

What Else Could We Have Done?: The Montreal Jewish Community, the Canadian  
Jewish Congress, the Jewish Press and the Holocaust

Max Beer

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## Abstract

### What Else Could We Have Done?: The Montreal Jewish Community, the Canadian Jewish Congress, the Jewish Press and the Holocaust

Max Beer

In 1933 Hitler and the Nazi party came to power in Germany. At the same time, in Canada in general and in Montreal in particular, anti-Semitism was becoming more widespread. The Canadian Jewish Congress, as a result of the growing tension in Europe and the increase in anti-Semitism at home, was reborn in 1934 and became the voice of Canadian Jewry

During World War II the Nazis embarked on a campaign that resulted in the systematic extermination of millions of Jews. This paper focuses on the Montreal Jewish community, its leadership, the Jewish press and their response to the fate of European Jewry. The study pays particular attention to the Canadian Jewish Congress which influenced the outlook of the community and its subsequent actions. As the war progressed loyalty to Canada and support for the war effort became the overriding issues for the community and the leadership and concern for their European brethren faded into the background.

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Thanks go to Eiran Harris, “preserver of history” and archivist at the Jewish Public Library. Mr. Harris not only made sure I had access to the microfilm of the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* but also in conversations provided me with information on the Montreal Jewish community.

I would especially like to express my gratitude to Mr. Joe Berman, the ninety-four year old father of a good friend, who volunteered to read and translate Yiddish newspapers and documents for me. Although I speak and understand everyday Yiddish my reading and comprehension of the literary language leave much to be desired. Mr. Berman read the *Kanader Adler* to me with such eloquence that I began to appreciate a language I had not heard spoken for many years. Because of his deep understanding of Yiddish, he was also able to explain many of the nuances and thus made it possible for me to present the reader an English version that is not “lost in translation.”

My thanks also go to Reuven Shultz, Director of the Farband. He not only shared with me his wealth of knowledge of the organization but also generously loaned me many books dealing with Canadian and American Jewish history during the 1930s and 1940s. I also wish to thank Malka Hubner and the late Tamar Kofsky who read Yiddish articles to me.

Last, but not least I would like to express my love and appreciation to my wife Deena, who kept urging me on, as at times it appeared that this project would never come to fruition. Her dedication as wife, mother, teacher and activist has always been an inspiration to me.

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	1
<b>CHAPTER</b>	
1. Historiography .....	8
2. The 1930s – Prelude to Catastrophe .....	31
3. World War II .....	64
A Question of Loyalty .....	69
4. The Shoah	
What Was Known.....	77
What Was Done.....	88
Conclusion .....	106
Bibliography .....	111

## **Introduction**

The Holocaust, the extermination of millions of European Jews, created in Jewish communities in the United States and Canada a trauma of such magnitude that it dramatically changed these communities and their perception of the world. For Jews, the Holocaust raised the question of non-Jewish apathy and silence. The indifference of Christian bystanders became an important subject in Holocaust studies. The contention by many historians that Jews and their communities outside Nazi-occupied Europe were also bystanders led to the emergence of scholarly research on Western Jewish communities.

This study focuses on the Montreal Jewish community from the early 1930s when Nazism began its meteoric rise in Germany to 1945 when the Allies liberated the concentration camps of Europe and scenes of utmost horror were revealed to the world. The study considers what members of this community knew and what they did to help the Jews in Europe. What was in fact known or not known, what was done or not done are not black and white issues. We now live in an age in which information is easily accessed; we live in an era when protests and marches have become important outlets for public expression on various political and social issues. The situation at that time was vastly different. Re-creating the past to determine what happened in that community and to that community is not an easy task. For us in the present to assign blame based on what we now know, or for us to believe we would have acted differently, is to assume that those in the past somehow lacked not only our insight but also our supposed moral integrity.

The thesis examines the influence of the Jewish leadership on the community. The “leadership” refers to the Canadian Jewish Congress – replete with its executives,

officers, members and staff – which in the 1930s became the authoritative body representing Canadian Jewry. Congress spoke on behalf of the community to government and to the Canadian public and also formulated policies that determined the Jewish response to the Holocaust. Although it was a national organization, Congress was based in Montreal, was largely staffed by members of the Montreal community and reflected the views of those members.

In this thesis, the past is presented from various sources: newspaper articles, documents, memoirs, diaries and filmed interviews. Each source and each perspective can be problematic. Newspapers and documents deal with another time, an era when information due to wartime conditions and limited technology was not readily available and in many instances suppressed. Newspapers may represent the views of their publishers, and must be read with that in mind. Documents are not always the most objective accounts of the past. Michel Foucault has suggested that every record of the past, including the archival, is “a representation and therefore subject to all of a culture’s mediating forces...”<sup>1</sup> Diaries, memoirs and interviews with people who lived in Montreal during that period depend on people’s perceptions and memories.

Saul Friedländer, noted Holocaust historian, states that the distant past can be observed with a more balanced view because its relevance to the present has in many cases been diminished by time. He suggests that in the study of what he terms the “recent and relevant past,” memory and history become intertwined as scholars search for an interpretation of a group’s past, their so-called “historical consciousness.”<sup>2</sup> The recent

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<sup>1</sup> James E. Young, “Between History and Memory,” *History and Memory*, Vol 9, no.6, (1997): 56.

<sup>2</sup> Saul Friedländer, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), viii.



past is remembered by a generation which, while aged and dying, is still with us. Their perspectives of the past become part of a collective memory.

In the movie *Rashomon* famed director Akira Kurosawa portrays the fragility of memory.<sup>3</sup> The film deals with the murder of a man and the rape of his wife through the recollections of the participants and witnesses to the crime. The event is presented as a series of flashbacks from four perspectives. Everyone sees what transpired differently. The movie tells us that recounting the past as it really was is a difficult if not altogether impossible task.

Memory is both unreliable and subjective. Psychologist Daniel L. Schacter contends that “memories are records of how we have experienced events, not replicas of the events themselves.”<sup>4</sup> People view the past through the present and see what happened through their own eyes, through their own experiences, through their own biases and recall and recount what occurred so that the present becomes bearable. The filmmaker Kurosawa suggests that people sometimes cannot tell the truth, even to themselves. Deception and self-deception, it would seem, are inherent components of human nature.

While *Rashomon* is a celluloid view of life, its ideas on the representation of the past make us aware of the unreliability of memory. Historical studies that examine a relatively recent past that is wrought with guilt, remorse and shame, must not only deal with the limitations of memory, but must also acknowledge that any particular representation of the past is affected by and also affects the present. Historian Omer

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<sup>3</sup> Akira Kurasawa, director. *Rashomon*. (Japan: Embassy Home Entertainment [distributors], 1950), videocassette.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel L. Schacter, *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind, and the Past* ( New York: BasicBooks, 1996), 6.

Bartov has observed how memories of war, especially memories of the Holocaust, have been altered by individuals, groups and nations.

The memory of the past will always extend into the future, always threaten to monopolize our hopes and aspirations. And so we mold and twist it to fit our needs, and project that newly fashioned image forward, making it into a distorting mirror of imagined, fabricated recollections.<sup>5</sup>

This thesis sheds light on a topic that has become a sort of no-man's-land, where few have gone or, it would appear, wish to go. Filmmakers, journalists, writers and academics have explored the Montreal Jewish community during the war years, yet scant attention has been paid to the Holocaust and any repercussions it may have had on the community. From these reports one would conclude that what was happening "over there" was somehow unrelated, even irrelevant, to the Jews of Montreal. This thesis thus explores an often neglected subject and brings to light an issue that has for many years remained buried.

In the winter of 2002 I watched the videotape version of *Montreal Jewish Memories: The War Years, 1939-1945*.<sup>6</sup> The documentary production, through interviews and film footage from that era, gives the viewer insight into the lives of Montreal Jews during the period when millions of European Jews were being exterminated. The film describes the day-to-day life of these ordinary citizens, yet it does not deal with reactions that members of this Jewish community had to the tragedy that befell the Jewish communities in Europe.

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<sup>5</sup> Omer Bartov, *Mirrors of Destruction: War, Genocide, and Modern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 82.

<sup>6</sup> Dov Okouneff, producer/director/editor and Stanley Asher, co-director/narrator/researcher. *Montreal Jewish Memories: Stories of the War Years 1939-1945* (Montreal: D.O. Film, 2002), videocassette.

About twelve minutes into the film one of the interviewees asks, “What else could we have done?” He does not mean what we [the members of the Jewish community] could have done for the Jews of Europe. He is talking about the Canadian war effort and the Jewish contributions to the home front. This question, although asked in a context seemingly unrelated to the wholesale destruction of European Jewry, does epitomize the attitude of many Montreal Jews to the Holocaust. Dov Okounoff, the filmmaker who produced *Montreal Jewish Memories*, stated that the lack of discussion of the Holocaust in his film was not because the topic was intentionally avoided either by the interviewer or the subjects. He says, in fact, that the issue seldom came up. For the people being interviewed, the Holocaust was not part of their consciousness; it was not part of their world.<sup>7</sup>

This thesis examines the issues that made the community act in the way it did during those years. It looks at the political and social landscape in Canada, and pays particular attention to the conditions in Montreal. While the Montreal Jewish community was subjected to a range of forces that affected its outlook towards the Holocaust, this study focuses on the Canadian Jewish Congress and delves into the role of the organization which, as the voice of Canadian Jewry, helped shape the perceptions and the mindset of the community.

Congress carried out policies that it felt would best serve the community and ensure its well-being. Historian Raul Hilberg contends that the tactics of adjustments and adaptations had long been practiced by Jews. He argues in his study of the Jewish councils of Europe during the Holocaust that he could not separate “the Jewish leaders from the Jewish populace,” as he believes that, “these men represented the essence of a

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Dov Okounoff, March 10, 2003.

time-honored Jewish reaction to danger.”<sup>8</sup> The traditional Jewish strategies employed in Europe persisted in the New World. Congress and the community were inextricably linked by centuries of Jewish history.

This study examines the Jewish press and the documents in the archives of the Canadian Jewish Congress. Although the non-Jewish press rarely reported on the Holocaust, the two Montreal-based Jewish newspapers, the *Kanader Adler* and the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, were instrumental in providing information on the ongoing tragedy of European Jewry. Although they published the reports and directives issued by the Canadian Jewish Congress to the community, these newspapers had editorial opinions and articles that at times urged Congress to change its approach. The archives of Congress contain the correspondence, both public and confidential, which was issued by the executive and tell the story from the perspectives of the leadership. There was dissent within the organization and archival records show the contentious issues that led to conflict. The archives also contain records from the *landsmanshaften*, mutual aid groups made up of Jewish members coming from specific regions of Europe. Of particular interest are the reports and appeals issued by an umbrella organization, the Federation of Polish Jews of Canada.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter explores the scholarly work that has preceded this study. Of particular importance is the research that has been done on bystanders during the Holocaust. The second chapter examines the 1930s and looks at the Jewish community in Montreal, its reaction both to the increase in anti-Semitism at home and the emergence of Nazism in Europe. The third chapter looks at

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<sup>8</sup> Raul Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory: The Journey of a Holocaust Historian*, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), 151.

the start of World War II and its effect on the Montreal Jewish community. Attention is given to the issue of loyalty, as the community and its leadership sought to display their patriotism to a population and a government indifferent to Jewish issues. The fourth chapter contends that by late 1942 there was ample information available in North America on the mass destruction of the Jewish population of Europe. It concludes that Congress's emphasis on the war effort and its call to the Jewish community for unquestioned loyalty to Canada helped make the Holocaust a secondary issue.

## Chapter 1

### Historiography

In his book, *Delayed Impact: The Holocaust and the Canadian Jewish Community*, Frank Bialystok explores how Holocaust awareness became instrumental in reshaping the Jewish community after World War II. The author posits that in the post-war era the shift from indifference to self-identification with the Holocaust has radically changed the community. In the United States, according to Peter Novick, a similar development occurred. In his much publicized and highly controversial book, *The Holocaust in American Life*, the American historian examines the emergence of a “Holocaust consciousness” and its effect on the Jewish community. Novick moreover contends that the Holocaust and its memory have become fixtures not only in the American-Jewish community, but also in a large segment of American society.

Bialystok’s research focuses on the evolution of the Canadian Jewish community following the near total extermination of European Jewry. According to Bialystok, the Holocaust has become part of the Jewish community’s collective memory, with its commemorations, its museums and its place in Canadian Jewish literature. However the role of the Jewish community during the war years has faded into the background, not totally forgotten but reduced to a footnote. A historical memory was created by the community that presumed that while their brethren were being murdered across the ocean, the Jewish community in Canada, although under restrictions due to war-time conditions, had done all it could to help the Jews of Europe.

[I]n the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, the popular view propagated was that the community had rallied to support

European Jews, worked efficiently with political and civic leaders, and mounted an earnest effective campaign of relief. This perception created a collective memory within the community that stated that, while a tragic and unprecedented calamity had befallen the Jews of Europe, Canadian Jews had done everything possible under the circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

The Montreal Jewish community which is the focal point of this study was many thousands of miles away from the death camps of Auschwitz and Treblinka. The community was not directly affected by the systematic murder of millions. This is not to suggest that Jews viewed the events with dispassion. Many Jews who settled in Montreal had left behind family and friends in Europe. But aside from those with relations in Europe, Hitlerism did not immediately threaten many in the Jewish community. Most of the population of Canada, both Jewish and non-Jewish, were bystanders in the tragedy that engulfed Europe.

Scholars have struggled with the problem of defining the bystander during the Holocaust. Victoria J. Barnett, a graduate of Union Theological Seminary and a professional writer, focuses on the moral and religious aspects of being a bystander during that period in her book, *Bystanders: Conscience and Complicity During the Holocaust*. As she grapples with the question, “Who is a Bystander?” Barnett does make distinctions based on different levels of involvement. She asks, “Can we really use the word “bystander” to describe such diverse groups as the American Jewish community, residents of areas that bordered concentration camps, and international aid officials?”<sup>2</sup> To be sure not all bystanders are equal. Nonetheless the enormity of these mass murders and the vast expanse of land where these crimes were perpetrated required the silence and

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Bialystok, *Delayed Impact: The Holocaust and the Canadian Jewish Community* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2000), 16-17.

<sup>2</sup> Victoria J. Barnett, *Bystanders: Conscience and Complicity During the Holocaust* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999), 12.

acquiescence of a multitude of people and thus brought into the study of bystanders an array of individuals, communities, institutions and countries. Also the belief that bystanders were powerless disappeared in the 1960s, a decade marked by the revelations of the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem and the emergence of “Holocaust awareness.”<sup>3</sup> A new generation began to question not only the misdeeds but also the inactions of their elders.

While there has been an immense amount of literature on the role of bystanders during the Holocaust, much of that literature has focused on the non-Jewish community. Christian Europeans are sometimes considered the quintessential bystanders, both because of their proximity to the mass murder and their supposed indifference. Nevertheless, one has to consider that those closer to the frontlines ran a greater risk if they spoke up or engaged in any activity to help Jews than those who lived in the relative safety of North America

Anti-Semitism has become for many scholars the principal factor defining the relationship between Jew and non-Jew during the Holocaust.<sup>4</sup> Both perpetrators and bystanders have been characterized by their deep-seated anti-Semitism. Perhaps the most critical and controversial book on the German role in the mass murder of Jews is Daniel Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*.<sup>5</sup>

According to many scholars, Goldhagen places the blame squarely on the shoulders of

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<sup>3</sup> Adolf Eichmann was one of the architects of the Final Solution. His trial in Jerusalem in 1961 brought world attention to Nazi Germany’s aim of exterminating the Jews of Europe.

<sup>4</sup> There is an enormous amount of literature on anti-Semitism and its relation to the Holocaust. See *The Holocaust and the Christian World*, ed. Carol Rittner, Stephen D. Smith and Irena Steinfeld (New York: Continuum, 2000); John Weiss, *The Politics of Hate: Anti-Semitism, History, and the Holocaust in Modern Europe* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Knopf, 1996).



the entire German nation, and makes every German a perpetrator driven by what the author refers to as “eliminationist anti-Semitism.”<sup>6</sup>

Other historians have suggested that anti-Semitism was not universal and that the planned extermination of the Jews, if it had been explicitly proclaimed, would not have met with mass approval. The Germans, in the view of these historians, were guilty of apathy, not collusion. Ian Kershaw, in his book *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria 1933-1945*, examines the near total indifference on the part of the Bavarian populace to the fate of their Jewish compatriots. What comes across in his study of these bystanders is their total lack of concern for the Jewish victims. Kershaw suggests that the problem was not that of being uninformed as much as it was of not caring. “The Jews were out of sight and literally out of mind for most.”<sup>7</sup>

While anti-Semitism for many historians remains the driving force that led to the destruction of European Jewry, some scholars have looked elsewhere to discover what made the mass murder of the Jews not only possible, but also acceptable and for some even a necessary deed. They have pointed to the state as being the true culprit. The role of the state and its responsibility is an important constituent in the work of political philosopher Hannah Arendt, who argues that anti-Semitism did not produce the Final

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<sup>6</sup> Jose Joffe, “‘The Killers Were Ordinary Germans, Ergo the Ordinary Germans Were Killers’: The Logic, the Language, and the Meaning of a Book That Conquered Germany” in *Unwilling Germans?: The Goldhagen Debate*, ed. Robert R. Shadley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 217-228. Roger W. Smith “‘Ordinary Germans,’ The Holocaust, and Responsibility: *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* in Moral Perspective” in *Hyping the Holocaust: Scholars Answer Goldhagen*, ed. Franklin H. Littell (Merion Westfield Press International, Merion Station, Pennsylvania, 1997), 47-57.

<sup>7</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria 1933-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 364.

Solution. It was the creation of the totalitarian state that made possible the systematic murder of a people deemed to be undesirable elements of society.<sup>8</sup>

While the study of bystanders to the Holocaust has become an important issue, it was a subject that for more than fifteen years after the defeat of Nazism was never explored. Hannah Arendt's book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, was published in 1963, two years after the trial of Adolph Eichmann, head of the Third Reich's Department of Jewish Affairs. The book was not merely a detailed account of the trial; it went far beyond that. It was a controversial and, some of her critics would add, a highly inflammatory report. Arendt questioned the efficacy and validity of the trial itself. However, it was her outright accusations of the collaborative role played by members of the Jewish councils in the ghettos, the so-called Judenräte, that earned her stinging rebukes.<sup>9</sup>

Arendt, referencing the work of Raul Hilberg, states that these councils, by obeying and colluding with their Nazi masters, increased the Jewish death toll.

Wherever Jews lived, there were recognized Jewish leaders, and this leadership, almost without exception, cooperated in one way or another, for one reason or another, with the Nazis. The whole truth was that if the Jewish people had really been unorganized and leaderless, there would have been chaos and plenty of misery but the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and a half and six million people.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ernard J. Bergen supports Arendt's argument. He examines her book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Study in the Banality of Evil*, and her studies on the emergence of the totalitarian state in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. "Arendt is radically divorcing the Final Solution from its meaning as the culmination of a history of European anti-Semitism." Bernard J. Bergen, *The Banality of Evil: Hannah Arendt and "The Final Solution"* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 4.

<sup>9</sup> For instance, Jacob Robinson, *And the Crooked Shall be Made Straight* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965). Robinson's book offers a rebuttal to Arendt's thesis.

<sup>10</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), 125.

Hilberg's account of the Judenräte was included in his monumental work, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, published in 1961. Arendt's criticism and faultfinding, however, go beyond what Hilberg had written. In her view the Jewish leaders, unwillingly no doubt, had crossed a moral divide, transforming themselves from victims to accomplices to murder.

Although Arendt's treatment of the Judenräte was controversial, the fact that scholars were able to discuss and question issues that had previously been considered out of bounds was significant. Historians, political scientists and an assortment of other scholars would not only be able to delve into the deeds of the Nazi hierarchy and its victims, but they would now also be able to look at all the "participants" in the Final Solution.

Hilberg's revelations and Arendt's accusations had opened up the floodgates. Some historians would look at the "ordinary" men who pulled the triggers or shoved people onto trains going to the East. Scholars would investigate the bureaucrats, the faceless men and women, who, from their sterile offices, organized the implementation of the Final Solution. As historians took a closer look at those on the periphery – people, groups, institutions and governments that had never been considered responsible for any wrongdoing, and as the circle of these "participants" grew, scholars began probing the question of silence, apathy or acquiescence.

In 1967 Arthur Morse's book, *While Six Million Died*, opened up a new chapter in Holocaust research. For although Arendt had considered the responsibility and guilt of Jews trapped in Nazi-occupied Europe, Morse attacked both U.S. "involvement" in the plight of European Jewry and questioned the silence in the American Jewish community.

Morse's book was the first to take a critical look at the policies of the Roosevelt administration vis-à-vis the Holocaust. The majority of Americans, both Jews and non-Jews, had assumed that their government had done everything possible to save European Jewry. Morse raises the question of American government apathy and insensitivity in the face of the known dangers faced by the Jews trapped in Hitler's Europe. The book broke through a mindset that had been established following the defeat of Nazism. Roosevelt and his administration had led the country through the Great Depression and through most of World War II. His government had been considered, until the publication of Morse's book, an exemplary force in the battle to save the Jews of Europe. The book points an accusatory finger at Roosevelt for his failure to open the doors to immigration following *Kristallnacht* and contends that although there were restrictionist elements within Congress, it was Roosevelt himself who "insisted on living up to the letter of the immigration law."<sup>11</sup>

*While Six Million Died* marked a turning point not only in its criticism of Roosevelt. Although Christian communities and especially the Vatican had previously been attacked for their supposed silence during the Holocaust, Jewish communities, particularly those in the West, had been spared any criticism.<sup>12</sup> They were seen as communities under siege, facing anti-Semitism at home, possessing little political power and watching anxiously and helplessly from the sidelines as Jews were being demonized

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<sup>11</sup> Arthur Morse, *While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy* (New York: Random House, 1968), 148.

<sup>12</sup> In 1963 the play "The Deputy," by German playwright, Rolf Hochhuth, was first performed. The play dealt with Pope Pius XII's silence – his alleged failure to speak out on behalf of the Jews during the Holocaust. The play portrayed the Pope as a callous, unyielding individual and contends that Pope Pius XII knew what was happening to the Jewish population in war-torn Europe, but said nothing and did nothing. Rolf Hochhuth, *The Representative* trans. Robert David MacDonald (London: Oberon Books, 1998). This edition includes an essay by Hannah Arendt, "The Deputy: Guilty by Silence?", 390-399, reprinted from *New York Herald Tribune*, 23 February, 1964.

and victimized in Europe. Morse however condemns not only the US government, but also the American public, including many in the Jewish community, who stood idly by. “Many Jews were as disinterested as their Christian countrymen. The bystanders to cruelty became bystanders to genocide.”<sup>13</sup> Morse’s book was the first of many that condemned US policy and censured the Jewish community.

While various Jewish communities in the West have been studied for their response to the Holocaust, the American Jewish community has become the focus for this type of research.<sup>14</sup> The United States had such a large Jewish population that it was viewed both before and especially after the Holocaust as the emerging centre of Jewish life. It had become the new Promised Land and was affectionately referred to by its early Yiddish speaking immigrants as the *Goldene Medine*, the Golden Land. Although the American Jewish community had experienced anti-Semitism, it had made great strides and members of the community had become politically active in the Democratic Party. FDR was seen by many as a modern-day saviour who had helped American Jewry enter into the mainstream of American life. His New Deal had strong support from the Jewish community. Thus for some it appeared that American Jewry had emerged in the inter-war period as a strong self-assured community with political clout. Much of this strength of the American Jewish community was illusionary, however.

Many historians have focused on anti-Semitism, North American style, to explain the response or lack thereof of the American Jewish community to the Holocaust. They

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<sup>13</sup> Morse, 383.

<sup>14</sup> For a view of British Jewry and the Holocaust see David Cesarani, *The Jewish Chronicle and Anglo-Jewry, 1841-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 176. The Yishuv, the Jewish settlement in Palestine, has come under severe criticism from several Israeli historians. Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 96. See also Orna Kenan, *Between Memory and History: The Evolution of Israeli Historiography of the Holocaust, 1945-1961* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2003), 89.

contend that the anti-Semitism paralyzed the community and its leadership and led to a submission to government policy that ignored the Jewish tragedy and refused to consider rescue efforts on behalf of European Jewry. While anti-Semitism did exist, other scholars do not see it as the overriding reason for the actions of the Jewish community. Some have asserted that the indifference to the Final Solution in the non-Jewish communities also existed in the Jewish communities.

Understandably the issue has become particularly significant to Jewish academics. In fact the most vitriolic attacks on the supposed indifference of the Jewish community have come from these scholars. It may be easier for someone from the “inside” to level such charges than for a so-called outsider who might be accused of bias. A non-Jew might be deemed “insensitive” to a community that shares with its vanished European brethren a common history – a past that has been portrayed as laden with hostility and outright hatred from the non-Jewish community.

In the 1980s, as seen by the voluminous outpouring of books and the controversy that surrounded some of these new publications, the response to the Holocaust by the American-Jewish community became one of the major themes of Holocaust studies. One of the most controversial books was *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945* by American historian David S. Wyman. Although Wyman points to anti-Semitism and indifference in American society and government, he does not absolve the Jewish leaders. Rather, he argues that as far as the Jewish leadership was concerned, the fate of European Jewry was not a high priority. “An additional problem was the inability of American Jewish leaders to break out of a business-as-usual pattern. Too few schedules were rearranged. Vacations were seldom sacrificed. Too few projects

of lesser significance were put aside.”<sup>15</sup> Nor was Wyman’s the only book critical of American Jewry. As mentioned, the harshest rebukes came from Jewish scholars (Wyman is Protestant). The titles of some of these works alone show the acrimonious discourse that ensued as accusations were levelled at the wartime community for their betrayal of their suffering brethren in Europe. Two such publications are Haskell Lookstein’s *Were We Our Brothers' Keepers?: The Public Response of American Jews to the Holocaust, 1938-1944* and Rafael Medoff’s *The Deafening Silence: American Jewish Leaders and the Holocaust*. Lookstein condemns the American Jewish community for its indifference in the face of an enormous calamity that was known to many. While he concedes that not much could have been done to save the Jews of Europe, he objects to the fact that nothing was tried. The Jews in the United States went on with life as if what was happening in Europe was of little concern to them. “The Final Solution may have been *unstoppable* by American Jewry, but it should have been *unbearable* for them. And it wasn’t.”<sup>16</sup>

Rafael Mendoff focuses on the American Jewish leaders and accuses them of more than indifference. He blames them for thwarting efforts by “outsiders” who tried desperately to bring pressure on the American government to save the Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe. His book pays tribute to Peter Bergson, head of the militant Revisionist Zionist movement in the United States. Unlike the established Jewish leadership, the so-called Bergsonites were willing to go public and demand action from the American government. According to the author the Jewish leadership battled the Bergson group

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<sup>15</sup> David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 329.

<sup>16</sup> Haskell Lookstein *Were We Our Brothers' Keepers?: The Public Response of American Jews to the Holocaust, 1938-1944* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 218. Italics are those of Lookstein.

because it feared losing its own power in the Jewish community and alienating the non-Jewish community. The most powerful Jewish leader at the time, Rabbi Stephen Wise, considered himself a personal friend of FDR. Jews in North America had much to lose by criticizing a president and a government that had made life better for American Jews. Many feared that trying to help Jews in Europe by demonstrating at home would raise the specter of anti-Semitism: Jews would be accused of dual loyalty for supporting their brethren in Europe against the best interests of an America unwilling to be pulled again into a European conflict. The leadership also feared an anti-Semitic backlash from the American public should European Jewish refugees reach America's shores. "For the American Jewish leadership, a frightening conflict was beginning to emerge between the instinctive desire to aid oppressed Jews abroad and the fear of jeopardizing the comfort of Jews at home."<sup>17</sup>

Newton's third law of motion states: For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Thus this debate has produced an opposing view, a perspective that generally believes that the Jewish community did everything possible under trying circumstances, and at the same time approves of US policy, accepts the proposition that the American government did all that it could, and lastly, believes that the only relief for the Jews rested with a complete victory over Germany. All action had to be subordinated to that end.

Perhaps the most ardent proponent of these points of view is William D. Rubinstein. The U.S. educated historian, in his book, *The Myth of Rescue: Why the democracies could not have saved more Jews from the Nazis*, concludes that the idea that

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<sup>17</sup> Rafael Mendoff, *The Deafening Silence: American Jewish Leaders and the Holocaust* (New York: Shapolsky Publishers, 1987). 28.



*anything* could have been done to save the Jews is absurd. He accuses historians of becoming moral judges on this particular issue, assigning guilt to people and governments who are innocent of any wrongdoing. “[B]oth the governments of the Western democracies and the Jewish communities of the democracies must be viewed much more favourably: no rescue action was taken because no one, anywhere, had anything genuinely practical or effective to suggest, apart from winning the war more quickly.”<sup>18</sup>

Lucy S. Dawidowicz offers a more balanced criticism. In her essay, “Could America Have Rescued Europe’s Jews?”, the noted historian agrees with some of the statements made by David Wyman. She acknowledges certain facts:

The historical record has amply documented the selfishness, narrow-mindedness, prejudice, and xenophobia which animated many members of Congress and many officials in government agencies, especially those in the State Department who oversaw matters of immigration and refugees.<sup>19</sup>

What she vehemently objects to is the implication that the United States is guilty of complicity in the murder of millions of Jews. To Dawidowicz, Roosevelt remains beyond rebuke. The President was in an unenviable position, encumbered with duties and obligations that were inordinate – “in Roosevelt’s defence one must adduce the burden of his responsibility.”<sup>20</sup> The blame for the murder of millions rested solely with Nazi Germany. Hitler could only be stopped by massive force.

In another essay, “Indicting American Jews,” Dawidowicz condemns the “self-castigation” that has characterized the criticism of the wartime American Jewish

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<sup>18</sup>Richard Rubinstein, *The Myth of Rescue: Why the democracies could not have saved more Jews from the Nazis* (London: Routledge, 1997), 216.

<sup>19</sup>Lucy S. Dawidowicz “Could America Have Rescued Europe’s Jews?” in *What is the Use of Jewish History?* (New York: Schocken Books, 1992), 160.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 163.

community. She attributes much of the furor to “enemies of the Jews, especially on the Left.”<sup>21</sup> While she suggests that the Jews might have “tried harder, shouted more loudly,” she is not persuaded that in the end they would have accomplished much more than they did.<sup>22</sup>

More than any other historian, Henry L. Feingold has placed the Holocaust and the response of the American Jewish community not only in the context of the times, but also in the context of the history of the community. Pogroms and cases of blood libel in the past had led to protests and calls for government action, generally to no avail. “[T]he community response to these crises were neither notably different from what Jews were doing in the thirties and forties nor more effective.”<sup>23</sup> Feingold asserts that many historians give the wartime Jewish community a strength and cohesion that never existed during those years.

The war and the Holocaust accelerated the process of reshaping American Jewry. It became an organized, effective community finally able to carry fully the mantle of leadership formerly held by European Jewry. The historian must take care not to read this later coherence and effectiveness back into the interwar period. Those words do not apply during those fateful days.<sup>24</sup>

While some historians have questioned what was done by the Jewish community during the war years, others have explored what was known. Much of the information, because of wartime conditions, had to go through government channels. Many governments tried to hide the true nature of the Final Solution. Scholars have pointed out

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., “Indicting American Jews,” in *What is the Use of Jewish History?*, 179.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>23</sup> Henry F. Feingold, *Bearing Witness: How America and Its Jews Responded to the Holocaust* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 205.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 224.

that Western governments were aware early in the war that the murder of Jews was being carried out on an unprecedented scale in Europe. While governments were constantly highlighting the evils of Nazi Germany, the fact that Jews were targeted for complete extermination was kept from the public; there were few communiqués dealing with the genocide.

Richard Breitman, in his book, *Official Secrets: What the Nazis Planned, What the British and Americans Knew*, provides a detailed account of information that became available to the Allies, but was kept from the public during the war. The author points to the knowledge obtained by British cipher experts who broke German codes and were able to establish the magnitude of the killings that were going on in the East. Breitman contends that Western nations were not immune to anti-Semitism. It permeated many levels of the bureaucracy and made it difficult for governments to act. Anti-Semitism, though not as virulent as in Nazi Germany, was widespread in the populace of Britain and North America. There was a belief within government circles that by mentioning the Jewish plight, and by acting on it, the Allies would be accused, not only by their enemies but also by a portion of their own population, of fighting a “Jewish War.”

In Canada, Claude Beaugard has compiled reports issued during the war years by the government that were kept secret from the Canadian public. His collection of documents entitled *Censorship Reports on the Jewish Community During the Second World War* illustrates, as does Breitman’s book, that government officials knew the “awful truth” of the Holocaust. Although Beaugard’s publication does not delve into the reasons why these reports were kept from the public, he does state that Canada, Britain and the United States worked in close cooperation. “Accordingly, reports were

written on various questions of interest to those governments.”<sup>25</sup> Correspondingly, the three governments probably had comparable reasons for suppressing information on the plight of European Jewry.

Whether the press dealt with the plight of Europe’s Jews in a way that brought the news of the genocide to the attention of the public has become a subject of much debate. In *Why Didn't the Press Shout? American and International Journalism During the Holocaust*, a collection of essays on the press and the Holocaust, many of the contributors take the view that various newspapers of the era knew about the genocide of European Jewry. Some simply buried the news on the back pages or did not bother printing any relevant information.

Newspapers have the ability to focus the public’s attention on certain issues by how they present the information, which must not only be believed by the public but must also be seen as relevant. The Holocaust seems to have been one of those events that was judged by many in the news media as not newsworthy. Laurel Leff in her essay “When the Facts Didn't Speak for Themselves: The Holocaust in the *New York Times*, 1939-1945” points out that numerous reports of the mass murder of Jews were to be found in the *Times*. Looking as one does today with 20/20 hindsight, one can grasp the full picture. But according to the author, “The problem was that the *New York Times* did not inform its readers, through placement, through headlines, through editorials, through retrospectives, that what was happening was something they needed to understand.”<sup>26</sup> The newspaper likewise did not emphasize the Jewish nature of the catastrophe.

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<sup>25</sup> Claude Beauregard, comp., “Introduction” in *Censorship Reports on the Jewish Community During the Second World War*, (Toronto: The Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 1994), v.

<sup>26</sup> Laurel Leff “When the Facts Didn't Speak for Themselves: The Holocaust in the *New York Times*, 1939-1945” in *Why Didn't the Press Shout?* (Jersey City, NJ: KTav Publishing House, 2003), 73.

Although millions were killed, the Jewish element is muted. The story was there; it just was not being told.

The Yiddish press in the US fared no better than the mainstream media.

Abraham Brumberg in his article "Towards the Final Solution: Perceptions of Hitler and Nazism in the US Left-of-Center Yiddish Press, 1930-1939" demonstrates the importance of ideology in shaping the Yiddish press' attitude towards the situation in Europe. Both the Socialists and the Communists were blind to the writing on the wall. They failed to perceive the depths of Germany's fall. They failed to see the coming Final Solution because they were too absorbed with their own beliefs which did not allow them to imagine the unimaginable. The Communists, as the writer points out, were more concerned with the "ideal represented by the leader of the world proletariat, the Soviet Communist Party."<sup>27</sup> Socialists, on the other hand, were fighting a rear-guard action, both against the Fascists and the Communists. Overriding all their concerns was their faith in a Germany that would, because of its past, defeat Hitlerism. They failed to grasp the strength of Nazism and thus failed, as did many Jews within Germany, to comprehend the dangers.

The American historian Deborah E. Lipstadt, in her book, *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust, 1933-1945*, writes about the response of the press to the fate of the Jews of Europe. There was disbelief, but there was also indifference. She argues that the information was available, but it was deemed not newsworthy; the news of the killing of the Jews was not considered extraordinary in a

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<sup>27</sup> Abraham Brumberg, "Towards the Final Solution: Perceptions of Hitler and Nazism in the US Left-of-Center Yiddish Press, 1930-1939" in *Why Didn't the Press Shout?*, 36.

world that was at war. The press, with access to such crucial information, "...was able to treat this information with apathy."<sup>28</sup>

Walter Laqueur, in his book *The Terrible Secret; Suppression of the Truth about Hitler's 'Final Solution,'* explores how the information on the Final Solution was "processed." He examines how the news of the mass killing of Jews was perceived in both Britain and the United States. Laqueur writes that Jews were low on the priority list; their fate was not of much concern to the Allied governments. He suggests that part of the reason for this indifference may have been due the fact that the press, the public, and their governments had trouble interpreting the event; they could not fathom the depths to which Germany had sunk. This lack of understanding and unwillingness to accept the true depravity of the Nazi regime created the conditions that forestalled any action.

A great portion of the literature pertaining to the press and its reaction to the Holocaust focuses on American newspapers. To date only one study has been done on the Canadian press. David Goutor, in his essay, "The Canadian Media and the 'Discovery' of the Holocaust, 1944-1945," contends that the media failed to report the genocide of the Jews. While stories of Nazi atrocities appeared regularly in the Canadian press, "little attention was paid to Jews as the principal targets of Nazi barbarism."<sup>29</sup> Goutor argues that most reports on systematic killing by the Nazis made no mention of the Jewish victims.

Likewise, while the American Jewish community and its response to the Holocaust have received much attention, the Canadian Jewish community has escaped

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<sup>28</sup> Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust, 1933-1945* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 278.

<sup>29</sup> David Goutor, "The Canadian Media and the 'Discovery' of the Holocaust, 1944-1945," in *Canadian Jewish Studies, New Perspectives on Canada, The Holocaust and Survivors, Vol IV-V, 1996-1997*, ed. Paula J. Draper and Richard Menkis (Winnipeg: Hignell Book Printing, 2000), 104.

such scrutiny. No two communities are the same, and a comparison to the American experience would be unfair. The Canadian Jewish community and especially the Montreal Jewish community existed in a milieu unlike anything found in the United States. Culturally, politically and socially the situation of Montreal Jewry, which during the war years and well beyond had the largest Jewish population in Canada, was different from the situation of New York Jewry, which had the largest Jewish population in the US. The state of affairs for the Montreal Jewish community was also unique within the Canadian landscape.

Besides describing the lack of political power that the community had in that era, many historians have stressed the rampant anti-Semitism that existed and how difficult it was for Jews to express their disappointment at government inaction on the Jewish question without being accused of disloyalty. The idea that the community could be accused of a divided loyalty, especially during times of crisis, has been an important issue in the historiography of Canadian Jewry. Paula Jean Draper, a Holocaust scholar, in her essay "Fragmented Loyalties: Canadian Jewry, the King Government and the Refugee Dilemma," writes about the quandary that the Jewish community found itself in as it was forced to choose between its loyalty to its government and country in time of war and the survival of world Jewry.<sup>30</sup>

The Canadian Jewish Congress was in the forefront in mobilizing the Jewish community to support the war effort. In his book *Mr. Sam: The Life and Times of Samuel*

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<sup>30</sup> Draper, Paula Jean, "Fragmented Loyalties: Canadian Jewry, the King Government and the Refugee Dilemma," in *On Guard for Thee: War, Ethnicity, and the Canadian State, 1939-1945*, ed. Norma Hillmer, Bohdan Kordan and Lubomyr Luciuk. (Ottawa: Canadian Committee for the History of the Second World War, 1988), 152. The same problem of divided loyalty existed in the United States. "The American Jews were on the defensive and they proclaimed their undivided loyalty to America. There was to be no conflict between an American interest, such as the restrictive immigration laws adopted in the 1920s, and a Jewish need. America would always have priority." Raoul Hilberg, *Perpetrators Victims Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933-1945* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 229.

*Bronfman*, historian Michael Marrus describes Bronfman's leadership of the Canadian Jewish Congress. Under his command Bronfman insisted that the Jewish community should speak with one voice and display its patriotism. Marrus paints a picture of a leader who tried to unite Canadian Jewry and present to the non-Jewish community an image of patriotic Jews willing to sacrifice all for King and Country, but who was insensitive to rising anti-Semitism in Canada and the plight of European Jewry.<sup>31</sup>

Several historians have pointed out that the efforts made by the Jewish community were in vain. Neither the government nor the public sympathized with the Jewish population, displaying both indifference and disdain for any efforts made by members of the Jewish community to help their European brethren. For example, *None Is Too Many*, a Canadian version of Arthur Morse's *While Six Million Died*, by Irving Abella and Harold Troper, examines the Canadian government's callous disregard for the Jews of Europe. In meticulous fashion the authors examine government measures taken to prevent Jews from entering the country before, during and after the Holocaust. This book brought out into the open the anti-Semitism that existed in Canada and especially in the upper echelons of the government. The Jewish community, although it organized protests and demonstrations through the offices of the Canadian Jewish Congress, remained powerless. And the leadership, though it tried to make itself heard, realized that it was impotent in the face of an apathetic public and a fearful government that resisted all attempts to open up its borders. "As long as the vast majority of Canadians and the provincial governments remained silent – and they did – the Canadian government did not have to move. And no one understood this better than the leadership of the Jewish

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<sup>31</sup> Michael Marrus, *Mr. Sam: The Life and Times of Samuel Bronfman* (Toronto: Viking, 1991), 264-270.



community.”<sup>32</sup> The authors, though they write of a Canadian public that remained uncaring and unwilling to admit Jewish refugees into the country, pay special attention to and single out for sharp criticism the prevalent anti-Semitism in Quebec. A Gallup poll conducted in 1944 revealed that “[A]mong those who emphasized the need for strict racial selectivity, many, especially French-speaking respondents, specified ‘No Jews’ ... With the force of nativism on the rise across Canada, it was still most concentrated and vocal in Quebec.”<sup>33</sup> The French press according to Abella and Troper spoke with one voice against the admission of Jewish refugees.<sup>34</sup>

Canadian anti-Semitism and especially the Quebec variety have become dominant issues of the historiography of Canadian Jewry in the 1930s and 1940s. Publications from the Jewish community compare the anti-Semitism in Canada to the more virulent variety found in Nazi Germany. In *The Canadian Jewish Archives: Our Archival Record of 1933, Hitler's Year*, Victor Sefton, Chairman of the National Committee on Archives, Canadian Jewish Congress, expressed the opinion that Canadian anti-Semitism was similar to the European variety. “When we note that, in all likelihood, the Canadian condition was no different than in other lands, we come to see that Hitler counted correctly on many national traditions to support him in his German program of devastation.”<sup>35</sup>

David Rome, historian and archivist at the Canadian Jewish Congress, condemned both the Catholic hierarchy and Quebec for their refusal to speak out during the

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<sup>32</sup> Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948*, (Toronto, Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1983), 139.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>35</sup> Victor Sefton, “Preface” in *The Canadian Jewish Archives: Our Archival Record of 1933, Hitler's Year*, (Montreal: National Archives Canadian Jewish Congress, 1976), 6.

Holocaust. “Unlike the situation in many other countries, *even in Germany*, there was, in Canada, no Catholic dissent from anti-Semitism; there was no Quebec condemnation of Nazism, there was no Quebec plea for the threatened . . .”<sup>36</sup>

However while anti-Semitism was a fact of life, the view that it led to an all-consuming attack on the Jewish community has been countered by several historians. Esther Delisle, considered by some as the *bête noire* of the French Canadian academic community, in her book, *The Traitor and the Jew: Anti-Semitism and extremist right-wing nationalism in French Canada from 1929-1939*, makes a strong case for anti-Semitic and fascist propensities among the nationalist elites, but suggests that extremist right-wing nationalism failed because French Canadians did not see the Jew as their implacable enemy.<sup>37</sup>

Pierre Anctil, Associate Professor of Jewish Studies at McGill University, views the anti-Semitism that existed in Quebec between the wars as more rhetorical than real. In his essay, “Interlude of Hostility: Judeo-Christian Relations in Quebec in the Interwar Period, 1939-1939,” Anctil does not downplay the perception that existed in the Jewish community of growing anti-Jewish feeling in Quebec, but he places it in the context of a growing fascist anti-Semitic movement in Europe. Against this backdrop of an increasingly dangerous situation in Europe, the Jewish community felt threatened at home. To Anctil the Jewish community’s assessment of the situation in Quebec tended to

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<sup>36</sup> David Rome, *Clouds in the Thirties: On Antisemitism In Canada. 1929-1939*, Section 1 (Montreal, National Archives, Canadian Jewish Congress, 1977), 81. Italics added.

<sup>37</sup> Esther Delisle, *The Traitor and the Jew: Anti-Semitism and extremist right-wing nationalism in French Canada from 1929-1939*, trans. Madeleine Hébert, Claire Rothman and Käthe Roth (Montreal: Robert Davies Publishing, 1995), 72.

exaggerate anti-Semitism among French Canadians, which they viewed as more dangerous than the Anglo-Saxon variety.<sup>38</sup>

The reaction of the Jewish community to the Holocaust remains a topic with many voids and numerous unanswered questions. Gerald Tulchinsky reveals in his book *Branching Out: The Transformation of the Canadian Jewish Community* that many communal leaders and several rabbis in their memoirs provide little information on the Jewish community and the war.<sup>39</sup> They do not mention any reaction of the community to the Holocaust.

Although it is nearly sixty years since the end of World War II, the scars of that era have not healed. Although much has been written, much still remains to be written. This thesis will fill in some of the gaps, and hopefully enable the reader to more fully understand what transpired during a time when the world was in flames and a people were faced with extinction.

Those on the sidelines, the witnesses and the bystanders, have become an integral part of the study of the Final Solution. It was the Holocaust that brought to the attention of scholars the idea that people can remain indifferent or even oblivious to mass murder. The bystander has become an enigmatic figure, a human being whose lack of action signifies his/her presence. In examining the Montreal Jewish community this thesis looks at bystanders who were very special, for they were in a very intrinsic way connected to the events in Europe, tied to their brethren in Europe and apprehensive about growing anti-Semitism both abroad and in Canada. They lived in a democracy that they

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<sup>38</sup> Pierre Anctil, "Interlude of Hostility: Judeo-Christian Relations in Quebec in the Interwar Period, 1939-1939," in *Antisemitism in Canada*, ed. Alan Davies (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992), 159-160.

<sup>39</sup> Gerald Tulchinsky, *Branching Out: The Transformation of the Canadian Jewish Community* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1998), 214. Also see footnote 60, 417-418.

considered their home, a home that at times made many of them feel that they were “strangers in a strange land.” This study not only researches the events of that time but also examines the forces that shaped the Jewish community and made that community act the way it did when millions of victims cried out to a world that did not hear their screams.

## Chapter 2

### The 1930s – Prelude to Catastrophe

The 1930s, with the devastating world-wide economic depression and the emergence of Nazism in Germany, set the stage for a war that would result in tens of millions of deaths and the mass extermination of Europe's Jews. The decade marked a complete stoppage of Jewish immigration to Canada, an increase in anti-Semitism on the North American continent, and the revival of the Canadian Jewish Congress, which became the voice for the community.

In 1921, the Jewish population in the city of Montreal was 42 817, which represented 93.7% of all Jews living in Greater Montreal.<sup>1</sup> By 1931, although the population had increased to 48 724, this new figure represented 84% of all Jews living in Greater Montreal. According to demographer Louis Rosenberg this decreasing percentage of Jews in the city was due to the tendency “for the Jewish population of Greater Montreal to move from the so-called Jewish wards of St. Louis and Laurier to the neighbouring satellite cities of Outremount and Westmount.”<sup>2</sup> This departure from the Jewish areas can be explained by a desire to advance economically and to obtain better housing. However there was also the wish by a segment of the Jewish community to assimilate into a more “Canadian” milieu, a need to become less visible as Jews in a non-Jewish environment. The departure from the Jewish area marked a move away from what

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<sup>1</sup> Greater Montreal refers to both the city of Montreal and the surrounding satellite cities and towns, including Westmount and Outremount. The data is provided by Louis Rosenberg. Louis Rosenberg, *Canada's Jews: A Social and Economic Study of Jews in Canada in the 1930s* (Montreal : Bureau of Social and Economics Research, Canadian Jewish Congress, 1939), 31.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

many considered a ghetto, an area of the city where Jews lived in a sort of self-imposed segregation, separated from the non-Jewish communities.

This wish to shed the image of the ghettoized Jew that many Jews perceived as embarrassing and undesirable was not unique to the Montreal Jewish community.<sup>3</sup> Unlike Eastern Europe, where many of these immigrants came from, North America with its seemingly endless opportunities appeared to offer the Jew a chance to become part of the mainstream. It was assumed that discrimination could be overcome. But to overcome anti-Jewish prejudice it was necessary to blend in, to assimilate into a society that would accept the Jew as a full-fledged citizen, as an equal among others. Assimilation, assuming an identity as Canadians, held out hope for the future.

In Montreal, in the first and second decade of the 1900s, the arrival of new waves of immigrants led to the formation of two distinct Jewish communities; the uptown Jews, the wealthy and anglicized old guard and the downtowners, the recent arrivals who lived in the area along “The Main.”<sup>4</sup> While the uptowners may have looked down on the downtown Jews, there was also sympathy and help for their poor brethren. “[T]he wealthy anglicized Jews were never disloyal to their self-appointed task of aiding immigrants and refugees. They occasionally dispensed their help and advice with condescension not untypical of Victorian society, but they dispensed it all the same.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In a study of the Chicago Jewish Ghetto of the early 1900s, Louis Wirth writes of the Jew who desperately wanted to escape from the ghetto and become a “true” American. Louis Wirth, *The Ghetto*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), 261. Originally published in 1928.

<sup>4</sup> St. Laurent Boulevard was referred to as “The Main.” The street forms the east-west dividing line in the city. The area around this street north of the downtown core was the Jewish area of Montreal from the turn of the century to the 1950s. The Jewish section of Montreal took on the nickname of the street and was affectionately referred to as “The Main.” “This intensely Jewish neighbourhood was a bustling square mile of vibrant Jewish life for more than 50 years. The ghetto-by-choice, this self-contained ethnic enclave became widely known as “The Main.”” Joe King, *From the Ghetto to the Main: The Story of the Jews of Montreal* (Montreal: The Montreal Jewish Publication Society, 2001), 102.

<sup>5</sup> Erna Paris, *Jews: An Account of Their Experience in Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1980), 30.

The waves of Jewish immigrants to Canada from the 1900s onward were generally from East Europe and most were Yiddish speaking.<sup>6</sup> With their language, their Jewish nationalism, their attire and their left-wing politics these new arrivals did not identify with the members of the established Jewish community.<sup>7</sup> They were outsiders both to the non-Jewish world that existed beyond “The Main” and to the assimilated Jewish community. Time and space separated them from their established brethren; they were “marked” by when they arrived in Canada and by the neighborhoods in which they lived. Jewish communities in Canada were deeply fragmented and the divisions went even beyond the downtown-uptown barriers as Jews were also divided by assimilationist versus nationalist beliefs, religious convictions, and political ideologies.

It [Canadian Jewry] was a community divided by its members' many countries of origin and by politics. Perpetual, often bitter conflicts existed between Zionist and non-Zionist, the observant and the secular, native-born and immigrant, and between an ostensibly well-integrated and generally monied Anglo-Jewish élite and the much larger, unassimilated and primarily Yiddish-speaking working class. In fact, Jews reflected almost every shade of political thinking on issues domestic and foreign. No faction of the community seemed too small to form its own organization, yet few were the common causes strong enough to weld the factions together.<sup>8</sup>

The Jewish communities, although perceived by outsiders as close-knit and monolithic, were in fact split and rarely spoke with one voice. In Montreal the downtowners had strength in numbers, but coming from areas of Europe where discrimination against Jews was widespread and where Jews had no voice in government,

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<sup>6</sup> The biggest jump in the Jewish population was found in the census of 1911. Louis Rosenberg states that this was due to persecution in Russia and Romania in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. *Canada's Jews*, 11.

<sup>7</sup> The issue of Jewish nationalism, with its belief in maintaining the Jewish culture and its traditions in a non-Jewish environment, eventually led to clashes with the assimilationists. Tulchinsky, 70-71.

<sup>8</sup> Irving Abella and Harold Troper, 10.

they lacked the ability to mobilize as an effective unit. Added to the apparent political impotency of the downtowners was the belief that they could best be served by the established Jews and thus as a rule they allotted power to both provincial and federal candidates who they assumed would best represent them in the corridors of power.

In 1927 Louis Fitch, candidate for the Conservative Party, ran against the Liberal incumbent Peter Bercovitch in a provincial by-election in the Jewish stronghold of St. Louis. Bercovitch had been branded as “an out and out assimilationist and traitor to Jewish interests.”<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless Fitch, who represented the Jewish nationalists, was defeated. Gerald Tulchinsky, in his analysis of the Bercovitch victory, concludes that pragmatic considerations superseded any emotional nationalist appeal, “Many downtowners probably were more interested in supporting a member of the Legislative Assembly....”<sup>10</sup>

The voting pattern of the downtowners was shaped in part by the myth of Jewish power. Abella and Troper suggest that Jews and their anti-Semitic opponents both “believed that Jewish politicians had far more influence in government than they actually had.”<sup>11</sup> This myth proved doubly dangerous. It provided anti-Semitic elements with ammunition to attack imaginary Jewish influence on government policy and it made Jews reliant on Jewish representatives whom they believed would be able to pressure the government but who were in fact powerless.

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<sup>9</sup> As stated by the *Kanader Adler*, the Montreal Yiddish newspaper. See Bernard Figler, *Biography of Louis Fitch, Q.C.* (Montreal: ? , 1968), 42-43.

<sup>10</sup> Gerald Tulchinsky, 77. There was one notable exception to this pragmatism. In 1943 Fred Rose, representing the Progressive Labour Party (Communist Party), won the riding of Cartier in a federal by-election.

<sup>11</sup> Abella and Troper, 14.



The rise in anti-Semitism in Canada led to an acceptance of the *sha-shtill* attitude, a Yiddish expression that translates as “keep quiet” or more aptly as “don’t rock the boat.” Gerald Tulchinsky has described how the policy of *shtadlanut*, quiet behind-the-scenes diplomacy, had led to some successes in the early 1900s in securing immigration for Jews.<sup>12</sup> Many in the Jewish community believed that if they stayed out of the public eye, the government would be more willing to listen to representatives of the community, both those elected to government and those chosen to speak for the community through Jewish agencies.<sup>13</sup> The use of Jewish notables to help avert disaster for their fellow Jews was based on a tradition that was adopted by court Jews in seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe.<sup>14</sup> However, it was a policy that ended up in tatters as the government came to the realization that dealing with Jewish representatives at a time of economic hardship and increased anti-Semitism led to little, if any, political capital and often proved detrimental to the interests of the policy-makers.

The divisions in the Jewish community before and during the war years would have far-reaching repercussions for the community.<sup>15</sup> Each new wave of Jewish immigration was relegated to the lowest rung on the social scale. Judith Seidel, in her sociological study of Montreal Jewry in the 1930s, writes that while different waves of

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<sup>12</sup> *Shtadlanut* which at times employed the services of wealthy Jews with government connections helped secure exemptions for Jews from post-World War II anti-immigration orders-in-council. Tulchinsky, 39.

<sup>13</sup> In the United States a similar situation existed. The *shtadlanut* or Jewish representations made by the B’nai Brith were intended to establish sympathetic contacts with the non-Jewish community. Many Jewish organizations were against any public displays and were apprehensive of any protest that would create a “Jewish issue.” See Haskell Lookstein, *Were We Our Brothers’ Keepers?: The Public Response of American Jews to the Holocaust, 1938-1944* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 60.

<sup>14</sup> See Hanna Arendt’s study of the rise and fall of the “court Jews” in Europe, “The Jews, the Nation-State, and the Birth of Antisemitism,” in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1966), 11-53.

<sup>15</sup> This thesis deals with the 1930s and 1940s. As in pre-World War II Canada, similar divisions in the Jewish community emerged with the arrival of Jewish immigrants in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Frank Bialystok has studied attitudes in Canadian Jewish communities towards these immigrants, many of whom had survived the Nazi genocide.

immigration may have only been separated by a matter of years; nevertheless “that difference was of great significance in life.”<sup>16</sup> The downtowners were largely from the last big wave of immigration which ended abruptly in 1930 as Canada then closed its doors to more arrivals; nonetheless they had still been in the country at least nine years when war broke out. Based on a 1938 survey, the downtown area was already losing some of its Jewish residents as people began to move northward.<sup>17</sup> The restrictions placed on immigration in the 1930s meant that the downtowners never replenished their losses. Even in the 1930s with increased assimilation and an Anglicization of the community the character of the downtown was changing.

The uptowners and downtowners did not read the same newspapers. Erna Paris writes of the differences between the *Jewish Times*, the English newspaper established in 1897 to represent the voice of anglicized Jews, and the *Kanader Adler* (*Canadian Eagle*) established in 1907, “which maintained a steady opposition to the assimilationist tendencies of *The Jewish Times* and the uptowners, and promoted a deliberate strengthening of the Yiddish language and culture in this new land.”<sup>18</sup> With an influx of Yiddish speaking immigrants the *Adler* captured the attention of the majority of Montreal Jews.<sup>19</sup> The *Jewish Times* survived until March 1914. Hirsch Wolofsky, owner of the *Adler* bought the defunct *Jewish Times* and created the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* to accommodate the Anglicized Jewish community. Wolofsky started the *Chronicle* as a

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<sup>16</sup> In 1939 Judith Seidel did an in-depth study of the Montreal Jewish community based largely on a survey of 512 Jewish families in the Montreal area. Judith Seidel, “The Development and Social Adjustment of the Jewish Community in Montreal,” MA Thesis (Montreal: McGill University, 1939). 54.

<sup>17</sup> Seidel refers to a study by David Solomon who based his research on data supplied by *Lovell's Montreal Directory*. The directory made it easy to examine specific areas in Montreal. Unlike a typical telephone directory *Lovell's*, among its other functions, gave information on residents based on districts. Solomon noticed a decline in Jewish names from 1931 to 1936 and a decline in Jewish schools and synagogues. David Solomon, “Jewish Population Areas in Montreal” 1937, unpublished paper. 56-57.

<sup>18</sup> Erna Paris, 31.

<sup>19</sup> Lev Levendel, *A Century of the Canadian Jewish Press* (Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1989), 8.

speculative enterprise supported to a large extent by Mortimer Davis, president of Imperial Tobacco. The *Chronicle* gradually increased its circulation as English became more common in the Jewish community.<sup>20</sup> Although both the *Adler* and the *Chronicle* had the same owner, they appealed to different audiences. While the *Adler* became the voice of the Yiddish community still living along the Main, the *Chronicle* reflected the voice of the “new” Jew; the younger Jew who, while still not totally assimilated, had already abandoned Yiddish. Although the paper never reached the sort of legendary status of the *Adler*, it did have a fairly large circulation. Historian David Rome observed:

The fact it appeared regularly in English and concerned itself with Jewish subjects must have impressed a large number of young people that Jewishness is respectable enough to appear in English.<sup>21</sup>

While the Yiddish press flourished in the 1920s, by the 1930s English papers increased in popularity and began taking over the “Jewish market.” Judith Seidel in her research shows that even before World War II the Anglicization of the Jewish community had begun and that there was a gradual shift away from Yiddish newspapers. In a ten year period from 1921 to 1931 the proportion of Quebec Jews listing Yiddish as their mother tongue dropped from 84% to 79%.<sup>22</sup> This decline may seem negligible, but Yiddish, although it was the mother tongue of so many Jews, was being phased out in the street and in the home. The language of business, the language of the schools and the language of everyday living was English. By 1938 over 80% of the Jewish houses in Montreal

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<sup>20</sup> The establishment of the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* is described by Wolofsky in his memoirs. Wolofsky proudly wrote that the *Chronicle* “has had a continuously progressive existence, and today is the leading Anglo-Jewish publication in the Dominion.” Hirsch Wolofsky, “Sir Mortimer B. Davis” in *Journey of My Life (A Book of Memories)* (Montreal: The Eagle Publishing Co. Ltd., 1945), 68.

<sup>21</sup> Lewis Levendel, personal interview with David Rome, Montreal, January 18, 1983. Lewis Levendel, 60.

<sup>22</sup> Louis Rosenberg, *The Jewish Population of Canada: A Statistical Summary From 1851 to 1941*, *Canadian Jewish Population Studies no. 2* (Montreal: Bureau of Social and Economic Research, Canadian Jewish Congress, 1947), Table no.23, 31.

were using English at home, in combination with other languages, mainly Yiddish. In Seidel's study only 5.7% of all households surveyed used Yiddish exclusively. The Yiddish press was still a vibrant force, however, as during the 1930s and 1940s the Yiddish papers were still read by a sizable portion of the Montreal Jewish community.<sup>23</sup> The circulation of the *Adler* increased from 10 000 in 1910 to 18 123 in 1941. Circulation remained stable during the war years and into the 1950s.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, Seidel concludes that English was the preferred language of newspapers. In the 1930s many Montreal Jews were relying more and more on the English press, whether it was the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, or the mainstream *Gazette*, *Montreal Herald* or *Montreal Daily Star*.

While the *Gazette*, the *Montreal Daily Star* and the *Montreal Herald* were making inroads in the community, Jewish opinion was still expressed in the Jewish press. The English newspapers viewed the Jewish community as a somewhat foreign element and carried very little news on the community. Many Jews, while they may have been reading the Anglo press, still relied on the Jewish press for news and information relating to the community. The Jewish press also reported on the worsening situation confronting German Jewry.

The emergence of the Nazi party as a political force in Germany was greeted with some trepidation by the Jewish community, but many could not fathom the thought that Hitler would ever take power. On September 12 1930, just before the German general

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<sup>23</sup> Montreal readers also read American Yiddish papers, including the *Der Forverts* (Jewish Daily Forward) and *Der Tog* (The Day). For *Der Kanader Adler* (*Jewish Daily Eagle*) the sworn circulation September 30 1939-September 30 1940 averaged 17 876. See McKim's *Directory of Canadian Publications, Edition 34* (Montreal: A. McKim Ltd., 1941), 72.

<sup>24</sup> By 1960 *Adler* circulation declined to 16 230 and by 1971 had plummeted to 3500. See Andre Beaulieu et Jean Hamelin, *La Presse Québécois des origines à nos jours V.4*, (Quebec: La Presses De L'Université Laval, 1979), 253.

election that would see a sizable gain for Hitler and his National Socialist Party, an article by Dr. Bruno Weil, a German Jew, appeared in the *Chronicle*. Dr. Weil warned of the threat posed by Hitler and especially his introduction of a new strain of anti-Semitism that was based on racial superiority. “[A]nti-Semitism sought to justify itself on ethical, moral and even religious grounds, but today it is directed along an ethnical and racial line.”<sup>25</sup> This was a new type of anti-Semitism because it marked a transformation from religious hatred to one based on blood. It was also a more deadly type of anti-Semitism; it was hatred that could not be halted by assimilation or even by conversion. However while articles on the dangers of Hitler were beginning to appear in the press there was still a feeling within the Jewish communities, both those in Europe and in North America, that Hitler and his vicious anti-Semitism would not last. It was an attitude that was reflected in the newspapers, which while warning of danger, also spoke of hope.

In September 26 1930, shortly after the Nazi Party’s stunning electoral gains, the *Chronicle* carried an article warning the readers of the danger posed by Hitler’s anti-Semitic demagoguery. The article also included a reference to a half-hearted hope expressed by German Jewry that his anti-Semitism “was only a political anti-Semitism and not meant as a permanent policy.”<sup>26</sup> The *Adler* carried several front page stories that same month pointing to the dangers to German Jewry from the rise of the National Socialist Party.<sup>27</sup> Although there now seemed to be a possibility that a fervent anti-Semite might one day take over Germany, many Jews preferred to believe that the situation would improve. After the handful of articles written at the time of the September

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<sup>25</sup> Dr. Bruno Weil, “Germany and the German Elections,” *CJC*, 12 September 1930, 13.

<sup>26</sup> Bernard Postal, “Who Is Adolf Hitler?” *CJC*, 26 September 1930, 17.

<sup>27</sup> “German Jews Now Fear Pogroms,” *Adler*, 16 September 1930, 1 and “Hitlerites Threaten Jews with Pogroms,” 22 September 1930, 1.

elections in Germany, news from Germany and the rise of Nazism diminished.<sup>28</sup> With the passage of time news of the Nazi threat was relegated to the back pages of the Jewish press.

On Monday, January 30 1933, President Hindenburg appointed Adolph Hitler Chancellor of the Reichstag, the German parliament.<sup>29</sup> Many Jews still clung to the belief that Hitler's rise was but a fleeting moment in German history. German Jews in particular still held out hope for the future.<sup>30</sup> Although they now lived in the midst of extreme anti-Semitism, many could not believe that their Jewish heritage – and many considered themselves more German than Jewish – would mark them for destruction. In Montreal as well there was the conviction that Hitler, once in power, would change. In an editorial in the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* some hope was expressed that Hitler's anti-Semitic outbursts would now be toned down as pragmatism would force him to act differently in the real world of politics.

The only hope we Jewish people have is that Hitler the campaigner is a different personality from Hitler the chancellor. It is a faint hope indeed, but history has shown how campaign speeches have become tempered when put into action.<sup>31</sup>

The *Adler* did point out the dangers of Hitler's accession to power, but there was an underlying theme that the situation would be remedied. On January 31 1933, while the

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<sup>28</sup> About one month after the elections the *Adler* did warn of the dangers of Hitlerism. See "Germany on the Brink of a Dictatorship," 17 October 1930, 1.

<sup>29</sup> For an analysis of Hitler's rise to power see Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitler in History*, (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1984), 1-22.

<sup>30</sup> The film on German Jewry at the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Museum is based on a series of interviews with Jews who lived in Nazi Germany during the 1930s. Many of the interviewees suggest that while anti-Semitic measures were being passed many Jews felt that Hitler would be overthrown. While Jews were being persecuted, while racial laws were being enacted, there was still an overriding belief that the wave of anti-Semitism would pass. Many could not comprehend the thought that Germany, where Jews had contributed much to the cultural and scientific life, would turn on its own citizens simply because of their Jewish background. Max Lewkowitz (producer), *Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (New York: Rainmaker Productions, 2003).

<sup>31</sup> "Hitler's Great Chance," *CJC*, 10 March 1933, 3.

Yiddish newspaper carried the headlines, "Hitler Becomes Chancellor of Germany," there were several sub-headlines that pointed to a possible short-lived chancellorship for Hitler. These sub-headlines spoke of the Communist and Socialist opposition that would mobilize against the Nazis. There were also reports that the German Jews were going to fight for their constitutional rights.<sup>32</sup>

Jews in Montreal at that time wished to show their opposition to the Nazi government in Germany. Rallies were organized by the Montreal Jewish community and large protests were held in April 1933. Israel Mendres in his memoirs writes of the participation of "prominent Christians."<sup>33</sup> In an editorial in the *Chronicle* one particular rally held in the Arena was billed as "The Mighty Voice of Humanity," and the *Chronicle* emphasized the "expressions of horror and resentment from the eminent non-Jews who were present is something which even the besotted minds of the Nazis cannot ignore."<sup>34</sup> Thus from the time of the rise of Hitler the Montreal Jewish community was convinced that any action on behalf of European Jewry had to be taken with the support of the non-Jewish community. But the Jewish press also realized that while some in the Christian community were supportive, there was mostly disbelief and indifference to Jewish suffering in Germany. While the Jewish press was becoming increasingly concerned with anti-Semitic measures in Germany the English press downplayed any reports of atrocities in Germany.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Adler, 31 January 1933, 1.

<sup>33</sup> Israel Mendres was a well-known Montreal journalist who wrote for the *Kanader Adler*. "The Creation of the Second Jewish Congress" in Israel Mendres, *Between the Wars: Canadian Jews in Transition*, trans. Vivian Felson (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 2003), 82.

<sup>34</sup> "The Mighty Voice of Humanity," *CJC*, 14 April, 1933, 3.

<sup>35</sup> "Who Is Lying?" *CJC*, 31 March 1933, 3. The *Chronicle* criticized the non-Jewish press for failing to report on the worsening situation facing German Jewry. The newspaper sarcastically referred to the *Montreal Star*, as "our esteemed contemporary."

Jews saw themselves facing two threats, one from overseas and one homegrown. Of special concern was the Quebec situation, where anti-Semitism (unlike the variety seen in other parts of Canada) was not only a preoccupation of some rabble-rousers but seemed ingrained in the politics of the province. It was a type of vocal anti-Jewish hatred that reminded Jews of the anti-Semitic invective that was being spewed in the German Reichstag; it was a type of anti-Semitism that many perceived as belonging to the streets of Berlin, not those of Montreal. Lionel Groulx's paper, *L'Action Nationale*, wrote that Jews in Germany were getting what they deserved and a similar fate awaited them in Quebec. "What is happening in the new Germany is germinating everywhere where Jews are considered as intruders. And where, one may well ask, are they considered otherwise?"<sup>36</sup>

Although anti-Semitism in Quebec may have been "rhetorical and metaphorical in character, as well as confined to specific publications connected with ideological movements whose impact on society as a whole was minimal,"<sup>37</sup> to the Jewish community anti-Semitism that was seen as so vicious in nature and that echoed the language of National Socialism could not be distinguished at the time from the anti-Jewish vitriol that was sweeping through Germany. For the downtown Jews in Montreal the Judeophobia in Quebec was a reminder of the hatred in Europe from which many had escaped. Whatever nuances and differences there were separating the anti-Semitism in Quebec from the more deadly variety in Nazi Germany, to the Jews in Montreal the

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<sup>36</sup> Article by Anotole Vanier, "Les Juifs au Canada," *L'Action Nationale*, September 1933, in Erna Paris, 52. Translation by Paris.

<sup>37</sup> Pierre Anctil, "Interlude of Hostility: Judeo-Christian Relations in Quebec in the Interwar Period, 1919-39," in *Antisemitism in Canada: History and Interpretation*, ed. Alan Davies (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1992), 159.



drumbeats of the Nazis in Germany and the anti-Semitic rallies in Quebec in the 1930s sounded the same.

These threats to Canada's Jews made the resurrection of the Canadian Jewish Congress a necessity.<sup>38</sup> The first Congress had been established in 1919 by the downtowners.<sup>39</sup> But that Congress died a quick death, never functioning as a cohesive national organization after its first session. Even as the new Congress was reborn in 1934 so that Canadian Jewry would speak with one voice, it still faced enormous obstacles in a community racked with dissension.

Although Congress was trying to become a national organization, uniting Jews from coast to coast, it remained in actual fact a Montreal-based operation in this period. Not only was Montreal the home of Congress run to a large extent by members of the Montreal community, but the city, with its large Jewish population, was also the cultural and political centre of Canadian Jewish life. The Montreal Jewish community assumed the mantle of leadership for Canadian Jewry and epitomized Jewish life in Canada. Congress executives, then, while heading a nation-wide organization, were also the leaders of the Montreal Jewish community. The city and its community became the focal point for any actions undertaken on behalf of European Jewry. Rallies and protests, although they also occurred in other Canadian cities, were most prominent in Montreal. As we have seen as well, in the 1930s and 1940s the Montreal Jewish community also bore the brunt of the anti-Semitic upsurge in Canada.

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<sup>38</sup> See editorial in *CJC* outlining the urgent need for a congress to confront rising anti-Semitism., "A Jewish Congress in Canada," *CJC*, 5 May 1933, 3-4.

<sup>39</sup> It was created because the downtowners felt that uptown Jews were not dealing properly with money collected to support European Jewry during World War I. The downtowners wished to donate all the money to their European brethren; the uptowners who were in charge of the distribution of funds donated most of the money to local Montreal charities. "The downtowners saw red...From their frustration the idea of a United Jewish Congress was born." Erna Paris, 35.

In 1933, the downtowners envisioned a Congress that would “utilize the authority of the populace instead of the traditional influence of those who were well connected.”<sup>40</sup> The *Chronicle* foresaw a new era for Canada’s Jews: “We have had enough *shtadlonus* and self-appointed spokesmen. Canadian Jewry has been woefully remiss in the establishment of an organization that actually represents the unanimous voice of the people throughout the entire land.”<sup>41</sup> As David Rome has pointed out, the Congress ideology was “an outgrowth of the Jewish labour nationalist movement.”<sup>42</sup> The downtowners resented the tendency of the wealthy to assume leadership of all Jewish organizations as if by birthright; in turn the uptowners, to quote Rome again, “tolerated the presence of the Jewish Congress, but not wholeheartedly.”<sup>43</sup> The consequence was that for the first five years of the reborn Congress, the organization was in a constant state of financial turmoil. It became a virtual one-man operation, run out of the Montreal office on a shoestring budget by the General Secretary, H.M. Caiserman. Caiserman himself believed that some of the wealthy members of the community were frightened by Congress, and would have liked to destroy it, although it should be noted that some of the administrative positions, including the presidency, were held by prominent community members right from the beginning.<sup>44</sup> Be that as it may, it took a number of years before a full reconciliation occurred. As we shall see, it was only in 1939 that the election of Samuel Bronfman to the presidency brought the wealthy into whole-hearted support of Congress and the organization became financially stable for the first time.

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<sup>40</sup> David Rome, “The National Story” in *Pathways to the Present: Canadian Jewry and the Canadian Jewish Congress*. (Toronto: Canadian Jewish Congress, 1986), 2.

<sup>41</sup> *CJC*, “To the Polls”, 22 December 1933, 3.

<sup>42</sup> David Rome, “The National Story,” in *Pathways*, 6.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Correspondence between H.M Caiserman and Baruch Zuckerman of the World Jewish Congress (1938). David Rome, *Clouds in the Thirties: On Antisemitism In Canada, 1933-1939*, Volume 4 (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress, 1978), 48.

The first meeting of the new Congress, ratifying its existence and creating three divisions: Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg, took place in Montreal November 13, 1933. The second, more substantial, general meeting was held on January 27, 28 and 29, 1934 in Toronto. The course of future action was being formulated at this meeting, and there were already signs of the cautious approach that Congress would adopt. Lyon Cohen, a well-known Montreal manufacturer and honorary president of Congress, called for restraint, "Let us not be led astray by extreme views."<sup>45</sup> In the view of Cohen and others it was not a time for strong action; every move had to be calculated so as not to antagonize the government and the non-Jewish community.

While anti-Semitism was on the increase across Canada, Sam Jacobs the newly elected president of the CJC, in his first address mentioned discrimination against Jews, particularly in Germany, but spoke optimistically that anti-Semitism at home was being opposed by many Canadians, "...and we have ample evidence of this from the public utterances of all the leaders of public opinion throughout this fair land."<sup>46</sup> Jacobs, an uptowner, represented the Montreal Cartier riding in Parliament from 1917 till his death in 1938, and owed his success to the overwhelming support of the downtown Jews in the St. Lawrence-Main district. By the time Hitler took power in 1933, Jacob's career was coming to a close. He never received a cabinet post he felt he richly deserved, and was "depressed and powerless and could offer only the rhetoric of leadership."<sup>47</sup> Although Jacobs was a personal friend of Mackenzie King, he had never appealed to the Prime Minister on behalf of European Jewry.

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<sup>45</sup> "From the Atlantic to the Pacific They Came to Unite," *CJC*, 2 February 1934, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Message from S.W. Jacobs, President of Canadian Jewish Congress, *Minutes: Canadian Jewish Congress Sessions*, January 27 1934, 2. Congress archives.

<sup>47</sup> Erna Paris, 79-80.

[I]n all the voluminous governmental and personal correspondence of Mackenzie King – full of importunities, petitions and requests, direct and indirect, from hundreds of people who had the ear of government – we do not find a single line from these Jewish friends of King asking for his help on these vital issues... King's Jewish friends knew better. The unspelled gentlemanly condition of their friendship forbade it.<sup>48</sup>

In an effort to help German Jewry Congress decided at the 1934 session to begin a boycott of German products. A resolution adopted at the January session of Congress called for “steps to co-ordinate and support all existing efforts in Canada to affect such purpose [a boycott] as long as present persecutions in Germany prevail.”<sup>49</sup> The boycott was not without its setbacks. In an open letter to the *Chronicle* in 1935, H.M. Caiserman stated that although the boycott was supported by a majority of Jews in Canada there were still pockets of dissent, “Canadian Jewish thought on this controversial subject is divided into three schools of opinion, namely, pro-boycott, indifferent and boycott infringers...”<sup>50</sup> Also trade between Canada and Germany increased during the pre-war period. A letter from Mackenzie King to Herman Göring, Hitler's right-hand man, in July 29, 1937 stated, “I need hardly say how much the Government hopes that it may be possible increasingly to improve trade between our two countries.”<sup>51</sup>

The infamous “Doctors' Strike” in 1934 in Montreal demonstrated to the community that Germany was not the only place where Jews were considered pariahs. On June 14 1934 interns at Notre Dame Hospital walked out on strike following the

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<sup>48</sup> *The Canadian Jewish Archives: Our Archival Record of 1933, Hitler's Year*. Insert following preface “Samuel W. Jacobs,” author unknown. The other Jewish friend of King mentioned in the article was Sir Herbert Samuel of England.

<sup>49</sup> *Constitution and Resolutions Adopted at Second General Session*, (Toronto: January 27, 28, 2 and 29, 1934), 7. Congress archives.

<sup>50</sup> H.M. Caiserman, “Canadian Jewry Now Must Speak,” *CJC*, 27 September 1935, 84.

<sup>51</sup> As quoted in Rome, *Clouds in the Thirties*, Vol. 4, 60.

appointment of a Jew, Dr. Samuel Rabinovitch, to the staff of the hospital. In sympathy with the strikers, interns from four other hospitals joined the walkout.

As the *Chronicle* reported “It was a painful awakening the Jews of Montreal had when they suddenly discovered in their midst a display of anti-Semitism which would have done credit to the Nazi hospitals of Germany.”<sup>52</sup> Dr. Rabinovitch was forced to resign; his letter of resignation acknowledged the efforts of the Board of Directors who opposed the walkout, but he bemoaned “the fact that so many French Canadian Physicians, namely graduates, should have ignored the first duty of their oath...”<sup>53</sup> In an editorial later that year the *Chronicle* stated bluntly: “Nor are we sure that the brand of anti-Semitism in Quebec is any less virulent than that of Germany. The dynamite is here, merely waiting for a Canadian Hitler to explode it.”<sup>54</sup>

In retrospect it is clear that although the situation in Quebec was far from idyllic, it could not be compared to Germany. Jews did not have to endure a state-sponsored campaign of intimidation and terror. In general, most Jews lived in amicable relationships with their French Canadian neighbours.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, in the Montreal Jewish community there was concern for what might happen. Some may have seen the German situation as a harbinger of things to come. In Germany Jews had been integrated for centuries into German life and culture; yet they became seemingly overnight the victims of extreme intolerance. Because of their recent arrival to Canada some Jews would now see themselves in a tenuous position. Some felt as vulnerable as their German brethren.

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<sup>52</sup> “The Notre Dame Hospital Incident,” *CJC*, 22 June 1934, 3.

<sup>53</sup> *L’Action Médicale*, Montreal, July 1934, 354. ZA 1934, Box 2, 05. Congress archives.

<sup>54</sup> “Anti-Semitism and Its Causes,” *CJC*, 12 October 1934, 3.

<sup>55</sup> Tulchinsky, 202-203.

The Nazi regime was proceeding step by step towards war. In 1935 Hitler, through skillful diplomacy, began abrogating terms of the Versailles Treaty and started rearming Germany.<sup>56</sup> Each step towards making Germany a military power and getting international recognition, such as was the case when Germany secured the 1936 summer Olympic Games, required a neutral or even acquiescent attitude from abroad, especially from the Great Powers. To achieve this, for a time Hitler toned down acts of physical violence against the Jews.

To avoid [atrocious stories of violence against Jews] he was prepared to contain, if not entirely quash, the ferment in the lower ranks of his movement. He could not and would not renounce anti-Semitism as the single immutable and focal feature of Nazi ideology. However, he had come to see that the world accepted discriminatory laws and statutes more readily than it acquiesced to acts of violence.<sup>57</sup>

And so he proceeded to pass the racist Nuremberg decrees in September 1935, which stripped German Jews of their citizenry.

In Montreal the Nuremberg laws were reported both in the Jewish and the non-Jewish press. Although in the past the *Chronicle* had berated the English press for its lack of interest in Jewish issues, it now reported that the *Gazette* had published a scathing attack on the Nuremberg laws.

The situation is, however, best summed up in the special dispatch which the Montreal Gazette correspondent sent from Nuremberg. "One is struck," he stated, "by the deep gulf that today separates German thought from that of the rest of the world."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> See Leni Yahil, *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 70. Yahil describes Hitler's early breakthroughs in foreign policy which required lifting restrictions imposed by the Versailles Treaty. Hitler's successes included the acceptance by the world community of the passage of the Reich's Law of Compulsory Military Service and the signing of a maritime agreement with Great Britain on June 18, 1935 which paved the way for the building of a powerful German navy.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *CJC*, "Editorial Comments: Hitler's Code of Inconsistency" 27 September 1935, 6.

While the effort to boycott German goods continued with varying degrees of success in 1935, Congress was having problems mobilizing Canadian Jewry to support their brethren in Europe. In a memorandum issued in October of that year under the heading "Relief of Stricken European Jewry," Congress spoke of Jewish unity under its leadership, and called for more support and especially for financial help. "The beginning of a Canadian unity has been established. It must be strengthened, and financed in a dignified manner!"<sup>59</sup> The response from the community to help the Jews of Europe had been lukewarm and the campaign had yielded little; as General Secretary Caiserman wrote, "...Canadian Jewry responded to the appeal for Stricken European Jewry with pennies, aye, with doled pennies."<sup>60</sup>

Canadian Jews who did want to show their support for German Jewry found themselves in an awkward position. The leaders of the community did not wish to upset the government, and many within the community who might have wanted to protest believed that the situation in Germany might worsen because of their actions. There was a veiled threat from Hitler suggesting reprisals against German Jewry because of Jewish protests in other countries. Hitler had often spoken of the menace posed by "International Jewry," and any demonstrations against Germany might serve as an excuse for further measures against German Jewry.<sup>61</sup> Again this reinforced the sense that protests against Germany required the presence of the Christian community.

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<sup>59</sup> "Twenty-two Months of The Canadian Jewish Congress Activities" October, 1935 ZA 1935, 4/40, Box 4. Congress archives.

<sup>60</sup> H.M. Caiserman, "Canadian Jewry Now Must Speak," *CJC*, 27 September 1935, 84.

<sup>61</sup> This contention was countered by some who thought demonstrations would be beneficial for German Jewry. Phillip Slomovitz, "Silence Condemns German Jewry," *CJC*, 13 September 1935, 5. The author, quoting an unnamed American journalist, argues that "any moderating of the protests is interpreted as evidence of growing indifference and tacit acquiescence in the persecution."

Following the introduction of the Nuremberg laws, conditions within Germany worsened for the Jews. They were slowly being squeezed economically, and more Jews were becoming destitute and dependent on relief.<sup>62</sup> Jews started to leave Germany, not in droves, but at an annual rate of about 5 percent of the 1933 Jewish population.<sup>63</sup> The refugee problem in Europe intensified in March 1938 following Hitler's annexation of Austria. Many German Jews who had left Germany seeking sanctuary in Austria now became refugees for the second time.<sup>64</sup> The German government in an effort to make Germany and Austria *judenfrei*, free of Jews, had embarked on a deliberate policy of forcing Jews out of the economic life of both countries. The Nazis' hope was that most Jews would leave the Third Reich on their own.

Jews who did want to leave were, however, faced with insurmountable obstacles. Besides having to relinquish most of their possessions before leaving the country, many had nowhere to go. Most western countries were still in the midst of an economic slowdown which exacerbated the unemployment situation. As the refugee crisis in Europe worsened, many countries closed their borders to immigration. Added to the closed door policy of many nations including Canada was the fear of any Jewish influx. Anti-Semitism had made the Jew a most unwelcome immigrant.

In the wake of the refugee crisis in Europe, in order to avert any efforts towards the liberalization of immigration laws, the United States under the leadership of Secretary of State Cordell Hull initiated a conference in Evian, France to discuss possible solutions

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<sup>62</sup> Bauer, 132. "52,000 Jews were on welfare in 1935; in 1938 with a Jewish population of 380,000, 100,000 were receiving relief."

<sup>63</sup> Bauer, 113. The effects of the Nuremberg laws did not appear until the Olympic Games of 1936 had ended. Bauer contends that Hitler was planning on war by 1940 and "as war approached, Nazi policy toward the Jews became more extreme."

<sup>64</sup> Abella and Troper, 16.



to the refugee problem. Arthur Morse states that the plan for the conference, in July 1938, was hatched in order to “get out in front and attempt to guide the pressure, primarily with a view toward forestalling attempts to have the immigration laws liberalized.”<sup>65</sup>

According to Abella and Troper, Canada was unaware of these American intentions and assumed that the conference would open the doors to more immigration. Canada need not have feared. However, plans were set in motion even before the conference started to ensure that Canada would not be put in the position of having to accept Jewish refugees. A month before the conference opened, Frederick Blair, director of the Immigration Branch, sent a letter to W.R. Little, technical advisor to the Canadian delegation to the Refugee Conference in Evian, advising him on Canada’s position. “[W]e are not prepared to receive any material increase in the number of refugees from Europe but will continue our present policy of sympathetic consideration where circumstances are favourable.”<sup>66</sup> For both the governments in Canada and the United States the conference was but a means of stifling any protests on behalf of European Jewry. The news that eventually emerged from Evian was that a supposedly concerned community of nations could do nothing to help those who sought refuge.

The Canadian Jewish community and its leaders had expected much from their government and the conference. Jewish MPs assured the community that the government would make a commitment at the conference and that Jewish immigration would follow.<sup>67</sup> Congress itself felt that the conference would be a sign of things to come. H.M.

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<sup>65</sup> Morse, 203.

<sup>66</sup> Letter from Frederick Charles Blair, Immigration Branch, Ottawa, to William R. Little, Commissioner of Immigration, London, 6 June, 1938. Paula Draper and Harold Troper, eds., *Archives of the Holocaust: National Archives of Canada, Ottawa and Canadian Jewish Congress Archives, Montreal*, vol. 15 of *Archives of the Holocaust: An International Collection of Selected Documents*, ed. Henry Friedlander and Sybil Milton (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991), 9.

<sup>67</sup> Abella and Troper, 23.

Caiserman pointed out in a letter to a Congress official, "I am now in a position to inform you confidentially that the Minister who has been seen is favourably impressed with the requests made... [W]e must all have the necessary patience until we are in a position to disclose what can be done"<sup>68</sup> Throughout the whole sorrowful period of the Holocaust many Jewish leaders in North America had a clouded vision of their governments' willingness to help. So they pressed for silence and patience from the community.

Caiserman urged restraint, "I had in mind to suggest that we refrain from mass meetings, publicity and noise, because such methods would only nullify what we have in mind."<sup>69</sup>

However despite Caiserman's optimism, not all within the Jewish community were reassured. As Abella and Troper point out, the more recent arrivals began to question the wisdom of quiet diplomacy. Their frustration with Congress was often based on personal connections with the unfolding crisis in Europe.

And, as the local Jewish establishment again endorsed its politicians' call for restraint, Labour Zionists, Yiddishists and local *landemannschaften* within the Canadian Jewish Congress were becoming increasingly impatient with the pace of negotiations.

For them, the newer immigrant sections of the Jewish community, the refugees in question were not distant Jews, but family and friends. For those who had themselves so recently emigrated, it was impossible to deny the appeals from terrified kin in Austria or from those in Eastern Europe who, reading the handwriting on the wall, begged to escape.<sup>70</sup>

On June 15 1938, less than a month before the ill-fated Evian Conference opened, while Jewish leaders were still quietly seeking the support of the Canadian government for a more open immigration policy, The People's Committee against Anti-Semitism, an ad hoc group formed by the Jewish Left, met with the cabinet committee on immigration

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<sup>68</sup> "Letter from H.M. Caiserman, Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC), Montreal, to M. Averbach, CJC, Winnipeg, 15 April, 1938," *Archives of the Holocaust*, 6.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Abella and Troper, 23.

and denounced the government's refugee policy. Although these demonstrators were not affiliated with Congress, their protests and the reactions to their "unorthodox" methods illustrated the schisms that existed within the Jewish community. The fact that the protesters were associated with the political left and stood outside the Jewish establishment allowed Jewish CCF MP A.A. Heaps to brand them as Communist sympathizers.<sup>71</sup> The *Chronicle* also weighed in, referring to the group as opportunists willing to take advantage of the dire predicament in which Jews found themselves. "The Jewish people are so helpless today that they will blindly follow any messiah who holds a Utopia in his hand, and it is this helplessness which the high-sounding committee is exploiting."<sup>72</sup> Not only had the group gone outside the "guidelines" that had been established by the leaders of the Jewish community, but it had made the Jewish refugee issue public; as the *Chronicle* declared, "With a blaze of trumpets and uncontrolled ebullience the People's Committee crashed with a thud on the front page of every newspaper from Halifax to Vancouver..."<sup>73</sup>

Many within the Jewish community believed not only that it was unwise to publicize any demands made by Jews, but that it was also harmful to even suggest that there was a "Jewish problem." Many worried that too much emphasis on Jewish suffering in Europe would lead not to sympathy but to an anti-Semitic backlash in North America. One writer in the *Chronicle* who decried the publicity claimed that any mention of Jewish hardships in Nazi Germany "has a bad effect on the relationship with non-Jews at

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<sup>71</sup> Abella and Troper, 26. The authors quote a conversation between A.A. Heaps and Frederick Blair.

<sup>72</sup> "The People's Busybodies," *CJC*, 24 June 1938, 3.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

home.”<sup>74</sup> An editorial in the *Chronicle* lamented the Jewish presence in press reports and the sensationalizing of Jewish agony, suggesting that “There is something indecent about this exploitation of a people weighted down by sorrow.”<sup>75</sup> The leaders of the community, perhaps because they feared the growth of anti-Semitism at home, began to adopt an attitude that downplayed the suffering of their brethren in Europe. It was an attitude that was to continue throughout the war years, and as we will later observe, the Jewish leadership increasingly placed the Jewish issue in a broader context of Nazi atrocities. In order to garner support from the Canadian public and Canadian government the fact that there was an effort on the part of the Nazis to target the Jews for persecution and eventually for extermination had to be sublimated to a theme that spoke of universal suffering under the Nazis. It would become one of the ironies of the coming catastrophe that in order to save Jews in Europe it was deemed necessary not to mention them.

On the non-Jewish side as well the “Jewish” problem was not mentioned. When government officials spoke of their inability to handle a large influx of refugees, many people knew what was being implied. Anti-Semitism, though prevalent in western countries, was becoming associated with the Hitler regime and thus to avoid charges of anti-Semitism the Jewish problem was camouflaged, hidden in a language that did not specifically mention the Jew.

Both sides, Jewish and non-Jewish, manipulated language and engaged in doublespeak. For public consumption, both governments and community leaders used euphemisms when they referred to the “refugees of Europe.” The Jews in Europe became

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<sup>74</sup> William Zukerman, “Is Publicity Good for the Jews?: The Reaction to Newspaper Reports of Pogroms,” *CJC*, 22 July 1938, 8.

<sup>75</sup> “Jews, News and Views,” *CJC*, 5 August 1938, 3.

in time invisible entities, and while not forgotten by their Jewish brethren, their appalling situation was masked under the horrors of Nazism, an ideology that threatened everyone.

When the Evian Conference ended in failure, the final communiqué spoke not of Jews but instead painted a very broad stroke when it referred to the “refugee” crisis. And the oblique references to the Jews in some of the statements were implicitly negative. For example the third point of the nine point official document stated, “Aware, moreover, that the involuntary emigration of people in large numbers has become so great that it renders racial and religious problems more acute...”<sup>76</sup> The conference had ostensibly been established to deal with the problem of Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi-controlled territory in Europe.<sup>77</sup> Germany had become a racist totalitarian state, but governments were fearful of offending Hitler. Not surprisingly, the words “Jew” and “Germany” were conspicuously avoided at the Evian Conference.

After the conference the *Chronicle*, in an upbeat editorial, warned that “it would be erroneous to enwrap ourselves in pessimism.”<sup>78</sup> Nonetheless behind a façade of optimism and hopefulness a change had occurred. Evian was a milestone, for while attempts to get Jews to Canada were to continue, the duplicity of the government, the indifference of the public and the impotence of Jewish political leaders demonstrated the powerlessness of the Jewish community.

With the war still more than a year away the Jewish community was faced with a no-win situation. Congress, which was now the voice of Canadian Jewry, had adopted the go-slow approach, and although it began to appear that they were not making any

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<sup>76</sup> Decisions taken at the Evian Conference on Jewish Refugees, July 1938  
[http://www1.yadvashem.org/about\\_holocaust/documents/part1/doc45.html](http://www1.yadvashem.org/about_holocaust/documents/part1/doc45.html). Accessed January 12, 2005.

<sup>77</sup> In March 1938, Germany annexed Austria creating more Jewish refugees.

<sup>78</sup> “After Evian,” *CJC*, 29 July 1938, 3.

headway, the alternative, that is a more public display in favor of their European brethren, seemed not only futile but counterproductive. Most governments in the West shed only crocodile tears for the Jews under Nazi control. And the situation in Germany was deteriorating rapidly.

On November 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> 1938, the Jewish communities in Germany were attacked with a fury that surpassed any previous anti-Semitic acts of violence carried out by the Nazi regime. In a night-long rampage that became known as *Kristallnacht* or Night of Broken Glass, Hitler unleashed his forces on the Jewish population in Germany. In a period of about twenty-four hours, *Kristallnacht* changed the outlook of German Jewry, from what was seemingly composed concern and apprehension about the anti-Semitism in the country, to fear and panic. This manifestation of Nazi policy shocked the Jews of Germany and stunned the Jewish communities in Canada.<sup>79</sup>

The Jewish leadership tried to enlist the help of non-Jews in protesting the actions of Nazi Germany and in opening the way for refugees to come to Canada. This was the point at which the leadership and the Jewish press began more and more to frame the issue of Jewish suffering in a manner that gave it relevance to the rest of the Canadian population. They tried to convince the public and the government that their cause was right and just, not because it affected Jews but because Nazism would have consequences for a significant portion of the general population. In an editorial in the *Chronicle*, for example, Nazism becomes not only a threat to Jews but also a world-wide menace that would endanger non-Jews.

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<sup>79</sup> *Kristallnacht* was reported in detail both in the *Chronicle* and the *Adler*. "Montreal Voices Horror at Plight of German Jews", *CJC*, 25 November, headlines. See also *Adler* editorial "Germany's Black Mark", 13 November 1938, 4 and "146 Jews Beaten to Death in German Concentration Camps," 15 November, 1938, headlines.

To-day it is the Jews who have been reduced to serfdom, decreed into helotry, made lower than the worm. But to-morrow? ... To-morrow it will be Catholics, the Protestants, all Christians whose doctrine of love is anathema to the savages who have sprung up upon the seats of the mighty in Germany. There is a lunatic abroad in Europe; and the world had better give heed.<sup>80</sup>

The Jewish leadership realized that Jewish organizations could not, by virtue of the fact that they were Jewish, influence government. "And so," write Abella and Troper,

with no alternatives, they turned to organizational restructuring, first seeking influential allies – allies to whom the government might listen and for whom the refugee cause was not a private Jewish agony but a broad humanitarian cause.<sup>81</sup>

Congress's plan to help German Jewry and change Canadian government policy now required alliances with non-sectarian organizations, in which Jews were to remain for the most part invisible. In anticipation of partnerships with non-Jewish groups a CJC official wrote, "Regarding the advisability of including Jewish members .... we have agreed that the Jewish representation should be small and should be effected through the Canadian Jewish Congress."<sup>82</sup>

The Canadian National Committee on Refugees and Victims of Political Persecution (CNCR) became the major non-Jewish body to deal with the Jewish refugee issue. Congress and the CNCR seemed to find each other. Congress was looking for such an organization, and CNCR appeared to answer its needs. CNCR was formed in early December 1938 from the Canadian League of Nations Society, giving that group the

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<sup>80</sup> "Vandal and Victim," *CJC*, 18 November 1938, 3.

<sup>81</sup> Abella and Troper, 44.

<sup>82</sup> Letter from Oscar Cohen CJC Toronto to Samuel Sheps, CJC, Winnipeg, October 30, 1938. Concerning the creation of a national refugee committee with minimal visible Jewish representation, *Archives of the Holocaust*, 28.

purpose for which it had been searching.<sup>83</sup> Congress declared immediately after the formation of the CNRC that “from the representative nature of those present, it is apparent that the new committee represents a large national movement in favour of admitting refugees to Canada.”<sup>84</sup>

While the organization was sympathetic to the plight of German Jewry, some within the CNCR considered Jewish immigration detrimental to the best interests of Canada. Charlotte Whitton, a well-known social worker and activist, suggested that Canada, in dealing with the refugee situation, should consider:

Her own racial composition, its distribution, and areas of concentration of different races, with frank recognition of possible severe repercussions from any policies which did not take cognizance of the full potentialities of the situation.<sup>85</sup>

Thus Congress allied itself with some voices that expressed sympathy for German Jewry and criticized the Nazi regime’s persecution of both political and religious victims, but nonetheless did not want European Jews to come to Canada.

*Kristallnacht*, because it received a large amount of press coverage throughout North America, opened the doors for Congress to protest publicly on behalf of their German coreligionists. Congress declared November 20<sup>th</sup> a day of mourning with memorial meetings in Jewish communities throughout Canada. But these meetings held to protest anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany were to be seen as primarily Christian responses to the atrocities. Caiserman advised:

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<sup>83</sup> Abella and Troper, 44. At a national refugee conference in Ottawa on December 6, 1938 the Canadian League of Nations Society became the Canadian National Committee on Refugees and Victims of Political Persecution.

<sup>84</sup> Congress Bulletin, “Non-Sectarian Refugee Committee Formed” December 9, 1938, Box 4, ZA1938, 38-55, 4/43, Congress archives.

<sup>85</sup> Canadian National Committee on Refugees and Victims of Political Persecution, Minutes of the First Meeting, Ottawa December 6, 7, 1938. Memorandum by Miss Charlotte Whitton, Appendix 3, Box 4, ZA1938, 38-55, 4/43, Congress archives.



It is preferable that these memorial meetings be non-sectarian in scope and it is advisable that non-Jewish leaders in the various communities should be asked to endorse the calling of such meetings and, if possible, take part in the arrangements.

Moreover, it is important that most speakers at these meetings should be gentiles prominent in political life, church leaders, etc.<sup>86</sup>

The Montreal memorial was held at His Majesty's Theatre, a venue that accentuated the non-Jewish nature of the meeting, Jewish rallies and meeting generally being held at the Mount Royal Arena in the heart of the Main or at the Monument National, also in the downtown area.<sup>87</sup> The *Chronicle*, with a front page photograph of the meeting, illustrated the Christian character of the rally, as non-Jews dominated the platform.<sup>88</sup> The newspaper emphasized the need for the "full co-operation not only of all Jews, but also of good and liberal Christians..."<sup>89</sup> Although there was perceived to be a glimmer of hope of convincing the government to bring Jewish refugees to Canada, the newspaper concluded that "Palestine should still constitute the principal designation of Jewish refugees."<sup>90</sup>

In January 1939, following the death of Sam Jacobs, MP and president of Congress, Samuel Bronfman, a well known figure in the Jewish community and one of Canada's richest men, was asked to become president of the Canadian Jewish Congress.<sup>91</sup> Bronfman, with his wealth and influence, was an obvious choice. The *Chronicle* stressed the celebrity quality of the Bronfman name and his ability to bring into Congress the uptowners who had for the most part remained outside the fold; "The very prestige with

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<sup>86</sup> H.M. Caiserman, Letter from the Dominion Council of Canadian Jewish Congress, November 15, 1938. Year Boxes Supplementary, Box 1, Congress archives.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Eiran Harris, archivist for the Jewish Public Library, February 2, 2005.

<sup>88</sup> *CJC*, 25 November, 1938, "Montreal Voices Horror at Plight of German Jews", headlines.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, "What Now?", 4.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Michael Marrus, *Mr. Sam*, 259-260.

which his name is associated should serve to bring into Congress activity those elements which for one reason or another, have held themselves, like expensive ostriches, blind and aloof from the major Jewish problems of the time.”<sup>92</sup>

Although initially opposed by many downtowners, Bronfman secured the support of several leaders on the left who, for pragmatic reasons, decided to back his bid for the presidency. His candidacy was endorsed by Moishe Dickstein, an influential leader in the Labour Zionist movement. Dickstein, despite his ideological differences with the rich capitalist businessman and industrialist, believed that Sam Bronfman was best suited for the position.

Dickstein made the case... that Sam Bronfman could be the statesman Canadian Jews so badly needed. He was strong-willed and dynamic. He could get things done. He could help mobilize the wealthy Jews who had hitherto remained aloof from Congress affairs—and from the fund-raising that was the lifeline of the organization.<sup>93</sup>

Bronfman had in the past expressed little faith in Congress, which he had viewed as a “useless organization... which was doing Canadian Jewry more harm than good.”<sup>94</sup> But he was determined to change Congress. He brought with him a new contingent of Jews who had the means and the skills to make the organization a more efficient and more solvent organization.

With him, he brought to the largely working-class immigrant organization the wealthier integrated Jews of Montreal. As far as Bronfman was concerned, the days of well-meaning but ineffectual amateurs, constrained by limited budgets and, perhaps, even more limited expectations, must end...<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> “Mr. Samuel Bronfman, President of Canadian Jewish Congress,” *CJC* 27 January 1939,3.

<sup>93</sup> Marrus, *Mr. Sam*, 262.

<sup>94</sup> Abella and Troper, interview with Saul Hayes. 57.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

Bronfman's appointment marked a dramatic change for Congress. The influx of members and money from the uptown Jewish community did make Congress a financially stable organization. With more resources and more uptown members this rejuvenated institution now presented a new agenda to the community. It initiated a program that was based on the uptowners' perception of the Jewish community and reflected a different approach to the crisis in Europe. The dramatic overhaul of Congress which began to reflect the views of the uptowners was accomplished with very little opposition. In fact the Bronfman presidency and the immense resources brought in by the uptowners were welcome additions to a weak organization.

In his opening address to Congress Bronfman set forth his aims for the Jewish community, "First, Jews had to be patriotic; second, Jews had to speak as one."<sup>96</sup> In his speech Bronfman emphasized these two imperatives. The speech was exceptionally noteworthy for the fact that he made no reference to the situation of German Jewry or to anti-Semitism in Canada.<sup>97</sup> The speech was about loyalty and unity; other goals and other agendas were, if not hidden, at least relegated to a position that did not interfere with these objectives. For Bronfman, Jews had to be seen as even better citizens than their Christian neighbours.

We as Jews, have a chance to build up a full position of citizenship and equality which is a privilege belonging to the citizens of the British Empire. It is the responsibility of Congress to see that the Jews are good citizens in their respective communities across Canada, and to so conduct themselves that they will gain the respect of their fellow citizens...the non-Jewish citizens. We have got to be just that much better to gain their respect.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Marrus, *Mr. Sam*, 264.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> "Verbatim speech of Samuel Bronfman, of Montreal, following his election as new president of the Canadian Jewish Congress at the Royal York Hotel, Monday night (January 23, 1939)." Bronfman, Samuel, Box No.2, Congress archives.

Bronfman concluded with a clarion call for a united Congress.

We, as your elected president and board, enter on our work with a full appreciation of what is expected of us. On our part, we ask you to do your share. Unity is and must be the watchword of the Canadian Jewish Congress.<sup>99</sup>

Bronfman's call for unity served several purposes. It would, to be sure, increase the efficiency of Congress. It would also hide the face of downtown Jewry, for the revitalized united Congress would now present the image of the uptowners, which Bronfman wished to show to the Canadian public. Bronfman's call for unity would also quell those dissenters who questioned Canadian government policy. Unity meant that only one voice would be heard from Congress, the voice of Sam Bronfman. As Marrus succinctly states, Bronfman's words left no doubt that while the new leader fully recognized the diversity of the community he was representing he "in the end would not be bound by the Jews he was supposed to lead."<sup>100</sup>

The Bronfman message as war approached became a kind of mantra, repeated at gatherings in an attempt to make the Jewish community understand that they lived in a country that supported them; that they were part of an empire that brought them security and hope. Even in August 1939, Bronfman's speeches, while expressing his profound love for Canada and the British Empire, all but ignored the coming tragedy. In a brief reference to the crisis facing European Jewry Bronfman remained confident in the future.

Were it not for democracies, we Jews would face a hopeless future. If, therefore, some sections of our people throughout the world today, find themselves at sea, I am thankful that Britannia rules the

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Marrus, Mr. Sam, 266.

Sea, because when she occupies that position, we as Jews have little to fear.<sup>101</sup>

The downtowners, for all their misgivings, came to accept Bronfman. To this community Bronfman, while coming seemingly from another world, represented wealth and power. In a community that was bereft of these two attributes Bronfman was the leader who many believed would in time influence both public opinion and government policy.

In the summer of 1939 there was both hope and apprehension in the Montreal Jewish community. The Canadian Jewish Congress under Samuel Bronfman appeared stronger. It had united the community behind a charismatic leader and seemed poised to make its voice heard in Ottawa. As war loomed on the horizon, what would, or could, the Jewish leadership do as their brethren in Europe faced the onslaught of the Nazis?

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<sup>101</sup> "Address of Mr. Sam Bronfman, President of the Canadian Jewish Congress, at the Second Session of the Third Regional Conference, on Sunday, August 7<sup>th</sup>, at 8:00 P.M., at the Community Building (Calgary, 1939)," Bronfman, Samuel, Box No.2, Congress archives.

## Chapter 3

### World War II

On September 1<sup>st</sup> 1939 Germany invaded Poland. On September 3<sup>rd</sup> England and France declared war on Germany, marking the beginning of World War II. Canada declared war one week later on September 10. At the outbreak of the war there were close to three and a half million Jews living in Poland. Polish Jewry, it should be noted, did not come under complete German control following the invasion. Poland, according to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, was to be occupied by Germany and the Soviet Union, which had sent troops into Poland on September 17<sup>th</sup>.<sup>1</sup> The majority of Jews were living in the German sector, and while some crossed over into Soviet territory others “wandered back to the German-controlled areas to be with families they had left behind. As German terror was directed at first primarily against the Poles, and as the situation in the East was far from being satisfactory, many Jews saw little difference between the two locations.”<sup>2</sup> The start of World War II left the citizens of Poland, both Jewish and non-Jewish, trapped by two ruthless dictatorships.

Although a large number of Jews came under Nazi control, it would take Germany more than two years to set in motion the process for the physical extermination

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<sup>1</sup> This non-aggression accord was named for the foreign ministers of Germany and the Soviet Union who signed the agreement. A secret protocol to this pact resulted in the partition of Poland and the borders of the occupied state were set by Hitler and Stalin. Eventually Stalin decided to relinquish some territory in Poland to the Germans in exchange for control of Lithuania. See Yahil, “The Outbreak of the War,” 125-130.

The Jewish press criticized the alliance between Stalin and Hitler, two sworn enemies. In his column A.M. Klein commented, “Now the propaganda smoke-screen is lifted and in the clear light of day one sees that both Hitler and Stalin stand – side by side. The crusade against Bolshevism has been abandoned; the Soviet ideological war against fascism forgotten. The sweet mystery of love is solved, and soul-mate has found soul-mate.” “Of All Things,” *Adler*, 22 September 1939, 8.

<sup>2</sup> Bauer, 155.

of Polish Jewry. At the start of the war German and Soviet troops, occupying different parts of the country, were both eliminating Polish forces who opposed their totalitarian regimes. While the Jews found themselves under a regime that promoted anti-Semitism, the *Blitzkrieg* invasion resulted in a confusing and often unpredictable situation for Polish Jewry. Even given Hitler's racial outbursts and his inflammatory anti-Semitic speeches, Jews both in Poland and in the rest of the world did not foresee what lay ahead. Knowing what we now know it may seem understandable to assert that genocide was the obvious goal of the Nazi regime. But we afford ourselves the luxury of hindsight that the Jews in Warsaw and Montreal did not have.

As we have seen, the Montreal Jewish community had experienced anti-Semitism at home and was aware of the wave of anti-Semitism that was sweeping through Europe. Violent anti-Semitism had unfortunately been a hallmark of Jewish life on many parts of the European continent, as forced ghettoization, expulsions, pogroms and various other forms of anti-Semitism had long characterized life for European Jewry. To many Jews Hitler represented more of the same kind of hatred.

The noted Holocaust historian Raul Hilberg, in commenting on the "slow and steady growth of anti-Jewish action and anti-Jewish thinking," supports this view. "The German Nazis," he argues, "did not discard the past, they built upon it."<sup>3</sup> Hitler did not appear out of nowhere. He emerged on fertile ground where his ideas were not merely accepted but passionately embraced by many. Nevertheless, although his extreme anti-Semitism found a receptive audience in Germany and eventually other parts of Europe,

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<sup>3</sup> Raul Hilberg, "The Destruction of the European Jews: Precedents," in *The Holocaust: Origins, Implementation, Aftermath*, ed. Omer Bartov, 26.

few imagined in 1939 that the end product of this rabid hatred would be the crematoria of Auschwitz.

Hitler's anti-Semitism was thus perceived by many Jews as not much out of the norm, something that could be dealt with, as past oppressions had been. The Jewish press and Jewish leaders had often quoted from the Bible to prove that the House of Israel had always overcome adversity. The *Chronicle* during the Jewish holidays would often refer to the glorious biblical past when Jews had defeated enemies who had planned their destruction. While Hitlerism was the most powerful menace to date, this enemy of Israel would soon meet his end.

The Haggada, while it speaks only of the works and wonders of Passover, implies also all the other incidents of Israel's troubled chronicles which record how they "rose up against us, to annihilate us," and how "they" were in the end themselves annihilated. Pharaoh is merely the prototype: and the Red Sea merely a *locus classicus*.<sup>4</sup>

There was, as there had been during Hitler's rise to power, a belief that although his particular brand of Jew hatred was abnormally strident, he was still a nationalist German dictator, whose anti-Semitism was part of his appeal to the masses. Pragmatic considerations would save the Jews. Many believed that killing Jews just for the sake of destroying a people was counter-productive and self-defeating. What useful purpose could there be for a country with such grandiose war aims to divert men and materiel for the slaughter of millions?

While some historians point to danger signs that were overlooked in Nazism's relentless march towards the Final Solution, David Engel states that many historians have

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<sup>4</sup> "The Eternal Passover," *CJC*, 19 April 1940, 3.



rejected the approach that assumes that mass murder was the only logical outcome of Nazi Germany's actions since "it assumes that there was always a clear message on the wall to be read, that the message always spelled death, and that any alert and reasonably intelligent observer should have been able to read it at any time."<sup>5</sup> The Jews in Montreal, along with most of their European brethren, could not see the handwriting on the wall because at that point, from their perspective, there was nothing to see.

In the months following the outbreak of the war, reports of atrocities perpetrated by the German forces on the Jewish population of Poland filled the Jewish press.<sup>6</sup> Although the news stories focused on Jewish suffering, the Jewish press and the leadership of the community were well aware of the importance of not giving the Jewish issue too much attention. Canada's entry into the war meant that the universalization of the struggle against Nazism became more and more the guiding principle for the press. In an eloquent essay in the *Adler* A.M. Klein wrote,

There is no doubt about it – the barbarian is loose in Europe. A lunatic is running amok. His victims today are of one kind; tomorrow, should he succeed, they will be of another. He must not succeed! If civilization is to persist, he must be destroyed.<sup>7</sup>

The community leaders and the press realized that they would also have to emphasize that this war was not one that was being fought for the Jews of Europe; it was a common struggle against a totalitarian regime that knew no bounds. Anti-Jewish propaganda had portrayed Jews as being responsible for countless wars, and the idea that

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<sup>5</sup> David Engel, *The Holocaust: The Third Reich and the Jews*, (Hallow, England: Longman, 2000), 38. "

<sup>6</sup> See for instance Boris Smolar, "Thousands of Jews Lie Dead in Polish Towns," *CJC*, 27 September 1939, 7 and Joel Cang, "Tragedy of the Polish Jews," *CJC*, 20 October 1939, 5. Also, "Nazis Kill Hundreds of Jews in Vilna," *Adler*, 17 September 1939, Headlines.

<sup>7</sup> "Of All Things: German Shrecklichkeit," *Adler*, 12 Sept. 1939, 6. The essay was written in English.

this war was tied to a “Jewish conspiracy” had to be dispelled. As an editorial in the *Chronicle* put it:

Others, again, inspired by cowardice or fascism, or both, have, under the protection of the democratic privileges of freedom of speech, shouted from the roof-tops that this is a “Jewish-war.” ...No, this is neither an imperialistic war, nor a “Jews’ war.” Its objectives are simple, indeed. They were succinctly and admirably expressed by Prime Minister Chamberlain right at the outset of the war. They are “to crush Hitlerism,” to safeguard democracy, and to re-establish the rule of reason, instead of force, in international relations.<sup>8</sup>

As we have observed, the Jewish leadership had stayed in the background prior to the start of the war, but the attack on Poland and Canada’s entry into the war meant that the leadership would involve the community in a national effort to fight Germany.<sup>9</sup> Supporting the Canadian effort and winning the war became the overriding issues for all Canadians. Ever mindful of anti-Semitism and knowing full well that the war, with Canadians serving and dying overseas, might increase animosity towards their community, the Jewish press and leadership vociferously displayed their patriotism.

Hitler’s armies began their relentless march through Europe seven months after the invasion of Poland.<sup>10</sup> The collapse of France, the evacuation of Dunkirk and the bombing of population centres in England finally brought home the horrors of war to the entire Canadian population. For the Jewish communities in Canada the anti-Semitism of the Nazi regime and its effects on European Jewry were replaced by concern for a war that had engulfed most of Europe, and as many believed, posed a threat to life in North America.

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<sup>8</sup> “Our War Aims,” *CJC*, 13 September 1939, 3.

<sup>9</sup> “Canadian Jews Organize to Help This Country in the War Against Hitler,” *Adler*, 11 September 1939, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Germany invaded Denmark and Norway on April 9, 1940. On May 10 Germany invaded France, Belgium, Luxemburg and Holland.

## A Question of Loyalty

Michael Marrus states that “Jewish opinion had shifted by then [when war broke out] – towards the fervent patriotism that Sam [Bronfman] personally felt and to which he had tried to give voice in Calgary.”<sup>11</sup> It was not solely the words of Bronfman which created the mindset that loyalty to Canada should take precedence over all other concerns. The war was being fought against an enemy that had proclaimed its hatred for the Jews. The battle was being waged against a war machine that seemed unstoppable. The very nature of this life and death struggle made the Jewish community part of the national effort to combat Nazi Germany. The media and the government made it clear that the war against Germany was a fight that demanded the full and unquestioned support of the entire citizenry. As news of German successes and Allied setbacks filled the airwaves; as newspapers began to highlight the threats of the German juggernaut in its march through Europe, the community became part of the national effort to fight this menace. The beat of war drums and the appeal to Canada’s citizens for support and sacrifice meant that the Jewish community had to change its priorities. The concerns for the fate of European Jewry were replaced by a determined effort by the leadership to enlist Jews into the armed forces and accentuate Jewish loyalty on the home front. The community, mainly through the efforts of the Congress, not only concentrated on how best to respond to Canada’s war needs, but also focused on publicizing its war effort.

Groups, committees and organizations were set up by Congress to keep track of Canadian Jewry’s contribution to the war. Gerald Tulchinsky contends that the main reason Congress decided to monitor all aspects of the war effort was for public

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<sup>11</sup> Marrus, *Mr. Sam*, 27.

relations.<sup>12</sup> There was a perception that Jews had not contributed adequately during the First World War and thus they now had to be seen as doing their full share for the country.<sup>13</sup> The Jewish leadership, well aware of the precarious position of the community, sought to increase Jewish enrollment in the Canadian military and show non-Jewish Canadians that not only were Jews loyal but they also stood behind their words by enlisting in large numbers to serve their country.

The need to demonstrate loyalty was highlighted in a letter from H.M. Caiserman to M. Averback, executive secretary for Western region of Congress. On September 20, 1939 Caiserman wrote: “The Jewish community is being watched carefully and we must give a good accounting of ourselves. Failure to do so may create a tragic weapon against us.”<sup>14</sup> Two days later, Caiserman sent out a confidential appeal discussing the initiation of a program to encourage Jews to enlist.

Our enemies are insinuating that the Jews are not enlisting for the military services in the present emergency... The Dominion Council of the Canadian Jewish Congress at an extraordinary session decided that a liaison registration office be opened to give information and to aid in the recruiting of Jewish men.<sup>15</sup>

To handle the Canadian Jewish war effort, Congress immediately set up several committees, including a: Military Committee, Patriotic Efforts Committee, Committee of Labour and Industry, and Committee of Information and Public Relations.<sup>16</sup> The War

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<sup>12</sup> Tulchinsky, 204.

<sup>13</sup> Tulchinsky, 205. According to the historian the view that Jews had shirked their responsibility during The Great War was refuted by Louis Rosenberg who showed that the percentage of Jews in the military actually surpassed the national average. Tulchinsky references Rosenberg's unpublished study, “Jews in Canadian Defence Forces.” See Tulchinsky, endnote 2, 414.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Abella and Troper, 69.

<sup>15</sup> H.M. Caiserman, Canadian Jewish Congress, Dominion Council, Confidential, Urgent. September 22, 1939. Box 4, ZA 1939, 32-45A, 4/35, Congress archives.

<sup>16</sup> “The War Efforts Committee of Canadian Jewish Congress” in *Canadian Jewish Year Book, Volume III, 1941-1942*, ed. Vladimir Grossman (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Publication Society, 1941), 67.

Efforts Board (W.E.B.) became the umbrella organization for all these various committees. According to Congress the W.E.B. was set up for three purposes.

1. To guide and stimulate the contribution to the national war effort by Canadians of the Jewish faith and to co-ordinate their efforts so that duplication would be avoided.
2. To be available to undertake such new developing functional activities as would result from the war.
3. To keep an accurate record of the contributions made by the Jewish community and its individuals to all phases of the war effort, so that this record would be available during and after the prosecution of the war.<sup>17</sup>

The public relations aspect of the Jewish war effort became one of the cornerstones of Congress's agenda. During the war Congress revealed figures highlighting the Jewish contribution to the war. In November 1943 the organization released a report stating that "The enlistment of Jews in the fighting forces of the dominion is higher than their proportion in the population of the country."<sup>18</sup> Later that year the press office department of Congress listed as its first task, "placing before the non-Jewish public of this country the facts regarding Canadian Jewry especially the war effort and refugee problems..."<sup>19</sup> By this date the mass murder of Jews in Europe had already been reported, and the "refugee problem" was being dealt with, all too efficiently, by the Nazis.

Although to Congress the issue of loyalty seemed to overshadow concerns for European Jewry, not all within the Jewish community sided with the leadership's guiding principles. There was dissent within the organization, as some members had originally wished to make the issue of Polish Jewry a major concern. In September 1939 an

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> CJC Memorandum, Subject: Jewish Enlistments, November 25, 1943. National Dominion Council, 1943, Box 4 Series BA., Congress archives.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., Memorandum Subject: Re Press Office, December 8, 1943.

exchange between Sam Bronfman and Mr. I. Eiley, a member of the Polish Farband ensued over the priorities of the organization.<sup>20</sup> As the minutes read:

Mr. Bronfman: Reminded the meeting that we cannot overlook the fact that in addition to our overseas obligations we must also consider our local patriotic funds.

Mr. Eiley: Stated that although he was much aware of his patriotic obligations as the others, he nevertheless felt that the immediate need at present was funds for Polish Jews. He even went so far as to threaten to organise the Polish Farband [sic] into an individual unit for the collection of such funds.<sup>21</sup>

The national leader of the Farband, M. Dickstein, suggested that for the sake of unity "...this very vital problem deserved cool and considered deliberations. We cannot help but realise the difficulties involved and that it would be fatal if we became panicky [sic]."<sup>22</sup> Having thrown in their lot with Bronfman, it may have been difficult for some members of Congress to protest, or at least protest too strongly.

Within the Jewish community itself there were efforts to alert the community and leadership of the dangers facing Polish Jewry. The Federation of Polish Jews of Canada made attempts to draw attention to the situation with its appeals in the Jewish press.<sup>23</sup> In its announcement, both in Yiddish and English in the *Adler*, the Federation called for the assistance of the Jewish community for Polish Jewry. Labeling the invasion the "greatest tragedy to fall on the Jewish people," the organization called for "substantial donations for immediate aid to the suffering Jews in Poland." The Federation had been making

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<sup>20</sup> The Farband was the leftist Zionist Workers Alliance.

<sup>21</sup> "First Draft, Minutes of the Dominion Council meeting held on Sunday, September 17<sup>th</sup>, at the Montefiore Club, 1195 Guy Street," 5. CJC Inner Executive Meetings, 1939, Series BA, Minutes and Meetings, Box 5, Congress archives.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> The appeals were not limited to the Yiddish press. See *CJC*, "Help Us Save 3,500,000 Jews In Poland", 8 September 1939, 6.

similar appeals on an annual basis on *Kol Nidre* Eve, but now the plea was more urgent, as the newspaper ad stated, “We appeal to the Jews of Canada to help save the 3,500,000 Jews of Poland in their terrible plight.”<sup>24</sup>

The organization also tried to alert the Congress leadership. In April 1941 M. Peters, national executive secretary of the Federation, sent Saul Hayes, director of the United Jewish Refugee and War Relief Agencies, a report with instructions to forward it to Samuel Bronfman.<sup>25</sup> The report, entitled “The Persecution of Jews in German-Occupied Poland,” dealt with deportations and forced ghettoizations that were taking place.

The issue of loyalty forced Congress to deal with the “problem” of the Canadian Jewish Left. It was one of the hallmarks of anti-Semitism, both in Europe and North America, to link Jews to communism.

The equation Jews=Bolsheviks has long joined the canard of the Jewish banker and usurer in the antisemites’ arsenal; often in the mode of the Protocols, antisemites imagined that international Jewish bankers and international Bolsheviks colluded in global conspiracy; claiming that the Rothchilds, Schiffs, and Warburgs financed the Bolsheviks.<sup>26</sup>

For this reason, far-left Jewish organizations were not allowed into Congress. It was a policy that was never officially proclaimed; nonetheless these organizations remained throughout most of the war years outside of Congress’s umbrella. Communists were considered by the government and a large segment of the population as disloyal Canadian

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<sup>24</sup> “Appeal for Polish Jewry,” *Adler*, 22 September 1939, 6-7. *Kol Nidre* refers to the eve of *Yom Kippur*, the holiest day on the Jewish calendar.

<sup>25</sup> According to Peters, Bronfman had personally asked him to send information on the situation in Poland. Letter and report sent to Saul Hayes by *The Federation of Polish Jews of Canada*, April 12, 1940. CJC, ZA 1940, File 6/65. Box 18, 126-151, Congress archives.

<sup>26</sup> Marvin Perry and Frederick M. Schweitzer, *Antisemitism : Myth and Hate from Antiquity to the Present*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 101-102.

citizens who owed their allegiance to the Soviet Union. Many in Congress contended that allowing these groups into Congress would surely taint the entire organization; it would confirm for many non-Jews the “truth” about the Jewish-Bolshevik link. Furthermore, as Gerald Tulchinsky points out, “the Jewish Communists did not hesitate to publicly attack Jewish capitalists and try to embarrass them in the community.”<sup>27</sup> This was certainly a tactic that the uptowners in Congress could not sanction. And unlike Congress, the far left engaged in militant action, as Congress had learned earlier when a leftist group had publicly protested the immigration policies of the Canadian government.<sup>28</sup> This policy of militant confrontation was not what Congress wanted. And it was especially not what Sam Bronfman wanted.

Among Congress leaders... Sam was one of those most wary of activism; he feared that a demonstration would be a disservice to the British Commonwealth, and he was suspicious of radical Jewish groups that might upset Congress’s quiet diplomacy.<sup>29</sup>

The Canadian Jewish Left had tried on many occasions to join Congress; its requests for entry highlighted the dire situation facing their “brothers” in Europe. For example a number of leftist groups issued an appeal in December 1943 for admittance.<sup>30</sup>

We, of the left-wing Jewish movement, address ourselves to your Dominion Executive, because we are confident that the C.J.C. could not but take cognizance of the fundamental changes taking place in Jewish life, as in the whole democratic world. We want to have unity of action, all inclusive unity, because we want to make the greatest contribution towards a speedy victory, because we want to settle our score with the nazi murderers; to rescue the lives of tens of thousands of our brothers; to preserve and extend our cultural

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<sup>27</sup> Tuchinsky, 128.

<sup>28</sup> See p.52-53 for the reaction to the People’s Committee against Anti-Semitism which protested against Canada’s immigration policy.

<sup>29</sup> Marrus, *Mr. Sam* 290.

<sup>30</sup> The appeal does not mention any specific groups, however according to Tulchinsky some of the major groups that later amalgamated into the United Jewish People’s Order were: The Labour League of Toronto, the Jewish Aid Society of Montreal, and the Jewish Fraternal Order of Winnipeg, 129.



achievements, and to assure a secure future for all the Jews in all countries.<sup>31</sup>

Eventually Congress admitted the Jewish left.<sup>32</sup> Morris Biderman, president of the large leftist organization, The Labour League, contends that the admission was largely due to the fact that there was “a change in Canadian attitudes towards the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union had become our ally in the deadly war against Nazi Germany.”<sup>33</sup> The *Chronicle*, in an editorial published after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, put aside its previous contempt for the Soviet Union and for pragmatic considerations welcomed Stalin’s Russia into the alliance.

But he is resisting Hitler. That is all we know, and all we need to know... Communism is not our ally, Russia is our co-belligerent. Whoever is willing or forced to fight Hitler, fights our fight. We ask for no references, we require no antecedents.<sup>34</sup>

As news reached the West describing the devastation wrought by German forces on the Soviet Union, sympathy towards the USSR grew. The Jewish press featured stories on the Jews in the Soviet Union and their contributions to the war effort.<sup>35</sup> Montreal Jewry also responded to appeals for financial assistance to the Soviet Union. Allen Bronfman, a co-chairman of the Canadian Aid to Russia Fund, stated “I cannot speak too highly of the important contribution which the Jewish Section of the Canadian

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<sup>31</sup> “Appeal To The Dominion Council, Canadian Jewish Congress.” The letter was sent through the offices of the *Vochenblatt*, the left-wing Jewish weekly, 7 December 1943. Canadian Jewish Congress, National Dominion Council, 1943, Congress archives.

<sup>32</sup> There was no public acknowledgement of Congress’ admission of the Jewish Left.

<sup>33</sup> Morris Biderman, *A Life on the Jewish Left: An Immigrant’s Experience*, (Toronto: Onward Publishing, 2000), 60.

<sup>34</sup> “Commentary,” *CJC*, 27 June 1941, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Harold U. Ribalow, “The Voice of Russia: A Study of S.A. Lozovsky,” *CJC*, 7 November 1941, 9 and 16. The article lauds the efforts of the Jewish Vice- Commissar of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Propaganda, “...listen to each word uttered by Lozovsky and believe in him,” 16; Samuel Wolkowicz, “Brave Jews on Soviet Front,” *CJC*, 22 May 1942, 7.

“Five Russian-Jewish Writers Praised for Heroism,” *Adler*, 1 May 1942, 1.

Aid to Russia Fund has made to the success of this Campaign in the Province of Quebec.<sup>36</sup>

Following the war, with the defeat of Germany, the Soviet Union and the West resumed their ideological battle. Once again Communism and the “Communist threat” became major concerns for the United States and Canada. Very rapidly the leftist organizations in Canada regained their status as subversive groups. The far-left membership in Congress ended abruptly with its expulsion in 1951 as the Cold War intensified.<sup>37</sup>

As the war raged in Europe, the Jewish communities in Canada, under the leadership the Canadian Jewish Congress, became part of a united effort to support Canada in its battle with Nazi Germany. But underlying this enormous endeavour on the part of the Congress, there was the perception that the community was still being watched and judged for any signs of disloyalty. At home anti-Semitism was still rampant, and as Canada’s participation in the war became the overriding concern for the community, attempts to help Jews in Europe faded into the background.

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<sup>36</sup> “Our Answer to Soviet Jewry: Report of Financial Campaign, Montreal Jewish Section,” February 1943, ZA1943, 12/112, Box 12, 1943, 110-112, Congress archives.

<sup>37</sup> Memorandum For National Executive, Confidential: Not For Publication, Termination of Affiliation of left-Wing Groups from Congress. CJC-CA/ 47/436. The memorandum specifically mentions the United Jewish People’s Order (UJPO) and the Morris Winchevsky School. See also “Disaffiliation of The UJPO” in *Pathways*, 35.

## Chapter 4

### The Shoah

#### What Was Known

While Hitler's anti-Semitic measures against the Jewish population were reported in detail in the Jewish press it was not until the summer of 1941 that reports began to filter through to the West showing that Nazi anti-Semitism had entered a new and deadly stage. The months following the German invasion of the Soviet Union added more news of the deteriorating situation of the Jewish population.

Although there had been reports of German atrocities since the start of the war, the latest news from the Russian front was especially unsettling. On August 29, 1941 the *Chronicle* editorial noted, "The progress of the German armies throughout that territory of Russia already overrun, has left in its wake, for Russian Jewry, for centuries concentrated in that area, death and pain and agony."<sup>1</sup> On December 5<sup>th</sup> the newspaper stated "The lurid pages of Dante's *Inferno* are namby-pamby compared to the gruesome horror of these cold and heartless statistics."<sup>2</sup> The reports took on a more ominous air as German troops pushed deeper into Soviet territory.

While the mass slaughter of Russian Jewry began with the invasion of the Soviet Union, the extermination of Jews in all Nazi-occupied territory had not yet started. Approximately seven months after the invasion of the Soviet Union, on January 20<sup>th</sup> 1942, members of the Nazi hierarchy met at a villa in the Berlin suburb of Wannsee. According to Michael Marrus, "Most historians agree that with this meeting, European-wide mass

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<sup>1</sup>"Incidents in the Ukraine," *CJC*, 29 August 1941, 3.

<sup>2</sup>"Census of Tragedy," *CJC*, 5 December 1941, 3.

murder emerged as the essence of the Final Solution.”<sup>3</sup> The Wannsee Conference was a pivotal event, marking a new stage in the Holocaust as the Nazis began bureaucratizing the killing process. According to Yehuda Bauer, “The importance of Wannsee lies in the fact that at that place and at that time the entire German bureaucracy became involved in the conscious effort to murder a nation.”<sup>4</sup> In Berlin and other administrative centres, government offices dealt with the “paperwork” involved in the implementation of the Final Solution. The operation now depended as much on the pen pushers as it did on the actual killers.

The Final Solution began utilizing a good deal of the manpower of the Third Reich and its expanding empire.

The implementation of Hitler’s prophecy was a vast administrative undertaking....

The machine that carried out the “Final Solution” consisted of a large array of offices, German and non-German, uniformed and civilian, central and municipal.<sup>5</sup>

The mass murders evolved to include the rail systems, deportation centres and the death camps.<sup>6</sup> The slaughter was institutionalized; the extermination of Jews became an integral component of the war. And as the killing process grew so did the fear that the “secret” would come to light.

Considerable efforts were made to conceal the Final Solution. The Nazi leadership, while it may have alluded to what was being done to the Jews, never

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Marrus, *The Holocaust in History* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2000), 33.

<sup>4</sup> Bauer, 226.

<sup>5</sup> Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews: Revised and Definitive Edition* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985), Vol. 2, 407-40. Hilberg’s book provides an authoritative study of the bureaucracy of the Final Solution.

<sup>6</sup> The first death camp to use gas vans was Chelmo. The gassing began on December 8, 1941, five weeks before the Wannsee Conference. Bauer, 225.

explicitly spoke of extermination.<sup>7</sup> Words covered up deeds. Instead of killings, the Nazis spoke of “actions,” instead of extermination, they referred to the “Final Solution,” and “resettlement in the East” replaced the death camps as the final destination for millions. The Nazis cloaked the killings with euphemisms; and at Wannsee the genocide became just another administrative function that required timetabling, bookkeeping and other bureaucratic niceties. Throughout the years when the systematic killings were taking place with all the effectiveness of a military operation, the language was altered so that Auschwitz and Treblinka became mere abstractions.

The Nazis attempted to hide evidence of the physical extermination of the Jewish population. The Final Solution, which had begun with mass shootings, was transformed to a process that could be carried out behind barbed wire fences. The death camp became the insane solution to the problem of secrecy. These camps were not as public as the shooting fields; there would be no witnesses from nearby cities, towns and villages to observe the killings. There would also be less psychological stress on the perpetrators in the camps who, unlike the shooters in the fields, did not have to be in close contact with their victims.<sup>8</sup> The death camps made possible the killing of millions, and the gas chambers and the crematoria left little evidence and few witnesses. Also the Nazis had set up these factories of death in the East for reasons of secrecy.

It appears that all the officials and the SS men present understood that masses of human beings could not be murdered within the Reich proper – or anywhere else in Western Europe—and that the

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<sup>7</sup> Even after millions of Jews had been killed the Nazis insisted on secrecy. In a speech to SS officers at Poznan on October 4, 1943, “Himmler lauded the ‘tact’ of the SS whereby the murder of the Jews was not spoken about even among themselves.” Christopher R. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 391.

<sup>8</sup> For an analysis of the “problems” encountered by members of firing squads in Poland see Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 1992), 49-70.

only place where it was possible to do so was in the occupied countries of the East. In most of the countries of the East, the Germans would not have to mount the major camouflage operation they deemed necessary in Germany in regard to a cover-up from their own people.<sup>9</sup>

Despite efforts to hide the mass murder of Jews, news did get out. The destruction of European Jewry necessitated the cooperation of many levels of government in Germany and in the occupied countries. The complexity of the operation and the scale of the crime meant that information about the Final Solution could not easily be concealed. Hundreds of thousands of personnel were involved in operations on the Eastern Front. Many were employed directly in the extermination program. Individuals involved returned to Germany during the war or sent letters back home, describing what was going on.<sup>10</sup> The enormity of the crime, with its numerous perpetrators and staggering number of victims, suggests that many people including bystanders either knew or suspected that Jews were being slaughtered en masse in Eastern Europe. Walter Laqueur comments, “The German experience shows that secrets cannot, in fact, be kept even in a totalitarian regime once they have percolated beyond a certain small group. Ten men or women may keep a secret, but thousands cannot.”<sup>11</sup>

Information coming from the Eastern front began to suggest a systematic campaign to target Jews for extermination. Stories of Nazi mass murders became more frequent in the Jewish press and emphasized the ruthlessness of the campaign. As early as

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<sup>9</sup> Yahil, 376. The meeting of high ranking SS leaders with Hans Frank, head of the Generalgouvernement took place on December 16, 1941. The Generalgouvernement was the area of Poland under Nazi occupation, under the authority of a governor. The northern and western part of Poland had been annexed by the Reich.

<sup>10</sup> See *‘Those Were the Days’: The Holocaust through the Eyes of the Perpetrators and Bystanders*, ed. Ernst Klee, Will Dressen and Volker Riess, trans. Deborah Burnstone, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret: Suppression of the Truth about Hitler’s ‘Final Solution’*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), 18.

January 1942, an article in the *Chronicle* stated, “the Nazis are reported to have slaughtered tens of thousands of Jews without displaying any mercy even to women and children.”<sup>12</sup>

The reports of mass murder increased in the Jewish press with each German advance. By March 1942, although the Allies had not as yet confirmed the existence of the Final Solution, an editorial in the *Chronicle* stated bluntly that the Nazis were annihilating the Jews of Europe.

That the policy of the German High Command, working under the spiritual guidance of the Gestapo, is the total extermination of the Jews of Europe to-day – to-morrow, to paraphrase a current Nazi ditty, of the whole world – becomes more and more apparent as the war progresses. For the ruthless destruction of large Jewish populations in the temporary conquered areas shows nothing of the accidental: these hecatombs of the slaughtered are not of the unfortunate victims who fall beneath the indiscriminate jeopardy of warfare. These who are flung into the mass graves are especially chosen for their unhappy role.<sup>13</sup>

By the summer of 1942, news from the Soviet Union indicated that the murder of Soviet Jews was proceeding at an alarming rate as cities and towns with sizable Jewish populations were being made *Judenfrei* by mass shootings.<sup>14</sup> Reports of the massacres of Jews in Poland were also appearing in the Jewish press.<sup>15</sup> In July 1942 the Jewish press reported the growing use of poison gas on Jewish victims. That month the *Chronicle*

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<sup>12</sup> Valentine Katayev, “Retreating Nazi Armies Intensify Anti-Jewish Terror in Ukraine,” *CJC*, 9 January 1942, 5.

<sup>13</sup> “Interim Report: One Hundred Thousand Dead,” *CJC*, 20 March 1942, 3.

<sup>14</sup> “13,000 Jews executed in Lwow since Nazi Occupation, ‘Pravda’ Reports,” *CJC*, 1 May 1942, 7; “Eye-Witness Reports Nazi Massacre of 5,000 Jews In Kerch, In the Crimea”, *CJC*, 10 July 1942, 5; “Nazi Slaughter of Soviet Jews Described at Jewish Anti-Fascist Conference,” *Adler*, 25 May 1942, 1. “Massacre of 72,000 Jews in Minsk: Described by Escaping Eye-Witness,” *CJC*, 21 August 1942, 5.

<sup>15</sup> Reports on the Warsaw Ghetto had previously attributed the high death toll to disease and starvation. *CJC*, “Helpless Dying Jews in Warsaw No longer Cry ‘Ratvet’ (save us)”, 16 January 1942, 4.

stated that 700,000 Polish Jews had already been killed, “Thousands of these victims were killed by gas...”<sup>16</sup>

While the Jewish press was highlighting the dire situation of European Jewry, the atrocities against Jews were downplayed, if not totally ignored by the Western press. The *Chronicle* featured an article that attacked the indifference to the fate of Europe’s Jews.

The world was aroused by the vengeance inflicted on Lidice and well it might be. But at least the world knew about it. The deep tragedy of the Jew is that his sufferings are on a vaster scale – there is a Jewish Lidice every day – but that the outside world knows nothing about it.<sup>17</sup>

By the summer of 1942, the so-called fog of war had lifted sufficiently to reveal what was happening to European Jewry. While this fog may have hidden more precise details on the nature of the extermination operations, there was mounting evidence that, starting with the invasion of the Soviet Union, the mass murder of Jews had developed into a planned systematic genocide. The World Jewish Congress attempted to publicize the plight of European Jewry at a London Conference called to deal with Nazi atrocities. They were advised by representatives of the Allies that it was not necessary to single out the Jews as victims of Nazism. That would introduce a racial element into the meeting and would be playing into Hitler’s hands.<sup>18</sup>

In a letter to Sam Bronfman urging action, H.M. Caiserman spoke of the carnage in Europe.

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<sup>16</sup> “Nazis Massacre 700,000 Polish Jews: Thousands Executed In Mobile Gas Chambers”, *CJC*, 3 July 1942, 5.

<sup>17</sup> David Schwartz, “A Conspiracy of Silence,” *CJC*, 15 July 1942, 6. Lidice, a town in Czechoslovakia, was wiped out by the Nazis; its inhabitants killed as reprisal for the shooting by Czech partisans of Reinhard Heydrich, a top ranking Nazi official. Articles on the silence of the West appeared on other occasions in the *Chronicle*. See “Should Jews Be Mentioned?”, *CJC*, 6 November 1942, 2.

<sup>18</sup> “London Conference on Atrocities in Occupied Countries Answers World Jewish Congress,” *Adler*, 5 June 1942, 5.



For weeks and months the newspapers have brought us the horrible items of the massacres of Jews in Europe. There has taken place a slaughtering of our brethren in Germany, Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Italy – in all Nazi-occupied countries on a scale that no human being can conceive.<sup>19</sup>

In September Congress received confirmation of the massacres in the ghettos of Poland. Saul Hayes, following a conversation with a representative of the Polish Government-in-exile, stated "... Washington informed him that over the period from 1939 to date 100,000 Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto died and 700,000 Jews of Poland."<sup>20</sup>

In August 1942, Gerhardt Riegner, a representative of the World Jewish Congress, sent a cable to London and Washington, stating that he had received information from a German industrialist who had heard of a plan in Hitler's headquarters that "all Jews in countries occupied or controlled Germany numbering 3 1/2-4 millions should after deportation and concentration in East be exterminated at one blow to resolve once for all the Jewish Question in Europe."<sup>21</sup> While the governments of the Allies, particularly Britain and the United States, spent months checking the veracity of the report, the *Chronicle* had already come to the conclusion that Jews were being targeted for extermination. In October 1942, the *Chronicle* had only one headline on its cover page, "And Millions Will Die: The Position of the Jews of Europe Today."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Letter from Caiserman to Bronfman, ZA 1942, 3/390 Box 3, ZA 1942, 29-41, July 21, 1942, Congress archives. *of the Holocaust*, 83.

<sup>19</sup> Laqueur, 77. The German industrialist whose identity Riegner had pledged never to divulge was identified as Eduard Schulte. See Walter Lacqueur and Richard Breitman, *Breaking the Silence* (New York: <sup>20</sup> Memorandum, "Report of Massacres in the Warsaw Ghetto" Saul Hayes, September 15, 1942, *Archives of the Holocaust*, 83.

<sup>21</sup> Laqueur, 77. The German industrialist whose identity Riegner had pledged never to divulge was identified as Eduard Schulte. See Walter Lacqueur and Richard Breitman, *Breaking the Silence* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986).

<sup>22</sup> *CJC*, 2 October 1942. 1.

On December 17 1942 the Allies, in an official declaration, condemned the Nazi policy of extermination of Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe.<sup>23</sup> It was the first and only official confirmation of the extermination of Jews that had gone on for well over a year and according to the Allies had resulted in two million deaths.<sup>24</sup> The Canadian Government joined the declaration by “strongly condemning the Nazi policy of extermination of Jews in territories under German control.”<sup>25</sup>

Both the *Adler* and the *Chronicle* printed editorials criticizing the fact that all the Allies had offered was condemnation. Denunciations at this stage were not enough; both newspapers wanted action to rescue the remaining Jews of Europe.

What can we do about those millions of Jews? We can save them from the teeth and claws of the Nazi beast. What can we do for the Jews who escape? The doors are still closed in spacious lands.<sup>26</sup>

The English press in Montreal had carried few reports on the Nazi atrocities against the Jews prior to December 1942. The declaration on December 17<sup>th</sup> and the “discovery” of mass murder received coverage both in the *Gazette* and the *Daily Star*. The *Gazette*, on December 20<sup>th</sup> on the bottom of the front page, next to an article “New Egg Prices Set in Canada,” ran a detailed account from the Inter-Allied Information Committee which stated that the Germans had transformed Poland “into one vast centre

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<sup>23</sup> “Eleven Countries Condemn Nazi Slaughters,” *Adler*, 18 December 1942, 1.

“Nazis Guilty of Jewish Massacres Will Be Punished: Eleven United Nations Declare,” *CJC*, 23 December 1942, 5.

<sup>24</sup> The figure of two million dead was originally given by Rabbi Stephen Wise who, on November 24, released the Riegner report to the press in Washington. The reports of mass extermination had been confirmed to Wise by Sumner Welles, US Undersecretary of State. Lookstein, 110.

<sup>25</sup> Press statement from the Department of External Affairs, December 17, 1942. *Archives of the Holocaust*, 89.

<sup>26</sup> Editorial “Acts And Not Words,” *Adler*, 23 December 4.

A similar editorial appeared in the *Chronicle* entitled “Not Merely Sympathy”, 25 December 1942, 3.

for murdering Jews.”<sup>27</sup> The article also mentioned that the killings were not limited to Jews of Eastern Europe but also included “those of other European nationalities.”<sup>28</sup> The article referenced camps where Jews “are murdered en masse by means of electrocution and lethal gas.”<sup>29</sup> The *Montreal Daily Star* carried the condemnation by the United Nations on the bottom of the front page. It reported the statement by the American State Department that the German authorities “are now carrying into effect Hitler’s oft-repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people of Europe.”<sup>30</sup> In another article the newspaper reported that the Canadian Government was “glad to associate itself” with the Allied declaration.<sup>31</sup> The article, from Canadian Press, ended with some somber figures on European Jewry.

It has been estimated that of the approximately 6,500,000 Jews residing at the start of the war in countries now controlled by Germany, at least two-thirds have disappeared. Some 3,300,000 of them were in Poland.<sup>32</sup>

The reports which appeared in December in the English press, although limited to a handful of articles, were probably read by a number of members of the Jewish community who eschewed the Jewish press. For example, the articles were read with great interest by Mr. Percy Jacobson, a well-to-do retired Jewish Montreal businessman. Jacobson, an Anglicized Jew, had started a diary on September 1, 1939, the day Germany invaded Poland. His diary provides insights into everyday life in Montreal. While he described personal encounters with anti-Semitism, he displayed his undivided loyalty to a

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<sup>27</sup> “Nazis Murder Jews En Masse,” *Gazette*, 21 December 1942, 1.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> “Eleven Nations Condemn Atrocities to Jews,” *Montreal Daily Star*, 17 December 1942, 1.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, “Canada Joins Group,” 2.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

free and democratic Canada, constantly referring to the battle for liberty that his country was waging. His only son had enlisted and was killed overseas. Mr. Jacobson, although he had written on the situation of European Jewry, was not aware of the extent of the persecution of the Jews in Europe, and the December declaration by the Allies more than opened his eyes; the account of the extermination of European Jewry shocked him.

The campaign of outmost savagery which the Nazis are pursuing in all their occupied lands in order to exterminate the Jews in Europe is too horrible to put into cold words. It is stated that already two million Jews have been done to death. It is impossible for the civilized mind to contemplate the extent of this horror. And the heart cannot feel the full extent of the misery which our people have had to suffer. Allied Nations have at last made an official proclamation of their horror and their determination to punish the criminals after this war is over. May they not forget their fine words.<sup>33</sup>

The news continued to come out of Europe describing the deteriorating situation of European Jewry. In April of 1943 as Polish Jewry was disappearing from the face of the earth, the Warsaw Ghetto erupted in flames as the remnants of the walled Jewish community fought a last-ditch battle with Nazi troops. The *Chronicle* honoured the fighters of the ghetto.

Of course the issue was never in doubt. No one knew this better than the Warsaw Jews. That flesh cannot stand up against explosives is an axiom in both the physical and military fields. But knowing this, the valiant of Warsaw preferred rather to fight inch by inch through the tortuous ways of the ghetto to being led out, like cattle, unto the unknown and macabre highways where the Nazi extermination squads do their heinous work. They died, but they exacted a price.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Percy N Jacobson, Typed Diary 1939-1949, December 20, 1941, Congress archives.

<sup>34</sup> "The Warsaw Ghetto," *CJC*, 21 May 1943, 3.

The *Adler* eulogized the dead of the ghetto and listed the well-known writers, journalists and religious leaders who perished.<sup>35</sup> On June 6 1943 the Yiddish newspaper, in its front page headlines, described the catastrophe of the Warsaw Ghetto, with its five thousand dead Jewish fighters. It also reported that 90% of the Jewish population of Poland had perished, leaving only about 300,000 Jews alive in the whole country.<sup>36</sup> One week later the *Chronicle* reported the destruction of most Polish ghettos. “Practically all the remaining Jewish ghettos in Nazi-occupied Poland are now being ‘liquidated’ following the procedures used in Warsaw, and tens of thousands of Jews are being mercilessly slaughtered...”<sup>37</sup>

On May 18, as the Warsaw Ghetto was being destroyed, the *Adler* reported the suicide of Shmuel Zygelboim, a representative of the Jewish Bund.<sup>38</sup> The newspaper pointed out that he committed suicide to protest world indifference to the fate of Polish Jewry.<sup>39</sup> In June the *Chronicle* published the full text of his suicide note with its angry denunciation of the “whole of humanity.”

The responsibility for the crime of murdering all the Jewish population in Poland falls in the first instance on the perpetrators, but indirectly also weighs on the whole of humanity, peoples and the governments of the Allied States, which so far have made no effort towards a concrete action for the purpose of curtailing this crime. By passive observation of this murder of defenseless millions and the maltreatment of children and women, the men of these countries have become accomplices of criminals.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> “The Martyrs Who Fell in Warsaw,” *Adler*, 27 May 1943, 4.

<sup>36</sup> “5000 Ghetto Fighters Killed, 2300 Nazis Killed or Wounded”, *Adler*, 6 June 1943, 1.

<sup>37</sup> “Nazis ‘Liquidate’ Ghettos in Many Cities”, *CJC*, 28 May 1942, 5.

<sup>38</sup> The Bund was the Jewish Socialist Movement.

<sup>39</sup> “Underground Papers Bring Terrible News: Confirmation of Zygelboim Suicide,” *Adler*, 18 May 1943, 1.

<sup>40</sup> “Zygelbom [sic] Suicide Note Appeals for Aid to Jews,” *CJC*, 11 June 1943, 6. The death of Zygelboim was also mentioned in an article in the *Montreal Daily Star*. His suicide was reported “as a protest against the ill-treatment of the Jews of Poland.” “Jews Will Honour Ghetto Fighters”, *Montreal Daily Star*, 14 June 1943, The Federation of Polish Jews of Canada file, Congress Archives.

The *Adler* featured an article praising Zygelboim, and noted that he, unlike other Jewish leaders in the West, had gone through the Holocaust, and escaped.<sup>41</sup> The article was by that time using the Yiddish expression “der khurbn” to describe the Holocaust.<sup>42</sup> The war and the slaughter of Jews were to go on for two more years. The Jewish community continued to get reports on the “progress” of the Final Solution, which included news on the mass murder of Jews in Western Europe.<sup>43</sup> The Nazis were methodically ridding Europe of its Jews. The extermination of European Jewry continued until the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945.<sup>44</sup>

### What Was Done

The Jewish community and Congress, in their efforts to open the doors of Canada to Jewish refugees from Europe, met with little success. The leadership, by following a policy that they believed benefited Canadian Jewry, downplayed the tragedy of their European brethren. While there were people in Congress and in the community who tried to publicize and protest Nazi atrocities against their coreligionists, their efforts fell on deaf ears. Although many, particularly in the non-Jewish community, were unwilling to listen, others never heard the messages from the Jewish leadership, which were often delivered in a subdued language that all but hid the true meaning of the Holocaust.

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<sup>41</sup> Zygelboim had been one of the leaders of the Jewish Bund in Poland. He had fled to London and was a member of the Polish National Council.

<sup>42</sup> Leo Kenig, “The Zygelboim Tragedy,” *Adler*, 21 June 1943, 4. “Der khurbn” which has become the Yiddish term for the Holocaust was originally used to describe the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.

<sup>43</sup> “Nazis Use Gas to Liquidate Jews of Holland,” *Adler*, 18 May 1943, 1.

<sup>44</sup> On January 27 1945 Soviet troops liberated Auschwitz finding 5000 survivors. In April American troops liberated Dachau and Buchenwald. On May 7 Germany surrendered.

Efforts undertaken on behalf of European Jewry were on many occasions diverted by issues that Congress believed were more relevant to Canadian Jewry.

There were some attempts to publicize the genocide in Europe and to bring the mass murders to the attention of the Canadian public. In the summer of 1942 one of the most ambitious undertakings was planned at a time when news coming out of Europe foreshadowed the catastrophe that would befall European Jewry. Months before the December disclosure by the Allies of the Nazi intent to murder all of European Jewry, Congress had begun preparations for protest rallies to highlight Germany's crimes against the Jews. The rallies, under the auspices of the Canadian Jewish Congress, were to bring to the attention of the entire Canadian population the horrific deeds that were being perpetrated against the Jews. The inspiration for these rallies came from the American Jewish Congress which held a protest demonstration at Madison Square Garden on July 21, 1942. The American Jewish Congress in a letter to its Canadian counterpart pointed out the need for such a rally:

We feel that it is important that this meeting should be held both to give the Jewish community an opportunity to register its feelings with respect to mass massacres of its fellow Jews, and also to evoke the kind of response from Democratic governments which would be a challenge to Hitler as well as a moral sustenance [sic] to the Jewish community.<sup>45</sup>

The Canadian Jewish Congress immediately began preparations for a day of mass protests. In a letter to leaders of Jewish organizations, H.M. Caiserman argued that demonstrations were necessary as the crimes against the Jews were not reported in the

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<sup>45</sup> Letter from American Jewish Congress to Saul Hayes Executive Director, Canadian Jewish Congress, July 16 1942, CJC ZA1942, 3/30, Box 3, ZA 1942, 29-41, Congress archives.

non-Jewish media. Rallies would serve to inform the non-Jewish population of Nazis crimes against the Jews.

The atrocities against the Jews in Europe have been steadily increasing from day to day, and we do not see the Canadian press and the press of other United Nations have properly estimated the terrible catastrophe...

Therefore the Canadian Jewish Congress urges all members of your organization to share in the big demonstration of protest and mourning in order to express together with all Montreal Jewry and with similar demonstrations throughout the Dominion, our deepest sorrow; to protest against the terrible massacres; to remind our neighbours and the Press of our tribulations; and to pass adequate resolutions to be brought to the attention of our Government and its Allies.

The bigger the demonstration -- the greater its effectiveness.<sup>46</sup>

Although demonstrations were to be held across the country, the focal point was to be the rally at the Montreal Forum. And while the American protest was held in July, the Canadian Jewish Congress decided to delay the rallies until October as Congress contended that holding the rally soon after the New York protest would "be a great anti-climax and would nullify the entire objective of the first demonstration."<sup>47</sup> The extra time also permitted Congress to organize a more elaborate gathering that would include the Canadian Secretary of State, Norman A. McLarty, and Mr. J. Pierrepont Moffat, United States Minister to Canada.

The announcements leading up to the demonstration issued by Congress presented the theme of Jewish suffering under Nazi oppression. As a letter sent out to the Jewish leadership in Montreal stated,

As you already know, the Canadian Jewish Congress is calling a Mass Meeting to express sorrow and protest at the inhuman

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<sup>46</sup> "Dear President" letter from H.M. Caiserman, July 21, 1942, Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> "To the Heads of Jewish Organizations", Michael Garber, August 20, 1942, CJC ZA1942, 3/30A, Box 3, ZA 1942, 29-41, Congress archives.



atrocities directed by the Nazis against our brothers and sisters in Nazi-occupied countries.

This meeting will take place on Sunday afternoon, October 11<sup>th</sup>, at 3.00 P.M. at the Forum, St. Catherine St. at Atwater, Montreal.

... The inhuman sufferings and tribulations of our unfortunate brethren in occupied countries should arouse the conscience of every civilized man and women. .... We must let our voices be heard! We must arouse public opinion!<sup>48</sup>

Two days before the rally the cover page of the *Chronicle* announced in boldface print “Protest Against Monstrous Treatment of Jews in Occupied Europe!”<sup>49</sup> Its editorial stated that the demonstration would bring to expression “the sense of horror which has shuddered the civilized world at the Nazi record of unrelenting and ruthless inhumanity to the Jewish population held in its clutches.”<sup>50</sup> The rally was a major turnabout for the Jewish community, which had generally shunned protests and chosen “quiet diplomacy” from its leadership.

But the demonstration strayed from its original objective; it was orchestrated in such a way that very little was said of the Jewish tragedy. The rally was managed in a manner that buried the message of Jewish suffering and mass murders under a torrent of information that emphasized Jewish loyalty and Canada’s war against Germany.

Most of the speeches by the participants of the rally focused on the war effort. Norman A. McLarty praised the demonstration since it gave Christians and Jews an opportunity “to join hands in a rededication of our energies, our fortunes and our very lives to the cause of freedom and to total victory of the United Nations.”<sup>51</sup> His speech

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<sup>48</sup> “To The Heads of Jewish Organizations in Montreal” Canadian Jewish Congress, Michael Garber, September 23 1942, CJC ZA 1942, 2/25, Box 2, ZA1942, 15-28, Congress archives.

<sup>49</sup> *CJC*, October 9, 1942, 1. The cover page also referred to the faith that Montreal Jewry had in the “... Coming Victory of United Nations,” but emphasis was on the atrocities against the Jews.

<sup>50</sup> “A Meeting of Protest and Self-Dedication”, *CJC*, 9 October 1942, 3.

<sup>51</sup> “Thousands Attend Protest Rally,” *CJC*, 12 October 1942, 1.

also emphasized Canada's war effort, "giving figures as to the size of Canada's Army, Navy and Air Force...."<sup>52</sup> Mr. J. Pierrepont Moffat, the United States Minister to Canada, "paid tribute to the great contribution the Jews have made in this struggle."<sup>53</sup>

Samuel Bronfman, chairman of the meeting, did mention the mass killing of Jews but the Jewish catastrophe became part of the greater struggle, "Not we alone are its victims, Frenchmen and Czech, Norwegian and Dane, Pole and Yugo-Slav, Dutchman and Greek, all have learned the meaning of that New Order whose monuments appear – on the cemeteries of Europe."<sup>54</sup> Bronfman emphasized the Allies' sympathy for the Jews and especially the Canadian Government's compassion for the Jews in Vichy France.<sup>55</sup>

[The messages received] all indicate that the people of the Ten Commandments receives warm response from the voices of the people of the Four Freedoms. I want indeed, as President of the Canadian Jewish Congress, speaking on behalf of Canadian Jewry, to pay tribute here to our Government, which, but a few weeks ago, expressed through our Prime Minister, the Honourable William Lyon Mackenzie King, its grave concern, and made its vigorous representations touching the fate of Nazi-pursued Jewish refugees on French soil.<sup>56</sup>

The rally did get some coverage in the non-Jewish press but atrocities against European Jews were not mentioned. Massacres by the Nazis were described with no reference to Jewish victims. The *Gazette* focused on McLarty's outline of Canada's war

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> "Great is Our Mourning, But Greater Still is Our Determination Not to Pause: Sam Bronfman," *CJC*, October 1942, 12.

<sup>55</sup> The *Summary Report at the Sixth Plenary Session* states that the formal complaint by Samuel Bronfman to Mackenzie King regarding the deportation of French Jews to Poland resulted in King's subsequent protest to the Vichy Government. It was one of the few requests by Congress that resulted in a protest by the Canadian government. "Efforts to Rescue the Surviving Jews of Europe." *Summary Report (1942-1944)*, Congress archives.

<sup>56</sup> "Great is Our Mourning, But Greater Still is Our Determination Not to Pause: Sam Bronfman," *CJC*, October 1942, 12.

role and the need to press on to final victory, “The winning of this war is the one and only purpose to which we must devote ourselves.”<sup>57</sup> The *Montreal Daily Star* provided similar coverage and the ongoing mass murder of Jews was buried in a language that spoke of the “persecution of temporarily conquered people.”<sup>58</sup> It was not so much that the newspapers failed to understand the message of Nazi persecution of the Jews; it was simply that this message was never broadcast to the audience at the rally. The Jewish leaders believed that silence on the issue of Jewish suffering might in the end serve the community’s best interests.

An international conference on the refugee problem held in April 1943 once again destroyed the illusion of government concern. The conference, scheduled to be held in Ottawa, was seen to be a godsend. Immediately Congress began work to organize a petition that was to be signed by members of the Jewish community and presented to the government. The petition requested “the government of Canada and other United Nations to put into effect a rescue program for Jews of Europe who are being exterminated by the Nazis.”<sup>59</sup>

However Canada did not wish to play host to a conference on refugees and the location was switched to Bermuda, “in a site far from the centres of Jewish population, where the participants would not be subject to “public pressure.””<sup>60</sup> Canada was not invited to Bermuda. The *Adler*, in its article, “The Burst Bubble of the Ottawa

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<sup>57</sup> “McLarty Outlines Canada’s War Role: Calls for All-Out Effort in Addressing Rally to Protest Nazi Atrocities,” *Gazette*, 12 October 1942, Section 2, 13.

<sup>58</sup> “Jews’ War Efforts All-Out, Hon. Pierrepoint Moffat Tells Rally,” *Montreal Daily Star*, 12 October 1942, 3.

<sup>59</sup> “Canadian Jews Will Ask For Help: Will Petition United Nations Governments to Succor Victims of Nazis,” *CJC*, 26 March 1943, 13.

<sup>60</sup> Abella and Troper, 136. The decision to move the conference to Bermuda was made on March 22, 1943, when Washington accepted the British offer, Abella and Troper, 136 and note 23, 308. Hayes was not officially informed of the decision to change locales until March 30, 1943, Abella and Troper, 137.

Conference,” referred to the proposed gathering as a “political miscarriage.”<sup>61</sup> Some in Congress understood that the governments were bowing to the anti-immigration policies of their own countries and therefore wished to make Bermuda “another Evian Conference, which will meet, pass some pious resolutions and not decide upon anything or take any action...”<sup>62</sup> The Canadian Government’s deceit was obvious, as Louis Rosenberg wrote to Saul Hayes:

Ostensibly the Canadian Government will not attend because it was not invited. Actually I am inclined to believe that the Canadian Government would have felt very much embarrassed if it were invited, and must feel quite relieved at this way out.<sup>63</sup>

Congress did appeal to the Canadian government. Aware that Canada was not attending the Bermuda Conference, Samuel Bronfman and the three regional leaders of the Canadian Jewish Congress nevertheless sent a letter to Mackenzie King urging immediate action, and suggesting “that a generous act extending refuge and the benefit of your good offices with other United Nations and neutral governments would be in keeping with the proudest traditions of our country...”<sup>64</sup> King later answered the request in “a noncommittal but appropriately sympathetic letter,” as Abella and Troper put it.<sup>65</sup>

The *Adler*, three days before the conference started, featured an article entitled “The Modest Aims of the Bermuda Conference.”<sup>66</sup> But by the time the conference opened it was clear that nothing was going to be done for the hapless Jews of Europe. An

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<sup>61</sup> *Adler*, 31 March 1943, 4.

<sup>62</sup> United Jewish Refugee & War Relief Agencies, Letter from L. Rosenberg to Saul Hayes, April 8, 1943. Congress Archives, Ottawa Conference on Refugees 1943, 230, Box 25, 222-231A, Congress archives.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> “Letter to Rt. Hon. William Lyon Mackenzie King”, from Samuel Bronfman, National President, Michael Garber President, Eastern Division, A.B. Bennett, President, Central Division and A.H. Aronovitch, President Western Division, April 15, 1943. *Archives of the Holocaust*, 292-293.

<sup>65</sup> Abella and Troper, 151.

<sup>66</sup> *Adler*, 16 April 1943, 4.

article in the *Chronicle* stated succinctly, “Bermuda Conference Will Not Deal with Rescuing Jews in Nazi Lands.”<sup>67</sup> In an editorial the newspaper contended, “It would seem, therefore, that the Bermuda talks are merely an instrument to prove to the world, at no expense and without any commitment, how humanitarian we are compared to others.”<sup>68</sup>

Saul Hayes, Director of the United Jewish Relief Agencies of Canada and Executive Director of Congress, was one of the figures within Congress who actively and at times vociferously criticized the government for its failure to act on Jewish immigration. Prior to the Bermuda Conference, he had attended an emergency meeting of Jewish leaders in New York and stated that “If the Canadian Government will not show its readiness to open the door to refugees, all the recommendations from the refugee conference will have no effect.”<sup>69</sup>

But Hayes’ efforts were not limited to bringing the issue of European Jewry to the attention of the government. He also tried to rally the Jewish community and the leadership to do all that they could to protest the systematic mass murder of the Jews. For all his efforts Hayes met with little success.

Hayes, as a representative of Congress, had to act with considerable tact in his attempts to convince government officials to open the doors to Jewish refugees from Europe. He walked a tightrope, trying not to antagonize government officials while seeking their help. His efforts for the most part were rebuked. As Abella and Troper point out, on the day before the Bermuda Conference opened, Hayes went to a scheduled meeting with King to discuss the refugee crisis and to get a favorable declaration, which

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<sup>67</sup> *CJC*, April, 23, 1943, 5.

<sup>68</sup> “The Bermuda Conference”, *CJC*, 23 April 1943, 3.

<sup>69</sup> “Jewish Leaders Hold Talks in New York on the Bermuda Refugee Conference,” *Adler*, 8 April 1942, 1.

“would be publicized at the opening of the Bermuda Conference.”<sup>70</sup> On Hayes’ arrival he was informed that the meeting with King was cancelled and that the Prime Minister would be “unavailable” for the foreseeable future.<sup>71</sup>

Hayes not only had to contend with an unsympathetic government but “was also fighting a rear guard with his own immediate superiors in Montreal.”<sup>72</sup> Following the ill-fated Bermuda Conference, he wanted Congress to write a strongly worded letter to Norman Robertson, Under-Secretary of State, about the Canadian Government’s refusal to allow children into Canada unless accompanied by a parent.<sup>73</sup> This created problems for Jewish children in Europe whose status, whether orphaned or separated from their parents, could not be determined. The letter read in part:

May we also respectfully engage the attention of the Canadian Government in the fact that there are many children in Spain and Portugal whom we were asked to make arrangements to bring to Canada for the duration, but are met with the fact that the immigration policy of this country does not approve the separation of parents from children. Surely it is within the control of the Canadian Government to close this gap and to remove pre-war immigration considerations from the exigencies of the present crisis. To persist in these rigorous standards of the pre-war days puts the Canadian Government in the position of declaring that because the children are not orphans, therefore, both children and parents have to be sacrificed.<sup>74</sup>

The letter had to be rewritten; it did not meet with the approval of Sam Bronfman or Lazarus Phillips, President of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies. Saul Hayes

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<sup>70</sup> Abella and Troper, 141.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Abella and Troper, 146.

<sup>73</sup> The reason for not admitting children or single people was explained by A.L. Jolliffe, Director of the Immigration Branch, “It would in our opinion be a mistake to include single persons in the movement as this would simply result in subsequent appeals for the admission to Canada of other members of the family.” *Archives of the Holocaust*, Letter from A.L. Jolliffe, Immigration Branch, to the Under Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa, February 29, 1944, 260.

F.C. Blair had retired in the summer of 1943 and was replaced by Jolliffe.

<sup>74</sup> Hayes letter to S. Bronfman, May 7, 1943, Ottawa Conference on Refugees 1943, 230, Box 25, 222-231A, Congress archives

explained, “Neither Bronfman nor Phillips feel that it would serve since it is too argumentative. My own view was that it was high time we looked at pious statements offering help and put them in proper perspective.”<sup>75</sup> The letter was redrafted, “argumentative” passages were removed, and the new version included complimentary remarks to the Government and Prime Minister. “We have been able to share these views because our government through the Prime Minister has more than once had occasion to articulate his sympathies to manifest his sincere hopes that the position would improve.”<sup>76</sup>

Hayes also had his detractors within the Jewish community. Some were wary of any moves that might be seen as pressure tactics that would embarrass the government by highlighting Jewish suffering. These worries became evident during the petition campaign on behalf of Jewish immigration to Canada. The petition was originally to be handed to government officials at the conference on refugees in Ottawa, which was cancelled. Hayes had persisted with the idea of a petition and before the ill-fated Bermuda Conference, in a hard hitting letter to the Jewish leadership, mentioned the Jewish perspective on the war.

The Jews have been singled out by the enemy for utter extermination and there is all too much reason to believe that he is capable of putting that threat into effect...  
There is therefore a Jewish interest in the problem which any serious discussion must boldly take into consideration, however we may dislike to appear to accept Hitler’s racial theories. This interest it is the duty of Jewish groups to assert.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., Hayes letter to M.Garber May17 1943.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., Draft B.

<sup>77</sup> “Dear friend,” letter from Saul Hayes, April 12, 1943. Ottawa Conference on Refugees 1943, 230, Box 25, 222-231A, Congress archives.

As first proposed, the campaign was to be strictly a Jewish project. "Its objective is the securing of the signed support of all the Jews of this country for the representations of Congress to our Government and to other United Nations' Governments on behalf of our stricken brethren."<sup>78</sup> However that campaign ran into opposition from within the Jewish leadership.

Hayes was constantly trying to placate Jewish leaders who looked with suspicion at any overt measures taken on behalf of European Jewry. Ben Sadowski, philanthropist, officer of Congress and influential member of the Toronto Jewish community, in a letter to Hayes, implied that a Congress petition would create an unfavourable link to all Canadian Jewry, for "when the Canadian Jewish Congress makes a request of the officials of government, particularly one that has to do with the saving of lives overseas, they are speaking for the whole Jewish population of the country."<sup>79</sup> Sadowski also put his trust in the Prime Minister.

I think it is our duty to find out what Mr. King thinks. I have maintained from the start that that would guide our efforts completely and absolutely, because if Mackenzie King expressed a favorable attitude, and I cannot believe he would do otherwise, and that the only reason he has not come out of the wide-open spaces and shouted it from the housetops is probably due to the political exigencies of the moment. We, therefore, would not want any further guarantee than that.<sup>80</sup>

After the failure of the Bermuda Conference, Hayes still believed in the need to take action and again proposed the petition. In a letter to Sadowski that showed his growing frustration, Hayes wrote:

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid. (Underlined in original).

<sup>79</sup> Letter from Ben Sadowski to Saul Hayes, April 17, 1943. Ottawa Conference on Refugees 1943, 230, Box 25, 222-231b, Congress archives.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.



We are damned if we do and damned if we don't.... It is not only a question of mathematical precision as to how many people will bother to sign the petition but one of philosophy as to the necessity of taking every available action.<sup>81</sup>

Because of mounting pressure from Sadowski and others and the failure of the Bermuda Conference, the petition policy changed to involve as many sympathetic non-Jews as possible. Hayes concluded that a strictly Jewish effort would fail and suggested that “unless we can still wed the petition to the activities of the non-Jewish committees, the petition itself is of little value.”<sup>82</sup> Congress joined forces with the Canadian National Committee on Refugees; the petition campaign now called for 500,000 signatures nationwide.<sup>83</sup> As the petition was to be circulated to a larger audience the message was changed. Originally the petition presented to members of the Jewish community had urged government to “provide sanctuary for a reasonable number of those Jewish refugees who may be released from Axis-dominated lands or are presently in neutral countries, to participate in measures to secure havens of refuge in allied or neutral countries...”<sup>84</sup> To accommodate the non-Jewish organization and to make the petition more acceptable to the general public the new petition no longer referred to Jewish victims, “We urgently entreat the Government of Canada ... To offer the sanctuary of Canada to refugees from political or religious persecution without regard to race, creed or financial condition...”<sup>85</sup> The petition campaign was transformed from a Jewish endeavour to help European Jews

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<sup>81</sup> Letter from Saul Hayes to Ben Sadowski, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1943. Ottawa Conference on Refugees 1943, 230, Box 25, 222-231A., Congress archives.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., Letter, Hayes to Ben Sadowski, May 4 1943.

<sup>83</sup> The Petition drive was officially started on October 20, 1943. Publicity Release “Today the Canadian National Committee on Refugees is launching a mass petition to be signed by Canadian citizens of 18 years and over.” CJC, Ottawa Conference 1943-1944, 231B, Box 26, 231B-244, Congress archives.

<sup>84</sup> Revised Draft of the Petition (no date), Ottawa Conference on Refugees 1943, 231, Box 25, 222-231A., Congress archives.

<sup>85</sup> Petition Form (no date), Ottawa Conference 1943-1944, 231B, Box 26, 231B-244, Congress archives.

to a Christian mission to bring in “refugees” from war-torn Europe. Hayes appeased some of the leaders of the community and may have made signing the petition more palatable for non-Jews, but once again the Jewish catastrophe was hidden away.

By the end of 1943 the petition campaign started to encounter opposition. German forces were weakening and the Allies were starting to take the offensive.<sup>86</sup> The population in North America could envision the end of the long conflict. Many people in Canada, while still concerned with the war, were beginning to focus beyond the conflict. Worries began to set in. The troops would be returning home, but would there be jobs for them? Would the economy improve after the long conflict or would it revert to what it had been in the 1930s? Also, what would be done with the homeless and dispossessed of Europe? Where would the hordes of refugees go?

The idea of large scale immigration began to worry the Canadian public. While Congress and the Canadian National Committee on Refugees both tried to obscure the fact that the refugees were mainly Jewish, the population feared that, whatever words were being used, they would in the end be inundated by Jewish masses from Europe. While Canada may have been battling a rabid anti-Semitic regime overseas, at home nativism and bigotry still had a firm foothold.

Many branches of the Canadian Legion began adopting resolutions to combat the new “menace.” Refugees were not welcome in Canada. Once again, it was not necessary to mention who the refugees were – the inference was sufficient. One such resolution read in part:

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<sup>86</sup> By the summer of 1943 American forces had landed in Sicily. The Allies had also started huge bombing raids on key industrial cities in Germany. On July 28 a raid on Hamburg had resulted in a massive firestorm. In November the Allies were conducting bombing raids on Berlin and the Russian offensive had resulted in the capture of Kiev in the Ukraine.

And Whereas: Our fighting forces are struggling to-day to free the Homeland from the oppressor so that they, the refugees, may re-establish themselves in the land of their birth where their problems should be simpler than in a strange land with a strange tongue.<sup>87</sup>

The resolution concluded that the end of the war might result in a wave of immigration which should be limited to “admission in the first instance, of Citizens of the British Empire Only.”<sup>88</sup>

Although Legion branches were among the first to oppose attempts to bring refugees to Canada, the decisive attack against Jewish immigration came in November 7 1943 when Maurice Duplessis, leader of the Union Nationale and former premier of Quebec, in a pre-election meeting threw a political bombshell at the opposition Liberals, both federal and provincial.<sup>89</sup> Brandishing a letter that he claimed proved that his political opponents had joined forces with the “International Zionist Brotherhood,” Duplessis charged that in return for financing Liberal candidates this “International Zionist Brotherhood” would be permitted to settle one hundred thousand Jews in Quebec. His anti-Semitic outburst found a welcome audience. It was a lie, but it “struck a responsive chord in the prevailing anti-refugee or anti-Jewish spirit in Quebec.”<sup>90</sup> While Congress and the Jewish press fought back, it was to no avail. What was said was said and the lie stuck. No matter what would follow, the Quebec public remembered the ominous warnings of Maurice Duplessis. The *Chronicle* denounced the cruel hoax: “There can be no condemnation too severe of this cowardly and despicable trick....For cheap political

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<sup>87</sup> General Sir Sam Steele (Man.#117) Branch, Subject: Immigration of European Refugees, Congress Archives, Ottawa Campaign, 231B, Box 26, 231B-244, Congress archives.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> See Abella and Troper, 162-164

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

advantage M. Duplessis has stooped to the lowest technique of the coercist.”<sup>91</sup> Months after the Duplessis speech Congress was still trying to control the damage caused by the Quebec politician’s “revelations.” In an open letter to Duplessis in February 1944, Congress denied the accusations and lashed out at the Quebec politician.

On behalf of the Jews of Canada we deny that there is any Jewish organization in Canada whose purpose is openly or secretly “to support in the House of Commons the Government’s scheme for the establishment on Quebec farms of 100,000 refugees from Central Europe.”

....Apparently there are politicians among us who wish to obtain power in the state by the methods which the Nazis used in the belief that the people of Canada are likely to fall into the trap as did the people of Germany.<sup>92</sup>

Duplessis was elected premier. While Duplessis’s ploy was not pivotal to his victory, the incident in Quebec had repercussions in Ottawa. King and his party could not help but notice the uproar in Quebec. King knew that the mood across the country was decidedly against immigration. The type of anti-Semitism displayed by Duplessis and echoed by nationalist groups in Quebec may have been more vocal than the bigotry in the rest of the country, but the message was the same.<sup>93</sup> While the petition campaign was to continue, it was outpaced by the anti-refugee sentiment that swept the country. Congress’s hopes of convincing the Government to save some remnants of European Jewry were destroyed. The Duplessis hoax contributed to the failure of the petition campaign; homegrown bigotry sealed its fate.

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<sup>91</sup> “The Protocols of Zion: Duplessis Edition”, *CJC*, 12 November 1943, 3.

<sup>92</sup> News Bulletin “An Open Letter to the Honourable Mr. Maurice Duplessis From the Canadian Jewish Congress”, Montreal, February 1944, ZA1944, 4/81, Box 4, ZA1944, 64-90, Congress archives.

<sup>93</sup> David Rome in his description of English Canada’s anti-Semitism states, “...even though more discreet, the campaigns of Anglophone Canadians....were no less lethal in their blocking of refugee admissions.” David Rome, “The Beginnings” in *Pathways*, 20.

A Gallup Poll in January 1944 confirmed the worst fears of Congress. Anti-refugee feeling and anti-Semitism had increased across Canada. As the opinion poll showed, despite five years of campaigning by both Congress and the CNCR, the percentage of people favouring a closed door policy increased across the country.<sup>94</sup> In fact, attitudes more than one year after the war remained largely unchanged; anti-Semitism was still rife in Canada. In a 1946 Gallup Poll, Jews were close to the top of the list in answer to the question, "If Canada does allow more immigration, are there any of nationalities which you would keep out?" Japanese topped the list at 60%, followed by Jews at 49% and Germans at 34%.<sup>95</sup>

After the revelations that most of European Jewry had been destroyed, the Jewish leadership in January 1945 issued reports to describe their activities during the Holocaust. In the *Summary Report at the Sixth Plenary Session of the Canadian Jewish Congress*, the "accomplishments" of Congress are contained in a two page document entitled "Efforts to Rescue the Surviving Jews of Europe." The report was issued in full cognizance of the tragedy that had befallen Europe's Jews and acknowledged the failure of Congress as its efforts had proved "unavailing against the heedless fury of the enemy."<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless it presented an image of a determined Congress that had maintained a working relationship with the government which was amenable to the pleas for help and rescue that emanated from the organization.

Congress *was* successful in helping bring to Canada several hundred Jewish refugees during the war. In 1944 approximately 450 refugees from the Iberian Peninsula

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<sup>94</sup> Abella and Troper, 161.

<sup>95</sup> "Gallup Poll of Canada: Selected Immigrants Favored, Public Opposed to Japanese," *Montreal Daily Star*, 30 October 1946, 11.

<sup>96</sup> "Efforts to Rescue the Surviving Jews of Europe", *Summary Report (1942-1944): Presented to the Delegates Sixth Plenary Session Canadian Jewish Congress, January 13-16, 1945*, Congress archives.

were admitted to Canada. It was the only time during the war years when Jewish refugees in any sizable number reached Canada's shores. According to a Congress report, "As a result of our repeated intercessions the Government granted asylum for the duration to nearly 500 Jewish refugees who had found temporary and precarious asylum in Spain, Portugal and Tangier."<sup>97</sup> According to historian Patrick Reed the admission of this relatively small number of refugees "was a political attempt [by the federal government] to address increasing internal and external pressure to help alleviate the refugee crisis without antagonizing anti-refugee forces."<sup>98</sup> While Congress did not have the political clout that it intimated in its reports, it did facilitate the arrival of these refugees. Congress guaranteed that the refugees coming to Canada would not become a public charge and also ensured their well-being after their arrival; "The entire facilities of Jewish communal life in the dominion were generously placed at the disposal of the reception and after-care programme for these refugees."<sup>99</sup>

Congress' reports on its activities during the war, while they put forward an image of a resolute Congress that "left no stone unturned" downplayed the problems faced by Jews in Canada.<sup>100</sup> The documents show a leadership which for the most part clung to the illusion that the Canadian government had done everything in its power to help European Jewry. The reports made no mention of government intransigence. In spite of Congress' claims the efforts mounted by the community and its leadership had been for the most

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<sup>97</sup> *Summary Report (1942-1944)*, "Admission of Refugees From Spain, Portugal and Tangier."

<sup>98</sup> Patrick Reed, "A Foothold in the Whirlpool: Canada's Iberian Refugee Movement," MA Thesis (Montreal: Concordia University, 1996), 115. The pro-immigration forces turned out to be much weaker than expected, and the perceived pressures on the government to alleviate the refugee crisis dissipated rapidly.

<sup>99</sup> *Summary Report (1942-1944)*, "Admission of Refugees From Spain, Portugal and Tangier."

<sup>100</sup> See "Efforts to Rescue the Surviving Jews of Europe."

part ineffectual.<sup>101</sup> They could not have been otherwise, considering the policies of the Canadian Government and the anti-Semitism that was endemic in a large portion of the Canadian population.

Congress did “play it safe,” promoting a strategy that emphasized patriotism and steadfast support for the Canadian Government. In doing so it came out of the war bringing honor and accolades to its leadership, and despite the high level of anti-Semitism, it also brought a level of self-confidence to the Jewish community that had not existed in the 1930s.<sup>102</sup>

The leadership was trapped by the times, facing an indifferent government and population in an era when Jews were considered outsiders. It relied on a policy of accommodation that many believed had contributed to Jewish survival in the past. Jewish leaders, in their attempts to protect the community, did not strongly protest policies on immigration and did not address the fact that Jews were being targeted for extermination. They placated the Canadian government and helped make the Holocaust a minor issue in the war against Nazi Germany.

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<sup>101</sup> Bialystok, 14-41. Bialystok refers to the “gloss” put on Congress efforts, 27.

<sup>102</sup> Marrus, *Mr. Sam*, “Wartime, indeed, provided Sam [Bronfman] with his first positive taste of public recognition and Canadian Jewry with a nationally acknowledged contributor to the war effort,” 284. At home the war also brought Jews and non-Jews together especially in the creation of support services. *David Rome*, “The War and the Jews,” in *Pathways*, 8.

## Conclusion

Four Million Jews waiting for death.  
Oh, hang and burn, but – quiet Jews!  
Don't be bothersome; save your breath—  
The world is busy with other news.

“Ballad of the Doomed Jews in Europe”  
Ben Hecht<sup>1</sup>

A universal response to genocide emerged in the twentieth century. While the actual slaughter is carried out very little is said or done. Once the mass murders are “discovered,” there is the gradual acceptance of the genocide, followed by a lot of hand-wringing and shedding of tears. Then there are numerous charges hurled— both at governments and the public— usually by a press which had failed to call attention to the genocide in the first place. We ask ourselves, “Why wasn't anything done?” This question has become the standard knee-jerk reaction to many atrocities. This pattern of ignorance and apathy followed by recriminations and soul-searching characterize recent genocides. One has only to look at the mass murders in Rwanda to see this oft repeated scenario.

The recognition of a genocide results in book publications, newspaper stories, television specials, memorials and museums, and last but not least, the Hollywood movie, which seems to be the ultimate demonstration of public acceptance of the slaughter. Mass culture becomes the final arbiter on mass murder. It should be kept in mind that while the murder of millions of Jews was being carried out, Hollywood refused to acknowledge the genocide. In Daniel Anker's recent documentary movie, *Imaginary Witness: Hollywood and the Holocaust*, the filmmaker contends that anti-Nazi films which were

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<sup>1</sup> *CJC*, 29 September 1943, 11.



being churned out during the war years failed to mention the word “Jew” in their portrayal of the brutalities in Nazi-occupied Europe despite the fact that many of the Hollywood moguls who ran the studios making these films were Jewish.<sup>2</sup>

Following the war, the Holocaust for more than a decade received scant attention. The event was forgotten in a world that focused on the Cold War, as former enemies became allies, and former allies became enemies. Thus the issue of the Nazi genocide was seldom raised in North America. West Germany, its past whitewashed, became the so-called fortress of freedom in the fight against the totalitarian state, the Soviet Union.

How strange it is that the systematic extermination of millions of Jews was overlooked in a world that now looks at the Holocaust as a pivotal event of twentieth century history. The Jewish communities throughout the West succumbed to the same kind of blindness that infected the non-Jewish populations, their governments, and the press. The non-Jewish population may have “missed” the significance of such a catastrophe, as it affected the coreligionists of a group which was marginalized in Canadian society and was viewed with suspicion and prejudice by a substantial segment of the Canadian population. What is perplexing is that a large part of the Jewish population and its leadership failed to react as European Jewry was being destroyed. Even after the war the Jewish community and its leadership in Montreal ignored the catastrophe. Few listened to the experiences and the narratives of the survivors who came to Canada in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Among the survivors some could not talk about what they had gone through; others, though, wanted to tell their stories. It would

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel Anker, producer-director. *Imaginary Witness: Hollywood and the Holocaust*. (USA: Anker Productions Inc., 2004), videocassette.

take the passage of time, the distancing from this horrific event, for the community and the survivors to eventually come to grips with the Holocaust.

In order to understand the reaction to such a cataclysmic event in Jewish history, this thesis has examined a Jewish community which, during the 1930s and 1940s, looked at the non-Jewish world with a combination of fear and envy. The fear was a reflex to centuries of anti-Semitism that had made the Jews acquiescent, willing to defer to the whims and decisions of the non-Jewish majority and its government. It had also made the Jewish communities reliant on “court Jews,” prominent members of the community who worked within government by quiet lobbying. The community also placed its hopes on Jews who they felt wielded some power because of their fame, their status, or their wealth. But what they failed to recognize was that these Jews, in the face of the prevalent anti-Semitism in government and in the Canadian population it represented, were totally impotent when it came to influencing government policy. Anti-Semitism and the fear of anti-Semitism influenced the actions of the community as it yielded to “higher authorities,” and paralyzed the leadership from taking strong action, from going “too far” in promoting Jewish causes.

Fear of the non-Jewish world was also tinged with envy. Jews were being excluded from a society to which they wished to belong. Many Jews desired to be just like their Christian neighbours. And being like them meant they had to act like them, think like them and therefore not consider the Jewish perspective on what was happening in Europe. Although some may have been ardent assimilationists who wanted to completely submerge themselves into a non-Jewish milieu and thus cut themselves off from any Jewish issue, others thought it was simply more convenient to ignore the Jewish

issue, especially when the country was at war. The Jewish leadership's message of loyalty to Canada resonated well with many in the community.

The leadership, especially the uptown component, was enamoured with the government, and any hint of protest, any words that might be misconstrued as "Anti-Canadian" were to be avoided at all costs. The leadership, it seems, did not want to embarrass the government and more importantly did not want to embarrass themselves, especially in front of a non-Jewish audience that did not share their concerns. Speaking too loudly on Jewish issues to a non-Jewish audience was avoided; it was considered off limits to mention the Jewish nature of Hitler's extermination policy. The leadership began using code words for the Jews, and made Hitler's crimes more of an offence against humanity than against the Jews. Appeals to the Canadian government to help their European brethren were issued in near secrecy. It was both fear of an anti-Semitic backlash, and a desire not to be seen as "too Jewish" – to be pleading too hard for their Jewish brethren, while others were dying in the field of battle – that made Jewish leaders avoid referring to any Jewish issue.

Previous studies on the Montreal Jewish community during the war years have focused on the political impotence of its leadership. Scholars have emphasized how anti-Semitism and government intransigence impeded the Jewish leadership's attempts to mount a rescue effort to save European Jews. While previous historians have referred to rallies and petitions, this study has found that not only were they ineffective but they turned out in many cases to have little to do with the Holocaust. Academics have written of the community's patriotism and support for the Canadian government, but the fact that the Jewish community and the Canadian Jewish Congress shifted their concerns from

their European brethren to undivided loyalty to the Canadian state has not been addressed. This thesis has examined how the Jewish population's perception of the Holocaust changed during the war years and how Congress helped influence that change.

Although there was information available on the Holocaust during the war years, especially in the Jewish press, most of the Jewish community in Montreal seems to have paid little attention. Other issues transfixed Montreal Jews. They were riveted by the war in Europe and its repercussions at home and so the Jewish issue faded into the background of the war. The Holocaust was not viewed as such an important event while bombs were falling on London or the bloody Battle of Stalingrad was being waged.

But while the sheer scale of World War II may have contributed to the submergence of the Holocaust, the Canadian Jewish Congress helped make the slaughter of millions of Jews a relatively inconsequential event for Montreal Jewry. This thesis, by its examination of the actions and words of Congress, has shown that the Jewish leadership played down the significance of the genocide. Instead of being the focal point of community concern, the Holocaust was rarely discussed publicly; it was deliberately made peripheral.

After the liberation, after Congress had sent delegates to Europe, and after Jewish leaders confirmed that European Jewry had been decimated beyond belief, there was sorrow and some questioning of the wartime activity of the leadership. The Holocaust was then again buried and forgotten for years by the community as it was by the rest of the world.

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