

GEORGE W. RABINOFF

1893-1970

George W. Rabinoff, whose death occurred on February 7, was one of the earliest Jewish professional social workers. He was an active leader in the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service during his entire professional career. He served as its volunteer secretary from 1929 to 1933—a turbulent period in the Conference as well as in the world. In 1949, he served as president of the Conference. In both capacities and through many Committee assignments, he brought to the Conference his usual dedication and great skills. Here, as throughout his career, he always searched for the essence of a problem, probing for a clearer definition of the facts, the choices and the means by which people of varying viewpoints could act together to achieve a mutually accepted goal.

George received his certificate of graduation from the New York School of Social Work in 1914. He did his field work at the United Hebrew Charities, now the Jewish Family Service of New York City, as the first professional social worker on that agency's staff. He was instrumental in advancing that agency's transition to a professional service.

From 1914-1918, he was Superintendent of the United Jewish Charities, now the Jewish Family Service, of Hartford—its first executive. In the next two years, he was associated with the National Jewish Welfare Board in services to the armed forces in New York and Texas. He was also the first professional executive of the Jewish Federation of Indianapolis from 1921 to 1928 and of

the Jewish Welfare Fund of that same city, from 1925 when he helped create it, to 1928.

From 1928 to 1932, he was Associate Executive Director of the Bureau of Jewish Social Research in New York. In that capacity he had a major responsibility for the establishment of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds and served as its first executive director from 1932 to 1935. When the CJFWF merged with the Bureau for Jewish Social Research, George became the Council's Associate Director.

In 1943, during the last war, he was called to Chicago to serve as Associate Director of the Jewish Charities and the Jewish Welfare Fund.

After the war, in 1945, he was Deputy Director of the Division of Welfare and Displaced Persons for the European Regional Office of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration in London.

One of the most exciting periods in his career came with his service as Executive Director of the Training Bureau for Jewish Communal Service from 1947 to 1951. This was a graduate educational program for training community organization and administrative personnel for Jewish Communal agencies.

When the Training Bureau was compelled to close, George joined the staff of the National Social Welfare Assembly as Associate Director for a ten-year period beginning in 1951.

George "retired" in 1961 but he was incapable of not working professionally. In 1962, he accepted a Fulbright Fellow-

ship in Social Work Training at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia, where he helped establish the sequence in community organization. Later that year, he served as Consultant on program for the Australian National Red Cross, and then for the Jewish Welfare and Relief Society in Melbourne.

At 70 years of age, George, still indefatigable, took on new responsibilities as Social Planning Consultant for the New York City Housing Authority. In 1967, illness compelled him formally to retire.

How does one summarize a career of more than fifty years of intensive professional activity? Perhaps the essence can be conveyed by quotations from three individuals who knew his work well.

Robert Bondy, who had been the Executive Director of the National Assembly when George retired from organization, wrote: "George Rabinoff has added the essential ingredients of soundly rooted philosophy, of deep concern about people, and an abiding faith in the capacity of our society to make possible the full life for each individual. . . . The range of committee product for which George has carried direct responsibility is wide. It includes guides to the use by the social welfare field of public service, radio and television broadcasting, and a statement of standards of fund-raising practice for social welfare organizations; workshops on international affairs, and on local regional concerns; difficult questions around intergroup relations, and on social welfare in public housing; national agency budgets and comics-with-a-message pages. No cataloging can do more than suggest the breadth of George's contribution to The Assembly."

Philip Bernstein, Executive Vice President of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, stated: "George

Rabinoff was one of the nation's outstanding leaders in Jewish communal service and in social welfare generally. To all of the multiplicity of responsibilities he carried, he brought a most creative imagination and innovation, a ceaseless discontent with the status quo, standards of the highest excellence—and with these professional qualities, a personal warmth and friendship which made him a delightful and inspiring friend and companion. The Council's debt to George is incalculable—for all that he did to establish and nurture the Council and for his humanitarian contributions generally."

I knew George best when I was associated with him at the Training Bureau. He searched for ways of fostering growth in his students—through helping them marshal facts in logical array, through suggesting challenging questions provoking reconsideration frequently of a well-buttressed viewpoint or position. He sought thoroughness in documentation; formulated ideas in a tightly reasoned quest for some truth; displayed the best attribute of a teacher in being a constant learner. He wanted the Training Bureau to be the best possible program for fusing Jewish and social work values and knowledge. In a sense, this linked him with his grandfather who was a rabbi and his father who was a socialist. He aimed to produce social work administrators who would have statesmanlike qualities at the service of the Jewish community. He took great pride in the contributions of his students to the social work profession and to the welfare of the Jewish and general community.

In 1951, in a farewell message to the alumni of the Training Bureau, George stated: "I want to express my firm conviction that the objectives set down by the original sponsors of the Training Bureau are still valid, that the fields of

Jewish communal service do require a continuing training program, and that such a program is possible within the scope of sound, technical training, as formulated in the Bureau reports and documentation."

He therefore rejoiced in the new educational programs for training professional social workers for Jewish service: the Wurzweiler School of Social Work of Yeshiva University, the effort at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion School of Jewish Communal Service in Los Angeles, the new Hornstein Program at the Master's level being introduced at Brandeis University as a cooperative project of the Florence Heller Graduate School for Advanced Studies in Social Welfare and the Philip W. Lown Graduate Center for Contemporary Jewish Studies.

George, as I saw him, had a deep passion for social justice. He was a patient builder, sometimes not so patient, but always with a profound faith in the democratic and social work process. He

was never satisfied with his achievements. He was continuously conscious of how much more needed to be done.

In the last few years, he found retirement painful, for he wanted above all else to be continually socially useful. He feared that the present and future generations of Jewish social workers would forget the origins of social work in this country: the contributions of great leaders he had known when he began his career at the New York School and, at the old United Hebrew Charities. He had wanted to describe that history, the people and the traditions. Illness cut that project short.

George never could appreciate the fact that he had a tremendous impact on more than one generation of social workers and lay leaders throughout the United States and Canada, in Australia, and around the world in his work with UNRRA. All whose lives he touched know this to be so. In that impact his work lives on.

MAURICE BERNSTEIN