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Esther Weissman, 73, labor lawyer, helped to alter compensation law

Sunday, July 31, 2005

Richard M. Peery
Plain Dealer Reporter

Shaker Heights- Esther Weissman, a usually low-key labor lawyer who played a major role in overturning changes to the state's workers' compensation law, died of complications of leukemia Thursday at her home in Shaker Heights.

She was instrumental in organizing a statewide referendum in 1997 that canceled modifications the legislature had made to the law. She believed they would deprive workers of existing benefits, though proponents of the changes said they would prevent waste and fraud.

"She was a living legend, a passionate defender of workers' rights," said U.S. Rep. Dennis Kucinich, Democrat of Cleveland. "She combined a towering intellect with impeccable ethics. I've lost a dear friend and the people of Ohio have lost a foremost spokesperson for injured workers."

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FROM ROCK HALL

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Born Esther Swerdlow in Philadelphia 73 years ago, she worked in a factory and attended Temple University. After she moved to Cleveland in the 1950s with her husband, Bob, she attended Cleveland-Marshall Law School.

Weissman always was interested in social causes. In the 1960s, she went to Washington to participate in marches opposing nuclear testing and the Vietnam War. She advocated for peace in the Middle East and urged respect for the rights of Palestinians. She supported Kucinich when he was elected to Cleveland City Council in 1969 and worked for him in subsequent campaigns.

When Kucinich was elected clerk of Cleveland Municipal Court, Weissman received the President's Award of the Ohio Academy of Trial Lawyers for her work in reorganizing the office's civil division.

Her husband served as the city's personnel director when Kucinich was mayor. The couple later divorced.

She was an attorney for the United Auto Workers union in Cleveland and later was in private practice. She specialized in workers' compensation cases and was asked to testify before the General Assembly as recently as this year.

Surviving are a son, Robert, and a daughter, Terri, both of Washington, D.C.; a grandson; and a brother.


Services are at noon today at the Berkowitz-Kumin-Bookatz Memorial Chapel., 1985 S. Taylor Road, Cleveland Heights.

Memorial donations may be made to the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland, 1223 West Sixth St., Cleveland 44113.

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