

Joe Dimow

Obituary Condolences

DIMOW, JOSEPH "JOE" Joe Dimow, 93, a political activist with a lifelong commitment to social and economic justice, died May 2nd of natural, age related causes. Joe was known for his intelligence, verbal skills, sense of humor, and warm and humane spirit - a true mensch. His wife of 67 years, Lillian Dimow, passed away in 2010. Joe was born on February 18, 1920, the youngest of four children. His parents, Hyman Dimow and Anna Dichner Dimow, were immigrants from Belarus and Ukraine. They were active participants in the secular, politically progressive world that included many Jewish immigrants of that time. They lived in the Bronx. Joe grew up in this culturally rich, financially poor milieu. His family placed a high value on learning and instilled deep values of respect for all people and for trying to make the world a better place. Joe worked for the Civilian Conservation Corps after high school. He then moved to Hartford, CT, to live with one of his sisters and her husband and began to learn the machinists' trade. After Pearl Harbor, Joe enlisted in the army and served in Europe during World War II as an army mechanic. It was before the war, at a dance in Hartford, that Joe met his future wife, Lillian Schlossberg. They married in 1943, while Joe was home on leave, and settled in New Haven, Lil's hometown, after the war. They had two children, Joan Dimow, now of Milwaukee, WI, and Carl Dimow, now of South Portland, ME. Joe and Lil had a long and close marriage. They had a large group of friends with whom they loved to socialize, go to the theater, and discuss world events. They also loved to travel and took numerous international trips. After the war, Joe continued to study the machinist's trade, taking math courses by correspondence, eventually becoming a highly skilled tool and die maker. He had a fifty-year work career, working in a number of small shops in the New Haven area, eventually managing Norris Tool and Die in Woodbridge. Beyond his family and work, however, Joe's passion in life was being a political and social activist. From the late '30's to the mid '50's, he was active with the Communist Party, working on campaigns for racial and economic justice. To a great extent, his primary interest was to get people to look at injustice in the world, and consider the possibility of change. In 1955, along with a number of other activists, Joe was arrested under the Smith Act, the primary law under which Communist Party members were prosecuted during the McCarthy era. The Supreme Court overturned the Smith Act arrests in 1958. During this same period, Joe became disillusioned with how Communism had evolved in the Soviet Union, and stopped working with the CP. He did not, however, lose his idealism. For the next 55 years Joe worked with numerous organizations on peace and justice issues. He also worked with local organizations, from neighborhood organizations to city committees. Joe participated in countless rallies and demonstrations, including the 1963 March on Washington where Martin Luther King gave his "I Have a Dream" speech. He was a founding member of Veterans for Peace in the New Haven area, and would march on Memorial Day with that group. Joe was also on the board of the World Fellowship Center, a progressive retreat center in New Hampshire, where he and Lil would spend summer vacations for many years. He supported a two state

solution in Israel/Palestine long before this became a mainstream policy goal, and worked with a number of organizations such as J Street and Brit Tzedek to promote that goal. In 1995, both Joe and Lil were interviewed for the book Aging Political Activists by David Shuldiner. In the 1980's Joe began working with Jewish Currents magazine, "A secular, progressive voice", eventually joining the editorial board. Joe wrote a number of feature articles for the magazine and, for many years, a regular column. He remained on the editorial board for the rest of his life. In 1962, Joe volunteered for a psychology experiment at Yale. This turned out to be the infamous Milgram experiment, which studied how far people would go if told, by an authority figure, to give shocks to another volunteer (who was actually an actor). Joe was one of the volunteers who refused to participate after a handful of shocks. He also guessed that he was the one being studied. He attributed his ability to stand up to authority to "my upbringing in a socialist-oriented family steeped in a 'class struggle' view of society which taught me that authorities would often have a different view of right and wrong than mine". Joe wrote an article for Jewish Currents about his experience with the Milgram experiment. He was also interviewed for a number of documentaries, books, and articles about the experiment. After retiring from work, Joe became very active with the senior centers in New Haven. He ran current events discussion groups at a number of these centers, and was also a member of the New Haven Commission on Aging from 2005 - 2012. In 2006 Joe and Lil moved to the Tower One/Tower East senior living facility in New Haven. Lil had been showing signs of dementia for a number of years. The dementia became more pronounced during the next few years and Joe became a devoted caretaker. Lil spent the last ten months of her life at the Jewish Home for the Aged where Joe visited her on a daily basis. Meanwhile, true to form, Joe served as a tenant representative on the Board of Directors of the Towers, and led a weekly current events discussion group there. He would also walk downtown for rallies during the Occupy New Haven demonstrations. Besides his two children and their spouses, Joe leaves his sister-in-law, Bernice Goldman, numerous nieces, nephews and extended family, and countless friends and colleagues.

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