

GREATER NEW HAVEN LABOR HISTORY ASSOCIATION

United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America - Local 299



UE Local 299 has been in existence since 1954. Since that time, it has organized many shops in the Greater New Haven area, many of which have since gone out of business. Currently, the Local represents workers only at Harco, and Entoleter. It represented workers at Circuitwise in North Haven, CT, from 1991 until the company closed in October of 2004. UE negotiations with Circuitwise began in 1988. Workers there went out on strike on September 11, 1989, and were out for 17 months. They worked without a contract from January 1991 until 1994, while a long legal battle took place. Dorothy Johnson was the President of Local 299 from the time it signed the Circuitwise agreement until the company closed.

The most important event in the Local's history was organizing Circuitwise and the strike of 1989-1991. Its greatest challenge was returning to work without a contract, and its greatest success was winning a contract in 1994. Its greatest present day concerns are maintaining health care benefits and the problem of concessions or "give backs."

There is a second UE local in the Greater New Haven area, Local 243. Its President is Ray Pompano. Local 243 represents workers at Sargent. For the most part, they kept separate records, although there were some records pertaining to Local 243 in the Local 299 office, formerly located in North Haven. Those records were turned back to Local 243 after the closing of Circuitwise. Local 243 has an office at 267 Chapel Street, in the same office building as the Greater New Haven Labor History Association. It also has an office at Sargent, where most of the older records are kept.

An office at 2 Linsley Street in North Haven, CT, was the home of UE Local 299, and it also served as the central organizing office for Connecticut, complicating record-keeping somewhat. The office consisted of three medium sized rooms on the second floor of a small office building. It was closed in the fall of 2004 and the bulk of the records held there were turned over to the University of Pittsburgh, which is the official archival repository for the UE records. The records have not yet been processed. A small collection of materials largely dealing with UE 299's organizing campaign at Circuitwise was donated to the Greater New Haven Labor History Association by the Local's outgoing President, Dorothy Johnson. The records pertaining to Harco and Entoleter were turned back to the shop stewards at those plants.

The Records

The bulk of the records in whatever category are concentrated in the late 1980s through the present, although there are small samples of earlier records dating back as far as the 1960s. They include hand-written, typewritten, and word processing documents, and the more recent documents are kept both in hard copy and on disk, although the location of some of those disks is unclear. Older records may have been shipped either to the international office or to the University of Pittsburgh, which has a labor history archives and is the official repository of the UE records.

Several categories of records were maintained in the North Haven office. The first are “reference materials,” which come largely from the international office and include guides to arbitration hearings’ organizing manuals and handbooks; and resource lists. They also include lists of shops to target for organizing in the Greater New Haven area; files on relevant pending legislation; and lists of names of elected officials. These materials are kept mostly in notebooks or books, although there are several videos in this category as well. In addition, proceedings from the national UE conventions from 1940 through the 1990s (incomplete) were kept in a glass book case in the front office.

A second category of records might be called, roughly, “the records of other UE locals and their organizing campaigns,” both within the Greater New Haven area and throughout Connecticut and New England. These tend to be interspersed among the files directly related to UE 299. The third category consists of the records directly related to the work of UE 299. Of these, a large portion of them relate to the Circuitwise organizing campaign, ongoing struggles there, and the company’s bankruptcy reorganization and its impact on workers. There are several folders of photographs of the strike. The photographs also include UE social gatherings.

In addition to photographs, the types of records in the latter two categories include: · Various kinds of documents about campaigns and occurrences at the companies involved, including contract agreements; sign-up sheets for employees interested in joining or learning more about the union; ballots of union elections; diagrams of the plants; tactics and timetables for organizing; information, including newspaper clippings, about any strikes or walk-outs that have occurred at the plants; grievances; disciplinary actions taken against employees; employee performance reviews; arbitration agreements; wage schedules; any OSHA violations or NLRB proceedings; sign-in sheets for union meetings; surveys/questionnaires filled out by union members about conditions; union-management proposals and counter-proposals (these are mostly hand-written notes taken by union officers); information on health plans and other employee benefits; and proceedings of court hearings · Correspondence between Local 299 officials and the International, other locals, officers of a specific company, or individual union members, officers, or organizers · Local 299 newsletters, going back to 1988 · Local 299 Constitution and By-Laws (multiple copies) as updated 1994 · Minutes of and hand-written notes taken at Executive Board, District Board, membership, officers’, and arbitration meetings · Staff long distance call logs, 1994-1999 · Financial records: records of bills paid during strikes; records of employees who collected benefits from the strike fund during strikes; records of donations from other locals during strikes; cancelled checks; the cash books of the financial secretary to 1994; copies of “Per Capita and Supply Payment” reports; and old invoices.

For records held at the University of Pittsburgh, contact David Rosenberg, Labor Archivist, at 412-244-7091; email: uelab@pitt.edu

As noted above, the Harco and Entoleter records were turned back to the shop stewards of those two locals.

Records held at Greater New Haven Labor History Office

The Greater New Haven Labor History Association holds a small subset of the Local 299 records. They are useful for a basic history of the organizing efforts at Circuitwise, and also provide some background information about UE itself. To access the finding guide for these records, or for more information about this collection, contact Joan Cavanagh, Greater New Haven Labor History Association archivist at 203-777-2756, ext. 2; e-mail: labor_history@hotmail.com

