

RUTGERS LABOR UNION ARCHIVES: A RECOLLECTION

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On June 19, 1947, the law establishing The Institute of Management and Labor Relations (IMLR) at Rutgers University became effective. Shortly thereafter the institute's structure was formed, composed of a director and four programs: Labor, Management, Public and Research. Initially, the IMLR Library functioned as a sub-unit within the Research Program.¹ In the late 1950s it was designated as a separate program, initially under the director's office and later as one of the functioning units within the institute.²

In its formative era the entire IMLR was located on the upper floors of Winants Hall on College Avenue. The fledgling library occupied one large room on the top floor. Its holdings were extremely small, composed of a relatively few number of books, a pamphlet file and a growing collection of periodicals, most of which were gifts or donations from Rutgers faculty members.

During this early period the IMLR was affiliated with the University Extension Division (UED), a non-degree granting entity which extended its educational services to labor, management, and the public throughout the state. Both the Research Program and the IMLR Library supported the UED teaching programs with appropriate research and information services. Within this institutional structure the labor union archives at Rutgers had its beginning.³

One of the first efforts to develop a cohesive policy on preserving labor union records can be traced to the establishment of an *ad hoc* Committee for the Preservation of Labor Reports in early 1959. The original committee had as its chairman, Robert W. Hill, Keeper of Manuscripts at the New York Public Library. Other members included: Edward DiRoma, Economics Division of the New York Public Library; Leone Eckert, Records Librarian at Cornell University's New York School of Industrial and Labor Relations; Louise Heinze, Librarian of the Tamiment Institute; and Dorothy Kuhn Oko, Head of Library Service to Labor Unions, the New York Public Library. Later, the IMLR librarian was added to the committee. This committee surveyed libraries throughout the country and devoted

exclusive attention to "the problem of how union labor records may be preserved."⁴ In response to the initial survey, the IMLR Library reported that it maintained a small collection of New Jersey labor union records but desired integration within the framework of "some kind of coordinated system for collecting archives of specific unions."⁵ At that time, the library could not engage in any significant record solicitation due to a limited staff.

In the summer of 1959 some members of the committee held discussions with trade union officials concerning the preservation of labor union records. As a result, the AFL-CIO passed a resolution at its 1959 convention on "Labor Union Archives" which recognized the scholarly importance of original union records and materials. The resolution further recommended that affiliated unions cooperate with responsible institutions such as libraries and historical societies in "encouraging modern practices in their preservation and service, and arranging for their ultimate deposition when no longer current, in suitable institutions for learning."⁶

Although unions did not immediately implement plans for the preservation of their historical records, further impetus came from the support of such groups as the Trade Union Committee of the Society of American Archivists (SAA) and the Committee of University Industrial Relations Librarians (CUIRL). This latter committee, of which the IMLR librarian was a member, specifically addressed concerns regarding the maintenance and preservation of union historical records and valuable labor documents. At the 1963 CUIRL Annual Conference (held at Cornell University's New York School of Industrial and Labor Relations, May 31-June 1, 1963), librarians and archivists in attendance authorized Philip Rappaport (NY Department of Labor), Bernard Downey (Rutgers University), and Robert Hill (NY Public Library) to "prepare a resolution to submit to Tony Gallo, Chairman of the Secretary-Treasurer's group of the AFL-CIO, who will in turn bring it up before his group when considering union co-operation with the project." The committee noted that "the need is becoming more urgent because of increasing scholarly research in this field. We respectfully and cordially ask that the (AFL-CIO) Secretary-Treasurer's Organization accord this subject official recognition again and help to call it to the attention of its affiliates."⁷

Despite concerted efforts by library and archival groups, the AFL-CIO did little to press the issue, even though it went on record as supporting the concept of labor union records preservation. The Committee for the Preservation of Labor Records prepared a brochure which instructed labor unions how to organize and manage their records and provided a reference list of advisory organizations for consultation. Attempts were made to have this brochure issued with the official endorsement of the AFL-CIO in order to achieve wider distribution among local unions and state and central labor councils. AFL-CIO approval apparently never materialized and the

brochure was not issued. However, individual university organizations published and disseminated their own instructional brochures and pamphlets on the maintenance and preservation of labor records. Prominent among these were *What is Past is Prologue*, published by Cornell's New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, and *Preserving Labor's Heritage*, produced by Wayne State University's Labor History Archives. This latter publication was notable for its description of the scope of the Wayne State University Archives and the inclusive statement that the United Auto Workers (UAW) had designated the labor archives in 1962 as the "official depository for its records of historical importance."⁸

It is within this historical context that the IMLR evolved a labor union archival program. In assessing prospects for the future of a Rutgers Labor Archives, the IMLR Library's Annual Report for 1959-1960 noted that growth would result from planned labor union archival activity with a view toward becoming a depository for archival material of the International Union of Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (IUE), as well as the historical records of New Jersey unions. While the above report provided some evidence of labor union archival interest within the IMLR, there were other circumstances that led to more concrete efforts to build and maintain a functioning labor archives at Rutgers.⁹

Probably the most important factor was the construction of the Labor Education Center (LEC) on the Cook Campus of Rutgers University. This center, the first unit in a proposed IMLR complex, provided the essential space to house both the Labor Program and the library. Contributions and gifts from unions throughout the country underwrote much of the construction costs of the center. This was acknowledged by naming various sub-units within the building in honor of the outstanding contributors. Al Loewenthal, executive assistant to the IUE District Four president, Milton Weihrauch, played a significant role in obtaining funds for the library wing of the center. Loewenthal served as a labor member of the institute's State Advisory Council and had been a long-time friend of the library. Because of the substantial financial support and assistance rendered by the IUE, a decision was made to name the library for James B. Carey, then president of the IUE.¹⁰

As the IMLR librarian, I accompanied Dr. Herbert A. Levine (head of the IMLR Labor Program) to Washington, D.C., in November 1960 to meet with Carey. At that time we discussed our plans for the projected library and broached the desirability of securing the records of his administration as the cornerstone of a Rutgers labor archives. Movement toward that goal gained greater momentum when George Collins, IUE District Four vice-president, delivered the keynote address at the dedication of the Labor Education Center on October 20, 1962. Collins envisioned the Carey Library as a central archives for all union documents on microfilm and stated



Fig. 4.1: Summer Institute participants in the James B. Carey Library in the Institute of Management and Labor Relations, June 1963. (from IUE Archives in Special Collections and University Archives)

“it [the IUE Archives] will make available to scholars and historians a tremendous storehouse of union information and data . . . ”¹¹

Two other events resulted in the decision to establish a significant labor archival program. One was the university’s strategic plan to expand its research capabilities and, concomitantly, the LEC’s determination to enlarge its activities to encompass a degree-granting labor studies program, including a doctoral program. Dr. Levine and I concurred that a labor union archives would facilitate the research mission of the university and buttress the proposed labor studies academic curriculum.

From the time of the LEC’s dedication until mid-1965, little progress had been made in acquiring the IUE archives which were envisioned as the keystone of the a major labor union archives. Organizational difficulties within the IUE owing to a disputed union election, coupled with the lack of university resources to house and maintain the voluminous IUE records, caused much of the delay. A breakthrough occurred in early 1965 when the new president of the IUE, Paul Jennings, agreed to meet with Rutgers University representatives to discuss the move of IUE records to the university. Meeting at the IUE headquarters (Philip Murray Building) in May 1965, Dr. Levine, William Miller (the University Archivist), and myself reached an agreement with the union for the transfer of its records to Rutgers. On June 22, 1965, Dr. Donald F. Cameron, Rutgers University Librarian, wrote to Jennings expressing the pleasure Rutgers took in being named the official depository of the IUE records and accepting them as part of a labor archives special collection. President Jennings officially designated Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, as the official depository on September 16, 1965. On September 21, 1965, Dr. Cameron acknowledged Jennings’ official depository designation.¹²

In early October 1965, I accompanied William Miller to the Philip Murray Building and marked approximately 350 transfer files of IUE records for shipment to Rutgers. The bulk of these records covered the formative era of the union (1949 to 1960) and chiefly documented Carey’s administration of the IUE. On October 11, 1965, the shipment of IUE records arrived and were stored in a university library warehouse on Livingston Campus.¹³

Although some preliminary checking of the IUE archives was made by William Miller, the lack of resources prevented the university from actively working on the records until September 1968. At that time the University Extension Division, through Dean Ernest McMahon, provided funding for one year’s salary for a full-time person to work on the archives under the supervision of the University Archivist. Substantial progress was made in bringing some order out of the large mass of material received from the IUE and a preliminary index was prepared. In June 1970 two graduate students interested in labor history were employed to facilitate processing of the IUE

records. One year later, major categories of the files had been arranged and processed, a cataloging system devised, and a refined index issued. In subsequent years some work continued on the IUE files with limited funding. During this period a number of scholars applied to use the files and labor studies students delved into the labor archives in conjunction with their university programs.¹⁴

Although this paper has dealt primarily with the important IUE archives, one must not suppose that this was the only labor archives with which the IMLR Library was involved. Along with William Miller, we actively pursued and received the records of Local 56 (Camden, NJ) of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of America. Other prominent acquisitions included: the documentary and photographic files of the Bryn Mawr Summer School for Workers; the files of the Hudson Shore Summer School; and the personal file and union contracts collection of Lewis M. Hermann. Hermann, editor of the *New Jersey Labor Herald* and a member of the New Jersey state assembly, shepherded the legislation which established the IMLR. Acquisition of the records of the New Jersey CIO Industrial Union Council, early contracts of New Jersey petroleum workers organized by the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers of America (OCAW), and the records (including handwritten minutes dating from 1900-1907) of the Newark local of the International Typographical Union (ITU) were added in later years.

As Miller took an active role in supervising many of the early processing initiatives associated with these and subsequent labor-oriented accessions, Rutgers University Libraries' Special Collections and University Archives became the primary unit responsible for development of the library's labor archives by 1970, although it was not until 1982 that the IUE Archives were transferred to that unit. In subsequent years many new collections (such as the records of the National Maritime Workers Union of America and the personal papers of Ernest Thompson, a prominent civil rights activist within the United Electrical Radio and Machine Workers of America) were added. The IMLR Library, however, still retained labor education collections and the institutional records of the Institute. A more recent comprehensive assessment of labor history resources at Rutgers can be gleaned from an article by Ronald L. Becker (Head, Special Collections and University Archives) which appeared in *Labor History* (Winter/Spring, 1990). Collectively, the labor archival holdings of the SMLR Library and Special Collections have established the RUL as a major institution for the documentation of labor history and labor education in the United States.¹⁵

NOTES

1. Rutgers University Institute of Labor Relations, "Review of Activities July 1, 1947 to April 30, 1950," Unpublished brochure contained in the Bernard Downey Files, School of Management and Labor Relations Library, Rutgers University (hereafter cited as BDF/SMILR).
2. Memorandum From Acting Director Irvine L.H. Kerrison to Institute Program Heads, 8 January 1958, Institute Archives Files of the Director, SMILR Library; Under the heading Office of the Director, supervision of the Library is listed as an administrative responsibility. In Institute budgets, beginning with the 1959/60 budget, the Library is listed separately with its own allocations.
3. Irvine L.H. Kerrison, "Philosophy and Operating Principles of the Institute," *IMLR Newsletter*, no. 1-S, 1 (November 1956), p.1.
4. Louise Heinze, Secretary of the Committee to Bernard Downey, 30 April 1959, BDF/SMILR.
5. IMLR Reply to a Letter from the "Hill Committee," 6 April 1959, BDF/SMILR.
6. "Labor Union Archives," *Proceedings of the Third Constitutional Convention of the AFL-CIO, September 16-21, 1959*, I: p. 302.
7. Committee of University Industrial Relations Librarians, *Proceedings of the Seventeenth Annual Conference held at Cornell University, New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, 31 May-1 June, 1963*, p.11.
8. *Preserving Labor's Heritage*. Wayne State University, Labor History Archives, unpagged brochure in BDF/SMILR, n.d..
9. "Future of the Library," *In Annual Report of the Institute of Management and Labor Relations Library, 1959-1960*, 3-4.
10. Herbert A. Levine to James B. Carey, 14 June 1960, BDF/SMILR; Levine wrote to Carey: "During the District 4 Convention at the Concord [Hotel] we agreed that the time has come to begin the collection of IUE archival materials to be maintained by the James B. Carey Library at Rutgers . . . Mr. Bernard Downey, Rutgers Institute Librarian, would be pleased to come to Washington with Al Loewenthal and myself . . . to discuss ways and means of beginning this important work."
11. "Center is Dedicated, Carey Chief Speaker," *IUE News*, no. 21, 13 (25 October 1962): p. 3.
12. Monthly Report of the IMLR Librarian, May 1965, BDF/SMILR; Donald F. Cameron to Paul Jennings, 22 June, 21 September, 1965; Jennings to Cameron, 16 September 1965, contained in Box 160, File 29, Record Group 2, IUE Archives, Rutgers University Special Collections (hereafter cited as IUE Archives).
13. William Miller, "IUE Records-Progress Report," 15 January 1969, William Miller Files, Rutgers University Special Collections and University Archives (hereafter cited as WMF).
14. John Morrell, "IUE Records-Progress Report," 10 May 1969, WMF; Elaine Cusker and Roslynn Gabrielsky, "IUE Archives-Final Report," 30 June 1971, WMF.
15. Ronald L. Becker, "Labor History Resources at the Rutgers University Libraries," *Labor History*, v. 31, nos. 1/2 (Winter/Spring, 1990): 67-70.

