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**THE STRUGGLE FOR A WORKING-CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS:
JEWISH GARMENT WORKERS IN MONTREAL, 1880 - 1920**

by

Miriam Judith Leyton ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

September 8, 1987

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ISBN 0-315-39397-1

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and Research acceptance of the thesis

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in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
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Thesis Supervisor

Chairman, Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Carleton University

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to develop a framework for the interaction between ethnicity and class using Jewish garment-workers in turn-of-the-century Montreal as a case study. It is argued that a distinctive Jewish working-class consciousness was shaped both by the working and living conditions in this time period and by the Jewish culture that had its origins in the Eastern European experience of Jewish immigrants. In this way, there was an interaction between ethnicity and class struggle that produced a unique response.

This was accomplished through the establishment of working-class communal organizations and garment unions that not only were concerned with wages and working conditions in the garment industry, but also emphasized cultural activities that helped to bring Jewish workers together. Such programs introduced schools, newspapers and lectures, all established by and for the Jewish working-class. Underlying the emphasis on the Yiddish culture was the importance of the Yiddish language, the medium of communication for the workers. Therefore, through a combination of a common heritage that included the Eastern European experience and cultural traditions and a common working experience in Montreal, both factors of ethnicity and class intersected to produce a working-class consciousness.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the members of my Advisory Committee, Professors Daiva Stasiulis and Wallace Clement, for the feedback and guidance on this thesis. In particular, Daiva Stasiulis helped me with the theoretical and scholarly work of my study.

Special consideration should be given to Lawrence Tapper, Archivist for the Ethnic Division at the Public Archives of Canada, for directing me towards the right places to begin my research. In addition, I would like to thank David Rome, historian for the National Archives of the Canadian Jewish Congress, for his kindness in assisting me throughout my visits to Montreal and allowing me to use his personal collection at his home. He was very encouraging during the various stages of my work.

More importantly, my family deserves special mention. They gave me the full support and encouragement when I needed it the most. The cheerfulness and companionship of my sister's made the rough times easier. Also, my parents gave me the drive and ambition to make my education possible. They proudly gave me their heritage that inspired this thesis.

I would especially like to thank Cemy Srouer. Without his reassurance, strength, understanding and love, I could not have made it through the final stages of the thesis.

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Chapter One
Introduction

During the turn-of-the-century, Canada was a great receiver of many different waves of immigrants. At that time, the country experienced the transformation to industrial capitalism. While Canada lagged behind in its industrial development, it nevertheless was well on its way to becoming an industrialized nation. In the major industrial centres, such as Toronto, Montreal and Hamilton, factories were increasingly built along with improved methods of production. Characteristic of this new form of industrial capitalism was the desire to make a profit through the cheapest means possible. Production was sped up as new and improved technology was implemented. As major factory owners entered into more intense competition, ways were devised to cheapen the entire production process. This created the need for a cheap source of labourers who would work for extremely low wages under adverse working conditions.

Industrial development in Quebec and Ontario and the wheat boom in the west, attracted thousands of new and ethnically diverse immigrants from the United Kingdom and central, southern and eastern Europe. The garment industry in Montreal, in particular, employed immigrants from Europe and French Canadian rural workers

from smaller farm communities outside Montreal. But the majority of workers within this industry were Eastern European Jewish immigrants who arrived in Montreal between the years 1881 and 1921. In this city, they had to adjust to living and working conditions that reinforced their position as members of the working-class.

Amongst the ranks of the Eastern European Jewish immigrants were people who were bound by strong ties to their ethnic heritage. As part of their own cultural traditions, these Jewish immigrants brought to Canada a strong sense of autonomy and community solidarity. These were developed as a result of their living and working experiences in Eastern Europe. But more importantly, this particular ethnic group incorporated within their community in Montreal the makings of a unique working-class consciousness. Aside from being part of the immigrant generation, these workers made up the majority of garment workers within the clothing trades which grew rapidly around the turn-of-the-century. In this respect, these workers not only shared the same ethnocultural foundations but also experienced the intense exploitation as employees within a highly competitive industry. These two identities -- ethnicity and class, interacted to produce the beginnings of a solidary response amongst Jewish garment workers. This was

demonstrated through the establishment of working-class organizations that aided members of the Jewish working-class politically, socially, culturally and financially. Out of the fight for improved working conditions, this time period also witnessed the formation of garment unions. Like Jewish mutual benefit societies, these unions were concerned with the general well-being of the workers. More importantly, underlying these organizations was emphasis on the Yiddish culture, one aspect that resulted in a distinctive Jewish working-class consciousness.

Theoretically, the starting point of this study is the idea of a working-class consciousness as proposed by "new labour historians" in Canada. According to the new labour history, a unified response among Canadian workers developed along class lines, as suggested by Bryan Palmer (1986) and Gregory Kealey (1981).¹ In an analysis of these writings, ethnicity, gender, region and other such factors are considered as divisive elements in attempts at solidary working-class responses. In particular, ethnicity is downplayed. In this thesis, I demonstrate the necessity of studying the interactive effects of ethnicity and class in shaping the response of immigrant workers to industrial capitalism. Emphasis on class alone or ethnicity alone is insufficient for comprehending the solidary

organization of Jewish garment workers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Both these factors are important when studying this time period, a period when various immigrants arrived in Canada on a large-scale. In most cases, immigrants tended to establish ethnic enclaves in an attempt to cope with working conditions of industrializing Canadian cities. In this respect, ethnicity can neither be ignored nor downplayed when investigating the "life of the worker." The formation of a working-class consciousness among Jewish garment workers in Montreal occurred in the context of cultural and social institutions, established by Jewish workers themselves to help cope with working conditions and to preserve and further develop the Yiddish culture.

It is important to define what constitutes a working-class consciousness. First, a working-class consciousness, in this study, is based on the interaction between ethnicity and class loyalties. Both these factors together reinforced the solidary response amongst Jewish garment workers in Montreal. Because of the highly exploitative and competitive nature of the clothing trade, garment workers were paid low wages for working long hours within an unsanitary environment. These conditions developed a commonality amongst the workers. What contributed to the formation of a working-

class consciousness was the emphasis these workers placed on the Yiddish culture that supported working-class ideals. Such organizations as Jewish working-class communal groups and garment unions expressed this consciousness through Yiddish newspapers, schools and cultural activities. These were aimed at educating Jewish garment workers about their situation at the same time as providing mutual support to their members. This working-class consciousness was demonstrated through the above factors as well as through the cohesive fight for improved working conditions in Montreal.

Between the years 1881 and 1921, Canada witnessed its largest numerical increase in the Jewish population. Prior to 1881, Canada's Jewish population was comprised of Jews with either a German or Spanish background. The majority of this group were found amongst the ranks of the middle to upper classes. Very few were working-class. In 1881, the Canada Jewish population was less than 2,400. In May, 1882, with the wave of anti-Jewish pogroms in Czarist Russia, Jewish refugees emigrated to such cities as Montreal and Toronto. This more than doubled the Jewish population of both these cities in less than two years. From this first big wave until after World War I, the number of Jews in Canada increased at a steady pace. In 1891, the Canadian Jewish population was recorded at 6,503. By 1901, this figure

had increased to 16,717. According to the 1911 census, the number of Jews in Canada more than tripled the number in 1901 so that 76,199 Jews were recorded. In 1921, after the major waves of Jews came to Canada, the Jewish population in Canada numbered 126,196. This period, from 1881 until 1921, recorded the largest influx of Eastern European Jews. It is also during this time that Jewish immigrants established fraternal orders, sick benefit, free loan and other mutual benefit societies as well as Jewish labour groups. These years were also characterized by the increased importance of the Yiddish language amongst the Jewish working-class. Cultural activities of Jewish working-class organizations, social and political events, and union meetings all placed a strong emphasis on the Yiddish culture. This same time period experienced the founding in Canada of a Yiddish Press and Jewish schools all aimed at the Jewish working masses.

The Jewish population, during the period under study, was instrumental in both establishing a garment industry in Canada and advancing the idea of garment unions in Montreal. Most of the employers and employees were Jewish. Many of the Jewish immigrants entered into the various sections of men's and women's clothing industry. Some areas of Eastern Europe had small garment

factories. But, for the most part, those who knew the business were classified as tailors. In Eastern Europe, tailors engaged in the complete assembling of clothing. As industrialization moved into the area, the old skilled trade was fragmented into different processes. This was particularly the case when Jewish immigrants arrived in Montreal. Because workers only learned how to sew one piece, this not only allowed room for many immigrants but also supported the idea of piecework and deskilling of the trade.

It is important to note here that the Jewish labour movement was only a one generation phenomenon. The immigrant generation constituted the members of the working-class. Many of these workers supported the idea of perpetuating the Yiddish culture as the culture of the Jewish workers, through programs aimed at children of the working-class. But, emphasis was also placed on their children obtaining a good education, something denied to Jewish immigrants in Eastern Europe. Jewish garment workers who were employed in either factories or sweatshops concentrated on educating their children for something better than a contract shop. Therefore, sons and daughters of Jewish unionists, communists and socialists finished high school and had the option to go to university. In this respect, the children moved out of the ranks of the working-class. This led to the

decline in the Jewish labour movement. While the movement was not perpetuated in future generations of Canadian Jews, it still succeeded in forming a Jewish working-class consciousness for that one generation. In addition, garment unions that were organized during this time period laid the groundwork for union locals and mutual benefit societies still found in Canada today.

The response of Jewish garment workers in Montreal is a good example of how class and ethnicity interacted to produce an ethnic-based working-class consciousness. To understand the rise of a Jewish labour movement, it is essential to consider the background and character of the immigrant masses and the conditions of immigrant life in Canada. What made their movement unique was the emphasis that workers placed on the Yiddish language and Yiddish culture. Jewish garment workers were bound to Jewishness through the medium of the Yiddish language so that the Yiddish culture was equated with the workers' culture. In addition, Jewish garment workers introduced the ideas of Jewish socialism. This meant that a class struggle would be based within the boundaries of Jewish secularism. These ideas introduced a new faith to Jewish workers in Montreal that helped them endure the hardships of everyday life. The ideals and principles of this movement were applied to garment unions and other

working-class communal organizations that were formed through the struggles of Jewish garment workers.

The basic concern of these organizations was the general well-being of the Jewish worker. The movement did not just fight to achieve economic gains for Jewish workers. It was a combination of ethnic-based radical unionism that was formulated out of the uniqueness of the Eastern European experience, and social idealism rooted in their Jewish origins and class oppression in Montreal. As part of their working-class consciousness, members of the Jewish working-class developed schools, newspapers, mutual aid societies and trade unions. Also, a secularized Jewish identity was shaped through their struggles. Yiddish books were published and Yiddish classes were started for young people. These activities were solely aimed at the Jewish working masses in the hope of improving conditions at the same time as leading Jewish garment workers into a unified class struggle.

Research Questions and Methodology

My first research question was theoretically based.

It was as follows:

Despite the new labour history's assertion that a working-class consciousness is based along class lines, is it possible to incorporate ethnicity, in addition to class, as unifying factors in coalescing a solidary working-class movement?

In order to analyze the relationship between ethnicity and class consciousness, it was asked:

Did ethnicity, or the uniqueness of the Eastern European Jewish experience make a difference to the experience of Jewish garment workers in Montreal?

More specifically, the following questions were used as guidelines for conducting my research:

To what extent were Jewish working-class organizations in Montreal influenced by the Eastern European experience?

How did the structure of the garment industry in Montreal contribute to formulating a unique Jewish working-class experience?

How important was Jewish identity, whether religious or secular, in the establishment of working-class based communal organizations?

What role did ethnic-based activities and programs such as language, schools and newspapers play in the formation of a distinctive working-class consciousness?

My information is mainly based on primary source material found in the Public Archives of Canada in Ottawa and the Canadian Jewish Congress National Archives in Montreal. Some of the key documents were printed in the Yiddish language. These included newspaper articles and some of the Jubilee Books for Montreal mutual benefit societies. In order to overcome this language barrier, I began learning Yiddish in

April, 1986. Because the Yiddish language was key to the Jewish labour movement, it was important to understand this language. Also, it is a loss to many researchers if they have to ignore documents written in a different language, especially when studying a non-English or non-French ethnic group. During the course of my research, I did not want to overlook Yiddish articles. Therefore, much time was spent translating various documents.

Various themes were employed in order to determine the relevance of certain information. To explore the relationship between class and ethnicity, it was important to follow the guidelines outlined by the above mentioned research questions. Therefore, in looking through historical documents, such aspects as living and working conditions in Eastern Europe, and adjustment to working and living conditions in Montreal were explored. Underlying these issues, I looked into the background of socialist teachings and where they first began. This shed light on why it was important to Jewish workers that they establish their own working-class organizations. In addition, if these organizations were comprised of Jewish workers, then I examined what type of programs they offered to their membership. Out of this, I examined the relationship between garment unions and mutual benefit associations in order to assess the

importance of the Yiddish culture to the formation of a Jewish working-class consciousness.

Extensive documentation was found in both the collections in Ottawa and in Montreal. All of my research was based on written documentation. No interviews were conducted due to the historical time period of my study. The Louis Rosenberg Collection at the Public Archives contained numerous Yiddish newspaper articles that explored working conditions of the garment industry and also outlined union formation, and the establishment of mutual benefit societies in Montreal. Also in Ottawa were family collections of various garment manufacturers of Montreal. These provided a background to the immigration to Canada of such people as Harris Vineberg and Harris Kellert, who were both clothing manufacturers and officers of the Baron de Hirsch Institute.

Of major importance to my research were collections found in the National Archives of the Canadian Jewish Congress in Montreal. Numerous documents were used on the individual mutual benefit associations and philanthropic organizations in Montreal. Such associations as the Russian Polish Hebrew Sick Benefit Association, the Bessarabian Hebrew Sick Benefit Society and the Workmen's Circle provided in their collections

various Souvenir Books, in some cases, from their tenth to their fiftieth anniversaries. These books contained accounts by founding members. They discussed wages, living conditions, cost of living and working conditions at the time of the arrival of Eastern European Jewish immigrants to Montreal. These accounts discussed why mutual benefit associations were established and how they were founded. As part of their program, the actual accounts of members covered the numerous benefits that were provided for members. Also, within these documents were outlined the difference between the Labour Zionists and Workmen's Circle. In many cases, these associations discussed union activity and cultural programs provided to their members.

Chapter Outline

The argument followed in this study is embodied in the subsequent chapters. Chapter Two addresses the importance of studying the relationship between ethnicity and class. Class cannot be the sole factor for producing a unifying response amongst workers. In contrast to what proponents of the new labour history believe, other factors, such as ethnicity, interact with class to bind workers together in a common struggle. This analysis will be framed by an examination of the debate between the "old" and "new" labour history. As part of this analysis is a discussion of both the

American and Canadian influences on this debate. This chapter also includes the importance of community in the formation of a working-class consciousness. It will be shown in this chapter and subsequent ones that Jewish cultural traditions as well as ethnic-based organizations acted as facilitating factors in Jewish garment workers' response to their working-class experience in Montreal.

The third chapter consists of a discussion describing the Eastern European experience. This unique experience demonstrates the key role that ethnicity played in the formation of Jewish working-class consciousness. Included is a description of the situation of Jews in Eastern Europe. This consists of a discussion of the many restrictions that were placed on the movement, political involvement and educational and occupational attainment of the Jewish population in their country of origin. A discussion of their living experience sheds light on the reasons for a strong sense of community solidarity. Their experience also provided the impetus for self-help that came in the form of mutual benefit societies, a tradition first established in Eastern Europe.

Chapter four deals with the structure of the garment industry during the time period under study. It

examines why competition and economic exploitation were so prominent in the clothing trades. There is also a brief discussion of the development of the industry in the province of Quebec. This includes the change from a rural-based industry to a urban-based economy. New technological innovations, such as the cutting knife and sewing machine not only sped up the production process but also created a gender division of labour. Patterns of ownership within the industry and the reasons for more sweatshops and poor working conditions are examined. In addition, this chapter distinguishes between the factory and outside sweatshop and explains why each was used and when.

The fifth chapter deals with the establishment of Jewish working-class organizations in Montreal. This chapter examines how the Jewish identity helped to maintain a Jewish working-class solidarity amongst Jewish garment workers. It also explores the older and more established Jewish community in Montreal and the relationship they had with their co-religionists found amongst the ranks of the working-class. This chapter emphasizes the importance of the ethnic background as a common basis for establishing Jewish mutual benefit societies. The origins, beliefs and goals of these organizations are analyzed. In addition, two groups, the Workmen's Circle and the Jewish National Workers'

Alliance are discussed in order to demonstrate the role of Jewish identity within Socialist and Labour Zionist doctrines. The role of the Jewish culture is discussed with reference to the development of a solidary working-class response amongst members of these groups.

The sixth chapter provides an analysis of garment union formation in Montreal between the years 1880 and 1920. A brief discussion pays attention to the history of garment unions prior to 1900. After the turn-of-the-century, especially after 1905, the more radicalized Jewish elements played a key role in organizing different locals of clothing unions in Montreal. The importance of socialist ideas in a Jewish labour movement is discussed in light of the role of ethnicity. In this respect, the two elements of class and ethnicity are examined to establish how both were employed by Jewish organizers in helping to establish a uniform response amongst Jewish garment workers. Also discussed are social reforms within all Jewish working-class organizations. The relationship between Jewish mutual benefit societies and garment unions is further examined to determine the strengthening possibilities of ethnicity.

The seventh and final chapter consists of a summary and conclusions. The first section of the chapter summarizes the argument presented in the thesis. This includes a summary of the findings and the major themes that are raised throughout the study. The second section of this chapter deals with suggestions for future research in light of the findings found in the present study. -

It was my intent in this thesis to assess the role of ethnicity in the formation of a distinctive working-class consciousness. In particular, the role that the Yiddish culture played in the Jewish labour movement is explored. There is also an analysis of the second aim of working-class organizations and unions; that is, the enhancement of cultural programs. How much the Yiddish culture is equated with the workers' culture is of much relevance to this study. In this respect, the Yiddish language is assessed here in order to establish the central role that it played in every aspect of the Jewish workers' lives. It found its way into both union meetings dealing with working conditions and as the centre for cultural activities whether this was in drama, the Yiddish press or Jewish schools. All these themes are further analyzed in the subsequent chapters.

Endnotes

1. B. Palmer, The Character of Class Struggle, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), p. 9. and G. Kealey, "Labour and Working-Class History in Canada: Prospects in the 1980s". Labour/Le Travailleur, 7 Spring, 1981, p. 89.

Chapter Two
The Role of Ethnicity and Class
in the
Formation of a Working-Class Consciousness

To understand Jewish garment workers' struggle to achieve a working-class consciousness, an analysis of the relationship between ethnicity and class must be employed. This involves examining not only working-class conditions but also exploring the important influences that both ethnicity and community ties had during this critical stage of industrial capitalism in Canada. While in many accounts of working-class culture in Canada, ethnicity has been viewed as a barrier to a unified working-class response,¹ it will be argued in the following chapters that Jewish garment workers in Montreal, during the years under study, achieved class consciousness through an interaction between ethnicity and class.

The case of Jewish garment workers in turn-of-the-century Montreal presents a interesting problem in the debate as to whether or not ethnicity plays a role in conditioning a working-class consciousness. It would appear, in this particular case, that ethnicity did indeed interact with class to form a distinctive Jewish

working-class consciousness. How ethnicity and class interacted is important here. Working-class organizations, whose membership was comprised of Jewish workers, not only attempted to maintain a working-class solidarity but also a Jewish identity. Because these organizations were based on the common element of the Jewish identity, worker solidarity of the membership was reinforced. Emphasis was also placed on Jewish cultural programs such as schools, concerts, and lectures. These programs not only related to problems of the working-class but also helped workers cope with their exploited position.

There is an ongoing debate in the literature regarding the approaches taken by the old and new labour history. On the one side of this debate is the old labour history, while the opposing side constitutes the new Marxist analysis. The old labour history takes more of an institutional approach to labour, examining the development of labour organizations and their leadership. In contrast, the new labour history is an attempt to deal with the experience of the rank-and-file workers.

The main emphasis of the old labour history is on institutional development. Two historians who represent this school of thought in Canada are Terry Copp and

Desmond Morton. When studying union formation and activity, those historians place stress on the leadership. According to David Brody, the practice of labour economics involved close contact with trade-union leaders.² This type of labour history never went beyond the study of trade unions. In this way, it tended to ignore the history of the worker.³ In Canada, this approach has additionally been concerned with Canadian nationalism. Gregory Kealey believes that these historians were more worried about portraying a distinctive national identity and thus ignored factors considered divisive.⁴ Such factors as ethnicity, class, region and gender were given very little (if any) attention. On the labour scene, working-class leaders were emphasized when dealing with the problem of industrial relations.

With the development of Marxist historiography in Canada at the beginning of the 1970s, the basic tenets of the old labour history were challenged. The new labour history, with its emphasis on a Marxist analysis examines the history of social forces that contribute to the working-class experience. These social forces include economic, political and sociological factors with an emphasis on class struggle. Such factors are employed to analyze why workers responded the way they did to increasing exploitation associated with

Industrial capitalism. It leaves behind the study of the leadership of unions and examines the general membership of the working-class.

Much of the new labour History has been influenced by the culturalist approach of the British historian E.P. Thompson which accounts for class consciousness in cultural terms.⁵ These include traditions, value-systems, ideas and institutional forms. Thompson also believes that the way individuals became part of the working-class is an historical question. He suggests that the notion of class involves the notion of an historical relationship. In Thompson's terms, class is defined as:

...when men[sic], as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs.⁶

In Thompson's view, the struggles of people are mediated by past cultural and social experiences.⁷

This stress on social history through the use of a Marxist framework enables these historians to focus their analyses on the common people. The works of Marxist historians and their counterparts in both the United States and Canada were greatly influenced by Thompson's writings. The main purposes of this new type

of historical analysis "include not only an attempt to fill the gap left open by previous historical writing but also a chance to reveal the "positive characteristics of working-class life."⁸ In this way, a neo-Marxist approach is applied in order to demonstrate the formation of class consciousness.

Evidence of Thompson's analysis is found in the major works of Canadian new labour historians. In Canada, much emphasis is placed on class formation and concern with the totality of working-class life. According to Bryan Palmer and Gregory Kealey, two leading Marxist historians in Canada, a transformation to industrial capitalism was responsible for creating a distinctive working-class culture.⁹ In his approach, Palmer is committed to studying the "totality" of the working-class not just their culture.¹⁰

However, to suggest that there was this overall working-class culture or working-class consciousness neglects other factors that may have also contributed to solidarity amongst workers. Palmer claims that:

...while workers' consciousness may have been circumscribed historically by a host of competing identifications, dependency on wage labour has rooted workers in common experiences that have often resulted in class confrontations pitting labour against capital.¹¹

The common experiences that contributed to class solidarity were also mediated by other factors such as ethnicity, gender and religion. It is these factors, especially the role of ethnicity, that provided workers with a sense of familiarity in the initial formations of working-class organizations.

The new labour history is not without its shortcomings. In focusing on working-class culture, Palmer seems to downplay the importance of ethnicity and gender. He admits, however, that ethnicity in addition to gender and region were forces of division that "weakened labour's capacity to resist monopoly capital."¹²

David Bercuson is a major opponent of this claim made by Canadian new labour historians. He rejects the notion of class solidarity in order to suggest that:

...some of the most class conscious in Canada, who had proven their allegiance to radical thought and action for decades in the face of government witch hunts and popular prejudice, refused to submerge themselves in a Bolshevized Communist Party. Their ethnic identification, their radical ethnicity, was too important.¹³

Bercuson supports this assumption by stating that one ethnic group was usually found in one workplace or trade. In this way, Bercuson believes that there was no basis for intra-class alliances, since "workplaces were

predominantly of one religious and ethnic grouping or another."¹⁴

In criticizing the Marxist framework, Bercuson raises valid points concerning the exclusion of ethnicity. But he uses ethnicity as a way to avoid the issue of class. Bercuson asks what gave workers their strength: their ethnic identification or their identification as workers?¹⁵ Kealey, however, admits that historians know far too little about the internal structure of Canadian ethnic communities, especially about occupational structures. To ignore the importance of immigrant workers and their communities during this critical time period of Canada's expansion towards industrial capitalism is a great oversight on the part of these historians. In a 1981 article, "Labour and Working-Class History in Canada: Prospects in the 1980s," Kealey suggests that differences within the working-class did not completely overshadow class alliances.¹⁶ Therefore, Kealey states that:

The complexity and heterogeneity of the Canadian working-class experience does not deny the existence of a working-class. It may have limited that class's effectiveness in specific struggles with capital; moreover, it may have prevented it at times from mounting challenges to capital's hegemony; it has never, however, eliminated the class tensions.¹⁷

Both a working-class identity and an ethnic identity played an important role in influencing the mobilization of workers. As will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters, Jewish garment workers did predominate in the clothing trade in Montreal and they did organize along class lines. Bercuson admits that in some cases, workers "responded as much from consciousness of job place, church, ethnic group and other factors as from a culture of class."¹⁸

Both schools of labour history fail to include important factors. The new labour history focuses on class dynamics and fails to analyze the importance of ethnicity. The old labour history tends to view ethnicity as a binding factor without dealing with any class issues. An alternative framework is therefore needed that more adequately deals with the relationship between class and ethnicity and its influence on the formation of a Jewish working-class consciousness. If a class analysis is employed, it should nevertheless be possible to demonstrate the importance and strengthening possibilities of ethnicity without losing sight of the strengths of class phenomena. I propose that association with an ethnic group not only aided the immigrant generation with coping with industrial capitalism but also helped establish organizations for and by the working-class.

To understand this relationship between ethnicity and class, it is helpful to review the writings of both Jewish theorist Ber Borochov and the works of American new labour historians. People like Borochov and American writers, Melvyn Dubofsky, Herbert Gutman and John Bodnar succeeded in incorporating ethnicity into their class analyses. Like the new labour historians in Canada, these American historians were also influenced by E.P. Thompson. But what differentiates the American works from the Canadian ones is their acknowledgement of ethnic identity in the formation of a working-class consciousness. Whereas Canadian Marxist historians have just begun to acknowledge the presence and importance of an ethnically diverse working-class (especially after the turn-of-the-century), their American counterparts seem to accept ethnic identity as a common element amongst the working-class and tend to emphasize this point in their analyses.

Herbert Gutman is an important figure in the rise of the new labour history in the United States. Like Thompson, Gutman employs a culturalist approach. He firmly believes that consideration of cultural background is important. This means that there is an interaction between preindustrial folkways and the industrial system in American society.¹⁹ Gutman suggests

that there is a working-class world that incorporates working-class intellectual traditions, working-class community patterns and a working-class structure of feeling.²⁰ But this working-class world is highly influenced by the worker's culture of origin. Gutman claims that the way workers behaved was shaped by the interaction between that culture and the particular society into which they entered.²¹ This point was raised in 1973 by Gutman when he suggested that working-class communities were predominantly working-class ethnic subcultures.²² It was not mentioned in Canadian new labour historical writing until the 1980s when Bryan Palmer and Gregory Kealey admitted that ethnicity may have played a role in the working-class' response to industrial capitalism. In 1986, Bryan Palmer released a new collection of essays, The Character of Class Struggle. Here Palmer acknowledges that factors other than class such as gender, ethnicity, skill level, region and religion and their relationship to class need to be examined more closely:

The American version of the new labour history attempts to include ethnicity in its analysis. First, instead of examining a working-class culture without considering past experiences, American Marxist historians claim that immigrant workers blended their own cultural traditions with their new work habits in

the industrial society.²³ Bodnar is a strong proponent of this. He suggests that it is important to examine the way ethnic characteristics shaped the entry of immigrant workers into the American industrial world.²⁴ In addition, Melvyn Dubofsky believes that in order to understand how industrialization affected the life and culture of American workers, the relations among ethnicity, class, gender and race must be considered.²⁵

In dealing with the Jewish working-class specifically, Borochoy at the turn-of-the-century was one of the first Jewish theorists to integrate the ideas of the Eastern European Jewish experience and a common working-class struggle. He lived in the city of Poltava in Russia where he developed many of his ideas. Borochoy interchangeably used such terms as Socialist Zionism, Labour Zionism, proletarian Zionism and Poale Zionism. He was a strong Jewish nationalist who believed that Jewish workers around the world could unite and help establish a Jewish homeland. The Jewish culture, according to Borochoy, played a key role in contributing to raising the consciousness amongst the Jewish working-class and achieving this aim. His ideas are relevant there since Borochoy was one of the first Jewish writers to formulate a theory of class struggle based on both a Jewish identity and a working-class status.

Borochoy based many of his ideas on the experience of Eastern European Jews and the influence this had on the development of a Jewish labour movement. All of his subjects were members of the working-class and were part of the generation that raised the spirits of the Yiddish culture. According to Borochoy, Jewish workers' struggle began with the development of mutual aid societies amongst Jewish communities in Russia and Poland.²⁶ An increase in membership and number of societies also increased the importance of the Yiddish language. Borochoy's writings were an attempt to establish a synthesis of Zionism and socialism; in essence an effort to integrate ethnicity and working-class struggle in explaining the formation of a working-class consciousness. Borochoy's theory was one of the earliest attempts at explaining a uniform Jewish working-class response through dialectical materialism.²⁷

In an integration of ethnicity and class struggle, a distinctive Jewish working-class consciousness was developed. This was the result of bringing Jewish workers together through the medium of the Yiddish language. As a result, common characteristics based on the Jewish culture and the struggle for improvements created a solidarity of goals amongst members of the Jewish working-class. Borochoy claimed that:

...in groups which are organized so harmoniously that their individual members adapt themselves uniformly to their environment, there sooner or later develops also the consciousness of this harmony. Thus we perceive that because the group lives under uniform and also harmonious conditions of production or relations of production there sometimes develops, in addition to the group character, also a group-consciousness.²⁸

In the case of Jewish garment workers in Montreal, the intersection of class and ethnicity helped workers to cope with their exploitative situation. A distinct Jewish working-class consciousness was evident through the establishment of working-class community organizations. The workers' organizations were formed solely for and by the workers. They offered educational programs through lectures and classes on ways to fight their employers.

Ethnicity and community ties were of major concern to Jewish workers both prior to migration and after settlement in Montreal. The ideas of the Jewish working-class had their roots in Eastern Europe. Jewish workers, while still in Eastern Europe, experienced class exploitation in the slowly industrializing economy. This, coupled with anti-Jewish policies, not only reinforced community solidarity but also helped to establish a tradition of self-help within the Jewish working-class. In addition, industrialization throughout Europe contributed to the formulation of revolutionary

ideas and socialist beliefs that eventually spread to North America with the mass migration waves from 1880 to 1914.

The uniqueness of the Eastern European experience which will be explored in the following chapter, contributed to a strong sense of community and solidarity. In Eastern Europe, restrictions on place of residence and choice of occupation resulted in a forced separation of Jewish communities from their non-Jewish counterparts. Therefore, an increased concentration of Eastern European Jews in the garment industry and other skilled trades resulted. Consequently, prior to their movement to North America, the Jewish community had not only developed a tradition emphasizing the importance of autonomy but also drew upon their community as an essential element for survival. These traditions were carried over and incorporated into the many Jewish mutual benefit societies and fraternal orders founded solely by Jewish members of the North American working classes.

Jewish workers in the garment industry were residentially and occupationally separate from other ethnic groups. A unified response among Jewish workers was achieved through a combination of a common ethnic background and a working-class position within the

developing capitalist society. Many Jewish workers in Eastern Europe were involved in union activity and similar organizations of a socialist nature. Contact with capitalism and industrialization in Canada further heightened their collective class consciousness. Even though the Jewish working-class movement was only a one generation phenomenon, it still demonstrated that workers could combine to fight against a common enemy: capitalism.

Although Jewish garment workers did not win all the improvements for the workplace that they fought for, they did succeed in attaining a distinctive ethnic-based working-class consciousness. This was achieved in Montreal through mutual benefit societies, garment unions, Jewish schools for children of working-class parents and Jewish newspapers aimed at the Jewish working-class. In this way, I argue that ethnicity did not cloud over or hinder class consciousness. Instead ethnicity and class interacted with each other to help Jewish garment workers in Montreal produce a unified response. While divisions within the Jewish working-class were evident and may have contributed to disorganization at times, Jewish workers struggled together for common goals: a way to improve both their working and living conditions.

In general, ethnicity draws from distinctive cultural traditions. These include religion, language and community support. Yancey et al. claim that:

...ethnicity, defined in terms of frequent patterns of association and identification with common origins, is crystallized under conditions which reinforce the maintenance of kinship and friendship.²⁹

Ethnicity can be appropriately defined in these terms to characterize Jewish garment workers in Montreal. The uniqueness of the Eastern European Jewish experience included a strong sense of working-class solidarity. Limitations on place of residence and choice of occupation separated the Jewish communities in Eastern Europe from non-Jewish groups. The Jewish working-class community not only developed a tradition for the importance of autonomy but also emphasized the worker's community and family as essential for survival. These traditions were brought over to Canada and used by Jewish immigrant workers to organize self-help groups and to improve the general condition of workers through solidary action. In the face of Canadian industrialization, Jewish workers depended on a common experience as workers and similar cultural traditions to establish working-class organizations. In some cases, immigrant workers, in New York City established organizations there and then moved to Montreal to open

one in Russia discriminated against, it was the one group which was the target of the most consistent prejudice.⁹ In addition, the Pale of Settlement itself was considered as a legalized form of discrimination. This also limited the mobility of Jews within the Pale. For example, the Canadian-based newspaper, the Jewish Times reported on July 4, 1902 that under an order from Russia's Minister of Interior, police made a raid on Jews shopping in Moscow without special police permits. It was reported that non-resident Jews were not permitted in any of the big cities without authority from police.¹⁰

While restrictions on areas of residence did result in the congestion of the Jewish population within the Pale, it also increased the sense of autonomy of the Jewish people. Consequently, Jewish communities developed a strong internal structure whereby members of a community depended on each other for survival. Restrictions on areas of living, passed in 1882, prohibited Jews from living in villages in 15 out of 25 districts of the Pale.¹¹ This resulted in other problems; a high density of the Jewish population and the forced movement of Jews from rural areas to cities and towns within the Pale.¹² In the cities, as elsewhere in Russia, Jews were excluded from employment in any government office. In this way, various Jewish

Between the microscopic forces of daily life, often centering around ethnic communal and kinship ties, and the macroscopic world of economic change and urban growth stood the culture of everyday life. This was a culture not based exclusively on ethnicity, tradition, class, or progress. More precisely, it was a mediating culture which confronted all these factors.³¹

Therefore, while ethnicity and class interacted to produce a working-class consciousness, cultural traditions rooted in both ethnicity and class were used to formulate the ideas that workers' organizations were based upon.

According to Cumbler, a community indicates feelings of commonality and distinctiveness.³² This connects with Bodnar's argument that within the community, ethnicity served as a basis for social organization and adjustment for newly arrived immigrant workers in an industrial society.³³ Because workers had established their own institutions, they were able to control these organizations in the community. Bodnar also suggests that:

Regardless of what historians may have written, the industrial worker's immediate instinct was to preserve what was familiar. The integrity of the workers' world came first. Only when that was secure would these men push for control of the workplace or worry about large social objectives. In a very real and ironic sense, community emerged as a prerequisite for protest because it was simultaneously the workers' ultimate objective.³⁴

In his book City Trenches, Ira Katznelson suggests that neighborhood institutions proved the possibility for the development of an independent working-class culture.³⁵ Jewish working-class organizations were primarily located within the working-class community. Cumbler has defined community as "an aggregate of people who occupy a common and bounded territory."³⁶ This would include members of the working-class who felt a common identity with each other. The Jewish working-class community in Montreal at the turn-of-the-century was composed of immigrants who experienced a similar past in Eastern Europe, spoke the same language, practiced the same customs and faced similar working conditions. In this respect, Jewish working-class organizations were formed on the basis of ethnicity and a common class experience of exploitation in Canada.

This was not just an ethnic community but also a workers' community. Although the majority of their employers were also of the same religious background, Jewish workers tended to align themselves with members of their own class. Consequently, community institutions were also based on working-class ties. With respect to working-class organizations, Melvyn Dubofsky believes that among immigrant workers, family and kinship networks, ethnic societies and music halls not only

preserved their traditions but also provided a culture that helped maintain their existence in an industrializing society.³⁷

The importance of this approach to sociology needs to be emphasized. A class perspective that is sensitive to the mediating effects of ethnicity offers a way to deal with life experiences of everyday that workers faced with the advent of capitalist exploitation. It also adds to the understanding of why they responded the way they did. Identification with members of their own ethnic group clearly prevailed among the workers. Yet workers established their own working-class intellectual traditions which influenced the establishment of garment unions at the beginning of this century.

Despite divisions between ethnic groups of workers and within the Jewish working-class, a working-class consciousness was developed along ethnic lines. Jewish immigrants who came from Eastern Europe at the turn-of-the-century found themselves in need of assistance. In addition, those who came brought ideas that would hopefully help to better their condition in North America. In some cases, a socialist ideology learned in Eastern Europe prior to the 1905 revolution in Russia, was applied to organizations in varying degrees. In support of a working-class consciousness, Jewish workers

organized libraries and schools aimed at the working-class. In addition, a Yiddish newspaper, Canader Adler (The Canadian Eagle) was established in Canada by workers that encouraged workers to express their views.

A distinctive Jewish working-class consciousness was developed through links established with both a working-class identity and an ethnic identity. Jewish garment workers in Montreal between 1880 and 1920, combined both class struggle and ethnicity in an attempt to formulate solidary class action. By using the Jewish garment workers as a case study, it is possible to develop a framework that incorporates both ethnicity and class. Much emphasis is placed on working and living conditions in addition to the ethnic working-class community. In the subsequent chapters, an understanding of the interaction of ethnicity and class is developed through an examination of the Eastern European experience, working conditions in the garment industry, and the establishment of working-class organizations.

Endnotes

1. Bryan Palmer, for example, suggests that a "working-class culture" is based solely on class. (B. Palmer, Working-Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour 1800-1980, Toronto, 1983).

In a 1981 article by Gregory Kealey, "Labour and Working-Class History in Canada: Prospects for the 1980s", Labour/Le Travailleur and in more recent writings of Palmer (1986), it is suggested that other factors, once conceived as being completely divisive, may play a role in contributing to a working-class culture.

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Chapter Three

The Eastern European Experience

To understand the key role of ethnicity in the formation of a Jewish working-class consciousness, it is important to examine the Eastern European experience of Jewish workers. The uniqueness of this experience contributed to a strong sense of autonomy, community and worker solidarity found both in Canada and Eastern Europe. A long history of economic, social and political legal restrictions in Russia, Roumania and Galicia hindered the occupational and residential mobility of the Jewish people. The problems of Eastern European Jews culminated in severe physical attacks or pogroms between the years 1881 and 1920. These were the same years that witnessed a major influx of Eastern European Jews into Canada. In this respect, community solidarity was strongly emphasized as an element for survival. In addition, the ideological foundations for socialist organizations in North America had their roots in Russia.

Slow industrialization within the provinces of Eastern Europe began to displace the skilled trades that many Jewish workers had been traditionally forced to enter. The eastern European Jewish experience was a result of many years of restrictions. This experience

not only provided Jewish workers with an ideological background but also determined how ethnocultural traditions, such as community and worker solidarity helped Jewish workers cope with the conditions within Canada's expanding industrial sector.

Prior to their movement to Canada, Eastern European Jews experienced a long history of anti-Jewish problems. During the seventeenth century, Peter the Great of Russia instituted a decree whereby thousands of foreigners were imported to help modernize his country. But as part of this early attempt at exclusion, he refused to admit any Jews. Exclusionary policies were continued during the eighteenth century when in 1741 Empress Elizabeth ordered the expulsion of all Jews from the Russian empire. These same types of tactics persisted under the leadership of Catherine II.¹ In 1762, in an attempt to exclude Jews from settling in Russia, she added an "except the Jews clause" to a policy that encouraged settlement of foreigners in her Empire. However, the problems for the Jewish people increased when three partitions of Poland in 1772, 1793 and 1795 gave Russia 1,000,000 Jews.²

In 1791, Catherine the Great instituted the Russian Pale of Settlement. From this period onward both occupational and educational mobility became limited.

Restrictions increased as Jews were prohibited from moving beyond the boundaries of the Pale.³ Major cities became off limits and certain occupations were forbidden. As time passed, the population within the Pale increased and economic competition was more visible amongst the people. It was not until March 20, 1917, after the fall of Czarism that restrictions on movement were repealed.⁴

From 1881 until 1920, increased physical attacks or pogroms on the Jewish people, their property and their shops exacerbated the economic and social problems of Jews in Eastern Europe. In 1881, Czar Alexander II was —assassinated. This was followed by pogroms that continued periodically until World War I. When Alexander III rose to power in 1881, his regime was characterized by oppression and injustice. His short term as Czar was commonly known as the "reign of terror."⁵ When his son, Nicholas II, ascended the throne, the restrictive legislation continued. Jews were still prohibited from owning land thus directing them towards the skilled trades. Restrictions on residential mobility persisted so that an increase in population intensified the competition for jobs in the crowded Pale.

A combination of residential and occupational restrictions and an increased population exposed Jewish

workers to both the effects of industrialization and discriminatory practices. First, because movement outside of the Pale was restricted, Jewish workers experienced the problems of increased unemployment due to congestion of the population. In 1901, there were 50,000 Jews unemployed in Russia.⁶ Secondly, increased industrialization in urban centres, threatened the skilled trades and forced many Jewish workers out of their traditional crafts. The population of Russian Poland increased by 179% in the four decades before 1900.⁷ Industrialization in Russia contributed to the growth of urban centres where 48.7% of Jews lived in officially designated urban centres.⁸ This combination of industrialization and anti-Jewish policies contributed to the unique experience of Eastern European Jews. In this way, a tradition of community solidarity was developed that was reinforced when Jewish workers encountered industrialization in Canada.

As the result of anti-Jewish policies instituted in Eastern Europe, the Jewish people established a common bond amongst themselves. This bond provided a link amongst Jews in Eastern Europe that helped them cope with the day-to-day struggles they faced. A well developed ethnocultural tradition was based on community self-help and the fight against both anti-Semitism and exploitation. While the Jewish minority was not the only

one in Russia discriminated against, it was the one group which was the target of the most consistent prejudice.⁹ In addition, the Pale of Settlement itself was considered as a legalized form of discrimination. This also limited the mobility of Jews within the Pale. For example, the Canadian-based newspaper, the Jewish Times reported on July 4, 1902 that under an order from Russia's Minister of Interior, police made a raid on Jews shopping in Moscow without special police permits. It was reported that non-resident Jews were not permitted in any of the big cities without authority from police.¹⁰

While restrictions on areas of residence did result in the congestion of the Jewish population within the Pale, it also increased the sense of autonomy of the Jewish people. Consequently, Jewish communities developed a strong internal structure whereby members of a community depended on each other for survival. Restrictions on areas of living, passed in 1882, prohibited Jews from living in villages in 15 out of 25 districts of the Pale.¹¹ This resulted in other problems; a high density of the Jewish population and the forced movement of Jews from rural areas to cities and towns within the Pale.¹² In the cities, as elsewhere in Russia, Jews were excluded from employment in any government office. In this way, various Jewish

communities became autonomous and governed themselves. This was a tradition that was later used to establish their working-class organizations and fraternal groups.

Eastern European Jews also suffered direct and indirect attacks against their religion. In many instances synagogues and Jewish schools were physically attacked. In other cases, the government would issue a proclamation against synagogues. This was the case in 1889 when the Government of the Province of Kieff ordered the closing of thirty synagogues and schools at Birditicheff.¹³ At the time, this was the centre of Jewish life in the southwest Provinces. In addition, Jewish males were the victims of a more indirect assault against their religion. In 1827, the Russian government issued an order that extended a compulsory twenty-five years military service to Jewish males.¹⁴ In this way, boys of twelve years of age were sent away from their families and communities to places where there were no contacts with other Jews.

Because of severe restrictions instituted against the Jews, community life became the centre of their livelihood. Marc Fried suggests that "regions of small-scale ownership appear to have maintained greater social stability with persisting forms of communal cooperation, investments in cultural traits..."¹⁵ Local villages or

shtetls, where the majority of Eastern European Jews lived, were forced to care for themselves. The forced separateness of Jewish communities allowed the Jews to perpetuate their cultural ties. These included the Jewish language, folkways, religion, holidays, newspapers and theatres.¹⁶ By living in a predominantly Jewish environment, the Jewish people, while still in Eastern Europe, were able to develop a strong tradition for community support. Within this community, Jewish culture and Jewish life remained as the dominant features.

The slow process of industrialization and the occupational structure of Jews were other aspects of the Eastern European experience that determined the response of the Jewish working-class. The largest occupational group of Jews in Eastern Europe was tailors. According to a report in the Jewish Times of October 9, 1902, of 76,540 Jewish women employed in a trade or profession in the Russian Pale, the largest group was comprised of tailloresses, 33,419 or 41% of the total female Jewish workers.¹⁷

Because of occupational restrictions for Jewish workers, tailoring, capmaking and shoemaking were the primary occupational groups of Jews. A long history of governmental restraints in Eastern Europe deprived the

majority of Jews access to owning land. Jews, therefore, engaged in the skilled trades which did not require bulky or expensive equipment. In 1786, 71% of all tailors in Lublin were Jewish, and in 1797, 58% of tailors in Posen were Jewish.¹⁸ Prior to 1860, tailoring was still considered a home craft and the complete garment was made there. With the invention and development of the sewing machine in America, mass production of clothing was possible.¹⁹ Industrialization of the garment trades slowly moved into Eastern Europe. As in Canada and the United States, the "ready-to-wear" men's and women's clothing industry developed in Eastern Europe. In many cases, Jewish tailors were displaced as small factories began to employ unskilled and semi-skilled workers. Therefore, Jewish workers were exposed to the division of processes within the industry prior to their movement to North America.

In Roumania, class divisions were more prevalent as Jews remained in the ranks of the middle class. A newspaper report in 1900 claimed that there were two major non-Jewish classes in Roumania. The first class was comprised of nobility, officials, army officers and estated proprietors. The second class contained elements of the poor masses. But between these two classes, Jews formed a middle class of professional men, teachers,

artisans, merchants and tradesmen. A combination of religious intolerance in the ruling class and jealousy of better conditions among the lower class started a campaign against Jews.²⁰ The Government passed anti-Jewish policies aimed at economically depriving Jews of their rights. Such Laws stated that non-Jews were forbidden to employ Jewish people or to trade with them, to purchase manufactures or rent houses from Jews. In addition, only 5% of children who attended schools were allowed to be Jews.²¹

Competition and indirect persecution through exclusionary measures were two distinct problems that faced Jews in Eastern Europe. In 1900, five million Jews lived in the Russian Pale of Settlement. This created competition because of congestion.²² While restrictions on mobility were rampant in the Pale, the Roumanian government was active in excluding Jews from entering guilds. A law in Roumania considered Jews to be "aliens" except those rich enough to buy naturalization. When the Roumanian government ordered organizing of all trades and handicrafts into guilds, it prohibited the entry of aliens.²³ Because a large majority of Roumanian Jews were artisans, this measure of indirect persecution resulted in an increase of Jewish emigration from Roumania.²⁴ At the time of settlement in Canada, this type of common experience was part of the tradition that

influenced a sense of commonality and solidarity amongst Jewish workers.

The Jewish people first encountered elements of economic competition and exploitation in Eastern Europe. This is supported by John Bodnar in his 1985 study of immigrants in urban America. He claims that immigrants did not leave preindustrial worlds but countries that were already experiencing capitalism.²⁵ As new factories were built in Eastern Europe, thousands of Jews who were unemployed in the towns sought work in the expanding economy. Population growth in urban centres had increased the competition for jobs. Therefore, while still in Eastern Europe, Jewish workers established a tradition of mutual aid societies. Such societies arose in direct response to coping with the new economic problems associated with both anti-Jewish policies and the advent of industrialization. These conditions also laid the foundations for socialist ideologies that first appeared in Eastern Europe.

Jewish life in Eastern Europe strongly influenced the development of Jewish socialist ideologies. The industrial revolution was responsible for changes in the occupational structure in the area. With slow industrial advancement, there occurred the rise of a non-Jewish middle-class. This was accompanied by growing anti-

Semitism as non-Jews discovered that their greatest economic competitors consisted largely of small traders, middlemen and artisans.²⁶ According to Joseph Kage, a Canadian Jewish historian, this aggravated the economic position of Jews. He claims that there arose two types of Jews. First, a kind of Jewish bourgeoisie infiltrated the ranks of the middle-class. But Kage suggests that a great number of Jews were forced to undergo an occupational readjustment. As a result, new movements amongst Jewish workers developed. They incorporated aspects of Jewish socialism, cosmopolitanism and Zionism.²⁷

Socialist ideologies that were transferred to North America during the mass migration of Eastern European Jews were originally shaped both by conditions of life in Russia and through the infiltration of radical thought in the Pale of Settlement. Amongst Jews two streams of Jewish nationalism came into being at the end of the nineteenth century, the Bund and the Zionist Movement. Politically they were opposed, but socially they both attempted to improve the economic and social well-being of the Jewish people.

First, social Zionism struggled for the establishment of a Jewish homeland. It maintained a socialist approach without abandoning the importance of

the Jewish religion. Socialism as advocated by early Jewish socialists was utilized as a solution to the Jewish problem. Kage claims that their basic theory promoted the ideas of international solidarity of workers and the elimination of capitalism which it was held would lead to a society based on equality.²⁸ A part of the Zionist doctrine was a strong emphasis on class struggle and nationalism. According to Marxist literature, national struggle hinders class struggle. But, Borochov, in his writings at the turn-of-the-century, believed that the struggle for nationalism establishes a common basis for class struggle. In an analysis of Borochov's theoretical perspective, Kage suggests that:

Nationalism springs from the most fundamental of all material conditions of production-territory which is a "work place" and a "struggle base" for worker where he entrenches himself, seeks roots, and uses it as a vantage point to conduct class struggle.²⁹

In this respect, a major contribution of Borochov to the background of Labour Zionism in Eastern Europe was his concept of proletarian nationalism; an attempt at integrating ethnicity into the class struggle. In 1905, the Poale Zion, the political wing, was established in the city of Poltava, Russia.³⁰ It incorporated both the foundations and theory of Zionism into a political doctrine.

A more secular-type of organization, the General Jewish Workers Federation (The Bund), was founded in September, 1897 in Vilna, Poland. It was founded by Jewish revolutionary socialists who fought against class oppression. The original establishment of the Bund occurred earlier in the nineteenth century. The original intent of their program included "promoting self-education, propagating socialism, and instituting loan committees."³¹ The Bund was one of the first successful attempts at Jewish worker solidarity. For the first time in Russian history, a large body of Jews formed an organization that could be used for self-defence.³² Also, as part of their doctrine, the Bund represented:

...a maximum and a minimum program, the minimum consisting of combatting economic as well as national struggle, while the incentive of the majority was towards liberal social order, nationalization of industry and enforcement of social political status.³³

The Bund is an example of a Jewish working-class organization that was created out of distinctive living and working conditions in Eastern Europe. In an article published in the Fifty Year Jubilee Book of the Russian Polish Hebrew Sick Benefit Association, Benjamin Orenstein claims that this organization aimed to lead and educate the Jewish proletariat in its struggle for economic, civil and political liberation.³⁴ The

secularized elements of the Bund opposed nationalistic, Hebrew, and religious beliefs. For this reason, its members often came into conflict with Zionists. Orenstein suggests that:

The basic tenet of the Bund was that socialism will automatically solve the Jewish problem. It emphasized, however, that the Jewish problem was of regional rather than of international importance, and this point of view led to the Bund's later antagonism and opposition to Zionism and Territorialism.³⁵

After the 1905 Russian Revolution, the Bund changed its perspective. According to Orenstein, there was a terror and disillusionment period following the Revolution. Orenstein suggests that this brought about a modification in its attitude towards nationalism. Their new program included elements of Jewish culture, Jewish minority rights, the principles of national and cultural autonomy, the defense of Jewish rights and in general took an interest in Jewish issues.³⁶ The foundations for the radical labour movement in both Canada and the United States, had its roots in the socialist composition of the Bund in Eastern Europe. Therefore, the Eastern European experience of Jewish workers provided a firm ideological background that was incorporated into their traditions and transferred to North America between 1880 and 1920.

The more secularized and educated Jewish workers in Eastern Europe were the leaders of the fight to improve the standard of living of the working classes. Many Jews, though disqualified or restricted from universities, moved to cities within the Pale where much radical intellectual thought was found. One such centre of association was the city of Vilna. Here Jewish intellectuals met with non-Jews to learn many of the new ideas of the day. John Bodnar suggests that young Jewish radicals "studied religion less and the gospel of socialism more in an attempt to improve the lot of the working classes."³⁷ But, there was one major difference between Jewish and non-Jewish intellectuals. Eastern European Jews used the Jewish culture with its emphasis on solidarity and the Yiddish language to develop their socialist doctrine for the Jewish working-class.

After 1880, conditions for Jews in Eastern Europe deteriorated socially, politically and economically. Throughout the Pale of Settlement and in Roumania and Galicia anti-Jewish policies increased. The Roumanian government, in 1899, raised the tax for foreign students entering and attending universities. Because Jews were considered aliens in their own country, the tax per month for Jewish students at Roumanian universities increased from forty to ninety francs.³⁸ This disqualified many poor Jewish students from attending

and receiving a higher education. In response to adverse social and economic conditions many Jewish communities adopted various methods of self-help. The establishment of Co-operative Loan Banks for small traders and peddlars is one of the most successful of the Eastern European self-help groups.³⁹ They were first established in Vilna in 1899 and by 1902 there were twenty-five banks.

Jewish mutual benefit associations first appeared in Eastern Europe in response to adverse economic conditions and discrimination. Within various Jewish communities, cultural aspects such as the development of modern Yiddish and Hebrew literatures bound the Jewish people together. But there was also an economic response. The 1890s witnessed an increase in mutual credit institutions throughout the Pale. Usually, artisans of a particular trade or workers of one industry collected savings in a fund.⁴⁰ This money was used for assistance in case of sickness or an accident at work. Where workers were better organized, money was accumulated for strike funds. According to Arcadius Kahan, this was an "embryonic form of trade unionism."⁴¹ It is evident that the economic and cultural responses were incorporated into worker organizations. Above all, these two types of responses were used as weapons to combat discrimination against the Jewish people:

On the cultural scene, the development of the modern literatures in Yiddish and Hebrew, the growth of the press, and the attempts to set up a modern school system contained the elements of a response to discrimination and assertion of dignity and pride in the Jewish cultural heritage.⁴²

From the year of the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881, the worst type of attack on Jews culminated in the forms of pogroms. These were physical attacks against the Jewish people and their property. In many instances, Jewish men, women and children were either brutally beaten or murdered. Usually they were provoked by some source that claimed the Jews had either murdered a non-Jew or that the Jewish people were the source of economic problems. These accusations were proven to be totally unfounded. While attacks against Jews were not instigated by the ruling power or government, the assaults were generally tolerated by the government. The first attacks occurred on April 16, 1881 in Elizabethgrad.⁴³ Another wave of attacks began in early July of the same year. The first wave of pogroms corresponded with an increase of Jewish migration to North America. Migration continued until 1920. The years between 1903 and 1906 witnessed a record increase when a new wave of severe pogroms occurred in Roumania and Russia.

An increased number of attacks seems to have occurred just prior to and after the 1905 Russian Revolution. The poor economic conditions of many Russians may have been the cause. Between the months of May and August of 1905, it was reported that 10,000 Jews were murdered by mobs. In Odessa on November 5, 1905, around the time of the revolution, 18,000 people were killed, the majority Jews. Because there were many Jewish revolutionaries among the Socialists, it was rumored that the Jewish people turned against members of their own ethnic groups.⁴⁴ However, the police did not deny that they instigated this attack on the Jewish people. In another set of pogroms, it was believed that the church, police and bureaucracy were in alliance with the mobs. In the following year, 1906, the three day Bialystok pogrom took place. Approximately, 150 Jews were killed. It was falsely reported that Jews threw a bomb at the Orthodox procession in honour of Corpus Christi Day.⁴⁵ These physical attacks prompted massive migrations of Eastern European Jews to North America.

The influx of Russian, Roumanian and Polish immigrants coincided with the transition of the clothing trades from a rural-based economy to a highly exploitative urban-based industry. More specifically, economic development in Quebec and Ontario attracted immigrants of various ethnic backgrounds. Therefore,

this critical time period produced an urban industrial working-class. Immigrants who had previously been skilled craftsmen or artisans found themselves the victims of deskilling. The increase in manufacturing created a sub-division of labour. Within Montreal, the ready-made clothing industry received many new immigrants. While most Jewish owners were of German or Lithuanian background, the workers were comprised of a majority of male and female Eastern European Jewish workers and French-Canadian workers.

The bulk of Montreal's Jewish immigrants arrived after the turn-of-the-century. In 1901, the most densely populated ward for the Jewish ethnic group was St. Louis. At this time there were approximately 3,000 Jews. By 1911, this figure for the Jewish population in the St. Louis ward had increased to 11,500.⁴⁶ Overall, in Montreal, the period between 1881 and 1921 saw a major increase in the Jewish population. During the decade from 1911 to 1921, the Jewish population outnumbered the total population of all ethnic groups which were not of French or Anglo-Celtic origins.⁴⁷ Within Montreal, the Jewish people established small communities, as did other immigrant groups at this time. These closely resembled the communities from which Jews came in Eastern Europe. Aspects of the community and cultural traditions along with a history of anti-Jewish attacks

had combined to form the Eastern European experience. These traditions were brought to Canada so Jewish immigrants were somewhat better equipped ~~to deal with~~ the problems of Canada's industrialization. In response to working and living conditions in Montreal, Jewish workers succeeded in establishing institutions and services necessary for survival and adjustment in the new world.

The Eastern European experience of Jewish workers determined the way Jews responded to anti-Jewish policies in the Old Country and industrialization in Montreal. A strong sense of community solidarity was established as well as a firm groundwork for mutual aid and socialist ideologies. Ethnocultural traditions such as the modern development of the Yiddish language, the establishment of schools and a strong sense of autonomy formed the basis of the cultural response. Because the Pale of Settlement limited the mobility of Jews, congestion within the Pale resulted. In other areas, such as Roumania, enrollment procedures in universities for Jews became tougher. These problems were further intensified between the years 1881 and 1914 with the added attacks of the pogroms. As a result, there was a massive movement of Eastern European Jews to North America. With them, they brought new hopes for their future and a background of self-help. This not only

encouraged the establishment of mutual aid institutions but also the formation of a unique Jewish working-class consciousness in Montreal's garment industry.

Endnotes

1. N. Levin, While Messiah Tarried: Jewish Socialist Movements 1871-1917, (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), p. 4.

2. Ibid., p. 4.

3. The Pale of Settlement included ten provinces of Russian Poland, six adjoining provinces of Vilna, Kovno, Grodno, Minsk, Vitebsk and Mogilev, known as Lithuania and White Russia. Also included were the five Ukrainian provinces of Volhyn, Podolia, Kiev, Cherniga, Poltava in southwest Russia. In the south of Russia, there were also the provinces of Ekaterinoslav, Kherson, Bessarabia and Crimea (Louis Rosenberg, 1957).

4. N. Levin, Op. cit., p. 4.

5. National Archives of the Canadian Jewish Congress (Hereafter CJC) Russian Polish Hebrew Sick Benefit Society Papers, ZC 2431, "A Short Survey of the History of Jews in Poland and Russia until the Second World War."

6. "Horrible Conditions in Russia," Jewish Times, Montreal, Vol. IV, 16 August 1901, No. 19.

7. J. Bodnar, The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 37.

8. A. Kahan, "The Impact of Industrialization in Tsarist Russia on the Socioeconomic Conditions of the Jewish Population", in R. Weiss (ed) Essays in Jewish Social and Economic History, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 28.

9. Ibid., p. 34.

10. "Persecution of Jews in Russia", Jewish Times, Montreal, Vol. V, 4 July 1902, No. 16.

11. A. Kahan, Op. cit., p. 35.

12. Ibid., p. 35.

13. Jewish Times, Montreal, Vol. I, 15 September 1899, No. 21.

14. Public Archives of Canada (hereafter PAC), Louis Rosenberg Collection, MG 30 C119, Vol. 26, File 33, p. 9 "The Jewish Community of Montreal", L. Rosenberg.

15. M. Fried, The World of the Urban Working Class, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 42.

16. PAC, MG 30 C119, Vol. 26, File 24, "Jews By Accident or Jews by Choice", L. Rosenberg.

17. Jewish Times, Vol. V, Montreal, 9 October 1902, No. 23.

18. PAC, MG 30 C119, Vol. 26, file 28, "Jews in the Clothing Industry in Canada", L. Rosenberg.

19. The sewing machine was developed between 1846 and 1856 in the United States by Elias Howe, Walter Hunt, Allan Wilson and Isaac Singer.

20. "Why The Jews are leaving Roumania", Jewish Times, Montreal, Vol. III, 17 August 1900, No. 19.

21. Ibid., p. 297.

22. "The Distress in Russia, Roumania and Galicia" Jewish Times, Montreal, Vol. III, 20 July 1900, No. 17.

23. "Roumanian Immigrants", Jewish Times, Montreal, Vol. III, 17 August 1900, No. 19.

24. Ibid.

25. J. Bodnar, Op. cit., p. 56.

26. CJC, Labour Zionism, ZG 4911, "Labour Zionism: The Evolution of an Idea", Joseph Kage, p. 13.

27. Ibid., p. 13.

28. Ibid., p. 12.

29. Ibid., p. 15.

30. CJC, ZC 2431, "A Short Survey of the History of Jews in Poland and Russia until the Second World War", B. Orenstein.

31. Ibid.

32. "A Gloomy Outlook" Jewish Times, Montreal Vol. VIII, April 21, 1905, No. 11.

33. CJC, ZC 2431, B. Orenstein, Op. cit.
34. Ibid., p. 13.
35. Ibid., p. 13.
36. Ibid., p. 13.
37. J. Bodnar, Op. cit., p. 49.
38. Jewish Times, Montreal, Vol. II. 18 August 1899, No. 19.
39. "Echoes of the Jewish World" Jewish Times Montreal, Vol. V, 3 January 1902.
40. A. Kahan, Op. cit., p. 42.
41. Ibid., p. 42.
42. Ibid., p. 42.
43. In one case a rumor was spread that an imperial ukase was issued that called upon the Russians to attack Jews during the Greek Orthodox Easter.
44. The Jewish Times reported on November 17, 1905 the following "How far Jewish revolutionists brought down on their co-religionists the fury of the police and the mob cannot be said." In addition, a large proportion of Jews were among the Socialist and revolutionary parties.
45. "The Bialystok Pogrom", Jewish Times Montreal, Vol. IX 29 June 1906, No. 19.
46. PAC, MG 30 C119, Vol. 28 "The Development and Social Adjustment of the Jewish Community in Montreal", September, 1939.
47. PAC, MG 30 C119, Vol. 26 File 33, p. 3 "The Jewish Community of Montreal" L. Rosenberg.

Chapter Four

The Structure of the Garment Industry

By the time Jewish immigrant workers started to arrive in Montreal, the garment industry was well underway. By the late 1820s, the clothing trades had begun to transfer its business arrangements from rural areas to the city. This was especially true in Quebec, where small clothing manufacturers were established at the beginning of the 1880s. The movement of the garment trades to urban centres and intensive economic development in Canada coincided with the massive immigration of Eastern European Jews to North America. Searching for a cheap source of labour, employers in the rapidly rising clothing industry were quick to hire these immigrants.

The development of the garment industry in this period demonstrates wide use of the contracting system. The industry evolved from custom tailor shops to partial factory production. Outside workers were employed in both contract shops and private homes. As was characteristic with the clothing trades, extreme exploitation ran rampant through the use of cheap immigrant labour. By 1900, garment manufacturers had perfected the system of contracting out. In addition, small-scale production coupled with contract shops

resulted in a division of labour. These contract shops, or more popularly termed sweatshops, were widespread due to uncontrolled competition. The sweating system was responsible for lowering both the standards of working conditions and wages. Between the 1880s and 1920s, thousands of Jewish workers poured into this industry and were faced with these sub-standard conditions. In order to cope with this exploitative environment, Jewish garment workers united with fellow Jewish workers who encountered the same experiences. This chapter investigates the evolving structure of the garment industry in Montreal between 1880 and 1920. It is argued that a Jewish solidary working-class response was clearly rooted in and structured by adverse conditions in the garment industry in Montreal.

The development of the industrialized garment trades produced employment opportunities for newly arriving immigrants. The 1860s to the 1870s witnessed the shift from custom-made clothing to factory-made clothing for men. This same time period also included the rapid growth of ready-made clothing production for women.¹ This was the fastest growing sector in the clothing industry at the time. According to Arcadius Kahan, the women's clothing sector accounted for almost two-thirds of growth of factory labour in the total industry from 1899 to 1914.² In the early years just

after its development at the turn-of-the-century, the clothing industry throughout North America was comprised of both factories or large-scale shops and the home industry or sweatshops. In Montreal, the same was true. By this time, many of the larger clothing factories were owned and operated by Jewish manufacturers. In a newspaper article written by Mackenzie King for the Globe on November 19, 1898, it was reported that in Montreal the ready-made clothing business was conducted by large wholesale merchants.³ Within this, there were three different contexts for the production of clothing; the home, the shop and the factory.⁴

Before the beginnings of mass migration of Eastern European Jews to Montreal in the 1880s, the clothing industry in Quebec depended on female labour found in small farming communities. During the 1870s, material was cut on the premises of wholesale clothing houses, including linings and trimmings. The bundles of material were then sent out to these areas to be sewn together by farmers in their homes. Sometimes entire populations of little villages around Montreal were involved in the making of coats, vests and pants for Montreal wholesalers.⁵ Usually the finished products were brought back to the city one week after the original delivery to rural areas.⁶ This was usually market day for the farmers. Payment was made on the basis of the

70
number of garments sewn. The aim of this entire process was to produce cheap clothing. A demand, though, for better made and better looking clothing forced manufacturers to move away from the farming-out system and develop a more advanced urban-based sector.⁷

Amongst clothing manufacturers in Québec, no Jewish names appear among the founders of the industry until the 1870s. In 1874, Solomon Levinson established a retail store in Montreal. Before the movement of Jewish immigrants to the city, Levinson depended on farmers in the country for the manufacturing of clothing for sale in his own store. According to a newspaper report in the Jewish Standard, Levinson discovered that he could have more clothes made than he could sell in his store. He therefore opened a wholesale clothing business in 1880.⁸ As late as 1900, his garments were still made by farmer-tailors and their families. It was this type of contracting out that resulted in competition between French Canadian rural workers and Jewish urban workers.

The ready-made clothing industry in Canada was not underway until 1890. The period from 1860 to 1880 was associated with the transformation from rural-based economy to a more advanced technological one in the city. This development was evident in the province of Quebec. David Rome, the historian for the Canadian

Jewish Congress National Archives in Montreal, claims that the growth of the clothing industry in Montreal reflected the consolidation of manufacturing in the province of Quebec. This benefitted the city economically.⁹ According to the 1890-1891 census, there were 435 garment-related manufacturing establishments in Montreal.¹⁰ This included the largest number of manufacturers in the city. The same census for 1891 revealed that 72 per cent of the workers in the clothing industry were women, half of all women employed in industry in Montreal.

The invention of the sewing machine and later the motor driven cutting knife, improved the quality of the clothing and contributed to the growth of the industry. These technological advancements succeeded in not only speeding up the process for producing ready-made clothing but also later resulted in a division of labour along gender lines. Cutting was originally done by shears, a task easily carried out by cheap female labour. The new technologically advanced cutting machine consisted of a circular knife which was used like a saw. The new advanced knife enabled material to be cut through six to eight thicknesses of cloth.¹¹ This required great strength so that women were displaced by men at this particular task. In this way, male workers did the more skilled and technologically advanced jobs.

As previously stated, the arrival of Eastern European Jewish immigrants occurred at the same time as new technological improvements were introduced within the industry. Jewish male workers were employed by manufacturers to do the more skilled jobs. At that time, the clothing trade started to move towards an urban-based economy. Mercedes Steedman claims that the growth of the system was connected to the arrival of increased numbers of Jewish immigrants. "They entered the trade as workers and contractors.¹² The factories that employed Jews still had to compete with farm labour. This competition led to a decrease in wages and extreme exploitation. Both intense competition and exploitation brought adverse conditions that were characteristic of the industry before World War One. More and more "outside" shops or sweatshops opened in order to compete in the industry. This meant that unsanitary conditions were harder to control as they fell outside the scope of government legislation. Many sweatshops were located within the homes of contractors. As a result, inspectors were not able to seek out all sweatshops as they remained hidden from the public. Also, an increase in shops caused more fragmentation in the industry as more manufacturers depended on piecework.

The majority of the clothing manufacturers who employed members of the Jewish working-class were also Jewish. Many Jewish workers, both male and female, had experience as tailors in Eastern Europe and also were familiar with aspects of the ready-made clothing industry. Thus, Jewish workers provided a cheap source of labour to respond to the demand for quality clothing. One such wholesale clothing business was established in 1881 by Jewish entrepreneur Harris Vineberg.¹³ Other firms such as Friedman Brothers, H. Kellert and Sons, Mark Workman Company and H. E. Davis and Company were also founded at this time. All the above were primarily involved in the men's clothing industry. It was reported in 1892 that these businesses carried on to a large extent in Montreal and gave employment to a large number of Jewish immigrants who competed with French Canadians.¹⁴ A reporter for the Canadian Yiddish paper, the Canader Adler (The Canadian Eagle) stated in 1909 that "by this time there are 15,000 Jews engaged in the needle trades in Montreal; only one large pants company was not in Jewish hands."¹⁵

The ready-made clothing industry in Canada, like that of the United States, developed into a highly competitive and exploitative establishment. As part of the ready-made clothing industry, material was cut within the factory and then distributed to individual

homes or contract shops to be sewn. The manufacturing process involved two types of shops: the inside shop and outside shop. The inside shop was located within the factory and outside shop was used for contracting out the garments to shops owned and operated by a contractor. Inside shops meant that the entire manufacturing process began and was completed under the same roof.¹⁶ The owners of inside shops tended to be large manufacturers and merchants. Some manufacturers believed that it was more profitable just to cut, make-up, bushel and examine the material within the factory. In these cases, garments were sent out to be sewn together in contract shops. In the case of the garment industry in Montreal, outside shops were more commonly used than inside shops.

Outside shops were basically run by contractors. The contracting out system was supported by the industry.¹⁷ Contractors who were usually the owners of outside shops, contracted to make garments of manufacturers at a given rate per garment. Mackenzie King in an 1898 Globe article titled "The Sweating System in Canada" reported that:

The workshop method is bound up with the contract system. Instead of the goods being manufactured entirely on the premises of the wholesale merchant as manufacturer, contracts are entered into with men, who have small shops of their own for the making up of the garments at a stipulated price or sum.¹⁸

In this way, the contractor carried out the basic function as a middle man. The contract shop owner usually provided sewing machines on the premises. The machine was easy to install in a room because it was small and did not take up much space.

Contract shops grew together with the sweating system. The problem with these shops arose when the workers were employed as a cheap source of labour in order for the manufacturer and shop owner to profit from this capitalist enterprise. Little care was put into establishing these "sweatshops". The sweating system can be defined as follows:

...a condition of labour in which a maximum amount of work, in a given time, is performed for a minimum wage, and it may be added, as a general thing, under conditions in which the ordinary rules of health and comfort are disregarded.¹⁹

A profit seemed to be the only concern of the owners. Workers in the shops paid for their own needles and thread. The sweating system was termed the evil of the garment industry by both government officials and labourers. The extreme nature of exploitation was due to the highly competitive nature of the industry. In this respect, the cheapening of labour costs was the most popular way of sustaining profitability. As stated previously, these types of shops could not be controlled

since many were hidden in homes of contractors. Manufacturers also benefitted from this system because the contractor assumed the cost of the worker, discipline and recruiting except when he or she worked within the factory.²⁰ This allowed for faster accumulation of capital.

Many problems were associated with the sweating system in Montreal. In order to gain a profit, contractors paid their workers wages far below minimum standards set by the Quebec government. Mackenzie King discussed the role of contractors in the following manner:

In some of the largest shops in Montreal the prices paid to the contractor by the wholesale merchants were as follows: for the making of heavy winter overcoats (including, in all cases, the putting in of linings, the pressing, the finishing, etc.) \$1 each; for gentlemen's morning coats, 75 and 80 cents; for men's double-breasted coats 60 and 65 cents, for men's sack coats 60 and 65 cents; and for the more common grade of coats, 35 and 40 cents.²¹

Because most shops were not unionized, there was no limit to the number of hours worked by employees. Under Quebec legislation, inspectors had the right to control overcrowding in factory workrooms but had no jurisdiction in private homes. Inspectors were uncertain as to where outside work was done. David Rome suggests that labour conditions in Montreal in the clothing

industry were worse than in Toronto not only because the city was the centre of the industry but also because the manufacturers were able to impose harsher work conditions.²² The Jewish Times on February 17, 1899 claimed that "the sweatshop is difficult to regulate if in basements or in garrets of private homes where no system of protection is found."²³ The exploitation and competitiveness of sweatshops were responsible for the unbearable conditions found within them. Overcrowding, dirty surroundings and poor ventilation were among the major problems.

Both the Canadian Anglo-Jewish newspaper, the Jewish Times and the Montreal Herald published articles relating to the problems of sweating labour during turn-of-the-century Montreal. In one account, the Jewish Times in 1899 described its concern for mixing both female and male labour in one crowded shop:

...some tailors' and dressmakers' establishments whose workshops are unclean were found in compromising promiscuity in conveniences where both sexes work together.²⁴

In addition to this problem, the Montreal Herald in 1897 commented on the number of working hours. "There is in fact no limit to the hours of labour, but that of physical endurance, and the pay is kept down to the starvation point."²⁵ The usual work week extended to

between seventy-five and eighty hours. In Montreal, the working environment within the sweatshop was very unsanitary. In the same newspaper article in the Montreal Herald, sweatshop conditions were presented as follows:

Occupied as they are from early morning until night, they have little time, even if they had the inclination, to give a thought to the sanitary condition of their surroundings, which are often simply vile. The combination living-room and workshop offers one of the saddest spectacles which can be sought by any humanly disposed person, who seeks light on the subject of human misery.²⁶

Documented evidence of these conditions were found in an 1897 report by Mackenzie King. The publication was concerned with clothing contracts made between the government and clothing manufacturers. He discovered that government contracts for clothing were made with four different firms in Montreal: two were small and the other two had obtained the largest contracts awarded by the government.²⁷ The clothing contracts were for the manufacturing of uniforms required by the militia, mounted police and post office. As was true for most of the garment industry at the time, King discovered that there was no case of the garment made up on one premise. His report is important here because it shows evidence of the existence of outside shops. In cases where private residences were used to assemble uniforms,

inspectors found it difficult to control the extent of exploitation. This was particularly true in Montreal where material was cut in factories and then sent to French Canadian villages.

King's investigation disclosed three main features of sweatshops: unhealthy conditions, long hours and extremely low wages. This was reported in the 1897 investigation for the Postmaster General into charges that military uniforms were produced under sweatshop conditions. His report concluded that sweating included maximum work for a minimum wage. King revealed that:

The atmosphere in which the occupants lived and cooked was frequently foul and noisome, and statements were repeatedly made by the employees to the effect that their health had suffered in consequence. A large number of hands were, as a rule, gathered together in small, ill-ventilated apartments, and this during the cold seasons, when the windows were kept closed and gas irons were used the whole day long, could hardly fail to be detrimental to those who were obliged to submit to this sort of confinement.²⁸

These conditions were the result of intense competition.

When garments were sewn in private homes, provincial laws could not be enforced to control the long hours worked. King reported in 1896 that:

Where the workshop is in a separate establishment the hours are regulated by the Provincial factory and workshops acts; but where the shop is in the home it is frequently

unknown to the inspectors, and the period of labour often extends beyond 15 and 16 hours a day.²⁹

The number of hours worked in these contract shops was not the only problem. The adverse conditions of these home sweatshops could not be curbed as long as they remained out of the jurisdiction of provincial laws. Concern for preventing these conditions as well as prohibiting child labour were documented in newspaper reports at the time. Because shops were not found on the premises of factories, investigators found it difficult to enforce laws forbidding the employment of children under factory age. In the following account, the Montreal Herald, on February 3, 1897, released this report:

Under existing legislation the inspector can abate the evil of over crowding factory workrooms, but they cannot prevent the over crowding of rooms in tenements which are used as workrooms by members of the family. They can force the child under a certain age out of the workshop or factory, but they are powerless to molest him when he is employed in the home-circle. They can cause the reduction of excessive hours of labour required of girls and boys, when employed in shops, but they cannot prevent such long hours of toil being imposed on persons of the same age when employed at home.³⁰

Despite these problems, there was some success in regulating child labour through legislation in Quebec. The history of control of hours of labour began in 1885

when the first Factories Act was passed. It set the minimum age of factory employment for boys at twelve years and for girls at fourteen years of age. It also stated that no boy under fourteen and no girl or woman could be employed more than ten hours in a day or sixty hours in a week.³¹ In 1903, the legal age for hiring boys was raised from twelve to thirteen and in 1907, the age was raised from thirteen to fourteen. This type of legislation was enforceable only in premises visible to the authorities. Therefore, low pay, long hours and unsanitary working environments continued to plague the garment industry.

As production of ready-made clothing increased, more and more males began to enter the industry. New technological innovations required greater strength and a greater number of skilled workers. Overall, there were more females than males in the garment industry during this time period. In 1891, 72 per cent of garment workers were women.³² According to a report written by Alexander Whyte Wright in 1896 on the Sweating System in Canada, as production of ready-made clothing increased in comparison with the making of custom clothing, the number of female employees became proportionately greater.³³ Among Jewish garment workers in Canada there were more men, while amongst garment workers of all origins, female workers formed the majority.³⁴ Louis

Rosenberg concluded that an increase in Jewish male garment workers was due to the fact that Jews were more frequently found among skilled occupations such as designers, cutters and tailors where men were employed. Also, non-Jewish women workers were primarily found among machine operators and in button-hole making and finishing. With an increase in production of ready-made clothing, the more skilled jobs went to the men and finishing went to the females.

But Jews were not the only ethnic group employed within the garment industry. The largest ethnic group of female workers in the clothing trades was French Canadian. The proportion of Jewish women engaged in the garment industry decreased rapidly after the immigrant generation. This was due to the fact that Canadian-born Jewish girls with high school education became stenographers and salesladies or entered into the professions.³⁵ But, between 1900 and 1920, Jewish workers still remained the largest ethnic group employed as tailors in Canada.

As the structure of the garment industry moved towards the use of both factories and sweatshops, jobs within the trade were split along gender lines. Cutting was done almost exclusively by men. This job consisted of laying out of the patterns and cutting the cloth. It

was considered a highly skilled position. This was the only occupation of the garment trades in which an apprenticeship was required. Sample-making was also considered one of the more skilled jobs. Both males and females were found within this occupation. It involved making samples of new garments from models furnished by a designer.³⁶ Pressing was undertaken by both males and females. This consisted of pressing out, with a hot press or iron, seams and other parts of the garment after it was put together by an operator (who was usually a male). Basting and finishing of the garment became characterized as female occupations. Both of these functions involved sewing by hand. Finishing consisted of attaching hooks and eyes, buttons and belts to garments.³⁷ Therefore, female jobs did not include the use of machinery and did not require much skill. Steedman suggests that technological innovation (such as the cutting knife) made work heavier. This she claims hindered the involvement of women in skilled work and encouraged the gender division of labour.³⁸ While men tended to be employed in the factory, women were more prevalent in contract shops where the garments were sent for the finishing touches.

With deskilling and the increased division of labour occurred the increasing use of piecework. Usually piecework was given out by a contractor for either

assembly in his own shop or to employees to sew together at home. Piecework was primarily carried out by women in private homes. In one case, a woman was assisted by two daughters. One daughter who was sixteen at the time, worked for a rate of two dollars per week.³⁹ This was quite low when one considers that experienced cloakmakers received an average of \$11 per week. In addition, the Immigration and Resettlement Aid Society reported in 1912 that \$11 per week for a male garment worker was not enough to support a family.⁴⁰ In another shop in Montreal, where women worked by piece, button-hole making was the specialty. Employees were paid one dollar for one hundred large button-holes and smaller sizes at seventy-five cents per one hundred.⁴¹

In the Report of the Royal Commission on the Relations Between Labour and Capital of 1889, it was found piecework effected a lowering of wages. In this respect, women received the lowest wages. The higher wages were paid to those who worked by day or week. This was common of factory workers who averaged approximately sixty hours per week. In King's article published in the Globe in 1898, he claimed that:

In the home-shops women are almost exclusively employed. The work done is that on the cheaper grades of clothing and consists largely in the making up of pants and vests. Many of them are employed at \$2 and \$2.50 a week, and \$3 is regarded as a good wage.⁴²

The amount of wages received depended on the skill level of a particular job. Amongst the more skilled male occupations were cutters, operators and pressers. But jobs such as finishing and button-sewing were usually filled by women and paid the lowest rate. A male wage earner received about \$10.00 or \$12.00 per week.⁴³ If he was experienced or a cloakmaker, then his wages were increased. In 1893, the fastest male cloak operator could barely earn \$10.00 per week while women only received between \$3.00 and \$5.00 for one week.⁴⁴ The wages for both sexes were very minimal considering long hours and unsatisfactory conditions within both factories and sweatshops.

Inhospitable living conditions in Montreal were accompanied by the adverse working conditions. First, Jewish workers had to adjust to the harsh climate of Montreal during the winter months. Also unemployment amongst garment workers increased during this season. The garment industry experienced its slack season during the winter months. Many workers tended to work part-time if they could secure employment.⁴⁵ Poor living arrangements due to low wage levels and seasonal unemployment intensified the oppressive situation of Jewish garment workers. This experience tended to reinforce a bond amongst members of the Jewish working-

class community. In 1908, it was reported in the Jewish Times that a People's kitchen opened up in Montreal.⁴⁶ Here, through the efforts of Jewish workers, poor men and women could obtain a solid meal for five cents or for free. It was also reported that ninety per cent who went there were non-Jews. This demonstrates that workers were interested in helping each other. It also meant that Jewish workers felt a solidarity with workers from other ethnic groups.

Another aspect of the Jewish working-class community was its split from the established Jewish community of Montreal. There were two distinct Jewish societies in Montreal at this time. The first was the established Jewish community which was already integrated socially and economically in Canadian society. Many of these Jewish families came to Canada from Russia, Poland and Lithuania in the 1860s and early 1870s.⁴⁷ They settled in the village of Lancaster in Glengarry County, Ontario, where they opened general stores. During the middle to late 1870s, the more successful families, the Jacobs, Friedmans and Kellerts moved to Montreal and began their manufactured men's clothing businesses. According to Louis Rosenberg:

...their sons laid the foundations of Jewish communal life in Canada and were prominent among those who led it through its formative years during the last two decades of the

nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century.⁴⁸

The second group included the Eastern European immigrants who arrived in Montreal after 1880. They spoke Yiddish and knew little, if any, English. Members of the established community tended to be the bosses of the Jewish workers. People like Vineberg and Kellert who had been in Canada since the 1870s were already the big clothing manufacturers in Montreal by the end of the nineteenth century.

Jewish manufacturers tended to play a dual role within the Jewish community of Montreal. They were both capitalist bosses and philanthropists. Harris Kellert is typical of this duality. Born in the Province of Kovno, Russia, he emigrated to Lancaster, Ontario in 1867. He came to Montreal from Lancaster, Ontario in 1883 to establish his men's clothing manufacture, H. Kellert and Sons.⁴⁹ The company grew to be one of the largest wholesale clothing firms in Canada. At the same time, he became one of the earliest supporters of charitable associations in Montreal.

Because of the differences in economic and social background, Eastern European Jewish immigrants, who were employed directly and indirectly by the established Jews, succeeded in organizing their own fraternal and

mutual benefit societies. While both Jewish communities in Montreal were of the same religious background, they tended to form two different ethnic groups. Jewish immigrant workers had different needs and expectations than those of the wealthier Jewish class in Montreal. From Eastern Europe, they brought traditions of a Jewish life rich with the Yiddish folk culture. When these new immigrants arrived in Montreal between 1880 and 1914, they were faced with the adverse conditions of an industrializing Canadian city. It was important to Jewish workers that they remain united through their struggles. With a background that included community solidarity, brotherhood and friendship, Jewish garment workers immediately established their own organizations. Most immigrants formed landsmanshaften groups based on community and village ties in Eastern Europe. Also, employment of Jewish workers within the clothing sector allowed immigrants to remain within their own cultural surroundings. In the face of new problems, Jewish workers fell back on their experience of solidarity and autonomy, and organized their own mutual benefit societies. These organizations helped workers cope with the exploitative structure of the garment industry in Montreal.

In summary, the garment industry in Montreal developed into a highly competitive and extremely

exploitative structure by the beginnings of the twentieth century. At first, the industry employed French Canadian families in the rural areas outside Montreal to assemble garments. Technological innovations such as the sewing machine and cutting knife, aided in speeding up the process of production. By the 1890s, the ready-made clothing industry was well underway. In order for manufacturers to produce clothing cheaply for a profit, material was cut on the premises of the factory and then contracted out to contractors who owned and operated sweatshops. This not only resulted in lowering the standard of working conditions but also caused a division of labour along gender and ethnic lines. Also, the process of production was broken down so that contractors could gain more of a profit from piecework. Coupled with these problems were low wages and long hours that lowered the standard of the workers' living environment. These conditions influenced the establishment of mutual benefit societies solely organized by Jewish workers. In this case, ethnicity was used as a strengthening factor that resulted in members of the Jewish working-class community organizing and forming their own organizations. As will be discussed in the next chapter, these organizations emphasized two key elements as unifying factors: ethnicity and class struggle..

Endnotes

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Chapter Five

The Establishment of Jewish Working-Class Communal
Organizations in Montreal

Following the mass migration of Eastern European Jews, the Jewish community in Montreal was divided into two groups; the more established and wealthier group and the Jewish working-class. When the poorer elements began to arrive during the 1880s, the older community established their form of charitable organizations. Notable among them was the Baron de Hirsch Institute of Montreal. Members of this group were also the leading clothing manufacturers of Montreal. Their interests were reflected in the way their charity was distributed. Those who added to the economic hardship were also the same people who provided the philanthropy. This point was not lost on the newly arriving immigrants who established their own organizations reflecting the interests of the Jewish working-class. The ideals of these groups demonstrated the beliefs of their founders whether they were Labour Zionists or socialists. But, the most important elements were a Jewish identity and a working-class status.

The arrival of Eastern European Jews to Montreal initially put a strain on the charitable organizations founded by the already established Jewish community.

Because many Jews fled Eastern Europe, they came to Canada with little money and very few belongings. Most of the immigrants eventually ended up amongst the ranks of the unemployed in the city. But both their experience in Eastern Europe and their poor and exploited state as workers in Montreal left many of these immigrants with a sense of loneliness and separation from what was most familiar to them. This chapter analyzes why and how Jewish garment workers in Montreal responded to their working conditions in the clothing trade.

Their initial response was evident in the form of Jewish mutual benefit societies and fraternal orders. In all cases, two common elements were found in these organizations: a strong Eastern European Jewish tradition and a working-class status. In this respect, ethnicity and class interacted to produce a unified response of the Jewish working-class. The founders of these organizations shared the belief that the Yiddish culture was one with the workers' culture. Most of the mutual aid societies not only provided financial benefits but also educational and recreational programs. Schools, concerts and lectures were part of Jewish cultural programs and their content related to problems of the working-class and strategies to cope with their exploited position. Through the establishment of working-class organizations, a common element based on

the Jewish identity helped to maintain a Jewish working-class solidarity amongst Jewish garment workers in Montreal.

Before the founding of working-class organizations, philanthropic activities within Montreal mainly came under the guidance of the wealthier and more established Jewish community. Relief money was distributed through the Baron de Hirsch Institute. This Institute was the first philanthropic Jewish association in the city. The money which was donated by the Baron de Hirsch, amounted to \$20,000. In Montreal, the Institute operated under the auspices of the Young Men's Hebrew Benevolent Society (YMHBS). The aim of the fund was "for the purpose of bettering the condition of the poor among the Hebrews of Montreal."¹ According to the By-Laws and Charter of the Baron de Hirsch Institute the aims of the Organization were:

...the provision of relief to sick and indigent persons of Hebrew faith, establish a home or refuge for the distressed, aged, orphans, provide a burial ground for the internment of the dead poor and conduct schools for general instruction.²

The fund also set aside enough money for the establishment of a school where children of Jewish immigrants could be educated and learn the English language. Evening classes were started for those immigrants who worked during the day.

Under the Baron de Hirsch Institute, other specialty groups were organized to deal with the poor and/or sick of Montreal. In February 1877, the Ladies' Hebrew Benevolent Society was established. Its main purpose was to assist and attend to cases where charity was required by Jewish women of Montreal.³ It was the first recorded Jewish charitable society for women in this city. A relief department was founded that combined the efforts of the Baron de Hirsch Institute, the Hebrew Ladies' Aid Society and the Ladies' Hebrew Benevolent Society. In order to receive charity, officers of the Institute went to the homes of potential recipients to determine whether relief was needed. Also, through the efforts of the Institute, the Mount Sinai Sanatorium was opened in 1911. The hospital received patients who suffered from tuberculosis.⁴ The values and beliefs of the Institute were incompatible with those of the newly arriving immigrants since members were part of the wealthiest and most influential Jewish families of Montreal.

The types of organizations established by the wealthier community did not seem to specifically aid the working-class. There is no evidence of either cultural or social programs that would have allowed the immigrants a chance to meet together and discuss their

problems. When available, charity was the way that the established community responded to the problems of workers. It must be mentioned though that various philanthropies did benefit the Jewish community in some cases. First, the Mount Sinai Sanatorium was built for the rehabilitation of tuberculosis victims. The Old People's Home was organized as a shelter and care facility for the Jewish aged. There was also a Jewish 'Orphans' Home and a free dispensary service for medical treatment. But these organizations did not provide the Jewish working-class with a way to improve their working and living conditions in Montreal.

Even when the wealthier Jewish community established a social club, the aims were a reflection of the wealthier community's values. One particular organization was the Montefiore Club. It was founded in September, 1880 by Jewish youths of Montreal. It was open to both young males and females. This particular club was concerned with drama and the discussion of literature among members.⁵ The club was only open to the upper classes of the Jewish community. As part of its constitution, the club was meant to offer the young Jewish youth of both sexes a common meeting place for the advancement of "social intercourse, exchange of literary thought, and general mutual benefits of this particular class."⁶ Therefore, the Jewish working-class

was not socially involved in the organizations of the wealthier Jewish society of Montreal.

During the 1880s, when the first waves of Eastern European Jews arrived in Canada, the older community faced a massive influx of destitute people. This is evident in the Annual Reports of the Directors of the YMHBS for those years. Relief was issued in the form of money, food, clothing, coal and medical supplies. It cannot be said that the older community ignored the needs of arriving immigrants. For the year ending 1884, \$555 was lent to different families of Russian refugees.⁷ Each family received approximately \$10 to \$30 each. In addition, each applicant was expected to repay in sums of 25 cents to one dollar per week. Their report of 1887 displays the same conclusion. In that year, the greatest amount of monetary relief went to Eastern European Jews. Out of 200 recipients, 95 were of Russian descent and 36 were of Roumanian background.⁸ In spite of this aid, the YMHBS as well as other charities could not keep up with the large influx of poor and destitute Jewish immigrants arriving in Montreal.

The Young Men's Hebrew Benevolent Society still could not provide the working-class with the necessary relief to their living and working conditions. First, a

massive influx of immigrants meant a sudden increase of Jews in Montreal so that the members of the established Jewish community were far out-numbered by Eastern European Jewish refugees. Also, the new elements tended to be poor and therefore the receivers of charity. The large influx of Eastern European Jewish immigrants became a financial strain on the wealthier Jewish class in the 1880s.⁹ But what may have been more of a problem for the new Jewish immigrants was that the leading officers of this Baron de Hirsch organization were also the leading clothing manufacturers in Montreal. They were Canadian-born or were long-term residents of Canada and did not interact socially with immigrants. Instead both groups maintained an employer/employee relationship.¹⁰ This separated the two socially, economically and culturally. Therefore, in the eyes of working-class immigrants, these philanthropic activities did not provide an atmosphere that was familiar to Jewish workers. Consequently, the Jewish working-class community decided to establish their own mutual benefit societies that would provide both monetary relief and an emphasis on more familiar Jewish cultural activities.

These Jewish working-class groups also grew in response to the need for companionship. According to one account from the Russian Polish Hebrew Sick Benefit Association:

There was a great need, at the time, of such an organization; because many Jews, who were recent immigrants to this country, were strangers in a strange land; they had no friends or acquaintances; they did not know the language of our country, nor its ways and customs. They very badly needed association with people of their own kind and circumstances; they also needed human association with people who had earlier arrived in this country, and who were already partly acquainted and familiar with its ways and customs; they needed their advice and counsel, as well as their help.¹¹

In some cases, mutual benefit associations were established along landsmanshaften lines. This simply meant associations of Jews from the same towns or political parties in Eastern Europe. An adequate description of mutual benefit societies is provided in the following passage:

[These organizations] responded to economic and social needs of young Jewish immigrants who found themselves thrown upon their own resources in the hard struggle to strike roots in an environment to which they were unaccustomed; and who sought friendship, cultural expression, and material aid in case of sickness and unemployment in an environment which would reflect their own social, cultural and economic backgrounds.¹²

In addition to the formation of these organizations, a distinctive working-class solidarity was developed through the creation of a Yiddish press, Jewish schools, clubs and theatres and, later, labour unions. All of these elements reflected the Jewish culture of the

particular garment workers under study.

Traditionally, Jewish mutual benefit societies were formed in order to meet the social and economic needs of Jewish immigrants. These fraternal orders were known to have existed in England before 1800. The Roapbe Shalom Society was established in London before 1797. Also, the Tent of Righteousness was founded in 1812.¹³ In England, these societies arose in direct response to the Industrial Revolution early in the nineteenth century. Here workers were forced to care for themselves. The benefit societies in England, as in the United States and Canada at a later time period, were established on the basis of landsmanschaften. Organizations were developed by English workers and they followed the guidelines of legislation regulating benefit societies during this early period.¹⁴ Growth in membership of Jewish fraternal orders in the United States and Canada occurred during the period of great migration between 1882 and 1914. In these countries, the fraternal and mutual benefit societies were modelled after the original establishments in England. Not only did these groups provide medical, funeral and sickness benefits, but also encouraged activities that would incorporate almost all aspects of Jewish life. It is important to note that these organizations were founded by members of the working-class who were mainly employed in the

garment industry. Therefore, the societies' members were of similar economic, occupational, religious and cultural background.

In Montreal, Jewish garment workers felt the same need to establish their own working-class organizations. The average wages did not permit workers to accumulate sufficient savings in case of sickness, unemployment or death. Besides the mutual benefits that were provided, immigrants received advice, a friendly environment and social and cultural activities. For example, the program of the Russian Polish Hebrew Sick Benefit Association emphasized:

The significance of the spiritual movement in Montreal is indescribable, having offered the first surroundings of cultural home for the immigrants, giving them an outlet for spiritual and cultural activities, thus creating a ground for formation of powerful organizations influencing his [sic] social life.¹⁵

It was a chance for workers to meet together. As one member of the Russian Polish Hebrew Sick Benefit Association reported:

...these organizations created by the first generation immigrated from Europe, have done for the Jewish population, for the maintenance of Jewish solidarity and for the prevention of assimilation, much more than their modest names "Sick Benefit Association" could suggest.¹⁶

In order to produce a strong working-class response, it was also important to the members that their organizations provide a Jewish cultural environment where members could participate in discussions and lectures.

The Russian Polish Hebrew Sick Benefit Association emphasized both a financial and cultural program. It was established in Montreal in 1907 by a group of Jewish men from Poland. Not only did the society provide a friendly atmosphere, but it also encouraged members to participate in all celebrations of its membership and to present gifts to family members. The main part of the organization was comprised of males. A ladies' auxiliary did exist, but it played a peripheral role in the activities of the society. Female members of the auxiliary tended to be involved with volunteer work in the Jewish working-class community. One of the major concerns though at the time of the Russian Polish Hebrew Sick Benefit Association's establishment was the financial well-being of their working-class members. If a society member became ill, a sick benefit was paid to that person during illness. In addition, a hospital committee made sure the sick member received visits from fellow members.¹⁷ In the case of death, a funeral committee was appointed in order to pay respect to the deceased, visiting the family, and consign and partly

cover the expense of the burial ground as well as "bestowing" upon the family of the deceased a compensatory sum of money.¹⁸ Also, on August 20, 1907, a medical doctor was hired to provide medical assistance to members. On happy occasions, such as Bar Mitzvahs and marriages, the membership would usually present a gift to the celebrating family. Above all, the Association was concerned with the "promotion of Jewish culture in Canada" and the keeping of "a vigil over all Jewish concerns."¹⁹

These aspects seem to be of great importance during an historical period when workers felt the effects of industrial capitalism. It was much easier for Jewish workers to establish their own organizations since their fellow members were of similar economic, social and cultural backgrounds. In order to promote a unified response, it was important for members of the Jewish working-class to provide their own type of assistance. They had come from a background in Eastern Europe that survived on community solidarity and autonomy. Much of their strength came from these traditions. When they came to Montreal, Jewish immigrant workers tried to recreate this atmosphere. In the Golden Jubilee Book of the Russian Polish Hebrew Sick Benefit Association, Mayer Fox claimed that:

The Association was the first niche where the immigrant was accommodated socially; there he met people of his own background, received information of political value, where he also developed a self-respect feeling of being wanted and considered. In the society the immigrant was given a chance to know social customs and traditions. In the society he discovered that he also can be a "speaker".²⁰

Therefore, it was emphasized that members of the Jewish working-class should not depend on other forms of charity established by the wealthier Jewish community. As Louis Rosenberg has suggested:

The system of voluntary insurance and mutual aid developed by mutual benefit and friendly societies arose out of the needs of low-income earning workers who did not wish to have recourse to the charity of others in a system of society which had not yet realised and recognized that the health and welfare of all its citizens was the responsibility of the community as a whole, rather than of the stricken individual alone.²¹

The purpose of sick benefit societies included the availability of financial help to members so that they would not have to go 'outside' to other charity organizations. In particular, the Hebrew Sick Benefit Association of Montreal strongly believed in this policy. This organization was founded in 1892 by seven men who were mostly employed in the clothing trades in Montreal. As part of their goals and intentions, the founders wanted an organization that would provide to the Jewish working-class community philanthropic and cultural programs. The establishment of this

organization was in response to the adverse living and working conditions of the Jewish working-class in Montreal. Each member was expected to pay five cents per week. This would be applied towards a sick benefits fund and outside causes.²² Sick benefits were to be issued at \$3.00 per week for three weeks in 1892.²³ In this particular association, free medical attention was given and an Invalid Pension and Relief Funds were also available. It was these types of benefits that appealed to the Jewish working-class.

Another important aspect of benefit associations was that they were usually founded on the basis of members from a similar area of residence in Eastern Europe. This was particularly true for the Bessarabier Hebrew Sick Benefit Society. It was founded by Bessarabian Jews in 1907. This common background was a major incentive to all fraternal groups so that immigrants could find a friendly atmosphere and continue a way of life in accordance with their religious and cultural traditions. According to one member of the Bessarabier Hebrew Sick Benefit Society:

When Bessarabian Jews started to migrate here after the tragic pogrom of Kichinev the need was felt for an organization that could provide brotherhood, friendliness, guidance and "heimishkeit" for the newcomers so that they could more easily adapt themselves to this new country.²⁴

Also, this basis of membership was extremely beneficial socially and culturally to immigrants who spoke the same language. It was a chance for the dissemination of information since there was a common basis of not only a working-class status but also of language and specific cultural traditions. In an article from the 50th Jubilee Book of the Society, L. Segal suggested that:

Coming to Montreal the Bessarabian Jews needed friends to feel at home. In our society he found both friendship and brotherhood, and the more he mingled the easier he adapted himself to this new community.²⁵

Mutual benefit associations were also based on different ideals of members of the Jewish working-class. Basically, there was an ideological split between religious and secular Jews. While some antagonism was evident between these groups, each was still established for the same purposes: to improve the condition of the working-class in Montreal and to maintain a commitment to the Jewish culture. Jewish secularists replaced the Jewish religion with the Jewish culture and strove for a complete socialist society. On the other hand, there were the Labour Zionists. Their main belief was to work towards a synthesis of socialism and nationalism.

This synthesis is one of the main contributions to the ideology of Labour Zionism. The framework on which

many Jewish working-class organizations based themselves, had its roots in Eastern Europe. As part of its program, the activities of working-class organizations attempted to emphasize this synthesis of class struggle and nationalism. As discussed in Chapter Three, it became part of the doctrine for Labour Zionists in both Eastern Europe and North America. Following the writings of Borochov, the basic theory suggested that "...the international solidarity of the workers and the elimination of capitalism would lead to a society based on equality."²⁶

In the original doctrine of Labour Zionism, there were four main principles outlined. It not only combined the two ideas of Zionism and Socialism but also emphasized the solidarity of the Jewish working-class. The first principle included a definition of Zionism. This meant that there should be a Jewish national home in Israel where Jews could be a free working nation with their own culture.²⁷ Secondly, the doctrine emphasized the importance of socialism. On this point, founders wanted "to organize a new socialist order through the destruction of the capitalist way of life from every type of exploitation."²⁸ A socialist government would be set up by the workers. The third principle had a professional aim -- the "strengthening of the working masses in America and strengthening of Jewish masses and

spreading the ideology of socialism amongst Jewish workers."²⁹ The fourth principle stressed the importance of the Jewish culture. This meant that Labour Zionists would work amongst the Youth who would participate in the upbringing of Jewish children in America through Jewish schools.³⁰

A national organization, the Jewish National Workers' Alliance (Farband), followed the principles of Labour Zionism. It was not a political organization, but rather a fraternal order that provided insurance and other benefits for its members and their families at low rates.³¹ The first branch in Montreal appeared in 1909. By the following year, there were sixty members.³² It was not just devoted to the continuity of the Jewish people but was also in support of labour movements in Canada. In its cultural and religious activities, the Farband protested against race discrimination and anti-Semitism. As part of the Jewish educational concerns of Farband members, the organization helped establish a network of Jewish elementary and high schools.³³

Since the Farband was considered a mutual benefit society, all their branches were involved with the Jewish working masses. Ideologically, this organization was allied with the Labour Zionist Movement in Canada and the United States. It was important to the founders

that living and working conditions of the Jewish working-class be improved through a strong socialist-zionist approach. Many different branches of the Farband were established as the organization won more and more support from members of the Jewish working-class.³⁴ Like other mutual benefit organizations, branches of the Farband were founded along landsmanshaften lines. This organization was not secular; it still maintained a strong religious commitment. While the Farband was in full support of a homeland for Jews in Israel, it was also concerned with the situation of Jewish workers in Canada. With respect to Jewish garment workers, the Jewish National Workers' Alliance (Farband) helped in the establishment of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers' Union. But this type of involvement was found more in the activities of the Poale Zion, the political wing of the Labour Zionists.

The Poale Zion Movement was more involved with political issues that were of great concern to members of the Jewish working-class. It was a major force behind the establishment of a Jewish labour movement while still following the socialist doctrines of its Zionist founders. The movement was originally founded in the city of Poltava, Russia where in 1905, the theory of Zionism was incorporated into a doctrine. The program of Poale Zion was based on social Zionism.³⁵ This was

formulated by Jewish theorist Ber Borochov. When the waves of Jewish immigrants came to Canada after the 1905 Russian Revolution, they brought a strong socialist base. Many of these immigrants were educated and believed strongly in socialist ideas. In Eastern Europe, they had gained the political experience with their involvement in the political activities of Labour Zionists. When some of these Jewish immigrants arrived in Montreal, they attempted to establish their unique form of socialist movement. Therefore, on July 25, 1905, the first chapter in Montreal of the Poale Zion Movement was established.

A major shortcoming of mutual benefit associations pertained to their treatment of women. As already discussed in the previous chapter, the involvement of female garment workers was quite numerous in the garment industry in Montreal. Hebrew sick benefit associations, however, were mainly established by male workers. Men were considered the prime movers in the struggle for improved living and working conditions. Paula Draper and Janice Karlinsky claim that this was the direct result of Jewish women's position in the community. They suggest that domesticity controlled women to the point that their opportunities for improvement were greatly restricted.³⁶ When women were involved, they were usually involved in ladies' auxiliaries which were on

the periphery of many mutual benefit societies. For example, the Ladies Auxiliary from the Bessarabier Hebrew Sick Benefit Society was formed in the 1920s, twenty years after the main chapter in Montreal was established. The Ladies' Auxiliary basically helped at the Jewish General Hospital and supported the overseas experience in Israel.³⁷

One particular group, the Pioneer Women's Organization (PWO) was founded by female members of the working-class. They were affiliated with the Labour Zionist Movement (Poale Zion) and therefore they were also supporters of Zionist-Socialist ideas. According to Draper and Karlinsky, these female workers organized their own group for the same reason male workers formed their own societies. The established community groups, especially those for women, tended to be socially-oriented and English-speaking. There was a clear class difference between the two female Jewish communities. Most of the immigrant women were employed in factories where their primary working language was Yiddish. Even though the PWO was not formed until the 1920s, it still maintained Labour Zionist beliefs, as applied to women. These included the education of children in the Labour Zionist tradition and the promotion of women's participation in the building of a Jewish homeland.³⁸ Draper also suggests that meetings of the PWO were held

in the evenings or on weekends so that working women could participate in meetings.³⁹ There therefore exists evidence that members of the working-class, both male or female, attempted to achieve a unified working-class response to conditions facing Jewish garment workers in Montreal.

While the previous mentioned organizations pointed towards Zionism, one of the major organizations of a more secular orientation was the Workmen's Circle. Many of its members were revolutionaries who had learned socialist ideas in such educational centres as Vilna. Branches of the Workmen's Circle were found in most of the large industrial centres in both the United States and Canada. It was more popularly referred to in Yiddish as the "Arbeiter Ring." The first branch appeared in New York City in April, 1892 when the foundations of its fraternal activities were established by a cloakmaker named Sam Greenberg. Like other fraternal orders, branches of the Workmen's Circle provided a place to discuss problems of the day in a Jewish cultural setting. It provided financial aid for those members who required it. The Workmen's Circle became more important after 1905 when the more militant working-class immigrants arrived in North America.

The Workmen's Circle was, from its beginnings

heavily involved in labour relations. In fact most of its members were also members of labour unions. The Workmen's Circle managed to combine socialism, and its growing strength of labour movements, with the social teachings of its own Jewish heritage.⁴⁰ The involvement in the labour movement proved the Workmen's Circle's devotion to the worker. The various branches established an educational forum whereby the Yiddish press, theatre and language, lectures and concerts were emphasized. According to Judah Shapiro, who documented the history of the Workmen's Circle in North America, this society provided "a unifying agency of Jewish workers, recognizing their independent identification with particularities of politics and social reform movements."⁴¹ Because the use of the Yiddish language and Jewish cultural identity was emphasized, the society also demonstrated a Jewish distinctiveness, characteristic of the Jewish working-class consciousness it set out to achieve.

The first branch in Montreal was formed in 1907 and started off with twenty-six members. By the early 1920s, there were approximately 1,000 members in the chapter.⁴² Many of its members had been involved, in Eastern Europe, with the Russian Revolution. They were part of the mass influx of immigrants who came to North America after the failure of the Revolution in 1905. The

socialist principles of its founding members were very strong from the beginning. The founders of the Montreal chapter suggested the following:

Imbued with the old revolutionary idealism, they could not adjust themselves to the old orders. The atmosphere was bourgeois; they felt stagnated and cut off from the vital throbbing life surrounding them. In them they found their bosses and sweatshop foremen--their recognized enemies.⁴³

Both male and female members of the Workmen's Circle tended to be the secular-minded immigrants from Eastern Europe. In some cases, it was a revolutionary background that influenced their belonging to the Workmen's Circle since "the organization saw itself as part of the large labour movement struggling to bring capitalist exploitation to an end through the creation of a just, socialist order."⁴⁴

The Montreal chapter of the Workmen's Circle operated as a distinctive Jewish working-class organization. Under the by-laws of the branch, membership was closed to employers. It was also a condition of membership that all members belong to a union, as long as one existed in their trade.⁴⁵ During the period under study, the majority of its members were operators, capmakers and cloakmakers and could easily join one of the garment unions. The branch provided to its members more than just sick benefits and insurance,

medical services and sanatorium treatment. It also sponsored social and cultural activities. In this case, dramatics, gymnasiums, libraries, open forums, socials and dances were organized to ensure that Jewish workers took part in cultural activities.⁴⁶ Furthermore, as part of the initial policy of the Workmen's Circle, the branch managed to raise and donate hundreds of dollars for war and pogrom victims, and striking workers and to support various labour causes throughout this period.

The Workmen's Circle branch in Montreal had a two-fold aim for its members. First, active members were strong supporters of socialist doctrines. It was important to them to spread their revolutionary ideas amongst the members and therefore amongst the working-class. In one account, a member commented that:

...the labouring masses, ran their reasoned argument, cannot be protected from the miseries and evils of the existing political system unless the system itself which breeds these evils is completely scrapped.⁴⁷

In fact, many of these active members were also involved as organizers of the garment unions in Montreal. This was part of the goal of the Workmen's Circle that they considered their organization part of the larger labour movement. Its members believed that:

The Workmen's Circle is a great army of such men and women engaged in a battle to the

finish, a battle that will end in the erection of a new order of society free from the brutal exploitation and human misery of this one.⁴⁸

This first element was encouraged in the carrying out of the second aim of the branch which was to meet the day-to-day needs of the membership. According to one member of the branch, these elements were combined with the "ideal of a classless society."⁴⁹ This was achieved through the establishment of a youth program and Jewish schools that taught children of workers the ideals of socialism, Jewish culture and the importance of the labour movement in an industrialized society.

As part of the educational program for young people, the Workmen's Circle advocated a distinctive Jewish school and youth program. First, the Yiddish language was regarded as the tongue of the Jewish masses. The schools established by the Workmen's Circle in both New York City and Montreal supported this issue in their own cultural programs. In addition, the schools emphasized two major principles: Jewishness and socialist ideas. The youth program founded by the Workmen's Circle in Montreal met these two basic purposes. After the establishment of the youth centre, it was important for the society to have as much influence as possible over every phase of working-class solidarity. This included trade unionism, politics, the

working-class theatre, lectures, library and encouragement of talent among young workers.

It is obvious that through the establishment of mutual benefit societies, the community played a key role in the formation of a distinctive Jewish working-class consciousness. Experience in Eastern Europe taught Jews the importance of community. Autonomy and strength characterized various Jewish communities in Eastern Europe prior to their migration to Montreal and to other cities in Canada and the United States. Once established, working-class organizations began at the community level in Montreal. Based on ethnic ties, these organizations offered ways to cope with their exploitative situation in the garment industry. The support for fellow workers was based on this background of community assistance. In Montreal, communal activities, in the form of mutual benefit associations occupied a prominent function in Jewish life at all times. It was believed that:

Jewish religious interests and Jewish autonomy were the foundation which cemented the distinctively Jewish life in all generations and which maintained Jewish unity and thus also made possible the existence of our people.⁵⁰

As in Eastern Europe when the rights of individual Jews were threatened by anti-Semitic policies, the Jewish

community took full responsibility in aiding members of their community. The same situation arose in Montreal with the experience in the clothing industry. Mutual benefit associations were established by Jewish workers when other groups could not provide sufficient financial and community support. In this way, Jewish workers looked towards their own working-class community in order to ensure financial support and cultural continuity.

At the basis of this community support was Jewish culture. On arriving in Montreal, immigrants felt like strangers in a strange world. Ethnicity was able to provide the most familiar aspect that attracted immigrants to form working-class organizations. Of equal importance to ethnicity was a working-class status that provided the original incentive for forming these agencies. It is hard to separate these two aspects, ethnicity and class, when both worked together in the formation of a unified response. The fact that members of the Jewish working-class brought to Canada characteristics of the Jewish culture when they emigrated from Russia, Roumania and Poland contributed to building a foundation for their societies. This aspect was further developed as Jewish workers tried to adapt to the economic conditions found in Montreal. Jewish cultural traditions were then employed to aid in

the adaptation. For example, a member of the Russian Polish Hebrew Sick Benefit Association claimed that his organization was:

...formed under peculiar conditions which were the outgrowth of the traditional spiritual physiognomy which our original founders brought with them from the cities and towns from abroad.⁵²

It is evident that ethnicity, or the Jewish culture, played an important part in strengthening a unified working-class consciousness amongst Jewish garment workers in Montreal. The ethnic background of the workers was used as a common ground to establish various working-class institutions in Montreal. What was needed were organizations that provided financial assistance and at the same time, emphasized a strong Jewish worker identity. Eastern European Jews had established a different set of values and traditions in the old country through their day-to-day experience. Whether they were Jewish socialists or Zionists, they realized that mutual assistance and a strong Jewish cultural background were important. A working-class consciousness could only be achieved through the establishment of societies that not only were founded by workers but also supported the ideas of the working-class. While mutual benefits may have been the main purpose, Jewish cultural activities were also found to be important. Through the Jewish language and the

Yiddish press, the Jewish working-class developed a distinctive form of unity that eventually helped promote a Jewish labour movement in Montreal.

Endnotes

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Chapter Six

The Formation of the Jewish Labour Movement in Montreal.

The formation of garment union locals in Montreal was facilitated by organizers from New York City. Such unions as the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America and the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) had their headquarters in the United States. It was common for American organizers to come to Montreal and try to organize the workers. But Montreal offered its own unique problem; there were many French Canadian workers at the beginning of the twentieth century involved in the clothing industry who remained non-unionized. Because both union organizers and the majority of garment workers were Jewish, an autonomous and ethnically unique movement was therefore established. This chapter will analyze the background and formation of garment unions in Montreal and assess the relationship between mutual benefit organizations and clothing unions. At the theoretical level, the role that ethnicity played in contributing to a unified Jewish working-class consciousness and union responses will be investigated.

Jewish garment workers' struggle for a working-class consciousness required a uniform, cohesive group

with clear, concise goals. In Montreal, there was an attempt amongst the working-class to achieve these aims. As discussed in Chapter Five, this was a time period when much radical ideological thought flowed into North America. Typically, the revolutionary ideals of Jewish immigrants, arriving from Eastern Europe after 1905, were applied to the Montréal situation. Most of the Eastern European Jews were of working-class background and had already experienced class oppression. In Montreal, it was the aim of Jewish socialists to aid in mobilizing class consciousness amongst the exploited workers within the clothing trades. Because the garment industry was composed of Jewish workers during the formative years of unions, it was easier to establish a strong union foundation since most of the workers came from the same background and experienced similar conditions in both Eastern Europe and Montreal. Despite ideological differences and gender splits within the industry and unions, there were still many successful attempts at solidary class action. In an attempt to improve conditions in the garment industry, the Jewish labour movement in Montreal, through garment unions, also provided a cultural and secular atmosphere for members to form a distinctive Jewish working-class consciousness.

Organization of garment workers first occurred in Canada during the 1870s and 1880s. One of the first attempts to organize took place in the 1870s. The organizing occurred among skilled and semi-skilled garment workers who were of both Jewish and non-Jewish origins. They were all employed together in a small factory. Amongst the members were cutters, pressers and pantsmakers who fought for a nine hour day. But lack of cohesiveness amongst them forced this small group to fall apart.¹ During the 1880s, the Journeymen Tailors Union was established. Its sole purpose was to protect individual tailors who assembled custom-made clothing. It was important to this particular union that Singer sewing machines not be produced so that jobs would not be taken away from skilled craftsmen.² Most of these journeymen tailors were non-Jews prior to a major influx of pogrom victims from Eastern Europe during the 1880s. Also intense competition within the industry produced an increase in exploitative sweatshop conditions. To reduce this competition, there was an initial effort on the part of skilled workers to organize unions. It was not until the twentieth century, when the garment industry started to grow at a faster pace and more radical elements came from Eastern Europe, did trade unions succeed in establishing a firm groundwork in the garment industry.

The exploitation that Jewish workers faced within the clothing trades formed the basis for the increased rate of unionization during the first twenty years of this century. One of the worst aspects of the industry was exploitation of co-religionists. It is evident that many Jewish immigrants, who worked in sweatshops, rapidly rose to the position of contractor. In the contract shops, Jewish immigrants were hired at lower wages and forced to work twelve to fifteen hours per day. In many sweatshops, conditions were physically poor. Usually the work area was small and ventilation was minimal. Under American instruction, organization was influenced by organizers' high educational background and political awareness.³ In confronting degrading working conditions, many workers began to listen to the ideas of radicals who appeared in greater numbers after 1905.⁴ These revolutionaries worked side by side with their fellow garment workers and also experienced the exploitation within the industry. According to a member of the Russian Polish Hebrew Sick Benefit Association, Michael Rubinstein, the labour movement in Montreal developed two angles: an economic viewpoint and a political aspect. Rubinstein claims that:

...fundamentally they both proceed from the same source - the struggle of workingmen for

the improvement of their conditions and the establishment of a more equitable social system.⁵

Most of the revolutionary ideas were formed in Eastern Europe and brought over to adapt to the Montreal situation. According to Jerry Halbus, ethno-religious persecution in Eastern Europe helped influence the participation of many Jewish workers in the growing revolutionary movement in Russia.⁶ He also claims that:

...the fact that most Eastern European Jews were in a fast-growing industrial proletariat must be seen as the principal explanation for the politics of their struggle.⁷

The post-1905 Jewish immigrants brought to Canada a more radical outlook to class solidarity. As part of their background in Eastern Europe, they sympathized with socialist ideologies and were more committed to organization of the working masses.⁸ With their socialist ideas, Jewish intellectuals visited many factories and sweatshops in Montreal. But, there was one major unifying factor which organizers stressed; and that was the Yiddish language. It was the common tongue of most workers of any particular shop. At the same time that Jewish labour unions were organized, there also developed a strong literary, secular, nationalist and socialist Jewry.⁹ Out of this movement emerged the

Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America and the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union.

The most common reason provoking Jewish garment workers to organize was to improve the working conditions within the industry. The work regulations both inside the factories and in outside contract shops, even when enforced, did not raise the standards of the appalling working conditions. The dirty and unventilated sweatshops meant that the general physical health of the workers was jeopardized. In addition, Jewish garment workers faced exploitation as an ethnic group and as members of a working-class. It was found that Jewish employers paid Jewish workers less than Ukrainians, Poles and French Canadians, and, they justified this by claiming that owners did not want to show any sympathy to one particular ethnic group when they paid low wages.¹⁰ Therefore, Jewish workers felt that political action was necessary in order to reduce problems in the workplace and propose changes to their employers. During the first two decades of this century, this task was made easier by the fact that the majority of garment workers were Jewish and communication between organizers and workers was facilitated.

The outlook of many garment unions at this time was highly supportive of socialism. Because most of the

membership was Jewish, in certain unions, Jewish cultural patterns and socialist ideologies were established as platforms for organization. Jewish garment unions promoted the ideals of such extra-union responsibilities as education and social security.¹¹ Also, militancy fostered by the concentration of a large number of Jewish workers with a previous knowledge of socialism was apparent in the first attempts of garment unions. In many instances, Jewish workers who led the fight for improved working conditions were members of such Jewish secular agencies as the Workmen's Circle. The leaders of the first needle trade unions were those who strongly believed in the class fight for socialism.¹²

A Jewish identity and a working-class struggle gave workers the strength to fight back through solidary class action. The major grievance in their fight for improved conditions revolved around problems associated with contractors and the piecework system. These two elements of sweating labour produced a highly competitive environment that lowered the standards of working and living in Montreal. Many strikes throughout the period under study were based on these issues. Between 1900 and 1914, there were 158 strikes in which 40,000 workers took part.¹³ One of the first recorded strikes occurred in 1900 at the Workman Manufacturing

Company. The factory owner fired nine members of the United Garment Workers of America, Local 140 in September of that year in order to replace them with newly immigrated Roumanian Jews. He paid the new workers four or five dollars a week instead of the fifteen dollars paid to other workers.¹⁴ When Workman was asked for a comment he denied importing cheap labour in contravention of law.¹⁵ In 1904., three hundred employees in Montreal went on strike to protest the fact that they paid for and supplied their own sewing thread.¹⁶

The year 1907 witnessed an increase in conflicts between employers and employees within Montreal's garment industry. A strike was recorded at the Empire Clothing Company, the Dominion Cloak and at Schillers tailoring shop.¹⁷ The issues of this particular strike were not mentioned. But the outcome involved the arrest of two cloakmakers, Max Kronenberg, and David Galliger. On August 26, 1907,, a larger strike occurred. During this particular conflict, the strike extended beyond one firm. The firms that were affected by the strike included Kellert and Sons and Freedman Brothers. On this same date, a strike was ordered at Standard Clothing Company. Here ninety men and women walked off their jobs. In addition, 150 operators left their work areas from Freedman Brothers. The Montreal Star reported that

in both cases the work was under the control of contractors.¹⁸ The newspaper article also proclaimed that:

Several of the manufacturers, when interviewed said the fight was between the contractors and the operatives. The strikers had not been employed by them and consequently had not the right to deal with them. They claimed that piece-work as well as time work existed in all the factories of the city and many of the employees preferred the piece-work system in order to be practically their own bosses. Quick workmen could also make more money.¹⁹

As part of the outcome of this strike, the union succeeded in signing agreements with two firms. Like the strike at the Standard Clothing Company and Freedman Brothers, the issues of this strike related to piecework and contractors. At Kellert and Sons and Levitt and Freedman, both sides of the conflict agreed to the abolition of the piecework system. In addition, both employers agreed not to use contractors in the future and to provide foremen with complete control.²⁰ But, according to a business agent for the local unions, Mr. A. Miller, tensions still existed between employers and employees in other clothing firms over the same issues. In an interview with the Montreal Star, he claimed that:

About 269 men and women...had returned to work under the new and improved conditions. There were still 3 or 4 hundred persons on strike, but there was every indication that all hands would be back at work before the end of the week under the week work system.²¹

Much strength was established through the common ethnic background of garment workers. This is supported by the fact that amongst twenty large men's clothing factories in Montreal, in which there were 5,000 workers, 90% or 4,500 were Jewish.²²

An example of class solidarity was confirmed in the general strike of 1912. This particular strike involved many garment workers in Montreal. It lasted approximately nine weeks and was one of the longest and most militant of strikes in the history of Montreal needle workers. This fight between employers and employees demonstrated tensions between these two classes at the time. Under the guidance of the United Garment Workers' Union, workers fought for a forty-nine hour week and the nine hour day. One worker stated that the work day should be reduced by one hour "for the present schedule robs us of the hour of freedom for refreshment, with our families, with the world, with nature, with life."²³ In several instances, violence broke out as employers called in the police to stop workers from demonstrating. Leon Chazanovitch was a union organizer at the time. He recorded his own perceptions of the struggle for improved working conditions. Chazanovitch was very disillusioned by Canadian industry and its treatment of workers. In his

article, "Patriotism and the Money Bags", Chazanovitch claims that:

Patriotism once meant the defense of the fatherland against foreign enemies, to-day it means the maintenance of class control and the oppression of the working masses under the mask of common national interests.²⁴

What made the struggle even worse was the discovery that Jewish employers aggravated the problems of Jewish garment workers.

In this strike of 1912, ethnic ties were second to class alliances. The fact that most manufacturers were Jewish did not help Jewish workers and may have provoked them even further than if bosses had been non-Jewish. Chazanovitch suggested that the bitter struggle was between the 5,000 workers - Jews, Englishmen, Frenchmen, and Italians - and employers. He accused employers of the following acts: "brutal force, class justice, prison, swindles and buff, libel and provocations."²⁵

What added to the problems of the Jewish workers was that Jewish employers were thought to have instigated acts of anti-Semitism, in order to provoke disunity amongst workers and antagonize workers against workers.

Chazanovitch blamed employers of "inflaming anti-Semitism and race hatred."²⁶ At the beginning of the strike, employers told newspapers that

"foreign" agitators wanted to get rid of non-Jewish workers. Chazanovitch believed that:

The horror of the anti-Semitic agitation becomes the more shameful when we recall that manufacturers are Jewish capitalists fighting Jewish workers. These Jewish bosses are the most bitter enemies of labour.²⁷

But throughout all of these tensions, the workers did succeed in achieving some of their goals. Workers received a 52 hour work week. In addition, subcontracting was eliminated and the rates for piecework were increased.

Union activity increased within the garment industry between the years 1905 and 1920. There were three main unions that concentrated their activities on both political action and social reform. These were the United Garment Workers' Union (UGWU), the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA).

The strength of the United Garment Workers' Union was more evident prior to 1914. After this date, the ILGWU and the Amalgamated became more powerful union organizations. The first independent locals in Montreal were organized in 1904. But, the first local in Montreal of the United Garment Workers' Union emerged in 1906. During this year, the union established four locals in

Montreal: pressers, coatmakers, pantsmakers and ladies' locals. In New York City, tailors were organized under the UGWU. The union then sent organizers to Montreal in order to organize tailors. The greatest expansion period occurred between 1912 and 1915, when 3,000 members were reported in the cities of Montreal, Toronto and Hamilton.²⁸ At this time, emphasis was placed on social reform. It was important to union officials that the union assume responsibility for the total welfare of its members. This included the implementation of sickness benefits and funds, hospitalization insurance, death allowance, cultural development, pensions and political direction.²⁹ It was these types of policies that provided a basis for social reform found in the early period of garment unions. These were also one of the major concerns of Jewish communal organizations. The strength of the UGWU was evident in the bitter strike of 1912.

The early history of the Amalgamated was characterized by both its militancy and strength. The first locals of the Amalgamated were established in 1915. By 1916, there were more than 3,000 members in Montreal.³⁰ In the 40th Anniversary Book of the Montreal Joint Board, Joe Shuster claims that:

The pantsmakers paved the road of the Amalgamated in Montreal. Our local 277 was the

first Amalgamated chartered local in the city. The other tailors joined our local and after a short time, all the former members of the United Garment Workers were under the Amalgamated banner.³¹

In February, 1917, a strike began at one of the clothing manufacturers in Montreal. It was provoked by a lockout to which the workers answered with a general strike.³² As a result, the majority of the members of the Montreal Amalgamated supported their fellow workers in this long battle. At the end of two months, workers received a 49 hour work week, as well as recognition of the union and introduction of a closed shop system. This meant that no worker could be hired unless he or she became a member of the union.³³

The International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, like the Amalgamated, did not successfully develop until 1917. The first locals of the ILGWU started to appear in New York City around 1900. The first local in Montreal was established in 1909. In 1910, the union was involved in a strike. This strike was particularly bitter because the English and French press wrote that it was instigated by immigrant elements who came from Europe to disrupt Canada.³⁴ In 1911, the union was reorganized under the International President Abraham Rosenberg. By 1914, the ILGWU had 4,100 Canadian members.³⁵

A major divisive force within the unions that eventually led to internal splits were ideological differences amongst the membership. Within the Amalgamated, a factional fight with leftists weakened the strength of the union at the beginning of the 1920s. In the 40th Anniversary book of the Amalgamated, Morris Rubinovitch commented on internal divisions:

But besides our struggles with the manufacturers, we also had our internal difficulties. We had problems with various political groups which were fighting one another within the ranks of our organization.³⁶

According to Rubinovitch, manufacturers were happy to see internal struggles and tried to take advantage of this situation.

The early 1920s was a period of much internal divisions amongst these working-class organizations. Within the ranks of the ILGWU, an internal battle left the women's clothing industry far less organized in the early 1920s than the men's clothing industry. According to David Rome, a strike would be organized, the union would be granted recognition and then would lose strength as the membership fought internally for the leadership.³⁷ At this time, the Communist element appeared within the ILGWU more often than during its earlier development stage. Those who believed in

communist ideologies, constantly spoke of the revolution. On the other hand, there were those social democratic elements who did not believe in change through revolution.

These splits caused disunity within the unions and other labour organizations. The division found its way into the Workmen's Circle by the early 1920s. Conflicts arose between the communist and social democratic elements of the Workmen's Circle. The pro-Communist faction of the organization wanted the Workmen's Circle to follow a more radical perspective.³⁸ In this way, internal divisions were rooted in the opposing opinions regarding the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. This led to internal conflicts that had two major results. First, a large part of the members withdrew from the organization. Secondly, the social democrats of the Workmen's Circle split from Branch No. 151 and formed their own Branch in 1925. These splits did not actually occur until the 1920s. Before that time unions and fraternal orders papered over their internal divisions to establish the original ideals for the formation of a distinctive Jewish working-class response.

Another split that was evident within the Jewish labour movement was along gender lines. Within the garment industry there was a gender division of labour.

Women's jobs tended to be more menial and less skilled than jobs performed by male workers. This peripheral role was also reflected in the composition of mutual benefit organizations and garment unions. In many cases, women were equally involved as men in disputes as long as they were members of a union local or worked in a closed shop within the factory. Otherwise, because many women tended to be involved in piecework in private homes or in unregulated contract shops, they remained hidden and unrepresented when it came to union matters. Mercedes Steedman suggests that male unionists took "women's inferior, transient status in the industry" for granted.³⁹

The male/female split within both the garment industry and garment unions meant that greater concern was expressed for factory workers than the usual female sweatshop workers. The more skilled workers were found in the factory. Outside shops created competition for unionized workers and, therefore, lowered the standards of working for inside employees. One major grievance of unionists was that piecework produced competition and took away the jobs from unionized workers. In their attempts to curb sub-standard conditions within the industry, union organizers were concerned with sweatshops not only because they created competition but also because they forced workers to work in the most

physically degrading surroundings. Therefore, women, while not represented directly, were nevertheless taken into consideration through an indirect manner. In this way, women's problems were aggravated more by the structure of the industry itself rather than their under-representation within garment unions.

Another problem that faced union organizers pertained to the difficulties encountered in organizing French Canadian employees within the clothing trades. From the beginnings of Jewish labour's involvement in the garment industry in Montreal, this was a unique challenge to union organizers. What made unionization difficult was the language gap between the Yiddish-speaking union executive and the French Canadian women found in both the city and rural areas.

Up until 1900, the Catholic Church maintained a traditional view towards the solution of workers' problems. For the Church the effects of industrialization could be solved by the spirit of justice and charity of the "upper classes."⁴⁰ By the beginning of the century, more important and more numerous strikes within the province of Quebec caused the Church to modify their perception. In addition, "socialist" and "anti-clerical" tendencies in the international labour movement made the clergy believe

that the time had come to form Catholic unions. From 1912 to 1915, French Canadian Catholic workers' organizations were born under the auspices of the clergy. However, this first attempt at unionization by the church, prior to World War I, did not meet with much success. Their projected formula called for an idealism irreconcilable with the realities of industrialization. Their program was inspired by the social doctrines of the Church.⁴¹ It was not until after World War I that Catholic unions were established that answered to the needs of workers.⁴² One union in particular was La Confederation des Travailleurs Catholiques du Canada (CTCC) which was formed in 1921. While the Church did encourage French Canadians to unionize, it still maintained a conservative attitude that pushed French Canadian workers to join Catholic-based workers' organizations.

Nevertheless, attempts were made on the part of union officials to organize French Canadian women. In one attempt made in 1904, in Montreal, ILGWU locals faced problems organizing French Canadian workers. But in 1910, the Canader Adler, reported that the ILGWU had named French Canadian organizers during the summer of that year.⁴³

While ethnicity was a unifying factor amongst Jewish garment workers, it tended to play a divisive role between ethnic groups. As previously mentioned, attempts at organizing non-Jewish workers on the part of Jewish organizers met with difficulty. It is important to suggest that ethnicity, in some cases, was a divisive factor. But, among Jewish garment workers, ethnicity, in fact, contributed to the formation of a unified Jewish working-class consciousness. When examining the working conditions of French Canadian garment workers within this study, for example, it is important to note that differences in language and values acted as obstacles to the development of a solidary working-class amongst garment workers in general.

Attempts on the part of Jewish union organizers demonstrate that other ethnic groups were not ignored when it came to union efforts to improve working and living conditions. Within the Amalgamated locals of Quebec there was some success. In 1916, French Canadian workers who worked in the shop of John W. Peck were concerned about their poor working atmosphere, the number of working hours and low wages. Adhemar Duquette was one of the workers in this particular shop in 1916. He claims that:

Working conditions at that time were very poor: we worked very long hours for very small wages. Some Jewish workers spoke to me about a union that had been recently founded: "The Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America." I listened to them and they were showing so much faith when talking about that union, that they impressed me very much, and convinced me. I decided to speak to my friends, the French Canadian workers and try to convince them that we also, French Canadian tailors, should join that union if we ever wanted our living conditions to improved.⁴⁴

In July, 1917, shop workers succeeded in obtaining a charter from the Amalgamated for a special local of French Canadian tailors to establish Local 115. After Local 115 was organized, Amalgamated officials approached French Canadian workers in the small villages of St. Gabriel de Brandon and Joliette, Quebec.⁴⁵ One French Canadian member of the Amalgamated reported that within Montreal, the union showed the spirit of international solidarity. Workers with different cultural and ethnic origins -- Jews, French Canadians, Italians and Scandinavians, joined together to try to improve working and living conditions of garment workers.

Despite the necessity to fight for improved conditions for garment workers, the Jewish element still remained strongest within the garment unions at this time. It was important for Jewish garment workers to first establish a strong base before other ethnic groups

could be organized. Communal institutions found their place at the base of these organizations. For the Jewish working-class, social welfare programs such as sick benefits tended to take the lead in their concerns. Therefore, the first garment locals were both Jewish-based and oriented. A strong history of communal autonomy pulled members of the Jewish working-class together and resulted in a unified Jewish working-class consciousness.

There was a positive relationship between mutual benefit associations and garment unions in that they both strove for the social welfare of the Jewish working-class. Fraternal orders and mutual benefit societies gave workers the opportunity to control their own institutions. Ira Katznelson suggests that the labour organizations workers developed in both the workplace and neighborhood institutions provided the possibility for the development of an independent working-class culture.⁴⁶

In a working-class community where the Jewish culture maintained the centre, social reforms remained the utmost concern of the members. The Jewish culture was used as a binding factor that directed Jewish workers towards the ideals of reform. By emphasizing these two elements, Jewish garment workers could feel

united with a cause that would hopefully bring about improvements through a solidary class action. The Hymn of the Workmen's Circle supports this point:

We shall be forging forever
A radiant circle of steel,
The order of workers and dreamers,
A guard both in woe and in weal.
With flames from our hearth stones we'll fashion
The link of the chain manifold.

All of the workers together,
United whate'er befall,
Struggling for life that is perfect
Each of the workers for all.⁴⁷

Jewish culture played a special role in the labour activities of Jewish garment workers. Jewish cultural programs that revolved around the Yiddish language became ingrained policies of the original unions established by Jewish garment workers. The same was true for mutual benefit societies and fraternal orders founded by Jewish immigrants. These organizations in Montreal offered a familiar atmosphere for immigrants by providing various cultural activities. When the Jewish labour movement began to develop at the turn-of-the-century, Jewish cultural matters were again given priority. Joshua Gershman claimed in 1955 that:

the struggle to build trade unions, to obtain better conditions...went hand-in-hand with the campaign to build Jewish fraternal cultural institutions.⁴⁸

Therefore, from the beginning of the Jewish labour movement, the main objective was to work through familiar cultural forms and ethnic loyalties as a way to educate and encourage the Jewish masses to progressive outcomes.

Of major importance to cultural programs was the Yiddish language. According to David Rome, the historian for the Canadian Jewish Congress National Archives, workers discovered a type of Judaism that was devised with Yiddish as its basis.⁴⁹ This "Yiddishism" was associated with socialism and the Jewish working-class life. It tended to play down the role of religion. In addition, the Jewish working-class culture focused on union reforms, secularization of education and the development of the Yiddish theatre. The plays performed in these presentations were aimed at the Jewish immigrant working-class. Actors performed various satirical skits in Yiddish, that highlighted the experiences of Jewish workers in both North America and Eastern Europe.⁵⁰ The Yiddish language was also the language that Jewish radicals and intellectuals spoke, especially when they attempted to organize fellow Jewish workers. This strengthened the bond between workers and established a form of solidarity amongst the working-class. When there were no strikes, union meetings were the centres for discussion of socialism and the

principles of labour solidarity.⁵¹ The Yiddish culture of the 1890s and early 1900s paralleled the rise of the Jewish labour movement; that is, the cultural development of Jewish workers was simultaneous with the cultural evolution that centred around the Yiddish language. Levin suggests that:

It is not a little ironic that Yiddish became a central element in the culture of the Jewish socialists, not only as a literary and dramatic tool, but as an important means of adjustment and economic progress. Whereas other ethnic groups became economically productive to the extent that they became anglicized, Jews became productive in and through Yiddish.⁵²

Parallel to the formation of their own community groups, members of the Jewish working-class established their own Press.

The Yiddish press in Canada was inspired by the need of Canadian Jewish workers to have their own voice expressed in their own newspapers. The first Canadian Yiddish paper was the Canader Adler. It was founded in Montreal, in 1907, at the same time that the Jewish working-class culture started to play a more prominent role in their community organizations. The second known paper, the Folkszeitung (The People's Paper), was established in Montreal in 1912. One of the founders was Leon Chazanovitch, a revolutionary Zionist. At one of its first meetings, it was reported that:

The Jewish labour movement at this time was considering establishing a workers' newspaper, and had formed a Folkszeitung Association. The Poale Zion had invited Chazanovitch to lecture in Montreal and soon had him invited to edit the weekly Folkszeitung which began publishing on April 19, 1912.⁵³

Other Montreal Yiddish labour newspapers included the Arbeiter Zeitung (1914), the Dos Vort (1917), the Dos Folk (1917), Der Chaver (1918) and Dër Yiddisher Arbeiter (1919).

In the tradition of improving conditions for the Jewish working-class, many of the ideals were taught to children in schools established by different Jewish working-class organizations. The curriculum always included aspects of Jewish history and culture. This was integrated with progressive ideas for the purpose of educating children and perpetuating the goals of the working masses. The program related to the continuation of the Jewish culture, an already established aspect in raising the consciousness of the Jewish working-class. Because many workers were afraid that their children would abandon the Yiddish language and culture, organizers strongly believed that schools should assure the perpetuation of Jewish cultural traditions. Most of the Jewish schools originated in New York City where much Jewish literary activities were centred.⁵⁴

Two types of schools were established in Montreal that attempted to teach the ideals of the Jewish working masses. One, the Jewish People's Schools, had more of a Zionist outlook. The other, The Jewish National Radical School (later the Peretz School), was the more radical and socialist school. The Jewish People's Schools were founded in Montreal by members of the working-class who were dissatisfied with the conditions of Jewish education in Montreal. They were concerned with the fact that the Yiddish language was not taught at all in the currently running Jewish schools. Therefore, in 1914, the first Jewish People's School opened in Montreal. The aim was to raise the consciousness of working-class children through the teaching of Jewish history in both the Hebrew and Yiddish languages. The curriculum attempted to direct children towards forming a working-class consciousness. It was thought important to instill a Jewish consciousness by conveying Jewish history and teaching of the Yiddish language, the language of the masses.

The second well-known Yiddish school that appeared in Montreal was the Peretz school. This institution was formed by a group of ten members of the Poale Zion. These Labour Zionists were the first to start a program of Jewish secular education. They did not, however, believe that Jewish education could be totally separated

from Jewish religious traditions. In 1915, there were 500 students in the school. The number of students enrolled increased so that two more schools in 1926 and 1927, Peretz No. 2 and Peretz NO. 3 were opened.⁵⁵ The schools provided the students with a strong Jewish cultural education. Like the Jewish People's schools, The Peretz school in Montreal strove for a Yiddish school system essential to those who believed in a secular Jewish culture. The difference between the two types of schools lay in the fact that the founders of the Peretz schools were politically-oriented since they were members of the Poale Zion. But both schools had similar aims: to teach the children about their Jewish cultural heritage and give them a greater understanding of the economic and social problems in Montreal at the time in accordance with socialist doctrines. According to Nora Levin:

Bringing a secular educational system into being and stimulating other radical and labour groups to a greater consciousness of Jewish culture was probably the most important Labour Zionist achievement in America before World War I.⁵⁶

The emphasis placed by the Jewish labour movement on not only labour issues but also Jewish cultural programs demonstrates that Jewish garment workers of Montreal were interested in more than improving their working conditions. Because there was always concern for

helping members of the working-class, it was important to concentrate on their general well-being, which included the education of Jewish workers. Members were attracted by lecture forums, schools and newspapers that these organizations offered. These particular educational devices established a solidarity amongst members of the Jewish working-class by increasing their awareness of their conditions and the means to improve them. In addition, they learned that strength could be gained through collective action when dealing with matters pertaining to their working and living conditions.

Through the emphasis on both social welfare and culture, a distinctive Jewish working-class response resulted. First, Jewish workers in Montreal were concentrated in few industries, particularly the clothing trades. This established a common working-class experience within their community. Out of this, Jewish garment workers developed a special interest in preserving both a communal solidarity and social stability. Their Eastern European experience produced a set of Jewish values and traditions that established themselves within Jewish unions. In this way, welfare, education and philanthropy were major concerns of

garment unions founded by Jewish organizers. It was a way in which Jewish workers transferred community values of Eastern Europe to both fraternal orders and the labour movement. The Jewish labour movement not only served immigrant workers as bargaining agencies for their rights but also operated as a cultural centre for meetings and social activities.

One annual event stands alone as evidence to show that Jewish members of the Montreal working-class identified strongly with the struggle to combat class exploitation. This event was the May Day parade, held yearly as a chance for labour to join together. It was proclaimed in 1884 in a resolution by the Trades and Labour Federation, the forerunner of the American Federation of Labour. In 1889, at the first Congress in Paris of the Second Socialist International, a resolution was passed that proclaimed the first of May as labour's day.⁵⁷ It was also the first time that Jewish immigrants under the banners of their own organizations marched side-by-side with other workers in a common cause. For example, the May Day Parade in 1910 included members of the Cloakmakers and Pantsmakers Union, the Workmen's Circle and the Jewish Trades and Labour Council.

Through an emphasis on social reform and Jewish cultural activities, the Jewish labour movement succeeded in organizing Jewish garment workers in their struggle for a working-class consciousness. While encountering difficulties in organizing French Canadian women, Jewish organizers found that their strength resided within their own working-class community. Like the Jewish mutual benefit societies, garment unions also placed emphasis on Jewish values and traditions. Underlying this was the importance of the Jewish working-class community. Union officials combined this with the collective action used to fight for their rights within their industry. This was easy to achieve since 90% of the workers in the garment industry were Jewish. The strong relationship between mutual benefit societies and garment unions established a framework within which cultural activities engendered a unified response amongst the Jewish working-class. In this way, ethnicity played a very encouraging role in the formation of a distinctive working-class consciousness.

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Chapter Seven

Summary and Conclusion

In taking Jewish garment workers in Montreal as a case study, this thesis explores the relationship between class and ethnicity. From the beginnings of the mass influx of Eastern European Jews in the 1880s into Canada, these immigrants tried to cope with their new surroundings and class exploitation. Their experience as victims of pogroms and other anti-Jewish acts in Eastern Europe forced them to develop a strong basis for Jewish community solidarity. This Eastern European experience was crucial to the founding of Jewish working-class organizations in Montreal - mutual benefit societies and garment unions. Both types of organizations were established by members of the Jewish working-class and both were expressions of Jewish working-class struggle.

Proponents of the new labour history in Canada believe that ethnicity is a divisive factor that hinders the development of a unified working-class consciousness. But this study demonstrates that the majority of workers within the garment industry in Montreal shared both a common ethnic background and identification with the struggle against class exploitation. Both ethnicity and a common working-class

status thus brought Jewish garment workers together and aided in the development of a distinctive working-class consciousness amongst Jewish garment workers in Montreal.

An ethnic working-class consciousness was accomplished through the organizations developed within the Jewish working-class community of Montreal. The 1880s to the 1920s was a key period for the industrial development and growth of the garment industry. Jewish immigrants became a cheap source of labour for this highly exploitative industry. Through the use of common ethnic traditions, Jewish workers founded organizations that would provide financial aid to members. Cultural programs, such as lectures, schools, newspapers and social events were also important to the running of these organizations. The lectures combined elements of social reform with the ideals of Labour Zionism. At the same time, the Yiddish language was used as the medium of communication for Jewish garment workers. Therefore, the Jewish working-class consciousness was based on a working-class identity and reinforced by Jewish cultural activities.

In order to determine whether both class and ethnicity contribute to a uniform working-class response, a framework that explores this relationship is

essential. First, there is an ongoing debate between the old and new labour history that discusses this question. Both of these schools of labour history contain elements that legitimately explain the response of workers to industrial capitalism. The old labour history, however, ignores the day-to-day struggles of the working-class and tends to be atheoretical in its analysis. The new labour history is based on a Marxist framework that utilizes a class analysis. This framework is not only analytical, but it also emphasizes the worker's struggle for a working-class culture. But this approach as it has developed in Canada tends to downplay such factors as gender and ethnicity in explaining collective action. In the case of an immigrant working-class, both ethnicity and class play key roles in the formation of a solidary class response. Ethnicity, in this particular study, is not treated as a discrete independent variable but in relationship to the exploitative situation of Jewish garment workers in Montreal. As part of their working-class experience, ethnicity helped Jewish workers join together and forge a collective response.

The struggles of Jewish garment workers began with their experience in Eastern Europe. There within the Pale of Settlement, working-class Jews were often the targets of Anti-Semitic acts. Even the Pale of Settlement was a legalized form of discrimination. It

not only limited the mobility of Jews within the Pale, but also restricted their choice of occupations. At the same time, throughout Russia, Poland and Roumania, industrialization slowly moved into the skilled trades. This contributed to an increase in population within urban centres as industrialization infiltrated the skilled trades. This emergent industrialization threatened the skilled trades and forced many Jewish workers out of work. The combination of this development and anti-Semitic policies contributed to the unique experience of Eastern European Jews.

A tradition of community solidarity and self-help developed amongst these Jews while still in Eastern Europe. As part of this experience, Jewish workers educated in the radical teachings of socialist ideologies laid down the groundwork for the class struggle of Jewish workers. One of the major movements to come out of this struggle was Labour Zionism, the hope for a Jewish nation based on socialist principles. These ideas were applied to Jewish working-class organizations in both Eastern Europe and in Montreal. Organizations in the form of mutual benefit societies and labour unions were established by and for the Jewish working-class. Jewish mutual benefit associations, from their beginnings, grew in response to economic conditions and discrimination in Eastern Europe. Whether

based on the principles of Labour Zionism or founded on the ideals of self-help, all these organizations shared a strong emphasis on the Jewish culture. Ethnocultural traditions such as the modern development of the Yiddish language, the establishment of schools and a strong sense of autonomy were all characteristics of this Jewish working-class culture. These same traditions were brought to North America with the massive movement of Eastern European Jews. Their class loyalties and Jewish culture contributed to the formation of a distinctive Jewish working-class consciousness in Montreal's garment industry.

When Jewish immigrant workers arrived in Montreal, they encountered a highly exploitative atmosphere within the garment industry. The clothing industry in Quebec had developed along the same lines as in other areas of North America and Europe. It was quickly transformed from a skilled trade to an intricately developed and highly competitive industry. The invention of new technological innovations speeded up the process of producing ready-made clothing and required greater strength to cut and press material. This led to a division of labour where men received the more skilled and higher paid jobs and women were employed as button-hole makers and finishers. In addition, intense competition meant wages were often lowered and hours per

week extended in order for the manufacturer or contractor to make a profit.

One of the worst aspects of this industry from the beginning of the 1880s was the use of the sweating system. Sweatshops, or contract shops, were characterized by their poor working conditions. This included working outrageous hours in dirty, unventilated and unsanitary surroundings. Many of the workers in these shops were females who worked by piece-rates. This type of work was the lowest paid within the industry.

These conditions influenced the establishment of mutual benefit societies that were completely organized by Jewish workers. Jewish communal organizations like the Baron de Hirsch Institute were founded by the established Jewish community but were largely rejected by Jewish workers because they represented the views of the wealthier Jewish class. Jewish immigrant workers decided to establish their own communal groups, which more closely reflected their own worker values and conditions. Their cultural traditions brought from Eastern Europe were further developed in Montreal as Jewish workers faced the exploitative structure of the garment industry. Such aspects as community solidarity, the Yiddish language and social programs were

strengthening factors in their struggle for a Jewish working-class response.

Jewish mutual benefit societies met the social and economic needs of its members and provided both monetary relief and an emphasis on Jewish cultural activities. It was important to members of the Jewish working-class that they supply their own financial and cultural assistance, based on their background of community solidarity and autonomy developed in Eastern Europe. But more importantly, these working-class organizations helped Jewish garment workers cope with the harsh affects of industrial capitalism. As part of their goals, these organizations strongly emphasized Jewish cultural activities that eventually became incorporated into various Jewish garment union locals in Montreal.

The struggle for a working-class consciousness amongst Jewish garment workers in Montreal was further developed through the formation of garment unions. During the time period from 1880 to 1920, union formation was only in its preliminary stages. The organization of the United Garment Workers resulted in a successful nine-week general strike in Montreal, in 1912. From the years 1914 to 1917, the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America increased their influence in

Montreal. The formation of the Jewish labour movement in Montreal met with success on two levels; through the improvement of working conditions and through the emphasis on Jewish cultural activities. In this way, the distinctiveness of the Jewish labour movement was a reflection of both their class struggle and ethnocultural ties.

For the immigrant working-class generation, ethnic working-class organizations formed the basis for familiarity and self-help. During this time, when there was no government assistance for social welfare, both Jewish mutual benefit and labour organizations succeeded in providing such benefits to aid in the workers' class struggle. The fact that the Jewish working-class had control over their own organizations gave them further strength in their fight for improved working and living conditions of these workers.

Organizers of garment unions and mutual benefit associations strongly believed that there was more to life than improving working conditions. During the period from the 1880s to the 1920s, an interest in the Eastern European Jewish immigrant experience sparked a new wave of literature. It emphasized the plight of Eastern European Jews both in their country of origin and in North America. Underlying this issue was the

renewed interest in the Yiddish language. Jewish day schools were also founded as part of educating children of the Jewish immigrant working-class. As part of the curriculum, children of the working-class were to receive an education that emphasized a Jewish radical program.

The development of Jewish cultural programs reflected the need for familiarity that could be obtained from one's own ethnic group in a changing environment. Here ethnicity was employed to cope with new surroundings. When faced with economic problems in Montreal, Jewish garment workers used their experience as workers and as an ethnic group to form their own working-class community institutions. In this particular case, their own Jewishness, or cultural traditions provided a "niche for themselves in the economy."¹ Cultural traditions were formed in Eastern Europe based on their experience there. In addition, the close-knit character and isolation of Eastern European Jewish communities contributed to a Jewish folk tradition, which was drawn upon by immigrants in Montreal.

The role that ethnicity played in the creation of a unified working-class consciousness was exemplified by the strong emphasis on the Yiddish culture and language. It was important to organizers that a Jewish cultural

and educational life be integrated into mutual benefit associations and garment unions. The use of cultural programs is what made the Jewish labour movement unique. Ethnicity was emphasized through Jewish schools, lectures and literature in order to further the labour movement and instill a common ground on which to build a uniform working-class response. Therefore, the two elements of ethnicity and a working-class status reinforced a solidary response in the form of Jewish working-class organizations.

Suggestions for Further Research

To further explore the question of class and ethnicity, it is important to establish a framework that is sensitive to both sets of loyalties and social relations. Both ethnic diversity and gender divisions require greater acknowledgement within Canadian labour history. This is especially true for the period from the turn-of-the-century up until the present as more immigrants of diverse backgrounds settled in the major industrial centres in Canada. It is evident that neither ethnicity nor class struggle can be ignored when dealing with an immigrant generation with strong attachments to its ethno-cultural traditions. Usually an immigrant generation, like the Jewish garment workers, have strong

ethnic ties. Being in a strange, impersonal new country, they may create their own communal organizations that help them to cope with their situation. Above all, if a theory is to explain a working-class culture, it cannot ignore the fact that the Canadian workforce from the beginnings of industrial development was ethnically diverse.

In order to explore this question in research, an analysis of the Quebec garment industry in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s could be undertaken. Particular attention could be paid to garment factories and union activities. In a closer look at this period, it would be possible to interview people who were actively involved in garment union locals in Montreal. An additional factor that requires further attention is that of gender. Such problems as holding the least skilled jobs, being the lowest paid, being more prevalent in piecework and being under-represented in unions and working-class organizations were faced by women. By analyzing the situation of women in the industry, it would be possible to determine whether gender deterred or contributed to unified class action. Another question that came out of the research for this thesis was whether Jewish women aligned more with their ethnic group or gender group? In addition, the gender division of labour within the garment factories needs to be further investigated.

Another important question that can be further researched is whether or not other ethnic groups have had similar experiences in other sectors or industries. The only way that the link between class and ethnicity can be solidified, is to investigate other case studies. If one is trying to demonstrate this interaction between ethnicity and class, then it is important to show whether it occurred with other ethnic groups in other industrial sectors.

The question of the role of gender and ethnicity involvement in a working-class struggle is even more pertinent during World War II. Many men in the factories left their jobs to fight the War. The vacancies left by them were in most cases filled by women. In this case, did they become a stronger voice within unions? How did this affect the outcome of a solidary working-class response? Another important element was ethnic diversity within the industry. How much did the ethnic composition change over the decades to be discussed? A more intensive study could analyze gender and ethnicity to determine whether these factors hinder a working-class consciousness. In addition, what role did Jewish leaders play in union activities in the context of an ethnically diverse labour force when Jewish culture could no longer be such a strong binding force? Were

responses as strong when ethnic and gender diversity became common features of the needle trades? In her 1987 article, "Organizing Women in the Clothing Trades: Homework and the 1983 Garment Strike in Canada", Carla Lipsig-Mummé concentrates on these issues. She claims that the appearance of more women and the entry of different ethnic groups into the industry challenge the union executive, replace them and face the manufacturers with a new program of union activity.² Also, the increased numbers and strength of the female voice could lead to more representation of feminist issues.

Based on the analysis provided in this study, it is evident that a distinctive Jewish working-class consciousness was formed. The Jewish labour movement in Montreal from 1880 to 1920 was a period when socialist teachings learned in Eastern Europe were expressed through the development of working-class communal organizations and garment unions. Solidarity came in the form of these organizations. A Jewish working-class culture was, therefore, adapted through their experience as workers and their experience as an ethnic group. The modern development of the Yiddish language at the beginning of the twentieth century was an expression of this culture. While some may describe a working-class consciousness in terms of success of union strikes, in this study it was demonstrated by both the establishment

of labour organizations and the unified struggle of Jewish garment workers in Montreal. Their struggle as workers and their identification as an ethnic group combined to produce a movement in Canada that laid the foundations for a culturally rich class solidarity amongst Jewish garment workers in Montreal.

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