



New York State Archives

**New York State Joint Legislative Committee to Investigate
Seditious Activities National Civil Liberties Bureau
Subpoenaed Files L0031**

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Overview of the Records

Repository:	New York State Archives
Summary:	The Joint Legislative Committee to Investigate Seditious Activities (known as the "Lusk Committee" for its chairman Clayton R. Lusk) subpoenaed these records from the National Civil Liberties Bureau (NCLB), which was active in the legal defense of suspected radicals and in protecting of the rights of conscientious objectors. The series principally contains correspondence between NCLB, attorneys, conscientious objectors, and individuals regarding activities of interest and contributions to the organization.
Creator:	New York (State). Legislature. Joint Legislative Committee to Investigate Seditious Activities
Title:	Joint Legislative Committee to Investigate Seditious Activities National Civil Liberties Bureau subpoenaed files
Quantity:	5.25 cubic feet
Quantity:	10 35mm microfilm roll(s)
Inclusive Date:	1917-1919
Series:	L0031

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Arrangement

Organized into 2 subseries: Subseries 1, Legal Defense Correspondence, 1917-1919, 3 cubic feet, is arranged alphabetically by topic or by state. Subseries 2, Conscientious Objection Correspondence, 1917-1919, 2.25 cubic feet, is arranged by topic, state, or Army camp.

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Administrative History

During its investigation, the committee charged that the National Civil Liberties Bureau (NCLB) was engaged in a number of seditious activities, particularly in regard to undermining the nation's efforts during World War I.

The NCLB was formed in 1917 as an outgrowth of the American Union Against Militarism, which was formed to work against American intervention in the war. The stated objectives of the NCLB were to protect free speech and civil liberties of citizens and to assist the defense of conscientious objectors during the war. The NCLB also served as a type of national clearinghouse of information relating to the legal defense of conscientious objectors and other individuals charged by the government with various types of seditious activity. In 1920, the NCLB changed its name to the American Civil Liberties Union.

During the hearings, the committee accused the NCLB of many radical activities including: encouraging individuals to register as conscientious objectors to escape military duty; assisting radical groups in obstructing the war effort; issuing propaganda for radical organizations; and furnishing attorneys for those objecting to military service and for those being prosecuted for violating the Federal Espionage Act.

The committee felt strongly that Socialist revolutionaries played upon pacifist sentiments of a large number of well-intentioned individuals to spread radical propaganda and to influence foreign policy decisions of the United States toward Soviet Russia. The committee charged that the NCLB was in the forefront of this pacifist movement and it closely investigated the bureau's activity.

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Scope and Content Note

This series consists of photostatic copies of records subpoenaed from the national headquarters of the National Civil Liberties Bureau in New York City by the committee as part of its efforts to gather information and evidence about suspected radical groups and individuals. The records primarily consist of correspondence between the NCLB and individuals and organizations throughout the country relating to the legal defense of accused radicals and conscientious objectors. The records are divided into two subseries.

Subseries 1, Legal Defense Correspondence, 1917-1919, 3 cubic feet. This subseries principally consists of correspondence pertaining to the legal defense of individuals arrested for various types of radical activity whom the NCLB assisted as part of its efforts to protect civil liberties. There is correspondence relating to cases in 45 states and Puerto Rico. Numerous cases relate to conspiracy charges under the newly-enacted Federal Espionage Act and Sedition Act, and many of the writers asked the NCLB for help in obtaining legal counsel or for advice on cases. There is a large amount of correspondence between the NCLB and attorneys regarding handling of individual cases, with a number of letters dealing with the legal defense of Industrial Workers of the World members. Many letters are from the NCLB to individuals and organizations seeking financial contributions to help pay for accused radicals' legal fees. The records also include letters written by the NCLB to various government officials seeking additional protection of freedom of speech and civil liberties.

Subseries 2, Conscientious Objection Correspondence, 1917-1919, 2.25 cubic feet. This subseries consists principally of correspondence between the NCLB and conscientious objectors from 32 states and 12 Army camps. Because of its pacifist roots, the NCLB advised conscientious objectors on the procedures to declare their status and their rights once they did so, and the majority of the letters reflect this. Correspondence from the NCLB provides general information on procedures for reclassifying as a conscientious objector and in some cases offers specific information on legal help. Included are letters from the NCLB to the United States War Department on behalf of individuals applying for conscientious objector status. The records also include correspondence between the NCLB and organizations active in the pacifist movement such as the American Friends Service Committee, the American Liberty Defense League, the League for Democratic Control, and the People's Defense Council.

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Other Finding Aids

Available at Repository

A folder list is available at the repository.

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Use of Records

Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions regarding access to or use of this material.

Alternate Formats AvailableAlternate Formats Available

Microfilm is available for use at the New York State Archives or through interlibrary loan.

Administrative Information

Custodial History

This series was originally accessioned as boxes 19-24 of old collection #281, accessions -236 and -237.

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