from the lumber industry those who did not sign. These closings were also designed to augment the trust’s larger manipulation of the lumber market through curtailment of production. When, by the spring of 1912 the BTW was not broken, and prices and demand for lumber had continued to rise, a second strategy was developed: keep sawmills struck by the BTW running with scab labor, and break the BTW financially. The Grabow “riot” of July 7, 1912, was not, according to lumbermen, a riot precipitated by the BTW. Instead, according to the BTW and its supporters, the Grabow incident was engineered by the southern lumber trust in an attempt to assassinate BTW leaders and destroy the union. Certainly, circumstantial evidence points to the latter conclusion. The day before the incident there was an attempted assassination of H.G. Creel, and by most accounts the first shot fired at Grabow hit a man next to BTW president A.L. Emerson.

Whatever the causes of the Grabow “riot,” however, the arrest and trial of BTW leaders following the incident was clearly designed to cripple the union. Although a coroner’s inquest found mill owner John Galloway “personally responsible” for the death of one man, only BTW members and supporters were arrested and held in the Calcasieu Parish Prison at Lake Charles, Louisiana. Although authorities denied A.L. Emerson the right to speak for publication after his arrest, and forced him to issue a denial of jail conditions, he managed to report to the editor of the socialist newspaper *The Rebel* that “I have been sick mentally for some time. There is so much noise in here that one can hardly think.”

Prior to the trial, *The St. Louis Lumberman* noted that

The non-union men and the lumbermen are said to have employed the leading talent of the South to prosecute the men whom they charge with murder and anarchy. They have expressed their determination to break up the practices which have caused them great annoyance for the past three years, and they are ready to take up the battle now in earnest.

During the trial, lumber leader M.L. Alexander added that he was “not at all satisfied with the general conditions of the territory at the present time and if those men are acquitted, unionism...
will become more open and pronounced at
every point and the fight will be a hard one." The southern lumber trust and its allies therefore did everything possible to prevent acquittal, and to drain the BTW’s finances in the process. Prosective jurors were mailed a fake IWW leaflet designed to prejudice them against the BTW; witnesses were mailed threatening letters. "All active for the defense were threatened with death or beating," and, as a result of Burns Detective Agency work, three BTW/IWW organizers were arrested, jailed, and charged with bribery and intimidating witnesses." Imprisoned BTW members were also threatened by Burns detectives in the employ of the southern lumber trust. Moreover, the trust pressured regional newspapers during the trial to the point that it could report to its members that "all responsible papers in this section are now handling the details of the trial in a very conservative way ..." and even considered "securing a representative paper ... to take up and publish the true facts regarding this situation."39

The trial itself featured a prosecution openly funded by the southern lumber trust and aided by the Burns agency, and a presiding judge (Winston Overton) with a history of pro-lumber and anti-BTW decisions. Some eleven years earlier, Judge Overton had in fact served as toastmaster at an honorary banquet for U.S. Congressman A.P. Pujo, later to become chief prosecutor in the trial. Not surprisingly, Judge Overton consistently granted prosecution motions and denied those of the defense. The St. Louis Lumberman reported prior to the trial, for example, that "in the charge given the grand jury by Judge Overton before submitting this case he repeatedly charged the members to investigate the possibility of a conspiracy," and during the trial the southern lumber trust reported to its members that "the prosecution has been the victor as to every [defense] objection offered." In addition, Overton granted a key prosecution motion to sever the trial of nine defendants from the remaining forty-nine, and ruled that defense witnesses could not return to their homes while waiting to be called. The support of these witnesses while in Lake Charles, coupled with the costs of the trial as a whole, all but emptied BTW coffers. Although the southern lumber trust finally failed to gain the conviction of the BTW defendants, it did succeed in using the trial to disable the union financially. By the time the trial ended, "pressing debts"

*Industrial Worker, December 26, 1912.*

![Cartoon of a man asking a man why wages, grub, and housing have changed](Image)
were being cited, and two months later the BTW could claim “exactly $30” in its treasury."

What few BTW funds remained were exhausted by the Merryville strike, which the southern lumber trust precipitated soon after the acquittal of the Grabow defendants by firing from the American Lumber Company at Merryville those employees who had testified for the defense at the trial. That the owners had been planning to attack the BTW at its Merryville stronghold was obvious. As early as August, 1911, C.B. Sweet wrote John H. Kirby that “the Merryville plant will possibly have their experience after our trouble is settled,” and a November 13, 1912, telegram from E.P. Ripley to J.W. Terry — the Santa Fe Railroad officer in charge of the plant — quoted S.H. Fullerton’s recommendation: Possibly easiest and quickest way [to] clean up M. [Merryville] would be to sell timber to neighboring mills, ship out your manufactured lumber at M. and let that town do without a manufacturing plant. Central Coal and Coke Company, Kirby Lumber Company, Pickering Lumber Company, Long-Bell Lumber Company, and Gulf Lumber Company could buy this timber at a price per thousand feet that could be agreed upon. If this could be arranged, timber could be cleaned up quick and citizens of M. be given object lesson which they would not soon forget. At meeting held [at] St. Louis few days ago this course suggested to some parties, and it was thought could be arranged . . . .

The St. Louis Lumberman thus noted the “cleaning” that was being done “to get rid of the Brotherhood,” and the Kirby Lumber Company did in fact begin filling orders for the American Lumber Company. During the strike, American Lumber Company gunmen were deputized, street meetings and public speaking were banned, BTW leaders were arrested, deported, and jailed for “intimidating labor.” strikers were beaten by a mob led by the Good Citizens’ League and deputized gunmen, the BTW soup kitchen was destroyed, and Union Hall was raided and ransacked, and transients were compelled by local courts to work for the company. By the end of the strike, the lumber trust’s goal of bankrupting the BTW was realized. SLOA Report #168 noted that the financial report to the May, 1913, BTW convention revealed “cash on hand, April 30th, $120.08, with scheduled liabilities amounting to $7,696;” and Covington Hall recalled that “we were financially flat broke” during the strike, and that “as the Merryville union had been, toward the last, the treasury of the [BTW], the loss of the strike left us practically bankrupt.”

For its part, the BTW called upon its full strategic arsenal as it fought to survive the Grabow trial and Merryville strike. In the tense aftermath of Grabow, the Brotherhood sought to minimize its legal repression through non-violent tactics. The Rebel, for example, quoted a Houston Chronicle report that “none of the arrested men offered any resistance. As soon as they were notified that they were wanted they agreed to come.” Moreover, Covington Hall noted that be and other BTW leaders “worked night and day” to abort open revolt in the weeks after the incident, and that he and others active in the trial remained unarmed, despite the threats and harassment noted above. When to protest the opening of the trial the BTW declared a “union holiday” — during which union members and sympathizers were to boycott work, and gather to raise money for the trial — it therefore warned participants that

your mission must be a peaceful one . . . All weapons must be kept at home. No guns or rifles will be tolerated . . . no one shall, upon that day, allow himself to become intoxicated and shall not enter into heated arguments that may cause trouble.

As the situation unfolded, however, the Brotherhood fought back with all types of confrontational tactics. During the trial, for example, the Central Coal and Coke Company reported receiving anonymous letters threatening to burn its plant and kill its employees, and, according to Hall, “rank and file” unionists proclaimed that

you can do anything you like in your crooked courts but [the defendants] are not going to be hanged, and they are not going to the pen! . . . [if we get the news of the boys’ conviction over the wires we are marching on Lake