Guide to the Retail Clerks Union Local 770 Scrapbook Collection, 1942-1959

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Overview of the Collection

Collection Title: Retail Clerks Union Local 770 Scrapbook Collection

Dates: 1942-1959

Identification: URB/RCU

Creator: Retail Clerks International Union. Local 770 (Los Angeles, Calif.)

Physical Description: 12.18 linear feet

Language of Materials: English

Repository: Urban Archives

Abstract: The Retail Clerks International Union (RCIU) Local 770 works to secure rights, negotiate wages, and resolve contract disputes for California-based retail employees. Joseph T. DeSilva helped form the RCIU and led Local 770 as executive secretary for over 35 years. DeSilva realized the RCIU’s political potential, leveraging strikes and shrewd negotiation tactics for local union members. Local 770 supported women’s rights, fair pay for African Americans and other minorities, labor legislation, and worked to address concerns of the surrounding community. The Retail Clerks Union, Local 770 Scrapbook Collection documents the union’s organizational activities, including union strikes, labor disputes, and worker-oriented political activity. The collection consists of scrapbooks containing national and local newspaper clippings, correspondence, pamphlets, magazines, photographs, campaign flyers, conference documentation, and other materials. Scrapbooks roughly cover the years 1942 to 1959.

Historical Note:
The Retail Clerks International Union (RCIU) Local 770 worked to secure rights, negotiate wages, and resolve contract disputes for California-based retail employees. The union was initially conceived as the Retail Clerks National Protective Union in the late 1890s, but eventually rebranded itself as the Retail Clerks International Association, and later, the RCIU. Joseph T. DeSilva helped form the RCIU and led Local 770 as executive secretary for over 35 years. DeSilva realized the RCIU’s political potential, leveraging strikes and shrewd negotiation tactics for local union members. Local 770 supported women’s rights, fair pay for African Americans and other minorities, labor legislation, and worked to address concerns of the surrounding community.

The RCIU was affiliated with The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL–CIO) for much of its organizational tenure. As a result of this affiliation, it gained greater collective bargaining power and political clout. Today, the union remains active as the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) following a series of mergers between The United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) and The Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America (AMC & BW of NA) in 1979. In 2005, disagreements with the AFL–CIO resulted in the withdrawal of the UFCW and other large-scale unions from the federation, however in 2013, the UFCW re-affiliated with the AFL–CIO. The UFCW now represents approximately 1.3 million workers throughout North America, across industries such as health care, retail food, meatpacking and processing, agriculture, and textile and manufacturing.

Genre/Form of Material:
Scrapbooks

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The collection is open for research use.

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For information about citing items in this collection consult the appropriate style manual, or see the Citing Archival Materials guide.

Scope and Contents
The Retail Clerks Union, Local 770 Scrapbook Collection documents the union’s organizational activities, including union strikes, labor disputes, and worker-oriented political activity. The collection consists of scrapbooks containing national and local newspaper clippings, correspondence, pamphlets, magazines, photographs, campaign flyers, conference documentation, and other materials. Scrapbooks roughly cover the years 1942 to 1959, however some overlap dates and content with regards to union activities, pivotal events, and salient figures.
Los Angeles and other Southern California unions and union activities are prominently featured. Scrapbooks include news reportage on local strikes, wage and salary negotiations, and the activities of particular union bodies (i.e., retail workers, garment workers, and food clerks). Events such as the Los Angeles General Food Store Clerks Strike in 1947, the 63rd District Assemblymen Election of 1947, the 9th Union Industries Show in L.A., the 23rd Convention of the Retail Clerks International Association, and the proclamation of Retail Clerks International Association Week in June, 1959 are included. News clippings documenting Joseph T. DeSilva’s labor contributions are accompanied by personal correspondences, photographs, and organizational memos. Researchers, historians, and scholars broadly interested in the history of labor unions in America and granularly in union activity in Southern California will find this collection rich in historical content.

| Box 1, Item 1 | Scrapbook, 1942-1944 |
| Box 2, Item 1 | Scrapbook, October 1946-May 1947 |
| Box 3, Item 1 | Scrapbook, December 1946-November 1947 |
| Box 4, Item 1 | Scrapbook, February 1947-July 1948 |
| Box 5, Item 1 | Scrapbook, January 1951-February 1957 |
| Box 6, Folder 1 | Loose items from Scrapbook |
| Box 6, Item 1 | Scrapbook, June 1959-August 1959 |