

The Archives of Labor¹

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National Archives

RECORDS relating to the modern labor movement constitute an important source of primary material for a variety of historical and economic studies. They are to be found among Government archives, among business records, in the manuscript collections of individuals (including those of employers, labor leaders, political figures, and specialized scholars), and among the files of labor organizations. The archival profession preserves labor records among Government archives as a matter of course in the appropriate Government depositories. A recent growth of interest — in the United States at least — in business records and history bears the promise of rescuing documentation on labor, as seen from the employer's side, from undeserved neglect and inaccessibility. Relevant collections of private papers are in some cases known to exist in institutions where they can be consulted, and it is possible that there are many more that could be made available. Least is known about the condition and content of the records of organized labor itself.

The Committee on Labor Union Archives of the Society of American Archivists believes that a dual benefit would result from an inquiry into the extent and nature of records dealing with labor-management relations. The first would be to make known what records of this sort exist and are accessible. The second would be to encourage the preservation of such records, so that they may be made available to researchers either now or whenever, after some lapse of time, the custodians of the records think it appropriate.

On these grounds, the committee has prepared a very prelimi-

¹ This discussion, prepared by the chairman of the Society's Committee on Trade Union Archives, with the assistance of committee members Leone Eckert and Mrs. Roger Thomas, is printed as an article rather than a committee report in the hope of "encouraging a flow of material" on which the committee can base "a more exhaustive union list of appropriate records." In transmitting its report the committee requested that it be furnished funds (\$100) to purchase reprints of this article, for the reproduction of questionnaires designed to elicit more information, and for stationery and postage to circulate the article and questionnaire to appropriate organizations and agencies. The committee hopes to obtain the cooperation of other organizations and agencies in this circularization and in other efforts to elicit the information desired. Eventually, the committee hopes to make available for publication an extensive list of archival and manuscript materials relating to labor.

nary and general report, based on currently available knowledge, on the existence of labor records, hoping that by bringing them to the attention of scholars it will be of service in facilitating their researches; hoping even more to encourage the custodians of such records to make known their holdings or to amplify existing descriptions of them; hoping, finally, to persuade the managers of such records in "going concerns" (as at the various levels of the trade union movement) to regard them not as mere "files" but as *archives* — an important primary source of documentation worthy of preservation and care. To the extent to which this report succeeds in encouraging the custodians of labor archives that are not here dealt with to make known their resources, the committee will amplify its report, looking forward to the time when the Society may publish a comprehensive guide to labor records.

In this report, the term "labor archives" is confined to the *official* records of the history, organization, and functioning of Government agencies dealing with labor matters, and of labor organizations, wherever found. Though such bodies of records usually contain printed and near-print materials, no collections that consist primarily of such materials are discussed, as they are documented in library catalogs. Nor are collections of the private papers of persons active in or connected with the labor movement or prominent in labor history more than touched upon, for lack of information. Attention has also been confined to records dated from about the middle of the nineteenth century — the period of modern industrialism — although it is of course recognized that there are many earlier archival sources that have great value for the student of labor history, records created by bodies politic, corporate, or other of the preindustrial period. Such documentation, much of it of nonlabor origin (such as manor rolls or guild records), is for the most part well known.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Government Archives

The largest body of Government records pertaining to labor is undoubtedly that in the National Archives of the United States, in Washington, D. C., and to some extent in Federal Records Centers. The records of the Bureau of Labor, established in the Interior Department in 1884, are the earliest Federal labor agency records in the National Archives; those of the 1950 Wage and Salary Stabilization Boards are the most recent, having been received by the National Archives in 1953. By 1953 all Federal labor-related

agencies were represented in the National Archives or in one of the Federal Records Centers by bodies of noncurrent records. Least well represented was the Labor Department itself, partly because so much of its work results in publications that make the records themselves less valuable; best represented were the quasi-judicial bodies dealing with labor problems: the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, from 1913 on; a succession of railroad labor boards from 1898 to the late thirties; the labor-relations agencies of two World Wars (War Labor and War Labor Policies Boards of World War I; War Labor and Wage Stabilization Boards and Fair Employment Practice Committee of World War II); the National Labor Board and successor National Labor Relations Board, from 1933 on; the Maritime Labor Board, 1938-42; and a number of less important boards and committees. Other bodies of records of considerable importance to labor are those of the United States Railroad Administration (1917-20) and the Office of Defense Transportation (1941-49), for rail and other transportation labor matters of the two wars respectively; the War Manpower Commission (1942-45), for manpower problems of World War II; the National Recovery Administration (1933-37), the Works Projects Administration (1935-44), the National Youth Administration (1935-44), and the Federal Works Agency (1939-44), for depression problems; and the Federal Coordinator of Transportation (1933-36) and the Board of Investigation and Research — Transportation (1941-42), for their reports and other data on transportation labor problems. More or less voluminous material on labor exists also in various record groups originating in agencies having no obvious connection with labor activities; for example, among census schedules, among the records of large contracting and procurement agencies, and among the records of agencies dealing with natural resources, such as the Bureau of Mines. In addition to the records in the National Archives, the agencies carrying on substantive programs of course also have their current files; these, with some exceptions, contain only material less than 50 years old.

Relevant State and local subdivision archives it is impossible to enumerate. Few are noted in the available guides, although both archives establishments and significant labor legislation and labor agencies in many States antedate their Federal counterparts. It is probable that most extant labor archives of State and local origin either remain with the current records of appropriate agencies (or their successors) or are in dead storage and unidentified.

Labor-Movement Archives

The American Federation of Labor has, at its headquarters in Washington, a considerable archival collection consisting of minutes and proceedings of its own conventions and organizational elements and those of some of its constituent bodies, and of the correspondence, speeches, and papers of Samuel Gompers, who seems fortunately to have regarded his own papers in a very inclusive sense as official records of the federation. (It is understood that the Gompers papers are currently being microfilmed by the federation, with a view to affording maximum protection to the collection.) The federation archives are supplemented by an extensive collection of newspaper clippings. These records have in a number of instances been opened to students of labor history. The Congress of Industrial Organizations until very recently regarded itself as too young a body to create any systematic archival collection apart from its current files. It does, however, maintain its noncurrent records under adequate storage conditions.

No inquiries have as yet been made about the archives of internationals, State or municipal federations or councils, or locals. It is known, however, that the United Mine Workers are developing an archives of John L. Lewis' papers and speeches; and it is likely that a number of the older unions with a strong corporate tradition have preserved some of their records, as has, for example, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, New York (in its Research Department). Some union records have also found their way into the New York Public Library (e.g., collective bargaining agreements of the United Brotherhood of Cloakmakers), the Commons Library at the University of Wisconsin, and the Rand School Library, 7 East 15th Street, New York.

As for labor leaders' papers, it is known that some of Samuel Gompers' are in the New York Public Library and that those of Terence Powderly, John Hayes, and John Mitchell are at the Catholic University, Washington, D. C. At the last institution, also, are the papers of Msgr. John F. Ryan.

EUROPE

Government Archives

For the most part, government labor records in the other American and European countries were in 1950 still in the custody of the currently active official labor agencies — ministries, boards, and so on. Exceptions were the Scandinavian countries and Germany. In the Scandinavian countries, the central archives at Copenhagen,

Oslo, and Stockholm had received inactive labor records until a relatively recent date, but there were restrictions on the use of records less than 60 years old in Denmark and Norway.

In Germany, Italy, and the U.S.S.R. special circumstances arose out of the Nazi, Fascist, and Communist revolutions. At a very early stage of the Third Reich, Nazi authorities seized the records of the former labor unions and their affiliated organizations, and of former manufacturers' associations, together with their collections of pamphlets, clippings, and other printed material, and built upon them the records of the Arbeitsfront. This collection was called the Zentralarchiv der Deutschen Arbeitsfront and was housed at 14 Leipziger Platz, Berlin W.9. It was still in existence in 1944, as was another subsidiary archival agency, the Berufskundliches Archiv der Reichsanstalt für Arbeits-Vermittlung und Arbeitslosen Versicherung, at 12 Hardenbergstrasse, Berlin-Charlottenburg 2.

There is reason to believe that in Italy a similar consolidation took place in the two Fascist Ministries of Lavori Pubblici and of Corporazione. The first-named continued after the fall of Fascism (via Nomentana 2, Rome); the second was incorporated in part in the new Ministero del Lavoro e della Previdenza Sociale (Piazza Dalmazia, Rome). A special body of records dealing with labor conditions under Fascism and with the elimination of Fascist forms and policies in the period 1943-46 by the Allied Commission's Labor Sub-Commission is in the Historical Records Section, Adjutant General's Office, Department of the Army, Washington, for official use.

Since 1918 the Soviet authorities have applied the term archives not only to segregated noncurrent records but to current records as well. The first class, which alone would in Western usage be termed archives, are denominated "historical archives" and were cut off in 1917. From that date on, the current records accumulation is called the "archives of the October revolution." Separately maintained are the "archives of the trade unions," presumably the current (post-1917) records of the official trade union structure. This three-fold division is supposed to prevail not only at the central government level but at the constituent-republic and all lower levels.

International Agencies

The International Labour Office at Geneva, Switzerland, maintains a card-indexed registry (central files) as well as outlying files

in operating offices, in which are inactive but important files segregated in 10-year accumulations for archival preservation. Categories included cover all aspects of the office's work, substantive and administrative. Some are confidential.

Labor Movement Archives

No survey has ever been undertaken of archival source materials representing the labor movement either in the United States or abroad. Four European nongovernmental depositories, however, are known to exist, in which are to be found records of trade unions and allied bodies and activities, including the political labor movement, and in some cases, perhaps, appropriate private papers and printed matter. They are the Arbetarrörelsens Arkiv (Upplandsgatan 4, Stockholm — the earliest of these four, dating from 1872), the Arbejderbevaegelsens Arkiv (Hjalmar Brantingsplads 5, Copenhagen), the Arbejderbevaegelsens Arkiv (Vilsesgate 1, Oslo), and the Työväen Arkisto (Paasivuokatu 3, Helsinki).

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