

**THE GENESIS PERIOD  
OF  
THE JEWISH PEOPLE'S SCHOOL  
IN MONTREAL**

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ABSTRACT

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It is the purpose of the following work to deal with the early development of the Jewish People's School from its founding during World War I to approximately 1930. An awareness of the circumstances of the Montreal community and the Jewish communal forces within it are necessary if one is to appreciate the evolution of this significant institution in the life of the community.

The struggles between the established early Jewish settlers and the newly arriving immigrants is important to assess. The various conflicts amongst ideologically and politically divergent immigrant working class are of some import. Differing cultural and language interests are apparent when observing the very vibrant Jewish community of Montreal. Evolving attitudes to the religious in Jewish life is another pertinent concern of the period. The attitudes of French Canadian Catholics and Anglo Saxon Protestants towards each other and towards the Jews affected the needs of the Jewish community.

The Jewish People's School attempted to answer some of these needs of the Jews in Montreal. The school was affected by the communal environment and, in turn, affected it most significantly. In understanding the processes of the school's early evolution, one gains some insights into the development of the Montreal Jewish community in the early decades of the twentieth century.

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## Chapter I

### THE MONTREAL COMMUNITY - ITS RELATIONSHIP TO JERSEY

#### Political - Economic - Social

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the Montreal of the French and English was evolving as an industrial and trade centre and important inland port. The English support of the British in the Boer War and the French in opposition to it was one indication of the cleavage between the two ethnic groups at the time. Henri Bourassa, the nationalist leader of Quebec, expressed antagonism to the federal government and the English. This antagonism was focused on the underprivileged economic conditions of French Canadians within the changing social structures of its society.

With the beginning of the second decade, Montreal was in the midst of unemployment and inflation. The city government was corrupt, graft was rampant, and solutions to the physical problems of the city were not found. The French Canadian expressed hostility to the federal government and the English citadel of Montreal by objecting to the conscription of French Canadians. Many refused to be coerced into fighting what, in their view, was a foreign war. They saw World War I as a battle of the British and their English compatriots of the city. The French Canadians remained at the bottom rung of the economic ladder, as they moved from the farms to the city and saw many of their English co-citizens living in middle-class comfort.

It seems true that French Canadian economic inferiority and the Catholic Church control moved them towards nationalism and isolationism.<sup>1</sup> This was expressed in the attitude of many French Canadians towards Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the French-speaking Prime Minister of Canada. Laurier felt that many of his compatriots were fanatical, doctrinaire and ultra montane. His very own Liberal party was opposed by many of the French Catholic clergy. Within his own party, Bourassa, who was also known for his unsympathetic view of Jews, was aiding and abetting isolationism and French Canadian nationalism.

French Canada was defensive towards the encroaching English economic and cultural control. French Canadian clerics, journalists, writers, and other leaders were preaching for a static agrarian habitant economy, so as to preserve their language and religion. At the very time these "city folks" were preaching, the habitant was migrating from the farms to Montreal. It is maintained by some that the French Canadian, be he on the farm or in the proletarian neighborhoods of the city, was kept in bondage by the Catholic Church "with narrow authority and antiquated doctrines which hindered the evolution of French Canadian society." These "shackles" handicapped the French Canadian in its rivalry with Anglo-Saxons. Underhill notes that the isolationism of French Canadians translated itself in a lack of interest on their part to assimilate the non-French and non-English elements arriving in Canada.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Frank N. Underhill, *The Issues of Confederation* (Toronto: C.B.C. Publications, 1969), pp. 48-50.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

The growing Quebec emphasis to protect the rural Catholic basis of the French Canadian nation did not let up with the threatening depression of the second decade of the twentieth century. With the uncontrolled inflation of the first World War, both the French Canadian farmer and the urban worker were affected adversely.<sup>3</sup> The conscription issue may have died, but not its implication for French-English controversy, and not the economic issues.

The ferment of the war period had subsided in the twenties, but the economic cross currents were very much alive. The English of Quebec still controlled the economy of the province as rapid industrial strides were made. The nationalist concept of an essentially rural society was continually threatened as the English-speaking manufacturers and industrialists and financiers of Montreal strengthened their control of the Quebec Government.

Attitudes of French to English: The Two Solidities

"Few of the English-speaking elite learned the French language and few French Canadians found a route to the top in the world of business." The English language remained an absolute necessity in most business operations. French isolationism also did not help to train young people for effective participation within an industrializing society.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Kenneth McNaught, Political History of Canada (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 211.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 241.

It is maintained by some that the English felt, because of the British conquest of Quebec in 1763 and because of their majority status within all of Canada, that the country was fundamentally English speaking. They felt that French Canadians would eventually accept English Canadian habits, methods, and forms of organization.<sup>5</sup> Laurier also had to contend with English Canadian opposition, who claimed that he was giving way to the very French Catholic hierarchy which was, in actual fact, opposing him in Quebec.<sup>6</sup>

There are those who claim that the English Protestant hierarchy was also a forceful influence in the separation of the two cultures. Sigfried makes the following perceptive observation about English Protestants: "If Catholicism is one of the essential factors in the development of the French Canadian, Protestantism does not count for less in that of the English race in the Dominion....To all appearances, the independence of churches (Protestant) in regard to the state has been absolutely established. Perhaps it would not be safe to say quite so positively that the state's independence of them is established in the same degree....The Protestant clergy do not aim at controlling the government in the ultra montane, Catholic fashion, but they do aim at informing it with their spirit." The English, it appeared, were protecting their interests by exerting control and influence, rather than by isolationism.

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<sup>5</sup>Underhill, *The Image of Confederation*, p. 49.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 50.

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The national spirit of Anglo-Saxon patriotism vied for control of Quebec society with French Canadian rural Catholicism. Above all, both groupings were interested in exerting their religious and cultural influence upon the state. "Canada, never having had its 1789, has no real comprehension of the theory of the neutrality of the state."<sup>7</sup> The English and French, each in their own way, could not break neighbors who would not become completely subservient.

The Jew then had the choice of assimilating completely with either community. He chose not to be submerged by the English-French conflict of interests. The Jew protected himself from the effects of a conflict which expressed itself by nationalism, isolationism, authoritarian control, and confessional influence. Most Jews, therefore, opted for an independent organizational and cultural path, and thus the creation of numerous Jewish institutions and Jewish schools, such as the Jewish People's School. To understand the rapid growth of Jewish institutional life, one must therefore also look to the attitudes of the English and French towards the Jews.

#### French Attitudes to Jews

The attitudes of French Canadians to Jews were not friendly, and expressed themselves in outright verbal and virulent attacks upon Jews. The Eucharistic Congress, held in Montreal in 1910, brought Catholics from every part of the world. This eccumenical gathering

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 52.



triggered off much anti-semitic feeling towards the Jews.<sup>9</sup> The church was, through the early decades, quite outspoken in its attitude towards the Jews. The following remark by Bishop Gieseler of Three Rivers, told to the Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Canadienne Francaise, is indicative of Catholic anti-semitism organized by the church: "For my part, it is a misfortune that we should have opened our doors to this unhappy people who have come to drain the substance of our race."<sup>9</sup>

French Canadian civic officials were even hostile to Jews in Montreal because of an antagonism they felt for a foreign dignitary. We are told in the Kanada Adler issue of October 14, 1910, that Archbishop Bruschi appealed to all Christians to condemn the then Jewish mayor of Rome. This conflict between the pope and Mayor Nathan was a rallying point for anti-semitic outcries in Montreal. This was but one of a number of strongly anti-semitic reactions of some French Canadian leadership. In this instance, it was the mayor of Montreal and some of his city council which decided to condemn Mayor Nathan. The French press obviously identified the Jewishness of the mayor with the Jews of Montreal. The mass meeting in support of condemnation did not add any sense of security to the Jews of the city.<sup>10</sup>

The press was often a source for the expression of anti-semitism, and also influenced in the spreading of prejudice towards the Jews. La Revue, we are told, appealed to French Canadians to patronize French

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<sup>9</sup>Jewish Chronicle, (Montreal) August 5, 1913.

<sup>10</sup>Kanada Adler (Montreal), October 14, 1910.

Canadian business concerns — not Jewish or English concerns.<sup>11</sup> The Canadian nationalist, Armand Lavergne, attacked the Jews in an article in "L'Action Sociale", a French language newspaper of the time, which later became "L'Action Catholique". He suggested most forcefully that Jews are undesirable citizens of Canada for they do not assimilate.<sup>12</sup>

There were rallies, where French Catholic notables, such as one called Flamondon, made inflammatory attacks upon Jews. He accused Jews of being thieves, seducers of women, and Christ killers. In this instance, a Jewish citizen, Ortenberg, brought this attack upon the Jews to the courts. Flamondon had claimed that Jews are a threat to the well-being and very lives of the Christians. Ortenberg claimed in the courts that these remarks were a threat to the well-being and safety of himself as a citizen of the country.<sup>13</sup>

The Jews' feeling of insecurity was strengthened by anti-semitic remarks being voiced in the Parliament of Canada. On March 9, 1916, H. Dale, member of parliament from Kinouaki, inquired as to the number of Jews who had volunteered to serve in the army. He suggested that Jews were not making a just contribution to the defense of Canada.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., September 30, 1910.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., December 14, 1913.

<sup>13</sup> Underhill, *The Jews of Confederation*, p. 52.  
Abraham Hinkovits, *The Jews in Canada*, vol. I (Toronto: Farlag Canada, 1925), p. 165.

<sup>14</sup> Hinkovits, *The Jews in Canada*, p. 255.

### English Attitude to Jews

The Anglo-Saxon community was also not free of prejudice, albeit of a more subtle variety. They saw the striving Jewish immigrant and his offspring as a threat to themselves. The following quotation is an illustration of the threat, mixed with some awe and respect: "Are Jewish boys cleverer than British boys between the ages of eleven and seventeen because of their greater physiological maturity, or because of inherited racial superiority? It is a difficult problem to solve. Yet in more than one secondary school it has been seriously proposed to handicap Jewish competition for entrance examinations because of precocious development."<sup>15</sup> Gentiles ascribed to Jews almost mystical qualities, which could but lead to being ostracized. This would also influence Jews to look inward to their own institutions.

The Catholic confessional school system made it impossible for Jews to attend their schools. To the Jews of Montreal, it seemed that the Protestant system of schooling, with less stress on religious training, and more open to cultural differences, would be a more natural habitat for their own children. The Jews had no other choice, for the two confessional systems were the only public supported schools. The Jews expressed their preference for the Protestant School Board, and proceeded to fight for rights within that system. In a judgement handed down in 1902, in the case of Pinaler versus The Protestant School Board of the City of Montreal, it was held that there are no public schools in the Province of Quebec, and that the Jewish children have no rights to

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<sup>15</sup>J. T. M. Anderson, The Migration of the Jew Canadian (Toronto: J. M. Dent, 1918), p. 67.

attend either the Protestant or Catholic schools, except as a matter of  
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grace.

From the minutes of the Protestant Board of School Commissioners of Montreal of 1903, we can readily assess what the degree of grace would mean. The Protestants were interested in safeguarding their confessional system, as we can see. The system, we are told, would be Protestant and Christian, with religious tolerance for Jewish students. The expressed economic burden to the Board for educating Jewish students was seen by some as a mark of inhospitality. "If the non-Christian elements of the community are made a charge upon the Protestant Board of School Commissioners, while the revenue from them is so small, a burden will be imposed upon us which will seriously prejudice the excellent school system that for some years we have laboriously been striving to establish....In the absence of the single system of public school which generally obtains on this continent, this constitutes an unjust inequality to our prejudice. At the same time, we hereby readily declare our willingness to educate the children of all citizens, whatever their race or religion, provided we have the means to do so."<sup>17</sup> With the influx of non-Catholic, non-Protestant immigrants to the city, the Protestants would accept the responsibility of educating their children. This seemed to them a difficult burden to bear.

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<sup>16</sup> Arthur Daniel Hart, editor and compiler, The Jew in Canada (Toronto: Jewish Publications, 1926), p. 464.

<sup>17</sup> David Rame, editor, Inventory of Documents on the Jewish School Question (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Archives, Canadian Jewish Congress, 1975), p. 1.

Some Jews protested the contention that the Board was losing money because of them, and saw this and other acts as prejudice towards them. The fact that the Hirsler boy did not receive a deserved scholarship because he was Jewish was seen as another illustration of prejudice on the "tolerated presence of Jewish children."<sup>18</sup> When Miss Sarah Gordon, teacher at Mount Royal School, asked for, on October 5, 1905, a leave of absence on the Jewish holiday, the Board decided to transfer her to the Baron de Hirsch Institute School, so as not to upset unduly the school's class. When Rabbi Glaser wished that his son refrain from studying any religious suggestion in school texts, his son was penalized.<sup>19</sup> Incidents like these were seen by Jews as prejudicial to them. The Protestants wished, on the other hand, to enhance the Christian nature of their schools. The two interests were caught in a bind because there was no neutral system, or a specifically Jewish one.

Some Jews reacted to the divergence of interests between Protestant Board and themselves by striving to set up a separate Jewish school panel. The Jews were given the right to establish their own government schools by a Privy Council decision. Since the Jewish leadership establishment opposed this, in principle, the separate panel plan did not materialize. The Jews could send their children to Protestant schools with the understanding that the Board could pretty well

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<sup>18</sup> Shloime Wiseman, from Jewish People's School file at Jewish Public Library, Montreal, 1935.

<sup>19</sup> Minutes, Protestant Board of School Commissioners of Montreal, October 6, 1905.

run their system as they wished.<sup>20</sup>

As many Jews made peace with the prospect of working within the Protestant system, they were buffeted by the ensuing problems resulting from Jews seeing no choice but to send their children to a confessional school. Twenty years later, there still was no resolution to the issue of education for Jewish children in the public sector. In 1923, the Board complained that the large number of Jewish children in their system was threatening the Protestant character of their schools. They felt that the addition of more Jewish teachers and Jewish school commissioners would affect the religious character of their schools. They claimed that the presence of Jews in their schools, which was a threat to their culture, was a contravention of the British North America Act, and ultra vires of the Legislature of the Province of Quebec. The courts supported the contention in 1926 that the Jews had no rights in the Protestant, and indeed the Catholic, system and even no right to establish a school system of their own.

It appeared as if the Protestant school leadership and the citadel it represented of vested Anglo-Saxon interests were willing to tolerate the Jews in their system. They would, though, wish to limit the number of teachers of the Jewish faith, and ban the selection of Jewish school commissioners. They would also continue to insist that they be fully compensated by the government for any deficits incurred in educating non-Protestant children. On the other hand, even if appeals to the Superior Court and the Privy Council would allow a Jewish school

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<sup>20</sup>Shlomo Wiseman, from file at the Jewish Public Library.

system, the well established Jewish 'uptowners' would never agree.<sup>21</sup>

This unhappy union between Protestant and Jew saw the increase of Jewish enrollment within the Board peak in 1920 with 40.6% of Jewish students and decline to 29.4% by 1930.<sup>22</sup> With the number of Jewish students at substantial levels, the Protestants continued to claim losses because of Jews in their system. The Jewish response was to negate their claim. The Jewish leadership did, indeed, indicate that the Protestants were profitting from the Jewish presence.<sup>23</sup> Some Jewish leaders even claimed that the Jews were not being given a fair proportion of the taxes for the education of their children.

An updated, unsigned statement of the twenties, by a committee of Jewish citizens, expressed in practical terms the resolution of the educational problems of the Jews. In their call, one could sense the gap which existed between the Jewish and English Protestant communities. They asked for "equality for Jewish citizens; co-education with children of other faiths in schools of the Protestant Board; no segregation; engagement of Jewish teachers; Jewish representation on the Board; use of some school premises after hours for Jewish instruction."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Hart, *The Jew in Canada*, pp. 465-6.

<sup>22</sup>Louis Rosenbery, *Jewish Children in the Protestant Schools of Greater Montreal in the Twenties* (Montreal: National Jewish Congress, March 13, 1979) (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress, Bureau of Social and Economic Research, 1979), pp. 6-7.

<sup>23</sup>Joseph Adler (Montreal), October 4, 1923. S. Yellin, *The Jew in Canada, 1763-1940* (Montreal: National Bi-Centenary Committee, Canadian Jewish Congress, 1961), pp. 25-6.

<sup>24</sup>Same, *Immunization in Canada*, p. 27.

Not Always Welcome - the Jew Turn Inward

Neither the French nor the English were able to swallow each other and the Jew within their midst as well. Both communities, distrustful of each other, and perceiving each other as a threat, were less than magnanimous and friendly to the Jews of the city.<sup>25</sup>

It can, therefore, be easily understood why the Jews of Montreal turned inward. The subtle intolerance of the Englishman or the "anti-semitic seed" within catholicism, encouraged the historic propensity of the Jew to remain culturally and socially aloof. The Jew felt the traditional hostility towards him, and thus found comfort with his own. This isolation from the Montreal community led to the strengthening of Jewish culture and identity. Assimilating trends more prevalent in other parts of the continent could not develop, for there was essentially no receptive group with which to assimilate. The Jew of Montreal structured this solitude by creating numerous institutions of great value to himself and others. One of these institutions was the Jewish People's School.

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<sup>25</sup> Donald L. Gold and Michael Trankhy, *Immigration and Culture in Jewish Canada* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston of Canada, 1970) p. 27.



## Chapter II

### THE MONTREAL JEWISH COMMUNITY - 1910-1930

#### From Left to Right

The Jewish community within the Montreal environment was multi-faceted. There were, on the one extremity, rich, well-established assimilationist Jews. At the other end of the polarity were extreme left-leaning Jews and poverty-stricken immigrants. The Evening Adlar, founded in 1907, the long-time Yiddish daily, was the forum for expression of much that transpired in the community. Many insights gained for this work were culled from the readings of numerous issues of this newspaper. The daily was not always consistent in its outlook, and, in this way, was also representative of Montreal Jewry. The daily sometimes was conservatively inclined when dealing with Jewish community and working class issues, but it was a supporter of the more liberal political elements on the Canadian scene. Generally, though, any Jew, established or immigrant, could get a hearing through letter or article.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Immigrant

The many immigrants arriving in Montreal in the first decades of the present century were in need of philanthropy and education. They

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<sup>1</sup> Evening Adlar (Montreal), 1907-1975.

came with little knowledge of Canadian ways and customs, and were quite ignorant of either English or French languages.<sup>2</sup> The following quotation is testimony to the rapid cultural and social growth and advancement of this group of bedraggled immigrants from Eastern Europe: "The social consequences and the consequences to the city's intellectual and artistic life have yet to be measured, but this much emerges — Montreal is no longer simply a bi-cultural city."<sup>3</sup>

The Jewish immigrants coming to Quebec settled primarily in the metropolis of the province. In 1901, there were 7,607 Jews in Quebec and, by 1921, the number grew to 49,977. Jewish immigration was very limited in numbers during World War I. Some years after, it increased immensely. Whereas in 1916, 65 Jews arrived in Canada, in 1922, there was an influx of 8,404 Jews. The immigration was primarily from Russia and parts of Russia which were later part of Poland.<sup>4</sup>

Number of Arrivals of Jews at Inland and Ocean Ports  
in Canada in Fiscal Years 1906-1914

	1906	1909	1910	1911	1912	1913	1914
Hebrew Austrian	195	24	56	218	269	392	728
" German	54	15	10	19	4	16	20
" Polish	46	2	28	85	52	26	22
" Russian	5,738	1,444	2,745	4,188	4,350	6,304	4,622
Other Jews	1,679	151	343	606	537	649	860

It is of some interest to note that Jewish immigration to Canada was not entirely unwelcome, in spite of some of the anti-semitic reactions of certain segments of the Montreal population. The Canada

<sup>2</sup> Cooper, *Montreal: The Story of Three Hundred Years*, p. 113

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14

<sup>4</sup> Anderson, *The Situation of the New Canadian*, pp. 250-1.

Yearbook of 1915 states, as follows: "The Italian and Hebrew immigrants are better known to us because we are more familiar with their history."

### Occupations

The immigrants began to settle down, and for many of them their primary concern was not with history or culture, but with livelihood and occupation. The 1931 census tells us that many Jews were involved in merchandising and manufacturing, including the needle trades. There were also substantial numbers in building and construction trades. There was a rapidly growing group of professionals and a smaller number of clerical people. Jews involved in transportation and communication were declining, too, with unskilled workers also at the bottom rung of the statistical ladder.<sup>5</sup>

### Culture and Organization

Jews of Montreal, although coping in these early decades of the twentieth century with the bread and butter issues of settling into a new land, were also beginning to spend their leisure time in cultural and organizational activity. Reuben Brainin, the editor of the Kanadier Adler, a prominent Hebraist, comments on the scene at the time. He became an important influence in the community, by compromising with his strong adherence to Hebrew, and becoming an editor of a Yiddish newspaper. He describes in an editorial how organizationally vibrant the

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<sup>5</sup>W. Louis Rosenberg, A Social and Economic Study of the Jews in Canada (Montreal: Bureau of Social and Economic Research, Canadian Jewish Congress, 1939), p. 173.

Jewish community was at the time: "It is the high season of our organizational life: steaming and boiling, smoke and gunpowder, assemblies, concerts, lectures of all sorts, banquets, resolutions, conferences, balls, tag days, suggestions, collections, protests, facts, thank-yous, arguments, intrigues, presidents, vice-presidents, secretaries, circulars, hand-bills, posters, advertisements, announcements, etc. etc."<sup>6</sup> Certainly, evidence of a community vitally concerned with its internal organizational life, turning inward to satisfy its many needs. Its only contact with the French and English was business, and, to some minor extent, politics.

One can get some notion of the organizational involvement of Jews in Montreal by viewing this partial listing of when certain organizations began to function:-

- 1881 - B'nai B'rith
- 1885 - Montreal Agricultural Aid Society
- 1886 - English and Hebrew Day School at Spanish and Portuguese Synagogues
- 1887 - Ladies Hebrew Sick Benefit
- 1890 - Baron de Hirsch Institute Free School and Shelter Home for Immigrants
- 1892 - Hebrew Sick Benefit
- 1892 - First Chevevei Zion Society
- 1896 - First Talmud Torah, founded by Rabbi M. Ashinsky
- 1897 - Jewish Times
- 1900 - First Canadian Zionist Convention in Montreal
- 1902 - New Baron de Hirsch building opened - Lord Minto affliates
- 1905 - First Labour Zionist group founded
- First Jewish Public Library.
- 1906 - First Workmen's Circle Branch
- 1907 - August 30 - ~~Kanadas~~ ~~Adler~~ commonweal publication
- 1909 - Montreal Hebrew Sheltering and Orphans' Home
- 1911 - Montreal Hebrew Free Loan
- 1913 - Y.W.O.A.
- 1913 - Mount Sinai Sanitorium

- 1914 - Canadian Jewish Chronicle
- Hebrew Maternal Hospital
- Felks Farain
- 1915 - Three War Relief Agencies
- .....and on, and on.<sup>7</sup>

Jewish Identity

These organized Jews, many of whom were staunch supporters of Yiddish, quickly learned English. In 1921, there were only 7.47% of Jews in Canada who could not speak English, and by 1931, only 5.22%. They were most likely newly-arriving immigrants. In 1931, there were among Jewish men 95.2% who claimed Yiddish as their mother tongue. Jews were also attached to Jewish religious values, in spite of laxity in synagogue membership and ritual observance.<sup>8</sup> Only .07% of Jews stated that they were atheists in the 1931 census. There were 3.7% mixed marriages amongst males and 2.1% amongst Jewish women.<sup>9</sup> All these figures are indicative of a community beginning to acclimatise to a new milieu, but seeking to safeguard its own identity as well.

The process of acclimatization was not simple. There were Jewish immigrant working people, speaking Yiddish primarily and called usually 'downtowners', or 'green horns', as opposed to the established immigrant and Canadian-born who lived in the better sections of town and were known as 'uptowners'. It is obvious that not always did their

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<sup>7</sup>Yelin, The Jew in Canada, p. 25, and Hart, The Jew in Canada, pp. 303-5.

<sup>8</sup>Rosenberg, Social and Economic Study of Jew in Canada, p. 187.

<sup>9</sup>Yakov Loshinsky, "Actual Facts of Jewish Life" in Institute for Jewish Issues, World Jewish Congress, VI (January, 1933).

interests converge, either in the Jewish organizational life or in the factory. Amongst the Jewish immigrants themselves there were varying political and ideological shadings and varying degrees of religious observance. There were, indeed, also differing degrees of emphasis on language, be they English, Hebrew, or Yiddish.

### Education

During the first quarter of the twentieth century, the majority of Jewish children receiving a Jewish education in Montreal attended the private ghemaria or received instruction from itinerant Hebrew teachers or melamid. By 1930, of 4,360 Jewish children receiving a Jewish education, 34.9% were receiving private instruction or attending the ghemaria. Children were attending five main systems of Jewish education:

1. Yeshivoth - chedaria
2. Congregational schools
3. Talmud Torahs
4. Jewish People's School - Jewish People's School
5. Yiddish leftist schools

The systems in Montreal proper catered to a declining number of Jewish children, as the community began to spread into the suburbs and outlying districts. Thus, the number of students in the Protestant schools of Montreal, where most Jewish children were receiving their general education, was also in decline. It was indeed in 1923 that the number of the Jewish student population of Montreal reached its peak and then began to decline steadily.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Lavy M. Becker and Louis Rosenberg, "Jewish Education in Montreal", in Jewish Education, Vol. XIII, No. 1, 2 (Winter - Spring, 1930-31), pp. 54, 69.

### A. Migration

The Montreal Jewish community was but a microcosm of what was transpiring in most major cities throughout the Western World. Starting with the year 1850, Jewish communities were formed, of which Montreal was typical. Montreal had its distinctive mark because of the dual cultures, but it still followed a general pattern. These communities were made up of 'downtowners' and 'uptowners'; immigrants and yiddish-Jews would leave the core city and move on to the suburb, and therefore the decreasing numbers of Jews by the thirties. Issues of language, differences in socio-economic outlook, and conflicts as to the emancipation of world Jewry were most hotly dealt with throughout the communities. Secular Judaism and the new religious trends vied for position as they threatened the strict traditionalists.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> David Rona, interview, Montreal, April, 1975.

## Chapter III

### THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN UPTOWN AND DOWNTOWN

#### In the Beginning

Some of the elite of Montreal, its aristocracy or Yahidim, were of Sephardic and German origin. Many of them had immigrated from Lithuania, were known by some, derisively, as 'Litvacks', and were the largest element within this elite category. These Jews, who lived in the northern and western parts of the city, were known as 'Uptowners', as distinct from the newly-immigrating Jews of the early decades of the twentieth century. These Jewish immigrants in Montreal came primarily from Rumania, White Russia, and the Ukraine, as opposed to the larger Polish migration to Toronto.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Two Factions

Moshe Myerson, a prominent leader of the Jewish People's School, confirms that the Jewish community in the first decades was, indeed, divided into two categories. Many old residents wanted to imitate the English and to emulate their customs and behaviour, thus removing from themselves any semblance of Eastern European manner. They

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<sup>1</sup>Simon Malkin, The Labour Zionist Movement in Canada - 1904-1920 (Montreal); Actions Committee of the Labour Zionist Movement in Canada, 1956, pp. 1,2.



did not want to be foreign and to be given the appendage of "green". On the other hand, the newly arriving immigrants were primarily concerned with establishing themselves in the new land. These Jews of early Montreal showed little interest in Jewish cultural pursuits. Numbers of the young people became students, professionally ambitious and success-oriented, but with little interest in Jewish culture. It is only by 1913, with a new wave of immigration and the arrival of one strongly stimulating element, that Montreal became more significantly interested in Jewish cultural creativity.<sup>2</sup>

#### Philanthropy - They Do Help

As the Eastern European Jew began to arrive in numbers, he was greeted by his established Jewish brothers. In the first decades of the century, the Baron de Hirsch Institute served as the focal point for aid to the Jews of Montreal. This social service institution was led and supported by the more affluent Jewish residents who were, as we have seen, Canadian-born or had lived in the country for many years. These leaders, through Baron de Hirsch, were instrumental in the formation of a Hebrew school, in addition to their various philanthropic endeavours. The Kanada Adlar of October 9, 1910, contains an article inviting the new Canadians to send their children to the school.<sup>3</sup>

Although the 'uptowner' was somewhat benevolent towards the 'downtowner', the bi-furcation of the two was, nevertheless, heightened

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<sup>2</sup> Moshe Meyerson, The Twentieth Anniversary - The Beginning of Jewish People's School, in The Jewish People's School Book, 1914-34 (Montreal: The Jewish People's School, 1934), p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> Kanada Adlar (Montreal), October 9, 1910.

by the different socio-economic concerns. It is true that the settled 'uptowners' were of some assistance to the 'downtowner' through philanthropic aid. It is, though, contended that the philanthropic activity was not as great as that of New York, Paris, or London. Nevertheless, the Jewish working man related to the established Jews through the Baron de Hirsch organizationally and philanthropically.

### The Conflict

This very same working man met this very same philanthropist of Baron de Hirsch in the factories. The executive members of Baron de Hirsch became here the exploiting, strike-breaking boss. It is small wonder that the conflict between the two factions moved from the factories to the Jewish institutions. Divergence of interests and ideology exacerbated the conflict between the two segments. The situation was, in effect, a typical model of the conflict between the exploitative do-gooder and the recipient with dignity and spirit.

### The Yiddish-English Conflict

The new Jewish immigrant, who had the time or inclination to become organizationally involved, had difficulty adjusting to the 'uptowner' meetings. The 'downtowners' spoke little English, and meetings by 'uptowners' were conducted in English. The first convention of the Zionist Organization, which was held in Montreal, and, indeed, all its previous meetings, were conducted in English. This language problem

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<sup>1</sup>E.G. Sack, "History of Jews in Canada", in *The Jew in Canada*, ed. by Arthur Daniel Hart (Toronto: Jewish Publications, 1926), p. 76.

was but one further reason for the new Canadian to turn to his own and create new social and organizational structures.

### Socio-Ideological Conflict

Another difference between the two segments was ideological.

The socialist tradition that the Jewish workmen brought from Europe led to the creation of such groupings as Poalei Zion, Bund, and Anarchists. The first branch of Workmen's Circle, an offshoot of Bundism, was founded in Montreal in 1906. These Bundists and Anarchists initially had little interest in Jewish education and culture, and had more concern for general labour issues and socialist ideology.

Some Jews in the community, amongst them the editor of the Kanader Adler, objected to the introduction of "secular" ideologies into Jewish life. In an editorial of November 29, 1910, the editor criticized the Poalei Zion because of their intention to found a school which was radical. In his opinion, a Jewish school could be neither radical, conservative, nor socialist.<sup>5</sup> He need not have feared, for the Jewish People's School quickly lost its radical and socialist tings, if we may anticipate.

Jews in Montreal were in agreement about socialism when referring to Zionist ideology and Palestine and the distant future. Dr. Yehudah Kaufman proposed a minority resolution at the Canadian Jewish Congress meetings, where 'uptowners', too, were represented. This resolution declared that the future Jewish national home in Palestine

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<sup>5</sup>Belkin, The Labour Zionist Movement in Canada, p. 198.

shall be owned by the people, with nationalization of industry an important goal. Thus the class struggle, in its most idealistic sense, was assigned to another time and another continent. However, the 'uptowner' and 'downtowner' conflict became more contentious with the bread and butter issues of earning a livelihood.<sup>6</sup>

### Labour Unrest - In The Factories

In addition to abstract ideological differences, there were in the factories serious divergence of practical interests. The newspapers of 1913, for instance, tell us of long-term, bitter strikes, police being called in to harm striking tailors and, in some instances, to arrest them.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, boss and worker were meeting under different circumstances in Jewish organizational activity at the Baron de Hirsch and in other Jewish organizations.

The class struggle would even reach the synagogue at times: "Yesterday, there was held the Chanukkah Mitzvah (dedication) of the new uptown synagogue....Mr. Lyon Cohen, however, did not deliver his address, because of the disturbance caused by numerous strikers who were present at the ceremony." Since a strike in the needle industry was then in full swing, and, in view of the fact that Mr. Cohen, the President of the Baron de Hirsch, was chairman of the manufacturers' association, the full anger of these striking workers was being directed

<sup>6</sup>Hart, The Jew in Canada, p. 475.

<sup>7</sup>Templer Adler (Montreal), December 2 and 17, 1913.

against him.<sup>8</sup>

Conflict in Education:  
For and Against the Separate Panel

Another conflict between 'uptowner' and 'downtowner' arose around the issue of establishing a separate panel for Jews, in addition to the Protestant and Catholic school boards. The 'uptowners' looked with longing towards the English citadel. The 'downtowners', more sensitive to the rejection by the English and French, and more attuned to the needs of Jewish cultural development, were interested in the establishment of separate schools for Jewish children of Montreal.<sup>9</sup>

The Kanader Adler of October 15, 1923, informs us of a huge mass meeting attended by two thousand Jews, mostly 'downtowners', one would assume. A resolution was passed in favour of separate schools, with only twenty-one opposed. The daily proceeds to tell us that hoodlums attempted to disrupt the meeting.<sup>10</sup> The 'uptowners' were equally adamant, as an invitation to a meeting at the Montefiore Club on October 9, 1923, would indicate: "It will be the object of the meeting to discuss all matters having reference to the Jewish children in the Protestant schools, and, especially, to take required measures to prevent the establishment of a separate Jewish panel."<sup>11</sup>

Ambivalent feelings of Protestants to Jews is expressed as

<sup>8</sup> Kanader Adler (Montreal), January 15, 1917.

<sup>9</sup> Hart, The Jew in Canada, p. 475.

<sup>10</sup> Kanader Adler (Montreal), October 15, 1923.

<sup>11</sup> Invitation from 1923 file, Jewish People's School.

some of them applauded those who opposed a separate panel. The Gazette of October 12, 1923, reports that the Jews view with repugnance "any suggestion of segregation" and are for the "mixing of faiths."<sup>12</sup> The 'uptowners' need not have feared, for the governing authorities would never agree to a separate panel. This conflict brought into sharper focus the divergence of views and interests of Jews in Montreal.

### Democratization

This divergence of views found expression as the 'downtowners' began to strive for democratization of organized Jewish life in Montreal. As the Eastern European Jewish immigrations had taken hold, the 'downtowners' began to assert himself and to aim for a voice in Jewish affairs. Representation before government, the press, and the public, had become the domain of the Baron de Hirsch and its self-appointed legislative committee. The Ignace Adler said it well in an editorial, that the Baron de Hirsch should not be an elite circle for a particular grouping in the community. The 'uptowner', we are told, wants to control the 'downtowners' by force. The editorial goes on to ridicule the 'uptowner' by reminding him of his origins. "A former Jew of Shnipishuck becomes today a fine Jew of the Goutiers, and tomorrow an uptown Yehudi, and already looks snobbishly askance upon the 'downtowners'."<sup>13</sup>

Reuben Brainin, a world renowned Hebraist and editor of the

<sup>12</sup> Montreal Gazette, October 23, 1923.

<sup>13</sup> Ignace Adler (Montreal), December 15, 1913.

Isidor Adler, was organizing a "Folks Farband". He was, as were many others, vitally interested in democratizing organized Jewish life in Montreal. The 'uptown' Zionists, on the other hand, feeling threatened by this move, formed their own organization as a counter to Brainin's democratic project. They called the first Canadian Jewish Conference for November 4, 1915, which, we are told, had little representation from the "bread folk elements", and indeed quickly aborted.<sup>14</sup>

Various forces, after much infighting, finally formed a temporary Canadian Jewish Congress on Paris of 1919. Some of the leadership of Jewish People's School were amongst the prime movers of the "Folks Farband", and were also instrumental in the establishment of the democratically representative congress. Dr. Yehudah Kaufman, the founder of the Jewish People's School, was a major influence in the formation of this and other democratic Jewish institutions in Montreal.<sup>15</sup>

Downtowners Move Upward

The democratization within organized Jewish life and the growing affluence amongst Jews following World War I both aided in the upward mobility of numbers of 'downtowners'. More 'downtowners' began to enter businesses and moved into the middle class. The uptown circle was widening.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Hart, The Jew in Canada, p. 299.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 29, 466.

<sup>16</sup> I. Madres, Between Two World Wars (Montreal: The Eagle Publishing Company, 1961), p. 22

Simon Belkin, the revered colonisation administrator, has described in his history of Pealei Zion in Montreal the development of the Jewish People's School in its early years. One can deduce from his work, and from the reporting of others, that the 'downtowner', in many instances, began to emulate the 'uptowner'. As the Jewish People's School developed, they began to exemplify the upper mobility of numerous Jews. As the battles for democratisation were taking place, there were those who began to invite the 'uptowner' into the upwardly mobile Jewish institutions.

Belkin tells us that, in 1918, the active members of Jewish People's School began to "broaden the circle". We are told that the school brought in "progressively oriented friends from the business world." An advisory committee of business people was set up. We also learn that there was a "Shanukas Mahain" (building dedication) in 1920. \$20,000.00 was raised for that purpose, and \$15,000.00 of that sum was collected from fifteen people donating \$1,000.00 each, in a time of difficult financial conditions. One could deduce from this campaign alone that the school was moving into the hands of the middle class.<sup>17</sup>

This pragmatism was also consistent with the ideological stance of Jewish People's School supporters. One could observe that any adherence to direct principles of socialist philosophy became minimal. Middle class values of social justice quickly replaced whatever real socialist concerns there might have been. It should also be noted that the Pealei Zionists amongst school supporters were also interested in social-

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<sup>17</sup>Belkin, The Labour Zionist Movement in Canada, p. 225.



ism for Eretz Israel, and very minimally did they espouse socialist causes in Montreal.

By 1926, only 55% of the students of the Jewish People's School were from working class families. By 1920, the constituency began to change from workman to petty bourgeois and middle class. The second branch of the school moved uptown, away from its original working class constituency. It would be more difficult to find working class families in and around uptown Outremont than in downtown Saint Urbain Street.

The upper mobility and changing values were apparent in curricular discussion and articles. One could read of terms such as social justice, progressive and social conscious, but never the terms socialism or radical. One detects a humanist liberalism, certainly a far cry from the ideology of the National Radical School. The 'downtown' Jewish People's School had become, in some respects, an essentially uptown institution. The school had become representative of progressive middle class values.

## Chapter IV

## RELIGION FACES NEW TRENDS

Orthodox and Secular

One who would have viewed Jewish life in Montreal during the early decades of the twentieth century would have been witness to discussions on abstract social issues, nationalist theories and plans amongst secular or non-religiously oriented Jews. One would have also been witness among the religious Jews to discussion and controversy on kashruth and kosher slaughterers and other ritual observances. These two segments disagreed amongst themselves and also fought with each other.<sup>1</sup>

The Secularist Regarding Religious Observances

Religious Jews and 'uptowners' were threatened by the secularizing tendencies of the Labour Zionists and other ideological groups. The Poalei Zion was condemned by the Zionist convention of December, 1910, for holding sessions of its own on the Sabbath. This eleventh gathering of Canadian Zionists, on the other hand, began its convention with Sabbath services. The Zionists were not observant enough for some, and a more religious element began to establish itself in 1910 under the aegis of Mizrachi - the religious Zionist organization.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Meir, Journal of History, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup>L. Golden, "History of Zionism in Canada", in The Jew in Canada, ed. by Arthur Daniel Hart (Toronto: Jewish Publications, 1926), p. 276.

These disagreements amongst various religious shadings did not prevent the observant Jews from attacking the secularizing Jews. Abraham Parness, an active Jewish People's School leader of the time, reports that some segments of orthodox Jewry were accusing the National Radical School of being Christian missionaries. The attack upon the school was made at a mass meeting for the entire Jewish community to protest missionary activity. Dr. Yehudah Kaufman responded to this sharpest of all criticism, and orthodox leaders, we are told, left the platform angrily.<sup>3</sup> Orthodoxy continued its attack, we are told by Mr. Parness, by expressing anger at Poalei Zion Schools for recognizing May Day as a holiday and not Yom Kippur.<sup>4</sup> This is the more ironic for Mr. Parness himself, a radical Labour Zionist and long-time lay leader of Jewish People's School, was also the president of an orthodox synagogue.

### Educational Choices

There were real differences in the community with the secular-oriented Jews looking to new answers for their cultural needs. The immigrants, conscious of their heritage, began to look about themselves in their new American environment in order to make educational choices for their offspring. They concluded that the public schools were not providing their children with a Jewish education, and some realized that the Talmud Torahs were for the religious, or should be so. With this attitude, it would not take long before we would see the founding of such in-

<sup>3</sup> Jewish Parents Schools, in Parents School Book, 1913-1914 (Toronto: Jewish Parents School, 1914), p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

stitutions as the National Radical School and its offshoots. Yeol Ertin tells us that it was this quandry of secular Jews vis-à-vis religious education which led to the establishment of the first National Radical School on the continent in New York on December 10, 1910.<sup>5</sup>

#### Alternative to the Old

The founding of the National Radical School in Montreal, as we can see, was a reactive response to the ideology and practice inherent in orthodoxy, as well as to the lack of Jewish education in the public schools. It was also an answer to the assimilating trend and the ignorance of Jewish knowledge amongst the Jewish working men and the assimilating settled Jews. One must not overlook the significance of the Jewish People's School as a reaction to the old-fashioned, unprogressive techniques followed in the Talmud Torahs of the time and in the shedarim (small private schools). The new schools were also an answer to the Barney Haiman types, prayerbook in hand, as he went from door to door "selling" lessons. The reading of the prayerbook in Hebrew, without comprehension, was the primary aim of much of Jewish education.

Much of Jewish educational endeavour in the World War I years was geared to this teaching of mechanical reading of incomprehensible lyra (Hebrew reading). Thus, each son would, at least, know how to pronounce the memorial prayer in the original. Girls, it is suggested, were taught to write Yiddish, so that they could correspond with friends and

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<sup>5</sup>Y. Ertin, Jewish People's School Book, 1914-1914, pp. 23-30. See Shapiro, "The Beginning of the Jewish People's School", in Issues for Jewish Education, New Series, No. 1 (Spring, 1962), p. 30.

relatives in Europe. It is indicated that later, because of these expectations, boys were sent to the existing Talmud Torahs and girls to schools where Yiddish was taught.<sup>6</sup> The Jewish People's School, and later the United Talmud Torahs as well as other modern Jewish schools, came to improve the quality of Jewish education, of whatever ideology.<sup>7</sup>

### The Early Schools

Although organized institutions for Jewish learning began to flourish by 1914, the beginnings or sparks were there much earlier. There were religious classes conducted by the two oldest congregations, Shearith Israel and Shear Hashomayim, before 1870. In 1890, a free school for the poor Jewish children was established, where both Hebrew and general studies were taught. That year saw the beginning of the first Talmud Torah, which was the Eastern European ghetto alternative to Baron de Hirsch's attempts and to the congregational schools. By 1904, with the opening of governmental tax supported schools, children were attending this first day school till grade three, and then on to other Protestant schools. When five Talmud Torahs united in 1917, there were an aggregate of eight hundred students in that religious school system. At that time, Jewish People's School and the Parents School had a combined enrollment of seven hundred and forty students.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Madras, Between Two Wars, pp. 28-9.

<sup>7</sup> Sh. Shapiro, "The Beginning of the Jewish People's School", in Papers for Jewish Education, New Series, No. 1, (Spring, 1962), pp. 28-9.

<sup>8</sup> Levy M. Becker and Louis Rosenberg, "Jewish Education in Montreal, in Jewish Education, Vol. XIII, Nos. 1-2 (Winter-Spring, 1950-1), p. 64.

### New Expectations

These two schools were a response to those who looked at Jewish education and Jewish life with pessimism. Many Jews at the time felt that teaching Judaism to Canadian-born children was futile. This pessimistic attitude, we are told, pervaded the traditional Jewish community, who felt that Canada was not fertile land for the future of religious Jewish life. Kashruth (dietary observance), Yizkor (Memorial prayer for the dead), and Bar-Mitzvah (thirteen-year male confirmation) seemed to be the only goals and expectations of numerous religiously-oriented Jews.<sup>9</sup>

### The Talmud Torah Alternative

The Talmud Torahs, we have seen, began to answer the educational needs of many Jews in the first decades of the twentieth century. It was to be an alternative to the inefficient private teachers and to the small shul. The Hebrew classes at Baren de Hirsch were being phased out by the Protestant School Commission. The existing congregational schools did not answer the needs of many.<sup>10</sup>

Each separate Talmud Torah seemed to be threatened by the existence of another, as they appealed to the Jewish community for funds.

The Kanada Ailax reassures us in an editorial that both the Talmud Torah of Mr. S.K. Balasky and the other, run by Mr. Hirschel Givins, author of the first Yiddish book issued in Canada, are both equally in need of assistance, for they are both Montreal-based and both Jewish schools.

<sup>9</sup> Medves, Interview, Jan. 1975, pp. 23-4.

<sup>10</sup> David Lane, Personal Interview, May 15, 1975.

By 1917, the five Talmud Torahs united under one administration, with a budget of \$16,000.00. Lazarus Cohen was the lay founder and Rabbi Hirsch Cohen its spiritual leader. With the union of these schools and under the eventual leadership of Melech Magid, important strides were made to enhance the quality of education.<sup>11</sup> Their goals became more than a smattering of Hebrew and a bit of ritual practice. Traditional texts were taught and modern Hebrew language and literature were introduced.

### Positive Influence

Shloime Wiseman asserts that the Jewish People's School had an influence on orthodox schools. He felt that his school gave impetus to other institutions to modernize, both in theory and practice. He also felt in fact that his school influenced the Perets Schools to be more positive towards Jewish nationalism and the Hebrew language.<sup>12</sup>

### A Force for Change

It is difficult to estimate the effect of one institution upon another, but the fact that the Jewish People's School was a force for change is definitely evident. It seems as if this change and progress moved forward with one eye on tradition. It was Shloime Wiseman who deserves much of the credit for innovation and respect for traditional values.

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<sup>11</sup> Hart, The Jew in Canada, p. 170.  
Sacks, The History of the Jews in Canada, in Hart, The Jew in Canada, p. 80.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 187.

He began his overwhelming influence upon the fate of Jewish People's School during the winter of 1916-1917, as a teacher of Jewish history.<sup>13</sup> He epitomized the involvement of the school in the world of Jewish knowledge with great concern for general learning. In him, one could see the new generation maskil, (enlightened Jew) with a regard for tradition and looking outside the ghetto for knowledge, too. While Shloime Wiseman entered McGill University in 1918 to take degrees in literature and philosophy, he continued to study Talmud and other traditional texts intensively.

#### Tradition and Change

There were others through the years in the school who were secular in outlook, but with traditional knowledge and regard for it, too. People like the poet, I.J. Segal and Shloime Gold, the medical doctor, were well versed in traditional texts and involved in developing Yiddish and modern Hebrew culture. They were looking beyond a brief Bar-Mitzvah training period to a serious concern for the education of the Jewish community. Thus, the schools became also a vital vehicle for the ideological expression of groups of thinking Jews, who had their feet in both worlds.<sup>14</sup> They sought support from Tolstoy and Gunkel to confirm the pedagogical significance of the narrative tales in the Bible. Even Hagar Alan Fee was a source for the methodology in teaching Bible. Shimon Dinsky, long-time vice-principal, scholar, and translator, was influencing his colleagues to look lovingly, but critically and analyti-

<sup>13</sup> Polkin, The History of Labour Zionism, p. 228

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 216.



cally at traditional texts. Many of the social scientists of the day were carefully read and studied by some of the lay people and professionals around the school. The traditional texts and Eastern European tradition were being looked at with the tools being developed by the humanistic sciences.<sup>15</sup>

The intellectuals of this movement were truly interested in their tradition. In December of 1913, for instance, Dr. Nachman Syrkin came from New York to speak on "The Bible as Literature". The choice of topic proves an interest in the traditional texts, while at the same time taking a scientifically critical look at them. The integration of the "them" world of tradition with the new realities surrounding these Jews is evidenced by the announcement that the proceeds of the Bible lecture would go to aid the Jewish striking workers. Concern for the workers, concern for the Jew, interest in tradition and involvement in modern Jewish scholarship are all symbolized by this lecture announcement.<sup>16</sup>

#### Religious Values

Although not necessarily preaching the practice of rituals, it becomes evident that the school was sensitive to religious values from the following excerpts of minutes of a faculty meeting:

<sup>15</sup>Y.I. Glass, "Stories from the Pentateuch" in Jewish People's School Book, 1914-1929 (Montreal: Jewish People's School, 1929), p. 37.

<sup>16</sup>Isidor Adler (Montreal), December 7, 1913.

...On Monday, Rosh Hashanah should be discussed and explained in all classes. The following four points or themes should be stressed:- (a) the year's beginning, (b) spiritual accounting, (c) forgiveness of sin, (d) the attitudes of the religious Jews towards Rosh Hashanah.

In spite of attacks from some orthodox, the school community was positively inclined towards the religious values inherent in the religious heritage. They had adopted a stance different from the ghetto holdouts as they integrated the contributions of modern culture with tradition. This paralleled various developments in the religious community in North America, such as the rise of Conservative, Reform, neo-orthodoxy, and Reconstructionist. In Montreal, the pioneers of historic Judaism, of rational inquiry into tradition, of change within tradition, were then in and around the Jewish People's School community.

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17 Minutes, Teachers' Meeting, September 19, 1919, file of the Jewish People's School.

Chapter V

NEW TRENDS IN CONFLICT

The Party

By 1904, Poalei Zionists, although not organized, were meeting at various gatherings of Socialists, Anarchists, Weizman Democratic Zionists, Palestinian-oriented and Ugandan-oriented groups. Each one of these groupings was seeking solutions to problems of the Jews afloat in the New World, as they grappled with their history and with the traditions of their past. Would the Jew find success in the arms of those who would depart completely from the past, as the Anarchists suggested? Would the Jew settle for at least a temporary asylum in Uganda? Or, would the Jew see a socialist Palestine as an answer to his dilemma?

With the arrival in January of 1905 of Laisner Zuker, later one of the founders of the National Radical School and then prominent minister of the Parents School, the nucleus of Poalei Zion began to form. These Zionists, who saw a socialist homeland as the answer, became sufficiently strong in Montreal by 1910 to host the fifth North American Poalei Zion convention. This political party in the diaspora made an important decision at this convention when it resolved to establish a school system which would express their ideological aspira-

ations.<sup>1</sup>

### The Schools

In Montreal local Labour Zionists, following such previous deliberation and encouraged by the convention resolution, moved to establish the National Radical School, which were followed later by its off-shoots, the Jewish People's School and the Jewish Peretz School. Poalei Zion leadership also continued in the years 1910 to 1920 to create other cultural institutions such as the Jewish Public Library and the Canadian Jewish Congress.

### The Unions - Socialism

Poalei Zionists in the early years were also helpful in organizing and encouraging support for the trade union movement. One could not deny that this party was concerned, in the early decades, with the needs of the Jewish proletariat. Belkin tells us that "One served socialism with devotion as one continued cultural activity, and trade union work, even as one became involved in nationalist Jewish activity."<sup>2</sup> Later, it became clear that there was little concern with socialist politics in the Jewish People's School. The very leaders who may have been espousing it within Poalei Zion came to forget it within the walls of the school; not so with regard to Zionism, Jewish nationalism, and prophetic inspired social justice.

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<sup>1</sup> Emanuel Adler (Montreal), October 24, 1918.

<sup>2</sup> Canadian Jewish Book, 1913-1918, p. 10

<sup>3</sup> Belkin, The Labour Zionist Movement in Canada, 1901-20, p. 26

<sup>4</sup> Belkin, The Labour Zionist Movement in Canada, 1901-20, p. 36

School and Party

Moshe Dickstein was a most significant figure within Poalei Zion, and for many years also the leading lay person at the Jewish People's School. It is asserted by Shloime Wiseman, the long-time principal and major formulator of principles, that Moshe Dickstein was constantly on guard not to allow the Jewish People's School to become a "party" school, but rather a school of the people.<sup>3</sup>

It is indeed interesting to note that in conversation with Poalei Zionists through the years one has heard emphasis placed on the tie between the Labour Zionist Movement and the Jewish People's School. As evidence of that, we are told that Dickstein, the head of Poalei Zion in Canada, was also the chief lay leader of the Jewish People's School.

The assertion of Mr. Wiseman does, though, most strongly indicate that Mr. Dickstein were two different caps. Although many people were interested in the two institutions, and although Jewish People's School was founded by Poalei Zion leadership, the two institutions became less and less bound to each other ideologically. When Labour Zionists would, through the years, talk about "our school", they were expressing a wish, rather than a reality.

The leaders of the Poalei Zion, such as Dickstein and Baker, attempted to separate the party from the schools. On the other hand, as individuals consistently and as the organized Labour Zionism

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<sup>3</sup>Isador Adler, (Montreal), August 7, 1970.

sometimes, they saw it their obligation to support the schools financially. From the Kanadar Adler of September 5, 1913, we read, "This Sunday there will be a house-to-house collection for the newly-opened National Radical School. Those involved in the fund-raising will be the Montreal Poalei Zion branch and the Jewish National Workers' Alliance (presently Farband: the social and mutual benefit offshoot of Poalei Zion) as well as private citizens and sympathizers."<sup>4</sup> Later, for a time, the Perets School was given complete support. The Yehosh Branch of the Alliance in 1922 accepted full responsibility for the finances of that school.<sup>5</sup> Generally, many Poalei Zionists through the years helped the two schools. These Poalei Zionists were, however, reticent in introducing socialist ideology into the schools.

Palestinarism Versus Territorialism -  
the Nationalist Socialists

Within and around the Poalei Zion, there were two elements which took different positions with reference to the national home. There were those who saw a national home for the Jews in Palestine, with Hebrew as the national tongue, incorporating a moderate brand of socialism. The others, called "Territorialists", could see the land of the Jews in the diaspora, with Yiddish as the national language, and a more radical brand of socialism.<sup>6</sup> Zuker of the Perets School who was with the "Territorialists", in due time urged re-

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<sup>4</sup> Kanadar Adler, September 5, 1913.  
<sup>5</sup> Neveck, in Evreyskaya Shkola, 1913-1922, p. 23.  
<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

unification with Poalei Zion; Dickstein of the Jewish People's School was a strict Poalei Zionist Palestinian.<sup>7</sup>

With the founding of the National Radical School in 1913, these two elements were expressing their intention of working together. But the Palestine Zionist Socialists could obviously not live with "Territorialist" and strictly Yiddishist peoples. The attitudes vis-a-vis the location of the national home could not be resolved easily.<sup>8</sup>

By 1915, the Hebraists and non-"Territorialists" of the Poalei Zion separated to form the Jewish People's School. The National Radical School, later to be called the Paretz School, attracted the "Territorialists", the Yiddishists, the more left-leaning socialists, and the anarchists. Paretz School had for some time very strict organizational contact with the "Territorialist" socialists of Toronto.<sup>9</sup>

Dr. Chaim Zhitlevsky, a world-renowned figure, was the ideological inspiration for the "Territorialist"-Yiddishists at one time; he saw Yiddish as an expression of the revolutionary battles of the Jewish masses. Dr. Nachman Syrkin, prominent Labour Zionist leader, referred to the social teachings of the prophets who spoke Hebrew.

When the schools separated, we are told by Balkin, there was a sense of exhilaration as the founding Poalei Zionists knew that they

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<sup>7</sup> Jacob Zipper, ed., Leiner Baker Memory Book (Montreal: Committee of Friends, 1968), p. 37.

<sup>8</sup> Hart, The Jew in Canada, p. 443.

<sup>9</sup> Novack, in Paretz School Book, p. 12.

would no longer have to justify the singing of "Hatikvah" in the school or answer those who called Hebrew a reactionary language. They would no longer be confronted with diaspora nationalism as an alternative to Zionism.<sup>10</sup>

### The Less Nationalistic Radical Left

Yeol Epstein was a New York Yiddish publicist and educator during the early decades of the twentieth century in the Jewish working class milieu of North America. He claims that the early Jewish socialists and workers of the 1890's, even to the 1920's, were not very keenly aware of their Jewish heritage and, in essence, often saw their Judaism as pure happenstance.

These less intensely national Jews did not manifest any identity with Jews when involved in union and other working class activities. They saw themselves as Yiddish-speaking workmen. Often these very socialist Yiddishists, in Montreal as well, flirting with the National Radical School and later Peretz School, saw little that was intrinsically valuable in Yiddish, other than as a means to an end.

Another American publicist, Ab. Cahan, expressed it aptly. Himself, the editor of the Yiddish Daily Forward, a widely circulated proletarian Yiddish newspaper, he wrote that even Yiddish would disappear quickly.

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<sup>10</sup> Epstein, The Labour Zionist Movement in Canada, 1904-1928, p. 221.



Erin credits Dr. Zhitlevsky with bringing the Jewish workmen to national awareness. He also contends that it was only as a result of the pogroms and counter-revolutionary activities in Russia that the Jewish workmen became more nationally conscious.<sup>11</sup> The Bolshevik turn of the Russian Revolution also eventually steered other socialists towards Jewish nationalism.

In the meantime, in Montreal in the 1910's, the movement for Yiddishism and radicalism amongst socialist Jews was strong. Numerous tailors and cloakmakers were even members of extreme radical union organization known as The Industrial Workers of the World. These Jewish proletarians were seriously affected by strikes which involved the Jewish-owned factories as well. Conflicts encouraged the workers who were active Poalei Zionists and supporters of the school to bring their work world colleagues into the committees of the schools. Clearly, there was an unwillingness on the part of the same Yiddish-speaking masses to compromise labour interests. Yiddish became, in a sense, an expression of ideological protest against the bosses.

Yiddish was, as Zhitlevsky had stated, an expression of mass Jewish solidarity. Any threat or imagined threat to Yiddish, even by merely adding Hebrew to the curriculum, could also be seen as a threat to the condition of the workman.

The individual working Jew was along a continuum. The

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<sup>11</sup> Dr. S. Shapiro, "The Beginning of the Jewish People's School", in Issues for Jewish Education, p. 90.

more socialist one was, the more Yiddishist one was; the less national-  
ist one was, the more universalist one was. The less socialist one was,  
the less Yiddishist and more Hebraist one was; the more nationalist  
Zionist one was and the more particularist one was. Both the Jewish  
People's School and the Perets School took varying positions near the  
middle of the continuum, with the latter to the right and the former to  
the left of centre.

Bundist - Anarchist

The Bundists and Anarchists who expressed the more extreme  
views could not agree to enter the fold. The Bundist, who had been  
functioning through Workmen's Circle before Poalei Zion appeared on the  
scene, fought any semblance of Zionism. They founded a "National  
School", in opposition to the Poalei Zion National Radical School. The  
~~Group~~, as they were called (so as to avoid the Hebrew word ghavaria -  
conrades) accused the Jewish People's School founders of being reaction-  
aries.<sup>12</sup> The Anarchists also supported the only Yiddish National Sunday  
School "against the ruling classes."<sup>13</sup>

In spite of objections by these groups, many working people  
nevertheless supported the Yiddish-Hebrew schools. The first classes,  
after the short-lived Mile End attempt of the National Radical School,  
of May, 1913, were held in the Pressers' Union Local. This illustrates  
the substantial support from unions and working people. The earlier

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<sup>12</sup>Belkin, The Labour Zionist Movement in Canada, 1901-26, pp. 201-19.

<sup>13</sup>Zacks, in Yiddish School Book, 1913-18, p. 20.

Mile End classes were held in a synagogue, again illustrating the right extension of this continuum.<sup>14</sup>

### The Yiddish - Hebrew Controversy

We have already observed that Yiddish language and speech were very important elements in the life of the socialist Jews and, indeed, of all early Poalei Zionists. Even those who favoured more Hebrew at all times favoured an important place for Yiddish; the reverse cannot be said.

It appeared, although not entirely, that those who stressed Hebrew would often emphasize a deeper affinity for past Jewish history, for Jewish nationalism in Palestine, for traditional texts. The Yiddish supporters, although not always, tended to emphasize the radical socialist dimension, proletarian involvements and universally accepted texts! Some would even suggest that the Hebraist particularist was more cultured than the Yiddishist universalist. The Hebraist came with years of study in Bible and Talmud and a greater tradition of learning than the more proletarian Yiddishist.<sup>15</sup>

We are told in the Kanada Adlar of October 24, 1910, of the decision at the Poalei Zion Convention in regard to radical "jargonist" schools.

The debate around the founding of a school system in North America was a very heated one. It was dominated by the two giants of the Labour Zionist Movement at the time, Dr. Chaim Shklovsky and Dr. Nachman Syrkin.

<sup>14</sup> Balkin, The Labour Zionist Movement in Canada, 1901-26, p. 203.

<sup>15</sup> David Neme, Personal Interview, May, 1975.

Dr. Shitlevsky was opposed to Hebrew being taught in the school, but was willing to compromise so as not to "hurt the feelings" of the Hebraists in the movement. He felt that the "bourgeois" schools were doing enough for Hebrew, and that it was up to Pealot Zion to stress Yiddish, which was the language of the masses. He minimized the importance of Hebrew in the diaspora by suggesting that when Jews arrived to Eretz Israel in due course they could speak Hebrew.

Dr. Nachman Syrkin, on the other hand, was "theoretically an anti-Yiddishist." He agreed with Shitlevsky that, due to circumstances, Yiddish was the chief medium of communication among Jews. He saw the necessity of Yiddish and was, therefore, also willing to compromise for purely pragmatic reasons. He wanted to be understood by the Yiddish-speaking masses.<sup>16</sup>

As we know, this battle continued within the National Radical School, which was founded in 1913, and came to a climax in 1915, with the founding of the Jewish People's School. The leader of those who wished an important place for Hebrew was Dr. Yehudah Kaufman, then a student at McGill University.

The Yiddish-Hebrew issue in all its ramifications aroused strong feelings even within Labour Zionism. Some members were temporarily suspended from the Pealot Zion because of their extreme Yiddishist stand in the schools. We are even told that feelings were so strong

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<sup>16</sup> Journal Ailon (Montreal), October 24, 1910.

that they led to fistieuffs.<sup>17</sup>

While strengthening its Yiddish program, the Jewish People's School became totally committed to the teaching of the Hebrew language. It was not only a subject to be taught, but also an important element of the Jewish People's School ideological outlook. The Perets School in the early years would justify the teaching of Hebrew as an aid to learning Yiddish, because of the many Hebraic elements in the Yiddish works. The Jewish People's School taught the Bible in the original and Hebrew literature because of a commitment to the text and its language, too. To them Hebrew was also the language of Eretz Israel being built.<sup>18</sup>

#### Curricular Implications

The 1924 annual report reflects the curricular concerns of the school. There is an outgoing concern with the teaching of Hebrew. The successes in Yiddish came more easily, for many children came from Yiddish-speaking homes. Hebrew, however, was another matter; the curriculum required the teaching of Torah and the Early Prophets in the original. The school was particularly proud that the entire book of Amos was taught. Jewish history, which was not taught systematically in the religious schools, was an important subject in the Jewish People's School. Modern Yiddish and Hebrew works were continuous fare in addition to the formalized grammar of these languages. The school gave great

<sup>17</sup> Kovack, in Perets School Book, 1913-14, p. 22.

<sup>18</sup> Shloime Wiseman, in Yiddisher Kampf (New York: Labour Zionist Organization, November 15, 1935), Vol. IV, No. 111, p. 37.  
Shimon Sussky, "Towards a Strengthened Labour Zionism in Our School", in Hebrew Education Now? (New York: Jewish Education Publications, May, 1934), p. 24.

weight to organization and structure in the curriculum, whether it be in grammar, Bible, or Jewish history, unlike the traditional practice in the religious schools. Social issues were discussed at club activities, conducted in Yiddish; Yiddish and Hebrew songs were taught.<sup>19</sup> Yiddish and Hebrew books were distributed from the school library, with a preponderance of Yiddish books, because they were more readily available, we are told, and because Yiddish was easier to read.<sup>20</sup> The school had succeeded in creating an institution in which the two languages were taught with a deep sense of commitment to both, - further proof that Poalei Zionists were never anti-Yiddish, but rather pre-Hebrew and pre-Yiddish.

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<sup>19</sup> Annual Report, Jewish People's School, October to May, 1954.

<sup>20</sup> Shimon Dunsky, in Jewish People's School Book, 1954-55 (Montreal: Jewish People's School, 1955), p. 52.

## Chapter

## FURTHER TO THE SCHOOL PROGRAM

## First Principles

We are told by Langer (teacher) Chairman, veteran teacher in both schools in turn, of some of the verbalized, but not formally written, principles and teaching program of the National Jewish School at its inception:

1. As Nationalists in the progressive, democratic sense of the word, we must give our children an education which will be tied up with our Jewish people, language, literature, history, and, actually, all our people's works.
2. As Radicals, we want to give our children an education which will be consistent with progress, the sciences, free thinking, and the most advanced attitudes of social justice and love for all oppressed people and classes.

The founders saw the program based upon these two general articles of faith, of nationalism and socialism. They, therefore, made the following curricular suggestions:

Yiddish to be taught because it is the living language of the majority of the Jewish masses...the language of instruction will, therefore, be Yiddish. Hebrew would be considered as an advanced subject in the elementary school...it, therefore, should be taught in the older grades as much as necessary, and a supplement to progressive Jewish education, and, as an introduction to old Jewish culture.

<sup>1</sup> Langer, Atlas (Montreal), Jubilee Issue, 1927.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

### Common Goal

As we have seen from the party conflicts, there were differences as to the language and differences as to socio-political solutions, but nonetheless the founders had a common goal in Jewish education. The following call expresses it: "To retain the Jewish youth for the Jewish people so that they will stand against assimilation and to develop in them a feeling for higher truth and for justice for their own people and for all mankind."<sup>3</sup>

### Differences

This common ideological stance was not enough. The Yiddish-Hebrew issue, and all that was implicit in it, led to the bifurcation of the National Radical School. When getting down to the nitty-gritty of highly charged curricular decisions on language, the abstract common goals were lost sight of.

When Poalei Zion retracted its support from National Radical School, it organized a committee to formulate ideological and practical foundations of the Jewish People's School. The committee consisted of Moshe Dickstein, Zelig Malofsky, Abraham Farness, and Dr. Yehudah Kaufman.

In a declaration published in the Kanader Adler of July 9, 1915, they clarified the programmatic intentions of the school. They indicated their intention of founding a school in which Hebrew and

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<sup>3</sup>Kanader Adler (Montreal), August 13, 1913.



Yiddish would have equal status. They expressed concern for and involvement with the traditional Jewish treasures and the principles inherent in the works of the prophets, Aggadic literature, Musar and Chassidic lore. The natural sciences and the history of the oppressed peoples were among the universal subjects to be taught.<sup>4</sup>

Dr. Yehudah Kaufman made quite clear the equal status of Hebrew and Yiddish. "The Jewish People's School belongs to that type of national radical school that excels in a rich Hebraic program. The school requires of its children more Hebraic knowledge. It begins teaching the children Hebrew on the first day of their entry into the school."<sup>5</sup> In Jewish People's School, therefore, Hebrew was taught in grade one, as opposed to Hebrew instruction in the older grades only.

The school took advantage of every opportunity to further the study of Hebrew. An all-day kindergarten, called by the Hebrew name, Gan Yehudit, was conducted in Hebrew only, so as to help the Yiddish-speaking children adjust more quickly to further Hebrew studies. In the original National Radical School, there had been those who had fought every inch of Hebrew.

The 1916 Poalei Zion convention adopted a resolution on Hebrew-Yiddish programming in the schools. The resolution illustrates how extremely threatened Yiddishism was by the inroads of Hebrew language. Hebraists finally convinced Yiddishists to replace "may or can" with "should"; Yiddishists conceded, after much controversy, that Hebrew

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<sup>4</sup> Montreal Atlas (Montreal), July 9, 1915.

<sup>5</sup> Montreal Atlas (Montreal), August 17, 1917.

"should" be taught rather than "may or can" be taught. With this agreement, the two segments could live together within the party. The Jewish People's School was the Hebrew language proponent, and Peretz School the strongly Yiddish proponent.<sup>6</sup>

#### Yiddish - Hebrew at Peretz School

By the mid-twenties, the Peretz School adopted a similar attitude to the two languages, with a little greater emphasis on Yiddish than Jewish People's School. The Peretz School continued to serve more of the working class elements of the Jewish community, as they remained downtown and as the Jewish People's School, as we have seen, moved in the direction of Outremont's middle-class element.

At the time Jacob Zipper, scholar and writer in Hebrew as well as in Yiddish, arrived in Montreal to take over the helm of the Peretz School. He eventually asserted that Hebrew was no longer an aid to the learning of Yiddish, but rather a language which expressed the old Jewish culture and modern creative life and Zionism as well.<sup>7</sup>

#### Peretz School Influence

The emphasis on Yiddish in Peretz School in the early years helped attract an element that might have been lost to Jewish life. Belkin suggests that the National Radical School, which was renamed the J.L. Peretz School in 1910, was an important influence upon Bundists, Anarchists, and sundry left-wingers. The school helped break the nose of assimilation among some of those who saw salvation in the resolution

<sup>6</sup> Belkin, The Labour Zionist Movement in Canada, 1904-24, p. 212.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 217.

of universal social problems. It attracted the Jewish workingman who might have gone further left and become more assimilationist.<sup>8</sup> The Peretz School rather than the Jewish People's School became the haven for some left-wingers who were interested in Jewish life.

It should not be overlooked that later Bundism and other left-wing groups became, through Workmen's Circle, more culturally and nationally committed. They, too, entered the field with their own school, which later became known as Abraham Reizen School.

### Many Faceted Structures

This intensified concern for Jewish education is also reflected in the programs of the Jewish People's School. The school was increasing its Hebrew text concerns in catering to older students. The Machara Courses (higher courses), which were made up of students in the later years of high school, studied thirteen hours per week after their regular high school hours. Bible studies in the original Hebrew, Sayings of the Fathers, and other selections from the Mishnah were taught. Hebrew poets, such as Hialik, and poets and philosophers of the Middle Ages were studied in the original. Only here, in the very upper grades, is some mention made of the History of Socialism and of the Labour Movement.

The school began to develop many formats for education in addition to Machara Courses to improve the educational process. Numerous faculty meetings, well prepared by Principal Shloime Wiseman, were often in-service training opportunities. There were graduated clubs, children's

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 214.

clubs, summer programs, adult education classes, concerts and lectures. Students could find reinforcement in informal extra-curricular situations outside the classroom. Their parents could find cultural gratification outside the home and shop.<sup>9</sup>

Folk or mass education was aided and abetted by Jewish People's School. Indeed, other institutions were also engaged in adult education, but the school was among the most successful in these various endeavours. In 1931, we hear of formal adult classes:- 1. Hebrew Language and Literature; 2. The History of Yiddish Literature; 3. The History of Social Thought; 4. Psychology; 5. American Literature.<sup>10</sup>

The school broke ground in various directions within the classroom structures as well. They opened a Junior High School (Mittle Shule) in 1922, the Senior High (Hashbara Gouran) in 1924, and the all-day school in 1928.<sup>11</sup> In 1917, an all-day Hebrew gan (kindergarten) was established, which eventually became the source of pupils for the day school.<sup>12</sup>

One structure did not last too long. A summer study program, we are told by Mr. Wiseman, declined in enrollment because so many of the students would go to the country for the summer holidays. This is also an indication of the changing clientele of the Jewish People's School. Poor, working class people could not have afforded a summer in the country.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Montreal Gazette, June 8, 1931.

<sup>10</sup> Annual Report, Jewish People's School, 1932.

<sup>11</sup> Bolkin, The Labour Zionist Movement in Canada, 1901-26, p.231.

<sup>12</sup> Annual Report, Jewish People's School, 1924.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 1930.

The various structures that were attempted and established, both formal or informal, for children, youth, or for adults, were important for the cause of Jewish education in the community at large. These programs were often innovative and unique, and, indeed, led other institutions to introduce them as well. The school was freely recognized by educators as having a significant impact upon Jewish educational institutions in Montreal and on the continent.

The school played a very significant role in the social and cultural development of its students, parents, and adherents, as illustrated by the various structures and programs that were introduced. It became more than just a school, for it fulfilled the function of a synagogue, congregation or community centre, as it concerned itself with the spiritual, cultural, and social needs of its people.

#### Method and Approach

The teacher's meeting was an important vehicle for enriching the teacher and developing his classroom techniques. Efforts were made to ensure that these techniques not be haphazard and incidental, but rather the product of serious deliberation on the part of teachers and the result of planning. Scientific pedagogical techniques were growing within the walls of this modern educational institution.

Here are some of the goals presented in a lesson plan, which illustrates high pedagogical aspirations. "The topic, 'Home and Family' should enrich the conceptual world of the child with new elements, and should dispel previous misconceptions. The lesson should develop humanistic and moral concepts in the child. Children should learn to

exchange ideas and also learn to be patient with the views of others... to develop the child's ability to fantasize."<sup>14</sup> How precious, even for a classroom discussion of today.

The Jewish People's School was also learning from the neighboring schools. They were adhering to some of the approaches of the public school system. Certainly the following information shows little influence from the unstructured ghedag: "Thirty-five students were promoted with honour, 220 were promoted, thirty on trial and twenty-four were not promoted."<sup>15</sup>

When had the Jewish child in the ghedag been subjected to the process of grading? In fact, the old ghedag system did not know of text books, subjects, marks, testing, promotions, and formal classes. The Jewish People's School had pioneered the establishment of organized classrooms, forms of evaluation, and articulated goals.

#### Some Curricular Goals Realized

The subjects of articles by students of the elder grades, chosen by them and approved by their teachers, for the program books of the twenties reflect the curricular interests and concerns of the school:

1. The Exodus from Egypt.
2. What I Think About When I Lie in Bed.
3. A Day in Lafontaine Park.
4. Tisha B'Av (Commemorating the Destruction of the Temple).
5. A Storm.
6. Jeremiah, the Prophet.
7. My Trip to New York.
8. A Visit to Belmont Park.
9. A Good Dream.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 1930.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 1926.

10. A Disturbed Picnic.
11. My Trip to the U.S.
12. My Memories of Palestine.
13. The Western Wall.
14. War and Peace.
15. Rabbi Mendel of Kletchev.
16. Storm in the Hills.
17. The Guard in Israel.
18. Chaim Nachman Bialik.
19. Jews in the Middle Ages.
20. Facism.
21. Baron de Hirsch.
22. Sabbetai Zevi, the False Messiah.
23. A Few Thoughts About our Youth.
24. Pioneer Life in Erets Israel.
25. School Days.
26. Reb Nachman Krachmal.
27. Erets Israel Idyll.
28. Attempts at Jewish Farm Settlement.
29. Ten-Week Summer Camp.
30. Vacation in Northern Ontario.
31. The House.
32. Plato as a Social Thinker.
33. About the Jewish Novel.
34. The Disappointment.

In addition, there were translations of English love and nature poetry into Yiddish.<sup>16</sup>

The very titles, and certainly the contents of these articles, help us visualize the nature of the curriculum. It is through these articles of senior students that we see illustrated the accomplishments of the teaching at Jewish People's School. Clearly, a love of the Land of Israel and of Zionism is one theme which is of prime importance to the student. Another is an appreciation of Hebrew language and literature, despite limited linguistic attainments - as compared with Yiddish, which was spoken in the house. A positive attitude to the Jewish tradition and traditional texts, although not much commitment to religious practice is evident. An interest in literature, sociology and the other

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<sup>16</sup> Jewish People's School Book, 1914-1914, 1914-1914, 1914-1914.

humanities with a sense of respect for the sciences is apparent. Identification with Jews of the world is apparently important to the student. An interest in social justice and the lot of the workman, but with no radical or revolutionary intentions to remake the world; no political partisanship is apparent in the articles.

A.S. Zacher, the first full-time professional teacher of Jewish People's School, reflected aptly when he said: "In a word, the school needs to be partisan in spirit, that is and in regard to the ethical and national ideals that should be implanted in the children's hearts. It should, however, be non-partisan with reference to the tactics that each separate party group might undertake to realize its ideals. When they grow up, the children will themselves find the ways and the means and will become active in the political life of society."<sup>17</sup> The non-partisanship of the school is certainly attested to.

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<sup>17</sup> Zacher, in Jewish People's School Book, 1914-1929, p. 51.



## Chapter VII

## FURTHER TO ORGANIZATION

Founder - Founding

In perusing the various publications of Jewish People's School, as well as the Montreal Jewish press, one becomes impressed with the gigantic presence in the school family of one man in particular. Dr. Yehudah Kaufman had spent some four years in Montreal from 1913 to 1917, and then visited on occasion, as he continued to influence the cultural and ideological life of Montreal Jewry. Dr. Kaufman moved on from Montreal to Philadelphia, New York, and Jerusalem in pursuit of a career in Hebrew scholarship. Dr. Kaufman was neither an administrator nor pedagogue, rather the ideologue, philosopher and prime intellect of Labour Zionism. A man of wit and magic, of personal warmth and humanized learning, it was thus that he exerted his elusive influence.<sup>1</sup>

Under the inspiration of Yehudah Kaufman and with the help of devoted Labour Zionists, the Jewish People's School was founded just two years after the establishment of the National Hebrew School. The school was opened on Sunday, August 29, 1915, at 902 Saint Urbain Street, according to the Kanadas Adler.<sup>2</sup> Another Yiddish daily, "Der Yag" of October 18, 1915, tells us that the school was opened in the beginning

<sup>1</sup> Bolkin, The Labour Zionist Movement in Canada, 1921-22, p.14.

<sup>2</sup> Kanadas Adler (Montreal), August 27, 1915.

of October, 1915. This daily informed the public that the Pealal Zion is no longer represented officially in the local National Radical School.<sup>3</sup> Some of the Pealal Zion membership, nevertheless, did continue their association with the National Radical School.<sup>4</sup>

Infra-Structure

When Shloime Wiseman, the later-to-be principal for many decades, arrived in 1917, he found Moishe Dickstein and A.S. Zacher the leading mainstays of the school. There was, as yet, no post of principal at the time, although Zacher, a graduate of the Vilna Teacher's Seminary, was the pedagogic director; Moishe Dickstein was the chief organizer; Dr. Yehudah Kaufman was its spiritual father, and Lainer Maltzer must have been the administrator. He was called principal from time to time. It seemed that in the early years the Jewish People's School was led by a number of persons sharing responsibilities, with titles of little consequence. Most teachers worked on a voluntary basis, receiving no payment for services. After the first six months, some additional teachers were hired at seven dollars a month. The workload increased as the school became the only one on the continent with daily sessions.<sup>5</sup>

It was difficult to distinguish between professional and lay involvement, for whether one was paid or not, the commitment was intense. Teachers who were paid would gladly have done without payment,

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<sup>3</sup>Belkin, The Labour Zionist Movement in Canada, 1904-21, p. 221.

<sup>4</sup>B.J. Sachs, Evista School Book, 1913-21, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup>Kanada's Mirror (Montreal), August 7, 1970.

if it had been possible. ~~Lazar~~ Chaitman sold eggs as late as the thirties, that he could continue to serve as a teacher. Those who could not teach were deeply involved in the various sundry activities around the school. The 'school farsin', with a membership of one hundred, met weekly with at least forty in attendance. They would deliberate on ideological and administrative issues. These very 'farsin' members carried the burden of maintenance tasks, such as painting and cleaning. The school was akin to their own homes.<sup>6</sup>

### Budget and Finance

The active members of the 'farsin' were also worried about budgeting and finance. The first budget of the school totalled fifty dollars per month, with twenty-five dollars for Zacher as the full-time secretary, bill collector and teacher. The school fee was ten cents per week; twenty five cents per week for three children from the same family.<sup>7</sup>

The rapid growth of the school is readily illustrated by the revenue and expenditure reports of the first decades:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Revenue</u>	<u>Expenditure</u>
1918-1919	7,401.12	7,314.93
1925-1926	22,371.21	22,483.53
1927-1928	37,079.67	35,340.79
1929	32,457.65	31,222.40

<sup>6</sup>Belkin, The Labour Zionist Movement in Canada, 1921-26, p. 220.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 222.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Revenue</u>	<u>Expenditure</u>
1933	16,433.40	17,360.24

It is quite evident that the school was seriously affected by the Depression of 1928-35.<sup>8</sup> The school had to give up the Notre Dame Branch and a fourth school property. The Depression also affected the school when some of its active leaders had to retire from schoolwork because of their economic circumstances. However, the school was able to overcome economic adversity and continued to grow.<sup>9</sup> It was, indeed, in 1929 that the first successful day school began.<sup>10</sup>

The same economic patterns are evident when looking at financial reports of the larger United Talmud Torahs:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Revenue</u>	<u>Expenditure</u>
1918	26,947.60	29,160.78
1925	39,547.01	43,016.96
1927	48,629.78	45,319.67
1929	38,457.00	42,494.06

**Enrollment**

The following statistics are of some interest in considering the socio-economic and cultural conditions of the community in the nineteen twenties, and their influence upon enrollment:

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<sup>8</sup> Twenty Years, Jewish People's School's Finances, May, 1914 to December, 1933.  
<sup>9</sup> Jewish People's School Book, 1914-34, p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> Meishe Dickstein, in Jewish People's School Book, 1914-34, p. 38.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

Reasons for students leaving the Jewish People's School: 11

1. Left the city	15
2. Moved too far away	11
3. Working	14
4. Illness	27
5. Religious Reasons	11
6. Do not want to learn	29
7. Must stay home	11
8. Lack of success	14
9. Unpaid fees	3
10. Unknown	4

We may deduce that numbers of Jews were moving to other parts of the continent. Upward mobility is evident, as students moved north and west. In some families, the children had to work or to care for younger ones, as both parents had to work. Sickness may have been more debilitating than in later decades. Lack of interest in Jewish learning or problems of religious identification were evident in the society. Clearly, the school population did not represent a static community.

Proportion of Boys to Girls

Another aspect of enrollment was the proportion of boys to girls. Throughout the years, the Jewish People's School was sensitive to a particular imbalance in the registration.

Traditional Jews had always emphasized the schooling of the boys. They felt that boys needed intense religious training, whereas girls could do with only a bit of Yiddish so as to be able to write letters to the Old Country. Therefore, many would favour the Talmud Torahs for their sons, with their religious emphasis. The Jewish People's School would get their daughters.

The school felt offended at the value judgement inherent in this condition. They often rationalized the situation by recalling the important contribution of women to Jewish history.

They, nevertheless, watched anxiously and with relief as the proportion normalized, particularly after the establishment of the day school. In 1920, there were 32% boys and by 1934 there were 42% boys. The proportion of boys at the school grew rather erratically.

One can also see the effects of the Depression on the enrollment in the school.<sup>12</sup>

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. of Students</u>	<u>% of boys</u>	<u>No. of classes</u>
1920	243	32	13
1921	371	40	17
1922	361	40	15
1923	350	37	14
1924	380	45	20
1925	421	42	23
1926	529	45	26
1927	560	45	32
1928	533	44	29
1929	559	45	26
1930	527	43	27
1931	497	40	26
1932	437	39	20
1933	461	43	23
1934	879	42	22

#### Proportion of Non-Canadians

The changing nature of the parent body which was enrolling its children in the school was apparent. The proportion of Canadian-born students was growing. School Number II on Waverley Street, in the north-west end, was dominated by Canadian-born. The downtown school

<sup>12</sup> Salome Wiseman, in Jewish People's School Book, 1914-24, p.23

was becoming less and less Yiddish-speaking. In 1926, 65% of students in Branch One and 90% of students in Branch Two were Canadian-born. The statistics on the country of birth of pupils enrolled in 1926 illustrates the changing sociological nature of the school.

**Birth Places for children of School One and School Two:-**

<u>Country of Origin</u>	<u>Branch One</u>	<u>Branch Two</u>
Canada and U.S.A.	256	145
Russia and Poland	131	11
Austria	9	0
Roumania	5	1
Others	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
	404	158

**Proportion of Parents' Occupations**

Although the parent body was primarily proletarian, the school was gradually becoming, even in the early years, less of a working class school. Branch Two, which eventually became the central school, had a much larger proportion of small business owners than did Branch One. The statistics foreshadow the impending upward mobility of the Jewish People's School parent body.

**Occupations of Parent Body, Jewish People's School, 1926:-<sup>13</sup>**

	<u>Branch One</u>	<u>Branch Two</u>
Working class	260	57
Small Merchants	67	12
Agents and Peddlars	54	37
Merchants and Manufacturers	23	52

The People's School, on the other hand, attracted a much larger

<sup>13</sup> Jewish People's School, Prospectus, September, 1926.

proportion of working class people. This element identified much more with working class causes. A poll of 84 graduates of the Perets School shows where their sympathies lie:-<sup>1A</sup>

Socialists	17
Leftists	17
Peled Sim	14
Left Socialists	6
General Socialists	6
No Answer	24

Perets School - Jewish People's School

The Perets School differed from the Jewish People's School, but there was much that united them. There were a number of convincing common ideological denominators.

The two school organizations were strongly oriented towards the Land of Israel. The schools quickly reached positive attitudes to the two languages. The two schools preached social justice. Both institutions were secular in outlook, but with an increasingly positive attitude towards religion. Both schools stressed the cultural and historical heritage of Judaism. Even though they may have differed in degree, they were close in essence.

Nevertheless, they did differ. The political battles between them were on the specific doctrinal differences which had arisen in their beginnings. It almost parallels the Protestant wars of old, when battles were fought because of slightly differing rituals and doctrines, in spite of so much that was Christian and Protestant that united them.

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<sup>1A</sup>Jacob Kipper, in Perets School Book, 1913-14, p. 69.



Here institutions separated and stayed apart because of a somewhat different emphasis on language. As among the Protestants, however, there was much more that united them ideologically and culturally than separated them.

Through the years, attempts were made by both sides to bring the schools together organisationally and pragmatically,

The minutes of a meeting of the Jewish People's School teachers of 1920 record a joint tag-day by the two schools.<sup>15</sup> Jewish People's School also tried to locate its new branches so as not to compete with Peretz School enrollment.<sup>16</sup> In the annual report for the year 1929, we have further evidence of the continuing desire of some of the leaders to bring the two schools together, but unity meetings were unsuccessful.<sup>17</sup>

It seems that one of the chief reasons for the original separation was no longer valid, for, by the mid-twenties, the Peretz School had begun to stress more Hebrew. Most other differences, as we have seen, were also of little significance. Personality clashes, both on the professional and lay levels of leadership, may have been one reason for the schools remaining apart.

It took over fifty years for the two institutions to come together again.

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<sup>15</sup>Minutes, Teachers' Meeting, Jewish People's School, August 12, 1920.

<sup>16</sup>ibid., The Labour Zionist Movement in Canada, 1904-24, p. 220.

<sup>17</sup>Annual Report, Jewish People's School, 1929.

## Chapter VIII

### IN CONCLUSION

French Quebecers and English Quebecers were at cross purposes with each other economically, culturally and historically. They were, in a very real sense, separate communities living apart from each other and coming together only when necessary. Each community set up barriers against each other and thus there was little interaction between the two, and these very same barriers of divergent interests affected the Jews of the community. The Jews could not integrate with either community, which excluded them as well. Thus, Jews nurtured their own historic separateness and aloofness from the rest of the Montreal community.

The Jews reacted by turning inward. The languages of the Jews, their culture, their religious practices, became the more important to them in the unfriendly environment. The Jews of Montreal became actively and affectionately involved in the founding and development of a whole series of institutions and organizations, which gratified their cultural needs and sated their social hunger. One must look to the external environment, and also to the Jews' traditional support for culture, to explain the richness of Jewish community experience in Montreal.

An outstanding expression of the high priority assigned to culture was the education of the young. The teaching of Jewish children

in Montreal was of the gravest concern to Jewish community leadership. The Jews chose not to educate their children in the French Catholic system. The Protestants, who had freely accepted the responsibility of educating the Jewish young, found themselves burdened with a task which frustrated their own desire for a strictly confessional system. The Jews, with no neutral system available, became dependent upon the English-speaking educational authorities. These conditions encouraged the development of a relatively strong network of Jewish schools.

There were, too, within the Jewish community, conflicts of interest. The divergent attitudes of the established Jews and the arriving immigrants is of some consequence. The 'downtowner' treasured Yiddish, whereas the 'uptowner' had little regard for it. The one sought democratization and participation, and the other stood for benevolent control and domination. The 'uptowner' was often the exploiting boss, and the immigrant the exploited. The one, conservative; the other progressive, often socialist. The 'downtowner' was ready for an independent separate school panel, whereas the 'uptowner' insisted upon integration within the Anglo-Saxon establishment. The Eastern European immigrants in conflict with their established brothers moved, therefore, intensively towards the development of numerous institutions which would express their particular needs.

The Jewish People's School is but one example of the evolution of an immigrant institution. The early proletarian radicalism turned to progressive, social and humanistic values, as reflected in the past history and works of the Jews. Zionism, and all that was pragmatically inherent in it, was of prime importance to the school.

This programmatic involvement with the Zionist idea and reality did not express itself through political affiliation with Poalei Zion, even though much of the early leadership was involved in both. There was cooperation, some common goals, some joint activities, but two distinctly separate entities. Jewish People's School was never really a socialist school.

The school plotted an independent course on a number of levels. The establishment of the school was also a reaction to the conditions existing in traditional educational life. The new institution reacted to what was old-fashioned in the Hebrew school by introducing modern pedagogical techniques. It reacted to lack of organization, planning, and foresight by structuring, organizing, and conceptualizing on matters concerning Jewish education for young and old. The school responded to the religious character of the traditional schools by developing a more secular Jewish educational environment.

The school was not as secular and was more traditional than the religious would credit them. There was evident a sensitivity to the religious, to the traditional texts, to religious Jewish lore and literature. Although not seeking to inculcate ritual observance, the school grappled with the religious nature of the Jew in its many facets. The educators and supporters groped for meaning within Judaism, while very much attuned to the cultural and scientific endeavour of the time.

This groping and searching led the school to take positions in Jewish life. The tendency was often to take an ideologically centrist

position on the issues of the day. The school was progressive and not radically socialist. It was Yiddishist-Hebraist, rather than polarized towards one or the other language. It was neither atheist nor orthodox, but rather challengingly sympathetic to the tradition. The school was neither singularly particularist nor universalist, but rather integrative of general and Jewish culture. The school observed the golden mean as it moved along the shvil hazahav (the path of gold).

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