Title: San Francisco Social Services Employees Union records
Date (bulk): 1962-2010
creator: San Francisco Social Services Employees Union
Extent: 6.25 Cubic Feet (5 cartons, 1 box)
Call number: larc.ms.0415
Accession numbers: 2016/001

Abstract: Records of the Social Services Employees Union (SSEU), an independent public workers union in San Francisco. The union, established in the mid-1960s and made up of rank and file social workers and social service employees within the San Francisco Department of Social Services (DSS), was entirely employee-run and governed, and remained unaffiliated with any other official union. Files consist of administrative records, correspondence, DSS inter-office memorandums and meeting minutes, SSEU Negotiating Committee and SSEU Executive Committee meeting agendas and minutes, reference material related to welfare work, and various SSEU-produced newsletters, flyers, and grievance-related materials.

Collection is available onsite.

Language of Material: Languages represented in the collection: English.

Arrangement

Organizational History
The Social Services Employees Union (SSEU) was an independent public workers union in San Francisco, active from the mid-1960s through the late 1970s. The union, made up of rank and file social workers and social service employees within the San Francisco Department of Social Services (DSS), was entirely employee-run and governed, and remained unaffiliated with any other official union. The SSEU was founded on July 14, 1966 in response to the low pay and difficult working conditions experienced by many welfare workers in the DSS and the dissatisfaction they felt with their current union, the Building Service Employees’ International Union, Local 400 (later to become the Service Employees International Union, Local 400). Opposed to strikes and any acts of insubordination that would lead to a member’s dismissal, the SSEU used collective action and creative resistance as organizing tactics to bring attention to issues they felt were frequently ignored by management. The SSEU required no mandatory dues or payments; all members were invited to attend Executive Committee meetings and every SSEU member present was able to cast a vote. People were encouraged to write letters to management, request administrative hearings, file grievances, and be as vocal as possible on the problems facing city welfare workers. Members represented themselves and their co-workers in disputes and grievances. SSEU created a Negotiating Committee and the actions of that committee, along with grievance updates, were reported in newsletters and bulletins distributed to worker’s desks. The Rag Times and Dialog, SSEU newsletters, published unedited and uncensored, quickly became the main forum for workers to voice their opinions and concerns on issues covering a range of topics, from high caseloads and difficult supervisors, to a shortage of office supplies. The SSEU, as was the case for many small independent unions, struggled to survive long term. It faced opposition not just from management, but also from other unions competing to represent the same welfare workers. In 1967, SEIU established Local 535, as a new statewide local for social workers that covered federally-employed welfare workers. SEIU Local 535 took over the representation of welfare workers from SEIU Local 400 (San Francisco) and, with the power of the national SEIU behind it, campaigned heavily for exclusive bargaining rights for its members. Although the SSEU continued on through the late 1970s, the last issue of Dialog was in 1975, and the last official SSEU meeting was in 1976.

Access to Collection
This collection contains partly restricted materials. Access restrictions are noted at the series level. Please contact the Director of the Labor Archives and Research Center for more information.

Conditions Governing Use
Copyright has not been assigned to the Labor Archives and Research Center. All requests for permission to publish or quote from materials must be submitted in writing to the Director of the Archives. Permission for publication is given on behalf of the Labor Archives and Research Center as the owner of the physical items and is not intended to include or imply permission of the copyright holder, which must also be obtained by the reader.

Immediate Source of Acquisition
Collection donated by the San Francisco Social Services Employees Union (SSEU) in 2016; accession number 2016/001.

Preferred Citation

San Francisco Social Services Employees Union Records larc.ms.04152016/001 2
[Identification of item], San Francisco Social Services Employees Union (SSEU) Records, larc.ms.0415, Labor Archives and Research Center, San Francisco State University.

Processing Information
Processed by Frances Kaplan in 2017.

Scope and Contents
The collection comprises documents related to the establishment and day-to-day running of the San Francisco Social Services Employees Union (SSEU), the bulk of which are newsletters, flyers, member correspondence, and reports. Newsletters were used as the primary form of communication between the SSEU and its members. Distributed to each worker's desk, they gave a voice to member's opinions and grievances and provided updates on any on-going disputes with supervisors and administrators in the San Francisco Department of Social Services (DSS), including cases where people had been suspended, fired, or transferred to different departments. Letters and comments in the newsletters were published unedited and reveal a department plagued by low morale, budget cuts, high caseloads, poor working conditions, and worker dissatisfaction with management's actions and methods of communication. Dialog, the main newsletter of the SSEU, ran from 1966 through 1975, with each issue containing a mix of member letters, editorial commentary, articles, cartoons, committee updates, and a listing of upcoming events. Other records reveal SSEU's efforts to gain a greater voice for their members, and to change the way grievance procedures are handled within the department. These include correspondence between the SSEU and the San Francisco Department of Social Services (DSS), DSS meeting minutes and inter-office memorandums, SSEU Negotiating Committee meeting agendas and minutes, and SSEU Executive Committee meeting minutes. The bulk of the records created after 1980 comprise DSS memorandums, correspondence, and reports. The collection also contains correspondence and promotional materials from unions and welfare rights organizations active in the Bay Area during the 1960s and 1970s, including: SEIU, Local 400; SEIU, Local 535 (San Francisco); South of Market Welfare Rights Organization; the San Francisco Poverty Workers Association, Inc.; the San Francisco State Student Strike Against Racism; and the National Federation of Social Service Employees (NFSSE).

Subjects and Indexing Terms
Labor unions -- California -- San Francisco.
Social workers.
Labor unions -- Organizing -- California -- San Francisco.
Labor union members.
Collective bargaining -- Municipal employees -- California -- San Francisco.
Grievance procedures.
Service Employees International Union. Local 535
Service Employees International Union. Local 400 (San Francisco, Calif.)

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Founding Documents 1 1962-1968

Arrangement
Arranged as received.

Scope and Contents
SSEU-produced materials related to the founding of SSEU, including the constitution and by-laws, proposed amendments to the constitution, SSEU employee handbooks, and articles on organizing social welfare worker unions in the United States. Also includes two reports written by SSEU members: The Case Against Case-Aides. Building a Caste System in the Welfare Department prepared by Burt Alpert and Peter Krynski (Carton 1, folder 3); and Progressive Labor Party's Goals of Organizing in the Social Services Department by Peter Krynski (Carton 1, folder 3).

carton 1, folder 1  Constitution and bylaws 1962-1966
carton 1, folder 2  Member handbooks, contracts, and guidelines 1965-1968
carton 1, folder 3  Welfare handbooks and reports 1967-1968

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Administration, Communication, and Organizing Files 2 1965-2002

Arrangement
Arranged as received. The bulk of the records from 1965 to 2002 are arranged in chronological order. Remaining records are arranged by subject.

Scope and Contents
Comprises records created in the day-to-day running of the SSEU, including bulletins, flyers, press releases, and newsletters that provided regular updates to members on issues such as caseloads, salary negotiations, management-employee relations, suspensions, transfers and firings, SSEU elections, and grievance hearings. The bulk of the correspondence comprises Department of Social Services (DSS) inter-office memos dealing with departmental policies and procedures, and responding to worker grievances over suspensions and transfers, disagreements with supervisors, and general work conditions. Many of these memos are from Ronald H. Born in his role as General Manager for the DSS. Other correspondence is between the San Francisco Social Services Commission, the San Francisco Department of Social Services, and representatives of SSEU, in particular, Bruce Alpert, Stewart Serman, and Roger Altman, all one-time presidents of SSEU, as well as Peter Krynski, Grievance Coordinator. Meeting minutes, agendas, and notes were primarily generated from Social Services Commission meetings, SSEU Executive Committee meetings, SSEU Negotiating Committee meetings, and general membership meetings. Carton 3, folders 7-10 contain records related to welfare workers based at San Francisco General Hospital. The SSEU maintained records related to specific topics, such as the implementation by the DSS of the Old Age Security (OAS) conversion, a separation of services that resulted in eligibility workers being hired to determine a patient's eligibility for cash and social services, a task previously under the domain of professional social workers (Carton 5, folders 4-7). Also well documented are the efforts by the SSEU to update departmental policies and procedures, in particular the way grievance communications are handled between the SSEU and the DSS. Carton 5, folders 8-10 contains records of individual grievance cases. SSEU-produced reports include A Study in Harassment: The Peter Krynski Case (Carton 1, folder 13); the 965 Report comprising articles submitted by employees at 965 Mission (Carton 1, folders 25-26); and The Civil Service Scene: How You Get Left Out (Carton 2, folders 1-7), a series of articles covering topics such as sick leave, grievance procedures, employee representation, and salaries.

Conditions Governing Access
Contains material restricted to protect the privacy of living individuals and to ensure confidential employment and personnel information. The following folders include restricted material: Carton 1, folder 1, closed until October 31, 2038 [redacted copy open for research]; Carton 4, folder 1, closed permanently [redacted copy open for research]; Carton 4, folder 7, closed until July 1, 2057; and Carton 4, folder 15, closed until March 31, 2070.

carton 1, folder 4-26, carton 2, folder 1-24 carton 3, folder 1-26 carton 4, folder 1-8 carton 4, folder 9-23 carton 5, folder 1-2 carton 5, folder 3 carton 5, folder 4-7 carton 5, folder 8-10

1965-1970

1971-1976

1977-1989

1990-2002

Procedures and policies 1966-2006

Welfare rights organizations 1967-1973
Social workers separation of services 1967-1975

Grievances and complaints 1971-2010
Publications 3

Arrangement
Arranged in chronological order.

Scope and Contents
Comprises SSEU-produced publications, the bulk of which consists of newsletters distributed to members. Includes The Rag Times, a mimeographed leaflet produced by workers in the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, and Dialog, a larger monthly publication that ran from 1966 through 1975.

Publications related to welfare work 1962-1967
Organizing: the art of self-defense in middle-class occupations by Burt Alpert 1974
The Rag Times 1974-1975

Dialog 1966-1975