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Ferd Wulkan Papers

1965-2006
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A 1968 graduate in mathematics from MIT, Ferd Wulkan has been a fixture in activist circles for many years. A member of SDS in college and a rank-and-file clerical union leader at Boston University, Wulkan moved to Amherst in 1989. Passionate in the intersection of the labor movement with other progressive movements, specifically that of left-wing politics, he served for 15 years as a field representative with Locals 509 and 888 of SEIU, working with non-faculty professional personnel at UMass Amherst and Boston, and then as a representative and organizer for the Massachusetts Society of Professors from 2004 to 2016. In 2007, Wulkan became organizing director for the Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts (PHENOM), a grassroots advocacy organization for affordable and accessible public higher education.

The Wulkan Collection consists of a fascinating array of material from Leftist and radical political movements during the late 1960s and early 1980s, with an emphasis on the Cambridge-Somerville area. In addition to a rich assemblage of formally published pamphlets and magazines, the collection includes a large number of fliers, handouts, informally published works, and underground newspapers on Socialist, Feminist, and anarchist topics, The Vietnam War, the labor movement, civil rights, and Black Power. The collection also contains three unprocessed boxes of material related to the clerical/technical union at Boston University. This union was affiliated with District 65, UAW, and District 65 had been part of the Distributive Workers of America, and affiliated with the United Auto Workers in the early 1980s.

Background on Ferd Wulkan

As an undergraduate in mathematics at MIT (SB, 1968), Ferd Wulkan was active in the Tiddlywinks Club and Students for a Democratic Society, the latter of which became a truer guide to his future course in life. A leftist, Wulkan chose to follow the path of many other members of the New Left of the 1960s, to become a committed workplace activist, hoping to spark a Socialist transformation in American society. He began his career as a labor organizer by taking a position as an orderly at Mount Auburn Hospital in Cambridge, joining Transfusion, a Socialist healthcare worker's organization. Building a union at Mount Auburn, however, would

not be an easy task. Transfusion imploded over disagreements about whether the intention of organizing was to build a union or seed a revolutionary movement, leaving just five members to continue as the aptly named Red Blood Cell. Although most members of Transfusion became part of the Party-building wing of the New Communist movement, members of Red Blood Cell founded the insistently non-sectarian, Organizing Committee for a Boston Area Socialist Organization. Never considering itself as leading the working class, and believing the time was not yet right for a new Communist party, OC/BASO organized as a "cadre" rather than "vanguard," and focused on discipline and organization, developing clear political positions based on rigorous study and analysis.

After six years at Mount Auburn, Wulkan sought more fertile ground at Boston University, taking a clerical position in the Economics Department in April 1979. There he was thrown immediately into a fraught struggle with the university's reactionary president, Jonathan Silber, to win recognition for clerical workers organizing under the radical District 65 of the United Auto Workers. Barely two weeks after he was hired, he found himself on strike, side by side with faculty and librarians, who were on their own campaign for union representation. After two and a half up and down weeks, the union won.

At BU, Wulkan experienced levels of both success and frustration. Although largely supported by the Economics Department, his labor activism frequently pitted him against the administration, as did his activism against apartheid in South Africa and U.S. intervention in Central America. A turning point of sorts for him came after District 65 succeeded in winning an agency shop at BU in 1985 and sought to expand by organizing clerical workers at several of Boston's private colleges. Outmaneuvered by management, they failed profoundly. At the same time, the long decline and ultimate dissolution of District 65 led the Boston University clerical staff to affiliate with UAW Local 2324, which proved to be more bureaucratic and unresponsive.

In 1989, Wulkan accepted a full time position at UMass Amherst as staff member and field representative for Local 509 (and later, Local 888) of the Service Employees International Union, serving non-faculty professional personnel at the university. From the outset, he found Amherst entirely unlike Boston, discovering a markedly less oppositional environment for organizing and a solid base of experienced organizers with whom to work. During his time in SEIU, he took part in campaigns against merit pay and to organize a graduate student union, but his greatest struggle came after SEIU reorganized its Massachusetts locals, creating a new local (888) for UMass, where Wulkan became the higher education coordinator. The president of Local 888 did not share the democratic style of the professional staff unit nor Wulkan's inclusive style of leadership, setting off a lengthy struggle. After trying to reconcile the differing approaches and fighting for the member-run vision, Wulkan resigned his position and set about organizing the rest of the local (primarily outside higher education) for a democratic process. After exploring the formation of an independent union, he negotiated with SEIU's national leadership and struck a deal whereby 2,300 members left SEIU in 2004 to join the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA), the union for faculty and librarians at UMass Amherst.

From 2004 to 2016, Wulkan worked for the Massachusetts Society of Professors (MSP) and as an organizing director for PHENOM, the Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts (PHENOM), advocating for public higher education at the state level. Although he retired in 2016, he has remained true to his roots, staying active in PHENOM and other causes.

Scope of collection

The Wulkan Collection consists of a fascinating array of material from Leftist and radical political movements during the late 1960s and early 1980s, with an emphasis on the Cambridge-Somerville area. In addition to a rich assemblage of formally published pamphlets and magazines, the collection includes a large number of fliers, handouts, informally published works, and underground newspapers on Socialist, Feminist, and anarchist topics, The Vietnam War, the labor movement, civil rights, and Black Power. Some groups highlighted throughout the collection include the Radical Education Project, Solidarity, Our Generation, and the IWW.

The collection also contains three unprocessed boxes of material related to the clerical/technical union at Boston University. This union was affiliated with District 65, UAW, and District 65 had been part of the Distributive Workers of America, and affiliated with the United Auto Workers in the early 1980s.

Series descriptions

[Series 1. Labor Activism](#)

1970-2006

Wulkan's own in-depth collection of personal notes, records, and research, as well as papers he wrote during the 1960s into the early 2000s, relating to his activism. Also included are detailed communications and documents of the unions he was involved with including SEIU Locals 888 and 509, as well as documents from his time at BU. Issues of Transfusion and Deadpan from Wulkan's time as a hospital worker are also included along with local pamphlets, mail, periodicals, and handouts from Somerville and the Greater Boston Area.

[Series 2. Labor Publications](#)

1970-1986

Publications focused on the union and labor movements of the late 1960s into the early 1980s both nationally and internationally. Among it are various pamphlets on workers control, with documents pertaining to union organization strategies as well as historical cases of union formation and strikes. Note that periodicals in Series 3 also offer insight on the labor and union movements: periodicals associated with labor-related aspects of the Women's movement or African Americans are included in Series 2, while periodicals from social justice movements pertaining to those groups are located in Series 3.

[Series 3. Social and Political Movements](#)

1965-1995

Publications including a variety of newspapers, magazines, handouts, pamphlets and other documentation related to the social justice movements and events of the 1960s-1980s. The series has a strong focus on the 1970s and features a collection of various newspapers as well as a collection of the periodical Radical America. Among the topics included are the women's movement, civil rights, gay liberation, the tenant's rights movement, and Native American rights.

Publications including political documents, essays, and pamphlets focusing on the theory and application of socialism and communism and their global movements with focuses on China and the Soviet Union. Also present are a diversity of pamphlets and handouts of radical and anarchist movements. Periodicals and pamphlets documenting struggles in the Middle East. Groups such as SDS and Solidarity are featured and the series also includes documents on the Vietnam War and American influence abroad.

Inventory

Series 1. Labor Activism

1970-2006

Advance Greivance Training

ca.2000

Box 1: 1

Area Representatives

ca.2002

Box 1: 2

AFSCME Council 4:Contract Costing/Costing Out

ca.2002

Box 1: 3

AFSCME Council 4: Contract Costing/Costing Out

ca.2000

Box 1: 4

Cambridge Food Coop

ca.1980

Box 1: 5

CLA/Friends of Labor

1978-1979

Box 1: 6

Clerical/technical union, Boston University

various dates

3 boxes (2019-027)

Union was affiliated with District 65, UAW, and District 65 had been part of the Distributive Workers of America, and affiliated with the United Auto Workers in the early 1980s.

Unprocessed boxes open for research.

Early Activism/Union Involvement

ca.1975

Box 1: 7
"The Growing Divide: Inequality and the Roots of Economic Insecurity"
2001 March
Box 1: 8
Hospitals
ca.1978
Box 1: 9
Hospitals
ca.1975
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Hospitals: Otis Hospital Strike
ca.1978
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Hospitals: Preterm Strike
1977
Box 1: 12
"Labor Notes"
1981
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Local Pamphlets: Unions and Universities
ca.1975
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Mailing Lists
ca.1978
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May Day
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Mechanics Notes
ca.1965
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Men's Group
ca.1979
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Mine Workers
ca.1978
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ca.2005
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Mount Auburn: Anti-Union
ca.1975
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Where Wulkan worked and organized.

Mount Auburn: Deadpan handout
ca.1974
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Mount Auburn: Meetings
ca.1975
Box 1: 23
Mount Auburn: Organization
ca.1975
Box 1: 24
Mount Auburn: Organization Materials
ca.1975
Box 1: 25
Neighborhood Notes and Meetings
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Box 1: 26
New England Political Economy
ca.1980
Box 1: 27
New England Political Economy
ca.1980
Box 1: 28
New England Political Economy
ca.1980
Box 1: 29
Nicaragua Trip
ca.1984
Box 1: 30
Nicaragua Trip
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Box 1: 31
Organizing Committee for a Boston Area Socialist Organization: CSO
ca.1978
Box 1: 32
Organizing Committee for a Boston Area Socialist Organization: Education Committee
ca.1978
Box 1: 33
Organizing Committee for a Boston Area Socialist Organization: Education Committee
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Organizing Committee for a Boston Area Socialist Organization: Education Committee
ca.1980
Box 1: 35
Organizing Committee for a Boston Area Socialist Organization: Education Committee
ca.1980
Box 1: 36
Organizing Committee for a Boston Area Socialist Organization: Education Committee
ca.1980
Box 1: 37
Organizing Committee for a Boston Area Socialist Organization: Education Committee-Socialism
ca.1980
Box 2: 1
Organizing Committee for a Boston Area Socialist Organization: Formation
ca.1978
Box 2: 2
Organizing Committee for a Boston Area Socialist Organization: Liaison
ca.1980
Box 2: 3
Organizing Committee for a Boston Area Socialist Organization: Leadership Committee

ca.1980
Box 2: 4
Organizing Committee for a Boston Area Socialist Organization: Minutes
ca.1978
Box 2: 5
Organizing Committee for a Boston Area Socialist Organization: Minutes
ca.1978
Box 2: 6
Organizing Committee for a Boston Area Socialist Organization: Red Blood Cell: Minutes
ca.1977
Box 2: 7
Organizing Committee for a Boston Area Socialist Organization: Recruiting
ca.1977
Box 2: 8
Organizing Committee for a Boston Area Socialist Organization: Recruiting
ca.1978
Box 2: 9
Organizing Committee for a Boston Area Socialist Organization: Work Program
1981
Box 2: 10
Papers, Writings, and Outlines
ca.1975
Box 2: 11
Practice Evaluation
ca.1979
Box 2: 12
Racism in Boston
ca.1975
Box 2: 13
Service Employees International Union
1991-2006
SEIU: Big Picture Debate
ca.2004
Box 2: 14
SEIU: Campaigns
ca.2004
Box 2: 15
SEIU: Constitutional Process
ca.2004
Box 2: 16
SEIU: Contract Comparison 11/03
ca.2004
Box 2: 17
SEIU: Decision to Stay or Go
ca.2004
Box 2: 18
SEIU: Higher Education
ca.2004
Box 2: 19
SEIU: Jurisdictional Hearing and Aftermath
ca.2004
Box 2: 20
SEIU: Local 36
ca.2004
Box 2: 21
SEIU Local 509: Anti-Union Campaigns
ca.2000
Box 2: 22
SEIU Local 509: Communication
ca.2000
Box 2: 23
SEIU Local 509: Contract Drafting Guidelines
ca.2000
Box 2: 24
SEIU Local 509: Health and Safety
ca.1991
Box 2: 25
SEIU Local 509: Media Outreach, How To
ca.1995
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SEIU Local 509: Mobilizing/Lobbying
ca.1995-1999
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SEIU Local 509: "New Strategies for Collective Bargaining"
ca.1990
Box 2: 28
SEIU Local 509: OC Training - Hampshire
ca.1997
Box 2: 29
SEIU Local 509: Organization Model
ca.1997
Box 2: 30
SEIU Local 509: Recruitment Plan/Member Activity
ca.2000
Box 2: 31
SEIU Local 509: Running Meetings/Time Management
ca.1999-2000
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SEIU Local 509: Workloads
2002 July
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SEIU Local 509: Binder
ca.2000
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SEIU: MTA Transfer
ca.2005-2006
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SEIU: Other Local Constitutions Info.
ca.2002
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SEIU: UMass Organization
2005
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SEIU 888: Activists Phone List
2004
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SEIU 888: Background Information Packet
2004
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SEIU 888: Campaign Outreach
ca.2004
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SEIU 888: Bargaining
ca.2005
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SEIU 888: Wulkan Communications/Records
ca.2004
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SEIU 888: Wulkan Leaving
ca.2004
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SEIU 888: Finances
ca.2004
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SEIU 888: "How and Why SEIU Lost 2,300 Members at UMass"
ca.2005
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SEIU 888: Media
ca.2004
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SEIU 888: Minutes, Notes, ect.
ca.2004
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1984
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Somerville: Movements
ca.1972
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Somerville: Movements
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Studies: Electoral
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Studies: Political Economy
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Studies: Political Economy
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Studies: Political Economy
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Studies: Pureto Rico
ca.1975
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Studies: Stage II - Evaluation
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Studies: Stage III - Planning
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Studies: Theory
ca.1978
Box 3: 11
Study Series
ca.1977
Box 3: 12
Syllabi and Class Reading Lists
1972-1985
Box 3: 13
Transfusion: Advancement
ca.1976
Box 3: 14

Socialist hospital workers' group that supported organizers via discussions and study/theoretical work, and published a newsletter

Transfusion: Class and Union Discussions
ca.1975
Box 3: 15
Transfusion: Newsletter and Publications
ca.1975
Box 3: 16
Transfusion: Study
ca.1975
Box 3: 17
Transit/Commuting Changes in the Boston Area
ca.1970-1975
Box 3: 18
"The Uses of Accounting in Collective Bargaining"
1969
Box 3: 19
Workshop Leadership Academy (WLA): Curriculum Material
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Workshop Leadership Academy (WLA): Handouts and Notes
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Dollars and Sense [Bulletin]
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Workers Pamphlets
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China: China Pictorials
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China: Social Structuring and Hospitals
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Civil Rights: The Black Panther [newspaper]
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Civil Rights: U. R. P. E.
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Marxism: General
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Middle East: Pamphlets
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Middle East: Periodicals
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"The Militant"
1968
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Native American Rights
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Nixon: Impeachment
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Periodicals: Community News Jamaica Plain
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Periodicals: Radical America
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Psychology: The Radical Therapist
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Vietnam War: "Indochina Report"
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Women's Movement: "No More Fun and Games"
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Women's Movement: Hysteria [periodical]
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ca.1969
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Worker Control: Capitalism
ca.1970
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Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Acquired from Ferd Wulkan, Sept. 2014 (2014-132).

Processing Information

Processed by Julia Casey, January 2019.

Related Material

Antiracism
Communism & Socialism
LGBTQ
Peace
Political radicalism
Social justice
Vietnam War
Women & feminismw

Language:

English

Copyright and Use ([More information](#))

Cite as: Ferd Wulkan Collection (MS 841). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

Search terms

Subjects

- Cambridge (Mass.)--History
- Clerks--Labor unions--Massachusetts
- Feminism
- Hospitals--Employees--Labor unions--Massachusetts
- Labor unions--Massachusetts--Amherst
- Labor unions--Massachusetts--Boston
- Radicals--Massachusetts--Cambridge
- Socialists--Massachusetts
- Somerville (Mass.)--History
- Underground press publications
- Vietnam War, 1961-1975--Protest movements

Contributors

- Wulkan, Ferd [main entry]
- Service Employees International Union. Local 509 (Boston, Mass.)
- Service Employees International Union. Local 888 (Boston, Mass.)
- Massachusetts Teacher's Association
- Transfusion
- Organizing Committee for a Boston Area Socialist Organization



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