

**Faith Jones**

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**BETWEEN SUSPICION AND CENSURE: ATTITUDES  
TOWARDS THE JEWISH LEFT IN POSTWAR  
VANCOUVER**

The Vancouver Peretz Institute was founded in 1945, the result of both internal migrations of Jews from other parts of Canada and a growing post-Holocaust awareness of the need to provide specifically Jewish education even within secular circles. Initially the organization focussed on providing after-school programs to children up to age thirteen, with instruction in Yiddish and Hebrew, Jewish history, Zionism and secular ritual observance. At the time of its founding it was the only Vancouver Jewish organization to promote either Yiddish or secular culture.

Many of Vancouver's new Jewish residents hailed from the Prairie provinces, and had been active in similar organizations in Winnipeg and Calgary. In these locations, the Yiddish secular school movement was affiliated with left-wing Jewish organizations including labour unions and the Jewish wing of the Communist Party of Canada. The International Ladies' Garment Workers Union in Toronto, and many of the needle trade unions in Winnipeg, had large Jewish memberships that often formed the intellectual wings of the organizations. The major time of Jewish influence in the garment unions was during the interwar years, when Jewish immigrants found employment in largely working-class occupations. While there were always non-leftists within the unions, the Left was well organized and at times worked co-operatively with other components of the

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labour movement.<sup>1</sup> As early as 1919 the Jewish-dominated trade unions were active in the Winnipeg General Strike.<sup>2</sup>

Within the Left in Canada generally, Jews had a major influence on debate and policy.<sup>3</sup> Jews were active in the founding of the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) in 1921, and the CPC established its Jewish National Bureau in 1926, which published a Yiddish-language periodical. The Depression heightened discontent among Canadian workers generally, and Jews were particularly motivated by the rise of Nazism in Europe to become politically active. But this did lead to suspicion. According to historian Gerald Tulchinsky, Jews were well behind the two largest groups (Finns and Ukrainians) in membership in the Communist Party of Canada, never making up more than 10% of party membership.<sup>4</sup> In spite of this, “[i]n November 1937 the *Globe and Mail* editorialized that although not all Jews were communists, most communists were Jews.”<sup>5</sup>

In 1945, as the war was coming to an end, left-wing Jews formed the United Jewish People’s Order (UJPO). The group was formed by the merger of several existing Jewish groups with ties to the CPC but not officially affiliated to it. The UJPO had branches in many cities and focussed on youth activities as well as political issues. While not all UJPO members joined the CPC, there was a large overlap and most leadership within the UJPO came from party members.

The impetus to establish the Vancouver Peretz Institute initially came from a Vancouver member of the United Jewish People’s Order, which was already running cultural programs such as a theatre group, hosting speakers, raising money for left-wing causes, and holding social events which the entire Jewish left in Vancouver attended, regardless of party affiliation. The UJPO invited members of the community to a meeting in early 1945 to discuss the establishment of a secular school. These discussions resulted in a free-standing organization with no formal affiliation to the UJPO or the CPC, although overlap in membership was considerable and relations between the groups were cordial. By late spring a location had

been found, a principal—Ben Chud—had been hired, and a board had been elected. The opening day had to be postponed several weeks in the fall while Chud, stationed in Toronto after serving in Europe, awaited his release from the army.

Ben Chud, with his wife Galya, arrived in Vancouver to find a community with very little money but a great deal of organizational energy and experience. Within a short time the organization comprised many smaller groups, including two women's organizations. One was primarily a fundraising body consisting of older, Yiddish speaking women called the *Muter Fareyn*. These women were sometimes grandmothers of Peretz students, or had teenage children who were too old to attend the Peretz Institute's school programs but were involved for philosophical reasons. The other women's group was a PTA, which promoted self-education on child-raising, did pedagogical planning, and generally addressed concerns of new parents—in English. According to founding member Hyman Berson, most of the actual fundraising was done by women. However, the actual governing of the school was for many years done by a board made up almost exclusively of men: "We hadn't heard of the Women's Liberation, so the men ran the show and we *permitted* the women to send two delegates to the meeting," Berson commented acerbically years later. "Wasn't that kind?"<sup>6</sup>

The organization was politically and religiously diverse. Ben Chud and many of the younger adults were Zionist, partly as a result of wartime experiences. Others retained an anti-Zionist personal position but allowed a moderate, pro-peace Zionism to be espoused within the curriculum. When the state of Israel was founded, annual celebrations were instituted. Importantly, however, the school did not allow modern Israeli culture to replace traditional cultural forms taught in the school. While many members were anti-religious and politically left-wing, mainstream individuals who were affiliated with orthodox synagogues also participated. Max and Susie Dodek were the only family of this kind in leadership, but they were well respected within Peretz circles because of their enormous com-

mitment to fundraising and other practical aspects of keeping the school running.

In the early years of its existence, the Peretz Institute had normal relations with the larger Jewish community. The Vancouver Jewish community, although no longer as heavily orthodox as it had been in earlier years, was a largely religious, middle-class group. Unlike Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, or even Calgary, the Vancouver community did not have a large working class at any time in its history and no major involvement in the labour movement. Most Jewish leftists active in Vancouver came from the postwar influx from other parts of Canada rather than an earlier European immigrant generation. The established community was therefore not as diverse as in other parts of Canada. In the postwar years, the established community became increasingly Zionist in orientation: a Zionist curriculum, for example, was introduced at the Talmud Torah.<sup>7</sup>

Although the Peretz Institute did not fit this general picture, there was little hostility expressed towards the school and a great deal of support in practical ways. Many non-members donated money or goods to be raffled as fundraisers. “The community was quite generous,” founding member Anne Wyne remembered later.<sup>8</sup> The Peretz Institute had a representative on the Vancouver Jewish Administrative Council, the local body which coordinated activities, operated the Jewish Community Centre and published the *Jewish Western Bulletin*. The Peretz Institute was allocated funding through the United Jewish Appeal. Ben Chud in particular was respected in the community for his talents as a teacher and leader. He was several times hired to run the summer camp programs at the Jewish Community Centre. Gradually the Peretz Institute grew from after-school programs for children to encompassing adult recreational and educational activities, a morning kindergarten and social events. A building was purchased in 1947 which allowed for expansion of programs and provided financial stability. The Peretz Institute became the central Yiddishist organization in Vancouver, superceding its founding organization, the UJPO,

which now rented meeting space from the Peretz School. Close relations with the Left continued: according to Galya Chud, three members of the first Board were also members of the Communist Party.<sup>9</sup> The organization was internally tolerant of difference and although conflicts inevitably occurred, it was a highly stable organization, both in terms of membership and leadership, for the first seven years of its existence.

Beginning in 1952, the Peretz Institute experienced conflicts with the organized mainstream Jewish community in Vancouver. These conflicts resulted from Cold War pressures which had finally reached a head in the United States and elsewhere. Although no parallel to the House Committee on Un-American Activities developed in Canada, Canadian intelligence and government circles were subjected to pressures from the United States to spy on Canadians, to collect names of left-wing activists to supply to the United States, to revoke passport privileges for suspect individuals, and to apply pressure downwards on other branches of civil life to cleanse all suspected radicals from the ranks of civil service and law. The Canadian government responded to these pressures, and local and private agencies responded likewise to the pressures from government.<sup>10</sup>

Community and service groups also were pressured to purge undesirable elements from their ranks. While in the United States this occurred openly and on a grand scale (particularly in the labour and African-American movements, but also within Jewish communal circles), in Canada these efforts appear to have been scattered and short-lived, and to have involved euphemisms and rationalizations rather than naming anti-communism as the cause. Within the Jewish community, at least in Vancouver, there appears to have been a clear understanding that Jewish groups were particularly vulnerable to government pressure and threats of retaliation, and that in ousting the Left one might hope to preserve the rights and reputation of the remaining community. The historic association of Jews with the Left was never far from anyone's mind. As early as 1947 the *Jewish Western Bulletin* published an article argu-

ing that more Eastern European Jewish refugees, then languishing in Displaced Person camps, should be allowed to settle in western nations because they were not communists: the headline read “Jewish DP’s No Reds.”<sup>11</sup> Whatever the personal beliefs of the mainstream Jewish community, it continued to work with the Peretz School for five more years.

The first sign of McCarthyism’s influence on Jewish community functioning in Vancouver was the response to a proposition by the Canadian Jewish Congress (Congress) to disaffiliate the UJPO. The RCMP had noted the UJPO’s membership in Congress with some alarm, apparently believing the UJPO would attempt to split Congress or gain control of it. The RCMP had also circulated internal memoranda stating that the UJPO was planning to gain control of other Jewish organizations, citing as evidence an individual member of the UJPO’s election to the executive of a *landsmanshaft* organization. As Gerald Tulchinsky has noted, however: “The UJPO in fact had no influence on the Congress, then firmly controlled by the Montreal whisky tycoon Samuel Bronfman and its executive director, the lawyer Saul Hayes.”<sup>12</sup>

As an openly and unabashedly left-wing organization, the UJPO had long-standing clashes with Congress. The UJPO often held unpopular beliefs, maintaining an anti-Zionist position and supporting the Soviet Union long after the glow of wartime alliance had faded. The UJPO had also received press coverage of its vocal opposition to the re-armament of Germany, while Congress took a more neutral and bureaucratic route to protest quietly to the Canadian government. Therefore, while the UJPO and Congress were aligned on the issue, they differed on tactics and the UJPO’s tactics gained it notoriety which Congress felt unbecoming to the Jewish community. The trick for Congress was to turn political opinion and action into something that could legitimately be seen as contradictory to membership in Congress. The national executive of Congress declared in 1951 that UJPO members could not be elected as delegates to the upcoming Congress national meeting. Reasons

given were the UJPO submitting briefs to the government which conflicted with Congress briefs, taking positions considered not to be in the best interests of the Jewish people (these were not elaborated), and supporting “phony peace movements.”<sup>13</sup> Each of the four regional branches was asked by the national executive to expel the UJPO independently on these bases. Three of the four branches did, but the Pacific Region did not. At an acrimonious meeting in Vancouver, the UJPO managed to hold on to membership through a combination of appealing to principle and packing the meeting. (It should be noted that the right wing also attempted to pack the meeting, but were less successful).<sup>14</sup> Also helping the UJPO cause was the fact that a number of avowedly conservative members of the local community were staunch defenders of the right to dissent. Groups which spoke against the motion to expel included such mainstream and Zionist organizations as the National Council of Jewish Women and B’nai Brith. Also different in the Pacific Region was the fact that the decision was made democratically by the full membership of the regional branch. In the other regions only the executive voted on the motion after being instructed to remove the UJPO by the national executive.<sup>15</sup>

Unfortunately for Vancouver’s UJPO, the national executive decided on its own to expel it from the Pacific Region, on the grounds that it was inconsistent to allow it to be a member in one region when three had voted against it. Although this was obviously a disappointment for UJPO members, it did not immediately affect its work since its main areas of interest did not overlap with Congress concerns. The UJPO did not need Congress membership in order to continue presenting its plays in Yiddish and English; the Yiddish-speaking branch and the English-speaking branch both continued to publicize their meetings, speakers and events in the *Bulletin*.

However, this relative cordiality again did not last. In February 1953 the UJPO invited Joe Gershman to speak at its annual banquet. Gershman was the editor of the Communist Yiddish/English Toronto newspaper *Vokhnblat* or *Canadian*

*Jewish Weekly*. He had also been a founder of the UJPO and one of the most prominent Jewish Communists in Canada for many years. Born in Russia, he had joined the revolutionary movement because of its use of force against pogromists. When he arrived in Canada in 1921, joining his father who had left Russia before the revolution, he went to work in a fur shop and there became active in the union. In 1927 he was hired by the CPC to be, in his own words, a “professional revolutionary.”<sup>16</sup> Within the CPC Gershman was always considered a bit of a renegade because he openly espoused positions contrary to the official line—including in articles he wrote for *Vokhnblat*. However, as the UJPO was formally unaffiliated with the CPC, Gershman was free to speak under its rubric without party endorsement.

Gershman was to speak in Vancouver against Zionism and to critique Canadian Jewish leadership (presumably regarding the mainstream Jewish community’s timid response to the re-armament of West Germany). Gershman had spoken several times previously as the guest of the local UJPO, and notices had appeared in the *Bulletin*, without arousing much debate. On this occasion, however, his appearance caused a fury before it had even occurred. An editorial, piously headlined “*Bulletin* Maintains Freedom of the Press” nonetheless indicated that the decision to publish the notice of the event was not automatic:

...it must be admitted that our own initial impulse was to deny the facilities of the community’s newspaper for any publicity concerning this individual.

However, after a great deal of discussion, careful consideration of the pros and cons, and a searching analysis of the functions and obligations of a community newspaper the decision was finally reached by the President of the [Vancouver Jewish Administrative Council] and the Chairman of the Publication Committee that the principles of Judaism and democracy would best be served by accepting the advertisement.<sup>17</sup>

The editorial went on to detail the reasoning behind the decision: the importance of tolerance towards Jews from mainstream society serving as an example of the necessity to be tolerant towards internal minorities; and the recent decision of the Publication Committee to make itself available to the entire community. The editorial then devoted considerable space to decrying the position taken by Gershman and the UJPO, ending by saying “however indignant we may be...nevertheless we must not permit ourselves to be stampeded into denying democratic principles.” It was signed by J.V. White, President of the Vancouver Jewish Administrative Council.

This editorial could stand as a clarion call for liberal democracy were it not for the fact that within five weeks the UJPO had been expelled from the Vancouver Jewish Administrative Council and its publication privileges had been suspended. The earlier position in favour of freedom of expression appeared to be completely forgotten. Within one week of this move, the Peretz School was denied participation in the United Jewish Appeal. These two events, though officially unconnected, were orchestrated by the same segment of the Jewish community. The United Jewish Appeal was run locally by two groups, the Pacific Region of Congress and the Vancouver Zionist Organization. The Vancouver Zionist Organization was also the member group which proposed expulsion of the UJPO from the Vancouver Jewish Administrative Council. Therefore it seems that a certain segment of the community exercised enormous power over the umbrella groups. The umbrella groups in turn controlled almost exclusively local funding and local publicity.

The UJPO’s expulsion was a matter of public debate within the Jewish community. On March 12, the *Bulletin* reported on the Vancouver Zionist Organization’s decision to put forward a motion to expel the UJPO and deny use of communal facilities to the organization. According to the *Bulletin*, it was Gershman’s speech that had caused the Zionist Organization to make this request, on the basis that the local

UJPO adhered to Gershman's views. Gershman's speech had been heckled, and angry letters were exchanged by *Bulletin* readers regarding the proprieties of expressing dissent. This time the *Bulletin* editorial was written by editor Abe Arnold, who seemed to grasp the essential difficulties of resolving the request with the Vancouver Jewish Administrative Council's basis of existence:

To deal with the question in this [democratic] manner would certainly preclude any hasty action on the part of the Council. Object "D" of the constitution, if it has any real meaning, obligates the Council to investigate carefully and to seek to conciliate every controversial issue which threatens community relationships....

The move to expel an organization from the [Vancouver Jewish Administrative Council] is completely unprecedented. Moreover, the constitution does not appear to provide a basis for the board of representatives to carry out such an expulsion....

The final decision on a question of such importance, rests with the community at large...<sup>18</sup>

The same issue also carried lengthy statements, as paid advertising space, by both the Zionist Organization and the UJPO. The Zionist Organization's statement relied heavily on pro-Israel, anti-Soviet sentiment, and appealed to the most mainstream of Jewish identities:

The attitude of the UJPO and its sympathizers towards Israel and the Zionist movement being inimical and tending to bring into disrepute the ideals and principles of the Zionist movement as well as the leading Jewish personalities of our time, we are compelled to publicly declare our feelings of indignation and contempt that any professing Jew should espouse or condone the actions of the Soviet government within the borders of Russia and her satellite states....



So far as we are concerned the persons who subscribe to this malicious and anti-Jewish thesis cannot be considered from our point of view as members of the Jewish community.... We feel it our duty to expose and denounce all those persons, regardless of who they may be, whose beliefs and conduct are subversive, dangerous and damaging to the interests and self respect of the Jewish community, the Zionist movement and to the State of Israel.<sup>19</sup>

The UJPO deployed a rhetorical strategy that alternated between a tone of reasonable conciliation and a fiery call to action:

May it be stated at the outset that this proposed resolution as reported in the *Bulletin* is an attempt to bring about an atmosphere of hysteria which could only result in undemocratic actions leading to a disruption of the long standing unity of our community as represented by the Community Council....

This move is not in accord with the true interests of the Jewish people. Such an attempt to divide and split our people by drawing lines of demarcation between those who fully accept political Zionism and those who do not, is contrary to the tradition of our people and to the historic lesson of the Warsaw Ghetto fighters whose tenth memorial we will soon be observing. The heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto learned in the face of death the need for unity when confronting a common enemy....

Those who propose such irresponsible actions as expulsions, which do nobody any good, will be held accountable for their actions before the bar of history.<sup>20</sup>

At a three-and-a-half-hour meeting, in which 108 voting delegates and hundreds of other individuals participated, those engaged in the debate repeated the anti-communist, pro-Zionist position of the conservative groups and the “freedom of expres-

sion” rhetoric of the liberal and left groups. The vote resulted in passing the motion to expel the UJPO and its affiliated groups (the English-speaking branch and the Drama Workshop) by a margin of 73 to 35. The *Bulletin* article on the topic, probably written by Arnold, was neutral in tone but ended with an odd final paragraph:

In announcing the vote at the close of the meeting, Dr. J.V. White, Community Council chairman [sic], who presided, said he was saddened at the fact that such a move had to be taken during his term of office. He called on the expelled organization to seek to bring its views more in line with those of the majority of the Council so that it might be reconsidered for membership at some future time. He also said that the expulsion resolution would affect only UJPO groups as such and would not affect the status of any individuals with regard to entrance or participation in the Centre and its activities, or with regard to the use of the *Bulletin*.<sup>21</sup>

White, who had just a few weeks earlier declared “we must not permit ourselves to be stampeded into denying democratic principles,” appears to have been negotiating a tricky balance between his personal disagreement with the UJPO, his apparent democratic impulses,<sup>22</sup> and the wishes of the community he served. By clarifying the status of individual UJPO members at the close of the meeting, when all chance for debate on that issue was closed, he provided the loophole that served to undermine the expulsion. The UJPO circumvented the ban on publishing its name through a variety of transparent ruses. The UJPO Drama Workshop folded and a “new” group called the Vancouver Drama Workshop sprang into being with exactly the same members. *Bulletin* editor Arnold, who was friendly with the Peretz School (and later a member) and knew many UJPO members through that connection, no doubt promoted the most literal possible interpretation of the Vancouver Jewish Administrative Council’s ban. Since only the UJPO and not

individuals had been barred from using the *Bulletin's* free publicity pages, coded notices were put in the paper in which a particular person invited the community to a discussion on a particular topic. In a community as small as Vancouver's Jewish community in 1953, everyone knew what group was behind these notices: this suggests that the entire expulsion was in some ways a false front meant to show the community's anti-communist leanings.

Community reaction to the move continued to plague the Council and to be played out in the pages of the *Bulletin* for another year. Critics of the move believed it was a form of internal scapegoating as often occurs when there is pressure from the outside:

A great tragedy has taken place in our Jewish community life by expelling the UJPO... Judging by the closing remarks of the chairman [sic] Dr. White, we took it that all the leaders of the community council did not favo[u]r such drastic action. It would be a dishono[u]r if they would associate themselves with such a despicable piece of McCarthyism and witch hunting which is very much in vogue these days.... Do not get panicky and draw conclusions, I am not a member of the UJPO nor do I belong to any left wing group.... Should the [N]azis some day return to power and begin the selection to feed the gas ovens, I wonder if they will select only "bad" Jews.<sup>23</sup>

Although this correspondent signed his name, the *Bulletin* was willing to publish letters anonymously. A letter signed "A Grandmother" (against the expulsion) was answered by another signed "A Grandfather" (in favour of the expulsion). In October, a letter noted that the UJPO had circulated an open letter to the community requesting a reconsideration of its expulsion. The *Bulletin* printed this letter but did not cover this development because the Council appeared to believe even

reporting on the UJPO was tantamount to giving it the publicity from which it had been barred. The outcome or any debate on the reinstatement request therefore is not mentioned in the *Bulletin*, which appeared to rankle Arnold, who took his job as a journalist seriously. In 1954, he wrote a column describing the difficulties of covering controversial issues within the Jewish community, and asking readers to take a more active role in shaping the paper's coverage. Even in this column he ran into the very difficulties he was describing, since he could only allude obliquely to the UJPO:

Still another controversy of local concern is that involving the decision of the Community Council which has been interpreted as barring the reporting or discussion of the very problem concerning which the decision was made. This concerns the expulsion of a member organization of Council about a year ago and the application of that organization for re-instatement.<sup>24</sup>

Members of the UJPO went so far as to seek legal advice on the matter, but were informed that the newspaper's publishers were well within their rights to refuse advertising or publicity space to any group or individual.<sup>25</sup>

Although scapegoating the UJPO in reaction to McCarthyism is the most commonly perceived reason for the move, it is also possible that the UJPO had simply been a thorn in the side of mainstream Jewish leaders for long enough, and the popularity of anti-communist feeling in the 1950s allowed them to expel the group at that time when they would have preferred to do it much earlier.

The UJPO's expulsion from the Vancouver Jewish Administrative Council and its loss of privileges in putting notices in the *Bulletin* were perhaps foreseeable. In addition to the stormy relationship with Congress, 1953 was the year of the Rosenberg execution in the U.S., perhaps the height of the Cold War mentality when killing communists was more acceptable than killing former Nazis.<sup>26</sup>

The Peretz School's loss of funding was certainly more shocking and caused much more hardship. Throughout the McCarthy period various rumours circulated about the Peretz School, including that there was a picture of Stalin in the front hall. (It was actually a picture of I.L. Peretz, who does not particularly resemble Stalin aside from sporting a large moustache.) There were also numerous complaints about the non-religious nature of the school, which for many people was conflated with anti-religious and anti-Jewish sentiment. It was also connected in many minds to communism. Most oddly, although the school celebrated the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and continued to celebrate its anniversaries, the school was identified as anti-Zionist.<sup>27</sup>

The expulsion from the community was certainly a blow on a financial level, but more deeply felt was the insult to the school's achievements. Years later Saul Wyne told an interviewer:

It's nothing new in Jewish life...that if anything progressive comes along, the status quo don't like it. They want everything progressive or liberal out of the way.... [The right wing] started different rumours about the Peretz School: "it's a leftist school, it's not religious, they're anti-Zionist." All those are fabricated lies because we never preached anything against Zionism, we never preached anything against religion, we cared. We minded our own business, we brought up our own children in the spirit that the school was built on, not any other organization.... Then it reached a point to choke us we received very little funds from the United Jewish Appeal, and even that they wanted to cut out... They were trying to close down the school. But Jews don't give up.<sup>28</sup>

As Saul Wyne's anger years later attests, feelings about the injustice of the exclusion probably ran the highest in the leaders who had worked hard to make the school inclusive and accepting of a variety of political and religious viewpoints. The

Dodeks were devastated:

Max: When the Peretz School was banned that took a lot out of me. When people started to tell me “it’s a bunch of communists, 100% communists...”

Susie: Or “they teach the children communism,” which they never did.

Max: They never did. And I had to take that and I had to start explaining: “they are not teaching any communist [sic] in the book. You come and look over the book.” I says “the curriculum, I can’t see one communist word in the curriculum. The only thing is they don’t wear yarmulkes.”<sup>29</sup>

It is also the case that in at least one family individuals ended up on opposite sides of this divide, causing a rift that has never completely healed. In private, family members had agreed to disagree for some time and family relations were basically normal. After the expulsion and the funding retraction, when everyone knew who had voted what way, the sense of betrayal was strong. Those in the UJPO felt that their right to political expression had been sacrificed in order to buy community respectability for their conservative relatives.

One effect of the coincident, though officially unconnected, expulsions of the UJPO and the Peretz School from polite Jewish society was that the two organizations grew together. While maintaining separate spheres of work, joining each other’s groups and certainly support for each other’s events grew more crucial. According to one person involved in the school, the UJPO/Peretz nexus of families and friends retreated into an insular, self-contained community with little direct relationship to the rest of the Jewish community. Even those who were leaders in the Peretz School, devoting enormous energy to the school on an almost daily basis, only met with the organized Jewish community on official business. The school was again allowed to participate in the United Jewish Appeal starting in 1955, but the amount allocated to it was lower and each year brought a fresh threat of expulsion. This

situation continued for many years.<sup>30</sup>

Although the *Bulletin*, thanks to the editorship of Abe Arnold, continued to cover Peretz events or to print its news releases, these items took on a beleaguered tone. The 1955 official summation of the first ten years of the Peretz School, while celebrating its achievements, also contains ominous paragraphs that hint at the level of frustration:

Yet from the very first days of the organization of the School there have been people who found fault, spread rumo[u]rs and defamed the school. They have raised false issues and attempted to subvert the School....

The Peretz School is an independent organization, affiliated with no other body except the local Community Council and the Canadian Jewish Congress. Everybody is welcome to join the Peretz School if they are interested in progressive secular Jewish education.<sup>31</sup>

A big change for the Peretz School occurred when the *Bulletin* changed management in 1960. The Vancouver Jewish Administrative Council sold the newspaper into private hands, Arnold left as editor and the new owners apparently openly declared that there had previously been too much coverage of left-wing organizations like the Peretz School.<sup>32</sup> Although they did not stop listing Peretz events in the pages where all the community announcements were placed, longer articles, coverage of events, and photographs virtually stopped until the 1990s. Although no longer bound by decisions of the Vancouver Jewish Administrative Council, the new owners continued its practice of not mentioning the UJPO at all.

Another cause of friction was the question of how to commemorate the Holocaust. A free-standing committee of Polish survivors formed the Warsaw Ghetto Committee and UJPO members joined them in planning events around the anniversary of that event. The UJPO saw a movement of Jews who resisted their persecutors as more in line with their vision of revolutionary justice than the then-common perception of

Holocaust victims as timid and compliant even when marching to their deaths. The mainstream Jewish community was more inclined to commemorate Kristallnacht, a 1938 event in which German synagogues and Jewish-owned businesses were destroyed which is widely viewed as the first hint of the genocide to come. In the early 1960s the artist Arnold Belkin offered a mural depicting the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising to the Peretz School. However, since the school had no real security system it suggested that the mural be donated to the Jewish Community Centre. Although the Community Centre accepted this work of art by a well-known artist, it refused to hang it on the basis that it was too violent for the children who might see it. Although many child psychologists attested that the work would not damage children (and in the light of the graphic children's television of the 1990s it certainly appears to be a mild depiction of violence), the Community Centre has never hung the work permanently and has only displayed it occasionally in conjunction with specific events. This is still perceived in the Peretz School as a slight to both the school—which quite selflessly gave up this valuable piece of art—as well as to the artist.<sup>33</sup>

Community relations became extremely strained. In 1966 *Canadian Jewish Outlook*, a progressive magazine which included (and still includes) many UJPO members as contributors and editors, characterized the Canadian Jewish Congress as politically discriminatory and continuing to ignore certain segments of the Jewish community:

While speaking in the name of Canadian Jewry, some Congress leaders often conjure up a community which fits in with their own outlook and aspirations and resembles but little the actual realities. A good example of this attitude was provided by no less a personage than Mr. Samuel Bronfman, the prominent Canadian industrialist and Chairman [sic] of the Board of Governors of Congress. In addressing the New York United Jewish Appeal during December he declared: "Canadian Jewry was always Zionist-minded and never faced an internal struggle on this ques-

tion. Canadian Jewry is mostly orthodox...”<sup>34</sup>

Other small incidents with the mainstream Jewish community contributed to the Peretz School’s strained relationships with umbrella groups and official bodies. Threats to discontinue United Jewish Appeal and (later Jewish Community Fund and Council) funding came at regular intervals. In the 1960s the Peretz School applied to the Jewish Community Fund and Council for an additional grant for tax relief, due to an exponential leap in city property taxes. The Council advised the school to declare itself a religious organization to obtain tax exempt status and refused to give the grant on the basis that the school was not availing itself of this opportunity to avoid the tax. The school felt that for a philosophically secular organization to declare itself religious was a violation of its principles. Although in the 1980s the Peretz Institute qualified for a new “fraternal” designation with lower tax rates, and later the City of Vancouver created a non-profit exemption across the board, the City was in a legal position to seize and sell the property for back taxes for almost thirty years.<sup>35</sup> Council grants worked their way up to \$4,000 when the amount was cut in half in 1972. In 1974 the Council withdrew the Peretz School from the campaign, but reinstated it after public pressure.<sup>36</sup> The grant gradually increased again to \$9,000 in the early 1990s, when it was cut to \$5,000 (the current funding level).<sup>37</sup> One particularly bitter exchange between the Peretz School and the Jewish Community Fund and Council came in 1982 when the Council suggested the Peretz School sell the building in order to pay its taxes; it simultaneously suggested that any profit from the building would belong to the Council, not the School, based on the Council’s grants over the years. The School was enraged that what it considered meagre grants should come with an obligation that was not expected of any other recipient organization.

The perception of many individuals involved in the Peretz Institute and the UJPO continues to be that the main-

stream Jewish community would rather erase internal differences by marginalizing the secular, left-wing organizations, both through funding cuts and a lack of acknowledgement of the organizations' work and contributions.

I think we are one of the very few [secular Jewish organizations] in North America that has this difficulty. Toronto doesn't have this difficulty. Philadelphia doesn't have this difficulty. Cleveland doesn't have this difficulty. I don't understand what it is about Vancouver that they should still be living in the McCarthy era.<sup>38</sup>

Galya Chud, still an active Peretz member after fifty-four years, feels the tension has eased within the community, although she does note that many people do not understand the role of a secular organization. She also is hopeful that, having withstood the punishments of the McCarthy era, the Peretz School has emerged with its purpose intact:

Fortunately we have survived the worst of times, which was definitely the McCarthy era. Many, many people were intimidated, frightened of belonging to the Peretz School lest their names appear on some subversive list. It was a very painful time for many people, and it was a stigma that we were forced to carry for quite some time, a stigma which we did not ever deserve. Despite that, we're still alive, we're still here, and I think we have an important role to play in the Jewish community.<sup>39</sup>

The UJPO has also continued to exist, though with less success than the Vancouver Peretz Institute. More research is required to fully flesh out the story of the UJPO's relations with the rest of Canadian Jewry. Nationally, the UJPO was re-instated as an affiliate of Canadian Jewish Congress in 1995. According to the National Board of the UJPO, previous attempts to re-affiliate "had been met with a list of ideological conditions that no other Congress affiliate had been required to fulfill."<sup>40</sup> It should be noted that compliance with the blacklists of the era was not restricted to Congress nor to the Jewish com-

munity. Many communities and non-governmental organizations in Canada as well as the United States enforced blacklists to satisfy government regulators.<sup>41</sup> The vibrancy of the Left was further eroded following Krushchev's revelations of Stalin's wrongdoings in 1956. Thousands left the Communist Party, including several prominent Jewish leaders. The UJPO was similarly devastated.

It would be interesting to consider how branches in other parts of the country withstood the blacklist era: whether through making alliances with non-left community groups to work on particular issues, as the Vancouver UJPO did in its work on the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising committee; or through its cultural activities such as the Toronto Jewish Folk Choir; or in Camp Naivelt, a community outside Toronto which ran summer programs and continues to operate as a progressive Jewish retreat. However, overall the UJPO's membership is dwindling and its activities have almost ground to a halt. The reinstatement of the UJPO to Congress affiliation is primarily of symbolic importance as recognition by mainstream Jewish organizations of minority viewpoints.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>These issues are examined in detail in Ruth A. Frager, *Sweatshop Strife: Class, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Jewish Labour Movement of Toronto, 1900-1939* (Toronto, 1992).

<sup>2</sup>Gerald Tulchinsky, *Branching Out: The Transformation of the Canadian Jewish Community* (Toronto, 1998), p. 119.

<sup>3</sup>Irving Abella, ed., "Portrait of a Jewish Professional Revolutionary: The Recollections of Joshua Gershman," *Labour/Le Travailleur* 2 (1977): 185-213.

<sup>4</sup>Tulchinsky, *Branching Out*, p. 128.

<sup>5</sup>Erna Paris, *Jews: an Account of Their Experience in Canada* (Toronto, 1980), p. 145.

<sup>6</sup>Hyman Berson, interview by Naomi Katz, 12 July 1972, tape #19-72:11, Oral History Archives, Jewish Historical Society of British Columbia,

Vancouver, B.C.

<sup>7</sup>Rozanne Feldman Kent, *Educating Vancouver's Jewish Children: The Vancouver Talmud Torah, 1913-1959 and Beyond* (Vancouver, 1995), p. 114.

<sup>8</sup>Anne Wyne, interview by Naomi Katz, 18 June 1972, tape #19-72:12, Oral History Archives, Jewish Historical Society of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C.

<sup>9</sup>Galya Chud, interview by Josette McGregor, 20 May 1993, transcript, property of interviewee.

<sup>10</sup>These activities are documented in: Merrily Weisbord, *The Strangest Dream: Canadian Communists, the Spy Trials and the Cold War* (Toronto, 1983), and Len Scher, *The Un-Canadians: True Stories of the Blacklist Era* (Toronto, 1992).

<sup>11</sup>*Jewish Western Bulletin* 7 November 1947. The specious argument given was that those who were communists would have chosen to settle in one of the Soviet-block countries, and therefore the remainder were patently not communists.

<sup>12</sup>Tulchinsky, *Branching Out*, p. 131.

<sup>13</sup>*Jewish Western Bulletin* 18 October 1951.

<sup>14</sup>Sylvia Friedman, interview by Josette McGregor, 23 June 1993, transcript, property of interviewee.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup>Abella, "The Recollections of Joshua Gershman," p. 198.

<sup>17</sup>*Jewish Western Bulletin* 19 February 1953.

<sup>18</sup>*Jewish Western Bulletin* 19 March 1953.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

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

<sup>21</sup>*Jewish Western Bulletin* 26 March 1953.

<sup>22</sup>In addition to his comments in the earlier editorial, UJPO and Peretz members always perceived White as "friendly" to them, even following the expulsion. Confidential informant, interview with author, 23 February 1999, tape recording.

<sup>23</sup>*Jewish Western Bulletin* 2 April 1953.

<sup>24</sup>*Jewish Western Bulletin* 14 May 1954.

<sup>25</sup>Confidential informant, interview by author, 23 February 1999, tape recording.

<sup>26</sup>See, for example, letter to the editor, *Jewish Western Bulletin* 6 November 1953, which supports the Rosenberg execution. Letters were also

written in protest of the Rosenberg execution.

<sup>27</sup>It is important to note that in the course of my research, all of these rumours were repeated to me as fact by members of Vancouver's Jewish community.

<sup>28</sup>Saul Wyne, interview by Naomi Katz, 15 July 1997, tape #19-97:04, Oral History Archives, Jewish Historical Society of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C.

<sup>29</sup>Max and Susie Dodek, interview by Irene Dodek, 29 Oct 1973, tape #19-73: 06, Oral History Archives, Jewish Historical Society of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C. The *yarmulke* is the head covering worn by most male (and many female) Jews during prayers, and all the time by traditional male Jews.

<sup>30</sup>Soli Jackson, interview by Naomi Katz, 22 Oct 1997, tape #19-97:10, Oral History Archives, Jewish Historical Society of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C.

<sup>31</sup>*Jewish Western Bulletin* 31 May 1955.

<sup>32</sup>According to Josette McGregor, the *Bulletin* owners made this comment to her when she was researching the Peretz School. Sylvia Friedman, interview by Josette McGregor, 23 June 1993, transcript, property of interviewee.

<sup>33</sup>Sylvia Friedman, interview by Josette McGregor, 23 June 1993, transcript, property of interviewee. According to Friedman these events took place in the early 1960s. The Belkin mural was apparently again the cause of dispute in 1968, although "there was no article [in the *Bulletin*] on this issue, only a letter referring to the story in a local daily, the *Vancouver Sun*." [Lewis Levendel, *A Century of the Canadian Jewish Press: 1880s-1980s*, (Ottawa, 1989), p. 217]. The history of Warsaw Ghetto Uprising observance in Vancouver is also discussed in Jean Miriam Gerber, "Immigration and Integration in Post-War Canada: A Case Study of Holocaust Survivors in Vancouver 1947-1970" (M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1989), pp. 86-7. The entire issue of Holocaust remembrance in the Vancouver Jewish community cries out for further exploration.

<sup>34</sup>George Lewis, "We Beg To Differ," *Canadian Jewish Outlook* (March 1966): 8-9.

<sup>35</sup>It was not until the deaths of founders Sid and Sarah Sarkin, early in the 1990s, who left a significant bequest to the school, that the organization finally paid off this debt. Soli Jackson, interview by Naomi Katz, 22 Oct 1997, tape #19-97:10, Oral History Archives, Jewish Historical Society of

British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C.

<sup>36</sup>*Jewish Western Bulletin* 31 May 1974 and 7 June 1974. The story is not covered in the news section: the Peretz School took out advertising space to explain the situation to the community.

<sup>37</sup>Vancouver Peretz Institute, *I.L. Peretz Fifth Anniversary Jubilee Book [Finf Yoriker Yubilay-Bukh I. L. Perets Shul]* (Vancouver, 1952).

<sup>38</sup>Soli Jackson, interview by Naomi Katz, 22 Oct 1997, tape #19-97:10, Oral History Archives, Jewish Historical Society of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C.

<sup>39</sup>Galya Chud, interview by Josette McGregor, 20 May 1993, transcript, property of interviewee.

<sup>40</sup>Kim Lewis, "United Jewish People's Order Reinstated by Canadian Jewish Congress," *Canadian Jewish Outlook* (March 1995): 30.

<sup>41</sup>Most of the blacklisted interviewees in Len Scher's *The Un-Canadians* mention groups which excluded them, including churches, unions, and, in one case, the Girl Guides. Henry Rosenthal describes a job interview with B'nai Brith when he was asked if he had ever belonged to an un-American group, in spite of the fact that the job was in Canada (p. 224).