

Anthony Mazzocchi, 76, Dies; Union Officer and Party Father

By Steven Greenhouse

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Anthony Mazzocchi, a longtime union official who was a pioneer in the occupational safety movement and the founder of the six-year-old Labor Party, died on Saturday at his home in Washington. He was 76.

The cause was pancreatic cancer, Labor Party officials said.

In his years with the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers, Mr. Mazzocchi was widely viewed as one of the greatest innovators and mavericks in the labor movement. In the 1960's, he become one of the first union leaders to develop strong ties with the environmental and antiwar

movements. He fought nuclear testing, and he bucked the labor establishment by criticizing its strong ties with the Democratic Party.

In that same period, Mr. Mazzocchi became convinced that workers were being hurt by chemicals on the job, so, as the union's legislative director, he held a series of town meetings for union members and environmentalists around the nation that helped accelerate the occupational safety movement. In 1970, when President Richard M. Nixon signed the Occupational Safety and Health Act, Mr. Mazzocchi was credited with being a principal force behind the legislation.

In the 1970's, he began working with Karen Silkwood, a technician at a Kerr-McGee plant in Oklahoma that processed nuclear fuel rods. She told him that the company was falsifying records about the rods' safety, something Kerr-McGee always denied.

In 1974, Mr. Mazzocchi arranged for Ms. Silkwood to meet a reporter for The New York Times to detail her accusations, but she died in a car accident while driving to meet the reporter. She was later made famous in a film starring Meryl Streep.

After retiring from the union in 1991, Mr. Mazzocchi focused on building the Labor Party because he was convinced that the two major parties were beholden to business. His slogan was: "The bosses have two parties. We need one of our own."

In 1996 in Cleveland, he presided over the founding convention of the Labor Party, which supports universal health insurance paid for by the federal government, free college tuition for all and laws making it easier for workers to unionize. The party has grown far more slowly than he hoped, he acknowledged in an interview last month.

"Breaking the two-party system is not an easy goal," he said. "Looking

at the experience of the Social Democratic parties in Europe, they didn't grow overnight."

Anthony Mazzocchi was born in Brooklyn on June 13, 1926, to a family so poor that the children slept three to a bed. His father, Joseph, was a garment worker; his mother, Angelina Lamardo, died of cancer when he was 6. Mr. Mazzocchi said his father lost the family home because of his mother's hospital expenses.

At 16 he dropped out of high school and joined the Army to fight in Europe during World War II. He served in the Battle of the Bulge, and he said he obtained his education reading paperbacks on the back of a truck carrying an anti-aircraft gun.

After the war, he was a steelworker in Brooklyn and an auto worker in New Jersey. In 1950, he took a job at a Helena Rubenstein factory in Roslyn, N.Y., and two years later he was elected president of the union local there.

He was one of the first labor leaders to obtain dental coverage for his workers, and he negotiated equal pay for women at the plant.

Soon he became one of Long Island's most prominent labor leaders, campaigning for Adlai E. Stevenson for president and working with scientists to fight nuclear testing. He collected baby teeth from the children of union members to show that human bodies were collecting the radioactive isotope strontium 90 because of nuclear testing.

From the mid-1960's to the mid-1970's, he lived in Washington, working as legislative director of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers, which merged with the paper workers' union in 1999 and was renamed the Paper Allied-Industrial, Chemical and Energy Workers Union.

In 1977 he became vice president of the chemical workers, and in 1979

and 1981 he narrowly lost races to become the union's president. From 1988 until 1991, he was the union's secretary-treasurer.

His marriages to Rose Alfonso and Susan Lynn Kleinwaks ended in divorce. He is survived by his partner, Katherine Isaac of Washington; a son, Anthony, of Brooklyn; five daughters, Geraldine Amitin of Atlanta, Carol Irish of Rochester, Linda Nagle of Houston, Elizabeth Mazzocchi of Boston, and Kristina Mazzocchi of Washington; and five grandchildren.

As founder and national organizer of the Labor Party, he said his goal was not to elect candidates, but to force important issues, like nationalized health care, onto center stage. As a model, he pointed to grass-roots groups in decades past that pressed the government to establish Social Security and unemployment insurance.

Noting that a Republican, President Nixon, signed the labor-friendly occupational safety bill, he said, "When you build a big movement from down below, regardless of who's in the White House, you can bring about change."

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