

...AND REMAINS A COW

My mother had an expression which struck me as a meanspirited put-down, but rather accurate: In Yiddish: “A kee gayt tzum Kiev, un kimt fun Kiev, un blaybt a kee.” Translation: “A cow goes to Kiev (the big city) and returns from Kiev and remains a cow.” I suspect it was said about the nouveau-riche who were taking the “Grand Tour” visiting London, Paris, Rome (and maybe Kiev) who came home no wiser than when they left.

This comes to mind as I think about all the people I met and worked with in the years that I was with the ILGWU and the Jewish Labor Committee. In my case, I, the cow, didn’t go to Kiev, but to the various offices where I worked: 1710 Broadway, 137 West 46th Street and 25 East 78th Street. And during those years from 1950 to 1962, I, the cow, came in contact with a number of legendary figures, and I (like a cow) wasn’t wise enough to realize how remarkable they were, what extraordinary qualities they had, and what stories they had to tell.

In May of 1950, I became part of the ILGWU Training Institute. The President of the ILGWU was David Dubinsky. He had been President since 1933, his term coinciding with and continuing beyond FDR’s. It may have been his idea to create the Training Institute, a sort of West Point for future union leaders. Dubinsky would look in on our classes from time to time, and engage us in discussions. He was one of the most powerful labor leaders of the period and one of the most innovative: a 35 hour week, health benefits and a union health center, retirement benefits, political action—the formation of the Jewish Labor Committee, the American Labor Party, and then the Liberal Party, FM radio station WFDR, etc.

The person hired to direct the Training Institute was Arthur Elder, a leader in worker’s education. He was responsible for putting together the curriculum and the teaching staff. This was separate from the Union’s Education Department headed by Mark Starr, a British labor educator and advocate of Esperanto, and Fannia Cohn. I later learned (from Benjamin Stolberg’s *Tailor’s Progress* that Starr was a hod carrier’s helper at 13, a miner at 14, a writer of labor education texts and named director in 1935. And Fannia Cohn was described by Louis Levine in his 1924 history of the Women’s Garment Workers as having come from Russia in 1904, active unionist since 1909, vice-president since 1916, and executive secretary of the education department since 1918.

Intl. Dubinsky

Kirtzman,

Arthur Elder,

Makin, Gladnick,

Mark Starr, Fania Cohn,

Gus Tyler, Res Dir Lazar Tepper, Wilbur Daniels, Bill Gomberg, Leon Stein,

Local 38 Sorkin, Casotta, Brahinsky, Torchinsky, Laura Wolf, Ann Cagliari, --Folkways:
Moe Asch and Marian Distler, WEVD—Zvee Scooler.

Local 99 Shelly Appleton, Doug Levin Rae Brandstein, Ben Laboda, Nick Mule, (Little
Rock HS kid)

JLC Charles Zimmerman, Adolph Held, Jacob Pat, Benj Tabachisky, Sara Jacob, Lazar
Epstein, Zalman Lichtenstein, Nathan Chanin, Will Stern, Joseph Mlotek, Rose Pesotta,
Manny Muravchik, S. Estrin, Phil Heller, Bund, Scherer, Yiddish artists—poet Jacob
Glatstein, Jewish Culture Congress-Hyman Bass, WC) Walter Kirschenbaum, Betty
Kaye Taylor, Israel Knox, field reps,