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**Ethnic, Class, and Gender Dynamics Among Jewish
Labour Activists and Jewish Human Rights Activists
in Canada**

Rabbi Solomon Jacobs, “of the assimilationist synagogue” (Holy Blossom, which represented mostly the old community of middle-class, English Jews), was accused of playing an “ugly role” during the 1910 strike of Toronto cloakmakers. According to Abe Kirzner, a prominent Yiddish-speaking trade unionist and socialist, the rabbi preached that “Jews must not rebel and that this [strike] is a disgrace in the eyes of the Gentiles.”¹ This is just one example of the conflicts that sometimes sharply divided Jewish communities in Canada. Our exploration of these issues in this paper is a tribute to Jerry Tulchinsky’s broad and inclusive approach to Canadian Jewish history. His detailed survey of Jewish history examines both middle-class and working-class Jews, while his most recent book focuses on the life of Joe Salsberg, a prominent left-wing labour activist. In this paper, we draw on examples from Toronto, Montreal, and Winnipeg to explore the historical interplay of Jewish identity, class politics, and gender dynamics in the Jewish labour movement from the turn of the twentieth century to the Second World War and in the postwar human rights campaigns.

The Canadian Jewish labour movement encompassed Jews who were active in unions and those who were active in various socialist groups. The movement was centred in the clothing sector where so many Jewish workers tended to congregate for a number of reasons: many of them had been doing this kind of work in the Old World; antisemitism closed many other jobs to them, even in Canada; and Jews sought to create an ethnic job ghetto in this sector that would help provide a basis for the maintenance of Jewish culture (while allowing Yiddish to be used at work), especially so that the Orthodox would not have to work on Saturdays and other Jewish holy days and also because the Orthodox had to depend on Jewish-made clothing in order to obey the religious injunction against wearing garments that mixed wool and linen.² The Jewish-led unions, most notably the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union (ILGWU) and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers (ACW), formed the core of the Jewish labour movement, while the leaders of these unions also strove to appeal to the non-Jewish clothing workers and to incorporate some non-Jews into the union leadership. While Jewish socialists were active in organizations such as the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, and the CCF, they also had their own leftist ethnic associations, such as the Arbeiter Ring (known in English as the Workmen’s Circle) and the Labour League (which eventually became the United Jewish People’s Order).³

In this paper we explore how activists within Canada’s Jewish labour movement struggled to focus on their ethnic identity and their class identity simultaneously. Indeed many had become radicalized because of their experiences of two-fold oppression as Jews and as workers, both in Eastern Europe and in the New World. They viewed antisemitism and class oppression as deeply intertwined, especially because antisemitic occupational and educational restrictions had consigned so many Jews to such abject poverty in the Old World. While there was less antisemitism in

Canada, this kind of racism nonetheless limited the job prospects of many Canadian Jews in the period from the late 1800s through the Great Depression. But, as we shall demonstrate, Jewish labour activists experienced constant tension between their close ties within Canada's Jewish communities and their dedication to inter-ethnic, working-class politics. On the one hand, these activists were deeply concerned to maintain Jewish identity, and they were not at all deaf to the argument that Jews needed to pull together in an antisemitic world. On the other hand, their class politics highlighted class divisions within Canada's Jewish communities. Then, too, their efforts to forge close, cross-ethnic, working-class ties were sometimes hampered by their dedication to Jewish identity, as, for example, when the ACW's devotion to certain Jewish causes risked lessening the union's appeal to the non-Jewish clothing workers.⁴

During and after the Second World War, Canadian Jews assumed a crucial role in broad campaigns against prejudice and discrimination. While Jews had struggled to curb antisemitism in Canada in earlier decades, they were better able to forge broader anti-racist alliances in the aftermath of the Second World War. By then, their ranks included English-speaking, educated professionals, as well as a large number of organized workers, social democrats and Communists, some of whom were willing and able to lead such a fight, at times even to the point of overcoming class and ideological divisions. In addition, Jews had the most developed organizational base for fighting discrimination: by the 1940s two different Jewish bodies were dedicated to fighting racist ideas and actions. In response to the intensification of antisemitism in Canada and abroad in the late 1930s, the Public Relations Committee of the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith came together to form the Joint Public Relations Committee (JPRC). "Public relations" in the organization's name stood for combatting antisemitism. The JPRC was joined by the end of the war by the Jewish Labour Committee (JLC), a branch of an American organization by the same name, established in 1936 to aid Jews and socialists in Nazi-dominated Europe. After the Second World War, the JLC came to focus on fighting prejudice and discrimination at home. In 1947 the two organizations formally joined forces, with the JLC becoming the main body to carry out such work in the labour movement.⁵ There were also Jewish activists in other important rights organizations such as the Association for Civil Liberties which also fought against racism.⁶

Yet neither the Jewish human rights activists nor the Jewish labour activists in the earlier period focused on women's equality. Despite their deep commitments to certain forms of equity, these activists were insensitive to the discrimination faced by women, regardless of the activists' own class backgrounds. In addition to exploring the class and ethnic dynamics related to Jewish activism, therefore, we also seek to explain why these activists paid so little attention to one of the main sources of inequality in their society. We hope that this study will thereby contribute to an understanding of the historical specificity and fluidity of ideas of equality and human rights.

In the early 1900s, it was not at all uncommon for Jewish labour activists and Jewish socialists to face accusations that their activism was fuelling antisemitism. Much like Rabbi Jacobs, various leaders of the Jewish community argued that Jewish strikers were feeding into the negative stereotype of rabid Jewish Bolsheviks and should therefore desist.

Antisemites in Canada often did frame their prejudice in terms of this political stereotype.⁷ During the Winnipeg General Strike, for example, the Citizens Committee of 1000 (the key anti-strike group) tried to intensify opposition to the strike with alarmist propaganda that the strike was the work of “aliens” who were disloyal to Canada. During the labour upsurge of 1919, much of this anti-immigrant hysteria was directed specifically against Jews, not only in Winnipeg but in other parts of Canada as well. In Winnipeg, advertisements sponsored by the Citizens Committee of 1000 accused Jews of helping finance the strike. When workers tried to mount a general strike in Toronto in conjunction with the Winnipeg General Strike, the *Toronto Evening Telegram* insinuated that the Jews were behind all of Toronto’s labour unrest.⁸

The concern that antisemites would exploit any evidence of Jewish labour and socialist activism did not diminish. Nevertheless, Jewish working-class militancy continued among both men and women. Despite the belief that Jews needed to stick together in an antisemitic world --- indeed, despite the Talmudic injunction that “*kol Yisrael arevim zeh ba-zeh*” [all Jews are responsible for one another] --- there was intense class conflict *within* the Jewish communities of Montreal, Toronto, and Winnipeg.⁹

Class tensions were particularly intense in the garment industry, where many of the workers and many of the employers were Jews, especially in the interwar years. Jewish workers and Jewish employers in the needle trades were often bound together through their families, their neighbourhoods, and a variety of Jewish organizations. Individuals from these two groups often belonged to the same synagogues or the same *landsmanshafin* (fraternal associations for those who came from the same home towns in the Old World). Sometimes both employers and workers even belonged to the same socialist Jewish organizations, such as the Arbeiter Ring or the Left Labour Zionists’ fraternal organization. When a strike was called in the garment industry, it was not unusual for Jewish workers to go out on strike against a relative (perhaps even a father or brother) or against the person who had helped them escape to the New World.¹⁰

These close inter-class ties troubled union activists such as Ike Gilberg. Writing in the newspaper of the Journeymen Tailors’ Union in 1913, Gilberg asked: “What’s the matter with the Jew?” “What my people need is to be educated to their class interests,” he declared. “My object in life ... has been to teach my people who make their

living by the sweat of their brow, that they do not belong to the Jewish race, but that they belong to that great International Family, the Working class."¹¹ Yet the quest for such a single-minded class identity was unrealistic. Although a few Jewish activists may have agreed with Gilberg, many class-conscious Jewish men and women embraced their Jewish identity as well as their working-class identity.¹²

Moreover, "that great International Family, the Working class" did not always welcome Jewish workers with open arms.¹³ Antisemitism was apparent, for example, in the coverage of the large strike of Jewish garment workers at the T. Eaton Company in 1912 by the Toronto labour paper, the *Lance*. The newspaper declared that "it is difficult ... to make the average Anglo-Saxon fall down and worship the far-eastern agitator," for "the foreign agitator has few friends in Canadian labour circles."¹⁴ Yet despite such hostility within the labour movement, Jewish labour activists advocated forging close links to non-Jewish workers not only because greater unity would result in more shop-floor gains in the clothing sector but also because of the socialist emphasis on class solidarity.

At the same time, a combination of fears of antisemitism and close inter-class ties within the Jewish community did sometimes dampen class conflict within the garment industry. Such ties, however, could bind employers, not just workers. While pressure was sometimes exerted on Jewish workers not to strike against fellow Jews, pressure was also sometimes exerted on Jewish manufacturers to make concessions so that Jewish workers would have enough to eat in the midst of the Great Depression — or so that strikes could be prevented or shortened.¹⁵ During the 1935 general strike in the Toronto cloak trade, for example, editorials in *Der Yiddisher Zhurnal* (the city's daily Yiddish newspaper) appealed directly to Jewish manufacturers, declaring that public fighting among Jews would arouse antisemitism. The newspaper (which had previously been edited for years by Labour Zionist Abraham Rhinewine) called only upon the Jewish employers to make concessions in order to end the strike — it did not call upon the Jewish workers to do the same.¹⁶

Even though shared ethnicity sometimes dampened class conflict within the Jewish community, sharp conflict did erupt frequently between Jewish workers and Jewish manufacturers. One Jewish garment worker declared rhetorically: "Why should I feel better if I am exploited by a Jew?" Having been oriented toward the Communist party for years, this activist defined herself as a secular, left-wing Jew. Despite the fact that being Jewish was an important part of her identity, she felt it was essential to fight against all forms of economic exploitation, whether or not the exploiter was Jewish. Many male and female Jewish socialists held the same view.¹⁷

For others, the issue was not so straightforward. Some believed that if a boss was to make a profit from their labour in any case, it would be better if the boss were a Jew who might donate money to the *landsmanshaft*, the synagogue, or other local

Jewish community institutions — or might donate funds to aid Jews who were desperately trapped in Europe. Some of these dynamics were evident in a strike of five Jewish bakeries in Winnipeg in the interwar period. The leader of the employers in that strike was a leftist who is reputed to have said: “How is it possible that they are striking against me, a friend of the working man who gives money for everything?”¹⁸

Class conflict within the Jewish community was so intense that some Jewish garment manufacturers refused to hire Jewish men and women because the non-Jewish garment workers tended to be less militant. At times, Jewish manufacturers even stirred up antisemitism among their non-Jewish workers to keep them away from the militant, Jewish-led unions. A few Jewish manufacturers even went so far as to demand that immigrant Jewish union “agitators” be deported.¹⁹

The *Yiddisher Zhurnal* was scathing in its denunciation of this kind of conduct. In an editorial in 1919, for example, the newspaper exposed the vilifying of Jewish workers that took place at a meeting of both Jewish and non-Jewish cloak manufacturers as they joined forces to fight the union’s latest initiatives. The *Zhurnal* reported that two Jewish employers at this meeting were smearing the reputation of all Jews in order to show off in front of the Christians. “All of Jewry stands in a volcanic fire now,” the editorial declared, “and here come ignoramuses, who have the fortune to be ‘all-rightniks,’ and pour oil on the fire, in order to find favour in the eyes of [the Christian manufacturers].” “Know, however, you denouncers, that the whole Toronto Jewish community despises you and sends you its curse,” the editors proclaimed.²⁰ Another *Zhurnal* article took up the same theme a short while later, portraying “conniving” Jewish bosses who had themselves entered Canada illegally a few years earlier, after the American government had refused them admittance on the grounds of dishonesty. According to this account, the “connivers” “scream that the loyal and quiet older [Jewish workers] are Bolsheviks and that they should be driven out of Canada.”²¹

The sharpness of class conflict within the Jewish community was highlighted during the 1919 general cloak strike in Toronto. According to strike leader, Samson Koldofsky, “an emaciated, pale-faced Jewish youth,” had just been fined forty dollars --- or sixty days in jail --- by magistrate Jacob Cohen for allegedly battering “two big strong non-Jewish Poles” who were acting as strike-breakers for a Jewish manufacturer. Koldofsky puzzled over this incident:

“How can one explain such a phenomenon[?] The proprietor who made the complaint against this Jewish youth is a member of the Labour Zionist Party. [He is] a Jew who complains about the terrible position of Jews in Poland and who seeks to protect Jews from the wild barbarism of non-Jewish Poles.

“Here, in free Canada, [he] hires big healthy Polish scabs to rob the Jewish workers of their little piece of bread.

“And at the word of such scabs, a Jewish judge punishes such a hunched-over Jewish youth for beating up such big non-Jewish Poles.”²²

Jewish labour activists argued that middle-class Jews were betraying the interests of the Jewish community as a whole in other cases as well. During the Winnipeg General Strike, when Jews participated on both sides of the struggle and the strike's opponents incited antisemitism, pro-labour Jews accused the two prominent Jews, who were members of the Citizens Committee of 1000, of being more loyal to capitalism and their class than to the Jewish community.²³

Class conflict was also pronounced in Montreal's Jewish community. Thus Norman Massey, an immigrant Jewish clothing worker who was an active Communist, recalled that, during the Great Depression, there were “cases in the [city's] dress industry ... where Jewish girls put crosses on their necks to get a job!” Indeed, Massey insisted that “class interests are always above the national interests among manufacturers, whether they're Jewish or Italian or otherwise.” He described a large factory on St. Lawrence where “at the time of the organization of the dressmakers, the boss made anti-Semitic speeches --- a Jewish boss --- to French girls, telling them he doesn't want to hire Jews: they're troublemakers, they're communists.”²⁴

In this city in the early 1930's, various Jewish manufacturers hired gangsters (some of whom were Jews) to beat up Jewish union organizers and picketing workers. During the large Montreal dressmakers' strike in 1937, Jewish manufacturers even allied for a time with antisemitic leaders of Quebec's Catholic needle trades unions in order to weaken the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. Pro-labour articles in the Yiddish press denounced these practices heatedly, stressing that Jewish manufacturers should not ally with Christian manufacturers against fellow Jews.²⁵ Indeed, in the late 1930s, the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* stressed that many of Montreal's Jewish clothing manufacturers were “boycotting Jewish labour.” The *Chronicle* highlighted the irony of “the attitude of the Jewish grandees of the dress industry... With one hand they deprive the Jews of their earning capabilities, and with the other hand they support charitable institutions to dole out relief.”²⁶

Yet sometimes the need to combat antisemitism drew working-class and middle-class Jews together despite class tensions. As one of Toronto's Jewish labour leaders stressed in the mid-1920s, for example, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers “attend[ed] to special Jewish problems and needs” in addition to its other functions²⁷ (despite the fact that attention to Jewish issues sometimes made it harder for the Jewish-led unions to appeal to Christian clothing workers). Canadian Jews engaged in cross-class efforts to help Jews who were caught in the wave of pogroms in Eastern Europe in the wake of the First World War. Similarly, they also mounted joint protests in the 1930's against the rise of Nazism and Fascism in Europe.²⁸ In the late 1930s, moreover, the Canadian Jewish Congress's Committee on Economic Problems,

which included large employers, supported labour unions because union hiring regulations could counter employers' discriminatory practices.²⁹ In the 1940's and 1950's joint activism increased as activists of all classes united to combat antisemitism as well as other forms of racism in Canada by promoting tolerance through educational measures and by pushing for anti-discrimination legislation that would prohibit discrimination in employment, housing, and recreational facilities.³⁰

In the post-war anti-discrimination campaigns, the heads of the Jewish Labour Committee (JLC) had originally intended to work quite separately from the Canadian Jewish Congress. Indeed, the JLC's leaders had been concerned that its credibility within the Canadian labour movement might be harmed if it were to draw closer to the Congress. The JLC's activists, who were also members of the CCF, generally promoted a class-based analysis of prejudice, stressing that racism was fomented by labour's enemies to weaken the labour movement by dividing the working class. Thus "anti-Semitism, anti-Negroism, anti-Catholicism, anti-French, anti-English as the case may be, and union-smashing are all parts of a single reactionary crusade of hatred and destruction."³¹ The Committee's representatives argued that racism was also used by anti-labour forces "to distract the attention of the working people of this country from the real issues facing them."³² JLC activists believed that since the search for scapegoats was intensified by economic hardship, labour's struggle to improve economic conditions and achieve economic security for workers automatically contributed to the elimination of prejudice and discrimination. Beyond this, as the JLC's 1957 Report declared in the Yiddish section (but not in the English section), "our [anti-discrimination] work is built on a larger idea of freedom, on all our socialist beliefs."³³ Thus the Jewish Labour Committee's ideological orientation explains JLC activists' distrust of the Canadian Jewish Congress, some of whose supporters opposed unions and many of whom were hardly socialists.

The Jewish Labour Committee nevertheless came to work closely with the Congress in the fight against discrimination. Although this was partly because the Committee needed funds from the Congress, its members also believed that they could develop a partnership with the Congress based on joint goals. For their part, Congress officials had decided that they needed the support of organized labour for the campaigns for anti-discrimination legislation, for union strength had increased dramatically during the war years. Congress officials had originally intended to set up their own campaign in the labour movement but found that key non-Jewish labour leaders tended to rebuff their efforts, insisting on dealing with the JLC instead. This then pushed the Congress to ally with the JLC. Despite ideological differences and initial tensions, the Canadian Jewish Congress and the Jewish Labour Committee generally worked well together in the human rights campaigns. After all, in this area, they were not dealing with the sharp vested interests that often pitted Jewish unionists against Jewish manufacturers when they focused on shop-floor issues.³⁴

In the post-war climate, Jewish human rights activists carefully built alliances with members of other minority groups, as well as with prominent Anglo-Canadians. Rabbi Abraham Feinberg, one of the most prominent activists in this period, insisted that the struggles against antisemitism and the struggles against other forms of racism were “indivisible.” He recalled that some Jews declared: “Our job is Jews. What have we to do with the Negro problem!” In response, he asserted that “the plight of one persecuted group [is] the fight of all,” and he clearly saw this as a moral issue. He added that “there was a shabby practical rejoinder too: the appetite for someone to hate grows by what it feeds on; a Negro-hater ‘graduates’ to Jew-baiter.”³⁵ Many Jewish activists became convinced that the root of all prejudices was the same: “prejudice and discrimination” were aspects of a “community disease” that threatened democracy.³⁶ Jewish human rights activists also valued broad alliances because they did not want to create the impression that the anti-discrimination campaigns were merely a product of self-interest, for such an impression would lessen the appeal of these campaigns. The Jewish activists strove to work behind the scenes as much as possible especially because they feared that more open human rights leadership by Jews could inadvertently fuel antisemitic propaganda about world Jewry’s alleged plot to dominate the globe.³⁷

Yet amidst the complex interplay of Jewish identity and class politics, the special oppression of women was rarely challenged, and it was seldom even recognized.³⁸ Nonetheless, women who were committed to the Jewish labour movement played strong roles on the picket lines, standing their ground against employers, strike-breakers, and the police. Indeed, Joe Salsberg, the first national organizer of the Communist-led Industrial Union of Needle Trades Workers, described some women as “fighting cats” on the picket lines.³⁹ Bessie Kramer, an activist cloakmaker who was also a committed Communist, proudly recalled the hard work and dedication required during frequent strikes in her sector: “There was never a stop [to the work]. Once you were on a committee for the picket line and you know that you are responsible, you didn’t care how cold it was, how late it was, or how early it was. This was a job you had to do [well].” As she described picketing in the bitter cold at six o’clock in the morning, she also stressed the camaraderie on the line: “When we used to have the strikes, we also used to have a lot of fun... When you went out on the picket line, you went out with pride. You are going on the picket line because you wanted a better life for you and a better life for your fellow workers.”⁴⁰

Immigrant Jewish women also organized a series of militant kosher food boycotts designed to protest sharp price increases while also highlighting class divisions among Jews. In 1933, for example, when the cost of kosher meat increased dramatically in Toronto, seven hundred indignant Jewish women gathered at a mass meeting and decided to organize a boycott. Approximately two thousand Jewish women joined the boycott, and hundreds of them picketed the butcher shops, holding their ground when the butchers tried to drive them away. Scuffles broke out between the

picketers and customers as well. The protest was so effective that within a week, the butchers reduced the price of meat substantially.⁴¹ These immigrant women were hardly constrained by middle-class, Anglo-Protestant notions of delicate ladylikeness. Nonetheless, they did not develop a commitment to women's rights.

Such disregard for gender-based inequality was, of course, not limited to Jewish activists. As Alice Kessler-Harris has explained in her study of the pursuit of equity in the United States, even most opponents of racist discrimination believed that there was nothing unjust about the gender division of labour or about lower wages for jobs defined as 'women's work,' for in the years from the early 1900s through the 1950s deep assumptions about the inherent differences between men and women commonly prevailed. Given the usual belief that a woman's place was in the home and the male head of the family should earn enough to support his family on his own, women's right to paid employment required justification on the basis of need: women needed to work outside the home when the male breadwinners were unemployed, ill, absent, or dead, or when these men did not earn enough to provide for their families. This needs-based justification challenged neither gender segregation in the workplace nor the wage differential between "men's jobs" and "women's jobs." Instead, the family wage ideology reinforced women's dependence on men in the family and helped confine them to inferior positions in the paid labour force.⁴²

Within the Jewish labour movement, the emphasis on both class consciousness and ethnic identity further inhibited the development of feminist perspectives. The very nature of their class analysis meant that the Jewish socialists stressed the common oppression of male and female workers. At the level of their articulated socialist ideology there was little recognition that women workers faced special constraints. Their critique of feminism maintained that an emphasis on women's rights would weaken the working class by dividing male and female workers. In addition, a vision of the common oppression of women, which transcended class, threatened to dilute the class struggle.⁴³

For its part, the women's rights movement in these years was much more relevant to relatively privileged women than to women workers, partly because so much of its attention focused on female property rights. With a few notable exceptions, middle-class activists in the women's movement seldom sympathized much with female workers.⁴⁴

The dearth of such cross-class female bonds was especially apparent during the strike of more than a thousand Jewish women and men at the T. Eaton Company's Toronto garment factory in 1912. Alice Chown, an uncommonly radical women's rights activist who came from a prominent Methodist family, stressed the difficulties she encountered when she tried to persuade middle-class women's groups to support the Eaton strikers: "I tried to interest the various women's clubs, but I was

amazed because they had no sympathy with the strikers, unless I had some tale of hardship to tell. The common, everyday longings for better conditions, for a life that would provide more than food, clothes and shelter, were not recognized as justifying a strike. I had to tell over and over the old, old story of the bosses who favored the girls whom they could take out evenings, girls who had to sell themselves as well as their labor to get sufficient work to earn a living.”⁴⁵ The image of the downtrodden female sexual victim appealed to them; the reality of the assertive female striker, fighting for higher wages and better working conditions, did not.

Chown highlighted the unwillingness of female suffragists to support female strikers. In a thinly disguised account of a special meeting of the Equal Franchise League, she depicted the audience’s lack of sympathy for the strikers: “During the [Eaton] strike I had to preside at a meeting of the Woman’s Political League. I asked [the woman], who had been sent from New York to conduct the strike, to speak to our association. She made a very wise and illuminating speech. I did not expect an audience who had never considered that justice to working people was a higher virtue than charity, to respond any more cordially than it did.” At this meeting, Chown “asked all who were willing to try to awaken interest in the strike to remain ... But [she] aroused a great deal of hard feeling amongst the zealous suffragists, who were afraid that their pet cause would be hurt through being linked with an unpopular one.”⁴⁶

The unpopularity of the strikers’ cause in Chown’s circles no doubt stemmed, in part, from the fact that the vast majority of the Eaton strikers were Jews. In these years, the Canadian women’s movement, like many other segments of Canadian society, was steeped in racism. Organizations such as the main women’s suffrage societies, the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, and the Young Women’s Christian Association sought to uphold values that were, as many of their names suggest, explicitly Christian. In this context, first-wave feminists sometimes viewed Jews as a threat. The newspaper of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, for example, even went so far as to reprint anti-Jewish material from Henry Ford’s viciously antisemitic *Dearborn Independent*.⁴⁷ Even Chown herself stereotyped Jews as “egotistical,” “aggressive,” and exhibiting “extreme emotionalism.” She added, though, that the Jews’ “great *atoning* qualities are their wonderful vitality, their keen sense of life, and their excessive feeling.”⁴⁸ Many other Anglo-Celtic Canadians were far less generous in their assessments.⁴⁹

In this context, the intense ethnic concerns of the Jewish activists also undermined the development of feminist perspectives. Because Jewish working-class women shared a common sense of oppression with many of the men in the immigrant Jewish community, not only as fellow workers but also as fellow Jews, the women were less apt to develop a critique of their position as women within this community or within the Jewish labour movement itself. Since the family was central to the perpetuation of Jewish culture, a serious feminist challenge to the traditional norms and

role structures of the Jewish family would have been viewed as a dangerous threat. Yet, as we have seen, this emphasis on the Jewish community as a whole — this need for Jews to pull together in the face of serious antisemitism — did not prevent Jewish workers or Jewish manufacturers from pursuing their own class interests in opposition to each other.

Both class consciousness and ethnic identity were definitive in shaping the politics of the Jewish labour movement — despite the fact that class issues functioned divisively within the Jewish community and ethnic issues could function divisively within the working class. By contrast, a developed commitment to feminism did not emerge, partly because of its divisive potential within both the Jewish community and the working class.⁵⁰

This is not to say that there was a total lack of awareness of women's oppression within the Jewish community in this period. There were some glimmerings here and there, as, for example, when *Der Kamf* (the Communist Party's Yiddish newspaper) remarked in 1930 that the woman "doesn't want to live as a man's appendage."⁵¹ But such sentiments were subordinated to the interplay of class and Jewish identities, both of which privileged masculine perspectives. There were all kinds of debates within the Jewish left concerning class consciousness and Jewish identity and how the two fit together (e.g. the Labour Zionists vs. the Bundists vs. the Communists). In contrast, there were no comparable debates about how to develop a working-class feminism or a Jewish feminism in this period.

This lack of recognition of the special forms of discrimination faced by women was also apparent in the human rights campaigns in the aftermath of the Second World War. The human rights activists struggled valiantly to rid Canada of various forms of racist, ethnic, and religious discrimination. But for so many Jewish human rights activists, like most of their non-Jewish allies, sex discrimination was basically a non-issue in the immediate post-war period. Kalmen Kaplansky, head of the Jewish Labour Committee and one of the most prominent leaders of the human rights campaigns in the 1940s and early 1950s, declared that the reason for this was straight forward: women were just not considered equal at that time, for they were expected to be mothers and to concentrate on looking after their families. Most human rights activists apparently believed that women were so fundamentally different from men that issues of sex discrimination could be dismissed on that basis.⁵²

Yet CCF MPP Agnes Macphail actually raised this issue in early 1951 when the Ontario Legislature proposed to enact the first law in Canada to prohibit employment discrimination on the grounds of "race, creed, colour, nationality, ancestry or place of origin." Macphail, who was a rarity as a female member of the Legislature, protested that sex was absent from the list of the prohibited grounds of discrimination. "Today we have a Fair Employment Practices Act which gives everybody else equity,"

she declared, “but does not give equity to women.” “What are women to think?” Macphail asked. “Anybody of any creed, anybody of any color, anybody of any nationality, anybody of any ancestry or anybody of any religion, so long as they are male will get equal treatment, but, if it is a woman involved, even if her ancestry is strictly Canadian, she has been here all her life and her family for generations, she can be discriminated against.” Contrasting Ontario’s bill with the United Nations’ 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, she added that the bill’s omission of sex made women second, or even third or fourth-rate citizens. Despite her suggestion that women who were “real Canadians” deserved better, her vigorous protests elicited no discussion in the legislature.⁵³

While Jewish activists played leading roles in the campaigns for Ontario’s Fair Employment Practices Act (FEPA) and for subsequent anti-discrimination laws in this period, the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) was not nearly as active in these campaigns as the male-centred Jewish organizations, especially the Canadian Jewish Congress and the Jewish Labour Committee. The Toronto section of the NCJW’s most notable contribution to the campaigns for FEPA took the form of sponsoring a large public meeting on this issue in mid-1949. The moderator of the meeting was not a woman but rather Rabbi Abraham Feinberg who started off by stressing “the right to work without handicap of race, religion or colour and also without handicap of sex.” Yet apparently no one else at the meeting picked up on this reference to sex discrimination.⁵⁴ When the NCJW’s Toronto section subsequently sent a resolution to the Premier of Ontario calling on the government to examine ways to end employment discrimination, their resolution focused on discrimination based on “race, color or creed” and omitted sex discrimination altogether.⁵⁵ While Rabbi Feinberg continued to be one of the foremost human rights activists in the province, he appears to have dropped the consideration of sex discrimination. Most Jewish human rights activists never raised this issue at all.

Although there were some women involved in Jewish human rights organizations, their presence was minor. While this was similar to many other organizations in the 1940s and 1950s, it also reflected the kinds of work undertaken by many of the leading Jewish human rights advocates. Apart from the Jewish Labour Committee which strove mainly to mobilize support within the labour movement for anti-discrimination initiatives, Jewish human rights activists tended to focus on researching areas of discrimination, drafting model anti-discrimination legislation, lobbying government officials, pursuing court challenges, and developing and distributing educational materials. Although some immigrant Jews were involved, especially through the Jewish Labour Committee (which was led by Kalmen Kaplansky who had been born in Poland), the leading activists tended to be members of the second generation, partly because members of this generation had a stronger sense of entitlement to equality in Canada and partly because they were also more educated. In fact, some of the most notable men were lawyers, including Irving Himel, Bora Laskin, and Alan Borovoy.⁵⁶

While the Jewish-led unions were also in the hands of men, outspoken immigrant Jewish women played key roles picketing, as we have seen, and sometimes held lower level leadership positions. The women's roles were significant particularly in the period up to the Second World War, in a context where workers' mass mobilization was crucial especially because the lack of collective bargaining rights meant that the unions had not yet come to rely so much on legal experts to make their cases.⁵⁷ As we have also seen, immigrant Jewish women did not seem to feel constrained by middle-class, Anglo-Protestant ideals of ladylike propriety, whereas it must have been harder for second-generation Jewish women to disregard such constraints in the context of increased assimilation. Thus although both the Jewish labour movement and the Jewish human rights organizations were male-dominated, women had more of a role to play within the former. In any case, neither the Jewish labour movement nor the Jewish human rights organizations supported women's rights.

For the men in the post-war period, self-interest may have been involved to some extent, for Jewish males who aspired to middle-class status may have resented job competition from women. Moreover, for many Jewish human rights activists, the immediacy of the Holocaust may well have made discrimination against women seem relatively insignificant — if recognized at all. In this context, the heightened concern for the perpetuation of Jewish culture reinforced women's traditional family-centred roles.

It was not until the second wave of the women's movement burst forth in the 1960s that some of these dynamics were to change. By then, however, the remarkable upward mobility of Canadian Jews meant that their working-class roots had become much less salient. At the same time, Jewish community leaders' fears of assimilation had dramatically increased. In such a changing context, the dynamics of gender, class, and ethnic identities shifted dramatically for Canada's Jews.

1

A. Kirzner, "Twenty-five Years of the Cloak-makers' Union" (in Yiddish), in International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, *Souvenir Journal of the Toronto Cloakmakers' Union, 1936*.

2

Jews were also drawn to this sector because it did not take long to learn the less skilled jobs and because the clothing industry provided many jobs in this period, including jobs for women and, at the turn of the twentieth century, even jobs for children. Moreover, for Jews with entrepreneurial aspirations, part of the attraction to this expanding industry was the expectation that one could become a clothing contractor or small manufacturer without having to invest much capital. On these issues, see Ruth A. Frager, *Sweatshop Strife: Class, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Jewish Labour Movement of Toronto, 1900-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 16-17. While Frager has previously published work on the Jewish labour movement and Patrias and Frager have published work on Jewish human rights activists, this paper focuses on comparing the historical interplay of Jewish identity, class politics, and gender dynamics in both these areas.

3

For a detailed examination of the Jewish labour movement of Toronto, see Frager, *Sweatshop Strife*.

4

Ibid., especially 43-51.

5

See for example, Minutes of meeting of Bureau of Social and Economic Research of Canadian Jewish Congress, September 20, 1943, on connection to the Board of Jewish Deputies in London, file 13, box 2, ZA 1943, Chronological File Series (CJCCF), CJC Organizational Records, Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee National Archives (CJCCNA). On the relations between Jewish human rights activists in Canada and their counterparts in the U.S., see Ruth A. Frager and Carmela Patrias, "Transnational Links and Citizens' Rights: Canadian Jewish Human Rights Activists and their American Allies in the 1940s and 1950s," in David Goutor and Stephen Heathorn, eds., *Taking Liberties: A History of Human Rights in Canada* (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2013), 139-165.

6

See for example James W. St. G. Walker, "The 'Jewish Phase' in the Movement for Racial Equality in Canada," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 34, no. 1 (2002): 9.

7

See for example Stephen Speisman, "Antisemitism in Ontario: The Twentieth Century," in Alan Davies, ed., *Antisemitism in Canada: History and Interpretation* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992), 117, 123-124.

8

Roz Usiskin, "The Alien and the Bolshevik in our Midst': The 1919 Winnipeg General Strike," *Jewish Life and Times* 5 (1988): 28-49; and *Toronto Evening Telegram*, 27 and 29-30 May and 5 June 1919. See, also, Richard Menkis, "Antisemitism in the Evolving Nation: From New France to 1950," in Ruth Klein and Frank Dimant, eds., *From Immigration to Integration: The Canadian Jewish Experience: A Millennium Edition* (Toronto: Institute for International Affairs of B'Nai Brith Canada, 2001), 48; and Henry Trachtenberg, "The Winnipeg Jewish Community in the Inter-War Period, 1919-1939: Anti-Semitism and Politics," *Canadian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 4, no. 1 (1980): 48-49.

9

On class conflict among Jews, see, for example, Usiskin, "The Alien and the Bolshevik," 38; and Gerald Tulchinsky, *Branching Out: The Transformation of the Canadian Jewish Community* (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co. Ltd, 1998), 103-110.

10

See, for example, Frager, *Sweatshop Strife*, 57-63, 67-69.

11

Ike Gilberg, "What's the Matter with the Jew?" *Tailor* (newspaper of the Journeymen Tailors' Union of America), January, 1913.

12

See, for example, Roz Usiskin, "The Winnipeg Jewish Community: Its Radical Elements, 1905-1918," *Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba Transactions* 111, no. 33 (1976-77): 25.

13

On antisemitism within some of the clothing unions, for example, see Frager, *Sweatshop Strife*, 77-90.

14

The Lance (Toronto), March 9, 1912.

15

See, for example, Frager, *Sweatshop Strife*, 60-75.

16

Der Yiddisher Zhurnal (Toronto), January 28, 1935. On Rhinewine's role, see, Stephen A. Speisman, *The Jews of Toronto: A History to 1937* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979), 239-240.

17

The quotation is from the interview with Sadie Hoffman, 1984. Additional information is available in the interview with Ida and Sol Abel, 1983. (Pseudonyms have sometimes been used to ensure the confidentiality of the interviews.) See, also, Frager, *Sweatshop Strife*, 66.

18

On the bakery workers' strike, see Harry Gale, "The Jewish Labour Movement in Winnipeg," *First Annual Publication of the Jewish Historical Society of Western Canada: A Selection of Papers Presented in 1968-69* (Winnipeg, 1970), 13.

19

Frager, *Sweatshop Strife*, 64-65, 68-75; Gerald Tulchinsky, *Taking Root: The Origins of the Canadian Jewish Community* (Toronto: Lester Publishing Limited, 1992), 207-211; Tulchinsky, *Branching Out*, 104-110; Mercedes Steedman, *Angels of the Workplace: Women and the Construction of Gender Relations in the Canadian Clothing Industry, 1890-1940* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1997), 245-249; and Irving Abella, ed., "Portrait of a Jewish Professional Revolutionary: The Recollections of Joshua Gershman," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, vol. 2 (1977): 200-201.

20

Der Yiddisher Zhurnal, June 27, 1919.

21

Ibid., August 5, 1919.

22

Ibid., July 20, 1919.

23

Usiskin, "The Alien and the Bolshevik," 41-42.

24

Interview with Norman Massey in Seemah C. Berson, ed., *I Have a Story to Tell You* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010), 97-98.

25

Tulchinsky, *Taking Root*, 207-211; Tulchinsky, *Branching Out*, 104-110; Steedman, *Angels of the Workplace*, 245-249; and Abella, ed., "Portrait of a Jewish Professional Revolutionary," 200-201.

26

Canadian Jewish Chronicle, April 30, 1937, cited in Gerald Tulchinsky, *Canada's Jews* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 256.

27

Der Yiddisher Zhurnal, February 3, 1925.

28

Frager, *Sweatshop Strife*, 57; Tulchinsky, *Taking Root*, 224; and Usiskin, "The Winnipeg Jewish Community: Its Radical Elements, 1905-1918," 13.

29

Carmela Patrias, *Jobs and Justice: Fighting Discrimination in Wartime Canada, 1939-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 52.

30

While the human rights campaigns drew in a number of different groups, Jews often played key roles in these campaigns. For a more detailed analysis of these campaigns, see Carmela Patrias and Ruth A. Frager, "This Is Our Country, These Are Our Rights': Minorities and the Origins of Ontario's Human Rights Campaigns," *The Canadian Historical Review* 82, no. 1 (2001): 1-35.

31

"Press statement on the background of the Labour Committee to Combat Racial Intolerance," file 4: Provisional Labour Committee to Combat Racial Intolerance, vol. 41, Jewish Labour Committee Collection (JLC), MG28 V75, Library and Archives Canada (LAC).

32

Public Relations Information Bulletin from Saul Hayes, April 1, 1947, File 1946-47, Box 72, Fair Employment Practices Legislation, 1943-63, Records of the Joint Public Relations Committee (JPRC), Jewish Archives of Ontario (JAO); File 2, 1946-47, 120-121, Notes, Kalmen Kaplansky Records (KK), LAC; and Patrias and Frager, "This is Our Country," 17-20.

33

1957 JLC Report, Yiddish section, n.p., File 50-23, vol. 50, JLC.

34

Public Relations Information Bulletin from Saul Hayes, April 1, 1947, File 1946-47, Box 72, JPRC, JAO; File 2, 1946-47, 120-121, Notes, KK; and Patrias and Frager, "This is Our Country," 17-20. On the growing strength of organized labour, see, for example, Wendy Cuthbertson, *Labour Goes to War: The CIO and the Construction of a New Social Order, 1939-1945* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012).

35

Abraham L. Feinberg, *Storm the Gates of Jericho* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964), 71.

36

"Press statement on the background of the Labour Committee to Combat Racial Intolerance," File 4, vol. 41, JLC.

37

File 2: 1946-7, 60, vol. 20, Notes, KK; and interview with Kalmen Kaplansky, Ottawa, June 30, 1995.

38

For a fuller analysis of these themes, see Frager, *Sweatshop Strife*, 98-179.

39

Interview with Joe Salsberg, 1984.

40

Interview with Bessie Kramer, 1984.

41

Der Yiddisher Zhurnal, March 28, 30, 31, April 2, 3, 1933; *Der Kampf*, March 31, April 7, 1933; and the *Worker*, April 1, 1933. For a more detailed discussion of this boycott, see Ruth A. Frager, "Politicized Housewives in the Jewish Communist Movement of Toronto, 1923-1933," in Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster,

eds., *Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 258-275. On other kosher boycotts, see, for example, *Der Yiddisher Zhurnal*, March 26, April 9, 1919, March 7, 25, 1921, May 22, 30, June 2, 1924. See, also, Ira Robinson, "The Kosher Meat War and the Jewish Community Council of Montreal, 1922-1925," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 22, no. 2 (1990): 41-53; and Speisman, *The Jews of Toronto*, 195-196.

42

See Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 203-205.

43

See, for example, *Worker*, February 28, 1931; interview with Joshua Gershman, 1984; and Frager, *Sweatshop Strife*, 120-121, 131.

44

See, for example, Frager, *Sweatshop Strife*, 139-148.

45

Alice A. Chown, *The Stairway* (Boston: Cornhill Co, 1921), 151-152.

46

Ibid., 153.

47

See, for example, "Report of the Corresponding Secretary, Ontario Union," in *The Report of the WCTU's Annual Convention* (1911); *The Canadian White Ribbon Tidings*, December, 1924; Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991), 120; Carol Lee Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred?: The Ideas of the English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), vii-ix, 52-55; Wendy Mitchinson, "The WCTU: 'For God, Home and Native Land': A Study in Nineteenth-Century Feminism," in Linda Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979), 164-166; and Diana Pedersen, "Keeping Our Good Girls Good: The YWCA and the 'Girl Problem,' 1870-1930," *Canadian Woman Studies* 7, no. 4 (1986): 20-24.

48

Chown, *The Stairway*, 225-226, 232.

49

The *Toronto Evening Telegram*, for example, was scurrilous in its assessment of Jews: in 1924, the newspaper declared that "an influx of Jews puts a worm next the kernel of every fair city where they get a hold." *Telegram*, September 22, 1924, cited in Speisman, *The Jews of Toronto*, 321.

50

On the lack of a developed commitment to feminism, see, also, Roz Usiskin, "Winnipeg's Jewish Women of the Left: Radical and Traditional" (paper presented at the conference "Jewish Radicalism in Winnipeg: 1905-1960," Winnipeg, Manitoba, September 10, 2001, 4).

51

Der Kampf, May 23, 1930, cited in Roz Usiskin, "Winnipeg's Jewish Women of the Left: Radical and Traditional," 18.

52

Interview with Kalmen Kaplansky, Ottawa, June 30, 1995; and Patrias and Frager, "This Our Country," 3-4.

53

Province of Ontario, *Proceedings of the Third Session of the Twenty-Third Legislature XXIX*, March 13, 1951. For a detailed analysis of the relations between women's rights and human rights in Ontario in the aftermath of the Second World War, see Ruth A. Frager and Carmela Patrias, "Human Rights Activists and the Question of Sex Discrimination in Postwar Ontario," *Canadian Historical Review* 93, no. 4 (2013): 583-610.

54

Transcript of panel discussion, April 21, 1949, 1, File 14, vol. 15, JLC.

55

Bella Sanders to Mr. Tanaka, May 30, 1949, File 14, vol. 15, JLC.

56

See, for example, interview with Ben Kayfetz, 1997. Kaplansky was a Bundist.

57

On the impact of the lack of collective bargaining rights, see, for example, Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Co., 1996), 75-80.