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Announcement

February 18, 2009

Dr. Alfred J. Kahn, A Giant in Comparative International Social Welfare, Dies

With deep sadness we share news of the passing of Alfred J. Kahn, Professor Emeritus at the Columbia University School of Social Work and world-renowned social policy scholar and educator. Dr. Kahn passed away on the morning of February 13, 2009. He was 90 years of age.



Dr. Kahn was the proud recipient of the first social welfare doctorate awarded by the School in 1952. He taught at the Columbia University School of Social Work for 57 years -- from 1947 to 2004. Those who studied child welfare and family policy, poverty and its causes and impacts, and social welfare will remember the monumental comparative work of Dr. Kahn, who along with Professor Sheila Brody Kamerman, shaped the discourse in many fields for decades. Program and policy recommendations advanced by Dr. Kahn and Dr. Kamerman were embraced by many international NGOs and were brought to life in social welfare programs around the world. His ideas also contributed to the development of graduate social work education. His lectures on the history of social welfare were rich, widely acclaimed, and informed by experiences that were drawn from his leadership role in the profession. We are fortunate to have captured his lectures on video for all Columbia students to come.

Dr. Kahn was a prolific author, a much sought after consultant, a much admired educator, and a fierce advocate for children and families. As an advocate, Dr. Kahn favored universal social benefits and services, saying that they ought to be "good enough for every American, not for the poor alone." He was a consultant to federal, state, and local agencies, international organizations, and foreign governments. In this role, he shared his expertise on family policy, cash and service programs, local community service planning and coordination, and issues of equality and equity. As author, editor, co-author, and co-editor, Dr. Kahn produced more than 25 books and 300 articles and chapters that have continuing relevance and a palpable impact worldwide.

Early in his research career, Dr. Kahn served as a consultant to New York's Citizens Committee For Children (CCC). In this capacity, he provided leadership to research staff and community lay leaders, and he authored some 15 studies of city and state programs concerned with truancy, youth, police, children's courts, protective services, and child guidance programs for at-risk youth. The widely-publicized and discussed results offered blueprints for reform at the local and national levels. They were also the foundation for a 1963 volume, "Planning Community Services For Children In Trouble," with a foreword by Eleanor Roosevelt, CCC board member, who wrote: "Too many communities have been willing to accept the agency and institution as the planning unit. Examination of experience discloses that effective intervention is so complex a process that it is doomed to failure unless all agencies are part of a truly integrated, carefully planned network."

In the early 1980s, Dr. Kahn chaired the influential Committee on Child Development Research and Public Policy of The National Academy of Science. He was the recipient of awards and honors from various universities and professional associations, including several honorary degrees, one from the University of York in England, awarded jointly to him and Dr. Kamerman, in recognition of their pioneering work in cross-national child and family policy research.

Among his survivors are his daughter, Nancy Valerie Kahn. Burial was held privately. In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to *The Alfred J. Kahn Doctoral Fellowship Fund* at Columbia University School of Social Work, c/o the Office of Alumni and Development, Columbia University School of Social Work, 1255 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, NY 10027. The School will be holding a memorial event in remembrance of Dr. Alfred J. Kahn at a future date.

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For 110 years, the Columbia University School of Social Work has been the leader in practice and policy. Located in New York City, the School offers Master's and Doctoral programs which are nationally and internationally recognized for their excellence. With a signature curriculum and far-reaching field education experience, CUSSW continues to be at the forefront of clinical practice, public policy, teaching, research and social work innovation in the 21st Century.

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