



Guide to the Thomas Donahue Papers LP001895

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English

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Walter P. Reuther Library

5401 Cass Avenue

Detroit, MI 48202

URL: <https://reuther.wayne.edu>

Table of Contents

Summary Information	3
History	3
Scope and Content	4
Arrangement	5
Administrative Information	5
Related Materials	6
Controlled Access Headings	6
Collection Inventory	6

Summary Information

Repository:	Walter P. Reuther Library
Creator:	Donahue, Thomas R. (Thomas Reilly)
Title:	Thomas Donahue Papers
ID:	LP001895
Date [inclusive]:	1962-1973
Physical Description:	0.25 Linear Feet (0.5 MB)
Language of the Material:	English
Language of the Material:	Material entirely in English.
Abstract:	Influential figure in Service Employees International Union and American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations. Served as executive assistant to David Sullivan, first vice president of SEIU, executive assistant to George Meany, secretary-treasurer of AFL-CIO, and president of AFL-CIO. Materials consist of business correspondence, legal files, and a publication.

Citation Style

"Thomas Donahue Papers, Box [#], Folder [#], Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University"

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

History

Thomas (Tom) Reilly Donahue was born on September 4, 1928 in New York City to parents Thomas R. Donahue and Mary E. Donahue (nee Purcell). The youngest of four in an Irish-Catholic household, Donahue attended Mount St. Michael Academy in the Bronx, and graduated in 1944. He enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1945 and served until 1946.

Donahue then started at Manhattan College and met Brother Cornelius Justin, to whom he partly credits his early interest in the trade union movement. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in Labor Relations, a major that Brother Justin initiated at the college, in 1949. Donahue also met George

Donahue, the President of the National Association of Catholic Trade Unions at the time, who was yet another instigator of his early trade union interest. Of no relation, George Donahue hired Donahue to work as a part-time organizer for the Retail Clerks' Union.

In 1949, Donahue started working full time for Building Service Employees International Union (now Service Employees International Union) Local 32B, having organized with them previously while working as an elevator operator in a department store. He held multiple roles for Local 32B, including Education Director and editor of their magazine.

Donahue continued his education during his time with the local. He took classes at New York University Graduate School, where he studied labor economics, and got his artium baccalaureus (A.B.) from Fordham School of Law in 1956. Donahue then moved to Paris to work with the Free Europe Exiles Relations Division of Radio Free Europe, a broadcast service created by the Free Europe Committee. He held that position until 1960, when he returned to the United States and served as the executive assistant to SEIU president David Sullivan until 1967.

He was then recommended to President Lyndon B. Johnson as a candidate for Assistant Secretary of Labor for labor-management relations. He functioned in this position from 1967-1969 then moved to become the SEIU Executive Secretary, a title created for Donahue, from 1969-1971. Donahue's work with SEIU continued for a few years more, as the first vice-president of SEIU from 1971-1973, until his shift to the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations.

In 1973, he worked as the executive assistant to AFL-CIO founder George Meany. He maintained that post until 1979, the year he married activist Rachelle Horowitz and ran for Secretary-Treasurer of AFL-CIO and won. Donahue remained in that position until 1995, when he was elected as president after Lane Kirkland retired. He officially ran for the position shortly after and lost to John J. Sweeney. Donahue remained active in both national and international politics.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Scope and Content

The papers document a portion of Thomas R. Donahue's time as the executive assistant to David Sullivan and as the first vice-president of the Service Employees International Union, and span from 1962-1973.

Material includes correspondence, legal cases, handwritten notes, conference material, and a published seminar featuring a paper written by Sullivan and presented by Donahue.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Arrangement

Folders are listed by their location within each box. They are arranged alphabetically.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Acquisition

Material was donated to the Walter P. Reuther Library by Thomas R. Donahue in 2006 and in 2014.

Processing History

Processed and finding aid written by Sarah Lebovitz on September 5, 2018.

Access

Collection is open for research.

Use

Refer to the Walter P. Reuther Library "Rules for Use of Archival Materials." Restrictions: Researchers may encounter records of a sensitive nature – personnel files, case records and those involving investigations, legal and other private matters. Privacy laws and restrictions imposed by the Library prohibit the use of names and other personal information which might identify an individual, except with written permission from the Director and/or the donor.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Related Materials

Related Materials

SEIU Executive Office: David Sullivan Records, SEIU Executive Office: George Hardy Records

Transfers

A recording, Heartbeat of Industry, related to Local 32B's 25th Anniversary was added to the Walter P. Reuther Library Phonograph Record Collection.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Controlled Access Headings

- Labor disputes
- Labor unions
- Sullivan, David, 1904-
- Service Employees International Union
- Hardy, George, 1911-

Collection Inventory

Title/Description	Instances	
David Sullivan Resignation and George Hardy Meeting Notes, 1967, 1971-1973	Box 1	Folder 1
"Labor's Role in the War on Poverty" by David Sullivan, 1967	Box 1	Folder 2
Legal Cases 71-50 (AFSCME Section 2 Violation) and 62-77 (East Ohio Gas Company), 1962, 1971-1972	Box 1	Folder 3
"To Fufill These Rights" Conference, 1966	Box 1	Folder 4