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Oyfn Veg Session One Discussion

To begin, let me say that it is a pleasure and an honour to participate in this well deserved tribute to Professor Gerald Tulchinsky. Jerry's contributions to the history of Canadian Jewry and through those works to a better understanding of Canada, as a whole, are of the greatest significance. It is no exaggeration to say that it would be impossible today to imagine conceptualizing or contextualizing the Jewish community of Canada without the guidance and insights of Jerry's works. And his studies of the Canadian Jewish community tell us a great deal about Canada as a whole. We, and future generations owe him thanks and appreciation.

The two papers on which I comment here are very different in scope and discipline, although both raise major issues of Canadian–Jewish life, one explicitly and the other implicitly. Professor Weinfeld's paper is a discussion of the old question of Jews' dual loyalty in its contemporary Canadian setting: the potential conflict of Jews' allegiance to Canada and to Israel. Dr. Lipinsky's paper focuses on a byway of Canadian–Jewish history that, perhaps surprisingly, illustrates some of the main themes of that history in the formative interwar period.

Lipinsky's paper has a narrow focus. It tells of the attempt in the 1920s to establish an agricultural school in Ontario for immigrant Jews. (In those years, there were two such schools in the US and one in Palestine.) Through micro–history, the paper illustrates the extent to which Canada has moved away from racist bi–nationalism and towards equality for all citizens and a multicultural perspective on Canadian society.

Despite the growing urbanization of Canada and the decreasing need for farmers as a result of mechanization, farming long remained a Canadian social ideal and an important criterion for determining the suitability of immigrants. As a highly urbanized group, Jews were considered "non–preferred" immigrants who would or might subvert that ideal. A number of Jews, in this case, Morris Saxe, "a trained European farmer," hoped to improve the desirability of their coreligionists as immigrants by, as Harold Troper put it, "mak[ing] farmers of them." Saxe and others believed in "productivizing" Jews, a process that had to the establishment of Jewish farming colonies in Palestine (now Israel), Russia, and South and North America, including the Canadian prairies.

Lipinsky's piece describes Saxe's personal connection to Frederick C. Blair, an antisemite and a racist, the go–to bureaucrat on immigration matters from 1924 to 1945, who set himself the task of acting as Canada's gatekeeper. But this is more than the story of an idiosyncratic do–gooder and his bigoted friend/nemesis. Writ small, it tells of immigrant chicanery, which helped seal the fate of the proposed school and of deserving (and less deserving) immigrants. Writ large, it illustrates the racism that governed Canada's immigration policies in these years, keeping out many potentially valuable citizens (Armenians fleeing the Turks, Jews fleeing the Nazis, and others) and made life unpleasant for many living in Canada (Ukrainians during World War

I, Japanese during World War II, First Nations people still).

As noted, Prof. Weinfeld's study focuses on the question of dual loyalty, Canada or (and?) Israel. He suggests that the Talmudic dictum, "The law of the land [in which one lives] is the law" for Jews no less than others, should serve as an answer to anyone who raises the issue. That dictum, however, is actually limited to money matters and not broadly applicable. (One might note, ironically, that an area in which Jews often transgress is money matters.) Weinfeld also points to the common practice of reciting a prayer for Canada or the queen during synagogue services as a means of undercutting the canard. The practice is, in fact, of ancient provenance, although one of its motives has undoubtedly always been a declaration of loyalty to the local powers. Today it is customarily followed by a prayer for the state of Israel.

Weinfeld asserts that the adoption in 1982 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms with its "*equal rights paradigm*" has reinforced the legitimacy of dual loyalty in Canada. My own work indicates that Canada's shift from binationalism to multiculturalism helped transform the country's Jews from outsiders to insiders and also strengthened the legitimacy of dual loyalty. Weinfeld illustrates all this in his analysis of the career of Irwin Cotler, who served as federal justice minister while remaining an eloquent and outspoken advocate for Israel. Implicit is a comparison with the United States, where the myths of the founding fathers and the melting pot make dual loyalty less acceptable. Weinfeld notes that the potential problematics of dual loyalty in Canada at the present moment are ameliorated by the unswerving support of Israel (and other embattled Canadian voter groups in their native countries, such as the Tamils) by the present (Conservative) government. Consequently, the abandonment of the Liberal Party for the Conservatives by many Canadian Jews, serves as an affirmation of loyalty to both Canada and Israel. (One could also see it as reflecting Jews' voting their perceived economic well-being.)

Interestingly, then, when Weinfeld embarked on a field study, what he calls the "Tebbit" or "cricket" test, he found an unexpected degree of discomfort and ambivalence regarding Canadian Jews' allegiance. Asked whom they would support in a sporting competition between Israel and Canada, prominent community members waffled and even then insisted on anonymity. One might well infer then, that there is less difference between American and Canadian Jews than expected, all the more so in an era when some extraordinarily wealthy American Jews have supported Israel's prime minister in his public criticism of the American president and secretary of state.

Two very different papers: a micro-history and a look at a refrain that reverberates throughout Jewish history from ancient times to the present. Both describe interesting aspects of Canadian Jewish life. More importantly, they situate the community in both the Canadian historical context and the Jewish historical context.