

# Thomas Barton Papers

1947-1978 (*Bulk:* 1960-1974)

4 boxes (2 linear ft.)

**Call no.:** MS 539

## Read collection overview [Collection overview](#)

In the early 1960s, Tom Barton (b. 1935) emerged as a leader in the Left-wing of the Young People's Socialist League, the national youth affiliate of the Socialist Party. Deeply committed to the civil rights and antiwar struggles and to revolutionary organizing, Barton operated in Philadelphia, Chicago, and New York and was a delegate and National Secretary at the 1964 convention in which tensions within YPSL led to its dissolution.

A small, but rich collection, the Barton Papers provide a glimpse into the career of a long-time Socialist and activist. From Barton's entry into the Young People's Socialist League in the latest 1950s through his work with the Wildcat group in the early 1970s, the collection contains outstanding content on the civil rights and antiwar movements and the strategies for radical organizing. The collection is particularly rich on two periods of Barton's career -- his time in the YPSL and Student Peace Union (1960-1964) and in the Wildcat group (1968-1971) -- and particularly for the events surrounding the dissolution of YPSL in 1964, following a heated debate over whether to support Lyndon Johnson for president. The collection includes correspondence with other young radicals such as Martin Oppenheimer, Lyndon Henry, Juan McIver, and Joe Weiner.

## See similar SCUA collections:



## Background on Thomas Barton

A native of Indiana, Tom Barton (b. 1935) joined the Socialist

Party (technically, the Socialist Party-Social Democratic

Federation) in the late 1950s and its youth cadre, the Young People's Socialist League, one of the new generation of activists who reenergized the fractious Party and helped propel it into the struggle for civil rights and the peace movement. A third generation union activist, Barton's grandfather was a member of the International Workers of the World, an uncle helped form a UAW local in Wisconsin.



Affiliated with Student Peace Union, Barton traveled to

Philadelphia in 1960 to help organize the peace movement in that city. His efforts soon bore fruit. Working with fellow Socialists Martin Oppenheimer (a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania) and Leo Kormis (a lab technician at Penn), he was influential in galvanizing local students to action, although their more orthodox Marxist perspectives sometimes sat uneasily with the New Left sensibilities of the Students for a Democratic Society and other groups. On the national stage, YPSL enjoyed considerable success in organizing the march for a nuclear test ban in Washington, D.C., in 1962, and they are credited with being the first left-oriented group to oppose U.S. military intervention in Vietnam.

With the Chicago Branch of YPSL in 1963, Barton gained increasing prominence. As an editor of *Young Socialist Review* and through his involvement in national committees, he was selected as a delegate to represent the Branch at the national YPSL Convention in 1964. The membership during that summer was badly divided in the stance the organization should take with respect to the upcoming presidential election, and particularly whether to support the candidacy of Lyndon Johnson. While Shachtman and Michael Harrington argued that the Socialist Party should realign to work with the Democratic Party and push them to the left, Barton became one of the leaders in the Left-wing faction of YPSL (along with Bob Brown, Marge Green, Walt Lively, Joe Weiner, and David Komatsu) opposing the realignment and favoring building a mass labor party. At the Convention, where he was listed as National Secretary, Barton was at the center of dispute between the Realignment, Left-wing, Third camp, Spartacists, and other camps. The events came to a head after a resolution was passed to suspend Socialist Party discipline over YPSL until the Party prevented its leaders from supporting Johnson and

the Realignment (Right-wing) faction walked out. Although the Left-wing never formally split from the Party, the Party responded by suspending YPSL. The Left-wing itself split into factions and YPSL itself dissolved. Although reconstituted two years later, it did not regain the vibrancy it enjoyed during the early 1960s.

During the latter half of the 1960s, Barton continued in the revolutionary vein and as an active participant in the antiwar movement. At one time East Coast distributor of the antiwar *Vietnam GI* -- assisting in sending issues to Vietnam -- he was part of the Wildcat group that supported revolutionary organizing of the working class. Described by Barton's friend and fellow Wildcat Juan McIver as surviving "in a no-man's land between leftism and communism," the Wildcat was rooted in Chicago, Baltimore, and New York, and published *Wildcat* (later renamed *The Spark*), *Wildcat Report* (for New York), and *Worker and Soldier*. In Detroit, they built on widespread alienation among Black auto workers, attempting to coordinate with radical organizations such as the Dodge Revolutionary Workers Movement, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, and Detroit Revolutionary Organizing Committee. One worker at Chrysler's Eldon Ave. gear and axle plant regarded the Wildcat people as "Old Left" and "so secretive they had crossed over into paranoia."

(<http://libcom.org/library/black-cats-white-cats-wildcats-martin-glaberman>).

Working in the health industry and a shop Steward with Local 768, Health Care Workers, AFSCME District Council 37, New York City, Barton has remained politically active. A member of the International Socialist Organization, he has taken part in antiglobalization protests in 2000 and has been active in opposition to the war and militarism, publishing *GI Special* (later *Military Resistance*) and *Traveling Soldier*. He assisted ex-Iraq GIs in organizing Iraq Veterans Against the War.

## Scope of collection

A small, but rich collection, the Barton Papers provide a glimpse into the career of a long-time Socialist and activist. From Barton's entry into the Young People's Socialist League in the latest 1950s through his work with the Wildcat group in the early 1970s, the collection contains outstanding content on the civil rights and antiwar movements and the strategies for radical organizing. The collection is particularly rich on two periods of Barton's career -- his time in the YPSL and Student Peace Union (1960-1964) and in the Wildcat group (1968-1971) -- and particularly for the events surrounding the dissolution of YPSL in 1964, following a heated debate over whether to support Lyndon Johnson for president. The

collection includes correspondence with other young radicals such as Martin Oppenheimer, Lyndon Henry, Juan Mclver, and Joe Weiner.

Woven together, the YPSL files -- and particularly those for Philadelphia, Chicago, New York, and Texas -- give a sense of YPSL's field work and the sometimes radically different approaches taken by the New Left and Old Left, and between the varied factions within each. The correspondence, reports, fliers, and other materials reflect deep seated tensions over ideology and tactics, as well as the assault on the left by the forces of authority, as the grappled with issues ranging from the war in Vietnam to the pervasiveness of racism and sexism, and international politics from Berlin to China and Cuba.

The tumultuous 1964 Convention that resulted in the suspension and dissolution of YPSL is well documented, given Barton's central involvement, and the files for the various branches of the League document the reaction around the country as news of the split spread. The YPSL Texas file with letters from Lyndon Henry and Doug Hainline is noteworthy for the clarity of analysis and candid discussions of YPSL's relations with SDS.

Other materials are bellwethers for the shifts in attitude within the movement and the increasing radicalization of some members. In November 1965, for example, Joe Verret wrote bitterly about pacifists: "Good God -- you know it and so does anyone else with serious intentions of defeating the imperialists -- the change to socialism -- the convulsion of property relations -- will never be accomplished on a world scale if we try tactics such as lying down in front of the tanks of bourgeoisie . . . are we revolutionaries or are we just interested in having a nice sized organization?" (Joe Verret, Nov. 26, 1965)

The most extensive, densest, and perhaps richest correspondence in the collection -- five folders worth -- comes from Juan Mclver, a fellow Wildcat and International Socialist. Sometimes signing himself Frank (and once Igor), Mclver's letters are remarkably intense and detailed discussions of Socialist politics, history, the struggle of the present day, revolutionary organizing, the international scene, his travels in Europe and England, and his evolving views on Socialism and the struggle to create a working class movement. Mclver eventually broke with Leninism-Trotskyism. Some of Barton's letters to Mclver are included.

About one third of the collection consists of a remarkable group of materials relating to the Wildcat, and particularly Wildcat Detroit. Mostly signed pseudonymously, the letters and reports analyze efforts to engage in revolutionary

organizing of the working class, primarily in the automotive industry. Among other highlights is an essay (filed under "Wildcat: Trade unions and revolutionary organizing") discussing tactics in navigating racism, suspicion of fellow workers, and the fight against capitalism. In a similar vein, the unidentified author of "Towards a Revolutionary Newspaper" laments the lack of a publication that reflects their point of view and offers thoughts on how better to reach workers:

■ "Initially we planned, and still plan to use locally produced factory bulletins, distributed free at the plant gates.  
 ■ As the basic tool of our organizing, recruiting, and propaganda work. The format would be the simplest and  
 ■ most economical; and 8 1/2 x 13 sheet mimeoed or printed on two sides; one side being a major political article  
 ■ by members of our organizing group, the other side being written entirely by people employed at the plant  
 ■ (ourselves and others)..."

The Wildcat files also contain materials relating to Revolutionary Union Movement groups, such as DRUM (Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement) and ELDRUM (Eldon Revolutionary Union Movement), which sought to organize Black workers and which joined forces to form the League of Revolutionary Black Workers. Among the printed materials are several copies of *Wildcat* and its successor *The Spark*, as well as a valuable series of highly ephemeral newsletters from Revolutionary Union Movements.

# Collection inventory

<i>Ceylon: The JVP Uprising of April 1971</i> [Publication]	1971	Box 1
Congress of Racial Equality. Southside Chicago Chapter Constitution and By-laws	ca.1963	Box 1
Independent Socialist Clubs (Mike Shute, Joel Geier)	1966	Box 1
International Anarchist	Undated	Box 1
<i>ISRAC 2</i> [Publication from Comite d'action revolutionnaire Israelien a l'etranger]	1969	Box 1
<i>Keep Left: The Paper for Socialist Youth</i>	1965 Feb.	Box 1
Labor Committee for Full Employment: Preamble and goals	1963	Box 1
<i>Labor Today</i> [Periodical], vol. 8. 4; 9, 1, 3/4	1969-1970	Box 1
Mclver, Juan	1970-1978	5 folders
Mclver, Juan	1970	Box 1
Mclver, Juan	1971	Box 1
Mclver, Juan	1972	Box 1
Mclver, Juan	1973	Box 1
Mclver, Juan	1976-1978	Box 1

National Committee to Abolish the HUAC. Philadelphia Council	1961-1962	Box 1
Peace Action Center	1961-1962	Box 1
Includes issues of the <i>Peace Action Newsletter</i> , the <i>Washington Witness</i> , brochures and circular letters, and information on the "Washington Project" and work with the Student Peace Union		
<i>Peace News Wire</i>	1961-1962	Box 1
Pennsylvania Committee for Economic Freedom	1961	Box 1
Philadelphia Peace March	ca.1961	Box 1
Organizational flier		
Philadelphia Picketers' Defense Committee	1961-1962	Box 1
<i>Phoenix</i> (Swarthmore College student newspaper), vol. 83, 3	1962	Box 1
Includes article on rightist R. Steven Uzzell criticizing Socialist and Communist influence at Swarthmore		
Saling, Rick	1970	Box 1
Socialism and peace (Donald G. Rose, Tom Condit)	1961-1962	Box 1
Socialism: reading lists	ca.1962	Box 1
Socialist Party / Social Democratic Federation	1959	Box 1
Socialist Party and Civil Rights	1963	Box 1
Socialist Party and the Right Wing	1961	Box 1
Primarily newsclippings on the topic		
Socialist Party. Boulder (Colo.) Branch	ca.1961	Box 1
Socialist Party. National Action Committee	1958-1964	Box 1
Minutes of meetings, resolutions, fliers, etc.		
Socialist Party. Peace Committee	1962	Box 1
Socialist Party: Friendly	1964	Box 1
Letters of support for YPSL		
Socialist Party: Organizational	1960-1961	Box 1
Student Peace Union (Donald McKelvey, Dave Komatsu)	1960-1962	Box 1
Student Peace Union (Donald McKelvey, Gail Paradise)	1963-1964	Box 1
Student Peace Union. University of Pennsylvania (Walt Brod, Carl Gilbert, George Laky, Diane Pachella)	1961-1963	Box 1
<i>Ten Revolutions That Shook the World</i> (University Democratic Socialist Club publication)	Undated	Box 2
Verret, Joseph S.	1964-1966	Box 2
Wildcat. Education Board: Minutes	1970	Box 2

Wildcat: Articles	ca.1969	Box 2
Wildcat: Baltimore, Md.	1969	Box 2
Wildcat: Buffalo, N.Y.	1969	Box 2
Wildcat: Correspondence and miscellaneous	1970	Box 2
Wildcat: Detroit	1968-1969	Box 2
Correspondence, reports, and communiques between Wildcat groups in several cities		
Wildcat: Mailing lists	ca.1970	Box 2
Wildcat: Newsletters and publications	1969-1970	Box 2
<i>Dodge Workers Speak</i>	1970	Box 2
<i>Eldon Wildcat</i>	1970-1971	Box 2
<i>Laying it on the Line</i>	1970-1971	Box 2
<i>Lynch Road Rumbings</i>	1970	Box 2
<i>Needling Points</i>	1970	Box 2
<i>Ring Down</i>	1971	Box 2
<i>Spark</i> , no. 1-3, 7, 10	1971-1972	Box 2
Newspaper, formerly called Wildcat		
<i>Wildcat</i> , vol. 1, no. 10-17	1970-1971	Box 2
Newspaper, continued by The Spark		
<i>Wildcat Bunch of ATT</i> [newsletter]	1970	Box 2
Wildcat: New York City factories list	ca.1970	Box 2
Wildcat: Press discussion	ca.1969	Box 2
Wildcat Report	1970	Box 2
Wildcat: Trade unions and revolutionary organizing	ca.1970	Box 2
Worker and Soldier	1971	Box 2
Workers Councils Parliament [publication]	1970	Box 2
<i>Workers Special News</i> [newsletter]	ca.1970	Box 2
Workers Voice (Western Electric Kearny Works newsletter)	1970	Box 2
YPSL. National Action Committee	1958-1960	Box 2
YPSL. National Action Committee	1963-1965	Box 2
YPSL. National Executive Committee	1960-1964	Box 2
YPSL: Bibliography and Study Guide	1961	Box 2
YPSL: Brochures	1962-1963	Box 2
YPSL: California (Michael Parker, Ted Alpen)	1964	Box 2
YPSL: California. San Francisco (Don Thomas, Stephen Meisenbach)	1963-1964	Box 2

YPSL: Chapter reports	1961	Box 2
YPSL: Conferences and publications	1960-1964	Box 2
YPSL: Contacts	1964	Box 2
YPSL: Convention	1964	Box 2
YPSL: Defense of Man [publication]	ca.1963	Box 2
YPSL: Financial	1964	Box 2
YPSL: Florida (Bruce Carl Huston)	1964	Box 2
YPSL: Fund raising	1960-1963	Box 2
Efforts and publicity for raising funds		
YPSL: Illinois	1961-1964	Box 3
YPSL: Illinois. Chicago Chapter (Janet Heywood, Joe Weiner, Pat Sexton, Joe Stetson)	1960-1963	Box 3
YPSL: Illinois. Chicago Chapter (Janet Heywood, Joe Weiner, Pat Sexton, Don Widman)	1964	Box 3
YPSL: Indiana (Gavin MacFadyen)	1957-1963	Box 3
YPSL: Massachusetts (Neil Chacker, Jonathan A. Wouk)	1964	Box 3
YPSL: Membership	1964	Box 3
YPSL: Michigan	1964	Box 3
YPSL: Michigan State University Conference on Political Perspectives	1965 Feb. 12	Box 3
YPSL: Miscellaneous	1961-1964	Box 3
YPSL: Missouri (Jim Hamilton)	1964	Box 3
YPSL: New Jersey	1964	Box 3
YPSL: New York City Chapter (Tom Barton, Marge Green, Norm Shatkin, Joan Shatkin)	1961-1964	Box 3
YPSL: New York City Chapter. Fliers for social events	1961-1962	Box 3
YPSL: New York City Chapter. Flyers for events	1961-1962	Box 3
YPSL: New York. Cornell University Chapter (Dave Rader, Doug Hainline)	1964	Box 3
YPSL: Pennsylvania	1964	Box 3
YPSL: Pennsylvania. Philadelphia Branch (Ed Hollander, Bob Brown, Carl Gilbert)	1947-1964	Box 3
YPSL: Pennsylvania. Philadelphia Branch Investigation	1963	Box 3
YPSL: Political history	1958-1964	Box 4
YPSL: Relevance of Hope [publication]	ca.1959	Box 4
YPSL: Split with Socialist Party	1964	Box 4
Relating primarily to convention of 1964		



YPSL: Statements and resolutions Possibly associated with National Action Committee	1961-1966	Box 4
YPSL: Student Socialist Union	1964	Box 4
YPSL: Texas (Lyndon Henry, Doug Hainline)	1963-1964	Box 4
YPSL: Virginia (Marc Gripman, Carol Rosenquist)	1964	Box 4
YPSL: Washington (Rick Saling, Dean Henry Fearn)	1964	Box 4
YPSL: Washington D.C. (Neil Maclay, A. Busby)	1964	Box 4
YPSL: Wisconsin (Joe Stetson, Scott Spencer, Paul G. Faler)	1964	Box 4
Young Socialists League (Martin Oppenheimer)	1957	Box 2

## Administrative information

### Access

The collection is open for research.

### Provenance

Acquired from Eugene Povirk, February 2008.

### Processing Information

Processed by Dex Haven, October 2010.

### Bibliography

Georgakas, Dan and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit: I do Mind Dying* (N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 1975)

Lyons, Paul, *The People of This Generation: The Rise and Fall of the New Left in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania, 2003) (N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 1975)

### Related Material

See the **Detroit Revolutionary Movements Collection**,  
Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University

### Language:

English

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

Cite as: Thomas Barton Papers (MS 539). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

# Search terms

---

## Subjects

- Antiwar movement.
- Civil rights movement.
- Communists.
- Revolutionaries.
- Socialists.
- Vietnam War, 1961-1975.

## Names

- Barton, Thomas.
- Gilbert, Carl.
- Henry, Lyndon.
- MacFadyen, Gavin.
- McIver, Juan.
- McKelvey, Donald.
- Oppenheimer, Martin.

- Shatkin, Joan.
- Shatkin, Norm.
- Socialist Party of the United States of America.
- Student Peace Union.
- Students for a Democratic Society.
- Verret, Joe.
- Weiner, Joe.
- Wildcat.
- Young People's Socialist League.

## Genre terms

- Fliers.
- Newsletters.
- Photographs.

## Link to similar SCUA collections

[Civil rights](#)[Cold War culture](#)[Communism and Socialism](#)[Labor](#)[Peace](#)[Political activism](#)[Social justice](#)[Vietnam War](#)

**Special Collections & University Archives**  
**University Libraries : UMass Amherst**

154 Hicks Way : Amherst, Mass. 01003-9275 : Ph. 413-545-2780