

‘The Agony of Israel’: Watson Kirkconnell and Canadian Jewry

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Résumé

Les lecteurs du *Jewish Standard* l’édition de Juin 1943 furent sûrement conscients des rumeurs inquiétantes concernant le sort de leurs frères dans l’Europe occupée par les Nazis. A cette époque, ils avaient également une bonne raison de se demander si quelqu’un à part les Juifs était préoccupé par le sort du Judaïsme Européen. Ainsi, il doit avoir été rassurant de lire un long poème écrit par un Gentil qui fut très sympathique aux douleurs des Juifs d’Europe. Ce poème est intitulé ainsi: “The Agony of Israel” et le nom de l’auteur est Watson Kirkconnell.

De nos jours, le nom de Kirkconnell est oublié; il y a cinquante ans il était familier aux oreilles des dirigeants du Judaïsme Canadien. De document retrace son pèlerinage intellectuel à partir de la quatrième génération de Canadiens W.A.S.P. jusqu’à la théorie dirigeante et au promoteur du concept de la masaique canadienne.

Ains que nous le verrons, la carrière de Kirkconnell jette une vive lueur sur plusieurs aspects de l’histoire juive du Canada particulièrement dans le rôle de la press Yiddish.

Readers of the June 1943 edition of the *Jewish Standard* were surely aware of the ominous rumours concerning the fate of their brethren in Nazi-occupied Europe.¹ By this time they also had good reason to wonder if anyone besides

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Jews was concerned with the fate of European Jewry. Thus, it must have been reassuring to read a long poem by a Gentile which was highly sympathetic to travails of European Jewry. The poem, entitled, "The Agony of Israel," began:

Bow your heads, all ye nations
And humble yourselves, all ye peoples
In the presence of sorrow unspeakable
At the sight of anguish beyond measure;
For the sons of Israel are slaughtered all the day long
And the daughters of Jerusalem are violated and slain
And the synagogue is burned in the fire
And the place of the Congregation is utterly destroyed.²

The author's name was Watson Kirkconnell.

Today Kirkconnell's name is all but forgotten; fifty years ago it was familiar to the leaders of Canadian Jewry. This paper will trace his intellectual pilgrimage from fourth generation W.A.S.P. Canadian to leading theorist and promoter of the Canadian Mosaic concept. As we shall see, Kirkconnell's career throws a bright light on many aspects of Canadian Jewish history, especially on the role of the Yiddish press.

Kirkconnell was born in Port Hope, Ontario on 16 May 1895. Both his parents were teachers. After a brilliant scholastic career, marked by a love of learning for its own sake, Watson enrolled in Queen's University in October 1913. He decided to focus his luminous and intense intellect on philology and aspired to a Professorship in Comparative Philology or Comparative Literature.

By 1916 he had his M.A. and a gold medal in both Latin and Greek. He then volunteered for war service and spent the next three years guarding German P.O.W.'s at Fort Henry and Kapuskasing. After the war, Watson felt that it was too late to resume his pursuit of linguistic scholarship. A long siege of illness in 1919-20 added physical exhaustion to his mental exhaustion. By early 1921 he had lost almost all hope of continuing his education.

Suddenly, in the spring of 1921, the portal of scholarship opened once more. Watson won an I.O.D.E. scholarship to Oxford. But even the prospect of one year at this famous university could not completely dispel Watson's depression over the disruption of his education. He decided to become a journalist and convinced himself that an Oxford B. Litt. in Economics would provide a good background for what he admitted was "a humbler profession."³

Kirkconnell arrived at Oxford just when the great institution was recovering

from the War. It was a time when internationalism and the importance of the League of Nations were important discussion topics.⁴ Watson was very interested in the 'problems of the Peace' and devoted his B. Litt. thesis to an examination of the threat to world peace presented by high unemployment and rampant and renascent nationalism during the postwar recession.⁵ Watson believed then—and for the rest of his life—that nationalism was the greatest threat to a peaceful Europe. During a Christmas vacation tour of the Near East, Watson was powerfully convinced of the validity of his thesis when he witnessed the plight of the Armenians with his own eyes.⁶

Kirkconnell returned home in August 1922. He was preparing to seek a journalistic job when a great opportunity arose. Arthur Phelps, Professor of English at Wesley College in Winnipeg, offered Watson an assistant Professorship in English. Watson hesitated, knowing that he lacked formal training in this field, but Phelps's pleas finally convinced him. It proved to be the key decision of his life—for it kept a born scholar in the ranks of academe.

The sure vision of historical hindsight reveals that the location of Wesley College catalyzed Watson's encounters with the New Canadians. Winnipeg in the early 1920's was a Canadian Babel, whose polygot population epitomized the potentialities of the Canadian West. For many English-Canadians, Winnipeg was dangerously dominated by its foreigners who were held responsible for the General Strike of 1919. New Canadians rejoiced in the cosmopolitan diversity of the city and regarded it as an important cultural centre.

Confronted by this ethnic diversity, Kirkconnell vacillated between Anglo conformity and sympathy for the New Canadians. His fear of nationalism and his hatred of Communism led him to declare that "in Winnipeg . . . there had already been an attempt at revolution in 1919 . . . floated on a black river of revolutionary purpose among the foreign language radicals of the prairie city."⁸ Yet at the same time, Kirkconnell was prepared to look upon most New Canadians as "neither angels or devils, but three-dimensional human beings like the rest of us, striving to build a new existence in a new country."⁹

In 1924 Watson married Isabel Peel after a three year engagement. He was not to enjoy marital bliss for long; Isabel died on 16 July 1935 after giving birth to twin sons the previous day. This shattering blow threatened to turn the young Professor's life into a nightmare. He was now alone for the twins were left with Isabel's parents, and he lived in a garret on top of the Men's Residence—85 steps from the warmth of human companionship. Watson had always enjoyed solitude; but the crushing solitude of grief threatened his sanity.

To occupy his grieving mind, Watson turned back to his first love—philology. He determined to use the large number of languages he knew or had learned at Wesley to help him translate elegaic poetry in many languages as a memorial tribute to his wife.

Watson labored at his task for almost two years. He was careful to translate the poetry faithfully in order that each poem would retain the metre, shades of meaning, and “emotional voltage of the original.”¹⁰ The intellectual and emotional experience of these two years forever changed Watson’s opinion of New Canadians and their culture:

I confess that . . . the task [of writing the book of elegiac poetry] . . . became at last an instrument of deliverance and revelation, not in any religious sense as normally so conceived, but in the broadest realm of the human spirit. In the years before I had believed in an academic way in the common humanity of mankind. My studies in history, economics, and anthropology had helped me towards a fuller intellectual realization of that truth. But I had remained emotionally blind to the reality until my heart, made sensitive by grief, had felt through the poetry of fifty languages man’s common perception of the sacredness of grief and the beauty of life even in its tragedy.¹¹

Thus, Isabel’s death catalyzed Watson into becoming emotionally as well as intellectually involved with the New Canadians.

The publication of these collected elegiac translations as *European Elegies* in 1928 marked the emergence of Kirkconnell as the defender of New Canadians against Angloconformity. His insistence that the European cultural heritage of Slavs and Ukrainians was superior to that of Anglo-Canadians flew in the face of Angloconformists insistence on the cultural inferiority of the ‘bohunks’.¹² Like any new convert, Watson was filled with zeal; by 1930 he attacked the ‘melting-pot’ theory, cornerstone of Angloconformity, in no uncertain terms:

I disagree profoundly with those who would hack off completely all roots of European culture into conformity with some arbitrarily nationalistic pattern; I believe rather that the perpetration of the finest elements of Old World culture will incalculably enrich the life of the New World.¹³

Watson believed, a bit naively, that all properly enlightened men could be more tolerant of New Canadians. The only reason for their tolerance was ignorance. For a Professor the solution seemed obvious: write a book informing people about the beauty of New Canadian culture. Kirkconnell’s next book, *The New Heritage*, attempted to fill this need. It was published in 1930.¹⁴

The book opened with a short introduction which sought to dispel any myths equating race and language. The next thirteen chapters were filled with laudatory comments about the European heritage of many New Canadians. An entire

chapter was devoted to Jews.¹⁵

This chapter was written in the semi-apologetic style familiar to all readers of the late Chief Rabbi Hertz's works; Kirkconnell tried to prove that Jews were useful and a force for good in the world because of men like Halevi, Isaiah, Ibn Gabirol, Marx, Mayerbeer, and a host of others. As befitted an intellectual, Kirkconnell told the intellectual history of the Jews with a special emphasis on Spinoza. He also revealed his interest in poetry by quoting from and pontificating at length on the merits of Ibn Gabirol and Yehuda HaLevi.

Kirkconnell argued that when all the contributions of Jews to world culture were added up, it was obvious that the Jews had made many important contributions to world civilization.¹⁶ Kirkconnell now decided to take his intellectual odyssey against intolerance to the next logical step: he would prove that New Canadians had contributed as much to Canada as their forebears had contributed to world culture.

Driven by his belief that the fires of nationalism could only be quenched by the still waters of international and interethnic brotherhood, and fearful that the Great Depression would rekindle the same fires of nationalism that had led to World War One, Watson labored to build bridges between New and Old Canadians. Indeed he labored on three fronts simultaneously: he continued translating new Canadian poetry, he wrote his own verse, and he wrote on the multinational nature of Canada.

By 1935 he had translated even more European verse and had established himself as a poet of considerable stature with the publication of his first volume of poetry, *The Tide of Life*. Most of the poems in this volume had been written in 1928, and one, "Intolerance", is strikingly similar to Kirkconnell's earlier writing on this theme. The poem characterized Intolerance as:

A tireless fiend, winging from the tracts of hell

whose appearance was a loathsome as its origin:

Old smoke, odor of ash, lingers about thee yet
Old Chains, fetter and rack, jangle upon thy breast,
Old creeds, slimy and blind, crawl on thy filthy flesh
Old hates, fetid and foul, reek from thy patriot throat.

Yet Watson believed that this hell-bred carrion could yet be slain:

Times change, truth is increased, sunlight of reason dawns.¹⁷

It is obvious that the remarkable continuity of thought between "Intolerance" and *The European Heritage* was intentional. The poem sketches the

malaise; the book seeks to provide the cure by filling Kirkconnell's own prescription:

"Truth is increased, sunlight of reason dawns."

Yet all men have their biases and Kirkconnell was no exception. His relationship with Jews never proceeded beyond intellectual involvement: unlike many other ethnic groups he befriended, he was never quite able to understand the emotions of Canadian Jewry. The basis for this attitude lay in his Baptist upbringing, which instilled in him the belief that Jews were religiously inferior to Christians. As he typified Judaism in a poem entitled "Blood", ironically published along with "Intolerance" in *The Tides of Life*:

Mosaic cultus sanctified the gore
of butchered beast and bird, and more and more

Hosea raised his voice against a world
That so misused the character divine
Isaiah's curse was hurled
Against the blind and heartless Jews that sought
Their righteousness in blood; and Micah taught
That G-d had set the sacrifices as naught
But centuries annulled the vision of that day
And let priest confirm their savage rite.
Until at last G-d's all-fulfilling might
Brought forth a man who walked a humble way.¹⁸

In 1935 Kirkconnell released *Canadian Overtones*, a book of translations of poetry by New Canadians in seven different languages. Interestingly enough, Yiddish was not one of them. In his 1967 memoirs, *A Slice of Canada*, Kirkconnell stated that he could not translate Yiddish because, "my competence is too limited to be of much value."¹⁹ It is difficult to credit his word on this point. It is hard to believe that a man familiar with Hebrew and Middle German could not know Yiddish. Besides, Kirkconnell frequently reviewed Yiddish poetry, and, as we shall see, was familiar with the Yiddish press. We may also dismiss that notion that Watson hired a translator given his perennially precarious finances.²⁰

Canadian Overtones confirmed Kirkconnell's vision of Canada as a land whose cultural potential could best be achieved by integrating New Canadians into Canada without stripping away their ethnic past which could inspire a rebirth of Canadian culture.²¹

Canadian Overtones caught the eye of A.S.P. Woodhouse, editor of the *University of Toronto Quarterly*. He gave Watson a podium from which to spread his gospel of interethnic fraternity by appointing him editor of a 'New Canadian Letters' section. Kirkconnell held this post from 1937 to 1968 and re-

viewed New Canadian literature, and, for the first eight years, their press as well. This appointment marked the acknowledgement of Kirkconnell's pre-eminence as an interpreter of New Canadian culture.

As European events drew war ever closer, Canadians began to eye new Canadians as potential fifth columnists. Kirkconnell, ever vigilant when the goodwill towards new Canadians that he had so painstakingly nurtured was threatened, decided to exert a special effort. In summer 1938 he travelled to Europe to see the situation for himself. His reports, syndicated by the Southam newspaper chain, are remarkable for their total absence of commentary on German Jewry. At first blush, this would seem to be a policy dictated by prudence; Kirkconnell could not be expected to reveal the truth while in Germany and risk imprisonment. Yet, when Kirkconnell returned home he refrained from publicizing what he had seen.

Shortly after he returned, Watson gave a radio lecture on "Minorities in Europe".²² He did not mention the plight of the Jews at all. Only one conclusion is possible: Kirkconnell did not believe that Jews, unlike all the other new Canadian groups he came into contact with, were a minority group entitled to a homeland of their own. As we shall see, he never changed his mind on this vital point.

The event of *Kristallnacht* shocked many hitherto blase Canadians—albeit only for a short time. Watson was deeply shaken; his long emphasis on the basic brotherhood of Man was under attack. He joined the Canadian National Committee on Refugees which called for the admission of selected refugees into Canada and constantly urged that Jews make up some of these refugees on the basis of strict humanitarianism.²³ This policy was consistent with Watson's belief in the brotherhood of all men and he threw himself into the CNCR's work with gusto.

The shock of *Kristallnacht* led Watson to finally reveal some of the persecution of Jews he had seen on his European trip. In an article on "Canada and the Refugees" published in June 1939, he wrote vividly of antisemitism in Vienna and of refugees waiting without hope in Prague. But by far the most revealing part of the article told the story of a boat moored at Bratislava with "300 Viennese refugees aboard."²⁴ which could not enter Czechoslovakia or Hungary and whose return was barred by the Austrian police. It was only thirty years later that Watson finally revealed that these refugees were Jews.²⁵

By now war was imminent. All through the fear-filled summer and early autumn of 1939 Watson labored on a survey of new Canadian opinion as revealed

by their press. His verdict, which appeared in October 1939 entitled, *Canada, Europe and Hitler*, argued that 98% of the new Canadians were loyal citizens. Watson was particularly supportive of Canadian Jewry, who were under fire from Canadian Nazis as well as foreign foes. He refuted Nazi propaganda claims that Jews polluted Aryan stock through intermarriage by citing census figures revealing that the rate of Jewish intermarriage was phenomenally low. He also refuted the myth that the Jews controlled Canadian journalism²⁶

This careful analysis of the new Canadian press won rave reviews from critics and established Kirkconnell's name as the national expert on new Canadian opinion at a time when the Federal government was desperately searching for a way to monitor this opinion. This led to Kirkconnell's appointment to many government committees, the most important of which were the Nationalities Branch, the Bureau of Public Information, and its successor, the Wartime Information Board.

The desire to ensure a united Canadian war effort led Kirkconnell to maintain his vigilance on new Canadian opinion. This drew him into even closer contact with Canadian Jews. Many academics were interested in Watson's ideas now, and he was invited to London, Ontario to present a paper at the annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association in May 1940. Watson, recently appointed as Chairman of English at McMaster University, delivered a fascinating paper on "The European-Canadians in their Press", in which he reasserted his belief that the vast majority of New Canadians were loyal.

A good deal of space was devoted to the Yiddish press. Kirkconnell noted that the circulation of these papers was 121,011—a jump of 28,000 since 1931. He attributed this amazing increase, which brought an average of three newspapers to each Jewish house, to "religious consciousness, Zionist nationalism, and the outside pressure of community prejudice."²⁷ Yet, Kirkconnell was not afraid that the intense group consciousness of the News would lead to "a balkanization of our national life."²⁸ He reminded his audience that in the Great War Canadian Jews had enlisted and had been decorated at a significantly higher rate than the national average. He was sure that this performance would be repeated.

As a result of this paper, Canadian Jewry began to notice Kirkconnell. Louis Rosenberg glowingly praised him in his weekly column in Winnipeg's *Dos Yiddish Vort* as being "unique in Canadian life" because "he has gone out to meet us more than halfway."²⁹ Watson Kirkconnell's name became a household word for many Canadian Jews when he contributed an article entitled

'Canada, a Multicultural State'' to the second "Canadian Jewish Yearbook" which appeared in September 1940.

In this article Watson alluded briefly to his Winnipeg experience with the "aggressive and intelligent"³⁰Jews of that city. Most of his article focused on the possibilities of enriching national life through the maintenance of ethnic cultural diversity. He believed that the war would cement the ties between New Canadians and their new homeland as all united behind the war effort.

In Ottawa, many government ministers were interested in making sure that Kirkconnell's dream came true and that the new Canadians would unite behind the war effort. The Bureau of Public Information (BPI) was established in late August 1939. It was responsible to the Minister of Labor. In September and October its functions were broadened by a series of Orders-in-Council and on 8 December 1939, P.C. 4073 authorized the hiring of a Director. The BPI was to distribute information about the war effort and was to use the war as a unifying symbol for all Canadians. In July 1940 the BPI was given a higher profile; it was now the responsibility of the Minister of National War Services.³¹ This coincided with a fresh outbreak of Anglo-Canadian xenophobia that accompanied the invasion of France and the subsequent banning of the Communist Party of Canada and many of its ethnic affiliates.

By this time Canadian Fascism was all but dead; the government was thus able to focus all its attention on Communism, which was much the greater threat anyway.³² Communism was not really that great a threat either, but popular opinion equated all Eastern European immigrants with Communism. In actual fact, while the Communist Party of Canada was composed mainly of Finnish, Ukrainian, and Jewish members, only a minority of each ethnic group belonged to the Communist Party of Canada.

Kirkconnell had always been fervently anti-Communist.³³ He did not have much contact with Communism in Winnipeg,³⁴ but his research for *Canada, Europe and Hitler* had revealed that a minority of certain new Canadians were attracted to Communism. Watson was happy to observe that *Der Kampf*, the Toronto Jewish Communist newspaper, was actively denouncing Russia in September 1939.³⁵He reaffirmed this conclusion one year later in a Canadian Club speech.³⁶

By June 1941 his relationship with Canadian Jewry was at its apex. In a very important pamphlet for the BPI entitled *Canadians All*, and published in June 1941, Watson reminded his readers that both Russia and Germany ardently desired the destruction of the British Empire.³⁷ He then informed his readers that

the C.P.C. membership was mainly Anglo-Canadian, and that “their most aggressive leaders are . . . among the Scotch from Glasgow.”³⁸ Canadian Jews were discussed in a long section vetted by Oscar Cohen of the CJC-Central,³⁹ and were praised at great length for their excellent record in many diverse fields. Kirkconnell reminded his readers of Canadian Jewry’s distinguished war record and warned them that accepting antisemitism was the first step to “paralyzing our nationale morale” and thus playing into the Nazis’ hands.⁴⁰

Shortly after the publication of *Canadians All*, Germany invaded Russia. This event completely changed the BPI’s approach to wartime information. Now Russia had to be portrayed as an ally. The federal government went even further than many Canadians, including Kirkconnell, deemed necessary when BPI information began to endorse the Communist system itself.⁴¹ This leftward shift in government policy left Kirkconnell, who sharply differentiated between support for Russia and support for Communism, in disfavor with the government. His *Canadians All*, was withdrawn; it was re-released after all his anti-Communist attacks had been carefully expunged.⁴²

Kirkconnell was frustrated by these attacks, especially since they occurred just as he was gaining recognition for his many talents. In 1942 he won the Lorne Pierce medal of the Royal Society of Canada, and was elected president of the Canadian Authors Association and Chairman of its Writers War Committee. But his honesty in denouncing Communism coupled with the increasing ineffectiveness of the BPI at winning the loyalty of new Canadians led to the reorganization of the BPI into the WIB in August 1942. On 28 January 1943 John Grierson became effective head of the WIB. He was convinced that Kirkconnell was a Red-baiter and had to be dismissed.⁴³

On 1 February Kirkconnell lashed out in a Canadian Club address in Toronto on “Our Communists and the New Canadians”. He attacked the reappearance of Communist newspapers under new mastheads, such as the *Vochenblatt* whose editor, J. Gershman, was correctly identified as “a prominent Jewish Communist who surrendered along with Tim Buck last September and has been conditionally released.”⁴⁴ He calmly exposed Communist threats against him and promised to continue his battle against the relegitimization of Communism in Canada.

Kirkconnell was immediately attacked as being an antisemite by the Jewish community as a result of his speech. He claimed that the ADL was set loose on him—but this is dubious in light of the low profile in which Canadian Jewry preferred to adopt on these matters. Kirkconnell explained his actions by stat-

ing that he was only trying to tell the Jews, as he did every other ethnic group, to clean the Reds from their midst. As he noted in his memoirs, "It almost seemed that to label *any* political leftist as a Jew was the unpardonable sin."⁴⁵

This attitude is reasonable; at the time Kirkconnell was certainly not anti-semitic. But Canadian Jews did not like attention being drawn to divisive forces in their midst; and despite Kirkconnell's accusations, they were trying to clean their doorsteps of Communism. Despite Kirkconnell's best efforts, he did not quite understand the inner dynamics of Canadian Jewry—who chose to admit Communists into the Canadian Jewish Congress and other bodies—without giving them much responsibility and even less of their trust so as to present a united front to improve the overall image of Canadian Jewry. Kirkconnell prided himself on understanding new Canadians; he certainly did not understand the Jews as well as he understood the Ukrainians or Icelandic-Canadians.

In 1944, infuriated with the continuing leftward shift of government information policy, Kirkconnell published *Seven Pillars of Freedom*, a long, lavishly documented expose of CPC propaganda in Canada. Most of the information was accurate, and an infuriated Communist press swarmed around Watson like angry bees. But, unfortunately, Kirkconnell's assessment of Canadian Jewry departed from his usual standard of scrupulous accuracy.

In a lengthy discussion of the woeful lack of fraternity in Canada, Kirkconnell bemoaned the persistence of antisemitism. After reminding his readers that "wholesale extermination of the Jews is under way in Hitler's Europe"⁴⁶ he reprinted his poem on 'The Agony of Israel' and lambasted the government for its heartless refugee policy. All this was consistent in light of his attitude towards Canadian Jewry in the previous five years.

But now, frustrated by the advance of Communism and the apparent refusal of Canadian Jewry to heed his advice, Kirkconnell sounded a new note. He stated that 'one sole factor partly explains, without excusing, this national hardness of heart [towards Jewish refugees]. That is the notorious leadership given to Canadian Communism by a substantial minority of the Canadian Jews.

. . . Jews, moreover, have been the dynamic nucleus of the party.' He then continued with the outrageous suggestion that "Norman Freed is really no. 1 Communist, with Sam Carr, Annie Buller, Becky Buhay and Joseph Salsberg as part of the organizing centre . . . Comrades Buck, Smith, and Dube are merely strategic fronts for the boys in the back room."⁴⁷

As if this misinformation from a man who knew, but chose not to publish the truth were not enough, Kirkconnell went on to attack Canadian Jewry for elect-

ing Communists to Parliament, for attacking his work and credibility, and for not heeding his advice and cleaning the Communist from their midst. "You cannot keep a pig in a city backyard without the neighbours knowing about it," he proclaimed.⁴⁸

Kirkconnell then embarked on a stream of self-adulation, informing his readers that he had ruined his eyes learning foreign languages so as to better understand new Canadians. He stated that his work was motivated solely by "the desire for the building of a better way of life in Canada" and not for political gain.⁴⁹ He therefore insisted that he refused "to be frightened into silence by accusations of anti-Semitism and racial intolerance issuing from the Communist board of strategy and re-echoed in Jewish quarters."⁵⁰

There is no record of any official C.J.C. response to Kirkconnell's attack. David Rome clearly recalls that, contrary to Kirkconnell's claims, the CJC left him alone because "they were not in a position to go after anyone."⁵¹ But it is certain that Kirkconnell's attack met with disapproval from all those Jews who read it. They must have been shocked to see their former defender attacking them—but worse was yet to come.

The Gouzenko revelations convinced Kirkconnell that his lonely voice had been correct in its assessment of Communism. In the postwar year he continued to rail against Russia. His appointment as President of Acadia University in 1948 along with the supposedly apolitical complexion of this post did not still his pen when it came to Communism.⁵² A strange silence pervaded his relationship with Canadian Jewry which contrasted sharply with his friendly relations with new other new Canadians. He wrote no "letters to the editor" urging relief of Jewish postwar refugees and was equally silent on the issue of the partition of Palestine. As Kirkconnell's papers are not yet available, we can only guess at the reasons for this strange silence. We can guide ourselves by using the only two revealing tidbits of Kirkconnell's post-war thoughts on Jews.

In a 1957 review for his *Letters in Canada* in the *University of Toronto Quarterly* of H. Sawatsky's *Templars of Mennonite Stock*, Kirkconnell acidly linked his archenemies, the Communists, to the Zionist Israelis:

those [templars] in Russia were wiped out in World War Two by the Communists. Those in Palestine were driven out in 1946-48 by the Israeli invaders, along with a million other victims of Zionist violence . . . The author of the present history belongs to the group that was settled in Palestine until the Israelis usurped the land.⁵³

It seems that Kirkconnell had accepted the rhetoric of the PLO long before that group had even begun its existence.

In 1968 Kirkconnell delivered a Presidential Address to the Royal Society of

Canada. Ostensibly, his lecture was philological; it dealt with three legendary animals—the *Leviathan*, *Behemoth*, and *Kraken* that “may serve as emblems for political entities.”⁵⁴ After a long, often obtuse discussion on the nature of nationalism, Kirkconnell got to his major point. He discussed *kraken*, a Norwegian sea-monster, and described two views of it. “One”, he ingenuously noted “is often alleged to be an octopus of world finance, which was blamed by Neville Chamberlain for dragging France and Britain into an unnecessary World War II.”⁵⁵ Just in case this allusion was not clear to an audience of scholars, Watson provided a footnote which indicated the Forrestal Diaries as his source of information. A glance at the indicated page is clear enough: Forrestal remarks that J.P. Kennedy had informed him that “Chamberlain stated that America and the world Jews had forced England into war.”⁵⁶ After thirty years Kirkconnell had come full circle: he now was an antisemite.

This tragic and ironic *volte-face* is understandable given the tide of world events that first drew Kirkconnell and Canadian Jewry together and then swept them apart. For his part, Watson tried to “meet the Jews more than halfway” by informing himself of their customs, reading their literature and press, defending them against antisemitism, and pleading on Christian and humanitarian grounds for the admission of some of Jewish refugees into Canada. Until 23 June 1941, when Hitler invaded Russia, Kirkconnell’s desire to paint a favorable picture of Canadian Jewry meshed perfectly with the policy of the CJC.

The German invasion of Russia changed the face of the home front. It allowed Communism to relegitimize itself in Canada. Kirkconnell was brave enough to distinguish between aiding Russia and aiding Communism, but in the heat of the crisis the Canadian government found it more useful to blur this distinction.⁵⁷ Kirkconnell, one of the best informed men in the country on the real nature of the CPC, fought a lonely crusade against the government’s policy. Like many crusaders, he was ostracized and subjected to ridicule; like many crusaders, in his zeal he saw all the issues in the solid colours of black and white. Thus, the apparent refusal of Canadian Jewry to denounce Jewish Communists were met by scorn from Kirkconnell.

Despite his knowledge of Canadian Jewry, Kirkconnell could not quite transcend the cultural barriers between Christian and Jew that he himself had done so much to lower. He understood facts about Jews; he did not understand their emotions. He thus could not understand that even though Communists sat on the Joint Public Relation Committee (JPRC) and CJC Executive they were not trusted,⁵⁸ that Canadian Jewry, like the federal government, accepted the

Communists without trusting them, out of a desire to close ranks in wartime.

After the war, bitter at Canadian Jewry's apparent rejection of his advice despite his long and lonely battles on their behalf, his old animosities towards Judaism came to the fore. He could never reconcile himself to the idea of the Jews having a land of their own. After the Six Day War, with Israel's survival seemingly secure, his antipathy exploded into actual antisemitism.

Kirkconnell's career reveals that, in the final analysis, he was unable to overcome the cultural and emotional barriers between Gentile and Jew despite all his talents. His behaviour reveals that his idea of a Canadian Mosaic was a fragile intellectualism that collapsed under a wartime stress that evoked a more basic appeal to religious sentiments deeply inculcated in childhood and adolescence. It is tragically ironic, yet revealing of the intellectual weakness of the Canadian Mosaic concept, that a man of such clear vision who wrote sensitively about 'The Agony of Israel' at its darkest hour, spitefully refrained from supporting the establishment of the very state whose existence would prevent the recurrence of so agonizing a tragedy.

NOTES

1. W.V. Sefton. "The European Holocaust—Who Knew What and When—the Canadian Aspect." *Journal of the Canadian Jewish Historical Society* (Fall 1978):121-34
2. W. Kirkconnell. 'The Agony of Israel'. *Jewish Standard*. June 1943. p.5
3. idem. *A Slice of Canada*. (Toronto:University of Toronto Press, 1967),p.15
4. For a good description of Oxford life when Kirkconnell attended see C. Hollis. *Oxford in the Twenties* (London:Heinemann, 1976). It should be noted that Oxford was in academic decline at this time. See J.L. Granatstein. *A Man of Influence: Norman A. Robertson and Canadian Statecraft. 1929-68*. (Toronto:Deneau, 1981),p.11-17
5. His thesis was later published as *Internation Aspects of Unemployment*. (London: Allen and Unwin, 1923).
6. For a fuller discussion see J. Lipinsky. "The Intellectual Road to a Canadian Mosaic Concept: Watson Kirkconnell and the New Canadians, 1895-1945." (unpublished '2000' paper for Professor C.C. Berger, 1978) p.10-13
7. D. Bercuson and K. McNaught. *The Winnipeg Strike: 1919*. (Toronto:Longman, 1974), p.35,103-105
8. Kirkconnell. *Slice*. p.314
9. *ibid.*,p.260
10. *ibid.*,p.55-6
11. idem. *European Elegies*. (Ottawa:Graphic Press, 1928),p.11-12
12. The literature on this topic is voluminous. For a good review see H. Palmer. "Mosaic versus Melting Pot?Immigration and Ethnicity in Canada and the United States." *International Journal* 31(1975-76);488-528
13. W. Kirkconnell. *The North American Book of Icelandic Verse*. (Montreal: Louis Carrier, 1930), p.2
14. idem. *The European Heritage*. (Toronto:J.M. Dent, 1930)
15. *ibid.* chapter VII, p. 56-72

16. *ibid.*, p.56
17. *idem.* *The Tide of Life and Other Poems*. (Ottawa:Ariston, 1931),p.66
18. *ibid.*,p.22-23
19. *idem.**Slice*. p.76
20. *ibid.*,p.228
21. *Canadian Overtones*. (Winnipeg:Columbia Press,1935),p5
22. W. Kirkconnell. "Minorities in Europe." *Canadian Thinker* 2(December 1938):16-21
23. On the Canadian National Committee for Refugees see I. Abella and H. Troper. "Canadian Jewry and the Refugee Crisis" in J. Daglie and T. Fernando. (eds.) *Ethnicity, Power, and Politics in Canada*. (Toronto:Methuen, 1981):233-51, especially p.248-50
24. This article is reprinted in W. Kirkconnell. *Twilight of Liberty*. (Toronto:Oxford University Press, 1941),p.60-66
25. *idem.* *Slice*. p.335
26. *idem.* *Canada, Europe, and Hitler*. (Toronto:Oxford University Press, 1939),p.157
27. *idem.* "The European Canadians in their press." *Canadian Historical Association Report* (1940):85-92 at p.88
28. *ibid.*,p.90
29. *Dos Yiddishe Vort/Israelite Press*. (Winnipeg) "Kirkconnell field." 27 September 1940. p.1
30. W. Kirkconnell. "Canada, A Multicultural State." in *Canadian Jewish Yearbook 5701(1940-41)*. (Montreal:Canadian Jewish Yearbook,1940):p.97-101 at p.97. This may be the first use of the word 'multicultural' in Canada
31. For a brief historical account of the formation of the BPI see *Canada House of Commons Debates*. 8 July 1940, p.1393; 23 July 1940. p.1839; 17 February 1941, p.799. A full and excellent account may be found in W.R. Young. "Making the Truth Graphic: The Canadian Government's Home Front Information Structure and Programmes during World War Two." (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation:University of British Columbia, 1978)
32. L.R. Betcherman. *The Swastika and the Maple Leaf*. (Toronto:Fitzhenry Whiteside, 1973), p.137-46
33. W. Kirkconnell. *International Aspects*. p.200-219
34. *idem.* *Slice*. p.315
35. *idem.* *Canada, Europe, and Hitler*. p.179-86
36. *idem.* "European Elements in Canadian Life." *Canadian Club of Toronto*. 4 November 1940. p.9
37. *idem.* *Canadians All* (Ottawa:Bureau of Public Information, 1941),p.15
38. *ibid.* loc. cit.
39. *idem.* *Slice*. p.273
40. *idem.* *Canadians All* p.38
41. Lipinsky, "Kirkconnell". p.46-7
42. Kirkconnell. *Slice*. p.315
43. Young. "Making Truth Graphic." p.192
44. W. Kirkconnell. "Our Communists and the New Canadians." *Canadian Club of Toronto*. 1 February 1943. p.13
45. *idem.* *Slice*. p.274
46. *idem.* *Seven Pillars of Freedom*. (Toronto:Oxford University Press, 1944),p.189
47. *ibid.*,p.192-3
48. *ibid.*, loc. cit.
49. *ibid.*, p.194

50. *ibid.*, p. 194-95
51. Letter from D. Rome to J. Lipinsky. 27 April 1982 in the author's possession.
52. W. Kirkconnell. "Canadian Communists and the Comintern." *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada* (1948):91-116; W. Kirkconnell. "Integrity in Foreign Affairs." *Ukrainian Quarterly* 11 (Autumn 1955):300-310
53. *idem.* "New Canadian Letters". *University of Toronto Quarterly* (1957),p.416
54. *idem.* "Leviathan, Behemoth, Kraken." *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada* (168):161-170 at 161.
55. *ibid.*, loc. cit.
56. J. Forrestal. *The Forrestal Diaries*.
57. Young. "Making Truth Graphic" p.155-63
58. personal interview with Mr. F. Catzman, Q.C., 23 March 1982.

Erratum:

In David Bercuson's article *Illegal Corvettes: Canadian Blockade Runners to Palestine, 1946-1949* (VI: Spring, 1982 p.14) the sentence "Jewish Immigration to Palestine was *illegal* in any accepted international sense" should, of course read "Jewish immigration to Palestine was *illegal* in that it violated the regulations of the Mandatory government but it was not *illegal* in any accepted international sense . . .

The editor deeply regrets this error.