

Hyman Weintraub Biography

Hyman Weintraub taught American history. But he also was a rabble-rouser --in the finest sense of grass- roots democracy -- to improve social and equal rights. He organized his mobile home park neighbors as well as the Jewish Labor Committee and the California Federation of Teachers while teaching the history of the American labor movement in classrooms from East Los Angeles to Sri Lanka.

“Hy Weintraub,” said their son, attorney David Weintraub, “was a leader, an organizer and a man of great ideals.... He had a lifelong commitment to a vision of democratic socialism, liberty and equality.”

He was a teacher at Los Angeles High School and other campuses, but mainly at East Los Angeles Community College, from which he retired in 1978. Weintraub helped organize a number of unions and advocacy groups for educators. Among them were AFT 1521, the Los Angeles College Faculty Guild, as well as the California Federation of Teachers. This state group made him its president, and in 1979 gave him its Ben Rust Lifetime Achievement Award.

One of his finest triumphs came as a tenants' association president, when he led his neighbors to convert their Malibu Village Mobile Home Estates into a condominium complex in 1984--the first such conversion in Los Angeles County. Weintraub, who had lived in the park since 1976, had to win approval from the county Planning Commission, the state Real Estate Department and the California Coastal Commission. He also had to persuade the landlord to sell the property to his tenants instead of evicting them, as he had planned. The battle took five years.

“The problem with most tenant groups is that they enter these battles with a splurge, a splash, vent some anger, and then fall apart and lose,” Weintraub said. “We prevailed because we stayed together in opposition to the eviction notices.... We had a positive alternative, a goal, which was ownership.”

Born in New York City to an anarchist mother and a father who was a leader in the Jewish Socialist Bund and an editor of the Jewish Daily Forward, Weintraub grew up steeped in the pursuit of education and socialist goals. He earned a bachelor's degree from Case Western Reserve University in Ohio and a master's degree and doctorate at UCLA.

In his youth, Weintraub was a speaker for the Young People's Socialist League and an organizer for the American Student Union and served as educational director for the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. He campaigned for Norman Thomas in his Socialist bid for president and was on the Socialist Party's national executive board.

Practicing the labor philosophy he taught about in class, Weintraub was an organizing leader of the Workmen's Circle and Jewish Labor Committee and directed Camp Kinderling, a Workmen's Circle summer camp, in the 1950s.

Weintraub wrote a biography published in 1959, “Andrew Furuseth, Emancipator of the Seamen,” about the organizer of the seamen's union. He also wrote a study of the International Workers of the World (Wobblies). He served in the Army in Europe during World War II and camped all over the world throughout his life, was a Fulbright scholar in 1962, and taught the history of the American labor movement in Ceylon.