Finding Aid to the Sonia Baltrun Kaross oral history, 1977, MS 3515

Finding aid prepared by California Historical Society staff; revised by Marie Dunlap in 2010.
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Title: Sonia Baltrun Kaross oral history
Date: 1977
Collection Number: MS 3515
Creator: Kaross, Sonia Baltrun
Extent: 3 folders (0.5 Linear feet)
Contributing Institution: California Historical Society
678 Mission Street
San Francisco, CA, 94105
415-357-1848
reference@calhist.org
Physical Location: Collection is stored onsite.
Abstract: Contains a transcribed copy of Lucille Kendall's 1977 interviews with Sonia Baltrun Kaross and ephemera documenting Kaross' personal life and activities as a feminist; Socialist and Communist activist; Lithuanian writer; United Textile Workers (UTW) organizer and representative; and pacifist in Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and California, from the 1900s to the 1970s.
Language of Material: Collection material is in English.
http://www.archive.org/details/chi_00003
Access
Collection is open for research.
Publication Rights
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Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], Sonia Baltrun Kaross Oral History, MS 3515, California Historical Society.
Separated Materials
The original sound recording from which the Kaross oral history was transcribed is stored separately on cassettes 41.1-41.15.
Photographs have been removed to the California Historical Society's Portrait Collection.
Related Collections
The following oral histories were prepared by Lucille Kendall in her effort to document the lives of women labor activists and radicals for the California Historical Society's "Women in California Collection":
Clemmie Shuck Barry Oral History, MS 3251
Dorothy Elizabeth De Losada Oral History, MS 3522
Elaine Black Yoneda Oral History, MS 3524
Helene Powell Oral History, MS 3518
Katherine Rodin Oral History, MS 3517
Louise Lambert Oral History, MS 3520
Marion Brown Sills Oral History, MS 3525
Mildred Edmondson Oral History, MS 3523
Violet Orr Oral History, MS 3516
The following oral histories were prepared under the auspices of "The Twentieth Century Trade Union Woman: Vehicle for Social Change," a project of the Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations, The University of Michigan-Wayne State University:
Angela Ward Oral History, MS 3536
Caroline Decker Gladstein Oral History, MS 3025

**Subjects and Indexing Terms**
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's public access catalog.
United Textile Workers of America.
Communists--California.
Women labor leaders--California.
Oral histories.

**Donor**
This oral history was transcribed from seven interviews with Sonia Kaross conducted by Lucille Kendall for the California Historical Society in 1977.

**Biographical Information**
Sonia Baltrun Kaross was born in 1901 in Lithuania. She grew up in East Arlington, Vermont, and began working at a chair factory there at the age of twelve. Upon the death of her father, Rafael Baltrun, in 1915, Kaross moved to Philadelphia, where she worked for the Lithuanian socialist newspaper Kova as a bookkeeper. She was active in the Socialist Party, Communist Party, women's suffrage movement, and in Lithuanian literary circles in Philadelphia, eventually managing the Lithuanian newspaper Women's Voice. She married her husband, Joseph Kaross, in 1918. Their daughter, Eugenia, was born in 1921.

In the early 1920s, the Kaross family moved to Easthampton, Massachusetts. There and in Pennsylvania, Sonia Kaross organized workers for the United Textile Workers (UTW). In 1929, the Kaross family moved to California. Sonia Kaross' career as a labor organizer, Communist activist, and peace worker in California was long and fruitful. In the early 1930s, she joined forces with Anita Whitney and Gertrude Warwick, advocating for the rights of the unemployed, and made unsuccessful attempts to organize domestic and agricultural workers. In 1932, she attended the First World Congress Against War in Amsterdam as a representative of the Lithuanian Women of America. Upon her return, she renewed her organizing efforts, this time among women textile workers at the California Cotton Mill in Oakland, leading a successful strike that secured improved benefits and wages, including pregnancy leave, for the newly organized women. She continued to organize textile workers throughout the state. As a representative of the UTW, she served on the AFL-affiliated Central Labor Council in San Francisco; and on the California and San Francisco councils of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO).

Kaross was also active in the peace movement for most of the twentieth century. She was a member of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and Women for Peace, among other organizations, and attended several international peace conferences. Reflecting her socialist, feminist, and pacifist commitments, she wrote four books in Lithuanian: *Women for Socialism* (Lithuanian Language Press, 1935); *Women and War* (Chicago: Vilnic, 1944); *International Women's Day and Women's Struggle for Emancipation* (Chicago: Vilnic, 1946); and *Around the World for Peace* (U.S.S.R., 1958).

**Scope and Contents**
This oral history collection consists of a transcribed copy of Lucille Kendall's 1977 interviews with Sonia Baltrun Kaross; an interview history; and miscellaneous ephemera documenting Kross' activities as a labor organizer and pacifist. The Kaross interviews were conducted under the auspices of the California Historical Society's "Women in California Collection" as part of an oral history project documenting the lives of women labor activists and radicals in California.

The Kaross interviews document Kaross' personal life and activities as a feminist; Socialist and Communist activist; Lithuanian writer; United Textile Workers (UTW) organizer and representative; and pacifist in Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and California, from the 1900s to the 1970s.