
Finding Aid to the Peter Comacho International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 85 Collection, 1904-1959

Finding aid prepared by Joshua Paddison.

Labor Archives and Research Center

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Peter Comacho International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 85 collection

Date (inclusive): 1904-1959

Collection number: larc.ms.0024

Accession number: 1989/085

Creator: Comacho, Peter

Extent: 0.25 cubic ft. (1 box)

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 records from International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 85 of San Francisco, donated by Peter Comacho. Materials include canceled checks from 1904 to 1906; general meeting minutes from 1907 to 1910; executive board minutes from 1908 to 1910; contract rules and regulations with the Draymen's Association from 1902 and 1906; and contract rules and regulations with San Francisco House Movers, Inc., and the Draymen's Association from the late 1950s. Also included in the collection is a program from Teamsters Local 85's 50th Anniversary Celebration, held at the San Francisco Civic Auditorium on November 25, 1950.

Location: Materials are available onsite.

Access

Collection is open for research.

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Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Peter Comacho International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 85 Collection, larc.ms.0024, Labor Archives and Research Center, San Francisco State University.

Material Cataloged Separately

The following material has been removed from the files and relocated to the LARC book collection:

Charter of the City and County of San Francisco. San Francisco: Bender-Chaquette Company, 1907. "J. P. M'Laughlin" embossed on the front cover.

Related Collections

International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 85 Collection, larc.ms.0023

Eugene Fambrini International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 85 Collection, larc.ms.0070

Processing Information

The collection was processed in 1999 by Joshua Paddison.

Acquisition

The records pertaining to International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Local 85 (San Francisco, Calif.) were donated by Peter Comacho in 1989; accession number 1989/085.

Indexing Terms

International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Chauffeurs, Warehousemen, and Helpers of America. Local 85 (San Francisco, Calif.)

Truck drivers--Labor unions--California--San Francisco.

Labor unions--California--History.

History

International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 85 of San Francisco was founded in August 1900, with an initial membership of thirty-five men. The teamsters organized in response to the appearance of the Draymen's Association, an alliance of San Francisco team-owners, which had been founded in January of that year. 1 Prior to the formation of the union, San Francisco teamsters toiled under conditions the *Labor Clarion* described as "among the most slavish in the west." The average work day was from 5 a.m. to after 8 p.m., and "there was no such thing as regulation of hours, or working men in shifts. The problem of the employer was to get as much work as he could out of the flesh and blood of his hired men; the problem of the teamsters was to keep alive." 2

The union was put to an immediate test: On Labor Day, 1900, the large draying firm McNab & Smith fired three teamsters who belonged to the new union. About one hundred of the firm's other drivers promptly went on strike, and the three men were reinstated the next day. This impressive flexing of union muscle convinced more than 1,300 teamsters to apply for membership at the next union meeting. 3

On October 1, 1900, Teamsters Local 85 entered into an agreement with the Draymen's Association that established a higher, standard daily wage; a twelve-hour work day; and guaranteed overtime pay for work on Sundays, holidays, or after 6 p.m. The contract also included a stipulation that the Draymen's Association would employ only members of the union, and that the union would work only for employers affiliated with the Draymen's Association. This strengthened the power of both the union and the association. 4

Teamsters Local 85 was led by two powerful men who would loom large over San Francisco organized labor for more than three decades: Michael "Bloody Mike" Casey (1857-1937) and John P. McLaughlin (1873-1949). Born in Ireland, Casey--a charter member of Local 85 and its first business agent--served as the union's president for more than thirty years. In 1904 he was elected one of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters' (IBT) seven regional vice presidents and the chief IBT representative and organizer for the entire United States west of Chicago. McLaughlin, like Casey a charter member of Local 85, acted as its secretary for nearly fifty years. He also served as State Labor Commissioner, administrator of the first Workmen's Compensation Act, Collector of Internal Revenue, and member of the Public Utilities Commission. 5

In April 1901, the Draymen's Association joined forces with a variety of San Francisco wholesale merchants, manufacturers, and retail merchants in a powerful new employer's union, the Employers' and Manufacturers' Association. Casey later claimed that the Association was formed due to a picnic--whenever the men of Teamsters 85 took a day off for a union picnic, business in San Francisco ground to a halt. "This so shocked the Chamber of Commerce and the powers that be in the economic world that they determined this was a dangerous thing and that the teamsters' union ought to be destroyed," declared Casey. 6

In fact, the Employers' and Manufacturers' Association collected a \$250,000 war chest to combat unionism and managed to put down several small strikes in May and June, 1901. But in July, when members of Teamsters 85 were ordered by the Draymen's Association to haul luggage for a nonunion company, Casey led more than 2,500 teamsters on a strike. On July 30 between 10,000 and 16,000 sailors, firemen, and longshoremen who were affiliated with the City Front Federation joined the teamsters in a sympathy strike throughout the Bay Area. "Not until 1934, at another time of crisis for San Francisco labor, did teamsters, longshoremen, and seamen unite once more in effective battle against employers," notes one historian. 7

The strike ended only after Governor Henry T. Gage stepped in on October 2 and announced that he was declaring "the teamsters' strike and all collateral and sympathetic strikes or lockouts originating from the teamsters' strike at an end." The exact terms of the settlement were never revealed, but the strike demonstrated the power and solidarity of San Francisco labor, helped launch the Union Labor Party, triggered the dissolution of the Employers' and Manufacturers' Association, and vindicated the teamsters' right to organize and bargain collectively. 8 (Unfortunately, no records pertaining to the 1901 strike appear in this collection.)

Also in 1901, Teamsters Local 85 joined with Oakland's Local 70 and other Bay Area Teamsters locals in organizing a central organization called the Team Drivers Joint Executive Council. After the 1906 earthquake and fire, the Team Drivers Joint Executive Council was reorganized as San Francisco Bay Area Joint Council 7, with Local 85 as its most influential member. 9

Of the four western Teamsters Joint Councils, San Francisco Bay Area Joint Council 7 was, according to one historian, "by far the largest, most powerful, and unquestionably the most conservative." 10 In fact, by the 1920s and 1930s San Francisco's Teamsters Local 85 was "so large, wealthy, well-established, and secure in its position" that it resisted organizing California's plentiful highway truckers, a move Teamsters locals in Seattle and Oakland eagerly embraced in the mid-1930s. Casey finally bowed to IBT pressure in 1935 and helped launch the Bay Area Highway Organizing Drive, later followed by the Highway Drivers Council of California. 11

During the San Francisco maritime and general strike of July 1934, strike leader Harry Bridges appealed to the members of Teamsters 85 to join his longshoremen in a sympathy strike. Said Mike Casey: "In all my thirty years of leading these men, I have never seen them so worked up, so determined to walk out. I don't believe any power on earth can prevent them going on strike unless the maritime strike is settled...." 12 In fact, on July 11, the Teamsters overwhelming voted in favor of the sympathy strike, considerably strengthening the longshoremen's position. 13

Mike Casey died in 1937, and John P. McLaughlin took over as IBT vice president. That same year, Local 85 joined approximately 150 other Teamster locals in eleven western states to form the Western Conference of Teamsters, led by Seattle Teamster Dave Beck. The creation of this multi-jurisdictional regional body, unprecedented in Teamster history, significantly shifted the balance of Teamster power westward; Beck himself rose to become president of the IBT in 1952. 14

1 Robert Edward Lee Knight, *Industrial Relations in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1900-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 58

2 *Labor Clarion* 4 September 1908: 14

3 Robert M. Robinson, "San Francisco Teamsters at the Turn of the Century," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 35 (1956): 62

4 Robinson, "San Francisco Teamsters," 63; Knight, 59-60

5 50 th Anniversary Celebration program, 25 November 1950, LARC, Peter Comacho Papers; Donald Garnel, *The Rise of Teamster Power in the West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 48, 51

6 Donald F. Selvin, *A Terrible Anger: The 1934 Waterfront and General Strikes in San Francisco* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 23

7 Knight, 95

8 See Ira B. Cross, *A History of the Labor Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1935), 237-247; David F. Selvin, *Sky Full of Storm: A Brief History of California Labor* (Berkeley: Center for Labor Research and Education, 1966), 21-26; Robinson, "San Francisco Teamsters," 145-152

9 Robert M. Robinson, "A History of the Teamsters in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1850-1950" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 1951), 181; Garnel, 49-51

10 Garnel, 54

11 Garnel, 101-116

12 Selvin, *A Terrible Anger*, 158

13 Selvin, *A Terrible Anger*, 165

14 Robinson, "A History of the Teamsters," 298; Garnel, 200.

Scope and Content

Consist of records from International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 85 of San Francisco, donated by Peter Comacho. The oldest items in the collection are canceled checks from 1904 to 1906. Other early material includes general meeting minutes from 1907 to 1910, executive board minutes from 1908 to 1910, and contract rules and regulations with the Draymen's Association from 1902 and 1906. The most recent items in the collection are contract rules and regulations with San Francisco House Movers, Inc., and the Draymen's Association from the late 1950s. Included in the collection is a program from Teamsters Local 85's 50th Anniversary Celebration, held at the San Francisco Civic Auditorium on November 25, 1950. It includes a brief history of Teamsters Local 85, biographies of several of its past and present officers, and description of the festivities (which included singing, dancing, music from the Walt Roesner Orchestra, a "knockabout comedy act," "musical novelty" by Harry "Woo Woo" Stevens, and a "Teamsters Special Surprise" by The Three Rio Brothers).

Box-folder 1/1

Minutes Ledger

General Meeting Minutes (p. 1-280) 1907 September 19-1910 September 1

Executive Board Minutes (p. 282-302) 1908 February 4-1910 August 25

Box-folder 1/2

Executive Board Minutes 1908 November 19-1909 September 21

Box-folder 1/3

Canceled Checks 1904 September 30-1906 May 29

Box-folder 1/4

Office Correspondence 1946 January 3-1951 November 19

Box-folder 1/5

Contracts and Agreements--Rules and Regulations (Draymen's Association) 1902-1959

Box-folder 1/6

Contracts and Agreements--Rules and Regulations (San Francisco House Movers, Inc.) 1948-1958

Box-folder 1/7

Print Material ("50th Anniversary Celebration" Program) 1950 November 25