

RESOURCES FOR RESEARCHERS

PRIMARY CANADIAN LABOUR HISTORY RESOURCES AT YORK UNIVERSITY: THE RAY STEVENSON FONDS D'ARCHIVES

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INTRODUCTION

Since its inception, York University Archives & Special Collections has focused on acquiring high-quality research collections that support the teaching and research programmes of York University.² In particular, York University Archives has acquired and made accessible a large number of primary and rare secondary resources on Canadian Labour History.³ These resources include not only the records of labour organisations, but also the private archives of labour leaders, including the *fonds d'archives* of Canadian labour leader Ray Stevenson.⁴ York University Archives acquired Stevenson's archives in 1998, 1999, and 2000 through the generosity of Stevenson himself and with the encouragement and assistance of Professor Joe Grogan, a faculty member at Humber College, Toronto⁵ and graduate of York University's Atkinson College (1972).⁶

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ray Stevenson is a trade union organiser and peace movement participant. He was also a member of the Communist Party of Canada from 1940 to 1998. He was born near Virden, Manitoba on December 17, 1919. He began working in the mines of North-eastern Manitoba in 1938; he was fired from the San Antonio Gold Mines in early 1939 for being an "undesirable element". Stevenson moved to Kirkland Lake, Ontario in late 1939 to work for Upper Canada Mines, where he immediately joined Local 240 of the International Union of Mine Mill and Smelter Workers (C. I. O.) and participated in the Mine Mill union organisational drive that culminated in the "union recognition" strike of 1941-1942. The strike failed, but within 18 months of its conclusion, the Federal Government legislated compulsory bargaining. Stevenson served his country in the Second World War as a 1st Lieutenant in the Canadian Army (1942-1946), but

was stationed at home along with other publicly identified Communist officers, due to his political affiliations. Stevenson ran unsuccessfully for the Communist Party in the Ontario Provincial Election in 1945. In 1946, he moved to Northern Ontario and became the Educational Director for Workers Co-op. He joined the Labour Progressive Party soon after and was a political organiser in Northern Ontario and North-western Quebec. In 1950, Stevenson went to work for Inco and was elected to the executive of Local 598 in 1951. Nationally, he served on the Canadian Mine Mill Council, sitting on Canadian Executive Board of the council until 1961 when he became executive editor at the Mine Mill Herald. When the Mine Mill Canada union merged in 1967 with the United Steel Workers of America (USWA), Stevenson served as editor of the USWA magazine *Information* until 1972. From 1972-1978, he was acting Public Relations Director for USWA Canada. He left the USWA in 1978 to pursue his interests in the peace movement organisations, including the World Peace Council in Helsinki, Finland, the International Committee of Trade Unionists for Peace and Disarmament and the Canadian Peace Congress. Stevenson was also a founding editor of the *Northstar Compass* from 1991 until his retirement in 1995.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The *Ray Stevenson fonds d'archives* comprises over eight metres of textual records, approximately 1350 photographs, eight audiocassettes, one videocassette, one compact disc, and seven phonographs that document Stevenson's career. Researchers will find correspondence, notes, speeches, newsletters, pamphlets, reports, newspaper clipping files and publications relating to Stevenson's various activities as a trade union member, labour organiser, member of the Communist Party of Canada, participant in peace movement organisations, and a supporter of Paul Robeson (1898-1976) the famous African-American athlete, singer, actor, and advocate for the civil rights of people around the world.

ACCESS AND USE

The records in the *Ray Stevenson fonds d'archives* are available for use by York faculty and students, as well as external researchers at York University Archives, Monday through Friday from 10:00am to 4:30pm. The Archives is located in the Scott Library, Room 305, on York University's Keele Campus. All archival or special collections materials must be used in York University Archives. All of the records in the *Ray Stevenson fonds d'archives* are open to researchers except the Communist Party of

Canada minutes, which are closed to research until January 1, 2006. The complete finding aid to the *Ray Stevenson fonds d'archives* is available on line at:

<http://archivesfa.library.yorku.ca/fonds/ON00370-f0000167.htm>. The finding aid provides an overview and detailed file lists for all of the material.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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Web site:
<http://www.library.yorku.ca/ArchivesSpecialCollections/index.htm>

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NOTES:

1. Ken Hernden is an Adjunct Archivist with York University Archives and Special Collections.
2. See <http://www.library.yorku.ca/ArchivesSpecialCollections/index.htm> for York University Archives' web site.
3. See <http://www.library.yorku.ca/ArchivesSpecialCollections/FindingAids/LabourHistory/index.htm> for a thematic guide to Archives holdings on Canadian Labour History.
4. *Fonds d'archives* is a critical concept for archival researchers to understand. It is defined as "the whole of the documents, regardless of form or medium, automatically and organically created and/or accumulated and used by a

particular individual, family or corporate body in the course of that creator's activities or functions." Therefore, a *fonds d'archives* is a group of records that is naturally created by a person, family or organisation in the course of their everyday lives and activities. This is different from a "collection". A collection is a unit of material that is artificially created or brought together on the basis of some common characteristic, such as subject, language, etc. by someone other than the creator of the records. Thus a *fonds d'archives* contains not only the factual information presented in the records themselves, but also the contextual information supplied by how the records creator produced, arranged and used his or her records.

5. Now the Humber Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning.
6. Now the Atkinson Faculty of Liberal and Professional Studies.