Finding Aid to the California Labor School Collection, 1942-1957larc.ms.0042

Finding aid prepared by Labor Archives and Research Center staff.
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Descriptive Summary

Title: California Labor School collection

Date (inclusive): 1942-1957

Creator: California Labor School

Accession number: 1988/043 and 1990/012

Collection number: larc.ms.0042

Extent: 2.25 cubic feet (5 boxes)

Repository: Labor Archives and Research Center

J. Paul Leonard Library, Room 460
San Francisco State University
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Languages: Languages represented in the collection: English.

Abstract: Consists of materials generated by the California Labor School, spanning the entire life of the School from its founding as the Tom Mooney Labor School in 1942 until its closing by the Internal Revenue Service in 1957. Materials include: catalogs, announcements, brochures, publications, class syllabi, correspondence, financial information and clippings.

Location: Materials are stored onsite.

Access

Collection is open for research.

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Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], California Labor School Collection, larc.ms.042, Labor Archives and Research Center, San Francisco State University.

Related Collections

Other collections with material on the California Labor School:
Holland Roberts Collection, 1987/088.
Norman Leonard Collection/National Union of Marine Cooks and Stewards, House Committee on Education and Labor (Kerstin Committee), Hearing in San Francisco, testimony of David Jenkins, Director, California Labor School, 1948.

Acquisition

This collection brings together records from several sources: The Bancroft Library which donated the bulk of the material; the Archives’ Ephemera Files which held an aggregate of items from individual donors; and a small collection from an anonymous donor. These were combined into this California Labor School Collection which spans the entire life of the School from its founding as the Tom Mooney Labor School in 1942 until its closing by the Internal Revenue Service in 1957. Researchers should also see the Holland Roberts Collection (Acc. #: 1987/088) which includes subject files on the School and a draft manuscript of Holland Roberts’ memoirs.

Processing Information

The California Labor School Collection was processed by Carol Cuénod in May-June 1994.

History

The Tom Mooney Labor School opened in August 1942 in a few rooms over an auto salesroom at 678 Turk Street in San Francisco. Under the heading of “Education for Victory,” the announcement stated “Side by side with the Army training camps, with the industrial training programs, with the civilian defense classes, it will undertake... the systematic training
and education of the men and women of San Francisco in the principles for which our country and the United Nations are fighting..." The School's program promised to analyze social, economic and political questions in light of the present world struggle against fascism. Dave Jenkins was the founding director and continued until 1949 when he was succeeded by Dr. Holland Roberts, the School's educational director.

This collection provides materials which describe the historical period of the California Labor School's early years. It was a period when unions and industry worked together to achieve maximum production for the war effort. There was interest in and a strong spirit of friendship for the USSR, a wartime ally of the U.S. Support for the School was received from unions whose membership had grown due to war industry. The ILWU sent 4,000 members to classes for new union members. Prominent citizens from industry and government were also listed as sponsors including Cyril Magnin, Richard Gump, Charles Crocker, U. S. Senator Sheridan Downey and U. S. Representative Franck Havenner. By the time the School was five years old, it boasted of conducting 135 classes for 1800 students, it had moved to larger quarters in a five-story building at 216 Market Street and had extension classes in Oakland and other Northern California sites.

In 1945, the U. S. State Department asked the California Labor School to serve as the official host in San Francisco for labor delegations to the founding conference of the United Nations. From 1945 to 1947, The California Labor School was accredited by the California State Department of Education for veterans' education under the G.I. Bill of Rights and by 1947 there were 220 full-time students. In 1947, the School bought its own building at 240 Golden Gate Avenue. Holland Roberts, in a draft manuscript of his memoirs, described 1948 as "the School at its peak." That same year, however, the U.S. Attorney-General placed the California Labor School on the Subversive List and thus began a ten-year attack led by the Subversive Activities Control Board in the Department of Justice and other government agencies. After the School was on the Subversive List, a student could not be employed by the federal government or any institution which had a "loyalty oath." If a student worked for the government, s/he could be discharged.

Support and attendance at the California Labor School declined. Union support was reduced to a few CIO locals which in 1949 were expelled from their Federation for being "Communist-dominated." The School was no longer a vital center for labor education and by 1951, the catalogs did not list one labor studies class. The School survived as a center of resistance to the political repression of the cold war-McCarthy years. Until it was padlocked by the IRS for alleged non-payment of taxes, the remaining students continued to support a reduced number of classes on the cold war, McCarthyism, U.S. history, USSR and socialism, writing, literature and the arts.

Scope and Contents
Consisting of materials generated by the California Labor School, spanning the entire life of the School from its founding as the Tom Mooney Labor School in 1942 until its closing by the Internal Revenue Service in 1957, this collection offers researchers a multi-faceted view of the California Labor School and its place in the left-wing community of the San Francisco Bay Area. Materials include: catalogs, announcements, brochures, publications, class syllabi, correspondence, financial information and clippings.

Series I holds term catalogs starting with the Opening Announcement of the Tom Mooney Labor School in 1942. The early growth of the School as well as its decline in the 1950s is documented by these catalogs which list the number of classes offered. The changing political atmosphere can be seen by the class subjects. Series II contains syllabi, reading lists and special flyers promoting the classes. Arrangement of folders is by general subject headings, alphabetically. Material for several different classes might be in one folder.

Series III is titled "Administration," but it represents all non-classroom activity. "Fundraising" records direct appeals for donations, but the files also includes announcements of many social and cultural events held to raise money. Significant was the annual Christmas Market booklet which in early years listed many of the supporters of the School—both businesses and individuals. "Publications" by the School range in content from Why Work for Nothing?, a popularization of the Marxist theory of surplus value, to Melanie, a booklet of whimsical autobiographical drawings by Melanie K. Kahn. A folder on the Library holds material on its active outreach work. Its bulletins and booklists offer insight into the intellectual character and scope of the left-wing community during the World War II and post-war periods.

Series IV documents attacks on the California Labor School by the Subversive Activities Control Board. The bulk of the material covers the years 1955 to 1957, a period when the School was ordered to register as a subversive organization. Correspondence and other documents report the Board's hearings on the School in San Francisco and other events up to the closing of the School.

This collection provides a rich study of the impact of anti-Communist repression on the left-wing School, contrasting its early success during World War II and the post-war era to its battle for survival in the 1950s.

Note
Throughout the container list, cross-references to the Holland Roberts Collection [indicated below as HR] are made.
Subjects and Indexing Terms
California Labor School--Archives.
Alternative schools--California--20th century.
Labor movement--Study and teaching.
Labor unions and education--United States.
Progressive education--California--20th century.
Working class--Education--California.

Series I: Term Catalogs

Tom Mooney Labor School
Box 1, Folder 1
Opening Term 1942
Box 1, Folder 1
Winter and Spring 1944
California Labor School
Box 1, Folder 2
Summer 1944
Box 1, Folder 2
Winter, Fall for Oakland School 1944
Box 1, Folder 3
Fall 1945
Box 1, Folder 4
Spring, Summer, Fall 1946
Box 1, Folder 5
Spring, Summer, Fall 1947
Box 1, Folder 6
Yearbook; Winter, Summer, Fall 1948
Box 1, Folder 7
Fall for Oakland and Berkeley
Box 1, Folder 8
Winter, Summer, Fall 1949
Box 1, Folder 8
Class announcements, various terms 1950-1957

Series II: Classes and Class Materials

Scope and Contents
Includes course announcements, leaflets, class outlines, reading lists, seminars and
conferences on class subjects.

Box 1, Folder 9
Art [see also: Holland Roberts (HR) Memoirs: Personalities Around the School - Anton
Refrigier] 1944-1955
Box 1, Folder 10
Asilomar Summer School 1947-1949
Box 1, Folder 11
Children's Classes [see also: Theater and Acting] 1945-1955
Box 1, Folder 12
Dance [see also: Art, for material on Cultural Conferences]
Children's Classes
Box 1, Folder 13
Economics and Political Economy 1945-1956

Scope and Contents
Class outlines, class schedules

Box 2, Folder 1
Film Series and Forums 1942-1956
Box 2, Folder 2
Foreign Policy 1943-1950
Box 2, Folder 3
History Classes [see also: HR: Course material for U.S. History classes] 1945-1956
Box 2, Folder 4
Literature and Writing [see also: Art, for materials on Cultural Conferences] 1944-1955
Box 2, Folder 5
Mental Hygiene 1944
Box 2, Folder 6
Minorities (Negroes and Jews) [see also: HR: Course material for "The Negro
Question"] 1944-1956
Box 2, Folder 7
Music
Box 2, Folder 8
Oakland and Other Branch Schools 1946-1950
Box 2, Folder 9
Peace-related Classes and Events, see: Foreign Policy
Box 2, Folder 10
Philosophy Classes 1944-1954
Box 2, Folder 11
Physical Science [brochure illustrated by Patri] 1944-1954
Box 2, Folder 12
Political Action 1946-1952
Box 2, Folder 13
Public Relations 1945
Box 3, Folder 1
Reading Improvement 1955-1956
| Box 3, Folder 2 | Socialism - Science and Society 1947-1955 |
| Box 3, Folder 3 | Theater and Acting [see also: HR Memoirs: Personalities Around the School - Mara Alexander and Dave Sarvis Art, for material on Cultural Conferences] 1936-1956 |
| Box 3, Folder 4 | Trade Unions 1945-1946 |
| Box 3, Folder 5 | Trade Unions 1947 |
| Box 3, Folder 6 | Trade Unions 1948 |
| Box 3, Folder 7 | Veterans Full-Time Program [see also: HR: Veterans Full-Time Program; HR Memoirs: The GI Bill of Rights] 1945-1947 |
| Box 3, Folder 8 | Veterans Full-Time Program - Study Plans |
| Box 3, Folder 9 | Women 1947 |
| Box 4, Folder 1 | Books and Book Fairs 1955 |
| Box 4, Folder 2 | Fund-raising [see also: HR Subjects: Fund-raising - Early grant application and final campaign in 1957] 1944-1956 |
| Box 4, Folder 3 | Fund-raising - Christmas Markets 1945-1955 |
| Box 4, Folder 4 | General |
| Box 4, Folder 5 | Library [see also: HR Memoirs: Library Days and Nights] 1943-1955 |
| Box 4, Folder 7 | Publications - Students 1944-1949 |
| Box 5, Folder 1 | Publications - San Francisco Writers Workshop 1952-1953 |
| Box 5, Folder 2 | United Nations Reception 1945 |
| Box 5, Folder 3 | Attacks on the California Labor School [see also: HR Subjects: Statements of Dave Jenkins and Holland Roberts to the Tenney Committee, 1946 |
| Box 5, Folder 4 | Attacks on the California Labor School - Subversive Activities Control Board (SCAB) |
| Box 5, Folder 5 | "Education for Victory and Action: The California Labor School in the Popular Front Era," by Marvin Gettleman (copy of ms.) |
| Box 5, Folder 6 | Newspaper clippings 1944-1955 |