

Rose Pesotta

Anarchist in a Union Bureaucracy

Jeff Shantz

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Rose Pesotta was a lifelong anarchist who would gain prominence as a union organizer and executive, the latter a position that some anarchists viewed as a contradiction of anarchist principles. Rose Pesotta was born Rachel Peisoty on November 20, 1896 in Derazhnya, Russia. In 1913 she moved to the USA with her grandmother, changing her name to Rose Pesotta. A year later she went to work as a seamstress, becoming a member of local 25 of the International Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU).

In 1922 Pesotta was assigned by the union to research the trial of the anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti. Pesotta met with the accused men and became an active advocate, travelling the country to speak on their behalf.

Despite being a close friend of Emma Goldman, who she viewed as a teacher, Pesotta was no revolutionist. Rather she took a pragmatic approach to social change, focusing on day-to-day organizing in working class communities. During her years as an organizer she fought against the Communist Party-led establishment that controlled the ILGWU. While advocating for rank-and-file participation within the union, Pesotta never overcame the tensions of being an anarchist labor professional within a union bureaucracy. She was even known for adopting an authoritarian organizing style as vice president.

Pesotta died in 1965 in Miami, Florida.

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