

Matthew A. Kelly

June 17, 1913 — January 18, 1993

Matt Kelly grew up in the Bronx, the son of a textile salesman who died when Matt was very young. He was raised by his mother along with a younger sister and together they faced the depression. In addition to his considerable intellect and academic ability, Matt was a world class swimmer. He soon learned that he could use his swimming ability to further his academic ability. For example, he was recruited by Evander Childs High School in the Bronx to be a member of its swimming team. He won a scholarship to Mercersburg Academy where his swim team set a world record. He turned down an offer to be on the U.S. Olympic swim team to continue his education at Amherst College which he attended on scholarship and graduated *cum laude*, Phi Beta Kappa and with high honors in economics. He married Perce, who helped him work his way through Princeton University graduate school as coach of the Westchester Country Club swim team. After receiving his Ph.D. degree in economics from Princeton, Matt joined the Department of Economics as a faculty member from 1940 to 1950.

During World War II he took a leave of absence from academia to serve the United States government as chief economist for the Office of Price Administration and labor relations specialist officer in the U.S.N.R. Following the war he was enlisted by the Office of Military Government to represent the United States in negotiations and developing labor relations policies with U.S. allies, Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union for occupied Germany. After returning to the classroom at Princeton, he was again enlisted as a negotiator by the Printing Industry in Washington, D.C. and later in New York City where he represented unionized printers at the bargaining table for sixteen years, acquiring a reputation for labor relations expertise which was widely respected by both employers and Unions.

With his combination of academic and professional accomplishments, Matt was an ideal candidate for appointment to the ILR faculty as a member of the Collective Bargaining and Extension Departments, a position created in 1966, which involved him in resident teaching on campus and in designing and teaching courses for ILR practitioners in New York City. He also conducted a seminar for ILR resident students who spent a semester in New York City.

In the 1970s he directed a national conference and a series of seminars on “Automation and Employment” and an international conference held in Jerusalem on “Technological Changes and Human Development.” Conference proceedings which he edited were published as monographs. His research interests ranged from public sector bargaining to railroad labor relations and publications included a book on *Labor and Industrial Relations: Terms,*

Laws, Court Decisions and Arbitration Standards which is widely used as a text and reference work along with numerous articles on collective bargaining and arbitration.

Matt was a moving force in faculty discussions which led to the establishment of the New York MSILR Program with Baruch College. This was an unusual venture, never undertaken before or since, of a joint degree program involving the collaboration of two independent tax supported institutions aimed at providing graduate instruction in the evening for individuals who for the most part were actively employed in the field of industrial relations and human resource management. Unique to the program was that the faculty was full time while the students were part-time. The degree itself bore the name of both institutions and some students attended graduation ceremonies at both campuses.

Matt Kelly was the academic director representing Cornell when the first classes met in 1977 and, in addition to his administrative responsibilities, taught each term a variety of courses, most notably collective bargaining and arbitration. The MSILR Program in New York would not have survived without his patient shepherding and it remains a monument to his abilities.

His retirement in 1982 was only nominal although he yielded his administrative duties. Without a pause in the pace of his life, he continued to teach in the MSILR Program for eleven years until the last month of his life. Within weeks of his death, he wrote a letter to his successor acknowledging his inability to teach in the spring term although he promised that he would be available in the fall. It must be observed that his pay for teaching was minimal. Indeed, as his health weakened in the last years, the cost of door to door transportation to meet his classes exceeded his remuneration.

Matt Kelly was a master teacher who incorporated the best in Cornell's traditional concern with students. His course outlines were long and elaborate with each week's assignment set forth in great detail. His lectures were carefully crafted and structured on the essential points of his subject. He was a demanding teacher, insisting on high quality student performance, and somehow the students met his demands. He challenged them and they responded by rising beyond themselves. Homework assignments, exams and term papers were riddled with Matt Kelly's red pencilled comments which were an extension of his lectures.

Matt's service to the wider community of industrial relations was to be found in his work as an arbitrator, fact finder and mediator in many labor-management disputes.

As early as 1941, the Governor of New Jersey appointed him to a labor panel of arbitrators. Since then, he arbitrated in an enormous number of cases in both the private and public sectors. In 1971, during a period of wage and salary controls, he was a consultant with the Cost of Living Council, an alternate member of the Pay Board, a member of the Pay Panel and a Special Hearing Officer for Cases and Appeals. He was a mediator in disputes involving the City of New York and police officers and other uniform services, chairman of the President's Emergency Board for the Long Island Railroad and its non-operating unions, member of a Board of Inquiry in a contract dispute between cemetery workers and cemeteries in the metropolitan area of New York, and was arbitrator for the North American Soccer League and Players Association, New York City Transit Authority and Transit Supervisors Organization, District 1199, National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees, and League of Voluntary Hospitals, and the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers and the Trans World Airlines System Board of Adjustment. For over 20 years, he was the arbitrator of the Consolidated Edison Company of New York and the Utility Workers Union of America, Local 1-2.

To his colleagues, Matt was an endearing, outgoing and enthusiastic partner and friend in the complicated, ambiguous and wonderful world of academe. A wise and kind man, he remains in memory as he was in life a lodestar for personal decency and professional responsibility.

He is survived by his lifelong companion—his wife Perce—and two children. His son, Randy, has followed in his footsteps as an arbitrator and teacher in the labor relations field and his daughter, Debbie, is a practicing attorney.

Esta Bigler, Phil Ross, Lois S. Gray