



Dr. Ralph Garber (Canada), President 1988 - 1996¹

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A fully revealing portrait of Ralph Garber would require a latter-day Boswell. As ordained, however, an attempt must be made to create a recognizable word picture. And it must give initial attention to the range of influences and factors in Ralph Garber's inheritance and environment that, throughout his life, he experienced, absorbed and utilized in his remarkably creative career.



It was Ralph's good fortune to be born into a culturally stellar environment within the city of Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Montreal, during the early years of his life was, perhaps, the most fascinating city in North America. Its political life was crucially enlivened by the erupting conflict between members of Canada's two founding societies, French Canadians and, less appropriately defined, English Canadians.

Of comparable significance to the separatist movement were social, economic and cultural groupings within Montreal's multicultural society. This included a richly endowed Jewish population. Among its many internationally recognized members was the poet and writer, Abraham Moses Klein, and the prolific journalist and novelist, Mordecai Richler. More directly relevant to Ralph Garber's life were family values revered and expressed throughout the Jewish community: Ralph married in his early twenties and began a family that was to include seven children.

Following his early schooling in Montreal, Ralph obtained his first academic degree at Queen's University in the adjacent province of Ontario. In this highly esteemed institution he was part of a student body drawn from all parts of Canada and abroad.

By the early 1950s Garber's career interests drew him to social work and he received his first professional education at another of Canada's renowned universities, McGill in Montreal. McGill's faculty from the 1930s had some of Canada's foremost intellectual leaders especially in social and public policy. At the time Ralph would have described himself as a social democrat with a wish to save the world, small parts at a time. He had been a youth member of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CC) - a labour-farmer social democratic political party formed in Canada in the midst of the Economic Depression of the 1930s. The CCF and others advocated a reconstruction of Canada's economy and welfare system,

¹ This article was first published 2005 in Social Work & Society, Vol.3, No.1, pp. 135-140.

modeled, in part on Sir William Beveridge's plan for the UK and more particularly on the ground breaking report by McGill's, Leonard Marsh: *Social Security for Canada*.

Ralph's years at McGill were also notable for meeting and marrying another social work student; Eileen, destined, in addition to her family responsibilities, to be a leading figure in social work. It was also at McGill's School of Social Work, where he graduated with the Master of Social Work degree in 1952, that Ralph adopted and became committed to the discipline of group work and community development. With it, combined with a wide ranging and life long sense of humour, there were forged the inestimable skills in working with people in groups that were to be the hallmark of his administration, teaching and charismatic leadership, locally, nationally, and on the international stage.

Group work was Ralph's method of choice, partly because he saw it as a vehicle for social change. Working in social settlements where the poor could take responsibility for their own future, and in the broad field of community organization, excited his professional imagination and engaged his well directed energies.

Immediately after graduation he took a position as a group work administrator at the Montreal YM- YWHA and rose in the administrative hierarchy to become head of his Branch. He became the representative of his agency in city-wide councils and participated in policy efforts with others in the Anglophone community. He accepted McGill students for field instruction and became convinced both by his success and failure in these efforts to go on for further study.

Educational and employment opportunities took Ralph and his family to the United States in the mid 1950s. The next twenty years were filled with educational, professional and family-related activities of central importance to every aspect of Ralph's life. The family base was in Highland Park, New Jersey, a good centre for a growing family and with easy access to New York City, Philadelphia and Washington D.C.

Ralph's first non academic post was similar to the one he had left in Montreal and he was thrust into an acting directorship when his director left. He also had begun doctoral studies at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Social Work. Faced with the choice of moving up the administrative ladder or leaving to join the newly established school in Rutgers University, New Jersey, even with a sharp drop in pay, he chose the latter.

Teaching group work to practitioners who took leaves from their employers to study at Rutgers exposed Garber to an intellectual milieu which furthered his intent to complete his doctorate. He continued to do full time teaching, work on his dissertation and play an increasing role in the educational administration of the school of social work.

The visibility that the university position provided helped him attain leadership positions in the newly formed chapter of social workers in the southern half of the State of New Jersey. He served as president of the Chapter and also instigated policy initiatives in the areas of migrant labour and child welfare by the Chapter on the State's legislative agenda.

Because of his leadership of the Chapter within the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), he was selected in 1959 to examine the New Jersey social welfare changes five years after *Brown vs. Board of Education*. This was the landmark decision of the United States Supreme Court striking down "separate but equal education" which, from 1896, had

segregated African American children from the public school system. As one of two northerners, he reported on the continuation of discriminatory practices in the southern part of the state which lay below the historical Mason Dixon Line, a demarcation where racial segregation had prevailed and was continuing.

Garber was promoted to an assistant deanship with responsibility for field instruction. Leadership in the county social planning council culminated in his being elected to the presidency of the newly formed United War of Middlesex County. Linkages with business leaders gave him an educational experience in the use of influence and power and facilitated entry to the State government's decision making apparatus.

Parallel with his activity in these spheres, he was also chosen to serve on national committees of the NASW and of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). One committee of the two associations convened in the early 1960s was to reconcile differences between them on the matter of education for group work. Another CSWE committee, 1964-68, on redefining the curriculum in social work education allowed him to sit with the leading social work educators of the time.

He was appointed to serve on a third committee on community mental health and on the National Institutes on Mental Health Committee (NIMH) to redraft the federal Community Mental Health Act which was coming up for renewal. That Committee worked for four years, 1969-73, and made major recommendations to the government. These were rejected by the administration of President Richard Nixon because they were deemed too radical and not in keeping with the prevailing conception of Republican thought.

Garber continued his interest in child welfare and was nominated to serve on the federal government's Children's Bureau as a member of its advisory committee in 1968. Upon Nixon's election as President, the Bureau was reorganized and deprived of its advisory status and the committee members, including Garber, left after serving for about four months. A similar outcome resulted from his membership on the NIMH Advisory Committee on training mental health personnel. Here too, politics determined who would serve. Garber and others were suspect Democrats and therefore replaced.

Through a set of circumstances which remain unclear, Garber was asked to serve as a "straw" candidate for the chairman's position of the Social Work Section of the American Public Health Association, being assured that he stood no chance of being elected. He was elected however, and served his two-year term, building on his New Jersey experience and learning about national public health in the process.

The several committees of CSWE on which he served became the launching pad for election to the Board of Directors of CSWE and subsequently to election as Secretary. One of the more exciting assignments was to serve on a deans' committee that met annually with the incumbent Secretary of Health Education and Welfare of the US Cabinet, Wilbur Cohen.

The committee structure within a university required administrators to serve as members, and throughout his academic career, Ralph was appointed to numerous committees at each of the universities in which he served. These provided many opportunities to experience administrative processes under a variety of circumstances and to observe the auspice influencing outcomes, the expertise of the participants and the urgency of the issues before them.

The work of the academic members of schools of social work was not much different than that of academics in other fields. It included teaching courses, engaging in applied research, supervising doctoral candidates, serving on departmental committees, playing the political games common to most group enterprises, presenting academic papers by invitation or through competition at state or national conferences, and trying to get work published in creditable journals.

After a stint as Dean beginning in 1968 at Washington University in St Louis, Missouri, Garber returned as Dean and Professor to Rutgers from 1973 to 1977.

As a teacher during those periods Ralph drew upon the solid base of his Canadian background and his further education at the University of Pennsylvania where he attained a doctoral degree in Social Work in 1963. His wide ranging teaching included Social Group Work Practice; Political Theory and Social Welfare Policy; Human Behaviour and Social Environment; History and Philosophy of Social Welfare; Knowledge and Values in Social Work; Social Welfare Organization and the Profession.

During his deanships he had linkages with the movement that brought the American schools of social work together to form the Council on Social Work Education. His teaching had also extended beyond the universities at which he was based: he accepted visiting roles as lecturer or professor at universities in India, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, Japan, Israel and Canada.

Ralph Garber had thus established peer relations with foremost American leaders in the fields of social welfare and health, social development and social work education. Of particular significance for later years were personal and professional linkages with Donald Beless, executive head of the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE), Herman Stein and Katherine Kendall of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW). Garber had, himself, become a foremost leader in the human services in the United States.

During the US period the Garber family retained strong linkages with Canada, that included Ralph's visiting lectureship in Canadian Schools of Social Work. It was the strongly proffered offer of the deanship of the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto that brought him to the leading position in social work education in Canada. Among distinguished predecessors in the position were Harry Cassidy, Charles Hendry and Albert Rose. Ralph Garber's U of T years were to extend from 1977 to 1990.

The country to which the Garber family returned had experienced remarkable growth. By the early 1970s the war time goal of establishing a welfare state had been substantially achieved through the gradual enactment of the social security measures outlined in the Marsh Report of 1943 and the Green Book Proposals on reconstruction in 1945. Although many additional social policy advances and improvements were needed through the following decades of the century, their initiation and development was constrained. Indeed even existing social security measures came under attack in the 1970s and were directly threatened by the conservative government elected in 1984.

In addition to his leadership in social work education, Ralph Garber played a leading role with local, provincial and national organizations to protect the gains of earlier years. He also provided substantial leadership on current social issues to the fore in Toronto and Ontario, particularly those relating to the needs of children. The government of the Province of Ontario asked Garber to chair a task force on how the province was responding to child abuse claims.

The report that was presented contained many recommendations and all but one were adopted by the government.

The need to train staff to respond quickly and effectively led to the establishment of an Institute for Prevention of Child Abuse and Garber served as one of its founders and board members. He had also at that time agreed to chair the Justice for Children organization which sought legal protections for children from abuses by the state and social agencies. In 1988, with a new provincial government, Garber obtained funding to create a policy research Centre for Children Youth and the Family which lasted five years; Justice for Children has survived to the present day.

In the mid 1980s the Ontario government also asked Garber to conduct a review of adoption practices, particularly relating to the disclosure of birth information of children placed for adoption. Again, recommendations were made and most were adopted. The skill that Garber learned from his many governmental experiences was to be imaginative but not radical, responding to the felt need while recognizing governmental limitations. Increasingly Garber participated in the work of Canada's foremost community service organization, the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD), serving on various communities, its board of directors and as president from 1985 to 1987. The 1980s were important years in the nation's constitutional and international linkages and Ralph gave strong leadership in the Council responses, notably in enlarging the scope and utilization of the human rights and freedoms provisions in Canada's new (1982) constitution and in countering the threats to Canada's social programs from aspects of the American-Canadian free trade agreement.

A major extension to the roles Ralph had played earlier emerged when he agreed to take initiatives in the development of social work education. Canada's few schools of social work had, from early decades of the twentieth century looked to CSWE for leadership and sought its accreditation. By mid-century, however, the schools in Canada were able to create their own nation-wide accrediting body. Ralph Garber was in a good position to aid in that development and from 1980 to 1982 became president of the new organization, the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work.

Following Ralph's retirement from the Faculty of Social Work in 1990 his contributions in social policy continued unabated. Throughout the 1990s and into the new century he served on human resource committees and boards and in formal and informal consultancies. What merits additional reference is the landmark contribution he made to the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW). This is best viewed against brief review of aspects of the Association's history. From its early years its growth and development depended primarily on the endeavours of committed volunteers, modest fees from member schools and grants from individuals, foundations and governments. With assistance from CSWE and the incomparable executive leadership of its executive director, Katherine Kendall, the Association was able to have an international office located in New York. And when IASSW decided to follow the United Nations' social components to Vienna, a time limited grant from the Austrian government made it possible for the Association to move its operational headquarters to Vienna.

With Marguerite Mathieu of Canada as the successor to Katherine Kendall, the Vienna office carried forward the Association's work from that centre. Following Mathieu's retirement Vera Mehta of India was appointed as the Association's third executive head. It was during her term

that the grant from the Austrian government expired and no comparable funding was obtainable. With costs increasing, IASSW faced an acute financial crisis. Ralph Garber, who had become president of IASSW in 1988, learned that, although each of his distinguished predecessors, Jan de John, Eileen Younghusband, Herman Stein, Robin Huws Jones and Heinrich Schiller had experienced financial difficulties, none were on the scale confronting Ralph. IASSW was bankrupt and this had both immediate and long-term implications. It fell to him to close the Vienna office, eliminate the executive director's position and initiate a long-term plan to eliminate the Association's debt. For the next several years, without an office or executive support and with the liquidation of the debt as a compelling priority Ralph kept IASSW alive, indeed he kept it moving as an association fully functioning in changing times. He enjoyed the support from members of the Association's Board of Directors, notably the Vice-president, Lena Dominelli, the treasurer, Jos Cornelissen, and national social work organizations and individuals.

His additional endeavours included the development of a commission to conduct a world census of social work education and his assumption of the role of principal investigator in what proved to be a highly complex operation. In 1995, toward the end of Garber's years as president of IASSW, the task was completed. In a well presented 250 page Directory of the Schools of Social Work, he was able to proclaim a strong and expanding organization with the inclusion of some 1700 schools of social work in 100 countries.

The mandate of this paper with its necessary emphasis on a major aspect of Ralph Garber's life could not produce "a fully revealing portrait". Rather it was limited to a specifically focussed image. It will, however, have provided an appreciation of Ralph Garber as a pre-eminent leader in advancing broadly defined social work education and international social development. This writer, having recently completed a major biography of one outstanding twentieth century figure, George Davidson, and being engaged on the biography of another, Leonard Marsh, is aware of what would be required for "a fully revealing portrait", namely a full length biography. Perhaps this glimpse of the life and work of Ralph Garber may inspire some forthcoming biographer to undertake that worthwhile enterprise.

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