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## Alfred J. Kahn, Specialist in Child Welfare Issues, Dies at 90

By WILLIAM GRIMES

Alfred J. Kahn, a social-policy scholar and an educator who turned a critical eye on failures of local and state governments in child development and family support, and who later argued for a European-style social-welfare system available to all citizens, died on Feb. 13 in Hackensack, N.J. He was 90 and lived in Cliffside Park, N.J.

The death was confirmed by his daughter, Nancy Valerie Kahn.

Mr. Kahn, who taught at the Columbia University School of Social Work for 57 years, was a one-man watchdog organization who monitored the social services offered by the city and state of New York, most visibly as a longtime consultant to the Citizens' Committee for Children, for which he wrote dozens of reports on matters like truancy, children's courts and child-guidance programs.

"I represent a concern for what is being accomplished, rather than what is being done," he told The New York Post in 1965. "Services rendered' are not enough. I want to know what's going on."

Beginning in the 1970s, when social policy makers largely ignored developments in other industrialized countries, he carried out pioneering studies on social-welfare systems in Europe and their possible implications for the United States.

"He introduced comparative social policy to the United States," said Sheila B. Kamerman, his collaborator on numerous reports by the Cross-National Studies Research Program at the School for Social Work.

Alfred Joseph Kahn was born in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn and grew up in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, and in the Bronx, where he attended DeWitt Clinton High School. After graduating from City College in 1939, he earned a degree in Hebrew letters from the Seminary College of Jewish Studies at the Jewish Theological Seminary.

In World War II, Mr. Kahn was assigned to the Air Force's first mental-hygiene unit, at Drew Field in Florida, where he studied the relationship between childhood truancy and a predisposition to break down under the stress of battle or to go AWOL. The experience led to his interest in childhood development and social welfare.

After earning a master's degree in social work, he became an instructor at Columbia's School of Social Work in 1947, and in 1952 he earned the first doctorate in social welfare granted by the school. For the next half century he wrote about 25 books and hundreds of articles intended to change ideas, and eventually government policy, on a wide range of social issues.

His early work focused on childhood development and delinquency. He lent his expertise to numerous government agencies and social-welfare organizations on issues relating to the family, child welfare and income support. In the early 1980s, he was chairman of the Committee on Child Development Research and Public Policy of the National Academy of Science.

In the late 1960s he broadened his focus to study poverty and its causes, and the role of social services in raising living standards. Government social services, he argued, should be regarded not as a form of welfare, but as a "social utility," like fire departments and post offices. Such benefits, he said, ought to be "good enough for every American, not for the poor alone." His comparative studies of European welfare systems were designed to shed light on this issue.

In addition to his daughter, Ms. Kahn, who lives in Manhattan, he is survived by a brother, Melvin, of Paramus, N.J., and a sister, Batya Weissman, of Burnsville, Minn.

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