Finding aid to the Louise Todd Lambert oral history, 1958-1976 (bulk 1976), MS 3520

Finding aid prepared by Marie Silva
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2011
Title: Louise Todd Lambert oral history
Date (inclusive): 1958-1976
Date (bulk): 1976
Collection Identifier: MS 3520
Creator: Lambert, Louise Todd.
Extent: Transcript and papers: 2 folders (0.2 linear feet); Tapes: 20 audiocassettes.
Contributing Institution: California Historical Society
678 Mission Street
San Francisco, CA, 94105-4014
(415) 357-1848
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URL: http://www.californiahistoricalsociety.org/
Physical Location: Collection is stored onsite.
Language of Material: Collection materials are in English.

Abstract: Contains a transcript and sound recording of Lucille Kendall's 1976 interviews with Louise Todd Lambert; an interview history; and a few miscellaneous papers, including a photocopy of Lambert's 1958 letter of resignation from the Communist Party. The interviews document Lambert's early years as an official for the Communist Party in California, including her participation in major labor actions and strikes of the 1930s; her involvement in local and statewide elections as a Communist Party candidate and campaign manager; her arrest and imprisonment in the Tehachapi correctional institute for women (1935-1938); her experiences "underground" as a member of the national Communist Party's reserve leadership (1950-1955); and, finally, her resignation from the Party in 1958. The final portion of the interview is devoted to Lambert's memories of fellow activist Anita Whitney.

Access
Collection is open for research.

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Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], Louise Todd Lambert oral history, MS 3520, California Historical Society.

Separated Materials
The original sound recording from which the Lambert oral history was transcribed is stored separately on cassettes 31.1-31.20. Photographs have been removed to the California Historical Society's Portrait and Photograph Collections.

Related Collections
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
Marion Brown Sills oral history, MS 3525
Mildred Edmondson oral history, MS 3523
Sonia Baltrun Kaross oral history, MS 3515
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

Acquisition Information

This oral history was transcribed from ten interviews with Louise Todd Lambert conducted by Lucille Kendall for the California Historical Society in 1976.

Biographical Information

Communist activist Louise Todd Lambert was born in 1905 in San Francisco to German immigrant parents. Raised in a socialist family, the young Lambert was active in the suffrage movement, the Young Workers League, and Nature Friends. In 1929, Lambert joined the Communist Party in California, filling the sensitive role of organizational secretary until the mid-1940s. As a state official for the Communist Party, Lambert participated in a number of important labor actions and strikes, including the 1933 cotton strike in San Joaquin Valley and the 1934 San Francisco General Strike. She was also active in local and statewide elections, running for the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 1931 and 1933, and working as a Communist Party campaign manager during the 1934 elections. These political efforts led to Lambert's arrest and imprisonment the following year.

In 1935, Lambert was arrested, tried, and convicted in Los Angeles on charges of perjury for allegedly making false affidavits on petitions to put the Communist Party on the 1934 state ballot. She was sentenced to prison at the Tehachapi correctional institute for women, where she was incarcerated, along with other Communist Party activists, until 1938. After she was released from Tehachapi, Lambert resumed her work for the Communist Party in California, organizing training schools for leadership, participating in elections, supporting the Communist Party's newspaper, the People's World, serving on the state executive committee. In 1939, she married her second husband, Communist Party member Rudie Lambert. Lambert continued to work as organizational secretary until the mid-1940s, when the national Party was restructured. In 1947, she was assigned a "political action" position, and was active in efforts to put the Progressive Party on the California ballot.

Beginning in the late 1940s, intensifying anti-communist sentiment -- and arrests of Communist Party members, including Rudie Lambert, under the Smith Act -- created an atmosphere of fear within the Party. In 1950, Louise Lambert was selected to serve in the Communist Party's underground reserve leadership. For the next five years, Lambert lived under an alias on the East Coast, separated from her husband and family. She returned to California in 1955. In response to internal party politics and international events, Lambert resigned from the Communist Party in 1958, signing a joint letter of protest with other prominent members.

Scope and Contents

This oral history collection consists of a transcript and sound recording of Lucille Kendall's 1976 interviews with Louise Todd Lambert; an interview history; and a few miscellaneous papers, including a photocopy of Lambert's 1958 letter of resignation from the Communist Party. The Lambert 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 interviews document Lambert's personal life, Communist Party activism, and political attitudes, from her childhood in San Francisco in the 1900s and 1910s to her resignation from the Party in 1958. Prominent topics discussed include: Lambert's experiences as a child growing up in a socialist German American family; her parents' memories of the 1906 earthquake and fire; her early years as an official for the Communist Party in California, including her participation in major labor actions and strikes of the 1930s; her involvement in local and statewide elections as a Communist Party candidate and campaign manager; her arrest and imprisonment in the Tehachapi correctional institute for women (1935-1938); her efforts on behalf of the Progressive Party in California in the late 1940s; her experiences "underground" as a member of the national Communist Party's reserve leadership (1950-1955); and, finally, her resignation from the Party in 1958. The final portion of the interview is devoted to Lambert's memories of fellow activist Anita Whitney.

In addition to discussing these events, Lambert reflects critically on the growth of American radicalism during the Great Depression; the culture of the Communist Party in the 1930s, '40s, and '50s; the atmosphere of fear that characterized the McCarthy Era; the successes and failures of the Communist Party in the United States; reasons for the Party's demise in the 1950s; and her own changing political attitudes.

Subjects and Indexing Terms