
Finding Aid to the Caroline Decker Gladstein Oral History MS 3025

Finding aid prepared by California Historical Society staff; revised by Marie Dunlap in 2010.

California Historical Society

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Title: Caroline Decker Gladstein oral history

Date (inclusive): 1976

Collection Number: MS 3025

Creator: Gladstein, Caroline Decker

Physical Description: 1 folder(0.1 Linear feet)

Repository: California Historical Society

678 Mission Street

San Francisco, CA, 94105

415-357-1848

reference@calhist.org

URL: <http://www.californiahistoricalsociety.org/>

Physical Location: Collection is stored onsite.

Abstract: Contains a transcribed copy of Sue Cobble's 1976 interviews with Caroline Decker Gladstein documenting her experiences as a Communist Party activist and labor organizer in the 1920s and 1930s across the United States. Topics include: the 1931 Harlan County, Kentucky, coal miners' strike; Communist organizing campaigns in Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and California; the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union; and farm workers' strikes in California.

Language of Materials: Collection material is in English.

http://archive.org/details/chi_000011

Access

Collection is open for research.

Publication Rights

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Preferred Citation

Consult owning institution.

Location of Originals

Originals held by the Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations, The University of Michigan-Wayne State University.

Related Collections

The following oral history was 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

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 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

Sonia Baltrun Kaross Oral History, MS 3515

Violet Orr Oral History, MS 3516

Separated Materials

The sound recording from which the Gladstein oral history was transcribed is stored separately on cassettes 35.1-35.7.

Indexing Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

Cannery & Agricultural Workers Industrial Union.

Communist Party of America.

Strikes and lockouts--Agricultural laborers--California.

Strikes and lockouts--Coal mining--Kentucky--Harlan County.

Audiocassettes.

Oral histories.

Donor

This oral history was transcribed from two 1976 interviews conducted by Sue Cobble with Caroline Decker Gladstein in San Francisco.

Biographical Information

The following biographical sketch was written by interviewer Sue Cobble:

Born in 1912 in Macon, Georgia, of immigrant Jewish Eastern European parents, Caroline Decker Gladstein became involved with radical politics and trade union organizing in her early teens through the influence of her older brother, then a student at Columbia University in New York City, and her older sister, who was a national officer of the left-wing Workers' International Relief organization. After moving with her family to Syracuse, N.Y., at age 12, Gladstein met many of the leaders of left-wing organizations who were offered hospitality in her parents' home. She joined the Young Communist League in her teens, helped organize cigar workers and shoe workers in Binghamton, N.Y., and became a speaker at such events as International Women's Day.

She took part in the first New York State Hunger March and in demonstrations of unemployed in the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, area at the start of the Depression and became active in organizing unemployed councils and foreign language-speaking groups of workers in Syracuse, N.Y. She took an active role in the first National Hunger March on Washington, D.C. and had the responsibility of finding food and shelter for 2000 marchers who came from the West Coast. Through her sister's involvement with relief efforts for the striking miners in Harlan County in 1930, Gladstein went South to work at the Harlan County Strike headquarters in Knoxville, Tennessee, helping organize miners and textile workers in that area and working on obtaining support and relief funds. Following this period, she returned to the Pittsburgh area and served as secretary to the Communist Party district director, working to organize unemployed councils and steelworkers unions in that area. During this period, she took an active role in the International Youth Day March to Youngstown, Ohio, which became a bloody battle when marchers were attacked by the "iron and steel" police employed by the steel corporations.

Early in the thirties, Gladstein went to California with the Free Tom Mooney Delegation and became involved with the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union, as its secretary, organizing migrants in camps throughout California and taking part in the 1932 Cherry Pickers' Strike, the 1934 Apricot Pickers Strike and the Cotton Pickers' Strike of that period. She organized a national 30-day training school in agricultural organizing for workers and Communist Party members which lasted for a few years.

In 1934, Gladstein was sentenced to prison under the California Criminal Syndicalism Act and spent three years in jail. Following her release, she became a legal secretary, married Richard Gladstein, a labor and civil rights lawyer, and raised four children. She considers herself primarily a trade union organizer who feels strongly that "workers will learn from experience" and that "if there are radical social changes, it will come as a result of the experiences that they [the workers] have had, not because somebody is going to superimpose it from the top."

Scope and Contents

This oral history collection consists of a transcribed copy of Sue Cobble's 1976 interviews with Caroline Decker Gladstein, a short biography of Gladstein, and an index to the transcript. The Gladstein interviews were conducted 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.

The interviews document Gladstein's experiences as a Communist Party activist and labor organizer in the 1920s and 1930s across the United States. In particular, Gladstein discusses her participation in the Young Communist League in New York; the 1931 Harlan County, Kentucky, coal miners' strike; Communist organizing campaigns among coal miners, steel workers, and agricultural laborers in Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and California; the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (C&AWIU); and farm workers' strikes in California, including the 1933 cotton strike near Corcoran.
