



Special Collections and University Archives

**John Brophy
Manuscript Group 40**

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John Brophy, Manuscript Group 40
Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Special Collections and University Archives
1 box; 0.5 linear feet

Biographical Note



Throughout his life, John Brophy (November 6, 1883 – February 19, 1963) supported organized labor as a miner, union activist, and union official. He was born in Lancashire in northwest England to a family of coal miners. As a youngster in 1892, he emigrated from England to the United States with his parents. The Brophy family immediately found work in the central Pennsylvania coal mines. Before he turned 12, young John Brophy began working in the mines. Raised by a union supporting coal miner, John Brophy entered the mines with his father in 1894, and joined the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) in 1899. An activist in the union, he was elected president of UMWA District 2, representing Central Pennsylvania, in 1916. As a member of the Nationalization Research Committee in the early 1920s he vigorously supported the nationalization of the mining industry. As a checkweighman, local officer, and finally as president of District 2 of the UMWA, he served the miners of Pennsylvania. During the 1920s, John Brophy became the leader of the opposition movement in the UMWA. Brophy maintained his position as President of UMWA District 2 until 1926 when he challenged John L. Lewis for the Presidency of the UMWA. After opposing and losing to Lewis in 1926, John Brophy was promptly expelled from the mines and union.

Between 1927 and 1933, Brophy did not serve in the labor movement in any official capacity, but continued to be active in supporting organized labor. He visited the Soviet Union with a trade union delegation in 1927, taught for a labor school in Pittsburgh, researched the history of mining in the United States, and continued to support the UMWA and the nationalization of mines. He worked for the Columbia Conserve Cooperative, a cooperative in Indiana run by the father of labor activist Powers Hapgood. A self-educated man, Brophy spent some of this time studying economics and philosophy. He also encountered the papal encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII (*Rerum Novarum*, 1891) and Pope Pius XI (*Quadregesimo Anno*, 1931). These papal pronouncements on the social wellbeing of people helped Brophy mesh the two most important components in his personal philosophy and life: his deep faith in Catholicism and his unflinching support of workers and organized labor.

In 1933, Brophy returned to organized labor in an official capacity when UMWA President John Lewis brought him back into the UMWA bureaucracy. Brophy then quickly became an important figure in the national office of the Committee for Industrial Organizations (CIO) after Lewis, Sidney Hillman, and other AFL leaders formed the industrial union federation in 1935. He worked as the CIO's first National Director from 1935-1938 and as the Director of Industrial Union Councils and Director of Industrial Unions. As director of the CIO in the 1930s, Brophy was involved in the organization of several major industries, including steel and autoworkers. Regardless of official position

in the national CIO office, Brophy tirelessly traveled the country assisting in the creation and functioning of state and local industrial union councils, supporting important strikes, and speaking at national union and state and local industrial union council conventions as a representative of the national CIO. Brophy was a mainstay in the CIO national office during its entire 20 year existence as an independent labor federation. He also took numerous foreign trips as a CIO representative to international labor organizations like the World Federation of Trade Unions and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and served on a number of government agencies as labor representative, like the National War Labor Board and the Wage Stabilization Board. After the merger of the AFL and CIO in 1955, Brophy continued to work in the national AFL-CIO office as a trouble shooter and with the Community Services Department. Brophy served on the Advisory Committee on Civil Defense Administration for the United States Department of Labor. Brophy finished a draft of an autobiographical manuscript that was later published as *John Brophy: Miner's Life*, (1964), a year after Brophy died in 1963. He served the CIO and its successor, the AFL-CIO, in a variety of capacities until his death.

Scope and Content

The John Brophy papers are housed in one archival box. These papers contain a few mementos of John Brophy's tenure with the CIO, the eulogy delivered at his funeral, an 8x10 photograph of John Brophy, a letter from President John F. Kennedy, and various newspaper articles about Brophy's work. Most of the newspaper articles are from 1963.

For more information about John Brophy, visit the John Brophy Papers at the American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives, The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., <http://archives.lib.cua.edu/findingaid/brophy.cfm>

Provenance

Unknown.

Restrictions

None.

Processor

Records rearranged and inventory rewritten by Special Collections in 2014.

Container List

Box 1 (3 folders)

1. Union Delegate Badges, 1947-1949
2. Newspaper Clippings, 1961-1963
 - a. "Veteran of Labor," *Washington Star*, August 13, 1961
 - b. "Farewell 'Brunch' Given for Brophy," *The Washington Post*, August 13, 1961
 - c. "John Brophy Challenges Labor to Lead the Way in New Era," *AFL-CIO News*, August 19, 1961
 - d. "John Brophy, Labor Leader," obituary, *The Washington Post*, February 21, 1963
 - e. "John Brophy, 79, Dies; Helped to Found CIO," Washington, DC, February 1963
 - f. "Brophy Rites Held; Helped Found CIO," Pittsburgh Press, February 1963

- g. "Rites Held for CIO Founder," Washington D.C., February 1963
 - h. "John Brophy, Former Union Leader, Dies," *Johnstown Tribune*, February 1963
 - i. "John Brophy, 79, Industrial Union Leader," *Worker's Journal*, 1963
 - j. "Churches Join in an Appeal to the Conscience of the People," *United Mine Workers Journal*, March 1, 1963
3. Retirement, Eulogy, and Letter from President John F. Kennedy
- a. Copy of Inscription by John Brophy from book *John Brophy: Fighter for Industrial Democracy*, n.d.
 - b. Copy of letter to John Brophy from John F. Kennedy, July 25, 1961
 - c. *Eulogy at the Funeral of John Brophy*, February 22, 1963
 - d. *John Brophy: Fighter for Industrial Democracy*, Industrial Union Department Publication, August 12, 1961