

## Walter Tarnopolsky

### 1932 - 1993

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Walter Surma Tarnopolsky was a legal scholar and judge who greatly contributed to the advancements of human rights and civil liberties within Canada.

He was born in 1932 in Gronlid, in Northern Saskatchewan, to parents of Ukrainian descent. He moved to Saskatoon to study at the University of Saskatchewan, completing his Bachelor of Arts in 1953 and his Bachelor of Laws in 1957. He then pursued a Master of Arts at Columbia University, graduating in 1955, and attended the London School of Economics, where he obtained his Master of Laws in 1962.

Walter was a skilled legal scholar who taught at several Canadian universities. His first appointment was at the University of Saskatchewan between 1959 and 1960. After having completed his MA, he taught at the University of Ottawa over two intervals, from 1962 to 1963 and then from 1979 to 1983. He repeated the same pattern at Osgoode Hall Law School of York University, from 1967 to 1968 and from 1972 to 1979. During the second placement, he also briefly served as the academic Vice-President of York University. In between the two appointments at York, he taught at the University of Windsor, where he was also Dean of Law.

During and after his career as a Law professor, Tarnopolsky was heavily involved in pioneering a Canadian vision of human rights. From 1967 to 1968, he was the chairman of numerous boards of inquiry under the Ontario Human Rights Commission. In the 1970s, he helped draft the Manitoba Bill of Rights and other provincial human rights legislation. In 1978, he codified human rights at the federal level, namely by working on the Canadian Human Rights Act. From 1983 to 1984, he helped draft the Northwest Territories human rights code. In 1983, he was appointed judge in the Ontario Court of Appeal, on which he served until his death.



Walter was also involved in several human rights organizations; he served on the United Nations Human Rights Committee from 1977 to 1983 and was the president of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association from 1977 to 1982. He was an active member of the Human Rights Institute and, during the 1970s, the Committee for the Defence of Valentyn Moroz.

He died in September 1993 at the age of 61. The Tarnopolsky Award was named in his honour and is given each year “to a Canadian resident who made an outstanding contribution to human rights at a national or international level”. He also authored numerous legal articles and books, including *The Canadian Bill of Rights* (1966) and *Discrimination and the Law in Canada* (1982).