
Inventory of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 85 Records, 1900-1948

Accession number: 1991/048

Labor Archives & Research Center

San Francisco State University
San Francisco, California

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Descriptive Summary

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Introduction

These records from International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 85, of San Francisco, California, were donated in 1991. The collection was processed in spring 1999 by Joshua Paddison.

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 overwhelmingly 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 50th 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

This small collection has only one series: Teamsters Local 85. Included within it are minutes, office correspondence, and contracts and agreements.

The oldest items in the collection are grievance committee minutes from 1900 to 1901, a subscription log from 1901, and a "Tickets for Benefit Fight" log from ca. 1901 (all contained within the same ledger).

The most recent items in the collection are contract rules and regulations with the Draymen's Association from the late 1930s and office correspondence from the late 1940s.

Included in the collection is a record of unemployment relief administered by Local 85 during the Great Depression (specifically, 1931 and 1932).

Material Cataloged Separately

The following material has been removed from the files and relocated elsewhere in the Labor Archives, as indicated:

- *Working Women in Large Cities: Fourth Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labor*, 1888 (relocated to LARC book collection).
- *Strikes and Lockouts: Sixteenth Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labor*, 1901 (relocated to LARC book collection).
- Agreement booklet, "Retail Furniture Council and Brotherhood of Teamsters Local No.85, July 1, 1964 - June 30, 1967" (relocated to LARC ephemera files, "Teamsters ... Local 85").

Related Collections

Title: Peter Comacho papers,

Identifier/Call Number: accession number 1989/085,

which also consists of early Teamsters Local 85 records.

Box-folder 1/1 **Executive Board Minutes Jan. 3, 1904-March 16, 1906**

Box-folder 1/2 **General Meeting Minutes May 4, 1905-April 12, 1906**

Box-folder 1/3 **Minutes and Financial Ledger**

Grievance Committee Minutes (p. 1-26) Sept. 16, 1900-Jan. 10, 1901

Unemployment Relief Records (p. 50-63) Dec. 22, 1931-May 27, 1932

Subscription Log (p. 325) May 28, 1901

"Tickets For Benefit Fight" (p. 340-348) ca. 1901

Box-folder 1/4 **Office Correspondence 1916-1948**

Box-folder 1/5 **Contracts and Agreements--Rules and Regulations (Draymen's Association) 1902-1937**