

Learning about Government Corruption

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Author

[Dr. Jerry Bergman, PhD](#)

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While still in high school, I began working at Oakland Center Hospital, at a small hospital in Royal Oak, Michigan, as a jack-of-all-trades handyman. My employment also included some medical photography. It was there that I developed an interest in medicine and medical research. The medical director, Dr. Bernard F. Gariepy, spent much time with me discussing medicine, science, and related matters. He was someone that I looked up to as a father. I also learned a great deal about law, an interest still with me today.

My primary supervisor and teacher was the maintenance man named Willie. Although a stern taskmaster, Willie taught me a lot about painting, plumbing, carpentry, and electrical work. We even installed an oxygen system throughout the hospital. Even Dr. Gariepy occasionally helped me with my work around the hospital. He was also a jack-of-all-trades kind of guy as I was then becoming. Once he even assisted me when I was doing some simple electrical wiring for a new outlet in a hospital building.

I soon found out that Dr. Gariepy had been involved in a scandal involving Father Charles Edward Coughlin, then an obscure Catholic priest in Royal Oak, Michigan. Coughlin later became a nationally known orator with a radio audience estimated at thirty million, or one out of every four Americans. During the peak of his popularity, the flood of his correspondence reached a level that required 106 clerks and four personal secretaries to keep up with. Many correspondents also sent him money to help support his work.

This level of support, in a time when radio was in its infancy, was unheard of. Soon the priest earned the title “The Father of Hate Radio” by his many opponents and those jealous of his success. His opponents accused him of being anti-Semitic and, at times during the early part of Hitler’s reign, sympathetic to the dictator. The good Father denied these charges, noting that Jesus and the first 33 popes were all Jews.

According to the court case, Dr. Gariepy walked in on his first wife, Mary, in a compromising position with a tall handsome charismatic Canadian named Father Coughlin. As a result, Mary and Bernard divorced. The allegation was that Dr. Gariepy was given 68,000 dollars during the three-year period, from 1942 to 1944, as “hush money.” Gariepy incorrectly assumed that one was not required to pay taxes on hush money. A lot of unanswered questions remain, including how the government knew that money was given to Dr. Gariepy and why.

Nonetheless, the IRS went after Dr. Gariepy for tax evasion in what was called a “strange income tax case.” Gariepy lost in court, was fined, and sentenced to two and one-half years in federal prison by Judge Frank A. Picard. Prosecuting Dr. Gariepy probably cost the government more than the 6,000 dollars or so in taxes that the government claimed he owed them.

I never could determine why someone in the government had it out for Dr. Gariepy. Both Dr. Gariepy’s ex-wife and Father Coughlin claimed that nothing inappropriate went on between them. In this classic “she said, he said” conflict one does not know who to believe. Interestingly, mobster Al Capone was also convicted of tax evasion, claiming that he did not know that he had to pay taxes on money he made illegally.

The questions remained: Why did Father Coughlin give 68,000 dollars to Dr. Gariepy, an enormous sum of money in 1948? How did the government know this? And why would he have to pay taxes on money given to him by his priest? Coughlin stated in court that he gave Dr. Gariepy the money “for professional reasons.” Dr. Gariepy, in answer to the question of Why the money was owed to him, answered, “He did [owe it to me] in a way. It was a way of easing his conscience.” Of note is the fact that Dr. Gariepy refused to testify against Father Coughlin, or even to clear Coughlin’s name.

The enormously popular columnist Drew Pearson repeated the Gariepy gossip, writing “Everyone I talked to figured that Coughlin had an affair with Mrs. Gariepy and also various other women.” Mary Gariepy sued Drew Pearson for libel and reportedly lost by one vote in the jury trial. She filed for another trial that was held

on January 27, 1955, and lost again. She was also ordered to pay the cost of the defense. Part of her difficulty was several important potential witnesses were unwilling to testify due to fear of repercussions. Drew Pearson's gossip column was also involved in at least three other libel cases.

Years later, the former Mrs. Mary Gariepy claimed the rumor of her affair with Father Coughlin was started by her former brother-in-law, Edward Gariepy, who had a grudge against Coughlin because, she claimed, Coughlin did not hire him to fill a position at the church. This event ruined Dr. Gariepy, who in my judgment, was the main victim in this case. I saw firsthand in my work at the hospital how the tax case severely damaged Dr. Gariepy and his family. In the end, when working at the hospital I probably learned more about government corruption than medicine.

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