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Reflections on Antisemitism in French Canada

Et, pour vrai dire, what more political
 is there to say after you have said :
 À bas les maudits Juifs!
 A. M. Klein¹

Introduction

It is more than appropriate that we are gathered together at this conference to honour Gerald Tulchinsky for his work that has served to shape the contours of Canadian Jewish history in the past two decades in which Canadian Jewish studies has arguably become a field of its own.²

He represents the transition from the community-based historiography of Canadian Jewry, as represented by the work of B.G. Sack, Louis Rosenberg, and David Rome, to take three distinguished examples, to that of university-trained and based academics. It is telling that in his survey of the historiography of the Jews of Canada in his initial 1992 history, *Taking Root: the origins of the Canadian Jewish Community*, Tulchinsky acknowledges only three academic predecessors, all of whose works had preceded his own book by less than a decade: Bernard Vigod (1984), Michael Brown (1986), and Irving Abella (1990).³ Of these three, it is evident that Brown's book made the most impression on him, as the other two books are described in a sentence apiece, whereas Brown's *Jew or Juif* is given four meaty sentences which conclude with the statement that the book "will remain an important point of departure for students in this field for years to come."⁴

This presentation will look at one of the theses of Michael Brown's book that impressed Tulchinsky: "the rejection of Catholic Québec as a major conditioning factor in the Canadian Jewish experience." The issue concerning the historical relationship between Jews and French Canadians is not merely fundamentally important for any responsible presentation of the historical development of Jews in Canada, it is also arguably the most controversial. Phyllis Senese is correct when she wrote "the history of antisemitism in Québec remains to be written" and that, further, "a great deal of superficial and shallow writing on antisemitism in Québec is in print."⁵ I also agree with André Elbaz when he states that antisemitism in Québec, while similar to manifestations in Europe and the United States, "révèle ici des traits spécifiques à l'évolution historique et idéologique du Québec."⁶

Analyses of antisemitism in Québec vary widely, to say the least. At one extreme, there is Denis Vaugeois who, in his recent award-winning volume on the Hart family of Trois Rivières takes issue with a statement of Jacob Rader Marcus that Aaron Hart had encountered "a great deal of anti-Jewish sentiment": "Where did he find this 'anti-Jewish sentiment?'" Vaugeois writes, "I searched long and hard for it, in

vain. And that, in fact, was the reality of ‘Canadian’ Jews: there was not an ounce of anti-Jewish sentiment around them...Rather than ‘anti-Jewish sentiment,’ all doors were open to Jews...”⁷

At the other extreme, one finds affirmations that a pronounced antisemitic current of thought existed in Québec, embodied, according to Esther Delisle, in prominent personalities like the Québec nationalist historian, Lionel Groulx, and in the Montréal francophone daily, *le Devoir*, and not merely in radical antisemitic and pro-fascist Adrien Arcand.⁸

Moreover, the issue of historic antisemitism in Québec is one of the few issues dealt with in the field of Canadian Jewish history that has become a major subject for public media discourse and controversy in Québec and elsewhere. It is, in other words, a public issue debated not merely in scholarly journals but in the op-ed pages of the Québec daily press in both French and English. If for no other reason the subject deserves our close attention.

Finally, the fact that I am currently some 275 pages into the writing of a manuscript on *Antisemitism in Canada*, commissioned by Wilfrid Laurier University Press, has forcibly impressed me with the need to try to make sense of the complex and often-conflicting data with respect to antisemitism in Québec. What follows is not and does not pretend to be a comprehensive look at antisemitism in Québec, for it will not directly address the considerable and related question of antisemitism as it manifested itself in English Canada. It should rather be considered a series of reflections on an issue that has merited considerable and sustained scholarly and public attention.

The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

The first Jews in eighteenth century Québec were British subjects. This meant that there was no legal basis for discriminating against them as Jews with respect to their pursuit of a livelihood. It meant as well that they were English speaking and accustomed to British ways. They were therefore a generally good “fit” in British North America and constituted a significant proportion of Québec’s small English mercantile community in the eighteenth century.⁹ If these Jewish merchants were resented, then, it is most likely that it was not primarily resented as Jews but rather as part of a British mercantile class that had aggressively displaced French Canadian merchants through superior political and trade connections. They would thus have been largely assimilated by French Canadians of that era into their resentment of the British “other.”¹⁰ It is not unlikely that negative Christian attitudes toward Jews, the heritage of both Protestants and Catholics in Québec may have occasionally come to the surface, though Tulchinsky finds “little evidence” of this.¹¹ He does remark, however, that “non-Jews did business with Jews despite the existence—possibly even the preva-

lence—of attitudes that held Jews in contempt, fear, and mistrust.”

There was, however, one area—political life— in which Jews in Québec were subject to prejudice in society as Jews. This key event was Ezekiel Hart submitting his name as a candidate for the Legislative Assembly of Lower Canada in 1807. His brother, Moses, had previously been warned by their father, Aaron Hart, that “I should be glad if you were elected a Member of the House...But what I do not like is that you will be opposed as a Jew. You may go to law, but be assured; you will never find a jury to favour you or a party in the House to stand up for you.”¹² The contemporary political debate on this issue, which was of a virulent and partisan nature, included the following relative to Hart’s ability, as a Jew, to represent his constituency:

[T]he Jews are everywhere a people apart from the body of the nation in which they live...a Jew never joins any other nation. He makes it a religious duty, a consistent rule of conduct, to keep separate from other people...By what right can a Jew be entrusted with the care of the interests of an entire people when he thinks only of himself and of his sect?¹³

The result of the Hart affair was that professing Jews were to be barred from the legislature. This precedent meant, as Tulchinsky states, that in Lower Canada, in principle, “Jews were now second class citizens. They were ineligible for membership in the Assembly and legally unfit to hold other office, civil, judicial, or military...” On the other hand, as Tulchinsky also points out, “[e]xcept for the Assembly, the ban does not seem to have been enforced.”¹⁴

Anti-Jewish opinion was also expressed in the aftermath of the failure of the failed rebellions of 1837, in a manifesto of the “Hunters’ Lodges (Frères Chasseurs) that called for “the strangling of all Jews and the confiscation of their property.”¹⁵ Dr. Aaron Hart David confided to his diary that his move in 1840 from Montréal to Trois Rivières was occasioned by the “aversion to our religion” in Montréal, which made it impossible for him to establish a medical practice.¹⁶ Nevertheless, Jews and Judaism failed to become an overt political issue in an ongoing way in early and mid-nineteenth century Canada.

On the other hand, Jews were apparently wary in their relations with the majority. When, in 1858, an Italian Jewish child, Edgar Mortara, was taken from his parents on the grounds of his alleged baptism, there was great worldwide protest in many Jewish communities. Significantly, a leader of the Jewish community in Montréal was reported as having stated at a protest in New York that Montréal Jews hesitated at speaking out in their hometown because “those with whom we are in daily intercourse...are subject to the Church of Rome.”¹⁷

The Era of Major Jewish Immigration

As early as 1884, Yosef Bernstein, an Eastern European Jewish immigrant living in Montréal, wrote an article for a Russian Hebrew-language newspaper, *ha-Melitz* in which he reported at great length that Canada was not immune from the plague of antisemitism.¹⁸ Antisemitism certainly manifested itself across Canada in this era, but in Québec the Jewish community faced four additional factors that increased tensions, particularly with French Canadians.

First of all, Jews in Québec had to contend with the sense that prevailed among French Canadian political leaders that immigration to Canada only served to diminish the percentage of French Canadians in the population, and hence diminish the political power of French Canada in Ottawa.¹⁹ For this reason alone, immigrants as such would be likely to be resented by many French Canadians.

A second factor was likely connected with general French Canadian resentment of English social and economic domination of the Province of Québec, and of Canada as a whole. Whereas in the early part of the twentieth century, the economic and social position of the English in Québec seemed all powerful, the Jews, who quickly adopted the English language and sent their children to English Protestant schools, were perceived as constituting a weak point that could be attacked with little fear of the consequences.²⁰

A third factor in French Canadian attitudes toward Jews was the predominantly urban character of the Jewish immigration. For many French Canadian intellectuals, like Lionel Groulx, the ideal French Canadian life was rural, and cities constituted a threat to the purity and integrity of this life.²¹ Jews, who were predominantly urban residents in the experience of French Canadians, became for them a symbol of all that was wrong with the big city.

The fourth factor also had clear political implications, but was essentially more religious in nature. It had to do with the fact that Roman Catholicism in Québec had taken on a decidedly ultramontane character.²² Ultramontanism was, as Bernard Vigod put it, “an arch-conservative, authoritarian reaction to liberal influences and revolutionary events.”²³ It contributed significantly to the ways in which Roman Catholics in Québec understood their relationship with Jews. The Papacy in the nineteenth century was vehemently opposed to the very aspects of the modern world that had revolutionized the status of Jews and enabled their equality. Therefore ultramontane Catholics would naturally take exception to the modernist, liberal, and leftist perspectives that “enjoyed a fairly warm reception among lower-class immigrants in Montréal, especially in the Jewish community.”²⁴ French Canada’s ultramontanism also led to a sympathetic hearing for traditional Catholic condemnations of Judaism. They certainly included traditional condemnations of Jews as killers of Christ, but

they went far beyond this. They also included condemnations of the Talmud and reiterations of Jewish hatred of Christians and Christianity, as well as accusations that Jews were commanded to kill Christians and to use Christian blood in their rituals.²⁵ The arguments of antisemitic French intellectuals, like Maurice Barrès, that “a true national ethics...obligated an anti-Semitic posture toward the Jews” resonated deeply in clerical circles in Québec.²⁶

Moreover French Canadian traditionalist nationalism, as reflected in the works of well-known public intellectuals like Henri Bourassa and Lionel Groulx, viewed French Canadians as a “race” whose sacred life, divine mission, and integrity were threatened by urbanization and new cultural models.²⁷ Thus they looked upon Jews, who symbolized all the various threats to the integral French Canadian way of life, as people whose influence on Québec society, like that of the English, had to be resisted.²⁸ Indeed, as Michael Oliver states, “it was difficult to see that nationalists of the Groulx school could be anything but suspicious in their relations with other ‘races’.”²⁹ We see that French Canadian nationalism and antisemitism became connected in the minds of Montréal Jews as early as the turn of the century.³⁰ Of both the English and the Jews Groulx had this to say:

We do not prevent anyone from living, but we want to live too ... I am, if I may say, neither anti-English nor anti-Jewish. But I see that the English are pro-English and the Jews are pro-Jewish. And insofar as such an attitude contradicts neither charity nor justice, I am careful not to blame them for so doing. But then I wonder why the French Canadians are everything except pro-French Canadian.³¹

For his part, Bourassa wondered why English Canadians preferred “Sicilians, with their knives, Polish Jews and Syrians” to French Canadians.³² But Bourassa also chastised French Canadians for:

That childish revenge of empty words spent on denouncing the Jews, swearing against the Irish and depicting the whole of the English-speaking people as coalesced against the French instead of winning the respect of all races by struggling for our rights and showing respect for ourselves.³³

While Groulx was not comfortable self-identifying as an antisemite, his way of explaining himself is most revealing. He wrote in 1954:

It is clear that Christian charity forbids us any form of antisemitism. On the other hand, with respect to the Jew, should we behave with carelessness and recklessness? History and daily observation have all too well demonstrated to us [the Jews'] most revolutionary tendency. Lacking roots wherever he is, refusing any assimilation, he is quite indifferent to the political and social order around him. That is the reason, therefore, that he is mixed into

all revolutions [even] when he is not one of its main agents. We must also equally contend with his innate passion for money, an often monstrous passion which lacks all scruples.³⁴

In French Canada principled opposition to Jews and Judaism at the turn of the century expressed itself clearly in the public square. Thus some organizations, like the Union of Franco-Canadians, and l'Association Catholique de la jeunesse canadienne-français adopted openly antisemitic resolutions,³⁵ while others considered the foundation of political groups similar to the powerful Ligue Antisémitique de France.³⁶

Anti-Jewish feeling in Québec at the turn of the century expressed itself in several well-publicized incidents. In 1910, Ernesto Nathan, a Jew, had been elected mayor of Rome. Accusations that he had insulted the pope led not merely to the adoption of anti-Nathan resolutions, but also to large and vociferous anti-Nathan rallies in Montréal and Québec City that included denunciations of the Jews by Catholic clergy and French Canadian journalists and politicians.³⁷

In that same year, notary and journalist Joseph Edouard Plamondon, addressed l'Association Catholique de la jeunesse canadienne-français in Québec City. This group had sponsored in 1908 a lecture by L.C. Farly who had urged driving Jews out of Canada and Québec, boycotting Jewish merchants, and creating an antisemitic league.³⁸ Plamondon's topic was an accusation against the Jews as ritual murderers, usurers and enemies of the Church, utilizing to the full historical and contemporary Catholic accusations against the Talmud. He further called for revocation of equal rights for Jews and for their exclusion from the country.³⁹ As a result of his speech and its subsequent publication in *La Libre Parole* and as a separate pamphlet, Jewish businesses and the synagogue in Québec City were vandalized and individual Jews were assaulted.⁴⁰ Following this, a civil action was brought against Plamondon by two Jews who resided in Québec City. Plamondon's arguments against the Talmud were aired in court and sustained by three expert witnesses, all Catholic priests.⁴¹ In the end, Plamondon was acquitted on the grounds that though he had indeed defamed "the Jews" in his speech and writings, no single individual had been libeled. He was, however, ultimately found guilty of defamatory libel by the Québec Court of Appeal.⁴² The ambiguous results of the Plamondon case presaged the difficulty Jews would find in gaining redress for antisemitism in the Canadian court system.

The Interwar Period

In the interwar period, French Canadians had a complex relationship with Jews that began with the residential propinquity of Jews and French Canadians in Montréal. As Gerald Tulchinsky points out, this residential pattern might be due to "the historical accident of where settlement first occurred...and where institutions...were first established. But it is equally plausible to interpret the definite persistence of

Jewish settlement by the overwhelming majority of Montréal's Jews from 1900 to 1950 amongst French Canadians as an indication that Jews felt more comfortable with them as neighbors."⁴³

Propinquity, however, also meant conflict. Jewish funeral corteges were occasionally stoned,⁴⁴ and poet Irving Layton remembered growing up Jewish in Montréal in the 1920s in this way:

The strongest memory I have is of clashes. Around Easter...something seemed to happen to the gentiles. They took it as a cue to come and beat up on the Jews. So, without fail, every Easter, they would descend on the embattled Jews with bottles and bricks, and we'd be waiting for them on the roofs, like an army, with sticks, and stones, with anything.⁴⁵

Away from the street and its physical conflict, French Canadians put great intellectual effort into determining what place, if any Jews were to hold in Canadian society. That Canada should overtly espouse the values of Christianity was well expressed by M. Ceslas Forest in a 1935 article "la Question juive au Canada," which stated that, "by becoming Canadian citizens, the Jews have accepted to live in a Christian country. There the promised freedom finds its limit. Their demands, however legitimate they may be, must never interfere with the character of our institutions and our laws."⁴⁶

Forest's essay was inspired by the controversy over Jewish school boards in Québec,⁴⁷ and had many echoes in French Canadian Catholic opinion. Since many Catholics affirmed the notion that the Jews nursed a profound hatred against the Church and its faithful,⁴⁸ the 1930 Québec Government proposal for the establishment of a Jewish school board could be treated as "an attack on Catholicism and on the values all French Canadians cherish."⁴⁹ Abbé Antonio Huot wrote that the Jews had no right to their own schools since "if we consider the natural and divine law, the Jewish religion has no right because it is corrupted and because according to the expression of God's own will it must give way to the Christian religion...according to the constitution and laws of our country the Jewish religion has no right either, for the Jews in Canada are immigrants who simply have to accommodate themselves to our laws."⁵⁰

The Jewish school issue also led elements in the Québec press to remind Jews that they were guests in Canada who did not have the right to demand equality of treatment.⁵¹ In 1938, Roger Duhamel gave a somewhat radical interpretation of this sentiment in *L'Action Nationale* when he advocated the position that a group such as the Jews, which wished to preserve its own faith and traditions, should refrain from participating in public life.⁵²

In 1933, McGill principal Sir Arthur Currie, who headed an institution that administered a quota system for the admission of Jewish students,⁵³ reported himself pleased that there was only one Jew in an incoming law school class numbering thirty-nine

because other prospective Jewish students had chosen the law school of the Université de Montréal.⁵⁴ At the French-language Université de Montréal, because there were relatively few Jewish students (no more than 69, or 4.4% of the student body in the academic year 1935–1936),⁵⁵ no quotas were imposed and the presence of Jews on campus was not opposed by the administration. However the legitimacy of their presence at a Catholic university was the subject of protest by members of the French Canadian student body of the university⁵⁶ as well as some French Canadian politicians.⁵⁷

The most notorious case of exclusion of Jewish medical personnel in Canada occurred in Montréal in 1934. In May of that year, Dr. Samuel Rabinovitch, the highest ranking graduate of the medical faculty of the Université de Montréal, was appointed chief intern at Montréal's Hôpital Notre Dame. His appointment was considered a provocation by the hospital's thirty-two interns who went on strike. The interns' strike was widely publicized and soon turned into a cause célèbre, with support for the strikers coming from doctors and nurses at five other Catholic hospitals in Montréal.⁵⁸ The interns expressed concern about working with Dr. Rabinovitch as well as the conviction that Catholic patients would find it "repugnant" to be treated and touched by a Jewish physician.⁵⁹ There was strong journalistic support for the strike on the part of French-Canadian nationalists, as expressed in *Le Devoir* and by the Société St. Jean Baptiste.⁶⁰ Though there were certainly voices within the French Canadian community condemning the strike, most notably by Montréal's liberal journal of opinion, *Le Canada*,⁶¹ the strike was ultimately settled by Dr. Rabinovitch resigning his position and obtaining an internship in the United States.

Rabinovitch was clearly up against more than simple professional prejudice. His appointment as chief intern at a leading French Canadian hospital had touched a very sensitive nerve. Historian Everett Hughes has observed that French Canadians of that era, no less than Jews, viewed the professions as "one of the favorite and surest ways of upward mobility", and thus tended to be "especially jealous" of perceived encroachment in what they considered to be a French Canadian professional domain. In the same vein, N.L. Nathanson's 1936 appointment to the Board of the Canadian Broadcasting Company was decried by *Le Devoir* on the grounds that the seat given to a Jew was not being given to a French Canadian.⁶² Similarly, Member of Parliament Samuel Jacobs' request to be appointed part of Canada's delegation to the 1936 coronation of King George VI was successfully opposed by Ernest Lapointe and Pierre Casgrain on the grounds that Québec should not be represented by a Jew,⁶³ and Samuel Factor's potential cabinet appointment met with the same opposition.⁶⁴ This sensitivity was also evident in this era among French Canadian lawyers, some of whom were "among the most bitter and outspoken agitators against English—and Jewish—invasion of the French Canadian domain."⁶⁵

Another aspect of this situation is that while Jews were not the only target of French Canadian resentment, they were relatively less powerful. As Hughes stated:

The symbolic Jew receives the more bitter of the attacks which the French Canadians would like to make upon the English or perhaps even upon some of their own leaders and institutions...Against the Jew, however, attack may proceed without fear either of retaliation or of a bad conscience.⁶⁶

In the Québec of the interwar era overtly anti-Jewish manifestations seemed to proliferate. Signs indicating “No Jews,” or “Gentiles Only,” or “Jews Not Allowed,” were increasingly to be found in the Laurentian Mountains, north of Montréal, where many Montréal Jews summered.⁶⁷ These Jews faced occasional harassment in resorts like Ste-Agathe and Val Morin, and, in 1935 in Val David a synagogue filled with worshippers was set on fire.⁶⁸ In the summer of 1939, French Canadian agitator Adrien Arcand spoke against the Jews in the Laurentian village of St-Faustin on July 23. The very next Sunday, July 30, Abbé Charland of Ste-Agathe announced a campaign against the Jewish presence in his community.⁶⁹

There thus grew a widespread perception that antisemitism in Québec was worse than elsewhere in Canada. As Toronto rabbi and Canadian Jewish Congress leader, Maurice Eisendrath, put it: “Here [in Ontario] it [antisemitism] is subtle. There [in Québec] it is widespread and demonic.”⁷⁰ In 1937, F.I. Spielman of the Canadian Jewish Congress wrote that “the rising tide of Anti-Semitism in the Province of Québec has assumed such proportions that it has become imperative for us to strengthen our position for the defence of the community.”⁷¹ However lest we think that Québec was in this era uniquely antisemitic compared to the rest of Canada, we should heed the words of A.M. Klein, who looked at this phenomenon from a Montréal perspective:

...editorial writers go out of their way to give the impression that the entire province of Québec is a domain of intolerance...This is simply not the truth and one has a right to question the motive of such wholesale prosecution... either the pious defence of a discriminated minority is being used as an instrument of denigration against the French-Canadian minority; or the crusader...is pointing to Québec antisemitism only to draw attention off his own.⁷²

In the 1930s, to the great consternation of Québec’s Jewish community, no single representative of the Québec Catholic Church condemned antisemitism. As Canadian Jewish Congress official, H.M. Caiserman stated:

Neither the French Canadian religious, political or cultural leaders, not the general press of the province (French and English alike) uttered a single word of disapproval or condemnation of the most irresponsible and libelous accusations leveled against the Jewish population.⁷³

On the contrary, often the political leadership in Québec fed fuel to the fire of anti-Jewish public opinion. Thus Québec political leader, Maurice Duplessis, who publicly disassociated his government with antisemitism,⁷⁴ publicized a rumour that 100,000 German Jewish refugees from Nazism were planning on coming to Québec to settle on farms. This set off a veritable wave of resolutions and protests against the idea of settling so many Jews in Québec.⁷⁵ The campaign within the French Canadian community against Jewish immigration continued throughout the period in which Jewish refugees fleeing the Holocaust sought refuge in Canada. In 1944, the Société St-Jean Baptiste campaigned against Jewish immigration with a petition that received over 150,000 signatures, led by a young Jean Drapeau.⁷⁶

This does not by any means mean that there were no voices in French Canada raised against such antisemitic manifestations. Henri Bourassa, who had been a strong anti-Jewish voice in the House of Commons debate on the Lord's Day Act, abandoned his anti-Jewish rhetoric in the late 1920s and stated in the House of Commons in the 1930s that antisemitism was an absurd monstrosity.⁷⁷ Bourassa expressed his current views on the subject in a 1934 letter to M.S. Bessler:

I deplore as you do the stupid and coarse attacks against the Jews, without distinction between respectable and non-respectable Jews...it seems to me that your compatriots are taking these attacks too seriously. They especially do not distinguish sufficiently between their declared enemies and certain well-intentioned though possibly ill-informed men who are suspicious of a certain number of Jews whose spirit of monopoly is becoming manifest in public or private enterprises.⁷⁸

As can be seen, however, Bourassa's change in attitude and repudiation of antisemitism did not mean that he had no ambivalence about Jews. He believed in the "international tendencies of the [Jewish] race, its financial power, and its hold [*empris*] over the press."⁷⁹ It is also clear that during the Second World War he lent his name and prestige to the movement against conscription and spoke at rallies that also had speakers like pro-fascist Paul Bouchard state: "We don't want to see thousands of young Canadians die overseas to save international Jewry's finances."⁸⁰

The proposed boycott of Jewish shops and businesses in Québec arose in the 1930s under the name "Achat chez nous," with the slogan: "If we do not buy from them, then they will leave." It was sponsored by various French Canadian organizations, including l'Action catholique and the Société St-Jean Baptiste, which attempted to get French Canadians to promise never to buy from a Jew.⁸¹ Here is how the issue was presented by Lionel Groulx, writing under the pseudonym of "Jacques Brassier":

Antisemitism is not only not a Christian solution [to the Jewish problem], it is a solution that is negative and ridiculous. To resolve the Jewish problem,

it would suffice if French Canadians regained their common sense. There is no need of extraordinary legislation; no need for violence of any sort. We will only give our people the order, "Do not buy from the Jews"...And if by some miracle our order were understood and complied with, then in six months the Jewish problem would be solved, not merely in Montréal but from one end of the province to the other.⁸²

While "Achat chez nous" does not in its title specifically target Jews, its spokesmen were clear enough. Henri Leroux wrote in 1926 that the organization had to "fight against only one foreign race, the Jews."⁸³ Another Québec cleric assured an audience in Vancouver that "Achat chez nous" was not directed at English Canadians but solely at Jews.⁸⁴

A number of French-Canadian newspapers assigned substantial space to the support of the "Achat Chez Nous" campaign. Prominent among them were *Le Devoir*, *L'Action Catholique* and *L'Action Populaire*.⁸⁵ There is some evidence, however, that these calls for boycotting Jewish stores were largely ignored by French Canadians. Thus, after two strongly antisemitic articles published in *L'Action catholique* on April 27 and May 5, 1942, Québec City Jewish merchant Charles Lax reported to H.M. Caiserman of the Canadian Jewish Congress on May 26, 1942, "We do not think that the articles published in the Action are having any ill-effects on business as the Jewish stores are still doing well and there is plenty of money in circulation."⁸⁶ And indeed it is noteworthy that *L'Action Catholique*, despite its editorial policy, was taking advertisements from Jewish stores, particularly the Québec City department store owned by Maurice Pollack.

Chain stores, department stores, high finance, and the burden of mortgages, were blamed on the Jews.⁸⁷ French Canadians were advised not to buy from Imperial Tobacco, a company with Jewish ownership, but rather to "fumez Chrétien."⁸⁸ Even French Canadian journals, like the Liberal *Le Canada*, were not immune from anti-Jewish sentiment in their pages. A.M. Klein, in response to an apology by *Le Canada* for such a story, commented:

...the management of *Le Canada* ...repudiated Mlle. Oligny's sentiments, saying that those were but an expression of her personal opinion....*Le Canada* in its apology, if it is intended as an apology, makes reference to favorable articles about Jews that it printed. We must admit that it does not seem much of a defense to us for a newspaper to state that it does not spread its Jew-baiting all over the journal, but reserves it only for a special department.⁸⁹

As if this were not enough, Jewish shopkeepers often experienced legal harassment for opening their establishments on Sunday in contravention of federal legislation

mandating closure on the “Lord’s Day.” Even though in Québec the law had been modified by provincial legislation that did allow Sunday openings, in practice the law was interpreted in a restrictive way to cover individual proprietors and not corporations.⁹⁰ Even at that the exemption became a political issue in the 1936 provincial election and was attacked by Maurice Duplessis, then the leader of the opposition.⁹¹

In the 1940s there was an attempt to build a new synagogue in Québec City. Unfortunately, the Québec City Jews ran up against a wave of public opposition to the planned new synagogue building stemming from their French Canadian neighbours that influenced the Québec City municipality to oppose the building of the new synagogue. Québec City’s *Chronicle Telegraph* on December 3, 1941, editorialized that:

...if it [the opposition to the synagogue] does not imply anti-semitic sentiment actively, it does so negatively at least; otherwise there would be no objection to Jewish citizens erecting a synagogue for their own use whenever they see fit.⁹²

The Jewish perspective on this opposition is perhaps best summarized in the words of A.M. Klein:

Our readers will no doubt remember that for the last several years, Québec Jewry has been desirous of building itself a place of worship in that pious city. Every time a site was purchased, however, the city fathers of Québec found...that a building permit could not be granted...the synagogue question has already been converted into a political playground...⁹³

On the recommendation of the Canadian Jewish Congress the Québec City congregation took the matter to court and began building on the site that the Québec municipality had officially expropriated for park land. While the matter was before the courts the basement of the synagogue was built.⁹⁴ As Rachel Smiley describes it, “with hostile mass meetings taking place in the adjoining park, the building took shape.”⁹⁵ From the perspective of the congregation, the city fathers of Québec were taking one unconstitutional step after another to prevent the construction of a place of Jewish worship. A.M. Klein wrote:

They did, in fact, prepare the intellectual (?) background to acts such as finally occurred. When certain influences, week in week out invoked all the shibboleths of mediaevalism and went rampaging in a veritable orgy of Jew-baiting, they did, in fact, without benefit of torch or phosphorous, prepare the milieu for a deed such as was finally perpetrated.⁹⁶

On the eve of the dedication of the new synagogue, scheduled for May 21, 1944, there was a fire in the synagogue. It was immediately and widely reported that this was a case of antisemitic arson, possibly the most notorious antisemitic act ever commit-

ted in Canada. Because of the fire, Québec City acquired a reputation as a city that had forbidden the construction of a synagogue and burned a synagogue built in the midst of a war in which the Allies were fighting for, among other things, “freedom of religion.”⁹⁷

Another issue the Jews faced was that of Communism. It is fair to say that mainstream French Canadian political figures in the interwar period opposed Communism and often had Jews as Communists in mind when they made some of their policy recommendations. This is clearly illustrated by the 1930 Jewish school issue. While there was vehement public opposition to granting a separate school Board for Jews in Montréal for numerous reasons, one of them certainly had to do with the widespread notion that Jews constituted a prime source for the Communist subversion of the Canadian system. Thus the Archbishop of Québec, Cardinal Félix-Raymond-Marie Rouleau, wrote Québec Premier Louis-Alexandre Taschereau that if there were to be a Jewish School Committee, there would be no guarantee “against the encroachments of Bolshevik propaganda, when even with the current provisions for supervision it is said that there are Jewish—or Russian Jewish—schools with Bolshevik tendencies in this very province.”⁹⁸

This attitude on the part of the Québec Church hierarchy doubtless informed its decision to recruit the antisemitic journalist Adrien Arcand to oppose the legislation, and this marked the real start of Arcand’s long career of antisemitic journalism and activism in his publications.⁹⁹ In these publications, the identity between Jews and communism served as a major theme. Arcand thus described the Russian Communist leader, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, as of “Judeo-Mongol origin” who spoke fluent Yiddish and who had declared the Jewish Sabbath as the official day of rest in Soviet Russia.¹⁰⁰ He also sought to use the communist issue as a springboard for an assault on the legal status of Jews in Canada, in this way going beyond the bounds of “respectable” French Canadian journalistic opposition to Jews.¹⁰¹

Lionel Groulx demonstrated that he shared this attitude toward Jews as communists when he wrote: “Many reputable authors believe that ... [Jews] cultivate [communists] in larger quantities than others, and this gives us sufficient grounds for wariness.”¹⁰² André Laurendeau, leader of the Jeune Canada movement likewise wrote in *Le Devoir* of April 27, 1933 that the Jews constituted a social danger to the country because of their internationalism and their communism.¹⁰³

Even though the absolute number of Jewish communists in the province was relatively small (in 1928 it is estimated there were only some sixty Communist Party activists in Québec, of whom some were certainly French Canadians and others),¹⁰⁴ Jews had become so identified with Communists that Pierre Dansereau, a leader of Jeune Canada, could state in 1933: “Mais chaque jour l’internationalisme juif (qui d’aucuns appellent communisme) fait des progrès même chez les nôtres.”¹⁰⁵ In a meeting

of Jews and French Canadians in the 1930s, the Jewish participants were pointedly asked: Why are so many Jews communists?¹⁰⁶

In Québec, the attitude of the government toward communism was particularly fraught. The Federal Government, in 1935, had repealed article 98 of the Criminal Code, under which membership in a “revolutionary” organization or even attending a meeting of such an association was a criminal offense.¹⁰⁷ However in Québec in 1937 the provincial legislature, at the urging of Premier Maurice Duplessis and with the approval of Cardinal Villeneuve,¹⁰⁸ enacted an Act Concerning Communist Propaganda, popularly known as the “padlock law.” This law allowed police to close any house, school, or building used by communists for their propaganda. This legislation was widely used against both leftist unions and political groups,¹⁰⁹ and even cultural events by communist-linked groups like the United Jewish People’s Order were attended by police.¹¹⁰ In this atmosphere of great suspicion, even labour organizations, like the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, which were decidedly anti-communist in their politics, had their activities in Québec placed under suspicion and perceived as a plot by “international Jewry.”¹¹¹

Insofar as many anti-Communists saw in fascism the most effective opposition to the Communist menace, many of them tended to give support to fascist causes in the 1930s.¹¹² Thus *L’Action catholique* remarked editorially that while Adolf Hitler may have made mistakes, he had saved Germany from falling to the communists many of whom, in Germany as in Russia, were Jews.¹¹³

Arcand tried to harness together anti-communist and anti-Jewish sentiments to further his cause. In the public meetings he organized, in the newspapers he edited, as well as in his organizations, notably l’Ordre des Goglus, the Parti national social Chrétien (1934) and the Parti de l’unité nationale (1938),¹¹⁴ Arcand concentrated largely on “the Jewish problem” and spreading fear and hatred of Jews.¹¹⁵ He wrote in a 1933 pamphlet:

Jewry because of its very essence, because of its destructive instincts, because of its ancient atavism of corruption, because of its exclusively materialist feelings, constitutes the real danger for the peoples whether materially or spiritually. This is why the Jewish Question needs to be at the foundation of any true fascism, of any serious movement of national regeneration.¹¹⁶

He further wrote:

Jews are like cockroaches and bugs. When you see one you can be sure that there are dozens around, and when you see a few around in the cities and in all the streets don’t be fooled. There are more around. It is too bad we cannot exterminate them with insecticide.¹¹⁷

It was clear to Arcand, whose publications often reprinted the virulently anti-Jewish images and texts of the German Nazi periodical, *Der Stürmer*,¹¹⁸ that there was no crime that the Jews were not capable of and that they did not actually commit. Thus Arcand alleged that the kidnapping of the child of Charles and Anna Lindberg in 1937 had been committed by Jews seeking to use the child's blood in Jewish rituals.¹¹⁹

Arcand developed a noticeable following in Québec, and, to a lesser extent, in the rest of Canada. His followers may have been relatively small in absolute numbers, but they were considered a potentially dangerous force and were thus investigated by agents of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who had hitherto confined their reporting to leftist threats to Canada's security. RCMP reports in the late 1930s indicated that Arcand's supporters were in the process of infiltrating factories and government agencies. In particular, it was reported that at the Montréal customs house pro-fascist activities took place quite openly.¹²⁰ By the late 1930s, Arcand's Parti de l'Unité Nationale boasted of approximately 6,000 members, of whom 5,000 were in Québec, and the movement gained considerable publicity in Canada as well as in the United States.¹²¹

When Jewish leaders in Montréal organized a protest rally against Nazi anti-Jewish atrocities, they were met by a counter-protest in April, 1933 organized by André Laurendeau, leader of Jeune Canada, to rebuke those French Canadian politicians who had shown sympathy for the Jewish plight in Germany.¹²² Laurendeau and his organization made this counter-protest because of Laurendeau's belief, obviously influenced by the antisemitic ideas that were commonplace in this era, that "the Israelites aspire—everyone knows this—one happy day when their race will dominate the world," and that the persecution of the Jews in Germany was not a reality but rather a pretence put forward by the Jews for their own purposes.¹²³

These same sentiments inspired a group of students from the Université de Montréal to demonstrate against the Jews on Montréal's Ste-Catherine Street on 29 September 1933.¹²⁴ Rowdy anti-Communist riots by students in which antisemitic slogans were heard as well, also took place in October, 1936.¹²⁵ Similar outbreaks of antisemitic slogans took place in 1942 in the midst of the referendum campaign over the issue of conscription for overseas service. A meeting of the anti-conscription League for the Defense of Canada, of which Laurendeau was a leader, resounded with cries of "down with the Jews." Laurendeau later claimed that these antisemitic manifestations were met with a strong protest from the podium by Ontario labour leader, Landon Ladd. According to Laurendeau, Ladd's protest got a round of applause from the crowd that was, however, not mentioned in any newspaper report. Laurendeau also attributed the anti-Jewish slogans to Arcand's people who had come to the meeting solely in order to make trouble.¹²⁶ He further claimed that it was they, and not his supporters, who subsequently demonstrated on St-Laurent Boulevard, scuffling with young Jews and smashing windows of Jewish shops.¹²⁷

Laurendeau himself began to have second thoughts on the Jewish issue when he visited Europe in the mid-1930s and he publicly expressed regret for his actions much later.¹²⁸ Looking back on his actions as leader of Jeune Canada in 1933, Laurendeau claimed that:

I can remember to the last detail how we got the idea for each of our political meetings, except for that one in particular, which we baptized "Politicians and Jews"...But we held it just the same, because a cloud of anti-Semitism had polluted the atmosphere...everyone was looking for a scapegoat.¹²⁹

Anti-Jewish tropes were heard in Québec political campaigns during World War II during which the provincial Liberals were derided as Jew lovers in the newspaper *le Bloc* with the slogan: "a vote for Godboutsky [Québec Liberal leader Adélard Godbout] is a vote for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob..."¹³⁰

Canadian Jews in the 1930s saw a stark analogy between them and the Jews in Germany, especially in Québec. The following *cri de coeur* went out from a Jewish member of the Ontario legislature:

Unless something is done quickly, the Jewish people may well meet the same fate in Canada that the Jews are meeting in Germany...No fire is so easily kindled as anti-semitism. The fire is dormant in Canada, it has not yet blazed up, but the spark is there. Germany is not the only place with prejudice. Look at Québec."¹³¹

In confronting the enormity and gravity of all the antisemitic charges and prejudices arrayed against them, Jews in Canada attempted to utilize the political process to create laws against spreading such hatred against them or other identifiable groups. These efforts, predictably, ran into problems.

In response to Arcand's antisemitic libels of the early 1930s, the two Jewish members of the Québec legislative assembly, Peter Bercovitch and Joseph Cohen, introduced a bill in the legislature against "the publication and distribution of outrageous subject matter against any religious sect, creed, class, denomination, race, or nationality" clearly aimed at Arcand's publications.¹³² The bill received extensive criticism in the Québec press, both French and English, and there appeared little support for the bill outside the Jewish community. In the end, Liberal Premier Taschereau, while strongly condemning antisemitism, announced that he could not support the bill and that the proper redress for Arcand's diatribes was through the courts. The bill thus died in committee.¹³³

The Jewish community then looked to the courts. A 1932 test case (*Abugov v. Ménard*), however, proved that existing law did not give Jews adequate recourse. The judge vigorously condemned the defendants, calling Arcand's publications "anti-Chris-

tian, anti-social, and anti-national"; but lamented the fact that he lacked legal authority to issue more than a moral injunction.¹³⁴ Premier Taschereau then prepared an amendment to the Civil Code dealing with issues of hate speech directed against identifiable groups only to withdraw it when Arcand's newspapers stopped publication due to bankruptcy in 1933.¹³⁵

The Postwar Period

The Canadian Jewish Congress, ever vigilant in its campaign against all manifestations of antisemitism in Canada, published an article in its *Bulletin* of 30 May 1947 indicating a subtle but distinct change for the better in the relationship between French Canadians and the Jews:

Since...January 1945 there has been a series of developments whose import cannot be exaggerated. This is not to say that racial or religious prejudice has disappeared from this part of Canada any more than from any other part. Nor is it implied that there has been a volte face or a change of policy or of doctrine among this section of the Canadian people. Rather might it be said that the friends whom we have always had among them have become more active in the presentation of their views...The change has been great although its symptoms are intangible.¹³⁶

Saul Hayes of the Canadian Jewish Congress was able to report in May 1949 that "Antisemitism does not present an immediate menace to the Jewish community today."¹³⁷ French Canada, which had been a major focus of Canadian Jewish concern in the interwar era, had seemingly turned a corner.

One of the major reasons for this sea change was surely the public revelation of the enormity of the Holocaust. Thus in 1952 André Laurendeau, who had been so strongly against allowing any Jewish immigration to Canada prior to the war, stated:

After the assassination of six million Jews under Hitler's reign, one must have a too delicate stomach to swallow these fanatical denunciations without heaving. Such anti-Semitism is so stupid that it turned us into philosemites.¹³⁸

Laurendeau's statement must be supplemented with an understanding that attitudes in French Canada were changing in the 1950s on a broad front, and that many traditional assumptions were in the process of being questioned and abandoned. On the other hand, it was patently clear that deep-seated prejudicial attitudes in society had not ceased. Thus in 1963 André Laurendeau described a conversation he had with a successful Jewish businessman who told him: "You are a French Canadian. I am a Jew...The others keep reminding us of it constantly—even perfect gentlemen, even those who denounce racial prejudice."¹³⁹

The statement Laurendeau recorded remained largely true for the Québec of the 1960s and 1970s. Researchers have noted that there appears to be a consistent and significant difference in public opinion surveys between English and French Canada in the postwar period. As many as 39% of Francophones have been prepared to say that Jews have too much power, or caused the holocaust, or that six million did not perish, approximately twice the rate among English Canadian respondents. Surveys in the early 1990s indicated 64% of Francophones and 37% of Anglophones in Québec agreed that Jews had too much power over business in Québec.¹⁴⁰

Québec political and social leaders in this era would on occasion make statements that appeared prejudicial to the Jewish community. Thus in 1965 Claude Ryan made a comment that “Very few French Canadians...maintain friendly private relations with Jews”, and added to it the statement that many Québécois believed in the stereotypical idea that the Jews “will do practically anything in order to make a fast dollar.”¹⁴¹ In 1976, Camille Samson, a leader of the Social Credit Party in Québec, singled out Jewish physicians performing abortions as “artisans of destruction,” threatening the people of Québec.¹⁴² In 1990, prominent Québec businessman Pierre Péladeau was quoted in an article in the Québec newsmagazine, *l'Actualité* that “ I have great respect for Jews but they take up too much room [*ils prennent trop de place*].”¹⁴³

The great issue in Québec for the past half century and more has been the resurgence of Québec nationalism and the issue of possible Québec separation from Canada. It is of the utmost importance to make sense of this issue in the context of the public perception of Québec antisemitism. Even though there is data from the 1980s that indicates that there is no support for the hypothesis that Québec nationalists are more antisemitic than non-nationalists,¹⁴⁴ Québec nationalism is an issue that has caused profound disquiet among Jews in Québec.¹⁴⁵ This disquiet feeds on statements like that of Québec Premier Jacques Parizeau, who famously attributed the failure of the 1995 Referendum on Québec independence to pass on “money and the ethnic vote” which he subsequently clarified to refer specifically to the activities of the Canadian Jewish Congress among others. This has led to social and political conditions that have caused 30,000 to 40,000 Jews to leave Québec, leaving a community much diminished in numbers from its demographic peak in the early 1970s.¹⁴⁶

Beyond the political anxieties shared by other Québec communities generally unsympathetic with the ideal of an independent Québec, there were issues directed specifically at Jews, prominent among which was the growing presence of a major Hasidic community in Québec. This community is situated largely in Outremont, a Montréal suburb otherwise largely populated by an upscale francophone elite, a group which a 2002 survey found to possess more antisemitic attitudes than the general Québec population.¹⁴⁷ The increased public presence of the Hasidim starting in the 1980s has led to recurring friction and close scrutiny by francophone Québec of a community generally perceived as failing to properly assimilate into the Québec milieu.¹⁴⁸

In the 1990s, the writings of Esther Delisle claimed that there was virulent antisemitism in Québec in the interwar years, and these conclusions were adopted and given wide publicity by Mordecai Richler in a prominent *New Yorker* article later issued as a book, *O Canada O Québec*. Richler's claim that Québécois were more susceptible to antisemitism than other Canadians was the subject of vehement denunciations in the French-language media of Québec and some of these denunciations caused considerable consternation within the Jewish community.¹⁴⁹ At height of Deslisle/Richler affair, Gary Caldwell, who had himself been involved in research on the Québec Jewish community, wrote that he was "well aware that, according to the contemporary definition of antisemitism I can do no other than to pass as an antisemite."¹⁵⁰

The State of Israel and its alleged misdeeds has provided numerous anti-Israel and anti-Zionist themes in Québec journalism that have been interpreted as antisemitic.¹⁵¹ These include opinions that Jews are all openly or covertly Zionists, that Zionism is a form of colonialism, imperialism and racism, and that thus all Jews are colonialists, imperialists and racists, either openly or covertly.¹⁵² The Québec separatist monthly *Ici Québec* called Zionism "the cancer of the world" in 1975, at about the time when Zionism was condemned as racism in a United Nations General Assembly vote.¹⁵³ Yvon Charbonneau, then president of the Centrale de l'enseignement du Québec (CEQ) stated then that it is incumbent on Québec teachers to instil anti-Zionist sentiments in the minds of their pupils.¹⁵⁴

At the same time, many of Québec's critics of Israel lashed out at the Montréal Jewish community for its perceived support of Israel's policies, with political and trade union leaders like Michel Chartrand, the president of the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CNTU) berating the Montréal Jewish community, speaking of an alleged sinister Jewish conspiracy,¹⁵⁵ and allegedly stating:

We don't want them [Québec Jews] to poison the air of this country any more. Israel is now committing the same barbaric crimes against others that were committed against her in her previous history. We are sick and tired of being called antisemites.¹⁵⁶

In 2001 Yves Michaud of the Parti Québécois pointedly asked how Jews could reject Québec sovereignty and yet affirm that of Israel, and stated his opinion that Jews felt they were only ones ever to suffer. His remarks were condemned by Parti Québécois Premier Lucien Bouchard and the resulting criticism within the party of the condemnation of Michaud's remarks by the Québec National Assembly was the official reason for Bouchard's resignation of his office.¹⁵⁷

A September 2006 Léger survey for the Association for Canadian Studies found a higher proportion of the population in Québec—38%, compared to the full Canadian average of 31%—attributing the conflict in Lebanon to "Israel's actions in the Middle East."¹⁵⁸

From the Bouchard–Taylor Commission to the Charter of Québec Values¹⁵⁹

In 2007, the Québec government appointed a commission headed by Gérard Bouchard and Charles Taylor to investigate the issue of “Religious Accommodation” in Québec. It quickly became clear that the Québec Jewish community was strongly implicated in the controversy. The debate that ensued seemed to a number of observers to go beyond previous bounds, and some feared that it might lead to “serious persecution of minorities, particularly religious minorities.”¹⁶⁰ It certainly led to calls for a crackdown on open displays of non-Christian religions in public spaces¹⁶¹ that ultimately led to the current controversy over the Québec Charter of Values.

While a major focus of the Commission’s deliberations concerned the place of the Québec Muslim community,¹⁶² a significantly large number of submissions to the commission concerned Judaism and the Jewish community in Québec. Issues raised publicly in and around the Commission with respect to the Jewish community, included the Hasidic community, kosher food, visible Jewish symbols such as male head covering [kipa, yarmulke], Jewish schools, and the Jewish character of publicly funded health institutions such as Montréal’s Jewish General Hospital.

Despite the Jews’ long presence in Québec, the Québec Jewish community remains largely isolated from, and mysterious to the surrounding francophone milieu in Québec.¹⁶³ It is little wonder, therefore, that Jews became quickly associated with Muslims in the public discourse surrounding the Commission. Thus, in a 2007 poll, a large minority of francophone Québécois (41%) responded positively to the statement “The Jews want to impose their customs and traditions on others,” while only 31% said yes to the proposition “Jews want to participate fully in society.”¹⁶⁴

Francophone Québec society’s reaction to the perceived crisis of “reasonable accommodation” was captured by politician and academic Louise Beaudoin who attributed Québec’s societal malaise in the following way, “Peut-être que cette réaction a été provoquée par la demande formulée par d’autres communautés de réintroduire la religion dans l’espace publique.”¹⁶⁵

An example of the sort of issue meant by Beaudoin, and one certainly very much on the minds of the public, was equality of the sexes, which was perceived by many as being in danger from resurgent religion in the public space on the part of “d’autres communautés.” Thus the Québec Council on the Status of Women, a group appointed to advise the Québec government on women’s issues, advocated requiring “public employees to remove visible religious signs when on the job.”¹⁶⁶

While it is arguable that most Jews (and Muslims) are well integrated into Québec society, the focus of the testimony before the Commission revolved around those

areas in which Jews became a visible minority to many Québécois, and in which they were alleged to have made concrete (and excessive) demands for accommodation in Québec. Kosher food, which serves to differentiate observant Jews from the food ways of their fellow citizens, became an issue. Thus, some presenters to the Commission, echoing the claims of American White supremacist organizations,¹⁶⁷ charged that the Jewish community was forcing food companies to pay for kosher certification, change their formulas, and raise their prices in order to obtain kosher certification, thus making everyone pay higher prices for their food.¹⁶⁸

One presenter, Pierre Lacerte, charged that the Hasidim are “powerful, stubborn and pugnacious,” bearing “special privileges.” Others described them as “money-driven profiteers of the immigration system, determined to force their archaic ways on the Québec majority with their kosher foods, large families, loud prayers, and separate lives.”¹⁶⁹

The official response of the Jewish community of Québec to the widespread nature of the controversy was determinedly low key. Montréal’s Federation/CJA, chose not to formally present a public statement but rather to be represented through the Canadian Jewish Congress, Québec Region.¹⁷⁰ The then president of Federation/CJA, Marc Gold, stated that his organization was determined “not to respond publicly to every comment made...believing it would not serve the best interests of the community.”¹⁷¹ The brief presented by Canadian Jewish Congress was in large part an attempt to answer charges that had been raised against Jews and Judaism during the hearings, such as the alleged prevalence of Jewish “wealth and influence”¹⁷² and the higher cost of kosher food. As well, the brief opposed the precedence of gender equality over religious freedom and supported the right of workers in public institutions to wear religious symbols. The main spokesman, Dr. Victor Goldbloom, tried to underline the community of values shared by the Jewish community and Québec as a whole.¹⁷³ The brief presented by the Jewish General Hospital likewise accentuated the positive and presented an image that is captured in the title of the brief, “Care For All.” The Hospital presented itself as an institution that has practiced “reasonable accommodation” for decades, and emphasized that the concept “is a sound one, as long as it is sensibly applied, fairly administered, and able to balance the rights and needs of the minority with those of the majority.”¹⁷⁴ Allegations against the hospital were passed over in silence.

The Commission officially released its report at the end of May, 2008.¹⁷⁵ It recommended a number of measures having a potential impact on the Jewish community. Most particularly, it recommended that government employees who “embody the state,” such as judges and police officers, should not be allowed to wear religious symbols, such as kippot, while other public employees, such as physicians, could be allowed to wear them. Thus Bouchard Taylor rather than calming the waters as its advocates had hoped, led directly to the current controversy in Québec over the

proposed “Charter of Values,” which Gérard Bouchard has characterized in the following way:

I think that the debate will be very heated, unpleasant and useless because (the proposed charter) will go nowhere...It will divide Québécois and it will (pit) the majority against the minority.

Toward a Conclusion: Plus ça change?

The intense and sometimes fractious relationship between Jews and French Canadians in Québec has been ongoing for well over a century, and the controversies engendered by this relationship show no sign of abating in the near future.

Morton Weinfeld has pointed out that “French Québec has not come to a full societal resolution of its attitude toward the Jews...during the 1930s and 1940s.”¹⁷⁶ This is certainly true but this salient fact must also be understood in its larger context. Québec has also not yet come to a full societal resolution of its attitude toward itself. What is it to be a part of Québec? Is it to be a society that is inclusive of all its citizens or will it be the sort of society in which, as Gérard Bouchard points out, there is no means by which an immigrant to Québec, no matter what his or her expertise in the French language is, can truly become a “Canadien français”; and, in which unless that immigrant renounces completely his or her cultural and linguistic past, he or she is confined to a quasi-marginality.¹⁷⁷

In historical context, some specific issues in dispute with respect to Jews in Québec have indeed changed. One hundred years ago, for instance, issues concerning kosher food were almost exclusively internal to the Jewish community and involved kosher meat almost exclusively.¹⁷⁸ It is worth noting in this context that Québec in the 1920s and 1930s never generated a significant, let alone successful campaign to ban the kosher slaughter of animals, such as occurred in such countries as Germany, Switzerland, Poland and Norway.¹⁷⁹ That kosher food became an issue presented to the Bouchard Taylor Commission is a significant change.

Another important change involves the nature of the Jewish “irritant” in French Canadian society. In the early twentieth century, Jews as such were “visible” to the French Canadian community and the presence of Jews in many areas of Québec, including the Laurentians, was deemed objectionable.¹⁸⁰ By the early twenty-first century, the presence of Montréal Jews and their summer homes in the Laurentians is fairly widespread and mostly non-controversial. Open conflict and controversy in the Laurentians with respect to Jews seems mostly confined to the Hasidic community. The situation has evolved in this way at least partially because Hasidim have become the symbolic “visible” Jews in Québec society, and male Hasidic garb has been used, in editorial cartoons and elsewhere, as media shorthand for “Jew.”¹⁸¹ Moreover,

the Hasidim, who tend to live in close proximity to one another, are visible to the rest of society in a way that most other Jews are not (even though most Jews in Québec, and not merely Hasidim, also tend to live in “Jewish” neighbourhoods).¹⁸²

A final issue of note in this survey is that in the early twentieth century, French Canadians considered themselves economically subordinated to “the English,” and expressed their resentment of this situation in campaigns like “achat chez nous,” which deeply impacted the Québec Jewish community psychologically. By the early twenty-first century, the Quiet Revolution has achieved many of its economic goals and has changed both perceptions and facts concerning French Canadian economic power.¹⁸³ Nonetheless, the fact that Jews came under criticism at the Bouchard-Taylor Commission for their economic power indicates that this is an area in which “plus ça change, plus c’est le même chose.”

Whatever has changed, it seems that the place of Jews as “others” to most French Canadians has not. The key difference, in the context of the early twenty-first century, is that in the early twentieth century the Jewish community was the sole significant non-Christian, non-aboriginal group in Québec. It has now been joined by Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and a host of others.

I started with a quote from A.M. Klein. I close with one from André Laurendeau:

Six million victims have not rooted out anti-Semitism. There are days when the progress of the human race seems dismally slow.¹⁸⁴

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