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1944: A Preview of Much of What Would Follow

This article focuses on the little-known arrival of the first group of Holocaust survivors in Canada in 1944. They arrived from Lisbon and came through the efforts of the Canadian Jewish Congress. Congress Executive Director Saul Hayes spearheaded this refugee project. The author argues that, while few in number, efforts to negotiate the entry of immigrants, and subsequent Jewish communal efforts to absorb immigrant populations in Toronto, and reactions to the immigrants, were to prove paradigmatic predictors of communal management and reaction to much larger Holocaust survivor influxes after the war. While the article focuses on immigrant absorption in Toronto, it also discusses broader issues associated with this movement and the role played by the Yiddish press in reporting refugee arrival.

Cet article porte sur l'arrivée peu connue du premier groupe de survivants de l'Holocauste au Canada en 1944. Ils sont arrivés de Lisbonne grâce aux efforts du Congrès juif canadien. Le directeur général du Congrès, Saul Hayes, a dirigé ce projet de réfugiés. L'auteur soutient que, bien que peu nombreux, les efforts pour négocier l'entrée de ces immigrants, les efforts communaux juifs subséquents à l'intégration des immigrants à Toronto, et les réactions aux immigrants étaient des prédicteurs paradigmatiques de la gestion communautaire et des réactions aux afflux beaucoup plus grands des survivants de l'Holocauste après la guerre. Bien que l'article se concentre sur l'intégration des immigrants à Toronto, il aborde également les questions plus larges associées à ce mouvement et le rôle joué par la presse yiddish en rapporter l'arrivée des réfugiés.

Mention 1944 to a Canadian reasonably versed in history – a group in short supply these days – and they will respond that "D-Day took place that year." Certainly for Canadians living in 1944 who were anxiously scanning the headlines, D-Day marked an epochal moment: for the first time, the German army was caught between two foes. At last, after five long years of war, there was a sense that the enemy was on the defensive. This proved correct. Events on all battlefronts moved quickly. By December, the end of the war was clearly in sight as Axis troops fell back on every front. On a smaller but significant scale for those affected, 1944 also marked a crucial turning point in the battle to ensure a steady flow of Jewish immigration and familial reunification. This cause served as a unifying point for Canadian Jewry during the first part of the 20th century. The constantly shifting parameters of Canadian immigration policy heightened communal tensions especially during the Holocaust years when uncertainty over the fate of relatives and *landslayt* loomed large. Participants in this struggle rightly perceived every immigration permit approval as a victory against long odds. And victories were few. This meant that every gain had to be savoured, and even overemphasized, by Jewish communal leaders.[1]

Seen against this backdrop of spasmodic success in breaching the wall of Canada's immigration bureaucracy, the arrival of a significant number of Jewish refugees from

Lisbon in 1944 proved a vital watershed for three reasons. First, despite every effort at obfuscation by Canadian immigration officials, the arrival of over 100 families of Jewish immigrants marked the first significant mass arrival of Jewish immigrants since the coming of the Ukrainian orphans over two decades before. Both these immigration movements had been negotiated by national Jewish organizations and required the Jewish community to ensure that none of the immigrants would, in the parlance of the day, "become public charges." While it is vital to note that the number of Iberian refugees admitted fell far below the government's secret quota of 200 families, the fact that political pressure compelled at least some bureaucratic response proved a key precedent to be further exploited in the postwar era by the Tailors, Furriers, and Orphans Immigration Projects.[2]

Second, the Toronto Jewish community's reception of these refugees presented a collection of attitudes, assumptions, and planning that would later characterize much of the organized postwar immigration to Canada. Indeed, immigrant reception prompted vital and lasting changes in the institutional fabric of the community. The fact that such a tiny group of refugees produced a disproportionately large effect on the community testifies to the continued salience of immigration while providing a useful indicator of communal attitudes and assumptions about both immigrants and the process of acculturation.

Last, the small but key successes obtained by communal lobbyists in 1944 foreshadowed a much more confident and successful lobbying effort in the succeeding decades. This is worthy of attention because the ability of Canadian Jewish organizational lobbyists to access government and significantly shape policy in some areas, especially but not exclusively limited to human rights, has vastly increased since the Second World War.

The origins of the Iberian immigration movement can be traced to the aftermath of the Bermuda Conference in April 1943. The Conference's blatant failure to do anything significant for refugees in the midst of the war gave Canadian pro-refugee lobbyists a tiny but significant window of opportunity which they managed to exploit, albeit with great difficulty. The lobbyists argued that since Bermuda was an international conference, it was a matter for External Affairs rather than Immigration. This approach sidelined the indomitably anti-Semitic Frederick Blair, tossing the issue into the lap of Prime Minister King, who also held the External Affairs portfolio. Blair's retirement soon after the lobbying efforts began also stoked the slim hopes of the Canadian Jewish leaders crafting this new appeal to the Canadian government.[3]

This wedge of bureaucratic opportunism sufficed to allow External Affairs personnel to get a secret quota of 200 refugee families, the vast majority of whom were Jews, who had managed to reach Lisbon in neutral Portugal after often harrowing journeys

from Nazi territory. This article will focus on the 174 refugees from 69 families that arrived in Toronto between April and October 1944 as a basis for assessing the "Lisbon refugees" importance as precursors to further Jewish communal immigration lobbying, assumptions about immigrant acculturation and acceptance, and the continuing use of self-congratulatory language by a much more mature and entrenched Jewish community.[4]

The Lisbon Refugees' arrival coincided with the final brushstrokes of Jewish communal professionalization in national and regional Jewish organizations in Toronto and Montreal. Indeed, the process of their arrival and acceptance served as a litmus test of professionalization. For example, it is hard to imagine that the lobbying effort to bring in the Lisbon refugees could have succeeded before Saul Hayes assumed his position as Executive Director of the Canadian Jewish Congress in 1942. Trained at McGill Law School, Hayes possessed the language, personality, and connections to alternately correspond with, cajole, and badger Ottawa's immigration bureaucracy in a manner they learned to respect. His sensitivity to the twists and turns of interdepartmental policy shifts and rivalries made him aware at a crucial juncture that the government needed to be reminded that the Jewish community stood behind its longstanding promise to ensure that no refugees became a public charge. Even more important, Hayes could explain why Jewish social service agencies were positioned to guarantee this pledge. Plus, given his experience with the abortive Vichy Orphans scheme, Hayes knew how this guarantee would be essential. He made the government well aware of these facts and it acceded to his requests in short order. Hayes then made sure, as will be demonstrated in more detail, to leverage his success by repeatedly reminding the Jewish social service agencies involved with the Lisbon refugees of Congress' catalytic role in the refugee movement to the exclusion of any other factors. His intracommunal goal was to establish and maintain the hegemony of Congress as a national Jewish spokesagency.[5]

This Lisbon Refugees methodology served as a template for Hayes' later work on behalf of what came to be called the Tailors' and Furriers' Projects. Once again, Hayes' antennae picked up an opportunity in which his ability to act as a pipeline to the Ottawa bureaucracy could be used. Stunned by the immensity of the Holocaust, unions and manufacturers had put aside their differences to create an "immigration scheme" along the lines of those that brought European domestics and lumberjacks to Canada. Hayes got wind of these deliberations in the planning stage and adeptly moved in to offer financial and logistical support while allowing the Projects to be "fronted" by the unions and owners. Hayes correctly detected an opportunity for Congress to gain traction with the labour unions, whose lack of affiliation had long proved a thorn in Congress' side, thus furthering his claim that Congress spoke for all Canadian Jews. When the furriers and tailors began to arrive, Hayes muscled aside rival agencies such as the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society, and funded new

agencies, such as the Toronto office of the Canadian Overseas Garment Commission, to coordinate tailor and furrier absorption and settlement. Throughout the Tailors Project and, to a lesser degree, in the Furrier Project, Hayes sought to ensure that Congress "assume the lion's share of responsibility and credit for being the *eminence grise* behind the tailors' movement."[6]

Each displaced agency was told in no uncertain terms that Congress would now take over its turf. At the same time, Hayes ensured that Congress' role was always cited so that the owners and unions would be unable to take exclusive credit for a scheme into which they had put a great deal of effort and funds. It is worth noting that, unlike the Lisbon Refugees situation, Hayes' strategy ultimately proved unsuccessful. The reason for his failure was tellingly ironic: Hayes' insistence on cementing Congress' hegemony in postwar refugee immigration had led to such disruption in Toronto's Jewish refugee absorption efforts that the financial records of the Toronto office of the United Jewish Relief Agency, controlled by Hayes, could not be located. Without these, it was impossible to apply to the United Jewish Welfare Fund for an operating subsidy to run the office and thus finalize Congress' control of immigrant absorption. Given this, it is hard to fault Hayes for his strategic choices despite Congress' failure to ultimately assume hegemony over the Tailors and Furriers Projects.[7]

While the Lisbon Refugees situation provided Hayes with a means to publicize Congress' role nationally, it offered the United Jewish Welfare Fund of Toronto (UJWF) the same opportunity on a local level. Since its founding in 1937, UJWF wielded its power of the purse to relentlessly streamline Jewish social service agencies and eliminate duplication of services. Indeed, the refugees' arrival would prove to be the first test of the newly formed Jewish Family and Child Services (JFCS), the result of the forced merger of the Jewish Welfare Bureau and the Jewish Children's Bureau. JFCS was thoroughly professional, hiring only accredited social workers and applying the latest trends in the field. This would greatly affect the approach of the agency's workers to the refugees and affect the language employed to record interactions.[8]

The Toronto end of the Lisbon Refugees movement was a testament to the efficiency of professional social service delivery and seamless coordination. Within three months of the last refugee's arrival, practically all the men were gainfully employed, all the adults were enrolled in English classes, and the students enrolled in public schools were receiving Jewish educations. The UJWF touted these achievements in its annual campaign drive. Its associated agencies, particularly the JFCS, did the same – and for good reason. By October 1944, every reader of the Yiddish press – a majority of Toronto Jews – knew a great deal about the Holocaust. As Rebecca Margolis has demonstrated, Yiddish press coverage of the Holocaust was significant for its detail and depth and for the fact that readers believed that genocide was possible. Yiddish press reports following the liberation of Majdanek in July 1944 confirmed

the worst fears of those who yet doubted the enormity of the destruction. Those who read the daily installments of Rabbi Hirschsprung's *The Vale of Tears* in Montreal's *Keneder Adler* would now see, if they hadn't yet heard from other sources, that his story of escape was the exception rather than the rule. Yet, Canadian Jews still hoped that somehow, as long as no definite news of their death had been received, their European relatives were still alive.[9]

The presence of the Lisbon Refugees therefore represented a coalescence of all the hopes and fears of Toronto (and Canadian) Jewry. This remnant might well represent many others who had survived. They had to be helped in every way. This explains the attention they received and why the quality of their reception was placed under the communal microscope. Certainly, Toronto Jews marshaled all the volunteers they could muster, and they spared no effort in planning or payments to assist the refugees. Despite a serious shortage of housing, the newcomers were soon settled in houses and apartments. Children were quickly enrolled in local public schools and in afternoon Jewish education programs. Mothers and fathers attended English classes, and jobs were found for the refugee breadwinners. Social workers met with the families to help them adjust to Canadian life. By early January, the vast majority of the newcomers were beginning to resume the patterns of normal life. Of course, it was all but inevitable that some families slipped through the net. The Kohn family had fled Milan for Tangiers after Mussolini singed the Pact of Steel with Hitler. They made their way to Portugal and were accepted into the Lisbon Refugee Scheme which settled them in Toronto. JIAS workers, hoping to assist their absorption, found them a host family. But the family took the Kohns to a hotel and left them there without a forwarding address. Despite this, the Kohn parents soon found work and their daughter Magda quickly caught up in school through the efforts of a helpful teacher and classmates.[10]

Successfully settling the Lisbon Refugees was no small accomplishment; this relatively small contingent strained the UJWF's social service agency apparatus to its limit. There were no houses left for future refugees, the JFCS social workers were swamped by their increased caseload, and it was impossible to hire additional workers given the surge in demand for their services created by the war. The refugees' arrival had boosted JFCS workload by almost one-third between June and November 1944. The settlement effort cost $24,000 – a huge sum in those days. Of course, no one complained, and refugee settlement would become a key area of UJWF campaign allocations going forward, but all of these factors foreshadowed the challenges that would face the community when the war ended and Canada's long barred gates began to open.[11]

However, and this is the crucial point, one would not suspect the existence of any of these underlying issues by reading the public pronouncements of the Congress, UJWF, or their associated social welfare agencies. These reports were uniformly

upbeat and stressed the key role of their agency in the refugee movement. The report of the JFCS to the UJWF on the handling of the Lisbon Refugees is a case in point. After stating that "we are regarded by them [the refugees] as their parent organization: they consult us in all manner of problems," the report emphasized that "they receive from us professional case work service to meet their individual needs and requirements and make their adjustment to Canadian life with the minimum amount of tension and conflict."[12]

The language of the Report underscores the observations of historians who have remarked on both the "paternalism" and the "patronizing attitude" to the refugees manifested by the social agency employees. In addition, the belief that these refugees, given their persecuted backgrounds, could simply be expected to adjust to Canadian life with minimal difficulty forms a recurrent theme in refugee resettlement effectively demonstrated by Frank Bialystok and Rebecca Margolis. Despite having access to extensive information about the destruction of European Jewry, professional leaders in general – and social agency workers in particular – downplayed the effect of the events on survivors. This reflected a key intraethnic educational and acculturational gap between generations. Though the Yiddish press discussed and featured stories of the refugees, the English language Jewish press was silent. Its major voice, the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, did not publish a single survivor story between 1944 and 1948. Many of these generally university-trained professionals were somewhat aloof from the immigrant experience. This disconnect can be traced to the effect of professionalism in both fundraising and social service delivery and supervision in the Jewish community that began in the interwar years. Simply put, immigrant absorption into the community was to be rapid and relatively uneventful; social workers would deal with whatever issues arose. The Lisbon Refugees only differed from other movements because of the complexity of their migration – not because of the persecutions they had endured.[13]

This became the template going forward for dealing with – and advertising – how Congress and other social service agencies managed the steadily increasing flow of European refugees. For example, published descriptions of the Orphans Project, in which the Canadian Jewish Congress coordinated the movement of 1,116 orphans to Canada in 1947 were uniformly positive. Certainly, this was required, not only for public relations purposes, but because Congress had guaranteed that none of the orphans would become a public charge, and it was vital that the government not know the myriad challenges the Project faced on the ground. Here was one obvious parallel with the Lisbon Refugees movement.

The other parallel was far more systemic. Both movements were complicated by social worker and public misunderstanding of the scale of the Holocaust and its impact on immigrants. Not only could possible foster parents not understand why

children under 15 were a rare commodity among the orphans, but they expected their charges to act more or less like "normal teenagers" after a short period of adjustment. Perhaps this was understandable given the unprecedented nature of the Holocaust and the fact that twenty years had passed since the influx of the Russian orphans, the last major Jewish population influx of this type. But the paternalism that also greeted this movement is paralleled by that associated with the Lisbon Refugees movement. Frank Bialystok observes that it apparently stemmed from "the feeling [of the Holocaust] that [was] not that different from earlier Jewish refugees who had to flee persecution before and immediately after World War I."[14] This certainly explains Saul Hayes' comment on a "shipment" of orphans: "at times we make plans for certain children and we find they make other plans. The most difficult thing in the world is to convince these orphaned children that the plans they have made will not be accepted. Let us hope these children [in this group of orphans] do not have set ideas." This statement reflected the leadership's plans to shunt most of these teens into the workforce as soon as possible, regardless of their deep desire to continue their interrupted educations. These sentiments could also be found among those who actually worked with the orphans as well. One member of the Toronto Committee for European Youth asked: "are we not pampering and overprotecting them?".[15]

A similar lack of empathy and understanding greeted the considerable number of workers brought in under the various "Immigration Projects" organized by the trade unions. Congress and the unions did a great deal to organize these movements, to convince the government that workers were needed, and to find one year's guaranteed employment for a large number of immigrants in order to satisfy the government's condition that no one become a public charge. But upon arrival, these immigrants found a desperate shortage of homes and little understanding of what they had experienced during the Holocaust. When some of the new arrivals mentioned their horrific lack of food, they were told "we had rationing here too," while other members of the community complained about how demanding the new arrivals were. As Goldberg and Bialystok have clearly demonstrated, frustrated survivors turned inwards to each other for solace, catalyzing a lengthy estrangement between survivors and the community at large.[16]

The average observer of the community would have seen few of these tensions. Granted, the challenge of finding homes for those who arrived in the various immigration schemes was well known and advertised through the lengthy public campaigns for housing and assistance. But with respect to the more serious failings of communal organizations in meeting refugee needs, the 1950 Palevsky Report on these failings was carefully hushed up after it graphically revealed a number of areas in which immigration settlement work and professionalism in Toronto was seriously lacking. The report was only rescued from oblivion more than 40 years later by historians in the field.[17]

The decision to admit the Lisbon Refugees was the first sign that the "post-Blair" immigration regime would be slightly more amenable to outside pressures to open Canada's tightly barred gates to Jewish refugees. Having read over 5,000 pages and 13 years of Blair memos and letters, one notes the pleasurable punctiliousness colouring Blair's refusals of admittance to Canada to Jews who asked for admission. Blair reveled in flourishing his bureaucratic latitude and never hesitated to throw in his personal opinions of Jews for good measure. His successor, Arthur Jolliffe – even when he ruled against admission – wrote in softer tones, and the various communal delegations came away with the impression they were being given a sincere hearing. Certainly, the expeditious way in which the government approved the Tailors' and Furriers' Projects and the tone of Jolliffe's correspondence on the file confirmed that a sea change was underway in the Department.

This project would provide a preview, in a small way, of a much greater change in the ability of Canadian Jews to get governments to listen to their communal concerns. In 1943, the Bermuda Conference made Canadian Jews brutally aware of their minuscule amount of power and influence. In the postwar world, Canadian Jewish lobbying evolved and became more sophisticated, subtle, and successful, first in the field of human rights and later in letting the government know about certain issues of particular importance to the Jewish community. It is interesting that in July 2017, when the Canadian Jewish community's designated lobby group – the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA) – quickly obtained the reversal of a ban on Israeli wine produced in the West Bank being sold in Ontario liquor stores, it issued a communiqué whose matter-of-fact language indicated a confidence in its ability to access and persuade government officials. Hayes and his contemporaries might well have envied this self-assurance.[18] Their significant successes with the immigration schemes and the large percentage of Jews among postwar refugees in general certainly reflected the small beginnings of a larger trend.[19]

Given this perspective, 1944 proved to be a "preview point" not merely of the end of the war in Europe, but of the relationships between Canadian Jews and the Holocaust, including the politics, communal reception, and social work aspects of the Holocaust survivors' settlement in Canada. Those who read the news carefully certainly knew that an enormous massacre of European Jewry was taking place. But the unprecedented Nazi mechanization of genocide only became apparent with the liberation of Majdanek, a timeline that makes it problematic to blame Toronto Jews for not fully recognizing the scope of the slaughter or fully appreciating the traumatized background of the Lisbon Refugees. However in later years, as a number of studies have shown, it is challenging to explain the deep-rooted refusal to understand the different mentality of Holocaust survivors that underlay and undermined the considerable institutional generosity accompanying the Orphans, Furriers, and Tailors Projects. This paternalism of Congress and the social workers would persist well past

the immediate postwar years. It would take the Eichmann Trial in the early 1960s to truly convince Canadian Jews that the survivors had passed through a uniquely horrific experience. In sum, 1944 marked an important preview of a decade and a half of the communal encounter with the Holocaust and also of the first indications that Jewish communal lobbying with the Canadian government could produce the desired results.

1
On the key role played by immigration as a focal point in communal organization and discussion, see Jack Lipinsky, *Imposing Their Will: An Institutional History of Jewish Toronto, 1933-48* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2012), chapter 4; Gerald Tulchinsky, *Branching Out: The Transformation of the Canadian Jewish Community* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1998), chapter 2 Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948* (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1982), chapters 1 and 2.

2
This article is intended as an assessment of the impact of the Iberian immigration movement, not an account of its origins. On that topic, see Abella and Troper, *None Is Too Many*, 148-173; Lipinsky, *Imposing Their Will*, 222-224. For a very efficiently condensed version, see Rebecca Margolis, "Review of the Yiddish Media: Responses of the Immigrant Community in Canada," in Ruth Klein, ed., *Nazi Germany, Canadian Responses: Confronting Anti-Semitism in the Shadow of War* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2012), 125-127.

3
Abella and Troper, *None Is Too Many*, 155-157.

4
Ibid.; Lipinsky, *Imposing Their Will,* 222.

5
Ibid., 185-186 and 261-263.

6
Ibid., 237-253; Abella and Troper, *None Is Too Many,* 257-271.

7
Lipinsky, *Imposing Their Will*, 237-253; Abella and Troper, *None Is Too Many*, 257-271.

8
On the origins of the UJWF and its desire to consolidate fundraising and rationalize communal organization, see Lipinsky, *Imposing Their Will*, 162-176.

9
Margolis ("Review of the Yiddish Media," 122-124) makes these points very effectively and with powerful examples. It should be noted that the leadership of Congress in Toronto rarely cited the Yiddish press in their discussions or decision making.

10
Adara Goldberg, *Holocaust Survivors in Canada: Exclusion, Inclusion, Transformation, 1947-1955*. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015), 50-53.

11
Lipinsky, *Imposing Their Will*, 222-225.

12
Ibid., 223.

13
Margolis "Review of the Yiddish Media," 138-139; Franklin Bialystok, *Delayed Impact: The Holocaust and the Canadian Jewish Community* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2000), Chapter 2. I have discussed the generational differences at length in my study. The communal leadership was overwhelmingly born in Canada or came at a very young age, and virtually all were university educated. For more detail, see Lipinsky, *Imposing Their Will,* 285-287, for a list of leaders and their educational backgrounds, see Ibid., 268-83, which summarizes the evidence of generational differences to communal funding and control.

14
Harry Gutkin, cited in Bialystok, *Delayed Impact*, p. 79.

15
Jean Miriam Gerber, "Immigration and Integration in Postwar Canada: A Case Study of Holocaust Survivors in Canada, 1947-1970," M.A. Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1989, 68. https://open.library.ubc.ca/media/stream/pdf/831/1.0097780/1 (2 August 2017); Lipinsky, *Imposing Their Will*, 236-37; Bialystok, *Delayed Impact*, 39-40, 48-50, 79. Adara Goldberg has traced this attitude even further back arguing that as early as 1942, "some community leaders felt that refugees from Europe would 'rock the boat'" (Goldberg, *Holocaust Survivors*, 44).

16
Bialystok, *Delayed Impact*, Chapters 2, 3, and 4. Lipinsky, *Imposing Their Will*, 140. Adara Goldberg makes this point frequently throughout her book, but most clearly in the first 3 chapters.

17
Lipinsky, *Imposing Their Will*, 260-263.

18
Within hours of the ban against further importation by the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) of two brands of Israeli wine, CIJA lobbyists and a Jewish member of Parliament went to work. Within 48 hours, the government reversed course and rescinded the ban very quickly, and the CIJA then directed its supporters to "buycott" the wines when they were restored to LCBO shelves. See Eythan Halon, "Canadian Agency Retracts Products of Wine from Israel after Backlash," Jerusalem Post (online edition), 14 July 2017 http://www.jpost.com/Diaspora/Canadian-agency-retracts-Products-of-Israel-wine-ban-after-backlash-499687 (14 August 2017); Ron Csillag, "Inspection Agency reverses directive on West Bank wine," *Canadian Jewish News*, 20 July 2017, 12.

19
On Jews in civil rights see Lipinsky, *Imposing Their Will*, 273-275; Carmela Patrias and Ruth A. Frager, "This is our Country, these are our Rights: Minorities and the Origins of Ontario's Human Rights Campaigns," *Canadian Historical Review* 82, no. 1 (March 2001): 1-35.