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Making and Breaking Bread in Jewish Montreal: 1920-1940

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A Thesis

in

The Department

of

History

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts at
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Introduction

If, as Roberto Perrin claims, the recent writing of ethnic history in Canada has been an “attempt to capture the evanescent character” of the immigrant experience,¹ this is especially true of research on Canadian Jewish working-class culture. While workers in the immigrant community had a deep-rooted class-consciousness, their existence as an urban working class collectivity was a one-generation phenomenon. This thesis is an exploration of one aspect of this culture, that of trade union and consumer activism in the bakeries of Jewish Montreal in the transitional years of 1920-1940.

The use of this angle provides a “missing link” between the Old World artisanal and collectivist traditions of the *shtetl* (from which the majority of Jewish immigrants came) and the culture of North American trade unionism. The Montreal Jewish local of the International Bakers’ Union for instance, was able to rework the traditional religious category of *kashrut* to create a consumer aversion to non-union bread, thereby strengthening its own position.

The Jewish bakeries of inter-war Montreal were sites of ethnicity in the rapidly changing immigrants’ world. Here the annual rhythm of traditional communal life was beaten out on the street, as the bakeshops stepped up their pace before the High Holidays in the fall, and closed for a Passover hiatus in the spring when the eating of leaven was proscribed by religious law. There was a sense of communal proprietorship of these institutions, owned by Jews, manned by them, and producing an “ethnic” product, primarily for Jewish customers. Even seasoned “Uptowners” bought bread in the St. Lawrence corridor, where pungent poppy and caraway seeds provided the aroma and the taste of “home.”

When housewives bought their loaves at the local bakeshop, the transaction was more than a simple exchange of calories for cash. Implicit in it was the expectation that owners would

¹ Roberto Perrin, “Clio as an Ethnic: the Third Force in Canadian Historiography,” *Canadian Historical Review*, LXIV, no. 4 (1983), 44.

provide the community with sustenance at a fair price and act in a socially responsible manner to their workers. Owners, bakery workers and consumers were thereby bound together in a common moral economy. To borrow from E.P. Thompson, this meant that they shared a “popular consensus about what were legitimate practices and what were illegitimate practices . . . grounded upon a consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community.”²

One of the parties which inhabited the milieu of the bakeries was local 115 of the Bakery and Confectionery Workers’ International Union (hereafter BCWIU), otherwise known as the “Montreal Bakers’ Union.” In the inter-war period, in Jewish immigrant workers’ circles they were perceived as a rough and ready group, and one of the most radical elements of a thriving local labour scene. They were distinguished for their work-sharing scheme, whereby all available work-hours were divided equally amongst all union members. According to this system workers would rotate among unionized workplaces, sometimes working at several establishments in the course of one week, much to the chagrin of owners (who no doubt would have preferred greater consistency and control over their work-force).

What were the ideological elements that defined this milieu? How were the strategies of bakery workers shaped by them? How did workers in turn help to mold it? These are the questions that this work seeks to address.

Our inquiry is divided into four basic parts. A preliminary chapter focuses primarily on how Canadian historians have used the concept of “space and culture” to probe Jewish Montreal. After a brief outline of the origins of the immigrant community, we go on to an exploration of the dynamics of the bread trade in the city and how the discourses of class and of ethnicity played out in the conflicts of the interwar period. Finally, we will look at the *35th Jubilee Journal* of the Jewish Bakers’ Union as a source of popular ideology emanating from this environment.

² E.P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” *Past and Present*, no. 50, 79.

A variety of different sources were used; *Lovell's Montreal Business Directory* helped to identify and situate the Jewish bakeries and the *Raisons Sociales* files of the Archives Nationales du Québec provided details of ownership and establishment. Labour and consumer disputes were well documented in the pages of the *Adler*, the community's Yiddish daily, and in the *Strikes and Lockout* files kept by the Ministry of Labour and deposited in the National Archives of Canada. Supplemental material came from the archives of the International Bakery and Confectionery Workers' Union in Washington, D.C. Finally, the documentary evidence was fleshed out by interviews with the children of bakery workers and with members of entrepreneurial families. All translations, (except where otherwise indicated) from the Yiddish are the author's.

This study would never have been possible without the generous help and support of many. Mary Vipond provided inspiration and enthusiasm when my own was flagging, as well as expert editing advice. Sylvie Taschereau showed the way to the hard business data on the bakeries, and Andrée Lévesque did the same for court documents. Ira Robinson read the manuscript and suggested a number of useful corrections, and Bernard Dansereau led me to the *Strikes and Lockout* files. Inexhaustible patience was exercised by Janice Rosen and Hélène Vallée of the Canadian Jewish Congress Archives, Airen Harris of the unfortunately neglected Archives of the Jewish Public Library in Montreal, and Jenny Levine, the archivist of the BCWIU at the University of Maryland. Finally, the Concordia Institute for Canadian Jewish Studies provided much appreciated financial support for my research.

Chapter One

Making and Breaking in Jewish Montreal: 1920-1940- Historiography

This work is a study of a milieu that is at once workplace, ethnic communal institution, and arena of consumer activism. As such it addresses issues common to three distinct historiographic traditions, those of Jewish Studies, Canadian history, and the historiography of immigrant experience. What I propose is to look at bread and bread making using a conceptual framework common to all three, that of “culture and space.” In order to situate this topic, and my own approach to it, I propose three related inquiries; firstly, what are the paradigms within which recent historians of Jewish Montreal have written? Secondly what are the specific spaces they have studied, and what have been the implications of these choices? Thirdly, how do the historians of the immigrant experience balance change with continuity? My commentary will draw when possible from the historiography of Jewish Montreal, but I will use material from elsewhere by way of contrast and complement. My interest is primarily in what is currently known as social history, and so I have made no attempt to integrate the literature on the institutions of the community. In the final section of this chapter I will look at the literature of bread-ways as it relates to my own work.

Although space and culture form the woof and warp of every historian’s work, the terms can mean very different things. Practitioners of the early Canadian grand narrative sought to convey the interplay of topography and society.¹ Conversely, when historians of the immigrant experience talk about culture, they are generally referring to the baggage of experiences, perceptions and ways of life that an immigrant collectivity brings to a new space. Historian Ewa Morawska uses a succinct but sophisticated definition, that of “ a reservoir of

¹ See Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English Canadian Historical Writing since 1910*, 2ed., (Toronto, 1986) 91-5 and 211-7.

practices, norms and value orientations passed on to subsequent generations through cultural socialization” stressing that transmission may be imperfect.² I find this definition very useful, since it strives to be “non-essentialist,” refers to practices that may be constantly changing, and allows for the possibility of selective or even missed transmission. The denigration of the “green-horn,” for instance, is just as much (if not more) a part of Jewish American culture as the collectivism of the *shtetl*. As I see it, Morawska’s definition contains two aspects of culture: a set of tacit codes that are reinforced by social sanctions and an explicit discourse, transmitted through the medium of language. The latter elaborates collective visions and projects for the future as well as the system of values that support these projections (taken together, what we often call “ideology”). Both aspects of culture order social distinctions within a given community.³

Having honed the definition of culture, we find that it is not independent of space, which in turn has a cultural dimension. This is the common theme of the volume *Espace et Culture/Space and Culture*, the product of an interdisciplinary colloquium held in 1994.⁴ “The landscape itself is replete with messages that we decode only by grasping the disparate texts on which they are based,” wrote one contributor.⁵ By means of illustration, an aerial photographer in the Eastern Townships would easily distinguish between areas traditionally under cultivation by French Canadians and those held by Anglo-Celts, thanks to distinct patterns of placing buildings, hedges and boundaries.

On the other hand, the constraints of space sometimes help to determine cultural practices. In the early nineteenth century townships, for instance, it became the common

² Ewa Morawska, “Changing Images of the Old Country in the Development of Ethnic Identity among East European Immigrants, 1880s-1930s: A Comparison of Jewish and Slavic Representations,” *YIVO Annual* vol. 21, (1993), 273-4. The citation is taken from Pierre Bourdieu (though no reference is given).

³ In articulating this definition of culture, I have borrowed heavily from Paul Clavel, who elaborated his own set of criteria in his “Reflections sur la portée de la géographie culturelle,” in Serge Courville and Normand Seguin eds. *Espace et Culture/ Space and Culture* (Ste-Foy, 1995), especially pp.32-4.

⁴ Courville, *Espace et Culture*.

⁵ Paul Clavel “Reflections,” 36.

practice to baptize children who were already several months old, due to the difficulty of exerting clerical authority in the ill-served, spread-out dioceses.⁶

But causal relationship between space and culture can be even more complex; places can be “invented” through the interplay of social dynamics and group perceptions of them. Using a post-modernist approach, Kay Anderson has shown how the marginalization of the Chinese in Vancouver was enforced by violent sanctions and combined with a European Canadian perception of Asiatics as exotic “others” to create a space within the urban landscape known as “Chinatown.”⁷ By a similar process, culture defines **social space**. When Pierre Anctil discusses the Jewish School debate of the 1920s and 1930s in Quebec, for instance, the factor that he considers as paramount is the difficulty for Jews in finding a place within a society that had designated public space as either Catholic or Protestant.⁸

Jewish history has its own troubles. It does not fit into any national framework in the generally understood sense of the word, but has constantly to carve out a space for itself within the existent national traditions, while at the same time maintaining a coherence that transcends these boundaries. Consequently, it operates within the conceptual framework of Diaspora, which designates a transcendent culture of inter-related settlements, in flux over time and space. Looking at the way in which a migratory cultural community has changed and is changed by receiving societies reveals the nature of both “new space” and culture of origin. Donald Akenson used the Diaspora concept to look at Irish Catholics in Ontario, showing how educational models taken from the “homeland” provided the blueprint for publicly funded Catholic schools in that province. At the same time, he raised the question of the impact of

⁶ Jean Roy and Christine Hudon, “Pastorale et vie religieuse dans les missions des *townships* au XIXe siècle,” in Courville, *Espace et Culture*.

⁷ Kay Andersen, “The Idea of Chinatown: the Power of Place and Institutional Practice in the Making of a Racial Category,” in Gerald Tulchinsky, ed. *Immigration in Canada: Historical Perspectives* (Toronto, 1994).

⁸ Anctil, Pierre, “Ni Catholiques, ni Protestants, les Juifs de Montréal” in *Tur Malka: Flâneries sur les cimes de l’histoire juive Montréalaise* (Sillery: Septentrion, 1997), 24-34. See also his *Le rendezvous manqué: les juifs de Montréal face au Québec de l’entre-deux guerres* (Québec: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1988).

different national contexts. Why does Irish sectarianism persist in the Canadian context, and disappear entirely from view in Australia?⁹ Nancy Green cautions us not to attribute all differences in development from one national context to another to the nature of the receiving society. What may be at stake, she says, is the specific local context of immigration, or the timing or pattern of migration.¹⁰ How is this pertinent to the historiography of Jews in Quebec?

Both Gerald Tulchinsky and Pierre Anctil used the Jewish immigrant experience as a mirror of identity for the societies that received the Jews. In his "The Contours of Canadian Jewish History,"¹¹ Tulchinsky broke away from the prevalent notion that American and Canadian diasporas are cast in the same mold, with one generation separating the older more assimilated American, and the younger Canadian versions. Tulchinsky argued that the ethnic duality of the Canadian polity left a niche for a third distinctive cultural entity. This theme is elaborated with regard to Montreal in his "The Third Solitude: A.M. Klein's Jewish Montreal."¹²

For his part Anctil used the Jewish immigration experience to highlight the distinctiveness of Québécois society. Exponents of a publicly funded Jewish school system, he says, used the confessional school system as a model. Anctil described the cultural shock experienced by Francophone Montrealers suddenly confronted at the turn of the century with the unfamiliar, Eastern European "other" among them and put it into the context of French Canada's crisis in modernization.¹³ Within this conceptual framework, space is the

⁹ See Donald Akenson, "The Historiography of English Speaking Canada and the Concept of Diaspora: a Skeptical Appreciation," *Canadian Historical Review*, September 1995.

¹⁰ Nancy Green, ed. *Jewish Workers in the Modern Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

¹¹ Gerald Tulchinsky, "The Contours of Canadian Jewish History," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 17 (1982-83).

¹² Gerald Tulchinsky, "The Third Solitude: A.M. Klein's Jewish Montreal, 1910-1950," *Journal of Canadian Studies* vol.19 (1984): 96-112.

¹³ Pierre Anctil, "Un *shetl* dans une ville: la zone de résidence juive a Montréal avant 1945," *Tur Malka*, 55-74.

environment wherein sub-groups meet, where their mutual identities are formed, and where cultural dynamics of the greater society are revealed.

Another way to look at the larger questions of mutual identity broached by these approaches is to look within the smaller physical units where relations play out day to day. One would expect the neighbourhood, where new immigrant populations and indigenous populations routinely rub shoulders and put up fences, to provide the perfect terrain for social historians. *Gathering Places*, published in 1985 and edited by Robert Harney, pointed the way.¹⁴ A few writers have followed this lead in relation to Montreal. Anctil's "St. Lawrence corridor" of inter-war Montreal has become a prototype for the ambivalent relationship between coexisting ethnicities.¹⁵ Sylvie Taschereau has provided us with a much-needed study of small merchants in the corridor.¹⁶ Meyer Smiatycki's wonderful piece, "Communism in One Constituency," written many years before the above cited works, was a classic study of the social and political factors that won the 1943 election for Communist Fred Rose in the multi-ethnic ward of Montreal-Cartier.¹⁷ Looking at Jews and non-Jews in the context of their co-existence in a public physical space gives us an ecological perspective. We can see the shapes that cultures create for themselves and allow for others, all within the perimeters of a larger general structure that evolves to contain these very cultures.

The historians we have looked at so far have taken "space" to mean an environment bounded by the nation state. But what happens when we conceptualize space differently, looking at how different ethnicities cohabit a given transnational economic structure? That is exactly what Nancy Green chose to do in her comparative study of immigrants in the clothing

¹⁴ See Robert Harney, "Ethnicity and Neighbourhoods," in Robert Harney, ed. *Gathering Places* (Toronto, 1985), 1-22.

¹⁵ See Colloque sur les relations judéo-québécoises: identités et perceptions mutuelles, Montreal 2000.

¹⁶ Sylvie Taschereau, "Les petits commerçants de l'alimentation et les milieux populaires Montreals 1920-1940" (Ph.D. diss., Université de Québec à Montréal, 1992).

¹⁷ Myer Smiatycki, "Communism in One Constituency: The Election of Fred Rose in Montréal-Cartier, 1943 and 1945" (Graduate Essay, York University, 1978).

industry in Paris and in New York. Comparing the experience of a single ethnic group in different countries will only yield national characteristics of these states, she said, while the comparison of different immigrant groups in the same setting can't tell us very much about how differences in structure impact on the response of each of these groups. In the "mezzo" approach which she privileges, she aimed to bring out individual voices and choices within a common structure (i.e.: the garment trade), playing out in two distinct spaces, the Paris Sentier and Seventh Avenue. Looking at the culture of the workplace allows us to see the different ethnic tropes within a common set of material constraints (such as production methods) and larger ideological constructs (in Green's case, fashion).¹⁸

The factory or sweatshop constituted spaces with work and class cultures of their own. Historians have used a variety of perspectives to look at the clothing industry, where initially Jewish workers, and then Jewish-led trade unions predominated. Gerald Tulchinsky and Jack Cohen looked at labour conflicts from the point of view of their divisive impact within the Jewish community.¹⁹ During the organization of the dressmaking trade in the 1930s, Jewish workers broke ethnic ranks to team up with French Catholic workers against their bosses, who were also Jewish. On the other hand, some factory owners were quick to exploit anti-semitic perceptions to discredit organizers. In his article "Clash of Cultures in a Confined Space," Tulchinsky interpreted these events as representing the triumph of "space over culture."²⁰

Much of the discussion about the clothing trade addresses more general questions of how class conflict affected the ethnic self-perceptions of participants, and conversely what role

¹⁸ See Nancy L. Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work: a Century of Industry and Immigrants in Paris and New York* (Duke University Press: Durham and London, 1998), and her "The Comparative Method and Post Structural Structuralism" in Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen, *Migration, Migration History, History: Old Paradigms and New Perspectives* (European Academic Publishers, 1997).

¹⁹ Cohen, Jack, "Shmatas, Strikes and Syndicates: the Organization of the Dress Industry in Montreal between 1930-1940." (B.A. Honours thesis, Concordia University, 1984).

²⁰ Gerald Tulchinsky, "Jewish Labour and Business in the Dressmakers' Strike of the 1930s: Clash of Culture in a Confined Space" in Courville *Espaces et Cultures*. This theme reappeared in more refined form in "The Rag Trade in Flux," his chapter on the clothing industry in the second volume of his general history of Canadian Jewry, *Branching Out: the Transformation of the Canadian Jewish Community* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1998).

culture played in helping workers take positions in what was very often a complex battle. Did cultural barriers between Jews and French Canadians undermine their solidarity in the workplace? Was the class and national collaboration position of the Catholic church a major motive in preventing French Canadian women from joining an international union? These are some of the questions asked by researchers Gemma Gagnon and Alexandra Szacka.²¹

For the most part, the studies cited above did not attempt to integrate into their analysis the perspectives of workers about their own day to day reality. That is just what Mercedes Steedman and Ruth Frager did, when they took the social science microscope to the factory and the sweatshop. Steedman's *Angels of the Workplace* is a study of the clothing industry in Winnipeg, Montreal and Toronto in the first half of the twentieth century.²² Steedman demonstrates how gender and ethnic hierarchies were written into the definition of skill that formed the basis of trade union negotiations. The work of French Canadian female machine operators was considered less skilled than finishing, the preserve of Jewish women, and both were poorly remunerated in relation to the Jewish male cutters. Steedman speculates that in the 1930s, the communist style of labour organization might have held out a special appeal to female activists, because it empowered them where they had the greatest control: on the shop floor and in the shop committees. By the mid thirties, when the "business unions" prevailed, the specific interests of women workers were sidelined during negotiations conducted entirely by male trade union executives and government officials. While Steedman's account is primarily structural, she incorporates a wealth of oral testimony that fleshes out her story, giving it immediacy and credibility. By constructing her story across a wide range of multi-ethnic workplaces, Steedman gives us a truly Canadian story.

²¹ Gemma Gagnon, "La syndicalisation des femmes dans l'industrie du vêtement, 1936-1937" (M.A. thesis, Université du Québec à Montréal, 1990), and Szacka, Alexandra, "Fragmentation du mouvement ouvrier: la situation des immigrants juifs au Québec, 1920-1940", (M.A. thesis, Laval University, 1981).

²² Mercedes Steedman, *Angels of the Workplace: Women and the Construction of Gender Relations in the Canadian Clothing Industry, 1890-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

Ruth Frager used the same analytical tools of class, gender and ethnicity, but she had a different perspective. *Sweatshop Strife*, her work on the clothing industry in Toronto during the same period, was placed within the framework of Jewish working class culture.²³ Her protagonists were fully rooted in a culture which had an ideal of social justice, embraced the concept of class war (the terms of which were hotly contested between socialists and communists) and of resistance to anti-semitism. She provided a sense of continuity with an Eastern European past by using citations from American Jewish immigrant socialist writers and Yiddish proverbs in her chapter headings, as well as material from the local socialist newspaper, *Di Yiddishe Zhurnal*.

This material reflects a diversity of options for building a framework of space and culture. The bakeries provide the perfect structure to address the issues pertaining to the ethnic cohabitation of public space. Labour relations were given their own particular trope by the specific trade union culture and communal dynamics that breathed life into this space. Two questions remain: what is an effective way to give immediacy and veracity to the experiences of the men and women that inhabited this space? How does one deal with the issue of change and continuity? In this next section I will outline what I see as some of the obstacles to this task, and how others have dealt with them.

One of the greatest challenges in conveying the immigrant experience from the perspective of the actor himself or herself, is to communicate the set of experiences and perceptions that the immigrant brings to the new world and the way that these are used or modified in a new social space.

Seemah Berson's 1979 thesis consisted mostly of oral interviews with Jewish immigrants who worked in the needle trade in the early decades of the century. Her subjects give detailed personal accounts of their material conditions in Eastern Europe, their motives for

²³ Ruth, Frager, *Sweatshop Strife: Class, Ethnicity and Gender in the Jewish Labour Movement in Toronto, 1900-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

immigration, and their early experiences on the job and on the street, in Canada.²⁴ This is one of the very few sources of primary material that we have in Canada relating to the daily life of immigrant workers. I turned to American historian Susan A. Glenn's work for a model of how individual testimony might be used in an analytically sophisticated collective picture.

Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labour in the Immigrant Generation, drawing on a wealth of memoir material, was a well rounded study of the values of the women and men growing up in the *shtetlech* of Eastern Europe, and of the transformation of these values in the needle trade in the lower East Side of New York.²⁵ Glenn focused on the shift from the valorization of mother as breadwinner in traditional Eastern European Jewish culture, to that of daughter as wage earner in America. Glenn's strength is in her cultural approach to areas that have previously been given a materialist ideological slant. She was able to make links between traditional and modern ways of thinking and behaving that allowed the whole person to emerge intact. To cite two examples: Glenn portrayed the *Bund* (the Jewish Socialist trade union movement that grew out of Poland, Russia and Lithuania) not as the inevitable product of modernity, but as a particular cultural response to it. In the Jewish world of the turn of the century the traditional masculine ideal of the Talmud scholar supported by a wife or father-in-law was rarely attainable, and the new youth culture of the *Bund* imparted dignity to manual work. Glenn also challenges the notion that participation in a culture of leisure and consumerism necessarily undermines workers' militancy. In the case of the generation of daughters of immigrants, said Glenn, they went hand in hand. Young women felt entitled to wages that would allow them to see shows, or to own clothes that were in fashion, and this in turn motivated them to fight for those wages.

²⁴ Seemah Berson, "The Immigrant Experience: Jews in the Clothing Trade, 1900-1930" (M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1979).

²⁵ Susan A Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labour in the Immigrant Generation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

If I have devoted so much space to Glenn, it is because her approach is so useful. She follows an immigrant generation from Old to New World, looking at shifting values through their own eyes, and she takes in all the complexity of their constantly changing cultural, social and material world.

Much of the work that is now being done on the early Montreal Jewish community has this very goal of looking at this society in its own cultural context. *An Everyday Miracle: Yiddish in Montreal* was a pathblazer.²⁶ This book had as its premise the role of Yiddish as linguistic and cultural matrix through which Jewish life was recast in its new environment. The volume consisted of a collection of essays on literary criticism, on socialist and labour-zionist community builders, on a Chassidic Rabbi coming to grips with the modernity of the new world and on the sweatshop poet I.J. Segal, who according to his reader was caught “between two worlds.” By using the lens of Yiddish culture, we get a more nuanced picture of collective transition and transformation. The resurgence of interest in Yiddish in Montreal (which can be credited in part to the labour of Pierre Anctil, one of the co-editors of the book) has spawned further work: Marc Larrue’s volume on Yiddish theatre,²⁷ Rebecca Margolis’ upcoming thesis on the Yiddish literary culture in Montreal and Pierre Anctil’s edition of a collection of articles from the *Keneder Adler*.²⁸

Nevertheless, the historiography of the Montreal Jewish community has not been abundant in the description of the day to day material life of immigrants from the point of view of change and continuity. There is no counterpart to Robert Harney’s article on the role of the boarding-house matron for young Italian male sojourners²⁹ or of Franca Iacovetta’s “From Contadina to Worker.” Iacovetta’s study is a sophisticated analysis of Old and New World

²⁶ Ira Robinson, Pierre Anctil and Mervin Butovsky eds., *An Everyday Miracle: Yiddish in Montreal* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1990).

²⁷ Marc Larrue, *Le théâtre yiddish à Montréal/Yiddish Theatre in Montréal*, trans. Catherine Brown (Montréal: Éditions Jeu, 1996).

²⁸ David Rome, *Through the Eyes of the Eagle: the Early Yiddish Press 1907-1916*, trans. David Rome, edited and with an introduction by Pierre Anctil (Montreal: Véhicule, 2001).

Italian immigrants. She argued that the blurring of gender roles in traditional south Italian peasant culture made for a smoother transition to the status of industrial wage earner in Canada than is generally acknowledged.³⁰

The social history of *Kashrut* in North America has also proven extremely fruitful ground for exploring transition, popular ideology, community and gender in immigrant life. Paula Hyman studied the New York Kosher meat boycott of 1902 in order to underscore the active role of married immigrant women consumers who insisted on the right to affordable kosher meat for their families. Her work led her to a reappraisal of shared values in the community. "Indeed the development of the boycott", she said, "suggests that the compartmentalization of the immigrant community into Orthodox, Socialist and Zionist sectors does not do justice to the interplay among the groups."³¹

Ira Robinson's "The Kosher Meat War and the Jewish Community Council of Montreal, 1922-25" documented the struggle over the authority to certify kosher meat.³² The battle was joined by a range of subgroups, with tactics that included a boycott, a butchers' strike, and one-sided polemics in the local press. The *Va'ad Ha'ir* (Community Council), a seemingly unlikely coalition of Rabbis, radicals and activists of various stripes, owed its existence to the desire for a lasting peace. This had widespread repercussions, since among its prerogatives was the allocation of communal funds for religious and secular education.

Robinson and Hyman unveiled a set of complex social negotiations brought into play by a conflict centred around meat. I wish to make a similar argument about the meanings and the social struggles that attached themselves to Jewish bread in Montreal in the inter-war

²⁹ Harney, Robert, "Men Without Women," in B.B. Caroli ed., *The Italian Immigrant Woman in North America* (Toronto, 1978).

³⁰ Iacovetta, Franca, "From Contadina to Worker" in *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Post-War Toronto* (Toronto: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992).

³¹ Paula Hyman, "Immigrant Women and Consumer Protest: the New York City Kosher Meat Boycott of 1902," *American Jewish History* (1980), 91-105.

³² Ira Robinson, "The Kosher Meat War and the Jewish Community Council of Montreal, 1922-25," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* vol.22 (1990), 41-53.

period. To a certain extent I can draw on the models of class and gender conflict used to analyze the culture of the sweatshop and factory; however I need to look elsewhere for answers to questions about community, and this is where the foodways literature is immensely helpful.

As historian Nancy Green has demonstrated so beautifully in *Ready-to-Wear*, each different product generates a distinct set of accompanying relationships and social discourses.³³ Since food is at the centre of everyday life, the way in which any given collectivity produces, consumes and distributes food necessarily tells us much about its social dynamics, and indeed, its social ideology. In consulting the literature of food-ways, I discovered a profusion of approaches and themes that escape the confines of any single discipline. What follows is a review of some of the concepts I found to be relevant to my own work, using illustrative works to bring them into focus.

Roland Barthes expressed the perspective of food as signifying and communicating complex psychological and social realities beautifully in an influential article. "For what is food? It is not only a collection of products that can be used for statistical or nutritional studies. It is also, and at the same time, a system of communications, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situation and behaviour."³⁴ His article influenced the work of a generation of researchers using a wide range of inter-related themes, which I discuss below.

The theme of commensality addresses ways in which the sharing or exchange of food defines group identity. In "Bread as World: Food Habits and Social Relations in Modernizing Sardinia," Carole Counihan looked at the town of Bosa to show how the industrialization of breadmaking (traditionally an artisanal activity requiring a great deal of cooperation between

³³ Green, *Ready-to-Wear*.

³⁴ Roland Barthes, "Towards a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption," in *Food and Culture: A Reader*, Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1997), 21.

households) has resulted in an increased sense of atomization and in the growth of individualism.³⁵

A second omnipresent theme in food literature is gender. There is a traditional slant towards the appreciation of women as “gatekeepers” who exert control over what the household consumes and how it is prepared. Researchers have looked at how women reinforce and act out cultural norms and sanctions at the family table. Starr Safed, for instance, described how elderly women of East Jerusalem using Jewish symbols and rituals in meal preparation see themselves as the guardians of Jewish dietary laws and traditions. Transforming the table into an altar, they imbue the everyday with holiness.³⁶ This brings us to the widely used motif of “tastes and distastes,” which encompasses both food aversions and preferences. Building on an immense anthropological literature on food taboos (including voluminous commentary on “clean and unclean” in the Bible), Pierre Bourdieu claimed that taste was an attribute of class, and explained the genesis of new preferences as being a struggle for social “marks of distinction.”

The question of the assimilation of new tastes and practices is central to the ethnology of food, which looks in detail at the movement of food across social and geographical space. Students of immigrant foodways look at what is retained from the Old World, what is discarded, what is adopted, and what is transformed. Andrew Heinze showed that the foods which signified sanctity and abundance (such as *challah*) in the impoverished environment of the East European *shtetl* became items of everyday consumption for Jewish immigrants in America, bringing an accompanying loss of ritual meaning.³⁷

³⁵ Carole Counihan, “Bread as World: Food Habits and Social Relations in Modernizing Sardinia,” in Counihan, *Food and Culture*.

³⁶ Starr Safed, reviewed in Stephen Mennell et al ed., *Current Sociology/ La sociologie contemporaine*, vol. 40, no.2, Autumn 1992, published as *The Sociology of Food: Eating, Diet and Culture* (Sage, 1992), 34. The current trend is towards a more critical approach to woman, food and power. Ann Allison, for instance, wrote a personal memoir of how Japanese mothers become the enforcers of state ideology by conforming to onerous standards of lunchbox preparations that emphasize state sanctioned norms of juvenile discipline and Japaneseness. “Japanese Mothers and Obentos: the Lunch Box as an Ideological State Apparatus” in Counihan, *Food and Culture*.

³⁷ Andrew R. Heinze, “Adapting to Abundance: Eastern European Jews and Urban Consumption in America, 1880-1914,” (Ph.D. thesis, University of California, 1987)120-5. Jack Goody also addressed the

It should be evident from the foregoing review that foodways material has a markedly anthropological bent which sometimes flattens out the process of change and avoids issues of power. Sydney Mintz stands out as a writer who combines political economy with a focus on the signification of food in his study of sugar. He argues that industrialization created an urban proletariat which was sold on the idea of “sweet” as bolstering its energy levels. This artificially created demand for sugar on the part of a mass market was possible thanks only to a colonial regime based on the institution of slavery.³⁸

Historical material relating to bread in Western Europe is abundant, though monographs are rare, as are articles of an interdisciplinary nature. Much of the material deals with differing consumption levels across regions and classes.³⁹ The classic bread trope is the migration of wheaten bread (as opposed to a bread of oats, barley and/or rye) to the urban poor, and then on to the rural peasantry. Another reverberating theme is the consumption of white bread as a mark of social distinction (which has, as one researcher has noted, been reversed in recent years, making the preference for “whole wheat bread” a correlative of class superiority). What happens when we combine an exploration of popular tastes and consumption patterns with an inquiry into the social basis of production itself?

The single most inspirational work in this domain was Stephen Kaplan’s *The Bakers of Paris and the Bread Question*.⁴⁰ Kaplan had his work cut out for him, since the role of bread in the French Revolution has passed into the popular imagination, along with the

issue of assimilation looking at the industrialization of the food as leading to an increasing dependency of the Third World on processed food. See Jack Goody, “Industrial Food: Toward the Development of a World Cuisine” in Counihan, *Food and Culture*. One of the rare works on diet and Montreal is Donald Fyson’s “Du Pain Au Madère, L’Alimentation à Montréal au debut du XIXe siècle,” in *Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française*, vol.46, no.1(1992): 67-90.

³⁸ This is the argument of his “Time, Sugar and Sweetness” in Counihan, *Food and Culture*.

³⁹ Consumption and nutrition levels provide the focus for the seminal volume on food put out by the *Annales* and edited by Jean-Jacques Hemardinquer *Pour une histoire de l’alimentation* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1970). The volume also contains the aforementioned Barthes article, which moves boldly in the direction of food as *mentalité*.

⁴⁰ Steven L.Kaplan, *The Bakers of Paris and the Bread Question, 1700-1775* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996).

concept that it carries with it: the centrality of bread in the social contract. At Kaplan's hands, the study of the activities of bread making and bread selling become an entrée into the intellectual and social life of an entire society. He plunges fearlessly into a variety of sources, including court documents of petty infractions, market-place disputes, and sundry acts of personal violence, guild records, and after-death inventories. The treatment of gender is a strong point in the book. Kaplan devotes a considerable amount of space to marriage and family, and the lively presence of female managers, vendors, and deliverywomen in his account stands out in a literature of entrepreneurship and labour where women are often notable by their absence.

For a more contemporary model of the artisanal bakery I turned to Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiames' "*Artisanal Bakery: How it Lives and Why it Survives*."⁴¹ This study tried to account for the hegemony of this institution in France - a contingency that defies the European and North American norm of a bread market dominated by the large industrial players. The authors argue that the popular expectation of fresh bread from an establishment "of good name," combined with the willingness of bakery couples to self-exploit, determines the outcome of the battle against the industrial giants. This encouraged me to look beyond economic determinism to the way that popular ideas and tastes in relation to bread helped to shape the structure of the industry in Jewish Montreal.

Unfortunately the bread related material I looked at was exclusively Western European. Many of the social categories that adhered themselves to bread do not apply elsewhere, an obvious example being the class distinctions between eaters of the wheaten loaf and eaters of rye. For lack of sources on Eastern Europe, I was forced to leave this area unexplored.

⁴¹ Daniel Bertaux, and Isabelle Bertaux Wiame "Artisanal Bakery in France, How it Lives and Why it Survives," in Frank Beckhofer ed., *The Petite Bourgeoisie: Comparative Studies of the Uneasy Stratum*, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1981).

The Jewish sections of the Bakery and Confectionery Workers' International Union have a long and colourful history, particularly in New York, where bagel bakers and matzo makers had their own sections, and where jurisdictional battles abounded. The sole article on the Jewish Bakers in North America is Paul Brenner's "The Formative Years of the Hebrew Bakers' Union, 1881-1914." The article is wonderful in its detailed account of a rapidly changing milieu. Brenner incorporated archival sources from contemporary newspapers and the *Bakers' Journal*. Unfortunately he put his story into a somewhat limited, contributionist framework. Brenner argued that the bakers' militancy paralleled waves of activism within the Jewish clothing unions, which have already gained a well-deserved place in American labour historiography.⁴²

I hope my own study will contribute to the Canadian research landscape in several ways. The clothing industry has virtually monopolized the attention of Jewish labour historians. There are valid reasons for this. The industry employed the majority of wage or piece working Jews of the immigrant generation. It created a process of labour negotiations that would become a model for modern unionism, as well as an organization that far outlasted Jewish participation in the trade. The choice of the bakers' union, however, permits us three things. It will allow us to re-evaluate the role of the craft-oriented Jewish unions that although typical of the earlier period, did not endure. We will get a glimpse of a culture of activism as it moved through a second, very particular material and social space, helped to shape that space and was in turn shaped by it. Because of the communal nature of the bakeries, we will hopefully be able to learn something new about the dynamics of the entire community, and about the place of the left in it.⁴³

⁴² Paul Brenner, "The Formative Years of the Hebrew Bakers' Union, 1881-1914," *YIVO annual*, vol.18 (1983). For an account of the early years of the Halifax sections of the International, see Ian McKay, "Capital and Labour in the Halifax Baking and Confectionery Industry during the Last Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Labour/le Travailleur* (1978), vol.3, 105-8.

⁴³ Despite the numerous articles and a couple of monographs on left-wing activism, the fact remains that intellectual products of Jewish Canadian left and labour culture have received virtually no attention from

Looking at the bread trade and the popular ideology that surrounds it allows us to look both forward and backward. Backward to the enduring taste for "Jewish bread," to the abiding communal role of the bakeries, to a willingness to act on principles of the moral economy, and forwards to trade unionism cast in a North American mold. In this emphasis on transition I see my own approach as a continuation of the work of Hyman and Robinson, though I will focus more closely than the latter on the class-consciousness of immigrant producers and consumers.

I hope that this study also answers the need for more work that includes a wider cross-ethnic perspective, as called for by students of immigrant history and of Quebec history.⁴⁴ One of the motifs I intend to invoke in my own study is the sharing of the social and physical space of the bakeries in the Montreal by two distinct ethnic cultures (French Canadian and Jewish), each with their own "narratives of bread."

I am aiming for the combination of three distinct angles to look at a single place: popular ideology as expressed in documents from within the culture, the narrative of labour and consumer activism, and the outside perspective that takes the measure of the space through which a group of people moved. As we have seen, not one of these angles is a new one. What I hope to contribute is a workable synthesis that will add colour and texture to our understanding of Jewish Montreal between the wars.

scholars. The labour movement produced a variety of cultural artifacts in the form of newspapers, journals, leaflets, school textbooks, and curricula, few of which has been examined. No one has looked at the history or the ideology of the Workmen's Circle, though they were crucial to the negotiation of change in the clothing industry and yes, even in the bakeries. Nor has anyone looked at that scourge of the Canadian Jewish Congress, the Young Communist League. While many of the left-wing activists of the inter-war period have been identified, it is difficult to be able to place them within the community, or to document their choice to attempt to escape it.

⁴⁴ See for example Sylvie Taschereau's "Invitation à fuire les ghettos," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, vol. 41 (4), 1987, 587-8.

Chapter Two

Ideological Traditions of the Jewish Immigrant Community of Montreal

Jewish Montreal in the years 1920-1940 was a rapidly evolving entity. The period opened just as the era of mass immigration to Canada was ending; the community was stabilizing, and establishing a mature identity of its own. At the same time it was constantly renewed by the trickle of immigrants that continued to arrive in the city until the mid-thirties from an Eastern Europe that was also in constant flux. The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with a few landmarks of immigrant identity, institutions and ideology through which class was negotiated in order to help situate the actors in the Jewish bread milieu. We will be looking at the continuities and divergences with the Eastern European context in which most immigrants had lived their childhood, and for some, their early adult lives.

The first section of this chapter will be a brief review of some of the social features of Eastern European Jewish life and the negotiation of class conflict. We will then go on to look at the process of social reconstruction in Montreal. In 1931, 28% of the foreign-born Jewish population of Montreal was from Russia, 11.8% was from Poland and 7.5% from Romania.¹ The *shtetlech* (the Yiddish name for semi-rural townlets having significant Jewish population), towns and cities that these men and women came from were for the most part, located within the region known until its dissolution in 1917 as “the Pale of Settlement.”² The Pale included Latvia, Lithuania, the Ukraine and eastern provinces of present day Poland. Under the terms of the treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1917, the Polish territories became part of the Republic of Poland and Lithuania regained its independence. While there were important social, administrative and cultural

¹ Louis Rosenberg, *Canada's Jews, a Social and Economic Study of Jews in Canada* (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress, 1939), 56.

² There are, to my knowledge, no statistics that tell us the percentage of Jewish immigrants hailing from the *shtetlech*, as opposed to the larger urban centres. The anecdotal evidence, however, is in favour of the *shtetl*

differences within this territory, it is possible to provide a sketch that contains features that were common to most Jewish communities in the Pale before the First World War, and persisted in some areas of Poland until the Second World War.

Jews of the Pale were accustomed to functioning in a multi-cultural and multi-linguistic milieu where they experienced both social and legal exclusion on the one hand, and close economic interaction with non-Jews on the other. A series of legislative measures passed at the end of the nineteenth century set the limits of Jewish economic life, restricting new settlement outside towns and hamlets, removing Jews from villages, barring them from universities without special permission and expelling them from Moscow.³ Consequently, in the *shtetlech*, and to some extent, in the larger towns, Jewish artisans, peddlars and merchants often took on service roles for the neighbouring Russian, Ukrainian, or Polish peasants. In a small *shtetl* non-Jews would live on streets adjacent to the Jewish residents and in a larger one, they lived on the outskirts of the town and in the surrounding villages. The centre of *shtetl*'s economic life was often the town square, which was lined with homes doubling as shops of various kinds; restaurants, butcher-shops, bakeries, smithies, tailor-shops and cobblers. Peasants often shopped here on Sundays, but the town really "came alive" on the weekly market days (each town had a different market day), when they brought grain, dairy products, fruits and vegetables, eggs, flax, cows, horses and chickens to sell, in turn buying from Jewish peddlars who set up stalls to sell hats, jackets, trousers, boots, and linen.⁴

This economic life had a traditional Jewish rhythm. Even Gentiles hurried to do last minute shopping before the stores closed for the Sabbath on Friday afternoons, while peasants would bring the appropriate fish, vegetables, or greenery to the market to sell for the Jewish

as the origin of most Jewish immigrants to Montreal in the inter-war period, especially in the 'twenties.

³ Salo W. Baron, *The Russian Jew Under the Tsars and the Soviets*, 2nd ed. (New York: Schocken, 1987), 32-3.

⁴ Annamaria Orla-Bukowska, "Shtetl Communities: Another Image," *Jews in Independent Poland, 1918-1939*, ed. Antony Duransky, published for the Institute for Polish Jewish Studies (London: Washington, 1994).

holidays. The market would of course be closed for the holy days, during which work was traditionally proscribed. Jewish/Christian interaction was primarily confined to the economic sphere, with the marketplace as its most important site.⁵

While the market was the main motor of the economic life of the *shtetl*, the traditional scale of values gave the most prestige to those families not directly engaged in trade or in manual labour and who were wealthy enough to live a “cultivated” life. The traditional male ideal was that of the religious scholar who was supported by the economic activities of a wife or a father-in-law. Next in the traditional social hierarchy came the *baalebatim*, the employers or notables (often translated as masters), then the *baal-melokhim*, or the master artisans, who had their own scale of prestige. The greater the manual labour involved, the lower the status. “It was no great pride to be a baker,” said one bakery owner, as an explanation for the lack of Jewish candidates for the job.⁶ The social hierarchy was reinforced by a series of public gestures of deference, such as access to the best seats in the synagogue, or to the choice burial sites.⁷ Traditional education reflected these values. The standard primary education for Jewish males took place in the one-room *kheyder*, or religious school, where basic Hebrew literacy based on the Bible was taught. A few young men went on the *yeshiva* for advanced religious education and a small number of middle class children went to the secular secondary schools (the *gymnasia*). Another possibility, for those who could afford it, was vocational training in the larger urban centres, but most children who learned a trade simply apprenticed to an artisan, often upon graduating from primary school.

Social tension was channeled, for the most part, through traditional institutions.⁸ The concept of “*K’lal Isroel*,” or the unity of all Jewry, contained within it the rationale for a system of

⁵ This is not to say that other forms of interactions were unimportant. Annamaria Orla-Bukowska’s article cited above makes the case for a revision of the view of the *shtetl* as a segregated community.

⁶ Pearl Potashnik, interview with the author, 10 May 2001.

⁷ Samuel D. Kassow, “Community and Identity in the Interwar *Shtetl*” in *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars*, ed. Yisrael Gutman et al. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1989) 201.

⁸ This is the argument of Samuel D. Kassow, in “Community and Identity in the Interwar *Shtetl*.” Class conflict, he said, expressed itself through traditional channels. Left and right fought for control of the local Community Councils (*Kehillas*), that supervised communal affairs. The burial society (*Khevrá Kadisha*), was also the site of such struggles. According to tradition, when a rich man died, the burial fee would be set

income redistribution. While *K'lal Isroel* contained the implicit acknowledgement that Jewish society was divided into classes with distinct interests, it held that the collective well-being of the entire people was of supreme importance, and that the latter depended on solidarity and mutual aid across class lines. This was of vital importance, since most inhabitants of the *shtetl* eked out a living with great difficulty. Even the exercise of a supplemental occupation was often not enough to make ends meet and the majority of artisans in the Pale had recourse to charity to carry them through the holidays.⁹ They were dependent on the social "safety net" which consisted of a varying number of associations (*khevres*), varying depending on the size and means of the community. Their functions included providing clothing for the needy (*Malbush Arunim*), providing for the marriage of needy brides (*Hakhnosses Kallah*), free schooling for orphans (*Talmud Torah*), the provision of medical expenses for the sick (*Bikkhur Kholim*), the loan of funds for family emergencies or for business deals (*Gemiless Khesed*), and the supplying of matzos for Passover (*Moes Khitten*). The system had an egalitarian aspect, since *Tzadakah* (commonly translated as "charity") was a social duty incumbent on all, and involved the participation of the entire community. Its dispensation was an act of social justice not to be practiced in a spirit of condescension (though many recipients perceived it as a shameful last resort, to be avoided at all costs). The public institutions of charity were in the hands of men, though women commonly dispensed social services such as the giving of alms or clothes and visits to the sick.¹⁰

according to how much the family had contributed to communal coffers during his lifetime. The greater the miser, the greater the fee. Apparently, where leftists had control of the *Khevrá Kadisha*, many a wealthy opponent lay unburied until a relative could cough up a hefty sum. See "Community and Identity," 210.

⁹ This was the case of Gedalye, who baked bagels on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday to add to his meager earnings as a cobbler. "Sunday and Monday weren't good days for bagels and rolls because there was still leftover *khale* from Shabbes, and on Friday, housewives did their own baking." Yaacov Zipper, *Tsvishn Taykhen un Vaser* (Between the Lakes and the Waters) (Montreal, 1961), 222-36, cited in Diane H. Roskies and David G. Roskies, *The Shtetl Book* (K'tav, 1975), 119-21. For the economic plight of Jewish artisans in general, see Ezra Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale: The Formative Years of the Jewish Workers' Movement in Tsarist Russia* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 14.

¹⁰ Marc Zbrowski, and Elizabeth Herzog, *Life is with People: the Jewish Little-Town of Eastern Europe* (New York: International Universities Press, 1952), 203-5.

The notoriety attached to the institution of the local sick house (often no more than a dirty shanty on the outskirts of town) is a likely indicator of the weakness of the safety net.¹¹ But in the memory of many an immigrant the “spirit of the *shtetl*” was mutual aid, or *khavershaft*. Said American Jewish labour historian Elias Tcherikower in 1943, “In sum, it was the duty of Jews to aid brother Jews. In the alleviation of distress, the Jewish community was, as it were, an extended family. This was the ideal, and in a large measure, the reality.”¹²

The *shtetl* was not a self-contained entity and many of its sons and daughters gravitated to the cities in search of vocational training and work. In a number of urban centres, such as Lodz, Bialystock, Gomel, Minsk and Warsaw, Jews formed a sizeable minority of the population, and an even greater proportion of the artisanal classes, into which they were increasingly crowded. They were generally excluded from the realm of the growing large factory sector, and a majority of Jewish labourers worked as independent and semi-independent artisans, or in small workshops.¹³ Jews plied a diversity of handicraft trades including baking, bookbinding, butchery, bronze-working, cap making, carpentry, haberdashery, lace-making and tailoring. A sizeable proportion of the urban Jewish workforce was female, with girls and young women concentrated in the garment industry, match production and cigarette making. The latter two trades, in addition to tanning, glove-making and bristle-making, were practiced in larger establishments, but these workplaces were as a rule unmechanized, in contrast to a growing industrial sector peopled by non-Jews.

In his study of working conditions in Belorussia, Ezra Mendelsohn emphasized the arbitrary paternalistic authority exercised by masters. Apprentices, for instance, were expected to help care for the household’s children and to perform general cleaning tasks, typically for a period

¹¹ Baron, *The Jew under the Tsars*, 107.

¹² Elias Tcherikower, *The Early Jewish Labour Movement in the United States* (New York: YIVO, 1961) 8. The power of the ideal was most obvious in the breach. One observer of the famine in the Ukraine in 1933 wrote in horror that “Few Jews are helping one another.” From a letter cited in David Rome, *Congress Archival Record of 1934*, n.s. no.6 (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress, 1976), 28.

¹³ In 1913, 45.3% of Belorussian labourers worked in establishments employing 50 men or less, and only 10% worked in shops hiring 50 to 100 workers. Ezra Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale*, 17.

of three years without pay.¹⁴ Work hours were virtually unlimited, with the exception of the Saturday, the weekly day off. Even this respite came with a cost, as work hours were extended on Thursday evening and Saturday nights. A typical workday in the town of Vitebsk at the turn of the century lasted from 17-18 hours.¹⁵ Long hours were not the only source of discontent. Jewish shops in Minsk were described by a contemporary observer as “ ‘narrow, dirty and dark’ places with no ventilation, where workers laboured in the damp foul air.”¹⁶ Living conditions were often no better, and workers’ homes were overcrowded and often unsanitary cellars, hovels or apartments.¹⁷ Jewish artisans, socially and economically marginalized, were ready to embrace radical social ideologies.

In the early twentieth century revolutionary social movements swept through workers’ circles in the larger centres and later migrated to the smaller towns. Urban radicals violently rejected certain aspects of traditional ideology, while readapting certain collectivist and egalitarian strains to their own ends. One of the most influential organizations in the Pale was the “General Jewish Workers’ Union of Poland and Lithuania,” commonly known as the *Bund*. The *Bund* sought to replace the notion of the unity of all Jews (which they argued, worked to the benefit of the Jewish bourgeoisie) with that of the unity of all workers. More than just a political party, the *Bund* (and its North American cousin, the Workmen’s Circle) steadfastly maintained its internationalism, but due to the pressure exerted by its popular base, it came to embrace the cause of cultural autonomy.¹⁸ Founded in 1897, it provided a focus for a generation of Jewish youth that rejected class distinctions and paternalistic values and replaced them with an alternative culture of

¹⁴ See also Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl*, 27.

¹⁵ Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale*, 11.

¹⁶ *Der Minsker arbeter*, no. 2 (January 1901), 6 and *Der Klassen-Kampf*, no. 5 (July 1901), 9, cited in Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale*, 15.

¹⁷ Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale*, 13, and Pyotr Wrobel “Jewish Warsaw before the First World War,” *Polin*, vol. 3 (1988), 167.

¹⁸ This move cost the group its membership in the Russian Social Democratic Party.

social, and to a limited degree, sexual egalitarianism.¹⁹ The workers' movement with which the *Bund* was associated spawned discussion groups, libraries of socialist oriented literature, and theatre groups. It elevated Yiddish to the status of the language of Jewish popular aspirations and allowed for an outlet for creative and intellectual talents of working class youth. The secularized, internationalist leadership of the *Bund* aimed at no less than the reorientation of the traditional collectivist worldview, with labour at its centre. It was unable, however, to divest Jewish youth of religious categories and practices, and these crept into worker militancy. The cigarette boycott in Bialystok, for instance, was interpreted as a religious act, and union leaders swore on the Torah not to break the strike.²⁰ Given the persistence of religious values in its membership, the strategy of the leadership was not to attack religion head on, but to emphasize the moral inconsistency of a rabbi who would side with the police against his own people, or of a "pious Jew" who would shamelessly exploit his own workers. The *Bund* provided leadership for a strike movement "of far greater intensity than any in the Western World" that swept through the cities of the Pale at the turn of the twentieth century.²¹ The war was one of Jewish "pauper against pauper," as bakers, bristle makers, carpenters, cigarette makers, and weavers stuck against employers whose standard of living was often barely distinguishable from their own. The battle was waged for "the modernization of labour relations between employer and employee; an end to arbitrary, anarchic conditions, to being at the employers' whim, and to long hours typically worked before the holidays; the right to regular pay, regular hours and respect from employers."²² While it is not certain that the strike movement brought any lasting material gains for Jewish workers, it left them with new models for action as well as a sense of collective pride. The *Kassas* grouped together a

¹⁹ *Bundists* even had their own dress codes - cropped hair and dark shorts.

²⁰ Ezra Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale*, 109.

²¹ Ber Berochov, *Ketuvim* (Tel-Aviv, 1958), 11, 274-5, 283 quoted in Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale*, 85.

²² Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle*, 87-8, 98.

number of trade unions to collect dues that were then distributed during strikes, and local all-craft committees banded together to coordinate strikes, sometimes forming local branches of the *Bund*.

The class-conscious culture of the city made its way to the *shtetl* in a variety of ways; by university students returning for the summer, through theatre and newspapers.²³ It formed part of the left-oriented political culture that immigrant Jews brought with them to North America.

Before we examine how this played out in Montreal, we will look briefly at who the migrants were, and why they left Eastern Europe. According to Joseph Kage, Jewish immigrants to North America were artisans, petty tradespeople and labourers. For such people, the prospects for social advancement in Eastern Europe were dim. Traditional Jewish urban occupations were saturated, due to the combination of demographic pressure within the Pale,²⁴ the lack of new commercial outlets, and ethnic discrimination. In Romania Jews were prevented from entering the professions and barred from government monopolies such as salt or tobacco. In Poland, inflation and deteriorating economic conditions in general, particularly in the inter-war period, translated into shrinking opportunities for apprenticeships, industrial training, or for the launching of small enterprises. Pogroms accompanied two decades of social upheaval in the region as waves of anti-semitic violence swept through the Pale in 1903, in the post-revolutionary period of 1905-1906, and during the Russian Civil War, when as many as 120 000 Jews were killed by Ukrainian guerrilla forces and by the White Army of General Deniken.²⁵ For many Jews, a climate of endemic violence undoubtedly contributed to the feeling that a better future lay — elsewhere.

So much for the push. The pull was the lure of the *Goldene Medine* (Golden Land). By the time Eastern European Jews began to arrive in significant numbers in Canada, *Amerike* was a known quantity in Jewish Eastern Europe. Many had friends or relatives living in the United States, letters circulated between the two continents, and remittance payments may even have

²³ Kassow, "Community and Identity," 23.

²⁴ In Belorussia, Jews formed a disproportionate 52 percent of the urban population at the end of the nineteenth century. Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle*, 4.

²⁵ Howard Morley Sachar, *The Course of Modern Jewish History* (New York: Dell, 1958) 302.

begun to play an important part in the economies of some households. By the twenties, many of the arriving immigrants had already established such connections in Canada.

The bulk of Jewish migration to Canada occurred in the years 1901-1911. The net number of immigrants for that decade was 53,129 (or 89.6 % of the total increase in Jewish population), while 30,722 Jewish immigrants arrived between 1911 and 1921 (60.9 % of the total increase of Jewish population).²⁶ Beginning in the early 1920s, however, Canada's open door policy was dismantled in a series of restrictive measures culminating in a complete reversal in 1923. Immigration was then restricted to close relatives and agriculturists from a hierarchy of preferred countries of origin. Non-preferred countries included Russia, Poland, Lithuania, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, which were the native countries of the bulk of Eastern European Jewry.²⁷

Despite these barriers, a further 48,434 Jewish immigrants were admitted between 1920 and 1930. Roughly one third of these inter-war Jewish immigrants were destined for Montreal, the urban power hub of Canada. The Jewish population of that city grew from 6,000 in 1901, to 29,000 in 1911, and to almost 42,000 in 1921 (or 6.7% of the total Montreal population), nearly 58,000 in 1931 (or a rate of about 5% of the total Montreal population, where it has since remained stable).²⁸ For the Anglophone and Francophone population, the presence of a non-Christian minority speaking neither of the languages of the country was a novelty, but to Eastern European Jews, the multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic landscape must have seemed like well-known territory.

As much as Jews used familiar signposts of ethnic difference to orient themselves in their city of adoption, the creation of the new immigrant settlement was really an act of collective reconstruction and of adaptation to North American patterns. This involved the creation of new

²⁶ Joseph Kage, *With Faith and Thanksgiving: The Story of Two Hundred Years of Jewish Immigration and Immigrant Aid Effort in Canada (1760-1960)*, (Montreal: Eagle Publishing Press, 1962), 24.

²⁷ Kage, *With Faith and Thanksgiving*, 62-5.

²⁸ Rosenberg, *Canada's Jews*, 31. The Jews were but one of a number of migrants groups to arrive in the city during this period. Between 1921 and 1931 it is estimated that 90,000 French Canadians from rural Quebec arrived in Montreal, out of a population growth of approximately 200 000 for the same decade, in addition to a much smaller number of English Canadians from Atlantic Canada and elsewhere. See Paul-André Linteau, *Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération* (Montreal: Boréal, 1992), 313-8.

categories of class identity that took account both of internal social differences within the Jewish community and of the marginality of immigrant life.

Eastern European Jews arriving in Montreal beginning in the 1880s physically carved out an ethnic niche between francophone and anglophone Montrealers. The bulk of the immigrant population occupied a swath along the axis of St. Lawrence Street, roughly between St. Denis and St. Urbain, between a well-to-do anglophone bourgeoisie to the West, and working class francophones to the East. Concentrated at the beginning of the century near La Gauchetière, Jewish immigrants had moved northward as far as Duluth by 1921, northward and westward to Mount Royal and Esplanade by 1931, and on to Waverley and Esplanade by 1941.²⁹ Isolated Jewish outposts existed in the eastern periphery of Papineau and in the north, in Mile End. The Jewish community of Outremont formed a sort of floating buffer zone of the upwardly mobile, as did a small group of Jews in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce. In the St. Lawrence corridor, Jewish small merchants (representing about one third of the Jewish “active population” in number in 1931) sold food, clothing, hardware and general goods to a French Canadian (and Jewish) clientele, much as they had serviced Slavic peasants in Europe. At the same time, they used the Protestant school system as an avenue of social assimilation into Anglophone society, in the same way that a few privileged Jews in the Pale had used the acquisition of Russian culture.

In contrast to the East European environment religion was relatively peripheral in the everyday world of most immigrant Jews. It was normal, for instance, to work on the Sabbath, and synagogue attendance was considerably lessened compared to the Eastern European norm.³⁰ The

²⁹ David Rome, *On Our Forerunners at Work* (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress, 1978), 14. In 1931, Jews formed 55% of the municipal ward of St. Louis, 56% of the Laurier ward, 39% of the St. Michel ward, 34% of St. Jean Baptiste ward and 23% of Outremont. See Rosenberg, *Canada's Jews*, 32.

³⁰ Contemporary observer Judith Seidel cited reduced synagogue attendance as an area of acculturation (along with lesser observance of *kashrut*), comparing figures for immigrant fathers and their sons. Gerald Tulchinsky used her data not to support the argument of increasing secularity, but as evidence of the traditional nature of the Montreal Jewish community compared to those of other Canadian cities. See Judith Seidel, “The Development and Social Adjustment of the Jewish Community in Montreal” (M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1939), 77, table 63, “Number and percent in each area of settlement who attended synagogue by frequency of attendance for 3 male generations in a sample of 512 families, 1938,” cited in Tulchinsky, *Branching Out*, 24-5.

immigrant population, however, vociferously clung to a few fundamentals, such as (for boys) a knowledge of Hebrew sufficient to acquit oneself honorably in synagogue. Protests over the price of kosher meat were endemic until well into the thirties, indicating that many Jewish consumers considered it, too, to be indispensable.³¹

Jewish workers had exercised a diversity of trades, both manual and entrepreneurial, prior to emigration, but occupational reorientation was common, resulting in a certain fluidity of class identity particular to the immigrant generation.³² Within the Jewish community, a major social distinction was that which differentiated “Downtowner” from “Uptowner”. “Downtown” was the term used to designate the social and geographical space occupied by Yiddish speaking immigrants in the St. Lawrence corridor, where the predominant employer of Jewish working-class labour was the clothing workshop or factory.³³ For many, “you become a peddler or you go into the tailoring trade”³⁴ and about five thousand Jews worked in the clothing factories, situated along Ste. Catherine and Bleury streets.³⁵ Downtown also included those workers and tradespeople living and

³¹ Israel Medresh, *Tvishn Tvei Velt Milkhomes* (Between Two World Wars) (Montreal: Eagle Publishing Press, 1964), 32. Ira Robinson argues that the availability of kosher meat and the right to religion as an expression of ethnic identity were important values that Jews were prepared to defend by violence. Ira Robinson. “ La violence dans le milieu des immigrants juifs montréalais” (Violence in the Montreal Jewish Immigrant Milieu), paper presented at the RCHTQ colloquium entitled “Le Boulevard St-Laurent, lieu d’émergence d’un prolétariat immigrant,” 3 May 2002.

³² For occupational reorientation, see Kage, *With Faith and Thanksgiving*, 31-7. My own interviews of Montreal bakery workers yielded ample evidence that the move from entrepreneurial status in Europe to wage labour was a common one, sometimes undertaken as a temporary measure until enough money could be saved to reestablish a business. Jacob Leman, for instance, was the son of a bakery owner who became a buttonhole machine operator upon arrival in Montreal. With the help of his Canadian-born wife’s savings he was eventually able to establish himself as a subcontractor. See Pearl Potashnik, interview with the author, 10 May 2001. Chaim Papernick was a skilled textile worker from Lodz who entered the baking trade in Montreal as a laborer during the depression. Saul Papernick, interview with the author, December, 2000. Aaron Kunigis had operated a bakery with his wife (the daughter of a bakery owner) in Vilkomer before working as a cake-making wage labourer in Montreal. David Kunigis, interview with the author, April 26, 2001.

³³ Kage, *With Faith and Thanksgiving*, 30.

³⁴ Seemah Berson, “The Immigrant Experience,” 212.

³⁵ Louis Rosenberg listed the figure for Montreal in 1931 as being 26.49 % of the gainfully employed Jewish population. Rosenberg, *Jews in Canada*, 177. Of the Jewish population, 3,713 males and 1,773 females worked in the trade. Rosenberg, *Jews in Canada*, 365.

working in storefront flats and engaged in small commerce of all kinds; butchers, bakers, grocers, hardware merchants, booksellers, bric-a-brac vendors, etc.³⁶

The term “Uptowners” was used by immigrants with the fluid connotation of “those who are not us,” and it provided a marker of identity by which the immigrant population distinguished itself.³⁷ For the Downtown intellectual elite, says Keinsuke Oiwa, “Uptown” had the associations of “English,” “assimilated,” “autocratic,” and “employer,” while the corresponding connotations for Downtown were “Yiddish,” “democratic,” and “worker.” The Uptowners constituted the Jewish establishment, whose arrival in the city predated that of the immigrant community. They included old-stock Anglo families, who had roots in Montreal stretching as far back as the mid nineteenth-century, as well as an acculturated second generation Eastern European component, many of whom owned the clothing factories in which immigrant Jews worked. Uptowners had their own synagogues, their own newspaper, and a variety of social clubs. Westmount and Notre-Dame-de-Grace were uptown territory, and Jewish Outremont was a grey zone for the upwardly mobile and rapidly acculturating.³⁸

Uptown was linked to Downtown in several ways, the most obvious as employer of labour. The two communities were also tied by a more subtle form of economic dependence, that of charity. The most important (and also probably the most calumniated) institution of philanthropy, financed largely by Uptowners, was the Baron de Hirsh Institute, located at the intersection of Ontario and Bleury. The building housed a myriad of charity groups and offered a wide range of services. As Israel Medresh tells it, immigrants made much use of these services in the first two decades of the century, but they did not forget that many of Jewish Montreal’s major

³⁶ Adam Fuerstenberg, “From Yiddish to ‘Yiddishkeit’: A.M. Klein, J.I. Segal and Montreal’s Yiddish Culture,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* vol.19 (1984), 68.

³⁷ For an excellent analysis of the fluidity of meaning attached to the term see Keinsuke Oiwa’s “Tradition and Social Change: An Ideological Analysis of the Montreal Jewish Immigrant Ghetto in the Early Twentieth Century” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1988), 37-45, 277.

³⁸ See Seidel, “The Social Adjustment,” 112

philanthropists were known on the street as capitalist exploiters.³⁹ Immigrants began to build alternative “safety net” mechanisms, replacing the paternalism of the philanthropic organizations with a democratic ethic of self-help and mutual aid. These men and women adapted the collectivism of the *shtetl chevres* to the new North American climate, in which they could become truly egalitarian instruments. The *landsmanshaft* groups, linking Jews from particular towns or regions, pooled their resources to create burial and sickness benefits. In the course of the twenties and thirties these came to be seen as outmoded, and many of their functions were taken up by Workmen’s Circle (*Arbeiter-Ring*)⁴⁰, and by the social welfare branches of the international unions (see below for further discussion).

During the crisis of the Depression, when class confrontation was accentuated, the strategies of philanthropy and of mutual aid inevitably clashed. The project to create a Peoples’ Kitchen and the ritual that accompanied its inauguration show how communal leaders having their roots in the immigrant community celebrated workers’ collective empowerment while deferring to the traditional social hierarchy. Family Services of the Baron de Hirsh Institute had disapproved of the project, citing the unwillingness of its clients to publicly receive charity. It was more appropriate, its agent said, to dispense services discreetly and in the privacy of the home. But immigrant ideas of self-help and social justice did not mesh with this mentality. The campaign for a soup kitchen went ahead. Donations were collected from the Jewish unions and from the Sick Benefit Societies.⁴¹ The official opening featured two banquets on Sunday, 8 November 1931. The first banquet was held during the day, for the carpenters, plasterers, painters, electricians and

³⁹ Israel Medresh, *Montreal of Yesterday: Jewish life in Montreal, 1900-1920*, trans. Vivian Felsen, (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 2000), 29-30. Gerald Tulchinsky cites an incident where activists interrupted the dedication of a synagogue to protest the presence there of manufacturer Lyon Cohen, an uptown manufacturer on the wrong side of a bitter strike in 1917. See his “The Third Solitude: A.M. Klein’s Jewish Montreal, 1910-1950,” *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol.19 (1984) 101.

⁴⁰ As Keinusuke Oiwa has pointed out, the transition could be sufficiently smooth as to permit the wholesale absorption of a *landsmanshaft* group into a socialist fraternity. Oiwa, “Tradition and Social Change,” 130-2. A poignant case in point was the Mahilover Progressive Farein, reconstituted as the Eugene Debs branch of Workman’s Circle in 1932.

⁴¹ *Keneder Adler*. 31 October 1931, 2 November 1931.

plumbers who donated their labour. They were joined by “popular organizations” (meaning both *landsmanshaft* and women’s relief groups) and labour organizations. The evening banquet was attended by *Yehudim* (the name given to acculturated uptown philanthropists), *balebatim* (masters) and community activists (*klal tuers*).⁴² The later event, it is to be assumed, was an acknowledgement of the help of philanthropists in funding the project.

This kind of communal project based on the principle of working class mutual aid was considered to be compatible with a class war strategy, as pursued by the leaders of the “Jewish Unions” of Montreal. The eight major Jewish unions included the Plumber’s Union, the Carpenters Union, the Ginger Ale Drivers Union, the Baker’s Union, the Amalgamated Clothing Worker’s of America (ACWA), the Hat and Cap maker’s Union, and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU).⁴³ Collectively they were referred to, in leftist circles and in the Yiddish press, as “the Jewish trade unions” or “the Jewish workers movement.” In the case of the clothing unions, this was a misnomer, since both the ACWA and the ILGWU had a growing non-Jewish membership, composed of French Canadians (mostly women), Italians, Poles, and others. However two features distinguished all the “Jewish Unions.” Firstly, they were “international” unions, that is to say, their headquarters were in the United States. This meant a distinct advantage, especially for tiny locals like the bakers. Not only could the internationals provide strike funds, but they could send organizers to support local officers in times of trouble. During a strike the international locals might also benefit from the organizational support of the Conseil national des métiers du travail de Montreal, composed of representatives of the international unions in Montreal.⁴⁴

⁴² *Adler*, 9 November 1931.

⁴³ From a listing of organizations sending delegates to the 1919 plenary session of the founding congress of the Canadian Jewish Congress. CJC Plenary Delegates, series ZA 1919, Box 10, file 27, Archives of the Canadian Jewish Congress.

⁴⁴ In 1906-7, when the council set up its organization committee, 7 out of 12 members were *Poale Tzionists* and Zionist Territorialists. A Labour Zionist was named as organizer during the clockmaker’s strike of 1907. Rome, *Our Forerunners at Work*, 125.

Secondly the leadership and the executive of the clothing unions, at both the local and the International level, was Jewish, allowing for a certain ease in communication both between union representatives and their co-ethnic employers, and between different levels of the union hierarchy. In order to facilitate mobilization in the larger multi-ethnic unions like the International Hat and Cap and the Amalgamated, French branches were formed, and their activities were closely coordinated with Jewish counterparts.⁴⁵ In the case of the Bakers' Union, there was both a French local (grouping a tiny minority of the francophone trade) and a Jewish local.

The clothing unions dominated the labour scene and provided a template for the North American Jewish trade union movement in terms of militancy and ethnic interaction. Workers within the industry were at the receiving end of a process that was very unstable. Business was highly seasonal and busy periods of extended hours and alternated with long dead seasons of unemployment. In many sectors of the trade sub-contractors vied with one another to provide a cheaper product, forcing down wages. The industry accordingly saw an unusually high rate of strike activity throughout the early century, and it gave many Jewish workers, (young unmarried women, and men of all ages) an experience of labour activism. The depression years in particular were marked by intense and often violent general strikes, the most notable probably being in the dressmaking trade, where the communist- led organizing drive took place in 1934-5, followed by an ILGWU campaign in 1936-7.⁴⁶ Unlike the Jewish "craft" unions where the membership was exclusively Jewish, Jews and French Canadians often worked and fought side by side in the needle trade. However, each ethnicity tended to socialize and to organize separately, though not on the

⁴⁵ To gain the allegiance of French Canadians during the twenties and thirties, the international unions had to battle the perceptions upheld by Catholic clergy and the nascent labour movement dominated by it. The "neutral" (meaning neither Protestant nor Catholic) unions were denounced as dangerous to Catholic workers. In accordance with the class collaborationist position, the clergy sanctioned defensive strikes only, and this only as a last resort. They were bound to collide with the general strike strategy of the international. Needle trade organizer Joe Gershman recorded his surprise at an incident in 1934, when one French Canadian girl handed him back her pay raises gained after a strike, on the instruction of the local curé. See Irving Abella, "Portrait of a Professional Revolutionary: the Recollections of Joe Gershman," *Labour/le Travail*, 22, 1977, 200-1.

⁴⁶ Mercedes Steedman records general strikes led by the ILGWU, the ACWA and the IUNTW in 1932, 1933, 1934, and 1936-1937. See Steedman, *Angels of the Workplace*, 149-52.

basis of equality. Jewish men retained leadership of the executives of the unions and owners were almost to a man, Jewish. While this cultural affinity had its advantages, it could become somewhat of an encumbrance to employers. In the depression years, for instance, some manufacturers were hauled to the ropes in the Jewish press for discriminating against Jewish workers, who were considered to be greater liabilities because of their union militancy.⁴⁷

For many working men and women, the clothing industry provided both a cultural shelter (where it was possible to work and to socialize in Yiddish) and a means of assimilation into North American institutional culture. There were many opportunities for leadership and for co-optation into the union structure, especially for young Jews who were adept at speaking English and French. At the same time, the “business unionism” of the thirties left the unions open to left-wing criticism. By the mid-thirties, the ILGWU and the ACWA were highly bureaucratized organizations, where negotiations of wages and working conditions took place at joint management/union boards far removed from the factory floor. Jewish communist activists contested the bureaucratization of the clothing unions, arguing that the strategy of negotiation through arbitration was tantamount to class collaboration.

The garment trade became a battleground torn by bitter fractional dissent between the social democrats, who dominated for the most part in the inter-war period, and the communists. In the early twenties the latter were enjoined by the party to “bore within” the unions, in order to replace the reformist leadership with their own revolutionary cadres. Meetings were disrupted, debates dragged on endlessly and the leadership discredited.⁴⁸ The level of invective was vicious.

⁴⁷ Tulchinsky, *Branching Out*, 107. The issue of intra-communal tension related to employer discrimination against Jewish workers is taken up more fully in Tulchinsky's source, Cohen's “Shmatas, Syndicates and Strikes.”

⁴⁸ For a general discussion of the communist/socialist rivalry within the union, see David Rome, *Our Forerunners at Work*, 171-92 and Steedman, *Angels of the Workplace*, 124-141. For the struggle within the men's clothing industry, see Johanne Duranceau, “L'évolution du syndicalisme dans la confection masculine: analyse d'un cas, l'Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America: 1925-1938” (M.A. thesis, Université du Québec à Montréal, 1988), 150-81.

Epithets like “labour faker” and “social fascist” (the communist name for social democrats) were slung about, much to the disgust of the membership, who deserted their unions in droves. The leadership of both major unions responded with purges of their most troublesome “leftist” elements throughout the twenties, but the rivalry continued. In 1929 the Communist party shifted gears, this time fighting for worker’s allegiance by means of their own rival unions, the United Clothing Workers’ Union and the Industrial Union of Needle Trade Workers.

In 1936, the wind changed again, and the new common front strategy of the Communist Party dictated that communist activists collaborate within the established unions to raise the level of militancy and awareness. Communist trade unionists disbanded their rival unions and “walked over” to the established Internationals as “organizers.” The Bakers’ Union had its own share of organizers⁴⁹ and a rival communist-led “dual union” organized a Slavic-owned cake shop in the east of Montreal in the early thirties. To the communists goes the credit for raising the level of militancy within the unions and placing the initiative for collective action on the shop floor. I have emphasized their divisive impact on the Jewish labour movement because for communal leaders (social democrats for the most part), the “real solidarity” prevalent in the Bakers’ Union provided a contrast to the internal labour strife which came to be considered as normative.

Many of the intellectuals engaged in communal reconstruction belonged to one of two leftist organizations that predated the communists, Workmen’s Circle (*Arbeiter Ring*) and the Labour Zionists (*Poale Tzion*). Although the two groups had divergent strategies, functions and ideological orientations, they often worked together in campaigns of communal concertation, working to coordinate the activities of various labour organizations and women’s fundraising groups within the downtown community.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ David Kunigis, interview with the author, 26 April 2001.

⁵⁰ The People’s Kitchen was one the result of one such campaign, and support given to striking bakers in 1927-1929 was another.

The two groups also worked “behind the scenes” to mobilize key players in contentious strikes in the clothing industry. The first Montreal branch of the Workmen’s Circle, founded in 1907, provided its members with unemployment, old age, sickness and death benefits, but it was much more than a fraternal society. Taking its inspiration from the *Bund*, Workmen’s Circle defined itself as “a labour fraternal organization whose establishment became a necessity when industrial conditions, became, under capitalism, a threat and a menace to the living conditions of the workers.” It considered itself a “part of the general labour movement as such ...striving for the complete emancipation of the working class.”⁵¹ The constitution limited membership to workers and their wives (who from 1932 could join one of two women’s branches), and members were required to join a union if one existed in their trade.⁵² Like the *Bund*, Workmen’s Circle worked to promote a Yiddish workers’ culture, and it operated a supplemental Yiddishist school for young children. The organization was particularly hard hit by the “civil war” between communists and social democrats. Its membership dropped from a high of 1000 in 1922 to a low of 160 in 1925 (numbers rose to 350 by 1939) as a result of a left secessionist split, leaving a legacy of bitterness that endures even to the present day.⁵³ In the twenties and thirties, however, it was the nerve centre of the Jewish labour movement, the site of coordinating and agitating activities during strikes, and it provided a venue for lectures by visiting radicals of many stripes.

The *Poale Tzion* (Labour Zionists) was a small group of socialist intellectuals with considerable impact within the left and in secular communal political circles in general. In contrast to the internationalist bent of the Workmen’s Circle, the group had an explicitly nationalist

⁵¹ D. Breslow, “Towards a Young Workers’ Centre” in *Workmen’s Circle Centre Souvenir Book* (Montreal, 1936).

⁵² Rome, *Our Forerunners*, 87.

⁵³ Rome, *Our Forerunners*, 171.

orientation and functioned largely as an agent for communal reconstruction.⁵⁴ It played a leadership role in a wide range of cultural, educational, and other downtown communal institutions, including the Jewish People's Library, the People's Kitchens of 1908 and of 1913, and the cultural association of 1919, which counted the Bakers' Union among its constituent members. Secretary Simon Belkin described the strategy of the party: "each time it wished to have an idea or a project accepted, it turned to the unions and the representatives of other organizations and led agitation within their respective assemblies in favour of the proposition it wished to have adopted."⁵⁵ When a strike was declared, the group could offer help in mobilizing and fundraising. During the tailors' lockout of 1917, for instance, it collected 1100 dollars in aid for strikers, and ceded its local to strikers.⁵⁶

At the beginning of the century, socialists found themselves in violent opposition to nationalist-leaning radicals, who tended to be more tolerant towards religion. But as time went on, the atheism of the internationalists became less relevant. Workmen's Circle activists and those in the *Poale Tzion* found themselves working together more and more often. Their interests, membership, and even ideology began to converge.⁵⁷ Members of both groups, for instance, were often involved in the bread arena as agitators and as arbitrators.

The role of communal mediator par excellence, however, belonged to the Downtown institution, the *Keneder Adler*, founded in 1907 by former grocer Hirsh Wolofsky. Although the newspaper was by no means non-partisan, Wolofsky saw it as part of his mandate as the publisher

⁵⁴ The Labour Zionists believed that emancipation would be achieved through the establishment of a Jewish workers' state in Palestine, but they worked for the collective empowerment of Jewish workers wherever they lived in the Diaspora.

⁵⁵ Simon Belkin, *Le mouvement ouvrier juif au Canada, 1904-1920*, trans. Pierre Anctil (Quebec: Septentrion, 1999) 264. Translation from French is my own.

⁵⁶ Belkin, *Le mouvement ouvrier juif*, 180.

⁵⁷ Part of this convergence was their common opposition to communism. There remained divisive factors, however. The Poale Tzion owed much of its influence to its ability to pull connections with Uptown Zionists, in order to gain strategic support for popular causes (see Oiva, *Tradition and Social Change*, 231-2). This accounts for the perception in socialist (and in later years, communist) circles that the organization was a bourgeois tinted group, which allowed class interests to be compromised by its nationalist orientation. For a treatment of differences between nationalist and internationalist tendencies, see Medresh, *Tvishn Tvei Velt Milkhomes*, 32-3, 35-6.

of Montreal's only Yiddish language daily to provide a forum for a diversity of often-conflicting interests. In the pages of the paper one could read, side by side, notices of mass meetings to be addressed by radicals, business news, a labour column, as well as commentary and injunctions (often concerning *kashrut*) by orthodox rabbis. From the *Adler* one gets a glimpse of a rich immigrant life that overflows the bounds of institutional life, while being heavily influenced by the organizations that attempt to channel it in various directions. The activities of the Consumers' League (or the "Hebrew Consumers' League," as it was sometimes known), provides us with one example particularly relevant to this study. Male socialists and other radicals had often used discontent over the rises in the price of bread as an opportunity for consciousness raising, and the *Arbeiter Ring* was probably involved in both the initial organization of the League, but the foot soldiers were, for the most part, married women. The first recorded meeting of the group was in 1908, when one thousand persons met to protest a rise in the price of bread. Among the plans of action adopted was a campaign to have housewives bake their own bread and the establishment of a cooperative bakery.⁵⁸ Over the next three decades, the Consumers' League remained an ad-hoc organization, ready to be mobilized at a raise in the price of bread or of kosher meat. During a dispute involving the bakeries in 1927, the *Adler* published competing declarations of the "Bakers' Union" (i.e. bakery workers), the "Jewish Bakers of Montreal" (i.e. the bakery owners), and those of the League. Thus the *Adler* served as a source of information both on the Jewish bread trade, and on its place in the daily life and in the imagination of the downtown community.

These, then, are some of the basic contours of Jewish immigrant ideological landscape in Montreal in the inter-war period. Some of the same currents of union activism and of socialist ideology that animated the clothing industry also flowed through the Jewish bread trade. Their expression was determined by the traditions of the Bakery and Confectionery Workers' International Union, of which Jewish Montreal Bakers Union local 115 was a member. The shape

⁵⁸ Rome, *Our Forerunners at Work*, 128.

of this space through which a generation of men and women moved was also molded by its place in immigrant life and thought. Seventy-two Montreal Jewish men listed “baker” as their occupation in 1931, a number which probably included both workers and employers.⁵⁹ Between 1920 and 1940, there were between 10 and 20 Jewish bakeries in Montreal, spread out along the St. Lawrence corridor (with the exception of the Schoel Richstone Bakery in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, and the Diamond bakery, which served Papineau).⁶⁰ Despite the small numbers involved in the baking trade, the milieu was an important meeting ground for workers, consumers, and owners, all involved in the exchange of a product that was an important marker of ethnic identity. Produced and sold in the heart of the immigrant settlement, Jewish bread was a public product both physically and ideologically at the centre of communal life.

The Jewish bread trade came to have the association with traditional European Jewish life by virtue of the ethnic commodity it turned out, by its handicraft nature, and by the composition of the male workforce, which was almost to a man, immigrant.⁶¹ In the next chapter, I will be looking in greater detail at the bakeries as an arena of social activism molded by the traditions of the Bakery and Confectionery Workers’ International Union, and by those of the Montreal Jewish working class community.

⁵⁹ Rosenberg, *Canada’s Jews*, Table 235, p. 364.

⁶⁰ Based on entries in *Lovell’s Montreal Business Directory*, and in *Entente sur la mise en valeur du Vieux-Montréal et du Patrimoine Montréalaise: Etude Historique du Patrimoine Industriel de Montréal*, Phase I, vol. III: liste des établissements industriels à Montréal, Geography Department, Concordia University

⁶¹ The sole examples that I have of second generation immigrants who chose the trade were in fact sons of immigrant entrepreneurs, and not employees in the proper sense of the word.

Chapter Three

Making and Breaking Bread in Jewish Montreal: 1920-1940

The Jewish bread trade in Montreal in the twenties and thirties was a milieu shaped both by communal influences and by the labour culture of the International Union of which the Montreal (Jewish) Bakers union was a part. Socialist intellectuals recognized the bakeries' role in giving immigrant Jews a paradigm of working class community based on the male/female solidarity in the respective roles as male producers, wives of producers, and consumers. Jewish bread was at the centre of a social contract in which bakery owners were held responsible for providing sustenance to their immigrant clientele at a fair price. Bakery workers, for their part, expected members of the Jewish working -class community to eat union-made bread only. Violations of the contract could result in collective action, in the form of consumer boycotts or strikes.

In order for the purchase of union bread to be construed as an act of communal solidarity, the union had to maintain the fiction that it was ethnically homogenous, even after 1927, when this was no longer true. Appeals by the union addressed to the public accordingly stressed the misconduct of those owners who sought to replace Jewish by non-Jewish labour. The ethnic nature of the trade was reinforced by the traditions of the International, which promoted modern industrial trade unionism while upholding the notion of protected ethnic preserves for distinct immigrant populations. Dynamics within the industry were also profoundly affected by a practice common to Jewish locals of the International, the work-sharing scheme, whereby the available work was equally distributed to all union members. Its adoption by the Montreal local reinforced the popular perception of the union as a radical organization pushing egalitarianism and solidarity to the limit. The unique nature of the system also established the Jewish bakeries as a distinct sub-economy where the ethic of collectivism and mutual aid held sway.

Of course any labour milieu is profoundly imprinted not only by the women and men who move through it, but by the nature of the product created in it, and by the concepts and ideas that accrue to that product over a long period of time. In the next section we will be looking at the role of bread in Jewish Eastern Europe, with a view to establishing continuities and contrasts with the Jewish bread trade in Montreal.

Bread in Eastern European Jewish Life

In the traditional Jewish imagination as in that of Christian Europe, bread had the distinction of being a symbol of sustenance, and of creation itself. The blessing said over the bread sanctified the entire meal, and the gracing of the Sabbath table with a *challah* set that day apart. In the *shtetlach* of Europe, as in the larger cities, bread making followed the weekly rhythm of traditional Jewish life.

The workweek of a baker would begin on Saturday night, at the close of the Sabbath, when next morning's dough would be mixed. It would end the following Friday afternoon, before Sabbath, when the lighting of a fire (and hence cooking and baking), and all work-related activity was prohibited. Bakeries were also in the sway of an annual rhythm. They produced great quantities of bread and *challah* just before the fall High Holidays, during which they closed for two days. During Passover, when all leavened products were prohibited by religious law, they shut down for a week.¹

The bakeries were important sites of communal life for the women of the town. Housewives often brought their *challah* dough to the bakeries for baking on Friday.² Later in the day, they would bring their *cholent* (a stew of beans or meat) to be baked slowly in the

¹ One Montreal baker told me that his family would use this opportunity to repaint the bakery. See O.C., (not his real initials) interview with the author, 12 March 2002.

² Eleanor Horvitz, "Rhode Island Jewish Bakers," *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, vol.12 (Nov. 1998) 521. According to Horvitz's informant, the practice continued in the early Jewish settlement of Rhode Island.

“sealed” oven, and retrieve them the following afternoon, gathering news and gossip along with their *cholent* pots.³

The work culture of the bakery was profoundly shaped by the fact that baking was largely a nocturnal activity in which the biological cycles of bakery workers were intimately tied to cycles of dough fermentation.⁴ The dough had to be mixed in large troughs in the evening, sometime between 6 and 8 o'clock. Rye and black bread required the use of a slow fermenting sourdough starter, while *challah* or white rolls were yeast raised. After two rising period in the troughs, the bread was kneaded and shaped into round, long, or braided loaves, and left to proof for up to an hour. The wood was prepared, and the oven fired. The first batch of bread was cooked around two o'clock in the morning, with subsequent batches prepared and baked throughout the night and into the morning. There might be more work in the late afternoon, before the process began again in the evening. Sleep was taken in broken intervals, directly after the first mixing, or while a batch of bread was rising.⁵ It was common for workers to eat and to sleep on the premises of the bakery, in effect boarding in their work place. The goal of the entire exercise was to turn out fresh batches of bread for early morning customers. The vendors, on the other hand, began their day around seven or eight in the morning, working sometimes into the late evening.

³ See Chaim Grade, *My Mother's Sabbath Days* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1984), 115-22.

⁴ International trade union associations made repeated attempts to eliminate night work throughout the early century. See, for instance, the resolution for the abolition of night work in bakeries adopted by the International Labour Organization, cited in *Gazette du Travail* (1925), 480,702,704.

⁵ This description of the rhythm of bread-making is drawn from Daniel Bertaux and Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame's "Artisanal Bakery in France: How it Lives and Why it Survives" in *The Petit Bourgeoisie: Comparative Studies in an Uneasy Stratum*, ed. Frank Bechofer and Brian Elliot (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981) 175. With slight variations, it is corroborated by interviews with bakers (both Montreal and Old Country) and their children.

The Leman Bakery

A brief look at the Leman bakery,⁶ a Jewish-owned establishment in Ostrog, Volhnia (in the present Ukraine) in operation from 1919 until the Second World War provides us with a model for comparison with its Montreal counterparts. In both Europe and North America, a characteristic feature was the family nature of the business. The basic unit of organization was the bakery couple, with the husband taking charge of the production end of the business, and the wife overseeing sales.⁷ The boys of the family were expected to work in the bakery part-time while in school and full time afterwards, while the norm was for girls to help either with sales, or the light production jobs.

In the Leman bakery the wood and the oven were located in the cellar until new sanitation laws forced the oven, and with it bread production, to the ground floor.⁸ The seven-member household was then crowded into quarters to the rear of the storefront. The family hired two non-Jewish Ukrainian men (who lived off the premises) to bake, and these men's labour was supplemented by that of the sons of the family, who worked in the bakery once they had finished public school.⁹ Workers who were not family members must have often laboured in uneasy tension with this fairly exclusive domestic unit, on whom they were economically dependent.

The mixer and the oven man were skilled workers, and their subordinates were the benchmen, who divided and shaped the loaves and other baked goods. A larger operation could

One Ukrainian Jewish baker told of how as a young man, he would climb onto the proofing shelves, (where the loaves were placed to rise) to catch a bit of sleep, or to "give a tickle" to the girl "helper" who rested there.

⁶ I have substituted a pseudonym for the actual name of the family. The source for information about the bakery is Pearl Potashnik, interview with the author, 10 May 2001.

⁷ For the role of the baker-wife see Kaplan, *The Bakers of Paris and the Bread Question*, 321-6, and Bertaux and Wiame-Bertaux, "The Artisanal Bakery," *passim*.

⁸ The cellar was traditionally the location of the bakeries early in the century, due to the weight of the oven.

⁹ Pearl Potashnik, interview with the author, 10 May, 2001.

have a foreman and possibly a cake-man, typically considered to be the artist of the group.¹⁰ While the mixer set the pace of work by starting the doughs, the job that required the most skill and carried the most prestige was that of the oven man. He placed the loaves in a long oven around two meters deep, with the aid of a wooden peel. This task required both considerable upper body strength and keen managerial skills. Several batches of bread went into the oven, but each batch had to be placed so that it was accessible once it was cooked, not an easy task given the depth of the oven.¹¹

Not all bakeries were equipped with a varied workforce. In establishments smaller than the Leman bakery, one man, sometimes aided by an assistant, would do all the work. Domestic production could also apparently provide serious rivalry, as illustrated by the complaint of owner Usher Leman. A neighbouring woman “was killing him,” he claimed, since she managed a lively trade from her home, thus escaping the taxation burden that was the lot of the owner of a commercial establishment.¹²

The Bread Market in Eastern Europe - Clientele and Product

The idea of a bread product made exclusively for and by Jews does not appear to have been an Old World phenomenon. The market that the Jewish-owned bakeries produced for was very much a multi-ethnic one. As far as I could determine, Jews and non-Jews ate the same bread products, rye, *kimmel* (caraway), black bread, pumpernickel, and rolls of many sorts,¹³

¹⁰ On the cake-men: one Montreal informant told me that Ukrainians were often hired to do the cakes in his bakery. O. C. described his cake-maker as an eccentric prima donna, stretching the usual privilege of reserving exclusive oven time.

¹¹ This was demonstrated to me by the manager of the St. Lawrence Bakery, which has preserved an artisanal work method, along with an old brick floored oven. David Kobulnik, interview with the author, March 2001.

¹² Pearl Potashnik, interview with the author, 10 May 2001.

¹³ The roll had the connotation of daily luxury, especially when eaten at breakfast, with chicken fat or at the best of times, with butter. In I. L. Peretz' famous story, Bontche the Silent is a simple laborer offered his choice of anything in Heaven as a reward for his outstanding humility. He asks for “a hot roll with fresh butter every morning.” See “Bontche the Silent” in I. L. Peretz, *The Case against the Wind and other Stories*, ed. Esther Hautzig, (New York: Macmillan, 1975).

though non-Jews seemed to have had a preference for heavy darker breads. Sarah Appelbaum, who ran her own bakery in Vilkomer, Lithuania after her husband left for Canada, catered to local non-Jewish taste with her prominent outdoor display of dairy products and preserves¹⁴ and the Leman bakery sold to Ukrainians, Poles, and Jews. One Catholic Polish woman from a *shtetl* in Poland apparently regularly patronized Jewish-owned bakeries, recalling how “the bread in Jewish stores was better than in Catholic ones.”¹⁵

The one bread that had the stamp of Jewishness was the *challah*, the braided egg bread usually reserved for the Sabbath and for the New Year (*Rosh Hoshana*). In Jewish eyes, *challah* took on the very quality of distinction from the surrounding cultures. Writer Lamed Shapiro, in his story “White Chalah,” used it as a device to symbolize the mixed attraction and repulsion of the Ukrainian peasant pogrom perpetrator for his Jewish victim. As he bites into her shoulder, he imagines that he is at last, tasting of the coveted white *challah*.¹⁶ This is an inversion of what we know of the pattern of everyday interaction between Jews and non-Jews, where breads and cakes were gifts given in appreciation for services, such as the lighting of the fire on *Shabbes*.¹⁷ The bagel, though a Jewish product, was marginalized in the Jewish imagination, as in economic life. As a rule bagels were made by petty artisans, who might ply another trade as well. They were hawked in the market or sold wholesale to the large bakeries, as later was the practice in Montreal.

¹⁴ David Kunigis, interview with the author, 26 April 2001.

¹⁵ Quoted in Anna-Maria Orla-Bokowska, “*Shtetl* Communities: Another Image,” *Jews in Independent Poland, 1918-1939*, ed. Antony Doransky, Published for the Institute of Polish Jewish Studies (London, Washington), 1994, 97.

¹⁶ Lamed Shapiro, “White Chalah,” in *A Treasury of Yiddish Stories*, ed. Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg (New York, 1965) 325-33.

¹⁷ See Orla-Bokowska, “*Shtetl* Communities,” 105. In the short story “Too Late” by Yiddish writer Abraham Reisin, *challah* is used as a symbol of cultural exchange. The peasant Antosh had mistakenly arrived at the *shtetl* market with green branches for sale “too late” for the festival of Succoth. To compensate for his loss of income, the generous townspeople ply him with food, particularly *challah*. The story ends with the grateful

The North American Market: an Economic Niche for “Jewish Bread”

In contrast to Europe, where Jewish-owned shops turned out a product that did not necessarily have the connotation of Jewishness, the Jewish bakeries in North America baked what was seen as a distinct product associated with an ethnic clientele. In Montreal the trade was divided into English, French and Jewish sectors and the idea of the ethnicity of bread was not confined to Jewish bread alone. Subsections of the trade had distinct structural and cultural characteristics. For example, a large proportion of the French Canadian and all of the Jewish establishments were handicraft shops. That these bakeries managed to maintain an economic niche in an environment dominated by the large industrial establishment was a remarkable achievement. In the next section we will look at the economic and social context in which the small Jewish bakeries operated.

Commercial baking was the product of urbanization, and required, for its growth, the conquest of home baking, a practice that persisted well into the twentieth century. We do not have figures for Canada, but we know that in the United States, it was only in 1930 that the majority of bread made in the United States was commercially produced.¹⁸ The second important development was the industrialization of the trade. At the beginning of the century, three quarters of all commercial bread in the country was sold over the counter. By the end of that period, the large industrial bakery monopolized 80% of the same market.¹⁹ This phenomenal change could be credited in part to a number of mechanical innovations that had been developed from the late nineteenth century onward. Mechanized mixers were available from about 1870, molding machines from 1895, rounding and proofing chambers from 1905,

Antosh swallowing a gulp of whiskey with a bite of *challah*. “Too Late” in *Yiddish Stories for Young People*, 2d ed., ed. Itche Goldberg (Kinderbuch: New York, 1987).

¹⁸ William G. Panscher, *Baking in America*, (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1956), 94.

¹⁹ Panscher, *Baking in America*, 175-181.

and wrapping machines from 1911.²⁰ In a “modern” shop, “the hand never touched the bread.”²¹ In 1930 only one quarter of all bread produced in the United States was sold over the bakeshop counter and 75% of it reached the customer via the local grocery or the chain store.²²

In Canada, mechanical mixers were widely introduced around 1900, and a general concentration of the baking trade followed suit between the years 1900-1915.²³ Between 1915 and 1929, the large flour mills intervened massively in the bread market, buying the majority of shares in many of the large and medium sized bakeries.²⁴ By 1931, the mill-owned bakeries gained as much as 93% of the market in cities where they produced bread.²⁵

In the course of the 1920's a merger movement in the American baking industry spearheaded by William B. Ward drew the fire of both organized labour and “independent” bakery owners, only to be ultimately blocked by the anti-trust laws of 1926.²⁶ The same decade was marked by price wars initiated by chain stores throughout Canada and the US in order to expand their small but significant share of the market. These stores often took a loss on bread production to secure customer loyalty, but independents held their own.²⁷ The perishability of bread and the difficulty of its transport over long distances could give an edge to the smaller retail firms. Having little or no distribution or advertising costs, they were able to produce at a lesser cost than the factory and to cash in on the public taste for fresh bread. As was (and still is) the case in France, the desire to buy bread at a known and trusted local bakery with “a good name” might have played a part, as did ethnic identification with the producer, or the product.

²⁰ Stuart Bruce Kaufman, *A Vision of Unity: The History of the Bakery and Confectionery Workers' International Union* (University of Illinois Press, 1986), 48 and 120.

²¹ The expression is that of O.C, a Montreal baker, in reference to the modern Richstone shop.

²² *Baking in America*, 141.

²³ Guy Martin, “L'industrie de la boulangerie dans la Province de Québec,” (M.A. thesis, Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales de Montréal, 1945), 93-4.

²⁴ Martin, “L'industrie de la boulangerie,” 99-100. Martin cites the post-war closure of European markets for Canadian wheat as an impetus for this development.

²⁵ This statistic is from 1929, as quoted in Department of Labour, Canada, *Combines Investigation Act, Investigation into an Alleged Combine in the Bread-baking Industry in Canada*, 5 February 1931.

²⁶ Panscher, *Baking in America*, 148-61.

²⁷ Panscher, *Baking in America*, p.160-1 and Martin, “L'Industrie de la Boulangerie,” 109.

For the small retail baker, “location was everything.” In Montreal, the small or medium entrepreneur operated within a diverse and expanding trade.

Montreal’s food and beverage industry steadily grew during the first three decades of the twentieth century, and the bakeries made up the largest category within the sector.²⁸ The best source of information we have about the role of the handicraft bakery in the city is a 1926 report published as part of an anti-trust inquiry. According to this survey Montreal had a total of 146 registered bakeries of varying sizes, from the gigantic plant producing tens of thousands of loaves daily, to the tiny establishment that produced a few hundred loaves a month.²⁹ There were five plants producing more than half a million pounds of bread monthly, nine between 100,000 and 500,000 pounds, 78 between 10,000 and 100,000 and 50 or more producing less than 10,000 a month. These figures are dreadfully imprecise, but they do permit us several conclusions. Firstly, the greatest share of the commercial bread supply in Montreal (probably over half) was produced in large factories that made up a small fraction of the establishments. A large share of the market (my estimate is 43%, based on these figures) went to half of the city’s bakeshops, medium, and medium -small bakeries, which had a workforce of about two to six bakers. Many of these at the lower end were likely to be family operations with no hired labour. The remaining establishments were likely to be operated by a single baker, or baker/vendor couple and produced for only a fraction of the market, though they were relatively numerous.

In Montreal a hierarchical division of the trade left the small and medium size production sectors to non-Anglos. The largest plants, including James Aird and A.L Strachan were operated by Anglo-Celts (in common parlance “the English bakeries”), though there were

²⁸ Brian Slack, Lourdes Meana, Martha Langford and Patricia Thornton, “Mapping the Changes: the Spatial Development of Industrial Montreal, 1861-1929,” *Urban History Review*, vol. XXII, no. 2 (May 1994), 105. As time progressed, the bakeries’ sectorial share of the food and beverage industry shrank, reflecting, according to the authors, a growing diversification of the food trade.

²⁹ Department of Labour, Canada, Combines Investigation Act 1923, *Inquiry into Alleged Combine in the Sale of Bread in the City of Montreal*, Department of the Registrar, 25 March 1926. I’ve done the conversion to loaves myself, based on the one and a half pound loaf. The registrar uses poundage.

a few sizeable French Canadian plants, such as Medard Paquette and Brosseau. French Canadian bakeries tended to be divided between a small number of long-established medium size firms and a plethora of very small shops which often lasted only a year or two (see table 1, Appendix One).³⁰ Sharing the small artisanal sector were Jewish, English, Greek and Italian bakery entrepreneurs, as well as the occasional Slav. By 1929 fourteen of the largest establishments came to be controlled by the three milling firms and their sales amounted to 54% of the bread market.³¹ It is likely that the small French-owned shops had their own reliable markets and did not compete with the factories. Because bread was sold in these establishments over the counter, relatively low distribution costs made it feasible for them to sell loaves at one cent below the going factory made rate, which was about 12 cents retail in 1925.³² Jewish bakeries in turn either matched this price, or sold slightly below it, in spite of the fact that higher wages and shorter hours prevailed here, in the only unionized sector of the industry.

French Canadian workers founded their own local of the Bakery and Confectionery Workers' International Union around 1903, but the small union was inactive during the period that we are studying. In 1919 a failed attempt had been made to unionize Montreal's non-Jewish bakery workers when three hundred and fifty bakers employed in seventy-five shops walked off the job, only to be replaced.³³

According to the 1926 survey, sixty percent of all bread sales were retail, over the counter transactions and the remainder was distributed mostly to grocery stores. Women commonly bought bread at local groceries or over the counter at the smallest bakeshops, but a

³⁰ One critic attributed French Canadians' inability to break into the big league to their unwillingness to entrust their capital to strangers and to form joint stock companies see Guy Martin, "L'industrie de la boulangerie," 96.

³¹ H. Larochelle, "Monographie d'une boulangerie" (M.A. thesis, Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales de Montréal 1942), 5.

³² *Inquiry into Alleged Combine in the Manufacturing and Sale of Bread in the City of Montreal, Department of Labour, Combines Investigation Act, 1926, 4.*

³³ *Labour Gazette, 1920, 288.*

great deal of bread was delivered by horse and wagon several times a week to the home.³⁴ One half of the bread sold in Montreal was sold unwrapped (in a paper bag), and as a rule, unsliced.³⁵

The Jewish Bakeries of Montreal

Nearly all the Jewish bakeries were located on St. Lawrence Boulevard, the main commercial artery of Jewish Montreal, or on adjacent streets in the “corridor.”³⁶ These businesses were relatively stable (especially in comparison to the volatile French Canadian small bakery sector), and about half of the establishments launched in the twenties and thirties lasted more than five years (see table 2, Appendix One). During the depression, however, many shops probably survived only thanks to a heavy reliance on unpaid family labour. Municipal evaluation rates for 1929 indicate a homogenous group, with only a few very small businesses, and no “factory” scale enterprises.³⁷ The bakeries owned by the Richstone family were somewhat exceptional. Seniority provided a distinct advantage (Schoel Richstone claimed to be Jewish Montreal’s first baker, a plausible claim, since he was established in the city sometime in the last decade of the nineteenth century). The sharing of resources between the several establishments owned by family members allowed for a flexibility typical of the chain stores bakeries of a later era. At the end of the period we are studying, the Richstones also distinguished themselves by opening the first fully mechanized Jewish-owned factory type

³⁴ The writer of the 1931 report (*Alleged Combine*) complained of the inefficiency involved in the duplication of the routes of drivers delivering for rival firms. Several drivers, he said could be seen on the same street in the course of a couple of hours. As for the method of delivery, as late as 1942, one economist recommended horse over the truck as the most efficient method of delivery. See Larochelle, “Monographie d’une boulangerie,” 43.

³⁵ One vendor recalled the popular outrage over the introduction of pre-sliced breads. Women apparently resented the fact that they could no longer squeeze-test their loaves for freshness. Mickey Berger, interview with the author, 6 November 2001.

³⁶ Notable exceptions were Diamond bakery, which served the Papineau outpost in the east, and Schoel Richstone, located on Sherbrooke Street in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce.

³⁷ Based on statistics appearing in *Entente sur la mise en valeur du Vieux-Montréal et du patrimoine Montréalaise: étude historique du patrimoine industriel de Montréal*, Phase I, vol. III: liste des établissements industriels à Montréal,” Geography Department, Concordia University, 62-5.

establishment, on the site of the Main Street store, on St. Lawrence near Rachel. With the exception of this store, opened in 1937, the method of production in the Jewish bakeries was “handicraft,” the sole machine used being the obligatory mixer. Until 1927, all the Jewish shops were unionized, a fact noted as exceptional by our 1926 investigator. These establishments were probably slightly larger than their Eastern European counterparts, with an average of 7-10 workers, organized in two or three shifts. They numbered 10 in 1920, 15 in 1930, and 20 in 1940 (see Appendix Three for an annotated list of Jewish bakeries).³⁸

Their products were identical to those available in Europe: rye and black bread, *challah*, and some “specialty” dark heavy round loaves popular among a Slavic clientele although with time some of the bakeries branched out to include Canadian products, such as pies and doughnuts. The bakeries were important sites of ethnicity, and according to Seidel’s 1939 study, even the most assimilated second generation immigrant Jews from Outremont traveled to the Main to buy their bread, compared to which “goyishe” bread was “tasteless.”³⁹ Ukrainian, Polish and Russian immigrants also bought their bread at these shops and as in Europe, bakers catered to their tastes.⁴⁰ As far as their Jewish clientele went, bakers came to understand that they were selling much more than loaves, but Jewishness itself.

Bread Advertising: the Politicization of the Crumb

Historians have argued that the Jewish immigrant community of Montreal developed a particularly strong communal identity because of the strength of ethnicity as an organizing principle in Quebec life. This theory would appear to be borne out in the bread trade, whose structure and discourse had a distinct ethnic character. Bread advertising also points to a

³⁸ As listed in *Lovell's Montreal Business Directory*.

³⁹ Judith Seidel, “The Social Adjustment,” 63.

⁴⁰ O.C. recalled peddling his dark, heavy loaves, called *khalutskah* in the C.N. yards, where Russian crews worked. O.C. Interview with the author, 12 March 2002.

common assumption that the bakeries were expected to be politically responsible by retaining their independence from the industrial giants, who, it was commonly thought, fixed the price of bread. When Jewish bakery owners vaunted their products as being union-made, therefore, they were operating within a wider discourse in which the act of bread buying was construed as an ethical gesture.

The ethnicity of bread was widely recognized amongst francophones, so much so that as late as 1947, economist Venant Pressault cautioned prospective entrepreneurs that being French Canadian alone could not guarantee an unlimited market, and that sound business practices were necessary as well.⁴¹ Presumably, the would-be bakery owner expected that a French Canadian clientele would patronize his establishment in preference to others. Perhaps he considered himself better able to produce the wheaten “pain des habitants,” or the loaf “bien cuit” (well baked), which, French Canadians complained, the English owned factories were unable to provide. Appealing to this popular identification with the French Canadian loaf, the Medard Paquette bakery advertised bread “baked exactly to your taste.” Boulangerie Baril’s “prime concern” was “to make a well-cooked loaf, hand made with the finest quality Ogilvy flour”, while the Durivage bread was “good because it is baked slowly.”⁴²

Bakeries attempted to cash in not only on ethnic culinary preferences, but also on a collective sense of belonging, even of national pride. They were seen as public institutions that were expected to reflect ethnic identity and to act in a socially responsible way to their clientele. In 1925, for instance, when three giant English bakeries merged to form a subsidiary of an American firm, there was considerable consternation in the English and the French presses, not unlike the hostile public reception that greeted the bread trust movement in the United States. The largest French firm advertised: “Le veritable pain de chez nous . . . fait pour les Canadiens, pour les Canadiens [qui] reste Canadien. La Boulangerie I. Caron ne fait pas partie du merger.”

⁴¹ Vincent Pressault, “L’industrie du pain” (M.A. thesis, Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales, 1947) 56.

⁴² *La Presse*, 11 April 1925, 7 January 1925, and 2 January 1934.

“Be patriotic” they urged, patronize us.”⁴³ Canada Bread announced in its ad that it was “not at all interested in the new bakery merger, but continues its policy of making and serving good bread to the public.”⁴⁴ while Medard Paquette vaunted its claim as “the oldest French Canadian Bakery,” “in the same family for forty years,” and “not part of the bread Merger.”⁴⁵

Jewish bakers advertised both the culinary qualities of their product and what can be termed its “social qualities.” In the first category, freshness (“baked three times a day” claimed Dominion Bakery)⁴⁶ and tastiness were emphasized. Price was often an advertising point, though one could expect more often to see claims for “strictly union bread” or “sanitary union conditions,” commodities valued at a premium amongst the working class clientele.

Bakers sometimes waxed more eloquent about their products. On the occasion of Rosh Hoshana (Jewish New Year) in 1925, Centre Bakery delivered the following homiletic ad:

Remember! Bread is the basis of human life. Without bread, one cannot exist. Jacob our Father begged for bread, when had the **Centre Bakery** existed in his time, with its fresh tasty bread, his problems would have been lighter, and the Jews would not have longed for Manna, since in our bread you find the qualities of: **sustenance, tastiness and richness.** And you will find it at your home, early in the morning. No need to gather it like Manna [emphasis from the original].⁴⁷

Although the ad is worth reproducing solely for its entertainment value, the treatment of the manna theme, closely associated in the Bible to Sabbath observance, is only one illustration of a certain pragmatism that allowed for the discarding by the bakeries of the Jewish week.⁴⁸ In addition, it shows that part of what gave the Jewish bakeries their ethnic character was the fact that the negotiation of “Jewish time” in North America was made tangible in this very visible

⁴³ I. Caron ads appearing in *La Presse*, 11 April 1925, p.18 and in *Le Nord de Montreal*, 1 July 1926, p. 6. Translated by the author.

⁴⁴ *La Presse*, 14 April 1925, 55. Translated by the author.

⁴⁵ *La Presse*, 11 April 1925, 22. Translated by the author.

⁴⁶ *Adler*, 15 January 1925, 3.

⁴⁷ *Adler*, September 1925.

⁴⁸ In the biblical account, a double portion of manna was divinely dispensed prior to the Sabbath, so that no one would need to violate the holy day by working to gather it (Genesis 16: 22-31 KJV). Centre’s daily delivery rendered the habitual pre-Sabbath double portion of bread obsolete. The “Jacob” reference is to the famine in Canaan that drove his sons to Egypt in search of grain (Genesis 42 KJV). The ad also illustrates the assumption that the Yiddish-speaking clientele had an easy familiarity with biblical characters and narrative.

public space. “ You just couldn’t make a go of it” being closed on Saturday, said one baker, who abandoned an attempt at *shomer shabbes* (Sabbath observation) after a brief experiment. According to him, only one bakery in the city was closed on Saturday, the seven-day week being the general rule.

This practice flew in the face not only of religious law, but also of local rabbinical opinion. That Jews should buy bread that was baked on the Sabbath was a worse ethical violation than buying a loaf containing lard in it,⁴⁹ bemoaned Orthodox rabbi Yudel Rosenberg in 1921.⁵⁰ Rabbi Simon Glazer for his part refused to give kosher certification to a Toronto matzo-making firm where, it was reported, fresh hot bread could be bought on Saturday nights.⁵¹ These were, alas, voices crying in the wilderness, but they do indicate a downtown consensus about the moral economy of bread making, whereby the behavior of the producers was considered more important than the physical ingredients that went into the dough. For Rabbi Rosenberg, this meant a focus on Saturday closing (a concern that would have been irrelevant in Jewish Eastern Europe). But in the eyes of the many downtown Jews who had abandoned all but a few rudiments of religious (or in the case of more than a few radicals, were downright anti-religious) “kosher” was replaced by a secular equivalent. Only a **union-operated** bakery was morally “kosher.”

Before we look more closely at the culture of the bread trade in Jewish Montreal, we need to know: who are the men and women who peopled it? How did they enter the trade? Most of the material used in this section is from interviews of the descendants of owners and workers, and in most cases is corroborated by documentary evidence.

⁴⁹ Lard is the fat of the pig, an animal whose flesh is forbidden by rabbinical law.

⁵⁰ See his notice to that effect in the *Adler*, 13 May 1921. Rosenberg also wrote an amusing diatribe against Saturday baking, in the form of a pastiche on the popular Passover song, *Dayeinu* in his *A brivele fun di zise mama Shabbes Malkese* (A letter from the Sabbath Queen), Montreal, 1923-4 (5684), 12-5.

⁵¹ See “ A Declaration Concerning Toronto Matzo to my Congregations in Montreal and Quebec,” Glazer 269 collection, Box 2, folder 2/7, American Jewish Archives cited in Ira Robinson, *Rabbis and their Community*, taped lecture no. 3, 13 November 2000, Jewish Public Library, Montreal.

The evidence suggests that bakery workers and owners sometimes shared common social origins and aspirations, as well as the value of mutual aid. At the same time, a great deal of effort was invested in creating a separate culture for employees, one which emphasized egalitarianism and solidarity with other workers, as well as street militancy. This put them at odds with the value of the entrepreneurial family, the economic basis of the established Jewish bakeries of the inter-war period.

Bakery owners - a collective portrait

As was sometimes the case in Eastern Europe, the decision to open a shop was not that of an artisan seeking independence, but that of an entrepreneur looking for a reliable business. The men that founded Levine Brothers' were drivers, not bakers. The same was true of Benny Dankner, the founder of Centre Bakery. Benny Rusk had no prior baking expertise, and he debated whether to open a butcher shop or a bakery before he and his wife Sarah established S. Richstone Ltd. with the help of Sarah's father Schoel Richstone, the senior Jewish baker in Montreal.⁵²

The career of Benny Dankner gives us a sense of what motivated early entrepreneurs, their family and business strategies, and the obstacles they faced. He was the son of Polish entrepreneurs who traded in flour and liquor. Upon arrival in Montreal, he worked as a baker for a *landsmann* whom he had known in Europe, but finding no prospect for advancement, he hired out as a driver to Schoel Richstone. Together with Richstone he bought out a bakery situated in a small lane near Dorchester avenue (a venture which was apparently short-lived). Upon his marriage to Rose Kaufman in 1910, he opened his own establishment, but a bad bout of appendicitis forced him to give up the business, and he returned as a bread driver to Richstone's. After a few years he was able to save enough money to buy a building on St. Lawrence and Cuthbert, where he installed an

⁵² Elsa Tooberman, interview with the author, 29 October 2001.

oven and set up shop. Benny, Rose, and their four children lived above the bakery. Rose worked out front, in the shop, coordinating sales and production. Like her husband, she worked irregular hours, though she was always available to the children in the evenings. Dankner's two daughters worked briefly in the shop, while his two sons worked as bakers once they graduated from public school. None of the family drew wages, but contributed to the common pot from which all drew for their needs. The bakery was probably slightly larger than the average union shop of the 1930s, employing a daytime shift of about four bakers (who worked from six o'clock in the morning until two o'clock in the afternoon) and a staggered night-time shift of the same number.⁵³ In its basic structure and in its reliance on the family as the basis of its business organization, there was a fair degree of correspondence with the Leman bakery in Poland, which we have looked at above.

Montreal's Jewish bakery owners cooperated fairly closely and they met regularly to agree on prices and to discuss other issues of shared interest.⁵⁴ A baker who strayed from the pack could see fairly drastic common action taken against him, as in the case of Nathan Dorfman. Bakery owners offered to buy out this notorious "price cutter," but when this tactic didn't work, they performed a *mitzvah* (good deed) at his expense. They raised the capital to help Anna Dershinsky (whose baker husband had been recently confined to a sanatorium with tuberculosis) to set up business on her own: next door to Dorfman.⁵⁵

One of the areas of common concern for bakery owners was, of course, relations with the Jewish bakers' union, local 115 of the Bakery and Confectionery Workers' International Union. As we have mentioned above, during labour disputes owners published joint public declarations in the *Adler* defending their position. On the one hand, group interests could clash violently, when open warfare flared up. During a strike in 1912, for example, three bakery owners were assaulted on separate occasions by groups of workers. Owners resented the loss of managerial prerogatives

⁵³ O.C., interview with the author, 12 March 2002.

⁵⁴ O.C., interview with the author, 12 March 2002.

⁵⁵ O.C., interview with the author, 12 March 2002.

when they were required to hire whomever the union sent to them, including elderly or otherwise “unproductive” workers. They undoubtedly felt that there was little room for them to maneuver, given the opprobrium of their clientele towards “scabs” and “scab shops.”

Their sense of an opposition of interests in relation to their workers, however, had its ambiguities, since the ideology of worker solidarity and mutual aid was part of a shared culture. Benny Dankner, for instance, bewailed the fact that the union obliged him to hire elderly bakers. But faced with the question from his son as to why these men need work at all, Benny answered indignantly, “just wait until you’re old. You’ll see.” And the bakery owner who complained of having to put up with coal spilled in the flour accepted this as understandable, even normal, behavior. The fact that some owners had moved from the ranks of drivers and had been part of the union (of bakers and drivers) probably made some more sympathetic to the workers’ point of view.⁵⁶ The names given to establishments that were set up by partnerships of three or more are suggestive. The designations of Union bakery, Cooperative Union Bakery, the Workers’ Cooperative bakery, Workmen’s Bakery, United Workers’ Bakery and People’s Bakery no doubt indicated not only the recognition of a popular vogue of collectivism, but a degree of identification with it.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ In order to measure the difference in class consciousness that separated workers and owners, it would be useful to be able to say how many workers moved from the status of worker to owner, or back to worker. D. Bayliss was briefly a partner in the Cooperative Workers’ Bakery in 1924, along with Israel Josephson (listed as a union member in 1934). One newspaper account names Bayliss as a union representative in 1928, and he reappeared as the founder of the St. Louis Bakery in 1931. In the interval, he was listed as a partner in the Cooperative Workers’ Bakery. Aaron Kunigis and Sam Greenstein were both very briefly in business before returning to the status of worker. Kunigis operated his own bakery in the early thirties, while his wife and family were running the family bakery in Vilkomer. Greenstein was a partner in the National Bakery, which was in business between 1929 to 1931. See *Raisons Sociales* file for National Bakery. Though we do not have the data to make solid conclusions, it seems a safe bet to say that amongst bakery workers (as opposed to drivers), there was little social mobility until the very end of the period we are studying.

⁵⁷ Names of these establishments come from the *Raisons Sociales* files (containing business listings for Montreal) of the Archives Nationales du Québec.

Bakery Workers and their Families

I interviewed the children of six male bakery workers who came from Poland, Romania, and Lithuania and who arrived in Canada between 1903 and the early 1930s. Three bakers came from medium size towns, and three from large cities. All six had primary education, and at least two went on to gymnasium. Three of the men entered the trade at about thirteen years old and one of the latter was forced to support his family upon the early death of his father. Two became bakers only after arriving in Canada and two married women from baking families while still in Europe. Bakery worker Joseph Nozetz of Warsaw married the daughter of a prominent Warsaw bakery owner and emigrated to Canada alone before sending for his wife. The couple was among the most active and articulate in union affairs in the thirties. In 1939 they made a smooth transition from trustee for the union and chairwoman of the Bakery Women's Council respectively, to owner and manageress of a successful family bakery, demonstrating that union activism could serve as an outlet for the same kind of skills and energy required to run a business.⁵⁸

Aaron Kunigis also married into the business, trading a rewarding but insecure living as an actor for that of the artiste of the trade, cake baker.⁵⁹ Why did some men choose what was a fairly low status job after emigrating? For some, it was undoubtedly a matter of chance connections with a *landsman* or a relative, but the trade did offer several advantages over the better-paid clothing work. There was a shorter apprenticeship period, ease of entry, and what was crucial, especially for those arriving during the depression, steady work without the long lay-off periods of the clothing trade.

⁵⁸ Toby Klein, interview with the author, 8 March 2001.

⁵⁹ David Kunigis, interview with the author, 6 April 2001.

At least two of the men were Workmen's Circle members though this low number does not necessarily indicate a lack of interest. Group affiliations must have been difficult for the many bakers who worked evening shifts. Religiosity ranged from the fairly secular families, who attended synagogue on high holidays only, to the fairly observant, who attended weekly. The number of children in the family ranged from two to four. Three of the families' children attended local Protestant schools, and three families sent their children to the Yiddishist schools. Many of the men took a keen interest in Yiddish culture: of our small sample, two had worked in the theatre, and another worker (not from this sample) was a poet well known in local circles.

The work environment was a piece of Old World, with Yiddish, Polish and Russian all being spoken in the workplace. Up to about one third of the workforce was Slavic and the Ukrainians were the cake bakers par excellence. Nevertheless the environment was one in which non-Jews were assimilated into a Yiddish culture of the *shtetl*. Bakery workers knew each other by Yiddish nicknames, like "Moishe the Turk." Because of the work-sharing policy of the union, they moved around a lot, often working in several establishments in the course of one week. This accounts for the fact that owners commonly knew all the union members, and they in turn were familiar with most bakery owners.

In their off-hours, workers gathered in their own informal club, the "Bakers' Café," on St. Lawrence a block north of the St. Lawrence bakery, where they played cards and talked.⁶⁰ The café was a men's world which complemented the male comradery of the workplace.

Wives of bakers, on the other hand, contributed to the class culture of the bakeries in their capacity as mandatory participants in labour disputes, especially pickets. They contributed to a working class alternative form of solidarity to that of the entrepreneurial family, where domestic

⁶⁰ This is where young David Kunigis, son of a cake-maker, found them when he took up a collection for the Loyalists in Spain. See David Kunigis, interview with the author, 6 April 2001. He had been allowed to deliver his appeal, on condition that he did so in Yiddish. Another gathering place (and apparently the launching site of many a courtship) was the home of union secretary Abe Sufferin, where union members paid their dues, according to Ruth Segal, who was interviewed by the author in February 2001.

and work lives of family members were intertwined on a daily basis.⁶¹ Wives of bakery workers did not have this option, and they devoted themselves almost exclusively to child rearing and in some cases volunteer work in *Hadassah* (a women's group that raised funds for social welfare causes in Israel), or other women's organizations. Children could also be enthusiastic recruits to the cause during strikes and campaigns to promote the union label. David Kunigis recalled expounding the virtues of the label in his classroom, and young Nathan Kalichman was commissioned as a spy, following the bread wagons of a "scab" shop to determine who was buying from them.⁶²

Female vendors on the other hand, were generally excluded from this culture of militancy.⁶³ They worked in shifts between seven or eight o'clock in the morning and midnight, the usual opening hours of the bakeries and were paid around half the wages of their unskilled male counterparts, the bakery labourers known as "helpers."⁶⁴ The "girls", as they were called, often worked in the front with the mistress of the establishment. Even when alone in the shop front, they were under constant surveillance from a bakery family member who watched for pilfering or dipping into the till.⁶⁵ In general, there was little contact between "back" and "front," and these women were never considered as candidates for unionization, though as we have seen, in the early days the drivers, who also did not "produce," were union members.⁶⁶

⁶¹ For an excellent treatment of the solidarity of the entrepreneurial family, see Sylvie Taschereau, "Les petits commerçants de l'alimentation et les milieux populaires Montréalais, 1920-1940," (Ph.D. diss., Université du Québec à Montréal, 1992), especially 340-1 and 236-40.

⁶² Nathan Kalichman, interview with the author, 14 March 2001.

⁶³ This is only partly true. If they were related to bakery owners, like the unfortunate Nora Altman, who received a head wound from a bakery worker's wife, they could take the brunt of the conflict during a strike. Steven Kaplan discusses the issue of bakery women and interpersonal relations with workers and customers in pre-industrial France in *The Bakers of Paris*, 93-102 and 321-36.

⁶⁴ These hours were similar to that of other small family run food establishments in Montreal. See Taschereau, "Les petits commerçants," 236.

⁶⁵ Ruth Segal remembered a confrontation with the baker's son, whom she reminded that it was a sin to spy on others. See Ruth Segal, interview with the author, February 2001.

⁶⁶ This was partly for strategic reasons, as experience in the United States had shown that the non-cooperation of bakery drivers could scuttle a strike or boycott.

Union Activity in Europe and North America: The *Bund* and the Bakery and Confectionery Workers' International Union

The ideology and the strategies of Jewish bakery workers were shaped by forty years of activism in both Europe and North America. Occupational stresses provided an agenda of issues to tackle: night work, broken sleep, and extended hours. The tactics that the union developed were appropriate to the immigrant neighbourhoods that produced the United States' first urban bakery workers. This was especially true of the co-operative and the union label, institutions supported by the strike and boycott. In the next section we will look at the work conditions of the bakery workers and their union traditions before proceeding to a close examination of the Jewish Montreal Bakers' local.

At the turn of the century, on both continents, the common perception of the bakery worker was that of a brutalized creature, working inhuman shifts in dark poorly ventilated cellars, often as long as eighteen hours, perpetually exhausted and cut off from social life. It was not possible for him to have a normal family life, not only because of his nocturnal schedule, but also due to the boarding-in system, without which, one owner claimed, the bakeries' provisions were not safe.⁶⁷ Wages were arbitrarily set, and partly paid in bread. In Russia in 1901, the *Bund* targeted this milieu, "paternalistic in the extreme," for education and organization. A general strike in several districts gained the main demands of the new union: a 12 hour day, an end to eating and sleeping in the bakeries, an increase in wages and in the amount of free bread distributed to workers, regular payment of wages and respectful treatment of workers. The strike was supported by funds collected from socialist organizations from New York, where Jewish bakers had been

⁶⁷ Kaufman, *Vision of Unity*, 8. Isaac Bashevis Singer's popular short story "Gimpel the Fool," is the story of a naive baker who is easily cuckolded by his wife, since he sleeps at the bakery, away from home, six nights a week. *Gimpel the Fool and other Stories*, trans. Saul Bellow (New York: Viking, 1953). For a Russian variation on the theme of the brutalized bakery worker, see Maxim Gorky's "Twenty-six and One" in *Malva and other Tales*, trans. from the Russian (New York: Collier, n.d.).

organizing since the 1880s, first under the auspices of the United Hebrew Trades, and then of the Bakery and Confectionery Workers' International Union.⁶⁸

The International was founded in 1886 by German Social Democrats and for many years it retained an explicitly Socialist orientation and affiliation. Although it eventually declared itself as having "strictly trade union aims" and joined the AFL, at its 1905 meeting it adopted a resolution that called for "the emancipation of the working class from wage-slavery as advocated through socialism."⁶⁹ The declaration of principles appearing in the bakers' 1936 Book of Rules is fairly typical of the contemporary Social Reform rhetoric.

The conflict through which we have to go with organized power of capital leads us to recognize that all Trade Unions must form one great, powerful body, where the solidarity of the interest of labor is proclaimed, and where the workers mutually assist each other. . . . Arrayed against the power of capital and its millions stands the power of the organized workers, self-reliant and conscious that they possess the power with which to protect themselves and defeat their enemies. . . . The organized workers . . . will establish a state of affairs under which every one will enjoy the fruit of their labour.⁷⁰

Given the large number of immigrants in the industry, the International was organized in German, Bohemian, "Hebrew," Irish, Polish, and other ethnic branches, all supported by their various community organizations. Locals were given a fair measure of autonomy, including the option of establishing sick and death benefit funds.⁷¹ They used tactics that heightened consumer awareness and played up working class solidarity. Especially in the immigrant enclaves (including Bohemian and German areas of settlement, where it was used from the 1880s onward),⁷² the boycott was favored over the strike. It was cheaper and more likely to be successful here, where

⁶⁸ Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale*, 89-90.

⁶⁹ Kaufman, *A Vision of Unity*, 57.

⁷⁰ *Book of Laws, Bakery and Confectionery Workers' International Union, 1936-1941*, 3-4, Series VII, Box I, Archives of the Bakery and Confectionery and Workers' International Union, University of Maryland.

⁷¹ Paul Brenner offers the plausible theory that the common culture and language shared by union founders and that of the German speaking Jewish labour elite facilitated Jewish affiliation to the International. See Brenner, "The Formative Years," 40.

⁷² On the effectiveness of boycotts in ethnic areas, see Kaufman, *A Vision of Unity*, 49 and Michael A. Gordon, "The Labour Boycott in New York City, 1880-1886," *Labour History*, fall 1964: 186-215.

the owner's market and the producer's neighborhood were one and the same, allowing for the use of social ostracism against offenders.⁷³

The Jewish locals had room to develop their own particular traditions, including communal concertation and the work-sharing scheme thanks to the autonomy given to local branches. This freedom fit well with the system of ethnic preserves whereby each branch reserved to itself the right to produce its own "ethnic" product. In 1886, for instance, Bohemian strikers at the widow Landgraf shop in New York City protested the interference of a German local, on the grounds that the latter had no right to produce Bohemian bread.⁷⁴ In 1910 the Schultz Bread Company provoked the ire of Brooklyn Jewish local 87 when they began to manufacture kosher rye, and the union led a successful boycott campaign against them.⁷⁵

Boycotts went hand in hand with the use of the bread label, which was first introduced around 1885, and came into wide use by the beginning of the twentieth century. The label was a small stamp, imprinted with the Union crest and attesting that the bread was union-made. It adhered to the baked loaf and had to be torn off before eating (see Illustrations, figure 1). The labels were sold to accredited proprietors. Loyalty to the bread label became a mainstay of Jewish working class culture throughout the country, partly because it tapped into a visceral repugnance to eating non-kosher foods. In North America, where the traditional religious sphere was shrinking, tearing off the crust of bread to which the label adhered was an act of dedication to secular kashrut and devotion to working class values. The stamp became so popular in Brooklyn by 1893 that one Jewish employer, recognizing the competitive edge that the label gave him, insisted that his workers organize and then go on strike, so that he could institute his new label with a flourish!⁷⁶

⁷³ Kaufman, *A Vision of Unity*, 49.

⁷⁴ Gordon, "The Labour Boycott in New York City," 223-8.

⁷⁵ Kaufman, *A Vision of Unity*, 72-3.

⁷⁶ Brenner, "The Formative Years," 65-6.

Another tactic popular in ethnic areas was the establishment of the co-op bakery. In Chicago in 1902, eighty striking workers, working in three eight-hour shifts, set up a co-op that delivered to local grocers. After three months, the employers caved, agreeing to the bakers' demands, on the condition that the co-op be closed. The story was repeated with variations in a number of North American cities throughout the next two decades.⁷⁷

Aiming the Pitch at Women: The Bread Label and the Bakeshop Laws

Appealing to communal solidarity went hand in hand with the targeting of women, in recognition of their power as the buyers of the family loaf. The local label campaign in New York, for instance, was part of a wider pitch aimed specifically at housewives. The Women's International Union Label League made this appeal in *Bakers' Journal* in 1910.

Woman spends the major part of the family income in purchasing the daily necessities. . . . The wives, sisters and mothers of trade unionists constitute an irresistible army, expending an enormous sum of union-made wages, which judiciously spent, for union made and union labeled products, would be a tremendous force for good.⁷⁸

By tying family welfare to solidarity with the unionized, the writer sought to represent the purchasing of the union loaf as an opportunity for women to assert their identity as agents of the working class family (see Illustrations, fig.2). In addition to its use as a weapon of class war, the bread stamp could also be constructed as an instrument of social peace, as in the following excerpt from the International's organ, the *Bakers' Journal*.

The union label makes women the strongest, as well as the gentlest of God's creatures. . . . The union label is essentially an emblem of peace, both in suggestion and in practice. . . . We can forget about our enemies if we will always demand the union label and better ourselves. . . . [It] ensures stability in business, because the principles it stands for are sound, enduring and unchangeable.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ A few examples are cited in Kaufman, *A Vision of Unity*, 93 and Golden Anniversary Issue of the *Bakers' Journal*, 11 January 1936, 6, 9 and 11.

⁷⁸ *Bakers' Journal*, 9 July 1910.

⁷⁹ *Bakers' Journal*, 30 July 1927.

Label campaigns also served to mobilize bakers' wives during strikes and lockouts. In Los Angeles during 1926, for instance, a women's door-to-door campaign to promote the label was instrumental in achieving the closed shop.⁸⁰

The International also targeted female consumers, who were presumably responsible for the health of their families. in its campaign against the appalling sanitation conditions of the bakeries. The problems that we have seen in Russia were also widespread in the United States (and among the Jewish bakeries in Montreal, as one government official observed): workers eating and sleeping in workplaces which were poorly lit, ill-ventilated, damp and often rat-infested cellars.⁸¹ Advocates of reform warned of the danger to the public in eating bread produced under such conditions, and as a result, New York State adopted bakeshop laws that set sanitation standards as well as a maximum 10-hour day and a 60-hour week. Other states soon followed suit, although provisions of the laws regarding hours were subsequently struck down in court as violating freedom of contract.

The American Jewish Locals

Jewish immigrant bakers entered the International not long after their German and Hungarian counterparts, and were particularly active in the early century. In New York, the bread label owed its success in part to the growing trade union consciousness that was a by-product of organization drives in the Jewish-dominated garment industry. It benefited from the efforts of the United Hebrew Trades and the socialist paper the *Fervents*, which conducted consciousness raising campaigns to promote the label and which helped to coordinate support amongst other organizations during strikes.⁸² The Jewish bakers' use of the general strike seconded by the boycott

⁸⁰ *A Vision of Unity*, 93.

⁸¹ H. Sufferin, "But it does Move Forward," in the 35th *Jubilee Journal of the Montreal Bakers' Union*, local 115 (Montreal, 1938).

⁸² Brenner "The Formative Years," 57. and Kaufman, *A Vision of Unity*, 61-2.

proved to be successful where legislation had failed. In 1910, their position was so strong that they were able to impose a 9-hour workday without a strike, and in the following year they obtained a 2-dollar across-the-board raise in wages (something historian Paul Brenner adds, the German unions were unable to achieve, even after an 11-week strike).⁸³ By the mid-thirties the Jewish bakers formed a hefty and vocal contingent within the International, and they included amongst them separate locals for matzo makers and bagel bakers. Much of their energy, however, was spent on jurisdictional battles with locals formerly affiliated with the Amalgamated Food Workers, who they claimed had broken an agreement to leave them the field of "Jewish products," straying from their legitimate preserve of "German American products."

General organizer Jacob Goldstone attributed the success of the Jewish unions to a practice initiated in 1891 by the Hebrew locals of New York and subsequently adopted by other Jewish locals, the work-sharing scheme. By this system, a list of both "steady" and unemployed bakers was made to determine how much work each steady worker would have to give up in order to sustain the unemployed person's existence. Each steady worker then gave up a day or two of his work hours. According to Goldstone, this made for a spirit of solidarity that was the strength of the union.⁸⁴ Montreal local 115 used an even more egalitarian formula, sharing out all available work hours equally among all workers, so that should there be a shortage of hour, all workers could conceivably end up with a two or three-day work week.⁸⁵ One of the implications of this was that in protracted strikes like that of 1927-1929 which split the trade between open shops and union shops, all union members ended up with reduced hours when union members were locked out from the renegade shops. Even when many of the bakeries had settled, every unionized worker had a direct material stake in enforcing a contract in all the shops.

⁸³ At this point "the Jews [were] stronger, better paid and working fewer hours than any other nationality in New York City, a complete reversal of the situation less than 20 years earlier." Brenner "The Formative Years," 100.

⁸⁴ Brenner. "The Formative Years." 105.

⁸⁵ H. Hershman "Bread," 35th *Jubilee Journal of the Montreal Bakers' Union, local 115*, (Montreal, 1938).

The initial years of Montreal's local 115 of the Bakers' Union coincided with this flurry of activity on the part of the American Jewish branches of the International, and the local's founders benefited from the common traditions of the sector, with which they must have strongly identified. Montreal provided fertile ground for the flourishing of a Jewish working-class communal conscience that was intermittently invoked in support of union demands.

Making and Breaking Bread in Jewish Montreal - Conflicts of the Interwar Period

The Twenties: Bread at the Centre of Communal life

Social activism around the price of bread was a long-standing tradition in the immigrant community. Housewives considered themselves entitled to a "fair price" from Jewish bakers, and periodically vented their anger at the "baker's trust," which, they considered, robbed them of their right to an affordable food staple. The union in Montreal, perhaps even more than its American cousins, was dependant on its alliance with consumers, as it was on a general consensus among the latter that they were duty-bound to buy union bread only, produced "under union conditions." Communal and labour activists in turn used the battles around bread, the staple of the working family, to help crystallize their versions of working-class community. All three groups - women consumers, male bread producers, and activists - had a large stake in a shared moral economy. In the next section, we will look at the interplay of these concepts, and these players, in the bread conflicts of the twenties and thirties.

One of the most important actors was of course, the union of bakery workers. Romanian Social Democrat Abe Sufferin reported the existence of a Jewish local prior to 1903, the date of his own arrival in Canada. Shortly afterward, the International organizer William Horn was in town to organize a French local, and at the request of Sufferin, a few veterans were rallied to

reorganize a Jewish local. The union led intense strikes, then foundered for a few years, losing its charter in 1907.⁸⁶ Two years later local 115 of the International Union of Bakery and Confectionery Workers' International Union was founded on a much more solid footing, and press reports and court records from the strike of 1912 illustrate violent confrontations, where groups of strikers clashed with their employers and with scabs.⁸⁷ In 1925, union membership stood at 70, and the 1938 album includes photos of 56 men (see Illustrations, fig. 3). Of this number, approximately four fifths were Jewish, and the remainder was Slavic and ethnic German.⁸⁸ This small number of men had a widespread impact in the downtown community.

The Women's Boycott of 1925: Focus on a Just Price

The Jewish bread industry in Montreal had all the hallmarks of a communally recognized public institution. When the Sunday observance by-law threatened to interrupt bread orders before Yom Kippur, for instance, the Council of Rabbis met and secured the services of socialist alderman Joseph Schubert to intervene (successfully, as it turned out) on behalf of the community.⁸⁹ In this case, as in others, the bakeries were at the forefront of the struggle to define "Jewish time" in the public sphere. In one well-publicized case six bakers from Montreal's largest Jewish bakery, Richstones', were brought to municipal court for working on Sunday morning (in violation of the Sunday observance act). Owner Schoel Richstone defended himself on the ground that sourdough fermentation, the method by which rye bread was produced, required a longer fermentation period and thus necessitated a Sunday start for bread

⁸⁶ A. Sufferin, "Reminiscences in the History of Local 115," *35th Jubilee Journal*.

⁸⁷ National Archives of Canada (hereafter NAC). Department of Labour, RG 27, *Strike and Lockout Files*, vol. 229, no.3489, and Court of King's Bench. 1912, cases nos. 1234,1649,1816,1233,

⁸⁸This term refers to Germans living in Russia since the late eighteenth century. Their contemporaries called them "auslander." Most of these men probably joined the union after 1927, when non-Jews were hired as strike breakers.

⁸⁹*Adler*, 18 September 1931.

to be delivered on Monday. He brought bakers from the up-market English bakery, Dent and Harrison, to corroborate his case. The latter produced a detailed schedule of mixing and fermentation by which they produced a similar product, prompting the comment by the presiding judge. "It is a strange thing that Christian bakers in preparation for the manufacturing of bread do the same as Jewish bakers are accused of and there were no prosecutions against them."⁹⁰

In relation to Jewish time in the immigrant settlement, it should be remembered that although Jewish entrepreneurs pleaded that their religion required them to shut down for their own Sabbath on Saturday, and that giving up two business days would be excessive, a survey made in the late twenties showed that only 18 stores closed on Saturday, out of a potential 143 which were open the following day. Most Jewish-owned businesses in the corridor were in fact, open on Saturday.⁹¹ Richstones' was the only Sabbath-observant bakery that I know of, although it is not certain that this was the case for the entire period we are studying.

In the twenties, disputes involving the trade were carried out in the pages of the *Adler*, and each side published declarations addressed to Montreal's Jews. In the first such conflict we will look at, the parties were the Consumers' League, the Jewish Bakers of Montreal (i.e. bakery owners) and the bakery workers. The dispute demonstrates how the union actively cultivated the alliance between male bread producers and their female customers. It also shows the extent to which the immigrant community was ready to act collectively on its conviction of the responsibility of bakery owners to provide bread at a decent price.

In the inter-war period, bread formed an important part of the diet of the Montreal working class. A family of four typically consumed fifteen pounds of bread weekly (the equivalent of ten small loaves) and this single-most-costly edible absorbed 11% of the family

⁹⁰ Cited in David, *Jewish Congress Archival Record of 1936, with a report on Sabbath Rest* (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress, 1978), 10a. See also Richstone vs. Rex, Archives of the City of Montreal, Court of the Recorder, 1933, no. 1864.

⁹¹ Rome, *Jewish Congress Archival Record of 1936*, 16a.

food budget.⁹² At the end of 1924, Montreal was slowly recovering from a recession when Jewish bakers announced a three-cent raise in the price of bread, in order to offset an increase in the price of flour. On January 19, 1925, the Consumers' League called a mass meeting at Prince Arthur Hall. A packed gathering, convinced of the injustice of drastically raising the price of an essential during the current hard times, decided on a consumers' strike.⁹³ The following declaration was published in the *Adler* two days later.

The Consumers' League is an organization that appeals to the Montreal public, and especially to fellow women. [We are] a women's organization linked to all workers' organizations in the city. Our goal is to help our husbands in their struggle and if it is not possible to participate in the struggle against exploitation, we can still fight against the other "trusts" in everyday necessities like bread, milk, meat, etc. We housewives know how much blood and sweat goes into our husband's wages. We cannot allow ourselves to be robbed for daily necessities. . . . Rise up sisters! Help your men out of slavery! Help us win the bread strike until the Consumers' League announces that the strike is settled, even should you be offered cheaper bread. After the bread strike we will adopt other means to keep prices down everyday, and we will help keep them down.⁹⁴

The bakers responded by belittling the organization, "whose mandate is to constantly complain." "What is the clamour from the women called the Consumers' League?" they asked. It was impossible, they claimed, to sell at 10 cents, as the women demanded. "Don't they know that Jewish bread cost more to bake on account of more expensive ingredients and the greater cost of labour?" Citing the rise in the cost of flour from \$2.80 a bag to \$5.20, as well as the fact that Christian bakers had charged even more than they did, (11 cents to the Jewish 9 cents), they warned the Jewish public not to be misled "by those who would catch fish in muddy water."⁹⁵

But the housewives held fast, willing to pay as much as 13 cents a loaf for *goyishe* bread. The English and French presses had a field day, reporting on the antics of Jewish women who picketed the shops, tore the bread from customers' hands, breaking the loaves over their heads,

⁹² Department of Labour, Canada, "Typical Weekly Expenditure of a Family of Five Persons, Year 1921," cited in Terry Copp, *The Anatomy of Poverty: the Condition of the Working Class in Montreal, 1897-1929* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), Appendix A, 150-1.

⁹³ *Adler*, 21 January 1925.

⁹⁴ *Adler*, 21 January 1925, 2.

⁹⁵ *Adler*, 22 January 1925, 6.

and tossing them into the street, or back into the stores.⁹⁶ “All along the St. Lawrence district, and all over the city the Hebrew loaf is temporarily extinct” since (as the headline read) “Jewish housewives buy Christian bread to spite [their] own dealers.”⁹⁷ The press attention was likely drawn by the arrest of Rachel Gold, one of the picketers. She attacked Louis Tichtin as he walked onto the street with his fresh loaves purchased from Richstone’s, scratching his face, and pulling his hair, he claimed. He went to the nearby police station, followed by Gold, and two police officers agreed to follow him home to protect him. As he left the station and walked on St. Lawrence, Gold crossed the street to attack him again, this time to be arrested by the conscientious officers.⁹⁸

Adler Journalist Israel Rabinovitch had sympathy for the women embittered by high unemployment and hard times. It was understandable, he said, that they lashed out against the bakeries. But were their demands justified? He asked for clarification from those in the best position to offer an opinion, the Jewish union.⁹⁹ The latter, however, was “caught between two fires.” On the one hand they were sensitive to the expectations of the highly politicized consumers who demanded the cheaper loaf, and whose support was crucial to their own position. On the other hand their employers maintained that the current prices were necessary to maintain the high cost of Jewish labour. The union issued no declaration, but instead all 42 workers and 9 drivers voted with their feet and walked out in sympathy with the women on January 24, effectively shutting down the six shops involved in the dispute.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ For accounts of the picket, see “Jewish Housewives buy Christian Bread,” *Montreal Star*, 26 January 1925, “No Bread Yet in Jew Shops,” *Montreal Herald*, 27 January 1925 and “Jewish Bakers on Strike in Montreal,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 27 January 1925.

⁹⁷ “Jewish Housewives buy Christian Bread to Spite Own Dealers,” *Montreal Star*, 26 January 1925.

⁹⁸ January 1925 “Bread-Buyer was Attacked in Street,” *Montreal Gazette*, cited in Department of Labour, RG 27, Strike and Lockout Files, vol. 334, no. 5. Either community opinion or masculine pride must have worked in Gold’s favour, and her victim dropped all charges.

⁹⁹ *Adler*, 23 January 1925.

¹⁰⁰ The motivation of the men is somewhat unclear. The *Montreal Star* report of 26 January 1925 cited the lay-off of two bakers due to the falling off of business as the motivating factor, but union secretary Abe Sufferin in his report to the Department of Labour mentions only a sympathy strike with the housewives. The action came on the morrow of a meeting of all workers organizations at the *Arbeiter Ring*.

After the loss of three more days' business, the bakery owners were anxious to resolve the issue. A flurry of new statements appeared in the *Adler*. In one of two declarations, the bakery owners took aim at the radical activists. They dropped their condescending tone towards the Consumers' League, adopting instead a hardball pitch for Jewish solidarity. Local Jews, they argued:

should not put up with the boycott of Jewish bakers and workers which anti-semitism and hooliganism has wrought in Poland...in Poland anti-semitism has torn bread from the hands of the Jews, and that is the work of those who call themselves the Consumers' League. . . . Women hit and beat Jews for buying a bread for 11 cents, and send him [sic] to pay 13 and 14 cents at a Christian baker. This takes away the livelihood from Jewish workers, who cannot get work at Christian bakers, even at the inferior wages that Christians pay their workers... Montreal Jews do not want Montreal bakers and their workers to be pushed out of the bakeries.

The writer challenged the bakery workers and consumers to put their solidarity to the test "by all means, let them open a cooperative bakery shop and we will be happy to sell bread at the same prices that the coop sells at."¹⁰¹ A second statement was addressed to the Jewish public in general, claiming the right of bakers to make a living for their families, and expressing their desire not to disappoint their clientele, who "tore open their flour bags" desperate to eat Jewish bread. They appealed to the sympathy for their workers, who had already lost half a week's work. Finally, they called for a meeting of the *balebatim* to settle the issue, so they could continue to sell bread, "at least to those customers who understood their situation."¹⁰²

Rabinovitch sought to bring what he considered to be a rational tone to "the bread tumult in Montreal," abjuring both the "hysteria" and "shrieking" on the side of the women, and the ethnic discourse of the bakery owners. Jewish *balebatim* had no right, he said, to take advantage of a captive market which included many Jews who could not eat *goyishe* bread, for reasons of *Kashrut*, nor should the bakers cover up their misdemeanor by the fact that they were Jewish. Like the bakery owners he favoured arbitration, though the committee he called for would include three members of the Consumers' League, three owners, and three impartial

¹⁰¹ *Adler*, 27 January 1925, 7.

¹⁰² *Adler*, 27 January 1925, 5.

negotiators. Until then, bread should be sold, he suggested, at least provisionally, at eleven cents, in order to allow the bakeries to reopen.¹⁰³

The denouement was somewhat anti-climactic; the shops reopened selling the eleven-cent loaf, and an arbitration committee of five was appointed. As was typical of contemporary Women's groups, the Consumers' League was represented by two male negotiators.¹⁰⁴ The committee ruled that bread be sold at eleven cents until the old stock of flour was exhausted, and then rise to twelve cents, effective February 15th. Furthermore, should flour cost less in the future, bakers would have to lower their prices.¹⁰⁵ The judgement, with a full report, was published on the front page of the *Adler*, and as can be imagined, was well received by the bakery owners.

On the face of it, the Consumers' League had lost their battle, paying the very price that bakers had charged at the onset of the dispute. The point that they had gained, however, was the reaffirmation of the principle of a just price for bread, and the right to participate in the setting of it. They had also demonstrated their ability to shut down a public institution for four days. The union, for its part, emerged with its image intact as an ally of the people, an idea that was to prove essential in the days to come.

If we pause for a moment to take the wider angle, we can see by the rhetoric of the conflict in the English, French and Yiddish press that in Montreal there was a consensus concerning the ethnicity that adhered to bread itself. *The Montreal Star* reporter had spoken of the extinction of the "Hebrew loaf" and of its temporary replacement by "Christian" and "Greek" bread,¹⁰⁶ while bakery owners claimed to act in defense of "Jewish bread." This language meshes with the 1926 government report that recognized the distinction between the

¹⁰³ *Adler*, 27 January 1925, 1.

¹⁰⁴ They were Jacob Margolis and Meir Bernstein. J. Shafran and J. Latt represented the owners, and the impartial chair was Chaim Yitchak Lavout. *Adler*, 5 February 1925, 5.

¹⁰⁵ *Adler*, 4 February 1925.

¹⁰⁶ *Montreal Star*, 26 January 1925.

French, English, and Jewish bread trades. The ethnicity of bread clearly had a social dimension as well. As we have seen, the French press used national pride to sell the French Canadian loaf. The boycott by Jewish women was an exercise of their social right, the entitlement to just treatment at the hands of their co-ethnic master bakers, besides involving the more obvious appropriation of the physical product of bread itself.

In the next section we will look at another angle of the social contract that included master bakers, their employees, and consumers - the willingness of bread buyers to support union action by boycotting non-union bread. This loyalty to the label and to the ideas that it stood for was put to the test in the course of a protracted strike in the Jewish trade in Montreal between 1927-1929. The rhetoric of the union conflated ethnic solidarity and class cohesion, allowing the bakery workers to appeal to housewives as part of a collectivity of Jewish working families supported by the wages of their male breadwinners.

The Cooperative Bakery of 1927: Banking on Solidarity

Peace reigned within the Montreal Jewish bakery trade roughly from the end of the First World War until 1927, when a general strike ushered in the two year struggle to determine what kind of relationships would govern the workplace. The workers banked on the notion of the solidarity of the "*bafelkerung*" (the entire Jewish community), and the "*arbeiter massn*," the worker's masses. Appealing to the downtown Jewish public, they used the communal institutions of the cooperative bakery and the bread label to assert their power. The bakery bosses at first appealed to the same collectivity for support, but in the course of the conflict, some, like Richstone, appear to have abandoned their pose as communal institutions, openly adopting an individualist "business only" ethos toward work and public relations.

The dispute erupted on 29 April 1927, when bakery workers walked out two days before the current contract was up for renewal. Union demands included a \$4 per week raise for bakers working a typical 51-hour week. Greater changes, however, were requested for “helpers,” who cleaned and helped load the ovens. The union was asking for a reduction in their hours (which were then from 12 to 13 hours daily, 7 nights or days per week) to 10 hours per day. A minimum pay of \$25 was requested, up from the current \$16-20. The bakers were negotiating jointly with the drivers and peddlers. Drivers asked for a \$5 raise, while peddlers requested a 3 ½-cent commission on each bread sold. They jointly demanded union recognition and the institution of the 6-day work-week, with one bread per day to go to the bakery workers.¹⁰⁷ Dominion Bakery and Levines’ settled immediately, but four major firms held out, publishing their position in the *Adler*. Addressing the “Montreal Public,” they claimed that the monetary demands of the peddlers and drivers would make business impossible without raising the price of bread, and they ridiculed those clauses that apparently impinged on the managerial prerogatives proper to an entrepreneurial family. According to workers’ demands, they claimed, bosses could not work more than 8 hours per day, nor could they freely use their children’s labour. They could not have their helpers bake bread, and the labour of these latter was to be under strict union control. They could not deliver their own bread to a neighboring store, but were required to pay peddlers to do so.¹⁰⁸

What we see here is a clash of visions by which the trade was to be run. The union sought to establish a modern, rationalistic division of labour under union control, with a minimum of unpaid (i.e. family) labour involved. The bosses, however, saw union demands as undermining their freedom as the heads of entrepreneurial families.¹⁰⁹ This interpretation

¹⁰⁷ See, NAC, Department of Labour, RG 27 *Strike and Lockout Files*, vol. 338, no. 4 and *Adler*, 2 May 1927.

¹⁰⁸ *Adler*, 2 May 1927, p.2, and 9 May 1927, p.6.

¹⁰⁹ According to Daniel Bertaux and Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame the self-exploitation (meaning long hours and difficult shifts with little monetary compensation) of the bakery couple is what makes the French artisanal bakery possible (See Bertaux, Daniel and Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame’s “Artisanal Bakery in France: How it

explains what distinguished the hold-outs, Richstone's, Centre, Richman and Harris, from those who settled earlier. Apart from Richman, these were the long established bakers, who relied heavily on the labour of teenage or young adult children. Schoel Richstone had three sons and a daughter in the business, most of whom worked in his shop on St. Lawrence near Rachel street, and the teenage children of another hold-out. Nathan Dankner, worked regularly in the family bakery. The newer establishments, Levines' and Dominion, were less likely to be dependant on family labour. In addition, the recalcitrant owners would undoubtedly have preferred to be able to choose their own laborers, and to be free of the rotation work system used by the union.

Whatever their motivations, the reaction of the recalcitrant bosses was swift. They locked out the union members, and hired Slav and ethnic German workers to take up the slack. The owners set up a rival union, which received a charter from the Canadian Congress of Labour.¹¹⁰ They were then able to publicly announce that they sold bread "with the union label," and to publicize the wages that they paid (which were beyond what the union had demanded) 45,41 and 38 dollars for bakers!¹¹¹ To further complicate matters, Schoel Richstone decided to privatize his bread stamp, replacing the imprimatur of social correctness with a label bearing his own picture: the sign, he claimed, of good quality.

The union response was the opening of a cooperative bread shop, staffed by striking bakery workers.¹¹² The Montreal public was warned "no to be fooled by counterfeit labels," and urged to support the bakery workers and drivers by patronizing the bakery. The union published an appeal featuring the names and addresses of those establishments which had complied with union demands, and claimed that all other bakers sold non-union bread only, "having thrown

Lives and Why it Survives"). From the point of view of the Montreal entrepreneur of the twenties, the demand that they restrict their shift to eight hours may well have been seen as threatening the viability of their enterprises.

¹¹⁰ See Leo Bertrand to C. Bolton, October 28, 1927, NAC, Department of Labour, RG 27, *Strike and Lockout Files*, vol.338, no. 4 and *Bakers' Journal* 4 June 1927, 30 July 1927 and October 1 1927.

¹¹¹ *Adler*, 2 May 1927, 2.

¹¹² The shop was first located on Cadieux Street (soon to become de Bullion). It then moved to 4242 St. Lawrence, near Rachel.

out the Jewish union workers and hired Poles in their place.” “Eat union bread, and help us to win a just fight against slavery and low wages!”¹¹³ After the cooperative had been in existence for two months, the dual union lost its charter, and Richstones’ settled, announcing in the *Adler* that it now sold union bread.¹¹⁴ At the same time, the cooperative bakery was taken over by a coalition of workers’ organizations.

The impact of the co-op bakery must have been considerable, in either moral or economic terms, since the bakery bosses felt obliged to publicly refute the claims that the cooperative’s bread was the only kosher (i.e. union-made) bread to be found in the city. “What are they doing now? They have made themselves into bosses and want to take the livelihoods away from the few bakers who have laboured many years to be able to make a living. . . . Make yourselves into bosses, but do not tell the public that you are the kosher union (see Illustrations, fig.4).”¹¹⁵ The hold-out firms even announced that they were ready to give in to all the strikers’ demands, on the condition that the cooperative be closed.¹¹⁶

This, however, would be to anticipate our story. The strike continued until a few weeks before the fall high holidays in 1927, the busiest selling period of the year and the time traditionally chosen by the union for strikes and agitation. A stepped-up campaign worked in their favour so that the remaining bakeries settled, and the union won the main points of salary and hours. This turned out to be only a tactical truce on the part of the owners, since conditions deteriorated directly after the holiday, when the 12 to 14-hour day and the open shop once again became the rule. The conflict dragged for two more years with a split trade, as four firms settled in November of 1928.¹¹⁷ The union called off the strike in May 1929, but competition between

¹¹³ *Adler*, 17 May 1927, 6.

¹¹⁴ *La Presse*, 27 June 1927, and *Adler*, 26 June 1927. Richstone had double kashrut on his side - not only was his bread union made, but it was now advertised as not baked on Shabbes! This was probably a practical contingency, following an agreement based on a six-day workweek.

¹¹⁵ *Adler*, 5 June 1927.

¹¹⁶ *Adler*, 5 December 1927, 5.

¹¹⁷ NAC, Department of Labour RG 27, *Strike and Lockout Files*, vol.338, no. 4.

the “legitimate” bakers and the open shops caused a further deterioration in all the shops, and a new general strike was called on September 25 of that year.¹¹⁸ Disruptions at Dorfman’s, Harris’ and Rusk’s continued sporadically until the beginning of 1930.¹¹⁹

The strategy of the union throughout the two-year conflict was one of group concertation and community mobilization, as trade union activists and communal leaders worked together, with the knowledge that the general opprobrium that greeted a scab worked in their favour.¹²⁰ They benefited, as well, from the high visibility of the bread stamp, a symbol of an ethical pact to which working class Jews adhered as a matter of identity.

Other workers’ organizations were convened to conferences on a number of occasions to discuss the operation of the bakery and to plan general mobilization. A leaflet issued during the strike was endorsed by twelve such groups, including four clothing locals, four *Poale Tzion* (Labour Zionist) groups and the National Farband.¹²¹ In addition to the picketing of Jewish bakeries, street demonstrations were held, livened by the participation of Jewish communists. Protestors shouted “Down with scab bosses, long live the bakers’ union”¹²² and marched through the street with a banner that read “Down with 12 hours.”¹²³ The baker bosses distributed their own pamphlets, though, as can be expected, consequences were not equal for both sides. Six strikers’ wives and three members of the Women’s Labour League were arrested

¹¹⁸ For a general description of the two year conflict, see I. Rabinovitch’s “*Der Arbeiter Velt*” column in the *Adler*, 26 September 1929, 5.

¹¹⁹ For Sufferin’s brief reports on the conflicts, see *Bakers’ Journal* from September 1929 through January 1930.

¹²⁰ Israel Medresh, writing about the immigrant community of 1900-1920 has this to say about the treatment meted out to scabs: “a scab was treated with extreme contempt....No one would speak to a scab and if he did, he had to answer for it. When a scab came to Dufferin Park or to the mountain, he sat alone on a bench. Even his *landslayt* would avoid him. The wife of a scab was also made to feel the community’s scorn. When she entered the grocery store, the grocer did not reply to her ‘good morning.’ When she came to the butcher shop, the butcher pretended not to hear her say goodbye.” Israel Medresh, *Montreal of Yesterday: Jewish Life in Montreal 1900-1920*, trans. Vivian Felsen (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 2000), 70.

¹²¹ The National Farband was an broadly based association of Jewish workers whose goal was to put the ideals of labour zionism into practice in the workplace and in the community. Israel Medresh, *Tvishn Tvei Velt Milokhomes*, 35-6.

¹²² *(Toronto) Worker*, 6 August 1927.

¹²³ *Montreal Star*, 2 October 1929.

at a picket in September of 1929.¹²⁴ On another occasion the indignation of the *Adler* court reporter¹²⁵ was raised when a bakery boss' son-in-law rushed to the police station to report picketing outside the St. Lawrence and Marie-Anne establishment. The picketers were arrested, and it turned out that among them was the local poet-bakery worker A.S. Shkolnikov, who had probably penned the circular being distributed, a document of high literary quality according to the reporter.¹²⁶

Not all of the partisans in the conflict were content to use the persuasion of the pen, and violence erupted more than once. Striker's wife Rosa Katz was sentenced to ten days in prison for the assault on Nora Altman, daughter of master baker Sam Altman. According to Altman, a crowd of demonstrators had gathered outside her father's shop (where she worked), though the establishment was not involved in the current strike. She appealed to a nearby constable to disperse the crowd, and the latter went to the "communist hall" (probably Prince Arthur Hall, which housed a number of trade union and socialist organizations). While the constable left for reinforcements, Katz threatened her, saying that she would let no one out of the shop. As Altman stepped onto the street to escort out her frightened customer, Katz grabbed her by the head and struck her "with an object hidden in a newspaper."¹²⁷

In a similar incident, Gershon Weitzman was arrested for the assault of Ed Harris, son of a hold-out bakery owner. Weitzman and Harris traded epithets of "scab" and "striker" on the street and a scuffle broke out.¹²⁸ The end result was a bloody nose for Weitzman, and a

¹²⁴ (*Toronto Worker*, 12 October 1929.

¹²⁵ Probably Israel Medresh, a frequent contributor to the paper and a committed socialist.

¹²⁶ *Adler*, 24 May 1927. The circular was written in big red letters, so as to be easily read. It was an appeal to all Jewish workers in Montreal, in the name of humanity, of brotherhood and of Justice, not to eat non-union bread. All branches of the Workmens' Circles signed it.

¹²⁷ File no. 7976, 1929 Centre de Préarchivage, Palais de Justice. See also *Montreal Star*, 24 September 1929, *Adler*, 25 September 1929, 1 and 9 October 1929, 1.

¹²⁸ *Montreal Star*, 8 February 1928, *Adler* 8 February 1928, 1.

bitten finger for Harris. Witnesses at the trial were divided into two camps with opposing testimonies as to who had thrown the first punch, and the jury acquitted Weitzman.

The two incidents show how high passions rose, and how violence was perceived as a legitimate means to enforce collective sanctions. They also show the extent to which a non-partisan stance was impossible. Even a bakery that did not employ union men was considered, nonetheless, either pro or anti-strike. From the bakery workers' point of view, the working son or daughter of a master baker was a legitimate target if she or he did not act as a union member.¹²⁹

In the early fall of 1929, it looked as though workers' and women's militancy alone could not win the conflict, and a heavy handed appeal to the conscience of the community was in order. This period, coming before the high holidays, was traditionally a period of introspection and collective self-judgment. It was also the time when bread production was about to peak. "The production of bread, which is our most holy food, should not earn death at the hands of the baker boss...let your conscience be your guide," read one union appeal.¹³⁰ Rabinovitch, for his part, spoke both in his capacity as labour reporter and in his guise as communal spokesperson in the daily column "*Tug in Tug Aus*" (Day in, Day Out) of the *Adler*, using the imagery of peace. "It has been the feeling of the Jewish masses to eat honest, peaceful bread, bread such as neither the worker nor the bosses need to quarrel over," he wrote.¹³¹ "The *koiletschen*¹³² of the striking bakery shops are baked in the sorrows of the bakers' families, who are stricken with hunger in honour of the holiday, for the sole sake of not wanting to work 14

¹²⁹ ILGWU president David Dubinsky provided the best known precedent for a baker-child's defiance of a parent. He won the confidence of workers by participating in a strike against the family bakery. He was arrested with sixty other workers and released only after the payment of twenty-five rubles by his father. See the introduction to the Finding Aid of the ILGWU archives, Kheel Centre, School of Industrial and Labour Relations, Cornell University.

¹³⁰ *Adler*, 17 September 1929, 2.

¹³¹ *Adler*, 16 September 1929, 5.

¹³² *Koiletschen* are light, spiral-shaped holiday breads.

hours a day and 7 days a week. . . . The bakers' strike must be settled so that the holiday challah not be without savour for everyone who thinks of the hungry families of the bakers for whom there is no holiday festivity."¹³³ In his *Arbeiter Welt* (Workers' World) column, he delivered a partisan pitch.

In former days in workers' circles, not a crust of scab bread was to be found. Should such bread be found by a worker, or a friend of the workers, it had the same meaning as a label 'not kosher meat' would have for a pious Jew. . . . Should such a worker meet with someone who worked in the same shop as him, [the offender] would be ashamed to look people straight in the face. But such solidarity was a thing of the past, and it is up to the leaders and the activists in the trade union to make clear to the local Jewish working population that those who eat scab bread commit an offense (*bageyn an avleh*) with a peaceful conscience.¹³⁴

Rabinovitch's report of the demise of Jewish working class solidarity was apparently premature. The Ginger Ale Drivers' Union instituted a five dollar fine for eating scab bread, in addition to contributing twenty-five dollars to the bakers' fund.¹³⁵ Social opprobrium had clearly also taken its toll on the trade. Bakery owner Benny Dankner claimed that he had six thousand dollars in customer accounts that he was unable to collect.¹³⁶

At the end of a two and a half year long battle, however, energies were exhausted on all sides, and communal spokespeople called for an arbitrated settlement. The way in which the process unfolded undoubtedly reinforced the public perception of the trade as a kind of traditionalist remnant of the Old World. In Montreal, at least, this proved not to be a modern industrial trade like the clothing trade, where the involvement of government officials was useful in settling a conflict. The *Poale Zion* initiated two unsuccessful meetings, one of which was attended by a popular socialist alderman and two Jewish M.L.A.s.¹³⁷ The recalcitrant

¹³³ *Adler*, 3 October 1929, 1.

¹³⁴ *Adler*, 16 September 1929, 5.

¹³⁵ *Adler*, 26 September 1929, 1.

¹³⁶ *Montreal Star*, 2 October 1929. The same article reports that Dankner planned to discontinue the use of the union label, "as he did not consider the practice hygienic."

¹³⁷ They were Peter Bercovitch and Joseph Cohen. Member of Parliament S. W. Jacobs also attended. *Montreal Gazette*, 2 February 1928.

owners came to the meetings, but they expressed no intention of settling.¹³⁸ As a last resort, the union turned to the traditional arbiters and sources of moral authority, the rabbis. "The voice of public opinion (*duas hakohol*) has been ignored, and every call to the baker *balebatim* that they settle the dispute goes unanswered" wrote Rabinovitch. "Today the Rabbis' Council (*Va'ad ha Rabonim*) calls the bakery bosses to arbitration. Will they ignore this call too?"¹³⁹ The Rabbis and the *balebatim* met in the Community Council (*Va'ad Ha'lr*) office, but this attempt had no more success than its predecessors.

Jewish communists, who had been active and militant agitators and participants in the street demonstrations, were appalled both at the resort to arbitration (which they saw as tantamount to class betrayal, as well as a misguided tactic bound to fail) and the appeal to the Rabbis for help. "Shame on you!" read an article in the *Der Kamf*, the Yiddish communist organ. "The union is so afraid that they resort to asking for help from the Rabbis!"¹⁴⁰ In the writer's eyes, it was a scandal for any self-respecting labour militant to accord legitimacy to a religious authority. It is safe to hazard, however, that for some of the union leadership who were committed social democrats, this was indeed a last ditch attempt where more appropriate paths had failed. It was a necessary evil due only to the weakness of the union, which employers felt safe in ignoring with impunity. At the same time the appeal to the Rabbis' council was a recognition by the union leadership that the Jewish bakeries provided a service and a presence

¹³⁸ Senior baker owner Schoel Richstone argued that price cutting competition from a [non-union] rival (probably Dorfman's) made this impossible. The owners were represented by B. Dankner, Schoel Richstone and B. Harris at the first meeting. Employers from Rusks' and from Levines' were present at the second meeting. *Montreal Star*, 30 January 1928 and *Montreal Gazette*, 30 January and 2 February 1928.

¹³⁹ *Adler*, 3 October 1929, 1.

¹⁴⁰ *Der Kamf*, 4 October 1929.4. The *Kamf* coverage of the strike reveals the frustration of militant communists who had participated in the strike, partly under the auspices of the Women's Labour League (a communist initiated group). The paper denounced the "reactionary gangsters" who demoralized strikers by promoting "the wrong road" of arbitration, instead of the path of militant struggle. According to a *Kamf* reporter, the *Adler* (named as the *K'lal Yisroel* paper), the Hillman company union (ie: the Amalgamated) and the *Poale Tzion* used the conflict to discredit the communists, claiming that "the union has nothing to do with the communists." This was a false accusation, argued the writer, since a *Kamf* banquet was addressed in the name of the unions. See *Der Kamf*, 20 September 1929 and 4 October 1929.

strongly associated with communal life, and that it was not inappropriate to use traditional arbitrators to settle their conflicts with the bakery *balebatim*.

The failure of arbitration attempts by government representatives, by socialists, by nationalists, and finally by religious authorities shows the growing limitations of the sub-economy of the Jewish bread industry. Until this time, the working class Jewish community could effectively apply sanctions to enforce a fair price and union conditions, the moral prerequisites that were necessary in order to sell bread. With the increasing social and geographical dispersion of this immigrant community came the creation of enough space for a “purely business” ethos, whereby community approval was no longer a precious commodity.

The Union Disarmed: Conflicts of the Thirties

The labour conflicts of the depression took place in a climate of heightened class conflict, where the values of collectivism and mutual aid (what Gerald Tulchinsky calls “*khavershaft*”) clashed sharply with the individualist stance of entrepreneurs, many of whom were new “Uptowners.”¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, Jewish bakery union supporters continued to appeal to communal solidarity (in a socialist trope), in order to halt the deterioration of their wages and working conditions. In fact due to the general feeling in the International that in these tough economic times, strikes were unfeasible, bakery workers were even more dependent on the public’s willingness to boycott non-union bread. The Jewish Bakers’ union played the ethnic card to the hilt in an effort to consolidate the support of the downtown community, though they had by now successfully integrated a considerable number of non-Jews. They were fighting an uphill battle.

¹⁴¹ For Gerald Tulchinsky’s treatment of this subject in relation to the clothing industry, see *Branching Out*, 109-10.

“Why pay more for bread,” read one ad, “when flour is cheap, and labour is even cheaper?”¹⁴² Conditions in the shops deteriorated as the price of bread fell as low as 4 ½ cents for a one-and-one-half pound loaf, though many could not pay, even at that price.¹⁴³ One vendor recalled a “respectable” client’s order for a half loaf of yesterday’s bread (at half price) on credit, to be discreetly delivered to her door.¹⁴⁴ We have no figures for wages in the worst years of the depression, but a rough indicator is the difference between local I15 average weekly wages of 41 dollars in 1929, and 33 dollars in 1936.¹⁴⁵ Unemployment increased among union members, and the implementation of the work-sharing system meant that a baker often got only two days work per week. Like their neighbours in the clothing trade, some bakery workers’ families were dependent on relief to make ends meet.¹⁴⁶

Strike activity was greatly reduced in the International during the depression; the Montreal local, however, experienced double the average number of strikes and lockouts for IBCWU locals. Financial secretary and union founder Abraham Sufferin was on the General Executive Board of the International between 1929 and 1941, and it is thanks to this involvement that we have a record of the Montreal union’s activities in the early part of the decade.

The entry into the trade of the non-union workers during the conflict of 1927-1929 proved a major impediment to the maintenance of union conditions once wages began to fall, and an organizing campaign was in order. Sufferin reported a drive amongst the ununionized in

¹⁴² Advertisement for Centre Bakery, *Adler*, 6 March 1931 (Centre Bakery).

¹⁴³ Prices taken from *Adler* ad 6 September 1931. Department of Trade and Commerce Statistics from Montreal give higher figures, citing a drop from 5.3 to 8 cents per pound in January 1929, to 4.7 to 6.7 per pound in December 1930. See Department of Trade and Commerce, *Combines Investigation Act, Alleged Combine in the Manufacture of Bread in Canada*, 5 February 1931, 17.

¹⁴⁴ Elsa Tooberman, interview with the author, 29 October 2001.

¹⁴⁵ *Bakery and Confectionery Worker’s International Union Convention, 1936*, 18.

¹⁴⁶ Nathan Kalichman, interview with the author, 14 March 2001.

the Dorfman shop, starting in June of 1931, and proceeding amongst “great agitation ... with sandwich boards all around the bakery.”¹⁴⁷ He made several unheeded requests for an organizer, and Dorfman was able to lock out eight union members in June of the following year. As in previous campaigns, the union mobilized community groups around its cause, including sick and death benefit societies and local unions. An International organizer was finally dispatched, and reluctantly recommended permission for a general strike, which began in early November 1932.¹⁴⁸ Two months later, Sufferin reported Dorfman’s clientele was down by half and the strike won in the other shops.¹⁴⁹ The bakery owner finally “resigned” the struggle a year later, only to try pulling the rug from under the union’s feet by signing with a Canadian union. His bid was unsuccessful, and business was so affected by the conflict that he was ready to go out of business. The union was not ready to give up the fight, and in an unusual intervention, Sufferin himself recommended to the General Board that they be chastised for an illegal strike!¹⁵⁰ Dorfman’s bakery disappeared from directory listings that year, though we cannot say for certain whether it was this strike that put the establishment under.

This kind of fight to the death was not unusual in a labour climate where confrontation was the norm. All three major trade clothing trade unions led general strikes in Montreal between 1930 and 1934, and the latter year marked the highest incidence of strike activity in the

¹⁴⁷ *General Executive Board*, 1931-1935, 16 June 1931, 6, Bakery and Confectionery Workers’ International Union Archives, University of Maryland, Washington, D.C., Series VII, Box 3.

¹⁴⁸ *General Executive Board*, 74, 100, 120, 128, 132.

¹⁴⁹ *General Executive Board*, 148.

¹⁵⁰ *General Executive Board*, 234, 238. Sufferin’s suggested reprimand might have been an attempt to rein in the communist young bloods who were involved in the dispute at Dorfman’s. From the *Kamf* coverage, we learn that the communists threw themselves with vigor into the cause. The paper reported the appointment of a strike committee which conducted a campaign among local restaurants and groceries, paying “with enthusiasm” the 1 \$ tax for this purpose (see *Der Kamf*, 15 July 1932). As in 1929, communist activists were apparently marginalized. *Der Kamf* complained that the leaders of the union repulsed the aid offered by communist organizers (see *Der Kamf*, 7 April 1933). The newspaper denounced the same group, who three years previously “saved the membership from the Red Menace and sheltered under the wings of the Rabbis’ Council and other God-fearing elements” and who “were not cooperating with the committee of progressive elements.” It is not clear from the articles in *Der Kamf* whether members of the strike committee were also union members. There is at least some evidence, however, that there were communist activists, or their supporters, among the union membership. Bakery worker “comrade” Louis Klein (named also as a member

Canadian labour movement, with three or more “violent” strikes in Quebec. In August of 1934 the communist-led IUNTW took 1500 Montreal dressmakers (mostly women) into the street, where they faced mounted policemen. In this context bakery workers came to represent themselves as small players, desperately isolated in a battle of the titans. This appeal came from them, probably by the pen of baker bard A.S. Shkolnikov:

Appeal from the Jewish baker’s union, especially to Jewish workers and folks-massn, turn to us! Brother workers! The significance of the baker’s union is not what it used to be. The bakery union is trapped in a fiery volcano and without your immediate help we are in great danger of going under. . . . We cannot stand by while a bakery, found in the very centre of Jewish organization and for which a long time has been in union control, has in the last few years slipped away and become a nest of scabs.¹⁵¹

In the course of 1933 and 1934, five other bakeries were affected by strikes or lockouts, where the main issue of contention was the nine-hour night, and the right of the union to assign workers to the job.¹⁵² In December of the latter year, Sufferin asked for permission for more generalized action. This was denied, with the recommendation that the union target one shop at a time. The local decided to choose the larger firms, which the union had been targeting with very little success. According to the leadership of the union, its effectiveness was undermined by its confinement to the handicraft sector of the baking industry. The union’s position was becoming weaker in the larger Jewish establishments, which were now mechanizing. A strike was accordingly declared at the New Harris Bakery, where six union members were employed.¹⁵³ Such an action was probably impossible at Richstones’, which had been operating as an “open shop” since 1927. The union decided to organize a boycott instead,

of the Tenants’ League), for instance, achieved notoriety when he was assaulted by three butchers with iron bars during a picket to protest a rise in meat prices. *Der Kampf*, 24 November 1933.

¹⁵¹ “Appeal from the Jewish Bakers’ Union,” [n.d.], Bakers’ Union file, Trade Union Collection, Archives of the Jewish Public Library, Montreal.

¹⁵² The firms were Dankner’s, Guaranteed. St. Louis Bakery, Richstone’s, and Workman’s. See *Bakers’ Journal*, December 1932, September 1934, and *Adler*, 8 May 1933.

¹⁵³ *General Executive Board*, 323.

thinly disguised as a strike. The conflict erupted into a confrontation that pitted downtown against uptown, and made the union a cause celebre in the immigrant community.

With four branches including an uptown store in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (the latter was first listed in Lovell's in 1928), the Richstone family business exemplified a new way of doing business and of negotiating Jewishness in the ethnic sub-economy. The stores were able to enjoy the advantages of a chain type operation, as baked goods were frequently distributed between them. The Main Street bakery on St. Lawrence and Rachel was administered by Louis Richstone, baker and manager, with the help of two brothers, one of whom was an accountant (see Illustrations, fig. 5). As we have seen, Richstone's father Schoel Richstone had taken the radical step of abandoning the union label to substitute for it a stamp of his own. At the same time he had broken with the closed shop altogether, employing almost exclusively non-union men, many of whom were Slavs and ethnic Germans.

Picketing began on December 5, 1934, and continued into the next month. Bakery workers gathered around the store on St. Laurence and Rachel in groups of up to twelve with a banner that read "Richstone on Strike."¹⁵⁴ Strike permission had not been granted by the International, but in order to present the conflict as a bona fide strike, the union used as a pretext the dismissal of Aaron Schwartz, father of twelve children, and the brief employment of Percy Young, both union members. The pickets proceeded in what must have been the usual fashion. According to witnesses, they followed customers down the street, trying to convince them not to buy scab bread and occasionally cursing them (you should get choked on that bread!). A scuffle broke out between union president Chaim Papiernick and Richstone baker Peter Krupp, who claimed to have been hit on the head with a sign as a disincentive to his working as a scab. Both were arrested along with five other men, but according to police testimony, this was a minor incident that did not alter the basically peaceful nature of the picket.

¹⁵⁴ ANQ, Superior Court, case no. 142179, 1935. The picketing was very well documented in the Yiddish and English presses and left an ample paper trail in both the King's Bench and Superior Court.

The grass roots nature of the campaign was illustrated by the testimony of shopkeepers in the district. Customers approached Meyer Dorfman, who had a little dairy store supplied by Richstone, to ask him if he would buy elsewhere. According to another shop owner Anne Durasky, the men working for her “were against me buying from Richstone’s store; they told me that no scabs will be working at a union shop.”¹⁵⁵

Richstone responded by having the pickets arrested on three consecutive days during the week of December 17. Two days later 24 union members spent the day in court, where they were fingerprinted, photographed, and finally released on 25 dollars bail.¹⁵⁶ Such an action on the part of an owner was not unprecedented. Nevertheless, it sufficiently offended public sensibilities to warrant a war of words between Richstone and the union, again fought out in the pages of the *Adler*.

Richstone fired the first salvo, anticipating public disfavor. His argument appealed to the values of sound business practices, the honour of a good name and to his status as the pioneer baker in Montreal.

Our firm is the oldest bakery firm in Montreal. [Schoel Richstone] has maintained the good name of the firm thanks to honest and reputable business methods. For the past forty years [we] have consistently dealt fairly with our customers, and our employees and workmen. To the workers we have always paid the best wages compared to other bakeries. In relation to the latest developments between ourselves and the union, we can say that we were forced to take these particular measures to protect our business.¹⁵⁷

Richstone soon found himself forced to engage the bakery workers on their own terrain, as the union distributed leaflets that conflated the concept of solidarity with the Jewish ethnic community, and worker’s rights. The leaflet distributed on the street during the boycott and as an insert in the *Adler* read:

THE BREAD of Richstones’ bakery is besprinkled with tears of women and children!

¹⁵⁵ File no. 20976,1935, Centre de Préarchivage, Palais de Justice. The information given is from the records of preliminary testimony for the complaint of “intimidation” made by Schoel Richstone against 21 bakery workers.

¹⁵⁶ *Adler*, 20 December 1934.

¹⁵⁷ *Adler*, 18 December 1934.

**RICHSTONE'S BAKERY arrests 40 Jewish workers---breadwinners and providers of 40 poor workers families! Protest against the brutal inhuman treatment of S. Richstone and Son, proprietors of Richstone bakery, corner of Rachel and St. Lawrence blvd.
WHY HAS THE BAKER UNION DECLARED A STRIKE AGAINST RICHSTONE BAKERY?**

- 1- Because S. Richstone has thrown out of his bakery two Jewish bakery workers, men of large families.
- 2- Because S. Richstone refuses to employ Jewish Union workers.
- 3- Because S. Richstone pays a pitiable starvation wage to his workers.

WHAT DOES THE BAKER UNION DEMAND OF RICHSTONE BAKERY?

1-Recognition of the union.

2-That he employ Jewish workers and pay the same wages as other Jewish Bakers.

JEWISH WORKERS AND PEOPLE! In your hand lies the lot of 60 Jewish Workers' families; you alone can compel Richstone Bakery to accept our just humane demands.

BUY BREAD WITH THE UNION LABEL! ASK OF YOUR GROCERS AND YOUR BREAD DRIVERS

BREAD WITH THE UNION LABEL! HELP US WIN THIS JUST FIGHT!

Let your conscience be clean when you eat your bread. Eat no bread soaked in the blood and tears of Jewish women and children.¹⁵⁸

On December 19 and 20, as arrests were proceeding apace, Richstone published his defense, again in the form of two public declarations. Not only did he have the right, he said, to operate an open shop, as he had been doing for the past eight years, but he claimed to employ more Jewish workers than any other shop in Montreal! He even published a list of their names. The union's criticism was ill placed, he said, since half of the bakers' union's membership was non-Jewish.¹⁵⁹ So far the union had not responded directly, but now they refuted Richstone's claims. According to their account, Richstone had fired the two Jewish union members after "taking counsel," and replaced them with non-Jews. Furthermore, they said, his list named vendors, drivers and cake bakers, not bread bakers.¹⁶⁰ As we have seen, tradition established cake-baking as the legitimate preserve of the Slavs, and the fate of the vendors, according to the craft traditions of the union, was none of their affair. Nor was the allegiance of drivers an issue, since as of the 1927-1929 fiasco, they were not included in union negotiations. What was relevant was the ethnicity of

¹⁵⁸ Archives Nationales du Québec (hereafter ANQ), Superior Court, File no.142179, .. The leaflet appeared in the English translation reproduced above.

¹⁵⁹ *Adler*, 19 December 1934 and 20 December 1934.

¹⁶⁰ *Adler*, 21 December 1934.

bread-makers, and the union published their own counter-list of the firm's bread-makers, eight men - all Slavs.

Richstone did have a point. Why did the union make an ethnic pitch in their leaflet, when in fact, so many of their members were non-Jews? The most obvious answer is that as in the clothing industry, during times of labour disruption, owners sometimes hired those who were less likely to be union members (i.e. non-Jews). Given this discriminatory strategy of employers, labour and ethnic self defense could easily become conflated. Secondly, union spokesmen might understandably appeal to ethnic solidarity in recognition of the audience they addressed, the Jewish working collectivity.

It is important to remember that Jewish bakeries operated in a social climate where exclusionary consumer habits were promoted as part of a necessary and natural means of ethnic self-preservation. The "Achat Chez Nous" campaign first began in the mid-twenties and was stepped up during the depression years when hard times intensified ethnic rivalries in the sector of small enterprise. Nationalist organizations such as the Société St. Jean Baptiste urged French Canadian shoppers to "buy at our own," and in some instances Jewish grocers, petty merchants and clothing manufacturers were singled out as rivals whom one patronized at the risk of pushing French Canadians deeper into economic marginality. One writer in *Le Devoir* hinted that should French Canadian employers benefit from the increased patronage that was the goal of the movement, they would provide better salaries for their employees, unlike the usual practice of "foreigners," who offer starvation wages.¹⁶¹ The author offered a list of French Canadian clothing makers and their addresses.

A third explanation, however, is more closely related to the ideological traditions common to the bread trade. Non-Jewish workers within the union became Jews for the purpose of labor propaganda so that they could be placed in the centre of an image of

“community”gendered principally female. Male workers were then featured in their capacity as breadwinners for women and children. This was a concession to the fact that ultimately, the bread-buyers, Jewish women, would decide the outcome of the strike. The construction of the conflict as one in which communal solidarity was at stake allowed for the boycott of Richstone’s bread to be construed as an act of identification with Jewish community. This rhetoric was appropriate to the strategy of widespread community mobilization pursued by the union.

In accordance with this approach, the Meyer London Branch of Workman’s Circle hosted two conferences attended by 22 groups. A coalition was set up and a nine- person executive was appointed to continue the work.¹⁶² The appeal went out for the participation of women’s organizations and on December 30, a mass meeting was held in the People’s Kitchen on Mount Royal and St Lawrence, a locale appropriate for the mixed gender constituency that the union wished to reach.¹⁶³ Israel Rabinovitch took up the cause in a tone somewhat different to that of 1929. This time he appealed to the position of weakness from which the bakery workers fought, and the duty of all “ good union members” to rescue them by asserting their strength as a collectivity. The union suffered more than other unions from repression, he claimed, and from the cavalier attitude of the owners. Not out of pity, but out of duty, union leaders and activists left and right were bound to persuade the Jewish masses, and especially the wives of workers to buy only bread with the union label.¹⁶⁴

The arrest of picketing strikers did not stop the campaign, and in early February, Sufferin was able to report a falling off of about 50% in Richstone’s business.¹⁶⁵ Richstone then tried a

¹⁶¹ *Le Devoir*, 25 May 1935. For a brief discussion of “Achat Chez Nous,” see Pierre Anctil, *Le Devoir, Les Juifs et L’immigration* (Institut Québécois de Recherche sur la Culture, 1988), 85-7 and Tulchinsky, *Branching Out*, 173-6.

¹⁶² *Adler*, 24 December 1934, 1.

¹⁶³ The meeting was addressed by union spokesperson Chaim Papiernick (recently emigrated from Lodz), by aldermen Joseph Schubert and Michael Rubenstein (both of whom were Workmen’s Circle members), and by ACWA activist A. Velicovitch. See *Adler*, 28 December 1934.

¹⁶⁴ *Adler*, 24 December 1934.

¹⁶⁵ *Bakers’ Journal*, 2 March 1935.

tactic coming into vogue in the clothing industry; he served 38 union members with an injunction against the picketing of his store, a legal suit which carried with it a 5000 dollar fine for damages resulting from intimidation of his customers.¹⁶⁶ The ensuing trial was widely publicized in both the English and the Yiddish presses. The bakers argued on the basis that they had a legitimate grievance and had received police permission to picket. They were supported by police witnesses, who testified to the orderly nature of the picket (marred of course, only by the single incident between Papiernik and Krupp).

Manager Louis Richstone (an uptown resident) denied that he was bound in any way to the union. His sole contact with them he, claimed, was confined to having invited them in for a glass of *schnapps* and to warm themselves up on New Year's Eve.¹⁶⁷ He portrayed himself as the innocent victim of his own paternalism, claiming that he had supplied the father of many, Abraham Schwartz, with a copious supply of bread and cakes. The other dismissed union member, Percy Young, had been in his employ for only a few hours, having been hired only "as a favour."¹⁶⁸ Witnesses called up for the prosecution testified to being accosted, and to being dissuaded from patronizing the shop by various means (including being given the information that bread was cheaper elsewhere). The most damaging testimony came from baker Krupp, who came forward to tell of his assault. On April 16, Judge Desmarais ruled in favour of the plaintiff, stating that although it was not the province of the court to determine the legality of the picket itself, he considered that in this case it had not been peaceful.

¹⁶⁶ One informant told me that the idea for the injunction had come from Schoel Richstone's accountant son, who learned from a beleaguered clothing manufacture that "you could get an injunction to prevent them from calling you a scab shop." I could not verify the story, but the details given were credible, and it demonstrates if nothing else, the ongoing opprobrium attached to the term, and the extent to which manufacturers took this seriously. O.C., interview with the author, 12 March 2002.

¹⁶⁷ This remark was reported in the *Adler*, 8 March 1935.

¹⁶⁸ There is evidence that this was not an entirely ingenuous attitude, and that Richstone took his paternal obligations towards his workers seriously. His mother Toba apparently sewed the aprons for the workers and supplied them with food. As we have seen, Schoel Richstone was instrumental in helping to establish at least one former employee (Benny Dankner). Mickey Berger, interview with the author, 11 November 2001.

The worker's coalition sprung into action with great rapidity. They called a mass meeting for February 20 in Prince Arthur Hall to protest the injunction, to be addressed by the "big names" of the left in Montreal, who undoubtedly provided a decent evening's entertainment.¹⁶⁹

As far as we know, this was the end of picketing at Richstone's. The union filed an appeal, but the case dragged on until 1943, when the injunction was lifted, some months after the parties had come to an out-of court settlement.¹⁷⁰ Meanwhile, the bakers' wives took up the task of organizing. Their committee mobilized forty organizations for a conference in the union's defense.

In this chapter on the social conflicts in the Jewish bakeries of the inter-war period, we have seen how men whose diversity of life itineraries led to the Jewish bakeries in Montreal participated, along with immigrant housewives and activists of various strains, in creating a distinct commercial milieu. The Jewish bakeries provided a venue for the acting out of a reconstructed idea of Jewish working class solidarity, which drew on both European and North American sources of inspiration, in addition to being molded by the prevailing modes of constructing ethnicity in contemporary Montreal.

In the next section, we will focus on Jewish communal identity in transition, as this theme appears in the 35th *Jubilee Journal of Montreal Baker's Union, Local 115*, the document generated by the 1934-1935 conflict.

¹⁶⁹ The announced speakers were Labour Party's M. Armstrong, Chaim Papiernick of the baker's union, M. Shatan of the Workman's Circle, S. Blackshaw of the Young People's Socialist League, and Bernard Shane of the ILGWU. Bakery Union file, Trade Union Collection, Archives of the Jewish Public Library.

¹⁷⁰ ANQ, Superior Court, case no. 142179. 1935.

Chapter Four

The 35th Jubilee Journal of the Montreal Bakers' Union, Local 115

“Were one to study the 35 years history of the baker’s union,” wrote Israel Medresh, “one would see reflected a piece of the Jewish *folks-massn* (popular masses) in our community. . . . All workers will surely participate in the anniversary celebration.”¹ In May 1938 local 115 celebrated its 35th anniversary with style. At contract renewal time the union staged a public display by calling a general strike against 11 bakeries on St. Lawrence Street.² A week earlier they had held an anniversary banquet, to which the public was invited, at the newly built Workman’s Circle Centre. Over a hundred bakers, their families and friends attended. There they were entertained by the Kunigis trio, the teenage children of baker Aaron Kunigis. The children, recently emigrated from Lithuania, sang Yiddish and Russian songs.³

The souvenir album put out for the occasion, the *35th Jubilee Journal of the Montreal Bakers' Union*, had a dual purpose. The union was fighting the Richstone injunction and a five-thousand dollar civil suit was still in the courts. The *Journal* was in all likelihood a fundraiser to help pay legal costs, or at the very least, to cover the cost of the banquet. It had a second purpose: to create a picture of the tiny group of 54 immigrant men as encircled and supported by the entire community. This point is borne out by some of the apparent anomalies of the album. In both its literary nature and in the prominence given to women, it deviated from the formula of souvenir albums of Jewish working class organizations. Testimonials that appeared in the album were those of the most prominent secular communal organizers; anti-war poetry, as well as a contribution by the chairwoman of the Bakers’ Women’s Council were also included. The *Journal* gives us a good

¹ *35th Jubilee Journal of the Montreal Bakers' Union, Local 115* (Montreal, 1938).

² The strike was probably a symbolic affair, a public display of solidarity and street presence after a nine year abstinence from general strikes. Four bakeries signed after one half hour of picketing, and another three after five days. See *Toronto Clarion*, 4 May 1938 and *Adler*, 29 April 1938, and 2 May 1938.

³ David Kunigis, interview by the author, 26 April 2001.

dose of traditionalist language and imagery, somewhat unexpected in a document produced by a militant Jewish Trade Union.

On the other hand, the album includes a different perspective, and a language to go with it. There is both oscillation and juxtaposition of a series of oppositions: tradition and modernity, *shtetl* and "city", wholeness/domesticity and militant class war, in which the union appears in its role as a component of an ethnic-neutral internationalist workers' movement gendered male. To a degree, the duality of language is the legacy of the Jewish socialist rhetoric in general. On the one hand, organizations such as Workmen's Circle saw themselves as internationalists whose goal was the emancipation of the *arbeiter*. The Yiddish word is gendered male and has embedded in it the idea of the unity of the cross-ethnic working class. On the other hand, labour Zionists and other socialist activists working in the communal arena were given to using a discourse that emphasized the common interests and identity of the people, the "folk."⁴

This duality of discourse reflected not only the ambivalence of Jewish socialist ideology in general, but the complex perspective of the Jewish Bakers' Union. The organization was a member of a multi-ethnic, Social Democratic, North American trade union that expressed itself using the language of male workers' militancy.⁵ About twenty percent of its membership was non-Jewish. At first glance, an ethnic-neutral language that stressed modernity in addressing its *arbeiter* members would appear to be perfectly appropriate. Things were not so simple, however. The leaning of

⁴ The term *folk* had an egalitarian and democratic dimension, as well as its obvious ethnic aspect. On the other hand, the word "*folksmassn*," translated as folk-masses, or popular masses, was used to reconcile the two strands, in the sense of an inclusive unified class-nation. The term allowed for the inclusion of the petty tradesmen and of women. It had a collectivist, an ethnic, and a slippery class connotation. These two categories each corresponded with a type of organization. The *arbeiter* was associated with the trade unions, and with Workmen's Circle, the *folksmentsh* (a member of the *folksmassn*) with the mutual aid societies or *landsmanshaftien*, and of individual women acting in their capacity as working class consumers, or as dispensers of charity. When one wanted to be even more socially inclusive, and less focused on the working classes, the term *bafelkerung*, denoting the entire Jewish community, was used. In the context of Montreal of 1938, the use of the term *arbeiter* evoked a masculine modern industrial world, where women's presence was barely noticed. In contrast, "*folksmassn*" could bring to mind both the "*shtetl*" of the Old World, or its Montreal Jewish counterpart, the downtown immigrant community. For a brief discussion of the ideological associations of the terms, see Oiwa, "Tradition and Social Change," 172- 3, 274.

⁵ This is true despite the fact that since the 1920s, the International had a significant female membership concentrated in the mechanized cracker and biscuit factories.

union propagandists towards traditionalist language was due in part to the longstanding association of bread with nature, domesticity and communalism. Of greater significance, however, is the place of the union, and of its strategies, in immigrant life. The tiny Montreal Jewish local was dependent on the loyalty of the community to the union label, and its cause had to be identified with that of the *folksmassn* (a term used in socialist circles and commonly translated as “popular masses”). It had a strong stake in the sale not just of an ethnic product, but in the idea of the folk community itself. Hence the repeated allusions in the album to the local’s historical contribution to communal causes. For the same reason, when the union addressed the Jewish community in the strike leaflets we have already looked at, the presence of ten non-Jews in the union ranks was entirely glossed over, and the fiction of their membership in a folk-class maintained. Secondly, in recognition of the fact that women are the people that buy the bread, and who ultimately decide the union’s fate, they needed to be given strong voices in the journal. They were cast in the role as the peacemakers (a traditional role for women in many cultures). By buying union bread, they pursued class war by non-violent means, empowering themselves and their men, and restoring peace and wholeness to the community. The literary tone and content of the Yiddish section of the bilingual *Journal* helped to flesh out the credentials of the union as an institution in the centre of communal life. This accounts for the presence of the language of tradition (appropriate to the folk-class), which appeared juxtaposed to that of modernity (suited to the international working class) throughout the album.⁶

This chapter addresses the dualism of Jewish working class identity as expressed in these series of sometimes opposing, sometimes complementary polarities in the album. After looking briefly at the content of the journal, I will demonstrate the interplay of these concepts in the testimonials and in the poetry appearing in the album. I will go on to look at the links to the greater world displayed in the greetings and in the advertising sections and their bearing on communal

⁶ See Chaim Papiernick, “Unzere Problemén” (Our Problems) in *Jubilee Journal May 1938*. When the author wished to be inclusive, he acknowledged the help of both the workers (*arbeiter*) and the popular

identity. Finally, I will compare the images of community which appear in the album with the complex social realities within the Jewish labour movement, and within a rapidly assimilating community. For purpose of comparison I will be making occasional references to the Golden Anniversary Edition of the *Baker's Journal* (the organ of the Bakery and Confectionery Workers' International Union) printed to mark the 50th anniversary of the union in January 1936. It was both an exemplar and a source of material for the *Montreal Journal*.

In the main, the *Montreal Bakers' Union Jubilee Journal* conformed to the basic formula of souvenir albums of Jewish Montreal. In the style of these bilingual editions, it read from one side in Yiddish, and from the other in English. It had fifteen pages of Yiddish text, six pages of English text, and thirty-five pages of advertising and greetings, the latter from individuals, workers' organizations and small businesses. Two thirds of the advertising pages appeared in English. Testimonials that appeared in the album were from prominent secular communal organizers H. M. Caiserman, Harry Hershman, writer Israel Medresh, and union organizer/poet Miril Shatan (a member of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America). Between the two pages of testimonials was a two-page photo spread featuring the fifty-four members of the union, most of whom are encircled in the oval frame commonly used for ancestral portraits. In addition to a page by Franny Nozetz, chairwoman of the Bakers' Women's Council, the journal also featured an unusual amount of poetry, including anti-war poems by Ida Maza and Miril Shatan, as well as an ode to the Bakers' Wives by Esther Segal.

The images on the front cover of the album served to reflect the semi-rural roots of the immigrant community, and to present the Jewish baker as a personification of these origins. The central figure was a baker, standing in a field of grain. His feet were framed by a pair of baker's paddles which were crossed by a sickle. On each side of him was a bundle of sheaves. Rising above this bucolic scene was a cityscape, complete with skyscrapers and smokestacks. The baker brandished in his right hand a square loaf of bread (standard Canadian fare), and in his left hand a

organizations, as well as the *folks-massn*.

long round shaped bread, typical to the Eastern European world (see Illustrations, fig.6). By the act of bread making, the baker was pictured as reconciling both Old and New World, country and city. While his casting in the role of a link between the pastoral and the urban worlds is typical of the traditional symbolism of bread, it may have had particular reverberations for many a Jewish immigrant with semi-rural roots in the world of the *shtetl*. The design chosen for the border of the pages had a similar dualism, combining a modernistic and traditionalist look. Each page was framed by a simple and stark geometric checker-like pattern, but breaking the frame on the top centre was a bundle of sheaves. Opposite the bundle, on the bottom of the page, the frame was broken by the union label (see Illustrations, fig.8).

This provides a strong contrast to the unabashed modern look of the front cover of the Golden Anniversary edition of the *Bakers' Journal*, which had featured the wreathed figure of Progress, holding a huge union label in her hand (see Illustrations, fig. 7).⁷ Below her was a plush-looking multi-story building, presumably the headquarters of the International in Chicago. The cover of the Montreal Workmen's Circle commemorative album of 1932 also has a much more modern, urban look, featuring an industrial scene in which a virile worker sporting an iron mallet stands against an unbroken horizon of smoking industrial chimney-stacks.⁸ Clearly the pastoral visuals were essential to the self-image that the bakers' local wished to project to the community, in contrast to the examples readily available to them.

Testimonials by communal leaders provided the frame for the bakers' collective self-portrait. At the same time, they allowed for a wider perspective that gave the reader the key to the significance of the tiny union. In these contributions, the local was given importance as a *symbol* of idealism and fraternal solidarity which the other "Jewish" unions did not live up to. According to this reading, the bakers' union provided a remnant of the Old World model, which evoked the *kehvres* of the *shtetl*, in contrast to the fractionalized, bureaucratic organizations that the clothing

⁷ *Bakers' Journal and Deutsche-Amerikanische Baecker-Zeitung* (Chicago), 11 January 1936.

⁸ *Souvenir Album of the Meyer London Branch of the Workmen's Circle, 1907-1932*.

unions had become in the past two decades. Jewish bread was deliberately associated with the spirit of the *shtetl*.

We can see this in the small piece entitled simply “*Broit*”(Bread) by Harry Hershman (see Appendix Three). At the beginning of the century, Hershman launched his career as a community activist by running Montreal’s first anarchist bookshop, by co-founding the community’s first recorded library, and by distributing the New York Socialist newspaper the *Fervents*. He was also active in a variety of social causes, including the Russian Polish Hebrew Sick Benefit Association and the rescue of Ukrainian children orphaned during the Russian Civil War.⁹ How did the erstwhile anarchist and atheistic promote the union?

A warm feeling moves me at this particular moment, because the bakery workers are altogether different from other Jewish workers. I would say that they have about them something of the legacy of tradition, along with their craft (*milokhe*). When we think of the bakers, we recall the unbidden memories of Friday daybreak in the Old Country,¹⁰ as Mama lit the oven to bake the Shabbes challah. One truly felt the odour of freshly baked bread, and of the “*plampletzlech*” that Mama used to give to us to bring to *kheyder*, so that “*ben Yehud*” [only son] should not, God forbid, be hungry, and so that he should have the strength to study God’s Torah. Nearer and dearer to us is the bakery worker (I would say almost as close as Mama) because they give you bread, which is the basis of life.¹¹

Here Hershman touches on all the keynotes of Jewish immigrant nostalgia: the Yiddishe Mama, home, childhood in the *shtetl*, the peace of the Sabbath, and the primal memory of smell. Nor was he loath to invoke the supreme traditional value of Torah study (though to be sure, he must situate it in the past, as befits a good socialist). Sprinkled throughout the passage are Hebrew-Aramaic terms associated with tradition and with religion.¹² By using this passage as a prelude Hershman emphasized continuity. The contribution of the tiny union to Montreal’s Jewish

⁹ Paradoxically, like so many other radicals drawn to the cause of communal reconstruction, he came to speak for a community that was not exclusively radical, nor particularly anti-religious. For a discussion of this phenomenon, see David Roskies, “Yiddish in Montreal: the Utopian Experiment,” in Robinson, *An Everyday Miracle*, 22-38. Roskies argues that (often anti-religious) radicals found themselves in the anomalous positions as those who drew the boundaries of Jewish community, simply by virtue of their enthusiasm for the task of communal reconstruction.

¹⁰ On the subject of involuntary memories evoked by smell, and their primal nature, see Marcel Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann* (Gallimard, 1987), 46-7.

¹¹ H. Hershman, “*Broit*” (Bread), *35th Jubilee Journal*.

¹² Hebrew-Aramaic words (as opposed to words of Germanic or Slavic etymology) were normally associated with religious and ritual life. Where they had Germanic equivalents, the use of the Hebrew indicated a choice to emphasize the traditional aspect of the object denoted.

workers' community is spiritual, he said. It lies in its spirit of brotherhood, as exemplified by the work-sharing scheme, which conquers the modern evil of unemployment, where the other unions have failed. The implication to be drawn is that Old World values triumph, where the modern model of the "business union" has fallen short.

When one measures the importance of the various organizations according to the number of members they have, then it manifests as an essential factor on the Jewish worker's streets of our city. In Montreal, there are currently Jewish unions that number their members in the thousands, while the number of bakers grouped around the union has never exceeded two digits. But this is not what is most important; the moral strength of an organization does not lie in its numbers. More important is the human material that holds it together and when one encounters the human material of the bakers' union, one must admit that there is no other such organization of ours in our city where the feeling of workers' solidarity has elevated its members. In no other of our unions in the city is the kind of brotherhood that we find amongst the bakery workers. To be among them is to feel respect for the organization and for its leaders, and one is moved to promote it as a model for other organizations in our city. . . . The brotherly solidarity which prevails in the ranks of the bakers is simply that the members take care of one another in a truly brotherly manner, and the work that is available in the trade is distributed so that each union man gets his share of the hours, so that there are no idlers (*laydik gayers*).

Certainly, according to this system, the earnings of the average bakery worker are very small. When work is evenly divided amongst all, each worker gets few hours, and fewer hours mean smaller earnings. But the bakers are satisfied with their own system that they administered. Happy to share a bite of bread with their brothers as true sons of the word.

Hershman also cites the exemplary role of the union in contributing to communal causes.

The bakers union decided to compete with other organizations in our city in other domains. This is in the question of the response to the appeal of the need of others. No action initiated on the Jewish workers' street in Montreal has gone without the bakers contributing their share to the appeal. Committees that visited the union on behalf of those whom it gathered together were warmly received. Not amongst the bakers will you find the tension present, unfortunately, in other organizations. The donations that the union gives, in such cases, are given as a true gesture of brotherhood.

When we read this passage alongside the opening paragraph of "Bread," we can see how in Hershman's telling, the union has inherited the traditional mother's role as a giver of bread. The child who receives nourishment is now the urban commune itself, thanks to the bakers' adherence to the traditional duty of *tzadakah* (social justice through communal aid).¹³ The writer has tied a

¹³ I was unable to determine what these communal causes were, with the exception of the People's Kitchen. It seems likely however, that some bakery workers were members of the *Poale Tzion*, or else were closely associated with them. With reference to the decade before this study, Simon Belkin recorded the participation of the Bakers' Union in the project for a community library, and in Balfour declaration celebrations and agitation. See Simon Belkin, *Le mouvement ouvrier juif au Canada, 1904-1920*, trad. Pierre Anctil (Québec: Septentrion, 1999), 212, 255, 258

female gendered image of domesticity (the Old World Mama), to modern life in North America, where Jewish men, like the exemplary bakers, contributed to the making of community and restored wholeness to the immigrant experience of loss of home.

Another contributor, Hannaniah Meir Caiserman, had been involved in bread activism in 1913 and 1916.¹⁴ A long-time socialist and communal activist, he now spoke for the community in his capacity as secretary of the Canadian Jewish Congress. His testimony emphasized the spiritual qualities of the union put into practice by the work-sharing system, and implied a criticism of the clothing unions that dominated Jewish working class life.

The bakers' union is the most beautiful symbol of the entire organized workers' movement. . . . All unions which have existed for decades must use various propaganda means to sustain the solidarity of their membership, and rarely does it link them. The bakers' union is not predicated on a theoretical solidarity. It has taught the membership that solidarity means that the bakery worker shares work-time with the unemployed baker, so that they may all be able to earn.¹⁵

To some extent the implied criticism was unfair. It was easier to maintain a spirit of solidarity in such a small group of men, small enough to gather quite comfortably in the Bakers' café in their off hours, than amongst a multi-ethnic, mixed gender organization numbering in the thousands. The workplace was less fragmented than that of the complex clothing trade, and quarrels with, or alienation from other workers were likely less frequent. The bakers were spared the ravages of the civil war between socialist and communist that had affected virtually all Jewish working class organizations.¹⁶ There were, then, material and not just spiritual reasons that the bakers were unique. But all the same, Caiserman's comment showed that communal leaders valued this ideal of brotherhood. The union's institutionalization of the value of mutual aid demonstrated that the Old

¹⁴ In 1913 and in 1916, Caiserman had participated in successful protests against rises in the price of bread. His biography mentions an earlier involvement with the Union and he addressed a mass meeting at Champs-de-Mars, probably in 1912. See Bernard M. Figler and David Rome, *Hannaniah Caiserman, a Biography* (Montreal: Northern Printing and Lithography Co., 1962, 37,40).

¹⁵ H.M. Caiserman, "A Por Oifrichtike Verter Tzu der Gelegnheit fun 35 Yor fun der Montreal Beker Union" (A Few Sincere Words on the Occasion of 35 Years of the Montreal Bakers' Union), *35th Jubilee Journal*.

¹⁶ As we have seen, the union was not impervious to attempts by the communists to steer the group.

World spirit of *khavershaft* (brotherhood) could be embodied in a modern work-sharing system, one that pointed the way for other unions.¹⁷

The content of the testimonials served to establish the union as a significant presence “on the Jewish street,” in contrast to their apparent marginality both in terms of numbers and of economic clout. The credentials given by recognized communal leaders lend them credibility, as well as a collectivist “frame.”

Articles by union executives opened and closed the Yiddish section of the *Journal*. The most prominent contributor to the album was union founder and Financial Secretary Abraham Sufferin. Having arrived in 1903 from Romania, he was a polyglot who had mastered English sufficiently to be able to move freely in the anglophone world of the union bureaucracy.¹⁸ He wrote two pieces in the album, one in Yiddish and another in English. In the Yiddish version he used a traditionalist framework, and managed to finesse the class war activities of the union so that it appears to be, above all, the maker of a just peace (see Appendix Two). “I was blessed with the golden craft,” he wrote of his vocation as a baker. Continuing very much in the vein of a Yiddish storyteller, he related his first shabbes at his *balebos*’ (boss’) table as union secretary, where his boss greeted him with a grilling, in place of the customary Good Shabbes. “The shabbes dinner of the baleboste [mistress] was ruined . . . not a like a shabbes afternoon at all.¹⁹ The kiddish wine was watery, the meat bony, and the answer to my “good shabbes” was a sour one. . . . My boss was

¹⁷ Caiserman may have had in mind the contrast with his own experience in the degraded environment of the clothing workshop where he worked briefly upon his arrival in Canada at the beginning of the century. A co-worker responded to his cheery “Good Morning” with “Go choke!” M. Figler and David Rome, *Hannaniah Meir Caiserman*, 31. Gerald Tulchinsky interpreted the labour battles in the dressmaking industry in Montreal as a struggle between the two cultures of *khavershaft* (as espoused by workers) and that of the North American business ethic, which provided the rationale for employers’ rejection of union recognition. Tulchinsky, *Branching Out*, 110.

¹⁸ He also had a good command of German, which was probably useful to him in the early years of the union when many Executive Board members and organizers were German speaking.

¹⁹ One may safely presume that in accordance with the boarding-in system then prevalent in the trade, Sufferin dined regularly on Friday nights (his only night off) at his employer’s home. He was a great reader of Yiddish literature, and the way in which he told this anecdote recalls a motif used by Sholem Alecheim, that of the “ruined holiday,” where material life intervenes to disrupt the ritual framework of the holiday. For a discussion of this motif, see David Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing: The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling*,

a *frumer*, a pious Jew at home, but in the shop he did what he had to.”²⁰ According to religious tradition, Shabbes should be a time of peace, a weekly cease-fire where weekday hostilities are at least temporarily suspended, but Sufferin cast his employer in the role of a man who violated tradition by verbally attacking his guest on the Sabbath. His so-called piety was suspect because it did not translate into ethical behaviour with regard to his employees. As a union activist Sufferin might have been considered to be the natural candidate for the role of class warrior. Instead it is his employer who was made to appear to have broken the bonds of community and violated the sanctity of the day of peace. Sufferin has portrayed a rupture with the patriarchal old-world version of moral kashrut, revealed to be hypocrisy in the world of class conflict, and he has substituted a new moral economy based upon the solidarity of working Jews, without discarding the powerful symbols of community and of peace.

The next section of his narrative recounts the story of the foundation of the local. As Sufferin tells it, the event that created the union was less a general strike than a drama of transformation. The workers’ access to domestic independence was a key issue, since the boarding-in system was common in the trade. The bakers started out from the position of dependants, boarding with their employers and constantly at their whim. But the foundation of the union required a dramatic rupture with the paternal hearths, and the creation of a new community was sealed by the acts of eating and sleeping together.²¹ “We gathered around in our local, and came up with plans to make our strike a success. No one went home, not those with families, nor those who lived with their bosses. We ate and slept together at union headquarters until the strike achieved a great victory...the bosses had to recognize that the workers could sometimes be made to bend, but could never be broken.” Only then, said Sufferin, could they breathe a little more freely. With a

Cambridge (Harvard University Press, 1995). Personal information on Avrum Sufferin is from Ruth Segal’s interview by the author, February 2001.

²⁰ A. Sufferin, “35 Yor Beker Union in Montreal” (35 Years of the Bakers’ Union in Montreal), *35th Jubilee Journal*.

²¹ The theme of forging a new, collective identity through a dramatic rupture and a communal act (such as a pitched battle, a trip, or eating together) is a common theme in foundation myths of union locals. For a

keen sense of his audience, Sufferin kept his narrative immediate and rooted in domestic life of family, table and bed, even when telling the story of an industrial dispute. In this way he evoked the sensibility and the sensual life of the Montreal Jewish *folksmassn* and linked Jewish bread and the bakery workers to them.

This evocative function was also admirably fulfilled by the poetry in the *Journal*. The presence of the many poems in the book was due in part to the participation on the Jubilee committee of baker-bard A. S. Shkolnikov. He was married to Esther Segal, and was a friend of Ida Maza, both of whom contributed pieces to the album. There is a good chance that he was personally connected to H.M. Caiserman, who took a lively interest in Yiddish literature, and had befriended Shkolnikov's brother-in-law, J.I. Segal, popular worker-poet. But personal connections between the contributors explain only how they came to work together. It doesn't tell us why an emphasis on poetry was considered appropriate, and why so much of it was not specifically linked to bread at all, nor written by bread workers. The answer to this question is that the journal needed to project an image of the union encircled by a community that each potential consumer, and especially every woman, militant or not, could recognize and identify with. Maza's anti-war poem "Vi a Boim" (Like a Tree) for instance, with which the Yiddish section of the book opens, set the pastoral tone, and established a strong women's voice.²² "Roite Shniter" (Red Reapers) is even closer to the pastoral origins of bread itself. In this poem, War is a "reaper of sorrow," a "binder of stalks" whose "fields bloom red."²³ The anti-war poetry in the album also served to situate the reader in a familiar left-oriented community in which humanitarianism, pacifism, and radical ideologies were all linked. Miril Shatan's "Friling" (Spring), for example, bemoaned the "cities in ruins/the fields unplowed/seeded with pieces of hands and feet" and was set in the battlefields

contemporary example, see A. M.'s account of the Guelph strike in the *Silver Jubilee Souvenir Album of the Toronto Cloakmakers' Union (ILGWU)*, 1936.

²² Ida Maza, "Vi a Boim" (Like a Tree), *35th Jubilee Journal*.

²³ Ida Maza, "Roite Shniter" (Red Reapers), *35th Jubilee Journal*.

beset by civil war in China and in Spain, both current foci of the local Jewish leftist energies.²⁴ The poetry of the husband and wife A.S. Shkolnikov and Esther Segal, appearing later in the album, zeroed in on the domestic life of the bakery worker as an integral part of this left-oriented community (see Appendix Two).²⁵

In her poem “*Tzu di Bekerishe Frauen*” (To the Bakers’ Wives) Esther Segal uses inter-related categories of the “weekday” and the “Sabbath,” often invoked in Yiddish literature to bring out tensions between the secular and the sacred, labour and leisure, need and abundance, and compulsion and freedom.²⁶ By inverting the conventional imagery relating to the Sabbath, she gives us a socialist critique of bourgeois Jewish morality and a model for the working class housewife, whose weekday gestures ennoble the home of the labouring family. In traditional Jewish life, a series of objects and gestures set the Sabbath apart from the weekday. The house is cleaned in preparation, a special meal is prepared using the finest ingredients and the best cutlery available, a white tablecloth is spread, and of course, *Shabbes* clothes are donned. Segal’s Baker’s Wife is rooted, however, in the workday world. She is wearing “weekday clothes.” Her sleeves are rolled over “callused hands” as she smoothes the white tablecloth “over the weekday table, and she papers over the “grey weekday walls.”²⁷ By her Sabbath-like gestures the Baker’s Wife renders the ordinary sacred, in contrast to the Sufferin’s anti-social *baleboste*, who has all the material requisites for the Sabbath (meat and wine), but debases the outwardly sacred by her antagonism towards her guest. In her “quiet, good, motherly eyes/she [the Baker’s Wife] holds out comfort for the household.” Her hands tend a sick child, unaided by her exhausted husband, who drags himself

²⁴ Miril Shatan, “*Friling*” (Spring), *35th Jubilee Journal*.

²⁵ Irving Massey (son of Ida Maza) argues that the ethics of Montreal Yiddish literary circles dictated that the poet express her own sentiments and fashion her own life not as an assertion of individuality, but as a reflection of collectivist values of the community. See his “Public Lives in Private: Ida Maza and the Montreal Yiddish Renaissance” in Ira Robinson, Pierre Anctil and Mervin Butovsky, eds., *An Everyday Miracle: Yiddish in Montreal* (Montreal : Véhicule Press, 1990).

²⁶ For a discussion of these polarities in the work of Sholem Alecheim, see Aaron Lansky’s lecture on the writer, 13th Summer Program in Yiddish Culture, Yiddish Book Centre, 1995.

²⁷ Esther Segal, “*Tzu di Bekerishe Frauen*” (to the Bakers’ Wives), *The 35th Jubilee Journal*.

home after a long night at the ovens, his frame “withered in toil,” having “given up the hours of sunlight.” The exploitative nature of his labour has destroyed the natural partnership between husband and wife and causes suffering to the baker’s wife, who lives “in painful loneliness,” “left to the bitter mockery of the shadows, to the cold whiteness of the kitchen.”

A page of the album is devoted to the poetry of Avrum-Shloime Shkolnikov. We have seen him earlier on as the young dynamic writer of the Bakery Union pamphlets distributed in 1927 and a popular figure in literary circles. Shkolnikov was born into a family of tailors, in Khaimetz (near Minsk), Belorussia. He was educated in *kheyder* (traditional religious school) until the age of nine, when he left school to help supplement the family income. He tried various trades, eventually leaving home to travel throughout Russia in search of a livelihood. He eventually joined his brother in Kiev, where he learned the baking trade. Shkolnikov arrived in Montreal in 1919, and was “discovered” as a literary talent by his brother-in law poet, I.J. Segal. By the time the album was published, Shkolnikov had launched several Yiddish literary journals, published two volumes of verse, and had his work widely published in the Yiddish press and in a number of anthologies and journals.²⁸

Shkolnikov’s page in the album contains three poems, “*Zei Bagrisn*” (They Greet One Another), “*Unzer Arbeit*” (Our Work), and “*Men Darf Arbeiten*” (One Must Work) (see Appendix Two for the full text of the poems). All are written in a tone of intimacy, unlike the cold, impersonal rhetoric of the English language poetry appearing in the book. Nevertheless, the poems, taken together, contain a double trope, one appropriate to the *arbeiter*, the male militant bound by brotherhood and the other to the *folksmassn*, or community, with a more domestic and female coloration. The first two poems are addressed to fellow workers, and hence the themes of brotherhood and common labour are broached. “They Greet One Another” reads like a celebratory

²⁸ For biographical information on Shkolnikov, see his obituary in the *Adler*, 12 February 1962. For details of his literary publications, see Ch. L. Fox, *Hundert Yor Yiddishe un Hebraishe Literature in Kanade* (Montreal: Ch. L. Fuchs Book Fund Committee, 1980) 322-3.

hymn of liberation, replete with earthy images, creating a contrast to the everyday darkness and exhaustion of the workweek. At this jubilee of brothers (a biblical symbol of rest from labour, both for humans and for the earth), fatigue and sadness are banished, and in the bakers' faces joy shines, like "young wine."²⁹ In the last stanza, Shkolnikov uses pastoral imagery of the plowed field, yielding stalks of grain for the baker, evoking the motif of his role as creative link between earth and humankind, country and city. In contrast to the bright, airy world of the fields "Our Work" takes place in the workplace, where workers toil at the flames of the oven deep into the night, passing bread from hand to hand, their eyes "broken with sleep." The baker is an outcast from nature, oblivious to the "rosy morning on the branches/ [that] awaken the leaves from sleep."³⁰ His days are described as "ashes in the oven . . . left-over yeast . . . left out fire" in an ironic use of bread metaphors reinforcing the sense of the worker's alienation from the fruit of the fields, and from the product of his labour. How is the worker redeemed from this alienation and slavery? "[with] Weakened eyes/tired and red/dark lamps without a glow/ only in his hand/like a mighty blaze/blooms a warm, fresh bread." The baker emerges from his degradation, a soldier, with weapon in hand. In Shkolnikov's dawn bread is both implement of war (specifically, a "brand") and creative force, "the blooming bread." That Shkolnikov should portray bread as an organic work of art should not surprise us from a man who had probably come to consider himself poet first and worker afterward.

In "One Must Work," Shkolnikov takes up this theme in relation to the bakery workers role as provider and father. Unlike "Our Work," it has a domestic setting, the family table, fleshed out by the reference to the "watery kasha, the little crust of bread on the table."³¹ Here is the *folksmassn* component of the bakery workers' message, including the entire working class community. As in the strike leaflets, the bakery worker is portrayed primarily in his capacity as

²⁹ A.S. Shkolnikov, "Zei Bagrisn" (They Greet One Another), 35th Jubilee Journal.

³⁰ A.S. Shkolnikov, "Unzer Arbeit" (Our Work), 35th Jubilee Journal.

³¹ A.S. Shkolnikov, "Men Darf Arbetn" (One Must Work), 35th Jubilee Journal.

breadwinner for women and children, only in this context the poet makes the female perspective even stronger. He has his daughter Masha ask the question that elicits the story of his work life, and the poem is dedicated to her. "One must work/ to earn one's food." The poet's degradation is reflected in the careworn, weary eyes of his wife, who looks down in shame at his hands. There is no trace of workers' pride, only humiliation at the inability to provide a home free of need, and a lament for a youth ruined by toil and compulsion. Shkolnikov writes: "I have a grievous lot/ and my youth has been pruned, like a branch in the fall/ gloom has fallen on my boyish face/ and bleached it as though washed with tears." This motif of wasted youth is a common one in socialist oriented poetry (though it is often used with reference to the lost bloom of womanhood), as is the wounded pride of the father who cannot support his family. In themselves they don't tell us anything about the particular context of the poetry. The poem, however, placed alongside "Our Work" evokes one half of the dual perspective of the ethnic bread worker. This domestic, female perspective is the very one used to allow Jewish housewives to identify with the bakery workers' experience, and presumably to act on this identification by buying union bread.

The poem also contains within it a paradigm for the trajectory of the immigrant men of the community, in the form of a potted biography. "A boy, a brave dashing lad/ with a strong frame and ten nimble fingers.../I packed my youth, my pride/into a small bundle/tore myself away from home/to earn my crust of bread// I offered myself up for work / and the wind took up my desire/ in jingling notes/ in the workshop with a song." Shkolnikov could be talking here about his wanderings in Russia. But the narrative works equally well for any young immigrant of his generation, carried across the ocean to the clothing sweatshop. In speaking of the work world, Shkolnikov retained artisanal categories that were particular to the world of the *shtetl*. "The tailor wished for me/ the cobbler asked for me/ the dyer painted for me a world of blue and gold...the baker gives bread, before kneading the dough." Surely this reflects his own early European apprenticeships before he arrived in Kiev. It also reflects the Old World, traditionalist perspective

that Harry Hershman mentioned as redolent of the Jewish bakers' trade. Shkolnikov is telling not only his own story, but that of the immigrant generation.

For those for whom the humanist and lyrical approaches of Shkolnikov and Segal are too subtle, the album features the direct and catchy jingle "The Union Label," written by cake-maker Aaron Kunigis. Rhythmic songs have long been used to reinforce solidarity in the workers' movement and in folk communities, and this song is an example of its use to rally around a populist cause. The refrain goes "Buy your bread, but don't forget the union label/ Buy your bread, buy your bread/ only from a union bakery." The verses hint at current battles that are never mentioned by name in the album. "Where there is a scab-shop / this we must condemn... // I will say one thing more, before they divide up the wreaths/ Let's wage a battle against the sweat-bakeries/that have sprouted up everywhere!" (the lyrics rhyme in Yiddish).³² Kunigis, like Sufferin before him, cast the scab shops in the role of the breakers of the social contract, and the union as its restorers. "Montreal is a great city/many Jews live there/ Know O Jews, from long ago came the decree, in the bakers trade, must peace be!"³³

In contrast to the richness of the Yiddish section, the English portion of the album is a perfunctory affair, with seven pages of text (excluding advertising and greetings) as opposed to the Yiddish twelve. Much of the material was lifted from the 1936 Golden Jubilee edition of the *Bakers' Journal* and appeared in the *Montreal Journal* in a shorter form. In contrast to the communal "frame" of the Yiddish section, the English side of the book opens with greetings from the International Corresponding Secretary, setting the tone of what was to come. "Vastly improved working conditions raised the standard of living and the very foundation upon which the welfare and economic security of the workers must be built."³⁴ The discourse used here and elsewhere in this section was ethnic-neutral and speaks to the unions' contribution to the material

³² A. Kunigis, "Der Union Label" (The Union Label), *35th Jubilee Journal*.

³³ Kunigis, "Der Union Label."

³⁴ Joseph Schmidt, "Greetings from the International Union," *35th Jubilee Journal*.

betterment of the working class, i.e. to the *arbeiter* in his internationalist, unionist guise, denuded of the Yiddish folk associations. The world of domesticity and female-male solidarity is totally absent in this picture of a male world of brotherhood and unity. The business union aspect of the organization is emphasized, because it was considered to be relevant to all of the current Jewish-led trade unions, particularly the clothing union activists who had either helped with the album, or would be reading it.

Sufferin's English language account of the foundation of the local, reprised from the 1936 *Bakers' Journal* Golden Anniversary Edition illustrates this difference in tone. In contrast to his Yiddish reminiscence which begin with his arrival in Montreal, he opens this story with his encounter with Social Democracy during days as a young traveler in Germany. By this telling, his establishment of local 115 upon arrival in Montreal was a natural extension of his political convictions. Arriving in Montreal in 1903, he became a baker in order to seize the opportunity to organize the unorganized, a far cry from the man "blessed with the golden craft" of the Yiddish version.³⁵

Another case in point was the adaptation of "Everything for the Union," which originally appeared in the 1936 Jubilee edition of the *Bakers' Journal* as an unsigned article. In the first part of the article, the genesis of the International is set in the context of the development of industrial society, the destruction of the independent tradesman and the intensification of exploitation. The story is given a bakers' trope by emphasizing the disruption of family life and the paternalism that accompanied the trade, as well as the deprivation of light and of sleep.

Bakery workers were compelled to work, eat and sleep in the house of the boss and in many cases take care of the babies or do any other general domestic work for the "mistress of the house." But comparatively few bakery workers could establish their own family and these unmarried men were the pitiable serfs of the boss upon whose personal caprices, good will or bad temper they depended for treatment during the endless life of drudgery.

In stupidity and subserviency they continued to work and live under such degrading, degenerating conditions at a time when in other branches of industry the workers had already laid the foundation for trade unions for their mutual protection. During those years of darkness and hopelessness in the basement holes called bakeshops, a few intelligent men . . . realized that the conditions of slavery and human misery in the bakeries of New York could be changed The new

³⁵ A. Sufferin, "Reminiscences in the History of Local No. 115," 35th *Jubilee Journal*.

gospel of Trade Unionism was preached in its columns and soon found its way into the holes of darkness where the bakery workers slaved and lived and slept.³⁶

The article continues with the story of the International's foundation and a good dose of socialist reformist philosophy. In the Montreal edition, the bare bones of the foundation myth appears intact, with much of the Social Democratic philosophy of the union left out, with the exception of the "business" aspect of the union. The paragraphs dealing with the American pioneers of the central organization, with the experience of blacklisting and with the ties to the American Federation of Labour is considered irrelevant to the purposes of whoever edited the English section of the Montreal album. Gone also is the mission statement which expressed the attachment to the union role of self-help, and the Trade Unions' role as the future administrators of a new (read Socialist) order of social economy.³⁷ Instead, the truncated version ends with veiled critique of the Industrial Recovery Act (the New Deal labour legislation passed in the US in 1933)!

Whenever a really democratic treatment of the social-economic problems in which the united trade Unions are interested and have voice and vote, is under consideration, we are ready and willing to render our help and support, provided that the other side is willing to co-operate with us and not attempt to work and decide against us (italics in the original). . . . What we will fight against . . . are the open and secret attempts to make out of the Trade Unions weak and helpless instruments, a sort of Fascist labor slave organizations, under a Government controlled economy system of industrial production, where the employers appear as the dictators while all the influence of the bona fide organized labor movement would be completely neutralized.³⁸

We have seen that only material considered pertinent to a Canadian bakers' local was retained. So why the cryptic last paragraph? Possibly because it reflected trade union fears that Quebec's version of the Industrial Recovery Act, the Arcand Act, would remove all negotiating room for organized labour. Another more likely explanation is that the passage projected a

³⁶ "Everything for the Trade Union." Golden Anniversary Edition. *Bakers' Journal*, 3.

³⁷ The relevant left-out text read: "Organized labour will not voluntarily quit the road of Trade Union self-help, which it has been marching up to this day. Through sacrifices and hard struggles Organized Labour has secured strong positions which will be defended as most valuable cultural achievements. No doubt, every thinking Trade Unionist will agree with us that our movement has not yet completed its historical mission, has not yet played the important role dictated as its share of work along the highway to a higher civilization. Our work has just begun and the future will have greater and more responsible problems [sic] for the Labor movement to solve. Under a new order of social-economy the Trade Unions will have to take charge of productive and distributive functions to assure better social conditions for all members or society." Golden Anniversary issue of the *Bakers' Journal*, 3.

³⁸ "Everything for the Union." *35th Jubilee Journal*.

business-like profile that would strike a chord with an acculturated clientele that had come to be accustomed to the resolution of labour conflict through joint negotiation in the large bureaucratic clothing unions. By invoking the spirit of the New Unionism, the Bakers' Union would appear something more than a tiny, ethnic union. Harry Sufferin (son of Abraham) took up the "business union" theme in his "But it Does Move Forward," his title announcing the primary perspective of modernity and progress. One generation removed from the immigrant founders of the union (who began to organize, in his words, "still smelling of the ship"), he spoke in his capacity as Workmen's Circle activist and son of a bakery worker. Using the rhetoric of progress he wrote dispassionately about the contributions of the organization to a modern industrial order, where the eight-hour day was the rule. If bakers suffered particular health problems by working in ill ventilated, dirty cellars, their suffering, said Sufferin, resulted in the institution of health benefits and regular medical exams as part of the union mandate, foreshadowing modern group health insurance. To tie this vision of progress to the class struggle, the writer wrapped up with a sentence in the militant mode. "We are now in the process of a backward slip, but go forward we must. And in the Vanguard of this forward movement shall be the working class and its trade unions."³⁹ Sufferin struck all the chords of the North American male *arbeiter* mode: Progress, union militancy, the working class, all without reference to any specifically Jewish collectivity.

The militant male working class aspect of the discourse was reinforced by the poetry in the English section. The poem "The Awakening," lifted from the Golden Anniversary edition of the *Bakers' Journal*, cast the theme of Socialist Enlightenment in a mold particular to the baking trade. This "from slave to man" motif portrayed bakery workers as sub-human, almost bestial, by virtue of their nocturnal schedule and the location of their workplace in the lower depths.

...Back in the olden days my mind would sojourn
In dark cellar bakeshops where I slaved night and morn;

³⁹ H. Sufferin, "But it Does Move Forward," 35th *Jubilee Journal*.

Where fresh air and sunlight never entered as guests,
Where as wage slaves we dwelled as social outcasts.⁴⁰

In typical Social Reform discourse, these broken creatures are redeemed through their participation in the workers movement, made possible by the epiphany that descends upon them in the form of class-consciousness.

See! There in the front ranks are marching with pride
Our bakery workers demanding justice and right!
Like real heroes they fight. Out of slaves they make Men!
Proclaim Freedom in the workshops! Break down the slave pens!
We are low, we are low! But we are on the march!
We are following the right way behind Liberty's torch!
We have won many battles, and we have suffered defeat,
But we are strongly entrenched, the enemy to meet!

In this poem, as throughout the English section, the discourse is strictly internationalist and the ideological framework is the need for the emancipation of the worker through Socialism. The militaristic tone is in strong contrast to the pastoral, humanistic and communal, and craft motifs of the Yiddish poetry. A partial explanation for this is that the Canadian-born poets writing for the English language section had to use a mode familiar to their acculturated readers. Still, Earl Massey's poem, a paean to the "tramp of a billion men/on their march to the rising sun" who sing the Revolution,⁴¹ and "The Cyclops"⁴² by Nathan Ralph Goldberg seem oddly out of place for a union that is distinguished for its artisanal base. The monster of the latter poem is a grotesque personification of the mechanized factory system, its mechanical teeth dripping with the blood of the wretched slaves he has destroyed, a condemnation hardly appropriate for a group of workers who sought to end their relegation to the handicraft margins of the bread trade.⁴³

As we have seen, the English section was a hodge-podge of readily available material, much of which was not immediately relevant to members of the union or to the Jewish housewives

⁴⁰G.A. Hoen, "The Awakening," Golden Anniversary Edition, *Bakers' Journal and 35th Jubilee Journal*

⁴¹ Earl Massey, "March to the Rising Sun", *35th Jubilee Journal*.

⁴² Ralph Nathan Goldberg, "The Cyclops," *35th Jubilee Journal*.

⁴³ One possible explanation for this apparent contradiction is that the writer, in all probability a second-generation immigrant, was far removed from the artisanal world of the Jewish bakers. Another possibility is that the combination of anti-capitalism with industrial imagery actually matched the aspirations of some of the socialist intellectuals of the union, who were able to identify with this modernist rhetoric.

that the Yiddish message was aimed at. It served the purpose, however, of tying the local struggles to the wider world of the social democrat, and spoke in a language familiar to many union activists, evoking the themes of progress, modernity, and male militancy. The discourse used is appropriate for the *arbeiter*, the international class warrior, denuded of any extraneous ethnic identity.

In the Yiddish section of the album on the other hand, it was necessary to put across the image of the class-conscious assemblage of women and of men united in struggle against a common exploitation, and sharing a common moral economy. How did the picture of a folk-community of Jewish wives, children and male workers, standing in solidarity around the Sabbath table while fighting the good fight compare with the reality of contemporary working class Jewish Montreal in general, and with the Jewish baking trade in particular? I would argue that the reality was much more complex, and that the traditionalism of the album reveals the discomfort of communal leaders not quite at ease with the transition that the community was undergoing.

We get some hints that the image of a homogenous, unified Jewish working class was a false one from discordances within the album itself. In 1936 about a quarter of the membership of the union was non-Jewish, either Slavic or ethnic German. The only mark that distinguished them in the album is the spelling of their names in Roman characters in the membership list (Yiddish uses Hebrew letters).⁴⁴ They had been made honorary Jews because the union produced an ethnic product that needed to be associated with Jewishness and Jewish community in order for the union to be effective. The clothing unions, in contrast, were not dependent on an ethnic market, and this permitted them to make greater use of an ethnic-neutral language.

Though the bakery workers' pitch was aimed at women, female participation in labour organization was at best, problematic. We hear nothing, for example, in the album, from the

⁴⁴“*Falguende Mitglieder fun der Beker Union Bagrisn der Union Tzum 35 Yorikn Yubilee.*” (Members of the Bakers' Union Greet the Union on its 35th Jubilee), *The 35th Jubilee Journal*.

vendors who made up as much as fifty percent of the personnel employed at the bakeries. These women were clearly not considered important to the purposes to the local. The Bakers' Wives were, and we hear from them in a short piece describing the organization of a Bakery Women's Council.⁴⁵ The group worked to promote the union label through conferences and maintained essential social and ties with "friendly organizations," doing the coalition-building work so important to the life of the union. But even this group of women, composed of the wives of bakery workers and having a direct interest in the fate of the union, proved difficult to mobilize. The first meeting was attended by only a handful of women, and it required several attempts before a significant number of women became involved. Given the demands of raising children, many of whom were pre-schoolers at the time when the council was active, this is hardly surprising. Their organization did not, in all likelihood, last long, though some of the organization skills used there could be put to other uses. Franny Nozetz, the energetic chairwoman of the council, became the manager of her own family bakery only three years later.

The union's problems extended beyond the mobilization of women. The Jubilee Committee complained that one of their enemies was "the coldness and indifference of the community (*bafelkerung*)."⁴⁶ This community was rapidly evolving and corresponded less and less to the ideal of a unified, class-conscious folk society. In his piece entitled "The Anniversary of the Jewish Bakers' Union is a Celebration of the Jewish Workers' Movement," journalist Israel Medresh tied the current weakness of the union to this evolution.⁴⁷ In the past the trade had been, he claimed, more stable and less diffuse. The geography of the bakeries bore out this conclusion. They were in fact no longer confined to the St. Lawrence area, sprouting up as far north as Bernard Street and as far west as Decarie Boulevard. At the same time, this movement was part of the

⁴⁵ F. Nozetz, "A Yor Beker Frauen Council," (A Year of the Bakers' Wives Council) *The 35th Jubilee Journal*.

⁴⁶ "Greetings from the Jubilee Committee" (also appearing in a Yiddish version), *The 35th Jubilee Journal*.

⁴⁷ I. Medresh, "Der Yontov fun der Yiddisher Bakers Union is der Yontov fun der Yiddisher Arbeiter Bevegung" (The Anniversary of the Jewish Bakers' Union is a Celebration of the Jewish Workers' Movement), *35th Jubilee Journal*.

social and geographical mobility of the Jewish immigrants and their children. Class relations were increasingly blurred, as downtown moved increasingly into the traditional buffer zone of Outremont, where in 1931 the Jewish population had risen to 23.7 %, from 9% in 1921.⁴⁸ With this physical and class diffusion came an erosion of cohesion where the issue of the consumption of everyday goods was concerned. It meant the loss of the opportunity to use social ostracism as a weapon, the very basis of the boycott strategy on which the welfare of the label, and the union, depended.

Medresh also stated that the “greater part of the Jewish masses Americanize so quickly, going over to non-Jewish bread.”⁴⁹ As we know, the commodity that the union was selling was communal identification of the product of their members’ labour. This was inseparable from the idea of Jewish bread. While there is evidence that uptown Jews came to the downtown ethnic food markets to buy their bread there is also evidence to support Medresh’s diagnosis of the erosion of the market through Americanization. From 1937 onwards, for instance, the readers of the uptown *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* were routinely treated at holiday time to the well wishes from the large non-Jewish English bakery firms.⁵⁰ Clearly these customers were eating the Anglo loaf.

On the Jewish side of the business, bakeries like Richstones’ were no longer producing for an exclusively Jewish clientele. Their new, mechanized bakery (where “hands never touched the dough”), opened in 1937 on the old site on St. Lawrence and Rachel, produced a variety of breads, cakes, pastries and doughnuts catering to Jewish, Slavic, and Canadian tastes (see Illustrations, fig. 5).⁵¹ The store, distributing through its various branches in different parts of

⁴⁸ Louis Rosenberg, *Canada’s Jews* table 3, p.19.

⁴⁹ I. Medresh, “*Der Yontov*.”

⁵⁰ The firms that advertised regularly from that date were Dent Harrison and the Canada Bread Company. See *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, 26 March 1937.44, 88, 31, 15 April, 1938, 25, 48 and 23 September 1938

⁵¹ In December 1936, Richstones’ announced the opening of their “Ultra-Modern Sanitary Bakery and Store,” on Saturday, December 4th at 5 p.m.(note the post Sabbath timing) in a full page ad in the *Chronicle*, featuring a photograph of the spacious interior of the store, as well as photo portraits of Schoel and Louis Richstone. The father and son were identified respectively as the founder and the general manager of the store. Seniority and modernity were thus simultaneously vaunted. The ad did not appear in the *Adler*.

the city, heralded the “chain store” that was to become the norm in the trade. This large scale, mechanized labour market was the very one that the union targeted as essential for the union to enter, and its officers had petitioned the international for organizational help in order to achieve this goal. It was a terrain that was never breached by the local, which was increasingly marginalized, swimming “in a sea of the unorganized,” as union ex-president Chaim Papiernick complained.⁵²

The advertising in the album reflected the diffusion of the community, and its progressive cultural assimilation. The majority of ads and greetings were in English, and were one to judge by the evidence given in the album, business took place increasingly in this language, even in the food industry, which we might expect to be an ethnic domain. Twenty food-related businesses submitted ads or business cards in English, versus ten in Yiddish. What is more, nine of these latter ten ads were for bakeries. Seventeen other small businesses advertised in English, as against only two in Yiddish. Only one large company (Fleischmann’s Yeast) advertised in Yiddish, as against ten in English (mostly producers of bakery supplies). Even the local Jewish-led unions sent their greetings in English, as did the American locals of the Union. In this section of the journal, Yiddish was reserved mostly for local communal organizations including *Poale Tzion* and *Arbeiter Ring* (twelve out of thirteen greetings from this kind of source were in Yiddish) and for greetings from individuals and from the bakeries.

The bakers had traditionally enjoyed a reputation as radical combatants in the class war arena, but the advertising section emphasized another image, that of respectability. The act of contributing an advertisement constitutes an alliance of sorts, a message that the advertiser is not averse to the goals of the organization whose publication it appears in. The same is true for the advertising committee, which solicits the ad. The fact that medium and large businesses, especially

⁵² Papiernick mentioned this aspiration in the album, see “*Unzere Problemen*” (Our Problems) in the *Journal*. At the 1936 Convention of the International he and two other union executives had submitted a resolution to pursue an organizing campaign in Canada, paying particular attention to the larger machine

bakery supplies, had so much space in the advertising section was an indication that the union considered itself a legitimate part of the business world, and wished to publicly display its links with it. This too, was a sign of the times. The late thirties, according to militant Lea Roback, marked the end of militancy in the clothing unions, and this is probably true elsewhere.⁵³ The aims of small enterprise, of socialism, and of trade unionism became increasingly blurred. Loan syndicates, for instance, originally conceived of as providing emergency interest free (or low interest) loans for poor immigrants, became "a way of doing business."⁵⁴ Israel Medresh described the thirties as the era in which the "physical separation" between uptown and downtown disappeared, due to the rapid social mobility of some of the latter's successful businessmen, many of whom became philanthropists working alongside their uptown brothers. Bakery workers were not in that league, but they were manual workers with middle class aspirations. In the forties, many of them opened their own businesses (sometimes very briefly). Their children moved through the school system, eventually joining the professions, or going into clerical work and business.

We can see how the Jewish craft union, operating in Yiddish, selling an ethnic product, and reliant on a militant and unified "folk community" of women and men had become increasingly untenable by 1938. The idea of such a community, however, had great appeal not only to the Jewish and non-Jewish bakery workers whose bread and butter depended on it, but also to communal leaders whose testimonials appeared in the album. These men, socialists and activists, had been deeply affected by struggles between communist and socialists that had played out in the clothing unions (the primary arena of Jewish working class activism), which had been battlegrounds torn by factionalism and internal strife for the better part of two decades. The garment industry was peopled by Italians, French Canadians, Poles and others, and Jews were now

shops. See resolution no.177, 1936 Convention of the Bakery and Confectionery Workers' International Union, p. 125, Archives of the BCWIU, University of Maryland.

⁵³ Madeleine Parent and Léa Roback, *Entretiens avec Nicole Lacelle*, (Montreal: Remue-Ménage, 1988) 150.

⁵⁴ Medresh, *Tvishn Tsvei Velt Milkhomes*, 24.

a minority of the labour force. It was not possible to use such an ethnically complex and strife-ridden industry as a symbol for communal cohesion. The tiny bakers' union, with its unique work-sharing programme and its reliance on consumer loyalty, was different. It is not surprising that a communal activist like Harry Hershman should use the *Jubilee Journal* as an occasion to look back with nostalgia at the "simple" and peaceful world of *Shabbes* in the *Shtetl*, and at the bakers themselves as a model of true workers' solidarity.

The Jubilee committee succeeded admirably in its goal of portraying the Bakers' Union as the centre of a warm folk community of workers and their families who identified the bakers' cause as their own and were loyal to the bread label. The prominence of women and the inclusion of humanistic poetry helped to bolster this image. The oscillation between female gendered language and imagery and that of male union militancy was a product of the dualism of Jewish Socialist ideology, focusing as it did both on *arbeiter* and *folksmassn* aspects of working class identity, and also a function of the dualism of the bakery workers' strategy. Amongst themselves they used the language of male militancy, but their dependence on Jewish housewives' loyalty to the bread label meant that they needed to use language and imagery with which women could personally identify.

Conclusion

The study of the Montreal Jewish bakery milieu in the interwar period uncovers a complex process of social change whereby traditional modes of thought and action were remodeled to serve the interests of a segment of the modern North American labour movement, Jewish local 115 of the Bakery and Confectionery Workers' International Union.

Kashrut, the religious category that differentiates edible from the forbidden foods was given a new ethical permutation, in order to distinguish a **socially palatable** product, the union-made loaf, from its contraband scab cousin. The bread label empowered consumers to act on violations of union standards by boycotting the outlaw commodity and the shops that sold it.

For the Jewish housewives, the purchase of union-made bread was a ritual that defined a multi-faceted set of solidarities and responsibilities. Loyalty to the label cemented an alliance with bakery workers and their union and underscored the responsibility of master bakers to provide decent working conditions and to tolerate a measure of workers' control. The periodic boycott of the entire trade, on the other hand, was a means of forcing owners to honour a tacit commitment to provide sustenance at a fair price. Sanctions were effective because they were exercised within the context of a community in which communal organizations worked together to mobilize large numbers of people for collective action in order to enforce a shared moral economy. At the same time, withdrawal of patronage was a limited measure. Customers were unwilling to indefinitely deprive themselves of the Jewish loaf and were also loathe to jeopardize the existence of the ethnic trade which they saw as their own, and which provided them with a more inexpensive product than they could buy elsewhere.

Despite the Social Democratic rhetoric of some of the leaders of Montreal's Jewish Bakers' Union, the owners, customers, and producers were aware of the way in which the bakeries and their products carried with them the idea of Jewishness, a commodity sold with each loaf. Immigrant customers willingly bought this idea because it provided a landmark of identity in a

rapidly changing world. The consciousness of the ethnicity of bread shaped the tactics and coloured the ideology of the bakery workers, especially at the point when their organization was particularly vulnerable, at the end of the twenties, and during the depression.

The Montreal Jewish Bakers' Union was able to act effectively because it was part of a North American union that used modern industrial tactics while building on communal forms of organization. The traditions of the International allowed for the flourishing of ethnic branches and for the separate labour preserves that these groups upheld. The BCWIU embraced the institution of the cooperative bakeshop, the institution that rendered concrete the pact between workers and the local bread-buying public. It was sufficiently flexible to accommodate the egalitarian work-sharing scheme that was developed by American Jewish locals and adopted by the Montreal Jewish local. Together with the insistence on a "fair price" for bread, this system helped establish the bread trade as a distinct milieu in where the ideal of a moral economy held sway.

The 35th *Jubilee Journal of the Bakers' Union* offers us a glimpse of how communal traditions and those of the International fit, and didn't fit, together. Combining progressivist socialist rhetoric with nostalgia for the *shtetl*, it reveals a community in transition. The *Journal* gives us a snapshot of Jewish working immigrant culture at the moment of its passing. The idealized picture of homogeneity also concealed the growing ethnic diversity within the labour force of the trade.

The activities, the organization, and the protracted dialogue between bakery workers and their community was part of a more lasting project; the struggle to give dignity and meaning to daily labour.



Fig. 1. BCWIU Bread Stamp

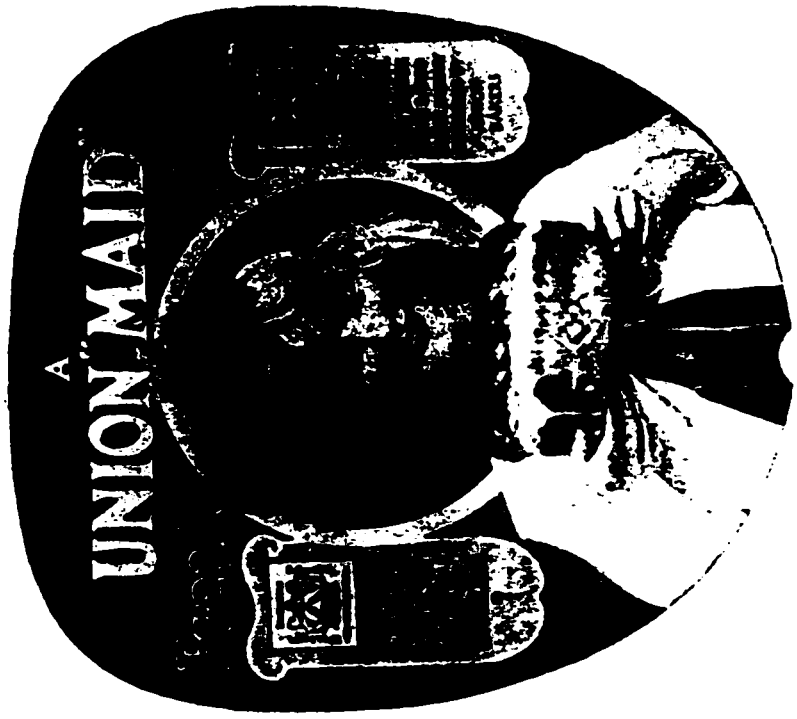


Fig. 2. "Union Maid" promotional advertisement

Richstones' Celebrate the Opening of their Ultra-Modern Sanitary Bakery & Store on Saturday, Dec. 4th at 5 p.m.



SCHOEL RICHSTONE
Founder of Richstone Bakery

It Takes Three Generations To Do Perfect Baking

RICHSTONE AND SONS have the unique distinction of combining the home-made quality of the old-time baking with the latest experience in blending ingredients by modern machinery.

This rare combination has built the reputation of Richstones' products to the benefit of the consuming public.

The bakery was founded by Schoel Richstone, who came to Montreal some forty years ago with a heritage of baking experience. Richstones' bread soon became a synonym in Montreal for good bread.

And this reputation has continued year after year, and reached its height in the erection of an ultra-modern sanitary bake-shop and store on Main and Rachel Streets, with its branches in various parts of the city, distributing the best there is in bread and cakes.



LOUIS RICHSTONE
General Manager, Richstone Bakery

We can state with perfect assuredness that when you buy cakes from Richstones, you can pass them on to your friends as made by yourself, because Richstone employs only the very best ingredients, such as fresh eggs, fresh butter and the highest quality of other materials; coupled with this, their baking experience, which gives to

their cakes the taste of the finest there is in home baking. Richstones' new bakery is the last word in sanitation and cleanliness, being praised and commended by the highest health authorities. Richstones' products can safely be fed to infants because of the care and scrupulous sanitation followed.

Open House Saturday and Sunday. We cordially invite you to inspect our new Store and Bakery. You are under no obligation to purchase.

SPECIAL FOR SATURDAY AND SUNDAY -- WITH EVERY PURCHASE OF 10c OR OVER, WE WILL GIVE AWAY FREE -- 1/4 DOZ. OF OUR OWN HOME-MADE CAKE-DOUGHNUTS



INTERIOR VIEW OF RICHSTONES' ULTRA-MODERN STORE.
No Expense Has Been Spared to Make This the Most Sanitary Bake Shop in Montreal

1218 ST. LAWRENCE BLVD.
2255 SHEPPARD AVE. WEST

PL. 1725
EL. 7325

Fig. 5. Richstone's Ultra Modern Store



Fig. 7. Golden Anniversary Edition of the Bakers' Journal

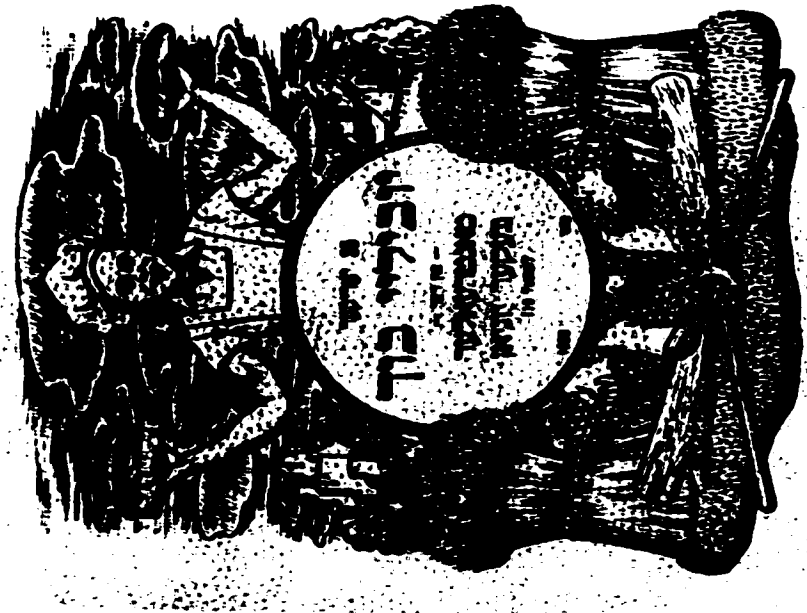


Fig. 6. Cover of 35th Jubilee Journal of Montreal Bakers' Union.

local 115

Fig 8. Sample pages from the 35th Jubilee Journal

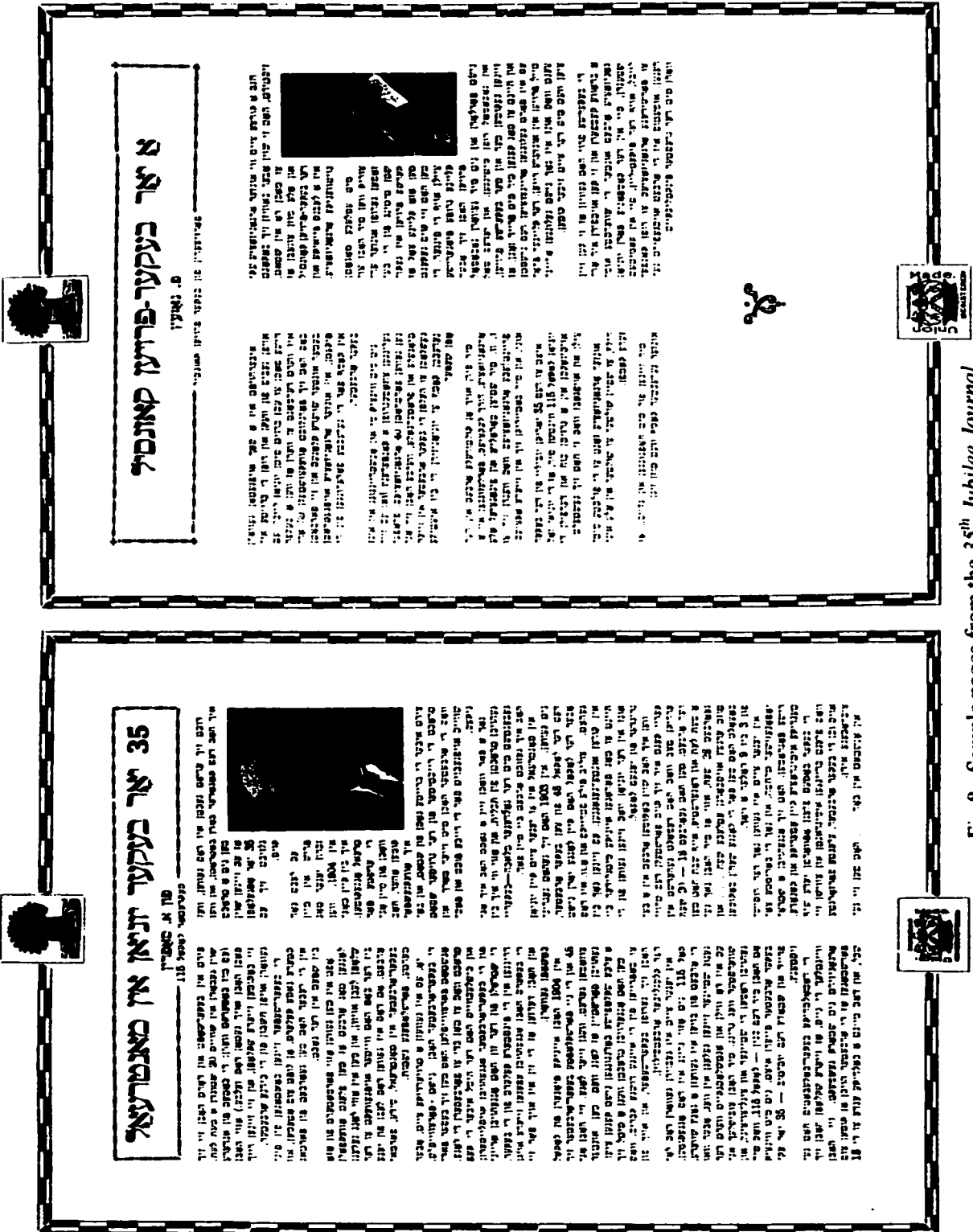




Fig 9. Banquet of local 115, April 20, 1938

APPENDIX ONE

Jewish and French Bakeries in Montreal, Comparative Statistics

Table 1. Relative Stability of Establishments

	Jewish	French	Number of French establishments expressed as a proportion of 51
Total in existence 1920-1940	51	60 (sample only)	51
Pre-established 10 years or more and in existence in 1920)	10	16	13.6
Lasting 5 years or more *	24	27	22.9
Lasting 10 years or more (within 1920-1940)	10	12	10.2
Lasting 20 years or more	2	6	5.1
Lasting 5 years or less *	17	25	21.2

*excludes those established after 1937

Table 1 reflects the division of the French trade into relatively stable long established firms and comparatively volatile smaller establishments. Out of a total of 60 French bakeries in our sample, 25 lasted less than five years, while the corresponding figure for the Jewish category was 17 out of a total of 51, bearing in mind that 6 of these 60 are long established firms. The French sample was obtained simply by including bakeries in the A-C range of Lovell's business directory having French names. The Jewish listing was as complete a listing as the identification of Jewish names allowed, supplemented by ownership information from the *Raison Sociales* files.

Table 2. Relative Stability, 1920-1930

	Jewish	French (sample only)	Number of French expressed as a proportion of 51
Total founded	29	23	19.5
Lasting five years or more	11	8	6.8
Lasting less than 5 years	18	15	12.75

In Table 2, the long-established firms have been factored out, allowing us to look at enterprises founded in the 1920s. Jewish bakeries founded in that decade were only slightly more stable than their French counterparts, with 37 % (compared to the French 34 %) of the total surviving more than four years.

APPENDIX TWO

Excerpts from the Montreal Bakers' *Jubilee Journal* (translated from the Yiddish)

35 years of the Bakers Union in Montreal - A Sufferin

It seems like only yesterday that I first set foot on Canadian shores. One can hardly believe that it is already 35 years, when one reflects upon it.

It is still fresh in my memory, that day in 1904 when I arrived in Montreal. The first few weeks after my arrival here, I walked in the wide streets of the city, and thought about the wealth of the great city, which the workers have built with their brains and with their sweat, for the idle rich.

After a few weeks of being a guest, I started to think about business. Since I am blessed with the golden craft-bakery-I looked for work in my trade. There were no unions at the time in Montreal. In 1903, ten bakery workers had founded local 48, but the local lasted only a few years. Due to many strikes, the local went down, but a few of its founders are now with us.

You can hardly imagine the sad state that then prevailed in the domain. We worked 18-20 hours day and night, and Thursday, before Shabbes we worked 28 hours. And for these long hours we were paid from 3 to 9 dollars a week.

This was the time of the Russo-Japanese war, and the notorious Tsarist pogroms. A wave of immigrants came to Canada and to America. The bakery bosses used to wait at each ship that brought immigrants, and to look for bakery workers amongst them: bedraggled worried and broken Jews.

They were hoodwinked, and led to bakery shops where they had to bathe in sweat 20 hours on end. (It should be mentioned: the bosses from other trades did the same). This is how they treated their slaves, and they got rich from the toil of the wretched slaves.

The bakery shops were situated in dark damp cellars, without air to breathe, and in these holes we worked from dawn until late into the night.

Often we were so exhausted from such a long work-day that we would fall asleep near the oven, until the boss woke us up to work again. That was the life of bakery workers in Montreal. Exhausted, tired, sleepy souls.

These were sad times, but the bakery workers did not despair. Instead of despairing, we thought of how we might improve conditions. And gradually, the sky above the bakery-workers head began to lighten. Sunrays began to penetrate into the dark cellars of the bakers. They began to open their eyes and to see that the sun was created for them as well.

In 1904, some pioneers from local 48 and the newly enslaved bakery workers spoke together of their situation. They began to understand that as long as they remained in their enslaved conditions, they could not move. They began to think about a means to free themselves from their dark stuffy graves that were called bakery shops, and from poor wages.

At this time, local 115 was born. This did not come easily. It was hard work to build, many stones lay in the road, but where there is will and determination, the difficult road becomes easier. We slowly began to place the rocks, and to build the structure, local 115, whose 35th anniversary we are celebrating today with much pride.

The bakery-*balebostes* of that time understood the news that bakery-workers had organized, and they were not too pleased. They understood that the workers had come to their senses and this means a quick end to the 18 and 20-hour workday, as well as to the three dollar a week wages. This meant that the workers began to understand their strength, and their right to live like humans and not like dogs under their masters' table. This is exactly what the bosses, exactly as today, did not want to allow.

I remember an incident that happened to me in the time of the union's foundation. It was Friday, and the bakery workers had come together to hold the first meeting of our bakers' group, and to lay the cornerstone of the union.

I was elected as secretary (a post which I hold until today). On my second day as a union man, I came as the union secretary to the home (*shhtub*) of my boss (*balebos*), and said good shabbes, (my boss was a pious (*frumer*) Jew at home, a *shomer shabbes* (Sabbath observing), but in the shop he did what he had to). To my "good-shabbes," my boss answered with a real welcome (*baruch-haba*): why had I become a union man, and how had I dared to become the secretary of the union?

After this evil encounter from my master came the shabbos dinner of my mistress. As I have said earlier, the majority of workers ate at their employers and slept by the ovens. The employers hoped to thereby achieve two things, that the workers who boarded with them could work dirt-cheap, and the worker could be awakened to work at the employer's will. This shabbos afternoon, when I ate at my *balebos*, was not like a shabbos afternoon. The *kiddish* wine was watery, the meat bony, and the answer to my good-shabbos was a sour one. ...

I wondered how my boss learned so quickly of our meeting, as there was no radio at that time, and the meeting had been called on short notice. Apparently the word-of-mouth radio had been very efficient. That was how the baker's union was organized 35 years ago. We hired a business agent to organize all the bakeries, and we paid him 2 dollars per week out of the workers' 10 cent weekly dues.

Some months later, we had a union, and we declared our first strike. We set to work enthusiastically. We gathered together in our local, and came up with plans to make our strike a success. No one went home; not those with families, nor those that lived at their bosses'. We ate and slept together at union headquarters until the strike achieved a great victory. From 18-20 hours became 12 hours, from 3 and 10 dollars a week became 10-15 dollars. In all ways this was a great achievement. The practice of boarding at the bosses was abolished, and the worker began to be able to breathe more freely. The bosses had to recognize that the workers could sometimes be made to bend, but could never be broken.

In our 35 years we have had to wage fierce and stubborn battles that have at times brought us close to despair, and it appeared that little by little, the union would be crushed. However the inner faith in unity has shown the outside world that the bakers' union is not so easily destroyed. Through this struggle the bakery worker has come to the realization that the union is its strongest protection, which it must defend if it does not wish to fall back into the abyss of slavery from which the union has lifted it.

It is true that the bosses strain with all their might to break to destroy the strong weapons of the union and thereby to weaken it economically, and with the help of the last depression years succeeded in undermining the economic standing of the bakery worker in large measure, so that we are not so far from the conditions that prevailed 35 years ago.

But the bosses should not rejoice, the bakery worker is not so fickle as to give up 35 years of struggle, 35 years union is no trifle. The bakery worker is just as feisty and as combative as the first pioneers that built the union, only with more union consciousness and years of experience. Such things cannot be taken away lightly.

Now that the bakers' union has won the sympathy of the greater Yiddish masses in the city, the cooperation of all socialists, union, and other organizations, is this truly a great encouragement. To all organizations goes out a big thank-you. They should know that the bakers' union strongly values their important work.



Reminiscences in the History of Local No. 115 - By A. SUFFRIN Flu. - Sec'y of Local 115

In the summer of 1902 I left my birthplace in the mountain town of Neamtz, Roumania to seek my fortune in the wide world. First I went to Germany where, in the course of two years, I travelled all over the country visiting all the larger cities; in the North-east I passed a good deal of time in the provinces of Prussia and Bavaria. From the outset of my sojourn in Germany I was impressed with the democratic freedom then extant there. The freedom and civil liberties contrasted strangely with the absolute lack of elemental rights in my own country. In my enthusiasm over these liberties it was only natural that I should become acquainted with some staunch Social Democrats who took great delight in initiating an ignorant small townier into their beliefs; but, nevertheless I took this all in good spirits and soon became a member of the party. Shortly afterwards I participated in a May Day celebration in the city of Leipzig. Later on when I obtained employment as a traveller for some firm it was obviously impossible to be very active in the party as I never remained very long in one single place, but nevertheless I remained a very ardent sympathizer.

And so it was with a very good social democratic background that I left Germany and sailed to Montreal. The ideals of social democracy remained deeply rooted in my heart and from the first day of my arrival in Canada I always sought ways and means to express these ideals. After being in this country a few months I came in contact with some ardent trade unionists and naturally the idea suggested itself of organizing a union permeated with the ideals of social democracy. Upon further going into the matter I found that there had been a bakers' union, Local 48, but it had gone out of existence on account of an unsuccessful strike. In an effort to revive it I contacted a few leaders of the socialist party and discussed with them the best means of reorganizing this local. These socialists succeeded in rallying to their side some of the former members of Local 48

and so, with the help of these parties and one year of intense organization activity, we succeeded in putting the local back on its feet.

Shortly afterwards, as a test of our strength we called a strike. It dragged on for a number of weeks. Then I learned of the presence of the late Bro. Wm. Horn, International Organizer, in our city. He had come to organize a French speaking local the present Local No. 55. I lost no time in making him acquainted with our difficulties and he gladly offered his aid although at that time we were not as yet affiliated with the International. Thanks to his assistance we were successful in our strike and in addition we gained the majority of the shops in the trade. Shortly afterwards the matter of affiliation came up. There were squabbles as to whether we should affiliate with an International Union or a Canadian Union. Bearing in mind the unselfish aid extended to us during the strike and also remembering that most of the founders of the International were staunch social democrats, I exerted all my energies to have our local affiliate with the International. In this I was successful. Then followed a few troublesome years where we had every opportunity to test the wisdom of our affiliation. During that period the strikes were numerous and prolonged. The International stood by our side during those years. Weakened by internal struggles and competition of a flood of cheap immigrant labor our local lost its charter in 1907. Because the local had founded twice it was with a great deal of difficulty that we were successful in gaining a new charter as Local 115, in 1909.

It is true that the idea of unionism has as yet not penetrated into the minds of all our baker workers. This is rather unfortunate, but when we look into the past, we must realize that this long and hard road of thirty-five years of struggle has brought immense achievements in our trade.

Now, when celebrating our thirty-fifth anniversary, we are full of hope and belief for much greater success—only with the strength of our union.



Bread - H. Hershman

It is a pleasure to recall the days of the foundation of the baker's union, as it a pleasure to write in general to about the bakery worker. An intimate feeling moves me at this particular moment, as we see the bakery worker as being different from all other kinds of Jewish workers. I mean to say that there is some traditional legacy in them and in their trade. When we think about the bakers, we recall unbidden memories of Friday daybreak in the Old Country, as Mama lit the oven to bake the Shabbes challah. One truly felt the enticing odour of freshly baked bread, and of the "*plampletzlech*" that Mama used to give us to bring to *kheder* so that "*ben Yehud*" (only son) should not, God forbid, be hungry and so that he should have the strength to study God's Torah. Nearer and dearer is the bakery worker (I would say almost as close as Mama) because they give you bread, which is the basis of life.

It is my fate to have been one of those to who witnessed the establishment of the union. Today, as the union celebrates its thirty-fifth anniversary, I feel just as festive as the bakers themselves. When historians write the history of the Jewish workers' movement in Montreal, they must give an honoured place to the Jewish Bakers' union that celebrates its thirty-fifth anniversary.

Were one to measure the importance of the various organizations according to the number of members they have, then it would appear to be an insignificant factor on the Jewish workers' streets of our city. In Montreal, there are currently Jewish unions that number their members in the thousands, while the number of bakers grouped around the union has never exceeded two digits. But this is not what is most important, the moral strength of an organization does not lie in its numbers. More important is the human material that holds it together. When encounters the human material of the bakers' union, one must admit that there is no other such organization of ours in our city where the feeling of workers' solidarity has influenced the members to a higher degree. No other union in the city has the kind of brotherhood that we find amongst the bakery workers. To be among them is to feel respect for the organization and for its leaders, and one is moved to promote it as a model for other organizations in our city.

No unemployment amongst Jewish bakers

Reading the foregoing lines many readers will surely ask in amazement, how can this be? It seems that unemployment is now a sickness that has conquered every branch of industry. The impact of unemployment is felt everywhere in every domain. How can it be that the Jewish bakery worker is protected from this very epidemic? This exceptional phenomenon can be explained when one becomes familiar with the system that has been instituted in the bakers' union.

The brotherly solidarity which prevails in the ranks of the bakers is simply such that the members take care of one another in a truly brotherly manner, and the work that available in the trade is distributed so that each union man gets his share of the hours, so that there are no idlers (*laydik gayers*).

Certainly, according to this system, the earnings of the average bakery worker are very small. When work is evenly divided amongst all, each worker gets few hours, and fewer hours mean smaller earnings. But the bakers are satisfied with their own system that they administered. Happy to share a bite of bread with their brothers as true sons of the word. This alone would be enough to put the union in an honoured place in the history of the Jewish labour movement, and to make it a model of worker's solidarity. But the bakers union decided to compete with other organizations in our city in other domains. This is in the question of the response to the appeal of the need of others. No action initiated on the Jewish workers' street in Montreal has gone without the bakers contributing their share to the appeal. Committees that visited the union on behalf of those whom it gathered together were warmly received. Not amongst the bakers will you find the tension present, unfortunately, in other organizations. The donations that the union gives, in such cases, are given as a true gesture of brotherhood.

The bakers union is the pride of the local workers movement and its jubilee is a cause for celebration for everyone. On this anniversary celebration, I conclude, together with the organizers of

Montreal labour and with the thousands that support the bakers' union, and wish them many more years of activity in the manner which they have operated in the past as a model for the other organizations of our city.

Poems - A.S. Shkolnikov

One Must Work (dedicated to my daughter Masha)

One must work
To earn one's keep
Said Papa.

At the table
Mama told Mashe
And the watery kashe.
The small crust of bread-
In the house there was poverty.

Worthy eyes,
Looking careworn at my hands,
Arching quietly
Looking sadly, with shame.

I have a grievous lot
And my youth has been pruned,
Like a branch in the fall

Gloom has fallen
On my boyish face
And bleached it
As though washed out with tears.

A father, you are right,
Lives by demanding his wages . . .
From good 'til bad
Only reality from the dream

The years have gone by
Picking me out for work
A boy, a brave dashing lad
With strong nimble fingers
The long awaited day came,
When I packed my youth, my pride
Into a small bundle, tore myself away from my
home
To earn my crust of bread.

I offered myself up for work,
And the wind took up my desire,
In jingling notes,
In the workshop, with a song.

The tailor wished for me,
A world of blue and gold-
The baker gives bread
for kneading dough.

I am in the baker's place,
In the dark bake-house.
The town clock rings out the morning.
I have had my hand tied to the yoke,
In juicy sugar-pastry,
The day is already gone and spent
From six until six.

They Greet One Another

In their eyes
Joy was reflected.
And in their faces it shines
Like young wine.
From their hearts breaks forth
Tonight's Jubilee.

Today is the holiday of brothers,
Of work and bread workers:
Not sad, and not tired,
They have drunk their fill of joy.
The fields ripen for us,
The stalks sing to us
The bright sun shines above us
With a light golden sound-
And over the years [*yern*=ferment] plowed up
beds
Yield forth the bread we have harvested.

Our Work

Our work-
A fresh juicy bread.
We knead the bread,
We bake the bread
Day and night,
In heated combat
With poverty.

Our day-
Flame and oven
Deep into the night.

By leaps and bounds [literally, like yeast]
We awaken
Toil and trouble pass
From hand to hand
Aflame-
It burns, hot brown breads
White smoke
As though from a wick
Soft, tender
Intoxicating sleepy eyes.

And the night, overcast with repose
Stumbles quietly to an end;
The rosy morning on the branches
Awakens the leaves from their sleep.

Our day-
Ashes in the oven
At the end of the night,
Left-over yeast
Unburned in the fire.
Weakened hands,
Eyes worn with smoke-
Dark lamps without a glow,
But in our hands
Like a mighty brand
Blooms forth,
A warm fresh bread.

To the Bakery Women Esther Siegel

I see you in your weekday clothes,
With sleeves rolled up over folded hands
That smooth out the white tablecloth
Over the every-day table
Hanging the gray weekday walls.

I see you, in painful loneliness
Bent over a feverish, sick child,
And in the quiet, in the good, motherly eyes,
You hold out comfort for the household.

I see you, with a prematurely aged face.
Never tired, standing ready,
Even when the wrinkles of your skin
Stay demanding, like a strict judge-
You are ready to share your last crust of bread.

I see you in your own few minutes.
When you spin in joy your golden dream.
And in the hours of deep pain,
When peace wanders like a lost lamb.

And who will answer for your life,
Faded, without light, and without joy?
When you are forged in the strength of silence,
Is that who, is that who will solve it?

Perhaps your husband,
Who has dragged himself by night to the flames of the oven,
To the floury baker's table, and who has left you
To the bitter mockery of the shadows,
To the cold whiteness of the kitchen.
Your husband, who has given up the hours of sunlight,
Whose frame has withered in toil,
Who brings to you in the early morning his exhausted body,
Throwing himself on the couch like a sheath in the field.

So I love the bakers wife's bitter anger
Which she cannot scream out expressed in smiles
On hot lips.
As the sun cannot shield the roads from the wind,
I hear in her wild reproofs
The lament of a suffering child.

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