
Inventory of the U.S. National War Labor Board Records, 1942 - 1945

Accession number: 1990/023

Labor Archives & Research Center

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San Francisco, California

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Descriptive Summary

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Access

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Introduction

This collection was donated to the Labor Archives and Research Center of San Francisco State University by the Institute of Industrial Relations, University of California, Berkeley. The National War Labor Board (NWLB) records had come to the Institute through the auspices of its first director, Clark Kerr, the former Vice chairman of the National War Labor Board, Region X. In 1989 the Institute arranged for the first shipment of records to the Labor Archives. Final transfer of the records was completed in 1993. The Clark Kerr Collection brings together records of the National War Labor Board Region Ten which had its office in San Francisco. The collection was given a preliminary processing by Carol Cuénod to facilitate access and intellectual control. The records remain in their original folders. Those folders were not screened for duplicate or extraneous material.

History

Following the United States' entry into the war in 1941, President Roosevelt called a conference of labor, employer and government representatives with the objective of ending industrial disputes which might hinder production during the war. By December 23, 1941, three general points were accepted: 1) there would be no strikes or lockouts; 2) all disputes would be settled by peaceful means; and 3) the President would set-up a war labor board to make a final determination on all disputes not settled by agreement between the parties.

In accordance with the three articles of agreement, the National War Labor Board was established by Presidential Executive Order on January 12, 1942. President Roosevelt appointed a tri-partite Board with 4 representatives each from the public, industry and labor sectors. Initially, the NWLB functioned only in Washington, D.C., settling labor disputes affecting the war effort. Later that year, Congress, by the Act of October 2, 1942, called upon the President to order a stabilization program freezing prices, wages and salaries to the level existing on September 15, 1942. On October 3, 1942, the Presidential Executive Order No. 9250 delegated some of the administration of wage and salary stabilization to the National War Labor Board. It extended the Board's authority over wage earners and salaried employees under \$5,000. The Internal Revenue Service was responsible for the stabilization of salaries for employees with salaries over \$5,000. Agricultural and railroad workers were also placed under the jurisdiction of other agencies.

The NWLB became part of an comprehensive program of economic stabilization controlling civilian purchasing power, including prices, rents, wages, salaries, profits, rationing, and subsidies. The stated goals were to prevent avoidable increases in the cost of living, minimize the unnecessary migration of labor from one industry to another, and facilitate the prosecution of the war.

Established in 1943, the Wage Stabilization Division of the NWLB was given the responsibility for establishing a system to process all requests for wage adjustment. Its mandate was to correct maladjustments and inequities and to eliminate substandards of living. Its initial guideline was "The Little Steel Formula," as set forth in an NWLB decision of July 1942. This formula limited wage rate increases based on changes in the cost-of-living to 15% over rates on January 1, 1941.

Wage stabilization brought a huge workload before the National War Labor Board. To administer this increased scope of work, it established 12 regional boards, with the same tripartite representation as the National Board, and assigned them the authority to make final decisions in labor disputes and to make rulings in voluntary wage and salary adjustments.

The National War Labor Board worked in conjunction with other government agencies within the Department of Labor: Wage and Hour Division, Conciliation Service, National Labor Relations Board, and Bureau of Labor Statistics. Some records generated by these agencies are also in this collection. Wage stabilization was also coordinated with the Office of Price Administration, War Food Administration, War Production Board, War Manpower Commission, and many more departments.

The National War Labor Board utilized the existing labor relations structure between unions and employers. Where possible, steps toward wage settlement started with collective bargaining. In cases of impasse, the next step was the U. S. Conciliation Service. If impasse continued, the dispute cases were brought before the Board.

By June 1943, the Regional War Labor Boards were using the bracket principle for making wage adjustments. Wage brackets were defined as "the sound and tested going rates of occupational groups within specific labor market areas." They set the minima and maxima wage rates for key occupations. They were deemed a sound economic approach for eliminating wage inequities. The creation of bracket rates speeded up the processing of cases and reduced the huge backlog of applications for wage adjustments--both voluntary and disputed cases.

The National War Labor Board terminated its activities by Presidential Executive Order 9672 on December 31, 1945. NWLB Chairman, Lloyd K. Garrison, reported to the President on the Board's work over almost four years of its existence. Up to V-J Day, the Board had settled 17,807 disputes involving 12,300,000 employees. Voluntary application for wage adjustments to all regions averaged 2,700 a week. This total was 415,000 applications involving 26,300,000 employees. The Board's total staff in Washington, D.C. and in twelve regions totaled 2,613 employees at its peak. The same order terminating the NWLB established the National Wage Stabilization Board, an agency within the Department of Labor which operated until February 24, 1947. It carried out limited wage stabilization during the period of reconversion to a peacetime economy.

Scope and Content

The Clark Kerr Collection records the full range of labor relations during World War II. Over half of the material is dispute cases brought before the Tenth Regional War Labor Board. These case files may include directive orders, briefs, opinions, transcripts, exhibits, research and correspondence. Most of the documents are mimeographed and copies will frequently be found in related files. Major cases may provide a detailed view of labor relations within a company or industry. Research and exhibits often describe the organization of work performed within a company, occasionally accompanied by charts and photographs. The subjects of Regional Board decisions cover the full range of industrial relation issues. Among them were wages, overtime, union security, benefits, discrimination, vacations, sex differentials, and seniority.

Records from the Wage Stabilization Division reflect its many assigned responsibilities and this series has been divided into five sub-series. There are case files on correcting substandard wages, inequities and maladjustments, voluntary compliance, and the establishment of wage brackets. The Division also kept subject files and collective bargaining agreements arranged by industry. Researchers interested in the manufacturing processes for this period will find detailed job descriptions used to establish wage brackets as well as attachments to Form 10 submissions for voluntary wage compliance.

Certain industries had special commissions and panels with their own boards and staff to carry out the NWLB program. The Clark Kerr Collection has significant records from the West Coast Aircraft Committee/West Coast Airframe Panel and the West Coast Lumber Commission. There are smaller collections on other

industry groups which were not predominantly located on the West Coast. In this category are the War Shipping Panel, Meat Packing Commission, Non-Ferrous Metal Commission, Daily Newspaper Commission, and the Wage Adjustment Board for Building Trades.

In addition to records created by the Tenth Region, material from the NWLB in Washington, D.C. is found in the Series titled Administration. There are executive and general orders, monthly reports to the U.S. Senate, research and statistical papers, and operations manuals. Press releases reporting activity nation-wide can be found throughout the collection where subject matter is appropriate.

Brought together in a series are informative articles and reports about the National War Labor Board. Significant in this category, but located in the Clark Kerr Collection Case File, is the Preliminary Inventory of the National War Labor Board Records at the National Archives compiled by Estelle Rebec. Three folders describe the work of the National Wage Stabilization Board which existed for one year during the post-war reconversion period.

Records from the Twelfth Region (Oregon and Washington) are held in seven boxes. These have not been processed; however, they are in good order. The series has been listed at the box level only.

In addition to this guide, there are two other finding aids which may be useful. The first is a four box set of index cards sent by the Institute of Industrial Relations. The index cards provide access to the Dispute Cases series: by Union, by SIC Code, by Case number and by subject. Secondly, the Labor Archives and Research Center has a complete 28 volume set of the War Labor Reports published by the Bureau of National Affairs, 1945. These reported significant cases of the National and Regional War Labor Boards only. Indices for War Labor Reports provide access to their reported cases by company, industry and subject. Researchers should also note that this guide contains useful appendices including a listing of the Dispute Cases in Series I listed alphabetically by company, and the Standard Industrial Codes (SIC) used in 1942- 1945.

Series I Dispute Cases

Physical Description: 87 Record Boxes, 6 Document Boxes

Scope and Content Note

These are files of the dispute cases brought before the Tenth Regional War Labor Board. Cases are identified by the name of the company. Arrangement is by Standard Industrial Codes (SIC), a numerical system, then alphabetically by company within an SIC code. There is a duplicate list of these cases arranged by company, alphabetically in the Appendices. Box 85-A holds supplemental material in binders consisting of Decisions of the Tenth Regional War Labor Board arranged chronologically.

Series II Wage Stabilization Division

Physical Description: 41 Record Boxes, 1 Document Box

Sub-Series 1: Wage Stabilization Cases

Physical Description: (15 record boxes)

Scope and Content Note

Arrangement is by SIC code. The code and industry is the first line of the Box/Folder List. The second line, in quotes, is the additional information written on the folder tab. In larger cases, a company, industry association, or union name might appear on the folder tab.

Sub-Series 2: Job Descriptions and Analyses

Physical Description: (3 record boxes, 1 document box)

Scope and Content Note

These are booklets or binders created by the employers or industrial associations. In some cases, they were submitted to the Wage Stabilization Division as Form 10, for filing applications for voluntary wage or salary adjustments.

Sub-Series 3: Wage Brackets and Supporting Material

Physical Description: (15 record boxes)

Scope and Content Note

A wage bracket is a band of rates or rate ranges from minima to maxima representing the sound, tested, and stable rates paid by employers for a given job classification in a given industry and labor market area. Arrangement is by SIC code, the box list has the folder titles in quotes. Geographical areas are frequently listed in addition to the industry. Of special interest are three binders with Wage Bracket Committee Memoranda. The "Unnumbered Memoranda" explain the orders for using wage brackets to stabilize wages.

Sub-Series 4: Agreements

Physical Description: (3 record boxes)

Scope and Content Note

Collective bargaining agreements arranged by SIC code.

Sub-Series 5: Subject Files

Physical Description: (5 record boxes)

Scope and Content Note

Material is arranged alphabetically. The main headings are taken from industrial relations terms, labor legislation and government agencies.

Series III: Industry Commissions and Panels

Physical Description: 11 Record Boxes, 3 Document Boxes

Scope and Content Note

The West Coast Aircraft Committee/West Coast Airframe Panel (3 record boxes, 1 document box) the West Coast Lumber Commission (4 record boxes, 1 document box) and the War Shipping Panel (1 record box, 1 document box) are the main industries here. Material was also collected for the Shipbuilding, Non-Ferrous Metal, Daily Newspaper Commissions and the Wage Adjustment Board for Building Trades (3 record boxes). Files contain dispute cases, agreements, general orders, job descriptions, minutes, hearing transcripts and general information on the industry.

Series IV: Administration

Physical Description: 3 Record Boxes, 1 Document Box

Scope and Content Note

Most of these records were created by the national office in Washington, D.C. Two boxes contain binders on Daily Board Actions, Weekly Actions, Field Memoranda and a Manual of Operations. There are folders on executive and general orders and their interpretations, monthly reports to the Senate, research and statistical reports, personnel matters, and from Region Ten two folders of correspondence with the California State Federation of Labor.

Series V: Region Xii Records for Oregon and Washington

Physical Description: 7 Record Boxes, 1 Document Box

Scope and Content Note

This collection has not been processed except for a box list. The records of the Dispute Cases and the Wage Stabilization Division are in good order and researchers can easily use these files. Of interest, but not as well organized, is a box on the Alaska Salmon Industry.

Series VI: Descriptive Material on the National War Labor Board

Physical Description: .5 Document Box

Scope and Content Note

Articles, reports and pamphlets about the NWLB, and key documents created by the NWLB on its purpose and operation.

Series VII: National Wage Stabilization Board

Physical Description: .5 Document Box

Scope and Content Note

Three folders include a report on the organization and procedure for this body, and press releases during its year of existence.

Series VIII: Pre-NWLB Cases (1925 - 1939)

Physical Description: .5 Record Box

Scope and Content Note

The Clark Kerr Collection includes transcripts of arbitrations by the U.S. Maritime Commission. Most the arbitrations deal with the maritime industry except for a Key System Transit Co. case from 1925 and a 1938 case between the Hotel Employers' Ass'n of San Francisco and the building trades.

Series IX: Post-NWLB Cases (1946 - 1947)

Physical Description: .5 Record Box

Scope and Content Note

In this group, transcripts and other documents of four arbitrations are between the Pacific American Shipowners Association and maritime unions. The fifth is for the California Street Cable Railway and the Amalgamated Association of Street Electric Railway and Motor Coach Employees.

Series I Dispute Cases

Physical Description: (87 Record Boxes; 6 Document Boxes)

Scope and Content Note

Appendix