THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE: PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS
OF JEWISH GARMENT WORKERS IN CANADA, 1900-1930

by

SEEMAH CATHLINE BERSON
B.A., The University of British Columbia, 1975

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
(Department of Anthropology)

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April 1980

© Seemah Cathline Berson, 1980
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the Head of my Department or by his representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of Anthropology & Sociology

The University of British Columbia
2075 Wesbrook Place
Vancouver, Canada
V6T 1W5

Date April 21st, 1980
ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with the lives of East European Jews who came to Canada in search of better living and working conditions. The period under review is 1900-1930. The study is based on the personal recollections of over fifty informants ranging in age from 65 to 90 years. The initial purpose was to discover why so many Jewish immigrants had chosen to work in the clothing factories of Montreal and Toronto. As the research progressed the reasons for choice of occupation faded into the background and their experiences in surmounting new problems became of paramount importance. In order to fully understand the motivations and actions of these people, this thesis investigates, through the media of taped interviews, the lives of Jewish immigrants in the Pale of Settlement. The Jews had been confined to the Pale for many years hence they were not only isolated but insulated from the wider political happenings of the last two centuries. Their awakening, at the end of the 19th and early 20th century, through wars and consequent occupations, set their sights beyond the villages and towns in which they lived toward cities across borders and oceans.

This thesis explores some of the historical roots and traditions of a people, why they tenaciously clung to their identity and their ability to start life all over again. The purpose is to convey a sense of living which a few people experienced even though millions emigrated to Canada and the United States at the turn
of the century. The focus is on revealing the lives of workers in the Old Country, their journeying to the New World, and their experiences in Canada adjusting to a new setting.

Utilizing the words of informants wherever possible the concern is not only to convey what their lives were like but also to show how they themselves reflect upon their past: the need to give meaning to one’s actions is always unconsciously present in the recounting.

Photographs are used throughout in order to give a further dimension to the words of these immigrants.

A Glossary is appended giving meanings of Yiddish and other language words used. A Bibliography of references cited is also appended.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ........................................ vii
List of Maps ............................................. ix

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Background to Research .................................. 1
Purpose of Paper ......................................... 7
Photographs .............................................. 9

CHAPTER II LIFE IN EASTERN EUROPE: THE PALE OF SETTLEMENT

Introduction .............................................. 12
Short History of the Jews Prior to Mass Migration to North America ........................................ 12
Conception of the Pale of Settlement: Overview of Russian History as it applied to Jews ........... 21

CHAPTER III THE SHTETL IN THE PALE OF SETTLEMENT

Introduction .............................................. 28
What is meant by 'Shtetl' ................................. 30
Life in the Shtetl ......................................... 40
Mothers' dreams for their Sons (and their Daughters) ................................................................. 42
The Impact of Poverty .................................... 54
Economic and Work Setting ............................... 68

CHAPTER IV IDEOLOGIES OF SOCIAL CHANGE ...................... 86
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IX</td>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td></td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLOSSARY</td>
<td></td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td></td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Research on the Needle Trades was made possible through grants from the Institute of Industrial Relations, University of British Columbia in 1974 and again in 1976. The research on Life in the Shtetl was funded by Youth Employment Programmes, through the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, University of British Columbia in the summer of 1978.

I wish to acknowledge with gratitude those whose time and efforts have contributed to this work. Amongst them are Professor Kenneth Stoddart who willingly accepted the challenge to sit on my Committee at its penultimate stage. Professor Martin Silverman has been available whenever I needed to discuss an idea or two. His moments of excitement were contagious and gave me the impetus to carry on. I wish to thank Henry Rosenthal for reading and commenting on parts of this essay.

To Professor Martin Meissner my gratitude for not only being instrumental in turning my vision toward this research but for his criticism and understanding when most needed.

There are many who have contributed their time and expertise. I am sorry I cannot acknowledge them all. I wish to thank Professor Marjorie Halpin for drawing out of me those feelings which might otherwise have remained submerged.

Professor Michaël Ames has been my mentor for many years. He has unstintingly given of his time and has with longstanding patience encouraged me over the difficult periods. I most gratefully acknowledge this.
Without the patience, understanding
and love of my husband, Harold, and our children
David, Joshua, Saul and Adam, this research
would not have been undertaken. Harold has spent
many hours transcribing all the tapes for this
study. I would like to thank my family for
without their help this thesis would not have
been completed in time. Thank you very much.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MAP I</th>
<th>Expulsions 1000-1500</th>
<th>17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MAP II</td>
<td>The Emancipation of European Jewry 1789-1918</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAP III</td>
<td>Partitioned Poland, 1815-1918 showing Pale of Settlement</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAP IV</td>
<td>The Second Polish Republic 1921-1939 showing The Shtetlach in the Pale of Settlement</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAP V</td>
<td>Tishevits - A Shtetl</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAP VI</td>
<td>Early Jewish Settlement in Montreal 1900</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAP VII</td>
<td>First Area of Jewish Settlement in Montreal 1901</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAP VIII</td>
<td>Toronto 1921</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAP IX</td>
<td>First Area of Jewish Settlement in Montreal 1939</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAP X</td>
<td>Second Area of Jewish Settlement in Montreal 1939</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAP XI</td>
<td>Third Area of Jewish Settlement in Montreal 1939</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For Thomas Robertson
1929–1975
my wise and gentle friend;
my teacher too.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Background to Research

It happened a few years ago when I heard him speak at a banquet about the things he had done as a young man: when he first came to Canada and the sort of life he had lived the past fifty years. I was an undergraduate at the time and I had a research paper to do. The man speaking at the banquet was Jewish and what he talked about then, though it was a part of his life, was also a reflection of a larger picture involving more than the one Jewish immigrant to North America. It reflected the transition of a people, the East European Jewish people.

Five or six years ago I had little knowledge about the Jewish immigrants who came to Canada, even though I am Jewish myself. My antecedents are not East European. I had vague ideas about what life had been like in the Old Country: the anti-Semitism, the pogroms, the poverty, the struggles, the heroes and heroines and their achievements. Listening to Sidney Sarkin at the banquet I became interested in finding out more about these people.

At that time Sarkin was in the process of writing his memoirs in Yiddish. He generously agreed to talk to me about his life and we subsequently spent many hours at his home taping the stories about life in Lithuania, about his leaving home, his eventful journey to Canada and the years he spent working in the garment industry, the trade union and the Communist Party of Canada. The many hours spent together resulted in a paper. However, the major outcome was that it crystalized a desire to talk to many more people and listen
to their life stories about coming to Canada and working in the
needle trades.

I began to look at secondary sources: books on Canadian
Jewish history, working-class struggles in Canada, trade union history,
census reports, and other related evidence, and what struck me again
and again were the facts that:

(1) 60% of the Jewish immigrants in Montreal, Toronto and
Winnipeg were employed in the clothing manufacturing industry in the
eyear decades of this century;

(2) in any history of the Jews in Canada little was said
about the industry itself (e.g. the sweat shops, the struggles, the
working conditions);

(3) the histories and reports of the period under review
were more concerned with quantitative documentation rather than a
reconstruction of what life was like for the Jewish immigrant
worker.

Further, Sarkin was a cutter, an 'aristocrat' of the trade,
and I wanted to speak to ordinary workers.

The historical record was incomplete. The personal dimension
was missing. References to institutional contexts were one-sided and
impersonal. What was this history like from the point of view of those
who had lived it? The interview with Sarkin suggested a format for
further research. I will attempt to reconstruct the history of East
European Jewish immigrants from the perspective of their own memories
in order to add a personal dimension to the impersonal records.

I decided to focus on the period 1900 to 1930 for
pragmatic reasons:
(1) It was difficult to find anyone who worked in the trades prior to this time;

(2) census reports giving dates, numbers of immigrants, religion, language, occupation, etc. begin in 1911;

(3) secondary sources dealing with Jewish communities in Canada are sketchy before the 20th century because of insignificant numbers of Jews prior to 1900; and

(4) the early 1930s was chosen as a cut-off point because of World War II. The immigrants who came after the mid-30s pose different sets of problems which will not be dealt with in this paper.

Before my final year as an undergraduate I was fortunate to have received a grant from the Institute of Industrial Relations, University of British Columbia, to travel to eastern Canada in order to do my fieldwork. Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg had been the centres of the clothing manufacturing industry and the people who were employed in the needle trades were to be found there. An impetus to hasten my work was the age group toward which the research was focussed: the immigrants were from 65 years old and over and not too many of them were still around.

In the summer of 1974 I went to Toronto and Montreal. I decided I would only do two of the three cities. I went with my tape-recorder and dozens of blank tapes. I was armed with enough names of immigrants in both cities to get me started. However, having a tape-recorder and being introduced to someone willing to talk does not necessarily mean that you are going to come out of an interview with 'good data' or 'a sufficient amount of raw material'. I had grown accustomed to interviewing Sarkin and felt comfortable talking to him.
In Toronto and Montreal I was a stranger. This, coupled with a degree of initial terror, made for a certain amount of time wasted, mistakes made in recording, inability to field appropriate questions, or to keep the respondent from straying into areas of no interest to me. There were occasions when a respondent had been talking for about five minutes before I realized that the outlet into which my taperecorder was plugged was dead. Needless to say, when we started all over again I did not get a detailed story but a resume of those first five minutes.

Before going into the field I was a little concerned about the language. My Yiddish is next to non-existent which means I could understand the general drift of what is being said but the finer nuances of the language would pass me by. I was worried that people might lapse into Yiddish which would then constitute a translation problem. However, all the people interviewed spoke good English. There were a few who chatted away in Yiddish when they were excited about something but fortunately it was basic enough for me to understand and translate.

The people I wished to interview did not lend themselves to filling out forms or questionnaires. Some of them could not read or write in English, and even if they could the type of questions I wished to ask could not be answered in one or two words.

My initial focus was to discover why Jewish immigrants went into the needle trades. I began with the following questions which I felt would allow people the room to unfold their life stories:

1. Where did you come from and when did you arrive in Canada? (from this was to be learned why they had left their homeland).

2. With whom did you live when you arrived? (this I felt was a crucial question: did the
person with whom they lived influence the type of occupation? A rich uncle; a revolutionary brother; a poor but religious family? Was the type of occupation, and the position within that occupation, determined by the answer to this question?)

3. What was your first job?

In dealing with these basic questions I felt I would be able to discover their reasons for choosing occupations. I wanted to know how various factors influenced their choice of occupation, such as religion, language, skills, kinship, friendship, membership in organizations, time of arrival in this country, etc.

Though I was interested primarily in people who had worked in the needle trades, I interviewed immigrants in other trades as well.

I also visited public and private libraries and archives in Toronto and Montreal. In Ottawa I spent time in the Federal Government archives and Canadian Labour Congress offices gathering data on labour and union activities.

I would like to say at this point that some sort of direction before going into the field would have been helpful. I knew what I was looking for: why Jewish immigrants had gone into the needle trades. I knew where to find these immigrants. However, I had difficulty pursuing secondary sources. I did have a publication: *Primary Sources in Canadian Working Class History 1860-1930*, (Hann, et al, 1973), but when I followed some leads they proved fruitful whilst others were non-existent, unavailable or useless for my purposes. My major focus was the Jews in the needle trades. But when you begin to know names and names have faces and struggles and fascinating experiences then how do you sit for
hours pouring over papers in the Attorney General's files deciding what is relevant and what is not? If, for example, one of your names with a face has been in the needle trades, has been an active union worker, a communist party member, has been arrested - can you just overlook a letter he or she wrote from jail? I found it very difficult to set an arbitrary parameter of interest. The files in front of me did not contain facts and figures of how many people lived in a certain city at a given time, doing a particular job for a specific wage. They did not contain tables of figures and numbers and percentages. The files contained original letters, personal papers, creative writings, of young children, of men and women, some still around, others long dead. In other words there were pieces of peoples' lives written in their own hand, in their own words, on various kinds of stationery. At that point I asked myself: what could I do with a list of names written very meticulously showing the five and ten cent contributions people made to a strike fund, or a sick benefit society? I realized I did not have a framework to fit this kind of material.

Consequently what evolved for me out of my research was a shift in focus. Instead of being concerned with gathering facts and figures to support what informants said to me and bolster the conceptual framework with which I went into the field, I began to see myself as a funnel or channel through which their lives and struggles could be written down. Further, two years of illness had also distanced me from my research and academic life to the extent that I do not consider my priorities as being paramount in this study. My priority has been to find adequate answers to the phenomenon: why had so many Jewish immigrants gone into the needle trades. Now the 'why' is no longer
important to me. Perhaps someone else later on can be concerned with that aspect. The concern of this paper is to portray the panorama of Jewish life at the turn of the century, both in the Old Country and here in Canada.

I was born, I have lived, and I have been made over.
Is it not time to write my life's story?

(Mary Antin, Russian Jewish immigrant in her book, The Promised Land)

In reviewing the oral histories of the immigrants I had interviewed in Toronto and Montreal, I felt I had somehow asked them to talk about their lives in Canada as though the years lived in Eastern Europe did not exist or have any bearing on their lives here in Canada. I felt I had to know about the towns and villages and cities from which these people came. What sort of lives they had lived there. Had they exchanged one set of problems for another? But mostly, I think the real reason for wanting to know about life in the Old Country was because there is no more a "Pale of Settlement" in Eastern Europe or anywhere else in the world for that matter.

Consequently I spent last summer recording the recollections of Jewish immigrants in the "shtetlach", villages, of Eastern Europe. Some came from cities and would be resentful if they were referred to as a "shtetl". However, the majority of those interviewed came from towns and villages.

Purpose Of The Paper

By utilizing personal recollections, I will attempt to describe, in all their richness, the experiences of Jewish immigrants, as reported to me. These experiences are not the milestones in the lives of these
people so much as the everyday, ordinary events which confronted people in their struggle to live from day to day.

These experiences will span three spheres of interest:


3. The Needle Trades. The contributions made by these immigrants in fighting for Canadian labour laws, such as the eight hour working day, unemployment insurance, etc.

These spheres were chosen because each in its own way should be viewed first in order to understand how the Old Country played its part in pushing the Jews out, how 'America' attracted them here, and how these two factors influenced their lives in the occupations they ultimately chose for themselves. One cannot, I feel, appreciate their fight for better working conditions without understanding the ideology with which these Jews were raised and without being cognizant of the fact that they brought this ideology with them to this country as part and parcel of their cultural baggage.

In reviewing the oral histories of over fifty people I find they are mostly concerned with talking about themselves, which is to be expected. However, male informants often juxtaposed their lives with 'political' events, whilst female informants streamlined theirs with events closer to their persons. Male informants were always the 'doers', the 'actors', the makers of history; whilst female informants were most often interested in telling me about what happened around them even though they might have been as instrumental as the next person in 'making history'. Life was always hard. Each day was a struggle; but no one ever left it
as being a struggle and nothing more. There were benefits, there were small rewards, there was the fight itself. Our 'givens' and 'taken-for-granteds' are the things they fought for and in most cases did without. On several occasions men and women went to where they kept their little private things — letters, papers, photographs — and very proudly pulled out their union card and showed it to me. "See, I've been a member for a long time and I still get a pension, not very much, it's only $25 a month, but I get a pension!" Some cried as they told me about "longing to go to school to get an education: to be able to read and write just a few words even".

Photographs

Though the camera does not lie, the photograph is neither value free nor does it provide more than a desituated fragment, accidentally preserved through time, of a larger picture.

(Dobroszycki & Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1977:xiii)

Photographs will be used in this study bearing in mind the above words. As John Szarkowski has remarked: "To quote out of context is the essence of the photographer's craft" (ibid:xiii). In doing this research, some time was spent in finding, collecting and reproducing photographs. Not all of them were finally used. Those used were taken from a number of books and personal collections.

I have chosen photographs showing people working, children studying, street and shop scenes in the Old Country, sweat shops and factories in Canada. Photographs were also chosen with a concern for showing how people dressed fifty to seventy years ago both in Eastern Europe and in Canada. In seeing a photograph, for example, of someone
carrying water in the shtetl it may help create a 'tableau' of some aspect of unknown or forgotten life. Hopefully photographs will be viewed as serving the purposes of eliminating useless words and stirring the imagination to perceive on a wider canvas what these immigrants felt and experienced. Far from detracting or intruding upon the flow and purpose of this paper, photographs will be used to give a further dimension to the stories of informants. However, I would strongly urge that they be placed in the correct frame of reference: somewhere between history and ethnography.

This study would not have been possible without the generosity of each and every one of the Jewish immigrants who gave not only of their time but of themselves in the hope that some part of their story will survive them. Today some of them live in their own homes or apartments; some in Old Folks' Homes, others in hospitals too old to do anything for themselves; and some have died. Those who were able, graciously invited me to their homes and talked to me over tea or lunch, even whilst baby-sitting grandchildren. Others met me at cultural institutions where they spent a part of their day. Those in Old Folks' Homes and hospitals gave of their endless time to talk to me: they were so grateful to have someone to talk to about themselves. Most people enjoyed the experience of recounting their past although in one or two instances I felt ashamed of myself and wondered what moral right I had to be there questioning them. When a man does not remember his wife's name, have I a right to ask him to remember his experiences in the garment industry? In these cases I withdrew as gently as I could. I felt they had earned the right to be left in peace: no need to dredge up pleasant as well as very unpleasant, better-forgotten times.
A Rabbi in the shtetl of Vilkomir, Lithuania.

Courtesy: Sidney Sarkin.

Photographic reproduction: Harold Berson.
CHAPTER II
LIFE IN EASTERN EUROPE: THE PALE OF SETTLEMENT

Introduction

In this chapter I will give a short history of the Jews prior to mass migration to North America. These Jews lived in the Pale of Settlement which covered an area of about 1,000,000 sq. km. from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. According to the census of 1897, 4,899,300 Jews lived there, forming 94% of the total population of Russia and accounting for 11.6% of the general population of the area (Slutsky 1971:27).

The Jews were an homogenous group and yet they were not. They had their similarities, their differences, their idiosyncrasies. For example, there existed a 'Gefilte Fish' line which separated those who seasoned their Sabbath Fish with sugar from those who did not (Roskies and Röskies 1975:37). They spoke the same language, Yiddish, but pronunciation of certain words differed. For example, depending on where they came from, some either said 'shul' or 'sheel' for synagogue. They believed in the same God but followed different schools of rabbinical thought: the followers of the Rabbi of Ger had nothing to do with the followers of the Lublin Rabbi.

Short History of the Jews Prior to Mass Migration to North America

The existence of the Jewish people as a continuous historic entity from the days of the Father of the Jews, Abraham, in ancient Mesopotamia, to the Jews living in Israel and the Diaspora (those living outside of Israel), plays an important part in the understanding and explanation of their survival prior to and during the period under review.
The contribution of the Jews to Western thought may be considered more than the belief of ethical monotheism. That a group of nomadic tribes were eventually able to forge such a document as the Bible stems, in great measure, from the fact that they were able to codify into written language their 1000 to 1500 years of wanderings, into a total unified structure. The very nature of these people trying to comprehend their secular world was imbedded in the necessity to understand the totality of their environment. The logical conclusion of the conditions of the day and age had to suggest a unity that was codified and ritualized into the Bible. That other people at that particular juncture of history were also able to detect in their own indigenous way the same comprehension of universality, is not denied. The accomplishment of the Israelites of that day was that they had evolved a method of recording – both written and oral – what one might consider to be the "First Whole Earth Catalogue". This 'catalogue' consisted of the Torah, which is the Five Books of Moses, plus the Talmud, which was initially transmitted orally from generation to generation and eventually transcribed into another set of sacred texts.

The languages used were Hebrew and Aramaic. The people who were landless and nomadic for the greater part of their early existence, were admonished in both languages to instruct all their children – the poor, the rich and the orphaned – in the teachings of the Sacred Books. This tradition was maintained throughout Jewish history. The Talmud insisted on this feature and the education of children became part of the ritual of Judaism. The ancient Hebrew sages are purported to have said:

The world is kept alive by the breath of school children;

and,

A town without a school ought to be demolished.
A scribe in Poland.

Source: Dobroszycki & Kirshenblatt-Gimlett (1977:68).

Photographic reproduction: Harold Berson.
Even though it may be argued that the Hellenic influence on the earlier Jews was limited to only the upper echelons of Jewish society, the culture of an evolving, benign, tolerant and conquering Greek civilization could not but influence the Jewish scribes who were in the process of writing the Bible. The pattern of civilized tolerance for minority groups within the Greek empire provided a great cultural leveller. Greek was established as a common tongue for the people of the Mediterranean world. The equality of opportunity that the Greeks fostered, siphoned off a large portion of the Jewish people from their homeland. The mobility of the Jewish people during this period was such that Alexandria with its cosmopolitan setting attracted a Jewish population of 250,000; Egypt had 1,000,000 Jews. Statistically, it is indicated that there were three to four million Jews living in Palestine at that time but a greater number of them were living outside (Ausubel 1955:77).

The Sacred Books carried instructions on how to live a good life in the eyes of God; what health foods to eat; how one should conduct oneself within the community. The sanctioning by religious edict of the Sabbath as a day of rest has been considered as being the first recorded piece of labour legislation. The wide variety of everyday activities which the Sacred Books implored the Jewish populace to follow in the name of God, covered a wide range of both spiritual and secular matters.

The rise of Islam coincided with the dispersion of the Jews from Israel. The Arabs conquered Palestine in 638 and Babylonia in 642 C.E. They conquered the south of Spain in 711 and with this conquest began the Golden Age of the Jews (ibid:105). Judaism outside of Israel and in the Moslem world continued to flourish. This era, known as the Golden Age, took place under Arab rule mainly in Spain from approximately 900 to 1200 C.E. The forward thrust of Christianity eventually forced the Arabs
out of Spain and subsequently the Jews, who were expelled in 1492.

Small enclaves of Jews were settling in the Rhine Valley for several hundred years and their numbers were increased with the migration from the Iberian peninsula. As Christianity continued to relentlessly march across Europe, the Jews migrated to those pagan areas where a more tolerant view of their presence was accepted. The bulk of world Jewry finally settled in Eastern Europe. Within the confines of this area, their stay was marked by persecutions and territorial confinement.

During their stay in the Rhine Valley, the Jews developed another language known as Yiddish. This language came to life at the same time as Middle German but was written in Hebrew characters and possessed much of the morphology of the Hebrew language.

Why did the Jews in the Rhine Valley in the medieval cities of Worms, Mayence, Cologne and Speyer, need a language of their own? The late Max Weinreich, a well-known historian of Yiddish, explained that the Jews of these cities chose to live apart from the gentiles. They wanted to be close to the conveniences necessary for a Jew to observe his religion; the synagogue, the ritual bath, the kosher slaughterhouse, and Jewish burial ground.

Settling in groups was the natural thing to do in the Middle Ages. What Jews wanted in particular was, not isolation from the Christians, but insulation from Christianity (Roskies and Roskies 1975:34).

Yiddish followed the Jews to Eastern Europe and this language became the everyday tongue of the Jewish masses. In order to teach the children Judaism, prayers were written in this language. Popular epic style poems and stories, very much typical of non-Jewish literature of the Middle Ages, were also written in Yiddish. Handwritten copies of these Yiddish works were circulated amongst the people until the paper they
EXPULSIONS 1000-1500

Source: Gilbert 1969:44
were written on literally fell apart. A continuation of the linear tradition and a multilingual approach was part and parcel of the mental luggage that the vast majority of Jewish people carried with them.

Ausubel says that the Jews of Europe had to wait some fifteen hundred years before they were officially accorded equality as human beings (ibid: 152). The 18th century saw the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. People were being freed not only from their physical bonds but also from spiritual ones: equality of human beings, reason above dogma, conscience above subservience to church, etc. The Jews also began to share in this freedom. But it came slowly. It was not until the 19th century that Jews were 'emancipated' and the walls of the ghettos crumbled.

To those Jews of Western and Central Europe who had managed to physically survive the onslaught of Christianity and the Crusaders and who had not migrated to Eastern Europe, Judaism developed in such a manner as to easily accomodate and adapt to the evolving territorial nationalist ambitions of their host cultures. The Jews readily adapted to the cultural life of this part of the world where German became the secular language.

For the Eastern European Jew this was not a period of emancipation. Poverty was the common lot of the vast majority of the people. Into this dark life, Judaism encountered Hassidism; a Jewish interpretation of God in a highly personalized and individualistic way which created a folk type religion. Hassidism addressed itself to personal and intimate dialogues with the Creator and infused Judaism with a spiritually uplifting, joyful experience.

The spirit of Emancipation attempted to force itself into the ghettos of Eastern Europe. Its success was somewhat limited, due in part to the fact that the advocates of Haskalah, Jewish Enlightenment movement, deemed Yiddish to be an illiterate and common jargon despite its use as
"And if, in the course of many centuries, the oppressed descendants of warriors and sages have degenerated from the qualities of their fathers; if while excluded from the blessings of law, and bowed down under the yoke of slavery, they have contracted some of the vices of outlaws and slaves, shall we consider this as a matter of reproach to them? Shall we not rather consider it as a matter of shame and remorse to ourselves? Let us open to them every career in which ability and energy can be displayed. Till we have done this, let us not presume to say that there is no genius among the countrymen of Isaiah, no heroism among the descendants of the Maccabees."

MACAULAY IN 1833

Emancipation gave the Jews full civil equality

Only European country not granting civil equality to Jews by 1919

Emancipation imposed by Bismarck and Disraeli at Berlin Congress 1878

Ghettoes freed by Napoleon, but subsequently restored

Frontiers of 1900

Source: Gilbert 1969:56

MAP II

0  200 Miles
the mother tongue of the Jewish masses of Eastern Europe. The leaders of the Haskalah were also concerned that the Hassidic movement was drawing the Jewish people closer to the womb of an obscure and isolated brand of Judaism and that in so doing was further isolating the Jewish people from the advantages of cultural enlightenment that was sweeping Europe. (Haskalah was a movement toward breaking down the destructive and imprisoning barriers of ignorance, backwardness and strangulation which the ghetto symbolized.)

Throughout Judaic literature runs the theme of return to 'Zion', to Israel. With nowhere to turn and hemmed in between Poland and Russia, the desire to return to Zion became very much more eloquent and plaintive. The Hassidic scholars would only use Hebrew for prayers because it was the holy language. Yiddish was their everyday vehicle of verbal expression. To this language they injected their Messianic verve for Zion. Haskalah wanted to make Hebrew the spoken language of the Jews. They said that until the Jewish people had a homeland of their own with their own Hebrew language, there could be no saving the Jews from the obscure, bleak life of the ghettos. Out of Haskalah, Zionism began to emerge, even though not yet formed into an ideology. Zionism felt that anti-Semitism would disappear once the Jews were settled in Israel under a mild form of socialism.

The growing momentum of socialism could not miss attracting wide segments of the Jewish masses: the promise of a better life here and now; a world of equal opportunity for all people no matter what their origin; the eradication of anti-Semitism. All these items were on the minds of the people. The Yiddish language was eloquently used by the socialists in describing the new and better world to come.
Throughout this entire period of time, the Jewish community accepted its responsibility of providing education for their children. Basically, the vast majority of male children were enrolled in kheyders, Jewish schools, where they learned some of the rudiments of Hebrew, at the very least for liturgical purposes. The respect of the community was bestowed upon the scholarship of a student. The very best catch that parents could wish for their daughter was an aspiring young scholar or one who had already attained scholarship in his Talmudic studies. All this despite the fact that the father would probably have to support his son-in-law because scholarship was not very profitable. If the family was well-to-do, a girl learned to read and say her prayers. The first priority for a young girl was to know how to look after and manage a kosher home.

Yiddish started to transform itself into a viable crucible for the cultural expression of the Jews. Its literary endeavors came of age around the 1850's and continued to find a tremendous response amongst the Jewish people. It was the start of a folk culture of considerable literary as well as cultural merit.

The seething unrest of Eastern Europe at the time created conditions whereby the monarchical rulers found it most convenient to use Jews as scapegoats. This resulted in mass migrations of Eastern Europeans to North America.

Conception of the Pale of Settlement: An Overview of Russian History As It Applied to the Jews, from Catherine II (1762-1825) Until Alexandra III (1881-1917)

In 1764 about one million Jews lived in the commonwealth of Poland. (Maps III and IV.)

From Courland in the north on the Baltic Sea, Poland extended as far south as the Dniester, across which lay Moldavia in the Turkish Empire. Poland's northern tier stretched from the
MAP IV
THE SHTETLACH IN THE PALE OF SETTLEMENT

LATVIA

LATVIA

THE SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC 1921-1939
Source: Dobroszychi & Kirshenblatt-Gimlett 1977:xvii
North German plains east of the Oder toward the Warta River, across the Central Polish flatlands beribboned with lakes and rivers - the Bug, the Vistula, the Nieman. Thence it extended across ten thousand square miles of the Pripet Marshes northward to the Russian lowlands, eastward through great coniferous forests all the way to the Dnieper, which marked the Russian border. The central Polish belt swept from Upper Silesia over the loess plains of Galicia across the ukraine (frontier) where the Zaporogian Cossacks lived. Its southern tier rose and fell in the peaks and foothills of the Beskids and the High Tatras, extending southward toward the Carpathians, eastward toward the Black Earth of Russia, and westward toward the Sudenten Mountains.

(Davidowicz 1967:6-7)

Jews lived in Poland from the 11th century on and it was after the 15th century that they began to flourish:

They lived mostly in towns, controlled the kingdom's export trade (mostly agricultural produce), the import trade, and the domestic trade through fairs. The Jews sometimes leased the royal lands and sometimes lands of the nobility, tax farming their meadows, woodlands, and fish ponds. The Jews planted crops, bred livestock, fished, lumbered, and manufactured flour and spirits. The Jews handled money, extended credit, and held mortgages. They developed their own crafts in competition with the Christian craft guilds, pioneering in that most characteristic form of early capitalism - the ready-made clothing industry.

(ibid 1967:7)

In Russia the pattern was different. Since the 15th century Jews had been excluded from living within its borders. After the First Partition of Poland (1791) when Poland became part of Russia, Russia and Catherine II had to contend with a large Jewish population within its borders.

At that time the government began to impose limits on the areas in which Jews were permitted settlement. "These limitations were consonant with the general conception of freedom of movement of persons which then applied" (Slutsky 1971:24).

In the years following, various other provinces were added to Russia and included in the area permitting Jewish settlement:
a) Kherson, Dnepropetrovsk (now Ekaterinoslav) and Taurida (Crimea).

b) In 1793 the Second Partition of Poland took place and in 1794 the above decree was ratified and further regions were added: the provinces of Minsk, Volhynia and Podolia, and the region east of the River Dnieper (the provinces of Chernigov and Poltava).

c) 1795 saw the Third Partition of Poland and the decree added the provinces of Vilna and Grodno.

d) In 1799 Courland was added.

e) In 1804 the "Jewish Statute" was passed and added the province of Astrakhan and the whole of the northern Caucasus.

The "Kingdom of Poland" which was incorporated into Russia in 1815 and which included the provinces (later called the Vistula Region) was officially not included and until 1868, during the reign of Alexander II (1855-1881) Jews were not permitted to pass through this area to the Lithuanian and Ukrainian provinces although in actual practice they did so.

There was a twofold purpose to all this: Russia, through the offices of Catherine II and Alexander I, hoped to open up and colonize her desolate steppes to the south and to curtail Jewish merchants, who were flourishing in Poland, thereby protecting the economic interests of her own people. It should be remembered that the Jews in these newly acquired lands were of the merchant and guild classes.

It was not until the reign of Czar Nicholas I (1825-1855) that the term "Pale of Settlement" was coined. (In Russian: cherta (postoyannoy yevreyskoy osedlosti); meaning territory within the borders of Czarist Russia wherein the residence of Jews was legally authorized (Slutsky 1971:24).

Under Czar Alexander II (1855-1881) Russian law began to ease up and permission to live beyond the Pale of Settlement began to be granted to various classes of people:
In 1859 to merchants able to pay registration fees of the First Guild.

In 1861 to university graduates as well as those in medical professions.

In 1865 to various craftsmen.

In 1879 to dentists, male and female nurses, midwives, prostitutes, etc.

The right of residence throughout Russia was also granted to Cantonists (Jewish children who were kidnapped and forcibly converted to Christianity. They were made to serve in the army of the Czar) who remained Jews, and to their offsprings, the so-called Nicholas soldiers.

The Jews hoped the above easing up of restrictions would lead to the final abolition of the Pale of Settlement. However, in 1881 the Temporary (May) Laws came into being and prohibited any new settlement of Jews outside towns and townlets in the Pale of Settlement. Those who had been living in villages before were authorized to reside in those same villages only. The peasants were granted the right of demanding the expulsion of the Jews who lived amongst them.

( Ibid: 26 )

Occasionally new places were excluded from the Pale:

In 1887 (under Alexander III) Rostov and Taganrog.

In 1893 the Spa town of Yalta.

During 1891 and 1892 thousands of Jewish craftsmen were expelled from Moscow.

( Ibid: 26 )

Under Czar Nicholas II (1894-1917) events took a different swing. Serfdom had been abolished and there was an upsurge of industry which produced an urban working class, who repeated the history of workers in the early stages of industrial capitalism in Western countries:
...they were unskilled, badly paid, overworked and miserably housed. Uprooted from the village communities they suffered physical and moral privation.

(Seton-Watson 1974:64)

The early stages of the 20th century brought changes for the Jewish settlements. Russia's economy was growing, political pressures and tensions increased, and various alleviations in the Temporary Laws occurred.

1. From 1903 those village settlements which had assumed urban characteristics were given the status of townlets and Jews were thus permitted to reside. Up to the outbreak of World War I some three hundred settlements were thus opened up to Jewish residence.

2. In 1904 all Jews permitted to live outside the Pale of Settlement were also allowed to settle in rural areas.

3. In 1910 Jewish members of the Duma proposed a bill to abolish the Pale of Settlement which was voted upon but subsequently fell into oblivion.

4. In 1915 August, many thousands of expelled and refugee Jews from the battle zones streamed into the interior of Russia and the government was compelled to permit residence of these Jews in the towns with the exception of St. Petersburg and Moscow.

In practice then, the Pale of Settlement was brought to an end. However, it was not until the Revolution of February 1917 when, amongst other anti-Jewish restrictions, the Temporary Government abolished the Pale of Settlement.
CHAPTER III
THE SHTETL IN THE PALE OF SETTLEMENT

Introduction

Since this thesis does not concern itself with the wider panorama of historical events which occurred at the turn of the century, the focus and thrust of this chapter will be to draw from personal recollections what life was like in some of the shtetlach of Eastern Europe. In order to understand why Jewish garment workers in Montreal and Toronto did the things they did and felt the way they felt, it is necessary to understand the cultural baggage they brought with them when they travelled to this country: their language, their literature, and their traditions played a vital role in shaping their lives in the New Land.

What they ate, where they slept, how they were taught, their daily triumphs and failures, their one-room houses with plaster walls and floors and their apartments with wooden floors, the dreams of mothers, family and community life, the struggle to feed themselves, their involvement in political activities, jail terms, escape from one country to another—all these aspects of life will be looked at here in order to show how some of the Jews lived in the Pale. This chapter will present a people not by quoting texts out of history books but by culling passages from the memories of a few dozen individuals.

The memory of the Jew is long. It spans two thousand years and even though informants spoke to me about their lives and their experiences, when they talked about pain and hunger, joy and marriage, they were recounting two thousand years of putting down roots and pulling up stakes; fleeing from one enemy to another; resting, multiplying and moving on again. By talking about dreams of mothers for their
"...doesn't matter where you go, you have to cross a bridge."

Source: Roskies and Roskies 1975:10
sons (and their daughters), about ideologies and philosophies, of how these pushed a vast group of people to question, debate, argue, accept, reject, reshape their lives so drastically in so short a time, by recounting these things, life as it was for the Jew in Eastern Europe should emerge, in some small measure, as a concrete entity, a reality.

Before proceeding to talk about shtetl life I would like to say that different perspectives will be brought together to show what life was like for the Jew in the cities and villages of Eastern Europe. How the shtetl was perceived depended largely on one's distance or proximity to life within it. There are accounts by Jewish historical writers like Salo Baron, Arcadius Kahan and others, who never went near a shtetl. There are stories by folk writers who lived in or near a shtetl, like I.L. Peretz and Sholem Aleichem. And there are the first-hand accounts of immigrants from the shtetl. (There are the children and grandchildren of shtetl dwellers who would have yet another accounting of what life was like there. However, we are not here concerned with that.) Each one, depending on his or her knowledge and level of articulation, can give us a 'description' of life in the shtetl. The task at hand is to convey a sense of living which these Jews had in the shtetlach of Eastern Europe.

What Is Meant By 'Shtetl'

... doesn't matter where you go, you have to cross a bridge. And the bridge was where all the soldiers were.

I remember when I was a child, ... we were six in the family, brothers and sisters, and I'm the third one. My sister she was an older one and we were living in a tiny place with our grandparents and it was a big, big hill and a small, little house; and underneath was sand and clay. And the yard, it was a big, big yard and water was running all the time. I don't know. There was like a waterfall. And there was also
Market Day in the Shtetl.

Source: Dobroszycki & Kirshenblatt-Gimlett 1977:56
a well and the whole little town used to come and take from us the water. The water was so beautiful, so clean.

(Nina Ullman)

I can remember when the 1st World War started. That was in 1914. And you know, when you live in a small town, a shtetl, the Jewish children didn't have any education there because they didn't take Jewish children into the public schools. We lived in a village and we were cut off from the rest of the world. We didn't know anybody in the immediate vicinity. But when the war broke out and you started to listen: cities here and cities there! To me it was — well I couldn't visualize it because this was my world.

(Bertha Dolgoy Guberman)

'Shtetl' is a Yiddish word for a town, a village, or a small city. I have never seen a shtetl and I never will. The shtetl dates back to the early 18th century and its inhabitants could number anywhere from three hundred Jews in a small shtetl to close to one thousand Jews in one of the larger towns. Albert Abramovitz' shtetl...

... was almost a Jewish little town, mostly 90% Jewish. The non-Jewish population lived around the fringes of it. Most of them were sort of in the countryside, farmers and so on. But they were all inter-connected with the city life because they had the goods, the produce and they brought it in. We were the customers.

The settlements dotted twenty-five provinces in Czarist Russia, in Poland, Lithuania, White Russia, Bessarabia and Crimea (Wigoder 1977:1490). This was known as the Pale of Settlement where Jews were legally authorized to live.

Russia in the 19th century was both a multi-lingual and multi-religious empire. Only about half the population were at the same time Russian by language and Orthodox by religion.

The Orthodox were to some extent privileged in comparison with the other Christians; all Christians enjoyed a higher status than Muslims; and the latter were not so disadvantaged as the Jews. (Seton-Watson 1974:60).
How did a Jewish child view her world: the Pale of Settlement? Mary Antin says:

Then there came a time when I knew that Polotzk and Vitebsk and Vilna and some other places were grouped together as the "Pale of Settlement", and within this area the Czar commanded me to stay with my father and mother and friends, and all other people like us. We must not be found outside the Pale, because we were Jews.

(1969:5)

Permission to live outside the Pale was granted only to certain groups. For example, "members of the liberal profession with a high school diploma, big businessmen, skilled artisans, and ex-Cantonists" (Wigoder 1977:1490). But this did not always apply:

Artisans had the right to reside outside the Pale, on fulfilment of certain conditions. This sounded easy to me, when I was a little girl, till I realized how it worked. There was a capmaker who had duly qualified by passing an examination and paying for his trade papers, to live in a certain city. The chief of police suddenly took it into his head to impeach the genuineness of his papers. The capmaker was obliged to travel to St.Petersburg where he had qualified in the first place, to repeat the examination. He spent his savings of years in petty bribes, trying to hasten the process, but was detained ten months by bureaucratic red tape. When at length he returned to his home town, he found a new chief of police, installed during his absence, who discovered a new flaw in the papers he had just obtained, and expelled him from the city. If he came to Polotzk, there were then eleven capmakers where only one could make a living.

(Antin:1969:22)

The fate of the Jews found outside the Pale without permission depended on the arbitrary decision of the local governor, or "they could purchase 'protection' from the local police" (Baron 1954:56). The capmaker did not have much luck in either direction.

Fanny Osipov recalls how her father and family were able to live in the city:
I am coming from, its a city, a big city, Nikolayev, right near Odessa. ... My father was a driver. You know in Russia they have this water in bottles which you push, like Seltzer water. He was selling all kinds of pop just to the stores. He had a wagon with a horse, and he made a living. He was born in a little shtetl but in this city, Nikolayev, Jews were not allowed to live. Those Jews who were citizens were allowed there. But my father was from a little shtetl and he made a living there in Nikolayev and so he thought he'll stay. The police came — everybody had to have a passport, papers, and you must register with the police ... ... the thing is, you give the police five cents, ten cents, he says, O.K. Stay. Now every month he came and my father paid him up. There were lots of people like that.

Rose Smith's oldest sister lived in Lenningrad. She had received a Gold Medal in university and therefore she was permitted to live in the city. When she got married, Rose said:

... father went. He went to a whorehouse to sleep over otherwise they wouldn't let him stay there. He had no choice. And he slept over because he wanted to go to the wedding and he went. The rest of us stayed home. So poor guy, you know, he had a beating. But my sister and brother-in-law finished university. They were good students, good engineers.

Polotzk and Vitebsk and Vilna were big cities at the turn of the century. People born in such places would never say they come from a shtetl. Such cities have paved roads, running water, train stations. Rose Kaplan Barkusky said:

It was different in Vilna, in the city. The house we lived in was like an apartment house. First when I was small we lived in a place which had three or four rooms. But the last house, after my mother remarried, we lived in a place where we had six rooms plus the kitchen. The kitchen was not counted as a room there. It was a big apartment, two buildings, one in the front and one in the back. Between was a garden. We lived in the back on the fourth floor and eighty-two steps to go up. And my mother, bless her, she'd send me down to the store for salt. I'll come with the salt. She forgot the pepper. I'll go down for the pepper. She'll forget something else. I used to go about five or six times a day. But then I learned to go down on the bannisters — slide down all the way. But up was marble steps. Eighty-two steps to go up four floors.
Young and old at the town well, Kozhenits, Kelts province.

Source: Roskies & Roskies 1975:152

Rose Gordon, right with mother, father, sisters and brothers in Kozhenits.

Courtesy: Rose Gordon

Photographic reproduction: Harold Berson
Most of the people I interviewed came from shtetlach. The village that Rose Gordon came from and the situations she recounts give a good idea of the hardships and deprivations with which people contended:

I was born in 1906 in a small village and there were very few Jewish people there — there was maybe half a dozen Jewish families — a very small place. It was right on the water. Very small place. My father's father and mother lived there and my father was born there. But my mother was born in a big city. My father worked in a mill. The name of the village was Kozhenits, Ukraine, near Odessa someplace, and was on the border of Bessarabia.

I remember every family in the village. We had a Jewish butcher. I don't know how the heck he made a living out of it! We had a store where you could go in and buy Jewish things — things like kasha and stuff which they used to bring in from Odessa and then the few families would buy that. We didn't have a synagogue and not much activities because it was a small village and small Jewish population.

Far, and yet not too far, from the 'big city' were most of the shtetlach in which the Jews lived. They were not all quite as small as the one which Rose Gordon comes from. As she said:

Who had a doctor? Who seen a doctor? My mother never had a doctor for children. The lady next door — if she made it in time, alright — and if she didn't make it in time, my mother did it herself.

Nonetheless, geographically the Jews found themselves, when the need arose, far from wherever they wanted or needed to be. "I never stepped out of a small town, except in Dwinska I was once" said Harry Ullman who was born in Dagda, Latvia and who had to escape the draft. In this case time was of the essence and he was twentyseven miles from the nearest railroad station and fifty miles from a horse and buggy in which to travel.
Houses in the Shtetl
Source: Dobroszycki & Kirshenblatt-Gimlett 1977:47

A Well in Rural Area of Volhynia
Source: Dobroszycki & Kirshenblatt-Gimlett 1977:43
Viewed in retrospect today, the shtetl does not carry the same weight for the immigrant as it did for the Yiddish writers of the period. How can it? The immigrant is reviewing situations and events which occurred half a century ago whereas the Yiddish writers lived and worked and wrote about life around them. Even though Sholem Aleichem and I.L. Peretz and others have written about very real and very sad situations in shtetl life, their stories leave you sometimes with a smile, for some a more understanding smile, but nonetheless as Roskies and Roskies state:

Folklore and literature alone cannot provide an accurate picture of the inner workings of the shtetl. For if they were our only source, it would seem that each town was made up of a mindless mob of Jews who dutifully followed their leader - the rabbi. (1975:181).

These writers never make a point of telling us that life in the shtetl was without its sorrows and pain, or that the inhabitants never worried about the next day and what it might bring. Perhaps this is because the Jews in the Pale of Settlement looked upon their afflictions as something external and apart from them, suffered by them, but somehow sustained through no fault of their own. Social existence was complicated and given the circumstances of the times (history books are replete with details of political happenings in Eastern Europe), life was anything but placid. Each family had its own problems and each person had his or her daily confrontations. Sholem Aleichem tells us about a man in a horse-drawn street car who does not have enough for his fare. The man tells the conductor:

I'm afraid you'll have to give me a little bit off the price.

I'll give you a little of my troubles, that's what I'll give you! said the conductor.

Thanks, said the shivering man. I have troubles enough of my own. You can keep yours, enjoy them in the best of health.

(From On The Kasrilevke Street Car, Goldberg 1966:47)
The reader's immediate reaction is laughter. What Sholem Aleichen is saying here goes deeper than the balanced reparte. It says so much more, not only to the shtetl dweller but also to me who has never been near a shtetl. Sholem Aleichen, with his inimical economy of words and use of folk language, is telling us that no matter how bad it was, no matter how desperate and bleak the future looked, there was always room for laughter.

The immigrant, on the other hand, has no such writing abilities nor has he qualms about economising words. In some instances the accounts given here were articulated for the first time.

There are many stories and many accounts depicting the various aspects of life in the shtetl. Today those of us who never lived in a shtetl can laugh with the Yiddish writers who deftly capture what life was like in the towns and cities of the Pale. Even those who lived and suffered in Eastern Europe continue to be regaled by such stories. Suffice it to say that the shtetl viewed the universe ...

... as a planned whole, designed and governed by the Almighty, who created it from original chaos. (This is not to be interpreted as the theology of the shtetl but rather the culture of a people). ... In such a universe behaviour, human and divine - must also be rooted in reason, order and purpose.

(Zabrowsky & Herzog 1962:409)

In this light one can understand Tevye the Milkman's arguments with God in Fiddler On The Roof (from the original story Tevye the Milkman by Sholem Aleichem). It underscores the notion that the Jews possess a Covenant or Contract with God: anyone can talk to Him; one does not need an appointment or place.

Nevertheless life was difficult. If there is one word I can extract from all the interviews to describe what life was like in the Old Country, it is the word 'hard'. Rose Smith said to me at the
beginning of her interview:

Oh, it's horrible. I hate to tell you. We went through so many pogroms and my childhood was terrible. Running all the time. And I didn't understand what it was all about. They used to raid father's house. They used to put a bomb - and it was always on our street. They want to kill an enemy - an enemy of the Czar!

And so life was very complicated and very tough. A very bad childhood. A very bad taste left in me. It was cruel, you know. And nothing to talk about. I never want to discuss those things. It is better to forget about it. But I had it very bad, very hard.

Life In The Shtetl

The East European Jew is no more. We will not find him or her on the Lower East Side of New York City, or Spadina Avenue, Toronto, or St. Urbains Street in Montreal. He has vanished along with his shtetl. However, some traits of the East European Jew still survive and quite vigorously in the Jews who were born in Europe and came here to settle. She may still drink her tea black with a piece of sugar between her teeth even though she may be wearing nylon stockings. He may not cut his beard even though he has given up wearing the *tallis-kotn*, sacred garment, next to his body. But these are characteristics some would toss aside as being inconsequential or lacking relevance.

What distinguishes the East European Jew from the Western European Jew, distinctions made by the people themselves? Essentially it is what the Western European Jews call 'kultur' in German. They had it but the Eastern Jews did not! Now 'culture' covers a gamut of traits and characteristics. For example, the Western Jews had higher education, more money, worldly knowledge; they knew how to dress, what to eat; they attended
Jewish and non-Jewish plays and went to symphonies. The Eastern Jew, on the other hand, admired and envied the Western Jew. Depending on where you came from in Europe, you either looked down upon or up at your fellow Jews. Western Jews in places like Austria, France, Germany helped their fellow Eastern Jews to obtain tickets, papers, passports to continue on their way to the New Land, lest God forbid, these penniless, cultureless travellers might decide to stay.

Many Jews who lived in Austria and Germany at the time of Hitler's rise to power did not know they were Jews. They had assimilated and integrated into the lifestyle of the host country to the extent that they did not consider themselves Jews but Austrians or Germans, and their children grew up not knowing they were Jews.

The world for the Eastern European Jew on the other hand was where he was born, where he lived and where he travelled in his daily work, which was not very far. After all, how far can you travel on foot, carrying or pushing your wares? Or how much further can you go in a horse-drawn wagon?

How do we, who were not part of the shtetl life, visualize the East European Jew? Warm, friendly, bearded men, babushkaed women, holes in their shoes? Somehow they are always pictured as being just a little bit worse off than the folks of today:

I came to Canada in 1913. My name is Max Dolgoy. In the Old Country, where we were born, we were a family of six children. Father in 1904, during the Russian Japanese War, left for Canada leaving mother with the six children without any earnings whatever. We had to live from day to day. At times we had no bread to eat. Till I came to Canada I haven't slept in a bed. The three boys used to be put to bed by pulling chairs together. No covers, no bedding. The three sisters used to be on the stove - there we used to have the brick stoves, they used to sleep on that.

The entire home was just on one floor. The windows sagged into the ground - there was no foundation.
Now this is the life! I remember my grandmother. In fact I have a picture of my mother's mother yet. And my father's mother was blind. In those years she had cataracts. They had no cure for it. She was blind totally. But she loved all the children. She used to knit socks for us - blind - and gloves and what not. And we lived like one family on my father's side.

(Max Dolgoy)

Mothers' Dreams For Their Sons (And Their Daughters)

I cannot overly stress the poverty of the Jews who lived within the confines of the Pale. Aside from a very small upper class, ...

... the majority lived in the direst poverty. The daily life was forever under the pall of insecurity, persecution, humiliation, and general cultural isolation from the outside world.

(Rubin 1963:29)

Although parents and children suffered these hardships, the weight of eking out each day fell upon the shoulders of mothers.

Mendele Moycher Sforim, the father of Yiddish literature, writes:

My mother always lived in want and simply never had enough to pull through the day. She would knit socks, pluck hens, assist at childbirth, and help with the baking of the matses before Passover. She worked day and night, poor soul, and, out of it all, we barely had a mouthful to eat.

(as quoted by Rubin 1963:31)

And yet, Albert Abramovitz said:

I had a very religious upbringing. It was the usual case with all the Jewish boys who in those days their mothers always had dreams for them. And the thing was, for some they at least developed into a rabbi. That was a great sort of thing in the family. And since I was the youngest and that time we had eight children, I had a special sort of privileged position in the family. All of them liked me extra. They treated me nicely and mother had extra plans for me. I was thrown very early into a synagogue choir. My father was a very good singer and didn't sing for money but when the cantor was away from the city he
was asked to officiate and he did the best of it. My brothers sang in the synagogue and when I was about six years of age they drew me in too.

When the Jews were dispersed from their homeland, Palestine, as a stateless people they became a nationality as well as a religious group and in order to maintain their identity as a group they adopted a theocratic state. The ethics and morals of their religion as set down in the Torah were carried with them. The Torah guided their efforts to cope with and solve the problems of life whether legal, economic, moral, religious, social or ethical. Therefore a Jewish community, a shtetl, no matter how small, always had a centre of learning. This centre should not be pictured as being a building or house separate and apart. Most often it was part of the synagogue or the synagogue itself: when prayers were over studies began and when it was time for prayers the studies ended. "Study is the duty and joy of a man reared in the shtetl tradition. As a duty it is twice prescribed." (Zborowski & Herzog 1952:71). Thus in order to possess this theocratic state one had to obey the commandments of the scripture (and this was incumbent upon being a good Jew). However, in order to obey these commandments one had to know them, and the necessity in terms of state was increased by the fact that the state was an integral part of their religious experience. Therefore to obey one had to know and one could not know without studying. Therefore education became the goal of every Jewish group for without it all identity was lost. Further, it is a mitzva, a deed commanded by God.

Now there are 613 mitzvos and not all of them are observed even by the most religious of Jews, but those "... which constitute the main base of Jewish behavior - ethical rules, social duties, religious beliefs, dietary regulations - remain in force" (ibid:71). "Thus", states Fauman, "it is apparent that the nature of Jewish life determined the very high
status of the educated man" (1952:13).

Mothers dreamed that their sons will sit all day in a shtibl or a synagogue, and learn and read and pray all day. A son should become a scholar, a reb, a learned man. And if a mother had a daughter she hoped and dreamed that her daughter will be blessed with catching a man of learning, a talmudic scholar, a rabbi's son. And so the vicious circle of dreams spun round and round without an ounce of practicality entering the picture. How should a family feed itself if the father and head spends all day and night in a house of prayer? If a boy had a rich, or well-to-do parents-in-law, he moved in with them and they supported him and his wife and children. And this was a mitzva. But most times it was the wife, pregnant, caring for little children, running a 'business', that is, making some commodity for sale on market days, or tailoring and dressmaking, in order to earn a few pennies to feed everyone, including and above all, her scholarly husband. It was considered not only a moral obligation but an act which would secure for one a better place in heaven. As Rubin states:

The aspiration for Talmudic learning becomes bound up with the conviction that such an achievement would bring not only economic security on earth but also celestial approval in heaven.(1963:31).

Hence the education of the boy and the education of the girl took different paths: study and scholarship for the boy and learning to keep house and a good marriage for the girl.

Riches, bodily advantages, and talents of every kind have indeed a certain worth ... but ... no merit is superior to that of a good Talmudist. He has the first claim upon all offices and positions of honor in the community. ... The most honorable place is assigned to him.

(Maimon, as quoted by Rubin 1963:31)
Beginning at the cradle a mother sings to her boy:

Buttered biscuits he'll be fed  
And then to Heder he'll be led,  
New Books he'll write too,  
And always be a pious Jew.

Study, children, do not fear  
The many hardships which appear  
Torah learning brings much joy  
To every Jewish man or boy.

... ... 

Yankele will study the Torah.  
He will study the Torah,  
He will write learned volumes,  
And a good and pious man  
He will always be.

In the shtetlach of Eastern Europe "there was always a poor student taking meals at our house ... Grandmother had told us that he was a lamden, and we saw something holy in the way he ate his cabbage" (Antin 1969:32). Not every man could hope to be a lamden, a scholar, but no Jewish boy was allowed to grow up without at least a rudimentary knowledge of Hebrew.

The scantiest income had to be divided so as to provide for the boys' tuition. To leave a boy without a teacher was a disgrace upon the whole family, to the remotest relative. For the children of the destitute there was a free school, supported by the charity of the pious (op.cit.) And so when a boy entered kheyder, Jewish school, at five years old, he became the hero of the family!

In the following pages we will see how the education of the Jewish boy differed from that of a Jewish girl.

One of my informants, Shaya Kirman, was sent to religious school at the age of three and thereafter spent many years studying in shtiblach. Fortunately his memory was excellent and he loved to talk, a combination which produced some interesting ethnography. Kirman's young life in religious studies is not typical of all my informants and this for various
reasons; however, it is typical for those whose parents set a course of religious studies for them.

"I came from Wlodawa. Now Wlodawa is by the River Bug, between Lublin, Khelm, Zamostsh, Goray," said Kirman and then he showed me the Yiskor Book (Memorial to the Dead), from Wlodawa and Sobibor gas chambers which was recently published. There he showed me photographs of his father and himself in a play. He said:

My father was a hand worker. A hand worker is not a worker which works by somebody. He is self-employed and somebody could work for him. And my father belonged to the hand workers' union. You see, if a boy wants to apprentice, and after he finishes his apprenticeship, he goes to this Board, the zect, and they examine him if he could be a hand worker, a self-employed worker. And there you will find different kinds of professions.

Pointing to another photograph, Kirman said:

This is not a shoemaker but he makes the top part of the shoe. And here's a tailor and there's another tailor. My father was a painter. Here's a capmaker. Most of them were tailors. Some were for men - men's tailors, and some were for women - a dameskey, a ladies' tailor - he couldn't make a costume for men.

This was Shaya Kirman's brief introduction to telling me about the years he spent in various forms of religious study. He went on to say:

My first memory is that they took me to the kheyder. The belfer - you know what a belfer means? A helper to the melamed, the teacher. The belfer used to bring the kids home and took them to the kheyder. You see, like you used to do with our kids.

Kirman here reminded me of the years I used to pick up his children and take them to Jewish school along with my own.

There was no car. You had to take, when they were small, you had to carry them on your shoulders.

The first time they took me with a tallis, a prayer shawl. So I was about three years old. Not like today. Three years old they took me first time to the kheyder. And then I learned for a few years and they called this
zman. Zman is six months from Pesach to Succoth and then from Succoth to Pesach is another zman. An agreement was made with the father of the child: I'll give you my child for zman. The melamed used to come after zman and the father paid him for the zman. And if my father liked the melamed then he gives me to the same melamed for another zman; if not, he sent me to another melamed.

Now the melamed used to come every month, every two months, to examine the child. And the father used to sit this side (indicating beside the child) whilst the child is being examined. So I was with the first melamed maybe three zmans and this was called Dardika melamed: the first or primary grade. Then the primary melamed hasn't got more to give me so we went to another level melamed and start to learn Homesh. You see with the Dardika you learn the alphabet: aleph, bet, gimel; and then you learn to put together words. And then with the higher melamed we used to learn to davin, to pray, already.

After Homesh then Rashesh and I was learning another few months with this melamed. So this melamed hasn't got more to give me. At this time I was maybe about five, six years old. By now I've had two melameds already. Now I go to the third melamed and I start to learn Gemora. This is Talmud. So my father doesn't like this melamed. So I learned there zman and my father says to the melamed: "Moishe, I see I don't like the way you are teaching my Shaya. He is able to know better. He has a good kepi, head". So my father looked around for a better melamed. And this melamed was a good one. I started to learn Tanach. Most melamden don't want to teach Tanach. Tanach was more progressive, you know. But all the orthodox melamden don't want to teach it. The same with the Rambam (Maimonides). They don't want to teach it and they don't want to learn it.

So I learned with this melamed. I was learning already Talmud, Tanach. You see, every Thursday you have to know the whole shir; shir means lesson. You had to know the whole lesson. I used to learn good, mostly by heart. So I had to work. It was not like today. The pupil had to work, if not, some melamed used to pull the peyes, and to shmays, hit with a konchik! You know what a konchik means? A leather whip! There was a konchik on the table. Some had a foot from an animal, the leg from a - how do you call it? - a rabbit, instead of a wooden handle. The konchik was on the table all the time, with a pointer made from bone, ivory, but flexible you see. They used to take it from a corset, you know, a corset? A bone - they called it a fishbone. And they used to point with it and it is called a teitl. The first time, with a small child you say: "What's that? That's an aleph. Here take this, (and the child is given the teitl) give a mestok, a poke, at the aleph." So the child was to take a poke at the aleph, bet. Then the melamed would take a groshen, a penny, and say:
"Dem malekh vill varf a groshen as yer gut learnen"
(The angel will give you a penny if you learn good).
So the malamed would drop a groshen so the child wants to learn good.

When I finished the Gemora with the melamed my father says: "I don't know what to do with you. If you want you can go for higher level school."

Near our house, side by side, there was a shtibl, the Misrich shtibl. There were two shtiblach together; it was one house but divided. One was a Parcheve shtibl and one was Misrich. The Parcheve rebbe and the Misrich rebbe were brothers. Their father was the Beyala Rebbe, you see. And our house was wall to wall with the shtibl. So I went to learn in the shtibl by myself. There were more boys learning. If I didn't know something so I asked my chavre, my comrade, so we used to learn together, without a rabbi, without a melamed.

We used to learn the whole day. But in the morning and in the afternoon the Hassidim used to come to davin. But in the middle of the day we used to learn and sometimes at night too. This is called mishmoren. Mishma means at night, after midnight. Mishma means the night is divided into three mishmoren, in three parts. So many hours is the first mishma, so many the second and so many the third. Let us say I learn the first mishma. Then I go home. Around the second mishma some others would come. So there was learning the whole night. So in each session we would have around five to ten people. We used to learn by candle.

In the meantime my father was working for a long time in Warsaw and he took us to Warsaw: my mother, me, and I had another brother. I was still a little boy. When I learned in the shtibl I was maybe ten years old. I was learning by myself already.

I went to Warsaw. It was before the First War. In Warsaw I went back to a Talmud Torah to learn and I went to yeshiva also. I had long peyes and when I went to the barber I used to hold them so he would not touch it. And my father told me: "Shaya, whatever you want - you want to be a rabbi, it's O.K. with me. But you have to learn. You have to know everything.

Now I was completing Talmud Torah and then yeshiva.

Kirman is a well-read and learned man today. He can discourse at length on any subject pertaining to Jewish life and religion. However,
Kheyder - note teitle in melamed's hand
Source: Dobroszycki & Kirshenblatt-Gimlett 1977:77

Kheyder: A tableau vivant
Source: Dobroszycki & Kirshenblatt-Gimlett 1977:12

Boys at kheyder with melamed
Source: Unknown
Men studying Talmud
Source: Dobroszycki & Kirshenblatt-Gimlett 1977:79

Yeshiva students
Source: Dobroszycki & Kirshenblatt-Gimlett 1977:78
he never became a rabbi. But that does not matter. The obligation of teaching the child had been fulfilled:

Sleep, sleep my son,
I will buy little boots for you;
... ...
You will run to cheder,
... ...
And study regularly . . .
A good reputation and fine virtues,
At eighteen you'll solve rabbinical problems;
Problems you will solve,
Speeches you will make.

(Rubin 1963:32)

If the baby in the cradle was a girl the song a mother sang was quite different:

To pray and write and read Yiddish.

To read Yiddish out of the books,
To sew and embroider headbands . . .

So as not to aggravate the parents;
Not to worry them, but be of good cheer,
Then the matchmakers begin to come . . .
Sorele's groom will be a wise scholar,
A wise scholar with fine virtues,
Sorele's groom will know how to solve problems.

(ibid:32-33)

"As far as an education was concerned", said Bertha Guberman, who was born in 1908 in Dagda, Latvia, "my mother used to sit nights and pluck feathers you know for the teacher for cushions so that she should give me private lessons I should be able to at least write an address because my father, my two brothers and my sister were in Canada". So Bertha used to go to the pharmacist so he could address an envelope for the family to send to Canada. Bertha said:

And the main dream was that the children should at least be able to read and write - well Jewish too. ... ...
So the few, the rich people in the town - there was always poor and rich - so they had the learning; they would go to the gymnasium in another city and they were exceptionally
Chicken plucker
Source: Dobroszycki & Kirshenblatt-Gimlett 1977:95
Girls studying Yiddish from tattered pages

Source: Dobroszycki & Kirshenblatt-Gimlett 1977:156
good because they only took 4%. The ones they did take into high school had to be top notch, and top notch financially and bright. They would come back to the shtetl and be the private teachers for the other children.

Women in First World countries today take education for granted. It was not so fifty to sixty years ago for those who lived in Eastern Europe. Thus it becomes difficult to imagine young girl children learning the rudiments of Yiddish, Yiddish the everyday language and not Hebrew the sacred language, from itinerent scholars who may happen to be staying at their home for a while, or from the melamed's wife who got paid in feathers. When I asked Fanny Osipov about her education in Nikolayev, a settlement near Odessa, she said very excitedly:

Oy I was in school! Oy I went to school! It was a Jewish school but the language was the Russian language and I remember there was a Jewish teacher. He was from Palestine. I passed. I was good at school. And I went to school and I could write. Now I have a niece in Israel and I still write her letters in the Russian language and she answers me. But when I came to Winnipeg, right away I thought I must to learn a little bit to read in English. I go on a bus - I must read. I go to buy something - I must read.

Others were less fortunate and talk about staying home to help their mothers whilst their brothers attended Jewish school. Others like Rose Gordon took a long time to walk to school:

... I walked two miles there and two miles back. And then after school I went to kheyder. I went to learn how to read and write Yiddish. And then by the time I come home the day is over. You know two miles to walk down there and then you go and learn your Yiddish and by the time you come home it's time to go to bed.

The Impact Of Poverty

Mothers' dreams aside, not every Jewish boy in the shtetlach and cities of Eastern Europe spent nine or ten years going to Hebrew
school. After all they had to get on with the business of living. "I remember myself and all the family, as soon as we were on our feet and able, we had to go out and earn as much as possible" said Max Dolgoy. None of my informants had time for dreams. Such people were considered luftmenschen, literally, man of the air, a rootless person, without a stable or productive occupation, one who lived on peddling and petty speculation (Wigoder 1977:1243-1244). Such people had their heads in the clouds and knew nothing about the struggles of daily living. This is not to say the Pale did not have its quota of dreamers. It did. Plus it had its share of thieves, bunglers, con artists, beggars, orphans and saints.

What I want to talk about here is the suffering and deprivation of some of my informants. It would be a monumental task to undertake to discuss the problems of all of the people I have spent time with. However, I would like to describe their lives using their own words so as to come closer to reflecting what life was like in the shtetlach and to avoid the two common hazards referred to by Oscar Lewis in the study of the poor: over sentimentalization and brutalization (1963:x1).

"Sadness" said Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, "is a sin". It is not that the Baal Shem Tov lived somewhere far from sadness or at a period of time when all was well with the Jews. According to Jewish Law it is forbidden to grieve or be sad on the Sabbath, for the Sabbath is the holiest of holy days. If someone dies, for example, two days before the Jewish New Year then the relatives of the deceased must only sit in mourning for the two days prior to the New Year instead of the prescribed seven days of mourning required by the Law. Not only is it incumbent upon a person not to grieve, it is sinful.

Whether they were allowed to or not, whether it was a sin or not,
Living conditions in Poland during W.W.I

Source: Dobroszycki & Kirshenblatt-Gimlett 1977:113
the Jews suffered. The words of the Baal Shem Tov are pronouncements
of the highest order (the highest order on earth, that is). But if Moishe
Greenberg's step-mother knew this she certainly gave no cognizance of it,
as Greenberg said:

... she was a nice woman and she got sick. She wanted
to go to the hospital. They didn't take anyone unless
they had an accident. So in order to have an accident
she jumped down from the roof and she killed herself.
She wanted to go to the hospital and we should save her.
So she made a mistake and she died.

An extreme case, one would say. Perhaps. Let us look at how some of my
informants lived and what their experiences were, bearing in mind that
these events took place during the German/Russian/Polish occupations
of their lands; the Russian Japanese War (1905); the First World War
(1914-1918); and the Russian Revolution from 1905-1917. Hundreds of
people were being moved out of their homes and shunted on trains from
their villages and cities to strange parts of the country. Imagine
travelling for days on crowded trains, in some instances parents and
children became separated forever; journeying without food, water, change
of clothing; or travelling by horse and wagon and being beaten up even
whilst attempting to escape one horror and confronting another. No, this
was not war-torn Europe under Nazi Occupation. This was Eastern Europe
between 1900 and 1920. Borders changed overnight. One went to sleep in
Russia and woke up in Lithuania and the next week back again in Russia.
Some had to live in army barracks: "... the rats were so big, mother used
to sit and watch all night that they didn't bite the kids" said Rose
Gordon. Some washed clothes to buy food; many sold food to soldiers;
others stood in line for bread and soup. One woman, Murial Grad, worked
on fishing boats far from her homeland.

How did they live? What did they eat? How did they survive?
So many of them ran from place to place. They ran, keeping one step ahead of the police (those eligible for conscription into the army), or from 'bandits' who made the pogroms. For Harry Ullman:

... in 1916 in October, for the Czar, my class was mobilized. I had to join the army. What I did not to go into the army! As mentioned before, I had a younger brother by two years. We went to a man. He had a small office. He used to give out the birth certificates and passports and so on. But there's corruption naturally. I remember I paid him 40 rubles. The ruble wasn't worth as before as in the olden days, but it sure was a hell of a lot of money. We paid him 40 rubles and he gave me the same passport, the same name, but my youngest brother's age. I didn't have to go in the army but I had to leave town. In a small shtetl everybody knew you. So I had to leave town.

I still had the money for to travel but where could I go? I never stepped out of the small town, except in Dwinska I was once. So I hired a man - a horse and buggy. He used to come 50 miles away from our village. We had no trains. We had trains from one side it was 27 miles and there's the Front already there. And the other side it was 15 miles to another railroad.

So I don't remember how much I paid him. He took me to - - 15 miles we travelled there to the railroad station. From the first station there was a big town - not a very big town - called Shaybish. ... ...

And the war was going no good for the Russians. The Germans killed them in the thousands. A cousin of mine, the first weeks they shot off his left arm and they used to make slugs. And the slugs used to explode. When it hit you it exploded. So his bones were running piece by piece. They kept him for close to a year in hospital. Then he came home and we saw it.

"Certainly the lives of the poor are not dull" says Oscar Lewis in his Introduction to The Children of Sanchez (1963:xii). The poor share a common heritage of not trying to fill each day with things to do but of simply trying desperately to **live**. It is the 'trying to live each day' which makes their lives 'not dull'. Somehow I feel Lewis entraps himself in the very sieve which he tries so hard to avoid: that of the middle-class North American mind. Would the poor describe
their lives as being 'not dull'? Getting an education or going to school is a dull part of our middle-class lives. Being grabbed by the police and taken into the army was something the Jews feared constantly in Eastern Europe and so they forged papers, ran away, they kept on the move. When there were pogroms people lost what little material possession they had; they lived for days in terror until the attackers had sated their lust and boisterous hunger. There was never a dull moment. To the poor, the lives of the rich are anything but dull. How exciting it would be to visit a museum or play a game of golf, they must think. "Going dancing or to an opera and to beautiful places" was exciting to Fanny Osipov but she was not allowed to do these things because she was a Jew living in Nikolayev where you had to have the proper papers for living there. Any day she and her family could have been ordered back to the tiny shtetl where she was born.

What I am endeavouring to say is that life is either 'dull' or 'not dull' depending on your point of reference. I do not think that the lives of any of the people who talked to me can be called 'not dull'. Their lives were sad, their lives were dismal; they all worked very hard to sustain their bodies and minds. And the other heritage which they shared with all other poor people was hope. Without hope, without dreams, they would not have been talking to me.

Let me go back to Fanny Osipov. She is called Baba, grandmother, by everyone under fifty years of age! I asked her to tell me about how she and her oldest son came to Canada. I expected her to tell me about her journeying from Nikolayev to Winnipeg. She started to but my question triggered in her mind so many other things that had happened to her that she began to relate her experiences as does one on awakening from a bad dream. I will not try to encapsulate her experiences for it would lose
Baba Fanny Osipov, 1980

Photography: Joshua Berson
its **tà'am**, its flavour.

Louie was born later. I had the papers already to come to Canada. Yeh, and then the war stopped already and I had a letter from my father. My father was still in Canada. When I was married, Louie was not my first one. I had another boy. I had another boy and the war was still bad and my husband they took him again in the army and I was left with this little boy and I became sick. And I have this - it's a rash all over and very catchy. It's not measles, not chicken pox. Worse than them. Oy, I forgot the name - they had it somewhere in Canada this sickness. But I forgot the name. It's very catchy and you go around with scabs ... I can't remember.

I couldn't stay at home and they took me in the hospital. Meanwhile, the boy what I had, he was two years old and his name was Velvl. He became sick with measles. You are not supposed to take a person from the house. It was chilly already and they took him to the hospital. And he was very sick, very sick.

When I came - shall I tell you what happened in the hospital? You want to hear? When I was in the hospital we were two people in one bed! On one bed. One side one, on the other side another. Was so many sicknesses. I was light but the other one in the bed was very wild. She nearly killed me. You know how it is when you are sick.

Then just as the temperature is gone, they said: "You go home". They need the bed for someone else. And they came and I was weak and they said: "You are O.K." and they shave your hair, and: "You go home!"

The hospital has a telephone but at home, my husband is in the army. I had a sister-in-law there. We lived together. I don't have a telephone. How can I tell them I'm coming home? I went for my clothes. Somebody took away my shoes; took away my dress. What did they leave? A coat! When I came to the hospital it was cold, winter, and the time went by and now it was warm.

I haven't got money. The hospital is far like from Vancouver to Burnaby. I thought, well ... ... at the time there was street cars with horses ... I thought I'll go inside, I'll tell him I haven't got the money. I could talk!

Nu, see I was with a coat, no clothes, without shoes, shaved my hair - so when I came in the street car the driver thought I was from the crazy home. He was afraid. He said "Giddup!" And I told him I'm coming from the hospital and he was afraid. So ... "Giddup! Giddup!" and I went.

So I start walking. I start walking home. It was in the morning 9 o'clock. I walked and I sit. Where do I sit?
Near someone's house, on the porch. But they come; they said: "Giddup from here! What are you doing?" So it was 2 o'clock when I came home. And I came home and my brother-in-law was there and he didn't recognize me. He said: "For who you are looking?" I said, his name was Selma; I said: "Selma, it's Fanny!" Oy, they took me in and -- at least I was home already.

And then the time was very bad. Was not enough food. And my baby passed away. I went to look in the hospital. They said he passed away. I said I could, I want, to see him. He's in a room, you know, for the dead people there. I say, they must put the name, at least I want to see it with my own eyes. So I start begging. I come to the door and the man said: "You couldn't go there. If you'll go there you'll pass away. It's from the bottom to the ceiling, so many dead people there." They didn't have the time you know to bury everyone because there was no food, so much sicknesses.

Nu. I'm sick. If I find my son what can I do? What can I do? But at least I want to see with my eyes. I start begging, crying. So he opens the door. He opens the door and I went inside. You know the smell. And I start looking. So he saw that I'm shaking. He took me out. I didn't find him. I didn't find my son. Until now I remember this: from the floor to the ceiling was men, women, kids.

That was life there, yes! said Fanny Osipov.

The temptation to compare conditions in the Old Country with those found here in North America was very great amongst informants. Experiences, places, situations were so often beyond my imagination, they said. Too often they prefaced their remarks with "It's not like here ..." and I would then discover so many things which were not like here.

Informants came from large families, meaning there were at least four to five children who had survived. Usually one or two had either died at childbirth or very young. "We were seven, three died. We had a boy too. You know in those days they have children, some passed away, some lived", said Fanny Osipov, and "... when my mother had time she was always in bed. How could she be with us, with so many? One or the other
Chicken plucker

Source: Roskies & Roskies 1975:98

Photographic reproduction: Joshua Berson
Water-carrier and his son at town pump

Source: Roskies & Roskies 1975:118

Photographic reproduction: Joshua Berson
we looked after each other".

The average family of six or seven, if they were fortunate, lived in two rooms plus a kitchen. "But things were not very good. My father was working in the house and I remember distinctly the table where he was working and there were two beds and a sink and all - and that was the whole business", said Jennie Litvak.

Harry Ullman said: "We were eight, all in one room. Two died when they were small kids and another in 1929 or something like that. We were poor as churchmouse. Absolutely nothing to eat whatsoever."

Rose Gordon's accommodation was even less spacious. She said:

We had only one room - kitchen, sleeping, everything was in one room. From that room there was a little other room where you kept your barrels of water. Because you had no water in the house. You had to go down a few blocks to get the water. You carried it on that wooden - it brings back memories for me that picture! Where did you get it? Yes, yes, that's the way we carried the water. You see, everyday we used to bring water like that.

And in Rose Gordon's family there were three sisters, two brothers, mother, father, all in one room.

So us kids used to sleep - two here, three there, one on top of the other. Mother and father used to sleep on a couch. ... But you know, it was spotless clean. Nobody had any bugs or anything because you see, you take your clothes down to the water, you hit it on the stones. My mother used to have the tub, the thing we used to take a bath in, and she used to soak the clothes in there and wash it out real good and then go down to the water and wash it again and hit it and bring it back and then put it on the grass to dry it, because it was clean, the grass was clean. We didn't have a line. We didn't know what a line meant.

Rose Gordon was not the only one who carried water on her back as shown in the picture. So did Murial Grad in Kovne, Lithuania. She also took her clothes to the river bank. She said:

... we had water there, but washing - I used to wash in a tub and I used to take the washing to the - we lived near, not far from, the River Niemen, and I used to rinse there my clothes and after bring it
The shtetl Tishevits

Source: Roskies & Roskies 1975:2-3
Back and put it on the attic. It was more than ten to fifteen minutes walk. I used to carry the clothes on my shoulders like the Chinese do in baskets. Every week I used to wash everybody's clothes.

(Murial Grad)

The stove on which they cooked was a big oven which generally occupied a wall. It was made of clay. Rose Gordon said:

I guess in English you would call it a heater but it's not a heater, it was connected to the oven and to the place where you used to put corn stalks to heat the house. ... And on the other side was the oven and between was a place to sleep.

... my mother used to make her own preserves, her own jams. ... And inside the house my mother used to have a special stuff that she used. It's not paint. It's like whitewash. She put it on the walls and the floors.

We had an attic and she put all the dishes for Passover there. And before Passover she used to put ten chickens there and feed them; make them good and fat so there will be lots of chicken fat, because for Passover you need a lot of chicken fat. And kosher! Oh God! The biggest rabbi could eat in our house. We could never do anything wrong. And before Passover my mother used to take everything off from the windows, wash the windows clean, and turn our pockets inside out to see if there was any bread. It was lots of work. Here it is nothing.

In the small shtetlach life was very simple. You travelled great distances to get to anywhere like the synagogue, railroad station, your relatives, to farmers to get work. And there was always a bridge. One always had to cross a bridge to leave the shtetl. Sometimes there were two and three bridges. In Roskies and Roskies' account of the Shtetl Tishevits we find the Long Bridge, the Short Bridge and the Old Bridge. There is also the Pasture Bridge and the Yatke Bridge. The Long Bridge is not so named because it is long but "because the road leading from it through meadows and fields into town - is long" (Roskies & Roskies 1975:4).

Every shtetl had a mill. "My father was a foreman in the mill, a
flour mill. They used to bring the wheat and there used to be a mill with a great big wheel that used to carry the water and run that mill", said Rose Gordon.

In the larger cities life was a little different. One could go out of an evening but that depended on where you lived. In Nikolayev for instance,

... most people were in the houses. The thing is, Nikolayev was a city for the Jewish people very hard. They couldn't go ... There were beautiful places, you know. ... dancing, operas, but the Jewish people couldn't go there. We were not allowed. At night - today at my house, tomorrow another house. We have a piano, there's dancing, enjoying, singing. We made our own entertainment.

(Fanny Osipov)

Economic And Work Setting

To use the word 'economic' in relation to the labours of the Jews within the Pale of Settlement is to give the impression, if not make the claim, that they were a part of the 'work force' of the country, as though without them the economy would slump or if seven tailors decided to leave a particular shtetl, like Zamoshtshe, the industry in that village would fall apart at the seams.

To begin with seven tailors (or capmakers, bakers, etc.) would constitute a burden on the community. Seven tailors would not be kept busy sewing for the inhabitants of a shtetl. Nonetheless in some shtetlach seven and more tailors had to live. They might even have lived on a street named after their trade. The fact that so many tailors lived in a shtetl did not mean that it was a prosperous one or that there was a constant demand for clothing as for balls, banquets, parties, celebrations, coronations. Not at all. First of all, not all the tailors in that shtetl
Source: Dobroszycki & Kirshenblatt-Gimlett 1977:90,91
Shoemaker

87 year old blacksmith

Source: Dobroszycki & Kirshenblatt-Gimlett 1977:92-93
made a living from tailoring in that village. Some had to leave their shtetl every Sunday morning and look for work amongst the farmers and peasants in the countryside and would not return until Friday afternoon to spend the Sabbath with their families. Others who stayed in the shtetl worked only on old clothes (sometimes from the dead), rags, repairs and such. The cream of the tailoring crop, an exclusive few, worked on clothes for the well-to-do.

On a Tailors' Street the entire family could be engaged in tailoring: father, mother, daughters, sons (Roskies and Roskies 1975:127-130). In other cases sons and daughters were 'given out to be tailors', that is, they were apprenticed for so many years to someone else a little bit better off. This, however, did not mean that the boy or girl turned out to be a good tailor or even a passable tailor. So much of their apprenticeship time was spent in doing household chores, getting cuffed, being abused, that sometimes they ended up being bunglers in their trade.

Aside from tailors one found capmakers, shoemakers, carpenters, clockmakers, builders, chicken sellers and butchers; mill workers; people employed in and around the synagogue and its daily rituals; and there were the drawers of water. Women who went to the well did not draw the water themselves. A man did the work of drawing the water. "We had to buy water", said Muriel Grad, "five pails for a penny. So I used to take the barrel and fill it up. Some would come around to sell the water but there was a well there and I would buy from a man at the well and carry it home on my shoulders like in the picture".

There were the melameds, the teachers, the rabbi, the scholars, and always around were the peasants. In the small towns and shtetlach peasant and Jew got along fine. In the larger villages and cities it was another story. Pogroms were mounted and organized by cossaks and
Water carrier
Source: Dobroszycki & Kirshenblatt-Gimlett 1977:74

Town pump
Source: Dobroszycki & Kirshenblatt-Gimlett 1977:49
'bandits' who lived outside the particular village they sacked and robbed. Sometimes local peasants looked after their Jewish neighbours. At other times they instigated and participated in the riots.

What sort of work were the Jews involved in? For various reasons the type of trades found in the shtetlach of Eastern Europe were of a "low grade of industry" said Sidney Sarkin. To work in the above-mentioned trades and to produce goods for the village people required a minimum of schooling and education. That is, one did not have to be sent to a trade school at great cost. If your parents were tailors they taught you how to sew. If your father was a shoemaker the chances were you learned the trade. Or you could be sent out to someone else in the shtetl to learn.

However, to make the above statements is to close one's eyes to the real situation and its consequent hardships and suffering. It is like saying they were rotten tailors because there was no need or demand for better ones. But supposing education was not lacking or restricted to the few, and Jewish children were able to be well-trained in proper trade schools, then they would have been able to get permission to reside in cities where they could make a decent living and where competition was not that great. One major reason why the Jews left Eastern Europe, in dribs and drabs initially, and finally in masses, was because of the lack of employment opportunities. This fact will be discussed later; suffice it to say that the shtetl did not turn out poor tailors because the demand for good tailors was scarce.

As it was, a very small percentage of Jewish children reached cities like Kiev, Leningrad, Odessa, Warsaw, Vilna, etc. A brief look at the trade abilities of my informants will show that twice as many grew
up and came to this country without having gone to a proper trade school. Those who did were either well-to-do or very bright.

Rose Smith said:

You see they used to take just a percentage of Jewish children. Then in our town, Homel in Russia, they decided they will open a Jewish school. There was a Jewish woman and they opened a Jewish school. It wasn't just for Jews; Jews and gentiles both went to school. But at least we went to school after that. ...

... and in university when you finish with a gold medal you can go in a city like Petersberg where Jews were not allowed there, unless you are a worker, meaning someone who has special permission to work in the city. A worker was allowed to go there and then those who finished with a gold medal. So my brother-in-law got a gold medal and he went to Lenningrad and my sister got a gold medal too.

Salo Baron, Arcadius Kahan, and others, in their Introduction to Economic History of the Jews, speak of major pitfalls for the economic historians: that "of deviating into an apologetic line of reasoning, such as a simplistic 'explanation' of Jewish occupations, or a laudatory exposition of Jewish 'contributions' to an economy" (1975:x).

I do not pretend to be an economic historian and my purpose here is not to attempt an 'explanation', simplistic or otherwise, as to why Jews laboured fruitlessly in certain trades. It is rather to show how they laboured and not why. As to the question of contributing to the economy of the country, I will discuss that at the end of this section.

To speak of an economy of a society or of a period one’s focus must encompass a wider field than this. My concern here is the story of the worker in the shtetl and not about the wheelers and dealers in the financial and industrial parts of Eastern Europe. Some of my informants were comparatively well off (I would not go so far as to call them well-to-do) and they enjoyed a modicum of comfort. However, the majority of them came from families where income was not assured, where nothing was put
away - or where nothing could be put away - for a rainy day, where if
the breadwinner took off for another city or went to 'America' the
family was left to survive on its own resources; if the breadwinner died
the family could sink further, if such were possible, into the morass of
deprivation.

Jewish labour during the period under review could very well be
called 'skilled' labour. Even though the majority of them did not go to
a trade school, and when they were 'given out to become ...' a shoemaker,
or a tailor, part of their chores always included doing a number of other
things on the side for the household where they 'apprenticed'. There were
those who learned their trade, as we shall see later, by simply setting
out on the road with an older man already in the trade.

The collector of facts can give you facts - that is if you are
looking for facts. My intent, when interviewing people, was to give them
a chance to talk about their experiences and feelings and thereby give some
meaning to their lives. Certainly the kind of work they did was not
considered glamorous by them. Those who succeeded educationally and
professionally stand out in the memories of these people, e.g. Rose
Smith's oldest sister and brother-in-law, mentioned above. The restrictions
which were imposed by the government regarding rights of residence outside
the Pale curtailed the choices available to, for example, an ambitious
young man who would wish to travel to a city like Kiev to find a job. "I
was a watchmaker, so you are a tradesman, so I could live in any city in
Russia where nobody else can live. So I lived in Kiev ...", said Abe Smith.
He was fortunate. Kiev was a provincial capital and he came from a place
called Homel.

Although every Jewish boy received some education in the rudiments
of Hebrew and religious training, the majority of them like Max Povitz and Harry Ullman, together with others whom I had interviewed, were 'given away for a tailor' (one can here read any other worker), if one's father could afford to have one spend the time in apprenticeship. One alternative to being 'given away to learn' was to try and make it on your own. "When you have nothing to pay to teach you - so you went to the farms. Not to learn to farm but to learn from an older tailor" said Harry Ullman.

I will briefly look at Povitz (born 1897) and Ullman (born 1898) from different parts of Latvia, to show how the above systems worked in the shtetlach in the northern regions of Russia. I will also look at James Blugerman (born 1887) in Kherson, one of the colonies settled by Jews in the desolate southern steppes in the late 18th century. After that, I will look at Jennie Litvak's father who lived and worked in Warsaw in the late 19th century.

Part of Max Povitz' story is as follows:

When I was nine years old my father gave me away for a tailor. ... I had three brothers and one sister and I was just a school boy. My brothers worked in a matches factory. My father was a tailor, that is, in the winter he was a tailor. In the summer he was just a peddler. He bought chickens and sometimes apples, or this and that, at the market and he peddled. He made a poor living, you know. My mother helped him a little bit. But she passed away young, when she was about 50 or 51 and I was a very young boy at that time and I got to help my father. My brothers they were working in a factory so they decided me to be a worker - to be a tailor. It's a big thing in the old country.

So I was to give me for a tailor for three years. I worked for three years for forty rubles. In the old country there wasn't factories. It was a small place where I worked - at that time only four people.

We didn't have factories like in America. In the old country there wasn't factories like that. I am now 77 years old, I'm not a youngster. I am retired 7 years, What I want to say is, so they decided to give me for a tailor. So I have a very, very hard living, you know. It was at that time very bad. I helped my
father a little bit. What could I help him? He was a tailor only in the winter. He maybe made at that time a dollar in a good week - that was very good. So what do I do? I work in a shop. It was very bad at that time, very bad. Even they - they, the people I work for - they didn't even give a piece of bread at that time. They gave me a pair of shoes because I didn't have a good shoes. With torn shoes I went to work.

Learning the trade turned out to be quite different from the usual apprenticeship which we understand it to be these days. One's father may have 'given you to be a tailor', however, you might at the end of nine years find yourself to be an excellent nurse maid!

It could take a budding or aspiring tailor anywhere from ten to thirteen years to learn how to make a pair of pants. In happier circumstances he might spend only nine years on the same garment. This was not because the boys were stupid but because an apprentice, another mouth to feed, in the majority of cases ended up being a slave to the boss and his wife. Said Povitz:

The boss' wife, she was very bad! She hollered at me for being late. She had four children, four small girls. I have to nurse them and look after them and went with them in the park and this and that. And they scream at me about what I should learn! That was my life. And forty rubles I have to take for the three years. The boss himself was a poor man. He was Jewish and he was in the army. But, you know, it was a poor life.

Anyway, I was ten, eleven, twelve years old when my mother passed away. I was still young. I remember just like now and what I want to say is that I went up for three years and I don't think he gave me all the forty rubles even. And I went away from that boss and I went to another to learn the trade. I was now thirteen or fourteen years of age.

The outbreak of the First World War led to an aftermath of confusion:

All of a sudden it's coming - in 1914 came over the War. And all the Jewish people they mustn't be forty miles from the Front. All the Jews in our shtetl from Dainska in Latvia had to go away. Nickolai let in Jews to stay there. But they sent us out. The Russians
sent us out. Where are we going? They don't know. They didn't kill us. They just put us on trains and said: "Alright go. Go where you want!"

So they sent us away to Siberia. They sent us away to Katherinesberg and I was at that time 17 or 18 years old. It was Yom Kippur (solemn Jewish Holiday) in 1914, between 1914 and 1915, and I couldn't see and the bombs there were. I had left my family and I went by myself. All of a sudden I see my father and my sister and my brother (my brother was in the army, my older brother), and I see my brother-in-law. Everybody you see in there in the trains - in the middle of nowhere!

So I go with them to Siberia. I was in Siberia for seven years. And I was a tailor at that time and I married there. In Siberia there was no Jewish tailors altogether and I had a job.

(Max Povitz)

Harry Ullman's experience was slightly different. Coming from a family of eight children, learning a trade, finding a job, earning wages, was an imperative he could not run away from. He went to "learn the trade over in the farms for about two years" he said. He learned from an older tailor with whom he lived. Ullman said:

In those days, in those days we used to work for nothing for three years in order to learn and we had to do housework and everything. But I was fortunate. I never had to do housework at all because we were more progressive already.

I asked Harry Ullman to explain how he learned the trade on the farms. Before he could reply his wife, Nina, interjected:

You see there was tailors who used to take young people into the trade. So whenever they went to a farm and they got work, they settled down. In the meantime, you know, the young boys got a little experience. You see they were practically like slaves, they worked for nothing. Tailors used to carry the machine on the shoulders, so the young boy helps him. So the tailor used to come to the farmer, and the farmer used to give him material and they used to sew for the whole family.

But the boys who wanted to learn were from the small towns, the shtetlach. But in the small towns there wasn't enough work so they used to go to the farmers from one town to
another, and stay for a week, two weeks, three weeks -
depending on how big the family is. And the farmers
used to make the material all by themselves - woven
material. Very seldom they had material which they used
to buy in the city. And then the young small boys, you
know, like mind you about 8 years old, for the mother it
was a blessing. She doesn't have to feed them a whole
day - a whole week!

So they give him to the tailor: Do with him whatever
you want. Learn him! Don't learn him! So long as he
doesn't have to be fed! So that's what it is.

So he (referring to her husband) went to a man like that
and I don't know how long - two years, three years - in
the meantime he learned in between the trade. You see
you are also doing other things.

James (Jimmy) Blugerman came from a family who could afford to
send him and his brothers not only to school but also to a proper trade
school. This man took great pride in telling me:

My name is James Blugerman. I was born on June 22 1887
in the Ukraine on the River Dnieper, in a small village
close to a bigger city called Kherson. At that time
Kherson was the capital city of one of the provinces or
as we called it in the Ukraine, it was the capital of the
guberniya, that is, the province. Around the city of
Kherson there was at the time of my birth a Jewish colony
with about 100 families spread on the farmland, raising
vegetables, wheat, chickens, cows, horses and so on and
so forth.

Blugerman graduated from public school and entered a technical
school in Odessa. "Just like our Technical School in the city of Toronto",
he said. Blugerman was 87 when I talked to him. He was very spry, alert
and never appeared confused about what he was telling me, proceeding at
a slow, meticulous pace to expound on the events of his life. He said:

Now in that colony near Kherson were two families - we
call them pioneers on lands: coloniste we called them in
the Ukraine. One family, quite a large family, by the
name of Blugerman, and another family that eventually
migrated to Canada ... by the name of Chaikoff. Now these
two families, with their children and grandchildren, lived
quite peacefully surrounded by villages after villages
along the Dnieper River where today, in the Soviet Union,
is the big power station near Prostroy, which supplies the
entire area with electricity and power.
It is the habit amongst Jews that when a number of families settle in an area they go about ensuring the religious education of the children. If a rabbi or teacher did not happen to live in the vicinity they had to "import one into the colonies to teach us children, youngsters, the language and the prayer in preparation for the 13th Confirmation, the Bar Mitzvah", said Blugerman.

The Jewish colonists in the Ukraine, going back to Blugerman's father and grandfather, spoke Ukrainian and Russian. Russian because "it was the Russian schools at the time which predominantly taught everybody whoever managed to attend the public schools", and together with their religious education "we children grew up in that atmosphere until by the age of ten, twelve, knowing practically the elements of three languages" said Blugerman.

We find in Blugerman's case again a confirmation of the dreams of Jewish mothers. It was because of his mother's "strong ambition" that the family, consisting of five boys and two girls, was moved to Odessa to live with an uncle who, according to Blugerman, "managed to live in the big city of Odessa" which was but a seven or eight hour ferry boat ride from Kherson.

Jimmy finished public school. His father was a shoemaker and so they lived where he could make a living either making shoes or repairing them. After public school he went to technical school where the entire afternoons were spent in 'workshops'. Blugerman said:

There were carpenters, cabinet-makers and mechanical trades, and so by the time I and hundreds of other Jewish boys and Russians had graduated, we had practically the education of our high school plus being able to build tables, chairs, fixtures, etc. etc. So we were ready, so to speak, to take employment in small shops.

Blugerman graduated from the technical school as a cabinet-
Going to buy and sell

Source: Dobroszycki & Kirshenblatt-Gimlett 1977:12
maker. He came to Toronto in 1908 and instead of carrying on the same trade he went into the tailoring industry: he learned to become a seam presser, an under-presser with a hand iron.

Jennie Litvak was born in Warsaw where her father and her grandfather had lived before her. Her grandfather had a drushka, a horse and buggy. She said:

... and he had a number. They were forced to have a passport and a photograph and I think it was the first time in his life that he took a photograph. He was what you would call a progressive religious man in Warsaw. And I have a photograph of that number on his hat with the peak.

... and my father had a dream. He always used to tell me his dream. He wanted to be a doctor. He used to sing very beautifully and so at six years old they brought him to a school and they put him into a choir. But it only lasted till nine years old. He was nine years old when they gave him to be an apprentice in a home in leathergoods in Warsaw. Now, not only did he have to - he actually wasn't learning anything - he was like, well, he rocked the cradle, he used to go for all the messages for the lady of the house. They probably only had one room and this is how his education stopped then. But he was a self-educated man and since his dream wasn't fulfilled he always had a dream for his children.

Now when he married he was already an efficient and also a very creative person in the leathergoods. Because to him to handle a piece of leather was like somebody handles a beautiful piece of brocade or a diamond.

Jennie Litvak's father, like so many others who emigrated from Poland to Canada and the United States, brought his dreams with him; even without realizing it, these immigrants brought with them the lives of generations to follow because the Jews who remained in Poland perished after 1939.

The latter part of the 19th century (Czar Alexander III 1894-1917), saw the rise of certain industries: oil, sugar, textile and forestry and lumber. Oil and sugar beet refining were two areas in
which Jewish labour was not represented. This was not only because these industries were located outside the Pale of Settlement but also because Jewish workers could not compete with the low wages of the peasants nor did they have the skills or training for specialized higher paid jobs. There were some Jews who worked in the oil industry along with non-Jewish labourers but this was in the towns of Austro-Hungary.

In the case of the textile industry, Jewish labour was not used in the larger factories and enterprises but only in small-scale operations. The same situation obtained in the manufacturing end where Jews were employed in small 'factories' like Max Povitz. There were many such small factories at the time, said Albert Abramovitz:

Every family, in the kitchen, had a little factory. Either it was the father or the son that was the head of it. And they hired two or three hands ... (there were) ... six, seven or eight hundred little things like this, with sons, with sisters and brothers, in every family.

According to Baron, et al (1975:87-88), there were certain 'constraints' and 'obstacles' which would have had to have been overcome for the Jewish labour force to have reached a 'significant level' in Eastern Europe. The first constraint was the 'assumed or real strength' of the religious sanction of observing the Sabbath. The second was the 'assumed animosity' of non-Jewish workers and foremen against their Jewish fellow workers. In the textile and lumber industries there were Jewish entrepreneurs who played:

... an important role in providing gainful employment for large numbers of Jews. It may be assumed that for a Jewish entrepreneur there existed a "psychological income" in providing employment for other Jews, whether he did so for reasons of greater familiarity and cultural affinity or because it was considered a "good deed" in cases when discrimination in favor of Jewish employees increased his operational costs (ibid:88).
Unemployed seamstress
Source: Dobroszycki & Kirshenblatt-Gimlett 1977:162

A clothing factory in Poland
Source: Dobroszycki & Kirshenblatt-Gimlett 1977:161
It did not increase their operational costs. In most cases Jews worked for less wages and brought more expertise to the job.

Even if there were more than the one 'tailoring town' as the one some twenty odd miles from Lodz, Poland, which one informant claims was "known throughout Poland and throughout the Russian Empire", and even if we lumped together all the little factories, whether tailors, shoemakers, tinsmiths, one could hardly be moved to say that there was a Jewish labour force of a "significant level" or that the Jews contributed critically to the economy of the Pale.

Most of the people I talked to either worked for themselves, as did their fathers and mothers, or they were employed like Povitz and Ullman in very small operations where neither the employee nor the employer made enough to feed themselves and their families.

How could they? Working in home industries and small factories they outnumbered the employment opportunities in the congested Pale of Settlement:

... in 1898 there were over 500,000 Jewish artisans, 100,000 Jewish day-labourers, and at least 50,000 Jewish factory workers. Despite the enormous emigration to America, Jewish artisans had increased about 20% since 1887. (Davidowicz 1967:58).

This emergent proletariat nurtured and gave birth to revolutionary ideologies and provided the impetus for the radical social changes which followed.
CHAPTER IV

IDEOLOGIES OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Changes are brought about by people; more specifically in the mind of an individual or sometimes in the minds of more than one individual. When one speaks of change, one is not referring to religion, or customs, or institutions for instance, bringing about the change. Things do not make change; people make change, and the only "...adequate and realistic explanation of human behaviour is to be found in the functions of the human mind" (Barnett 1953:9).

This chapter therefore will be a brief attempt to show how ideas held in common precipitated changes. It is not enough to give a chronological account of social facts. Behind such facts are ideas, behaviour, motivations, feelings. Because these latter are not always easily obtainable or forthcoming, the firsthand studies which are done are the more important in illuminating the background of social change.

Every human being is born into some form of organization which predates him. He as an individual may respond to these external conditions in a number of ways. The chances are that he will carry on the traditions of his group (barring any major external force which would also affect his group). However, even whilst he is carrying on the traditions of his group he will not do so in toto since he will reject some aspects, subtract some, add some, and together with his own ideas he will produce some new forms. It should be borne in mind that no one person can produce a new idea, so to speak, in a vacuum. It is the coming together of the past, and the impetus of the present, which creates in the human mind a novel idea.

It is the coming together of the past (traditions, religion, years of persecution) and the impetus, the imperative of the present (the demands of the times, the rebellion of youth): "and you hear a little
bit here and a little bit there, and suddenly you start to think: life does not have to be that way, and, why should this be? (Abramovitz)

It is not so sudden, this idea, this thought. It is the last link in the mental chain which produces the answer for a person. Clarity is sudden but the road sometimes is long and elusive, beclouded with thoughts like: it is God's will that I must suffer this way.

Utilizing the words of informants I will show how ideas developed amongst the Jews of the Pale and what radical philosophies motivated and conspired to bring about what all of them prefer to call progressive social changes.

Ideas and ideologies were rife in Western Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries not only amongst such non-Jewish thinkers as Rousseau, Voltaire, Samuel Johnson, Boswell but also amongst Jewish thinkers and writers such as Moses Mendelssohn, Elijah of Vilna (known as the Vilna Gaon), and others. Within the Pale were writers and thinkers like Mendele Mokhar Sforim, Sholem Aleichem, I. L. Peretz to name only a few. Ideas and people did not move as swiftly nor as far afield in those days. Travelling was tedious and long, and even though there was the written word and there was a postal service, nonetheless people carried radical ideas with them and by word of mouth enflamed and influenced the minds and thoughts of others – particularly those of the youth.

Occurrences in Eastern Europe in the late 19th century began to affect the thinkings of young Jewish minds. Suffering and deprivation being God's will was one thing, but when young boys were being taken away from their families by the Russian government and put into the army for years and years in an attempt to 'russify' them then people began to rebel. In 1827 the Russian government demanded that numerous areas within the Pale supply their armies with what was known as Cantonists. These young boys
would be taken at the age of anywhere from 9 - 13 and an intensive 'russification' programme would follow. The boys were kept in the army for several years. By the time they were 'discharged' they were too old to remember their families and community. Those who steadfastly held to their religious beliefs came back broken men. The aim of the Russian government was to convert these Jewish boys to Russians. This supplying of boys brought about a split in the Jewish communities because the rich and well-to-do could buy their boys out of the army and have boys from poor families sent in their stead.

This policy was later abandoned. Nevertheless there were numerous other cruel and anti-Semitic policies which were carried on sometimes under the auspices of the government and sometimes only with their unofficial blessings.

However, because of the numerous wars which Russia continued to fight on various fronts there was a continuous demand for Jewish soldiers:

In 1916 in October, for the Czar I had to join the army. What I did not do to go into the army! (Harry Ullman)

When Romania started to fight with Bulgaria and Hungary I was only 18 years old and they took me to the army for training in the boat. That was 1914 when they gave me my privileges to go home (on leave) and I went to the Romanian border and I passed to Chernovitz - without papers, no passport, nothing. Only the uniform from the army. That's all I had. I didn't have a penny in my pocket. (Hyman Leibovitch)

At twenty years old everybody is called to the army there. I made my outfit and was ready. I didn't mind to go anywhere in Russia. But Siberia I didn't want! (Sam Nemetz)

So Sam Nemetz also ran away.

Away from the shtetlach and small towns one became exposed to different kinds of people and new, exciting ideas. "At that time", said Art Browner, "in Lodz, I mean in especially the big cities, everybody was interested in politics. So naturally I was one of them also!"
May Day Rally of Labour Zionists in Khelm
Source: Roskies & Roskies 1975:287

Polish and Russian Social Democrats and Members of Bund Honouring Victims of 1905 Pogrom in Vilna
Source: Dobroszycki & Kirshenblatt-Gimlett 1977:110
People were not rejecting religion or their Jewishness. Nor were they turning their backs on their traditions in their entirety. Rather they were asking "why" for the first time in their lives. Why did they have to suffer? Why did they have to do without? Why did they have to bow their heads? For too long had the Jews accepted the dictum that somehow they were to blame for their miseries, that God was punishing them for something they had done. Young boys and girls were beginning to read and talk to one another. It was like a fire which spread slowly. Albert Abramovitz said:

When I was already a tailor, labour conditions in those days were very harsh. Very difficult. I just couldn't take it. You had to get up in the morning about five o'clock or half past five and be on your way to work. And sometimes work to twelve, one o'clock in the morning. Eighteen and twenty hours at a stretch was the order of the day.

I must have been influenced by some radicals by then: that life doesn't have to be that way. That if you keep - I forget the name - establishing a collective sort of group, we can exert pressure and win better conditions and thus reduce the hours and raise wages.

That brought me together with a number of people who thought that way. We discussed these things. I remember, I believe that I was, together with others, in the leadership of establishing a union in that city in 1926. We established a branch of what we called the "Beglagin Centralle".

The Jews were either instrumental in forming organizations and groups, such as the Bund, the Poale Zionists, Communist revolutionary groups at universities, or trade unions; or they joined existing ones. May Day (May 1st) became a focal point for revolutionary and underground movements to participate and communicate with the general public by printing and distributing leaflets and pamphlets about current social ills and injustices. Said Blugerman:

May Day was introduced to us in the parks and suburbs of the city of Odessa in 1905 under the pressure of general strikes of the railroads, steel works and other places; under the pressure of demonstrations and mass demonstrations, when thousands and thousands of students in the city of Odessa
and in other cities throughout Russia and the Ukraine came out and learned about these things. And our teachers invited us to their place. We understood that we were being secretly assembled. We knew that already that there were spies that would watch our movement.

I remember that the most revolutionary upsurge happened after 1904 when we (the Russians) lost the war against the Japanese and the soldiers were coming with their tails behind surrendering a good portion in the Far East like Vladivostok and so on and so forth.

It is clear today, according to Blugerman, that it was under the pressure of the revolutionary movement that the Czar and his advisors in Petrograd issued a proclamation in October 1905 granting the people a constitution by promising to allow property owners to elect members to the Parliament or Duma, and further promising the people freedom of the press and freedom of assembly. This spread "like wildfire through the entire country". The proclamations appearing on street corners in the city encouraged the students and workers and every radical and liberal-minded young and middle-aged person, but "mainly the educated young generation" said Blugerman.

What topped off the revolutionary fervour within the city of Odessa was the revolt on the battleship Ptomkin because of worms in their rotten food. It was to the city of Odessa that the remaining sailors came in their boats after so many of their comrades had been shot by the authorities. "All the workers of the city came to the port to pay tribute and honour to the dead sailors of the Ptomkin and this was the basis for a terrific upsurge and demonstration throughout the city", said Blugerman.

However, the celebrations were shortlived. Street corner meetings by student speakers and Red Flag waving came to a halt when orders went out to Cossacks to disperse the crowds. Thousands were arrested and locked up in jail. Shotnya Zotnais, The Black Hundred, was an organization which
operated throughout Russia and the Ukraine. After the Cossacks began to shoot the demonstrators and arrest others, Shotnya Zotnias organized a pogrom in the Jewish neighbourhood "in the city of Odessa within two weeks after the proclamation and an absolute terror, a cloud of terror, then came into being over the skies. And hundreds and hundreds of Jewish men and women and children were murdered in front of us", said Blugerman.

What were the political leanings of the majority of the Jews then when they left the shtetlach for the cities of Eastern Europe to come to America? Sidney Sarkin, a political 'jailbird' by the age of nineteen, said:

It would be, without exaggeration that at that time in the early 1920's, the bulk of our people, except of course the top upper layer, were in sympathy with the Russian Revolution and were affected by it. And it was natural from the point of view that they had a background of oppression by Czarism for centuries. A lot of them participated in those struggles against oppression. A lot of them were founders of the great Jewish socialist organization known as the Bund, which is one of the largest in comparison you see with social democracy even in those days.

It exerted a tremendous influence on our people. It even directed our whole culture, Jewish literature and our classics toward social justice and socialism.

The rumblings and stirrings in the Pale of Settlement took various forms. The young ones joined organizations and groups. Some left to seek their fortunes in other lands. Circumstances were such that forced some to travel far distances before they actually embarked upon the road to North America.

Whether they were forced out of their homes, as a number of them were, or whether they left because they were wanted by the authorities, or whether they left because they could not tolerate the life any longer, they brought with them a sense of social justice not only for themselves and their families but also for generations to come.
Kramer and Masur state the following in reference to Jewish grandmothers, but it can also be said of Jewish grandfathers:

Those most likely to immigrate were often the least traditional and most rebellious, qualities which enabled them to break with their Old World life (1976:152).
Daguerreotype of Baba & Zaida Grandma & Grandpa in 19th century Poland.

Source: Dobroszycki & Kirshenblatt-Gimlett 1977:9
Zaida in 20th century Toronto

Courtesy: Claire Klein Osipov

Photographic reproduction: Joshua Berson
CHAPTER V

PUSH/PULL FACTORS: THOSE WHICH PUSHED THEM OUT OF EASTERN EUROPE AND THOSE WHICH PULLED THEM TOWARD 'AMERICA'

Introduction: Why I Came to 'America'

The last chapter briefly dealt with ideas which brought about social change in the people of the shtetlach of Russia, Poland, Lithuania, Romania and other parts of the Pale. In Chapter VIII, we will see these same people transformed into 'worker bees' in the clothing factories of Montreal and Toronto.

This chapter will serve as more than a link in the chronological accounting of the movements of a people. It must serve not only to establish the space/time co-ordinates but also the many lived experiences of Jews who emigrated from the Old Country. Further, in so doing, it is my hope that it will reflect what other immigrants encountered in their early efforts of transformation.

I will begin by looking more closely at why people left their homelands; what helped push them out, why they travelled for months to some far distant land where they might have had a relative, a close friend, or perhaps someone, just someone whom they had not seen in years but who would nonetheless be there to greet them. I will also look at what attracted them to this country 'America', where gold is like mud in the streets' (Harry Ullman) and 'where the sky's the limit' (Bertha Guberman).

...while rising expectations, demography, misería, and ethno-religious persecution provided the push factors, available work - the hunger of labour-intensive North American business - provided the pull factor.

(Harney & Troper 1975:4)

"Why I came here is a lot to tell", said Pauline Chudnovsky. "We went out of Russia because of the pogrom of the pre-revolution. People
were very militaristic."

Yes, there is a 'lot to tell' only it cannot all be told in these pages. In the latter part of the 19th century decades of deprivation and suffering reached a boiling point. Not so much was it due to the fact that those who suffered had finally reached a stage when they could take it no longer but rather it was due in the main to the pogroms of the 1880's which brought the years of misery to its final close. Statistics show how many towns and villages were attacked and the numbers of people killed. Women and children were raped, property and belongings destroyed, and those who were left picked up the pieces and tried to start again. In a number of cases the drama would repeat itself perhaps with increased intensity.

**TABLE I**

**DISTRIBUTION OF AFFECTED PLACES, POGROMS AND EXCESSES BY PROVINCES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Number of Affected Places</th>
<th>Number of Pogroms</th>
<th>Number of Excesses</th>
<th>Absolute Total</th>
<th>Average per Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kiev</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>516</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Podolia</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volhynia</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kherson</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poltava</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chernigov</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kharkov</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekaterinoslav</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tver</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Russia</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>531</td>
<td>887</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>1,236</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I shows the geographical distribution of the pogroms and excesses, according to provinces. At the head of the list is the province of Kiev, in which 516 (41.7 percent) pogroms and excesses occurred. Then follows the province of Podolia, with 293 (23.7 percent) and the province of Volhynia with 202 (16.3 percent) pogroms and excesses. The other provinces suffered less, and the provinces of Kharkov, Ekaterinoslav and Tver had less than ten pogroms and excesses each.

The main center of the pogroms was on the right bank of the Dnieper, where civil war and nationalist passions raged in full fury. The Petlura movement, which accounted for the largest number of Jewish victims in the Ukraine, had its roots here. Here too a number of atamans and partisan leaders stirred up the peasants that were dissatisfied with the Communist experiment against the Jewish population. Denikin's army raged on the left bank of the Dnieper, in the province of Kiev and partly also in the province of Podolia.

Source: N. Gergel, in YIVO Annual Jewish Social Science, Vol. VI 1951:239
### TABLE II

**POGROMS IN THE UKRAINE, 1918-21, BY MONTH**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month and Year</th>
<th>Pogroms</th>
<th>Excesses</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To Dec. 12, 1918</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 12, 1918—Dec. 31, 1918</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1919</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1919</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1919</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1919</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1919</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1919</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1919</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1919</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1919</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1919</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1919</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1919</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1920</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1920</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1920</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1920</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1920</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1920</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1920</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1920</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1920</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1920</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1920</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1920</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 1, 1921—April 1, 1921</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date undetermined</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>887</strong></td>
<td><strong>349</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,236</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The close relationship between political developments and the pogroms is clearly reflected in Table II, showing the chronological distribution of pogroms and excesses in the years 1918-21. This table is a kind of calendar of political events in the Ukraine in so far as they were reflected in pogroms against the Jews.


Rose Smith comes "...from Homel which is not far from Minsk which is not far away from Moscow". She was born in 1899 and lived with her father, mother and brothers and sisters. I asked Rose why she left Russia to come to Canada. This is what she said:

I didn't know where Canada was because I didn't have nobody here. I had no family here.

...Perhaps you have heard or read about the Beiliss case. Things were so rotten that they used to think we put Christian blood in our matzos (unleavened bread eaten by Jews during Passover).
So before Easter some hooligans killed a boy and Beiliss was blamed. This was done just to make provocations against the Jewish people. ... in the end a trial was held, a rabbi and lawyers from all over the world had a meeting and they studied the case so much until they found out that it was all provocation, and this Beiliss was let go.

... Where I was living in a house with father, mother and my brothers and sisters, I was already married at this time. There was a Catholic family next door. The Catholics in our city were very religious. And we were very good friends with them. So the daughter-in-law says to me, and this is after the Revolution already, "Mrs. Smith there are rumours what they say about blood in the matzos". "Look", I said, and I had my baby, a son Leo who was killed in the Second World War, so I tell her, "Look, I'm going to swear with my Leo's life, there is no blood!" And they know how much I love him and they loved him very much too.

My neighbour's son was working already in the Post Office and he understood. He said, "Don't talk nonsense. It's full of nonsense" to his wife. He understood. Anyway, in general, it didn't work that way because by the time they found out what's what there were so many pogroms all over the place, you know. And life was very hard, very hard.

Rose's father had a store "that was the only store" which was like a delicatessen store. Her father used to buy fish from many different countries. "It was just beautiful, beautiful. So when they burned it down - what do you do after?" said Rose.

The night the store was burned her family hid in a hospital. The next day:

... there was no train to take, there was a wagon, a buggy. We were all travelling in the wagon from Homel to grandfather's to hid ourselves. So on the way there we got a good beating! One of my cousins was beat up terribly, you know, because he was a younger man and they thought he was a revolutionary.

These people came leaving nothing behind and taking nothing with them, that is, nothing of material value. No one was burdened with possessions on their travels to this country. What could they take from their one and two room homes, some with straw roofs, which they could not find bigger and better in 'America, where the streets were paved with gold?"
So before Easter some hooligans killed a boy and Beiliss was blamed. This was done just to make provocations against the Jewish people. ... in the end a trial was held, a rabbi and lawyers from all over the world had a meeting and they studied the case so much until they found out that it was all provocation, and this Beiliss was let go.

... Where I was living in a house with father, mother and my brothers and sisters, I was already married at this time. There was a Catholic family next door. The Catholics in our city were very religious. And we were very good friends with them. So the daughter-in-law says to me, and this is after the Revolution already, "Mrs. Smith there are rumours what they say about blood in the matzos". "Look", I said, and I had my baby, a son Leo who was killed in the Second World War, so I tell her, "Look, I'm going to swear with my Leo's life, there is no blood!" And they know how much I love him and they loved him very much too.

My neighbour's son was working already in the Post Office and he understood. He said, "Don't talk nonsense. It's full of nonsense" to his wife. He understood. Anyway, in general, it didn't work that way because by the time they found out what's what there were so many pogroms all over the place, you know. And life was very hard, very hard.

Rose's father had a store "that was the only store" which was like a delicatessen store. Her father used to buy fish from many different countries. "It was just beautiful, beautiful. So when they burned it down - what do you do after?" said Rose.

The night the store was burned her family hid in a hospital. The next day:

... there was no train to take, there was a wagon, a buggy. We were all travelling in the wagon from Homel to grandfather's to hid ourselves. So on the way there we got a good beating! One of my cousins was beat up terribly, you know, because he was a younger man and they thought he was a revolutionary.

These people came leaving nothing behind and taking nothing with them, that is, nothing of material value. No one was burdened with possessions on their travels to this country. What could they take from their one and two room homes, some with straw roofs, which they could not find bigger and better in 'America, where the streets were paved with gold'.
Motives & Desires for Migration

I have often heard older people say that the past is so very clear to them, that they can picture places and events as though they had lived through them only yesterday. Very early in my talk with Max Dolgoy he said: "There's lots that I can tell you because it's more in my memory today than at any other time." Max was in his seventies at the time I talked to him. And yet Rose Barkusky, younger by a few years only, began her story by saying to me: "Now I don't remember nothing about my childhood..." However, she proceeded to tell me numerous interesting things which had happened to her and others going back to age six.

Alma Wittlin, in, In Search of a Usable Future, says:

People concurrently live in three environments, the one that is, or could be, accessible to their senses, another in their memory, which houses their individual past and inherited traditions, and another still in the imagination.

(1970: Ch. 2:3)

In examining the reasons given by informants for emigrating, it would be advisable to bear in mind that for some of these people the task of meshing these three environments was not very difficult. For others the imagination dominated and consequently some of their past actions and events loomed disproportionately large in their minds.

When one is asked to talk about oneself the over-riding imperative, consciously or unconsciously, is always: How to give meaning to the events of my life? One constantly searches for words and events which will give meaning to that life. Barbara Myerhoff in a recently published study of an elderly Jewish community living in a small California city, says in reference to one of her informants:

And he incorporated external historical events into his life account, thus establishing continuity between himself and the times in which he lived, meshing inner and outer history into a unified tale (1978:221).
Even though she is referring to a person's autobiographical writings it can have meaning within the framework of verbal recollections.

For a number of informants it was very difficult to talk about the ordinary, everyday happenings. "It's not important what I did" or "What should I tell you that is so wonderful?" The shortest interview I had was with a woman I have known for a very long time, albeit I do not see her often. I felt confident she would feel comfortable chatting to me as she would have under any other circumstance. She dispatched parts of her life with quick short sentences like "I was sent back to Poland because I didn't look like a tailoress". When I asked her to elaborate she asked "Yes, could I tell you this?" For so many of them being asked to make sense of their lives for the first time in 50 or 60 years made them think and reflect that perhaps all of their lives were not a waste. They were happy and sad because for some of them it was the first time that all the threads in their past were being pulled together and through their own words.

Reasons for Emigrating as Given by Informants

To say people left the Old Country because times were bad and they had set out to seek their fortune is to say first of all that these people were aware of options and second that they had the wherewithall to pursue these options. No. Life was not so simplistic that one could 'discover' Montreal advertised in the local paper one day and make plans to leave the next. An uprooting of thousands of people, with no fixed plans for travel, accommodation, food, clothing, passports, papers, money taxed the countries through which these people travelled and it put a burden upon receiving communities. For the young and carefree it was the most exciting time of their lives: seeing another place, any
place outside their shtetl; eating a banana, peel and all; pulling a chain to clean the toilet; 'stealing' a small piece of chocolate only to discover it is a laxative.

Some of the reasons for emigrating which surfaced in my interviews were essentially of the following nature: (See chart):

a) the strongest pull factor was a close relative in this country.

b) the strongest push factor was the pogroms of Eastern Europe.

c) their involvement in underground political/revolutionary activities, arrests, incarceration, need to escape.

d) draft-dodging - at 20 all men had to serve in the Czar's army.

e) pervasive hunger due to lack of employment opportunities.

Whatever the reasons given for coming, the Jews who came to Canada and the United States never came as transients or harbouring any hopes of ever returning to their natal country. They had burnt their bridges behind them and sometimes others burnt it for them. The only ties they maintained with the Old Country were for purposes of bringing friends and relatives to 'America'.

The immigrants who came ranged in age from infants to grandmothers and grandfathers. Children did not participate in the decision-making of migration. Old parents had a choice: to follow their children or to spend the rest of their lives alone. Of course, at that time, prior to the Depression, no one had any idea that Hitler would come along soon and there would be no option but death for those left behind. And for those who tried to flee from Eastern Europe, other countries refused to accept them. To our eternal shame, Canada, under Prime Minister MacKenzie King, must go on record as being chief amongst those countries who refused entry to a particular boatload of Jews, mostly women and children, which
THE SHTETL

PUSH FACTORS

- GEOGRAPHIC CONFINEMENT
- LITTLE OR NO EDUCATION
- LIMITED OCCUPATION
- POGROMS, WARS, DRAFT
- POLITICAL ACTIVITIES, JAIL TERMS

'AMERICA'

PULL FACTORS

- RELATIVE OR FRIEND
- GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING
- NO POGROMS, NO WARS, NO DRAFT
- LAND OF OPPORTUNITY - i.e. OCCUPATION
after abortive attempts to land somewhere, anywhere, finally returned to
die in Europe at the hands of the Nazis (Wyman 1968:38 and Crowe 1980:2).
"I'll tell you a story" said Abe Smith. So many stories would
come out after we had finished the formal part of the interview and were
sitting down enjoying a cup of tea. His story went: One day Abe was going
on a boat in the spring to Kiev and there was a woman dressed in black who
was sitting by him and she was moaning, 'Oy! Oy!' as though she were
having nightmares. So Abe woke her up and said, 'Are you troubled by
something? You are crying that is why I am waking you up'. She did not
know Abe and Abe did not know her. She proceeded to tell him a story
about the bandits: 'You know the bandits?' A rhetorical question for who
did not know the 'bandits'? 'Well', she went on 'we were on a boat and
they took my father and mother and tied down their hands on the back and
they threw them in the water. And because I look like a gentile girl,
they didn't make the connection and let me go'. "And this is what she
thinks about", said Abe. "About what happened to her father and mother
and she cries and has nightmares".

So why did you leave the Old Country?

Oh I can tell you (said Samuel Nemetz). I didn't have no
intention to go away to America. No. I was a fighter
there. In Nepapetrovsk in the Ukraine. At that time it
was Ekaterineslav. I wanted to join the army. I had my
outfit all ready. At the age of twenty the boys were
called up. So everyday I went down to the army barracks
and waited. There were Jews and Ukrainians and Russians.
And these boys would wait to be picked and sent to fight in
different parts of Russia. I was strong and I was sure I
would be chosen. I wanted to go anywhere in Russia. I
didn't care; anywhere I wanted to go. But Siberia I
didn't want.

And that was where he was picked to go. How was he to tell his
mother? She was busy selling live chickens in the market that day.
Finally Sam went to see her and "she looked at me in the eye and said 'Are
you crying?', something like that, because she notices. Mothers can
notice quicker". Before too much time had elapsed, Sam's mother had arranged for him to leave Nepapetrovsk and travel to Warsaw and from there to 'America'. He did not want to come to 'America' but then again he did not want to go to Siberia either.

Another informant, Lil Abramovitz, wanted to go to Paris. She had studied French in high school and had learned dressmaking. And

...because a few of my girlfriends' sisters were dress designers in Paris and they wrote such romantic letters about Paris and all that. So all of us girls decided that we will go there.

However, her mother and family had other ideas for her and Lil came to Toronto in October 1928. Her first job was as a saleslady in a dress store where she worked from nine in the morning until midnight for $8 a week.

The majority of immigrants who came here were those who had run away from violence, persecution, death and destruction of the pogroms. It would not further the purpose of this thesis to enter into a definitive study of pogroms which plagued the Jewish communities of Russia and the Ukraine. The difficulty lies in selecting from the many experiences I have on record. Everyone did not experience the same cruelties, the same horror, the same losses. My selection is arbitrary. Some experiences were typical to so many communities and some were more horrible than others. Always, what came through was the fear coupled with the knowledge that one had to keep one's mouth shut. Rose Gordon said:

And the revolution broke out and they started to kill us; started to kill the Jewish people. But my dad was so close with all the people in this little village that they did anything to save us. They dug a hole - just like a grave - and for two weeks we were there. For two weeks they used to bring us food every day. They had boards over it and straw so if others came they didn't know we were hiding there. This was in 1919-1920. We were all small kids but everybody knew they had to keep their mouths shut. We used to go out at night to sleep wherever we could find a place. We couldn't go back to the house because they would have killed us.
That was during the time of Petlura and the Nickonits and all those bandits.

It wasn't the ordinary person; the ordinary person had nothing to do with it. The ordinary person tried to help us.

And then it got to a point when we had to leave home . . .

Baba Fanny Osipov started her story by telling me about the pogrom she lived through in Nikolayev, a settlement near Odessa, when she was only four years old:

When I was four years old we had a pogrom. They know what a pogrom means? ('they' referring to who-ever would read my report). And the pogrom what started for three days they come and they kill and they take away just from the Jews. And next door to us was a little grocery store. Jews were there. And they made a mess. The oil and the flour and the sugar they put everything on the floor. And I start talking to my father: 'What are we sitting in the house, they'll come here. Let us hide under the bed.' I was four years old and they are all these years laughing at me about hiding under the bed!

And next door we had a neighbour. He was Russian. He was a fine man. He said if something happens he'll put a step-ladder and we should come and he'll take us in. You see, they didn't go to the Russian people, just to the Jewish people. And we were there hiding for three days in the cellar. And he brought us milk and bread and when we came back home after three days what a mess there was in the house. All of the windows were smashed, lots of things, linen and all, they took away. The good things they took away. They not just took away, they break everything. They were drunk.

This was in 1905 at the start of the revolution. The Czar said it was started by the Jews and that is why they made the pogrom. After three days everybody came to their home and start again living. And that's what life was like until something happened again.

Dave Ship came from a shtetl in White Russia not far from Minsk. Dave has been a political being all his life. Consequently when it came to talking about what life was like in the Old Country he could not refrain from giving it political overtones and shadings in an attempt to make sense of events which took place when he was a child. He started by telling me that he was born during the War which was followed by the Revolution and
Casualties of the Bloody Sabbath
Pogrom in Bialystock 1905

Source: Dobroszycki & Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1977:108
"life in my early years was very interesting and it was of great importance to Russia because those were the formative years of the New Republic. It was after the First World War that the White Guards and bandit groups began the pogroms where he lived. He said:

They tried to take advantage of the weakness of the Communist government and they robbed and pillaged the population. And a small shtetl or town where I lived went through a pogrom where eighteen or nineteen people were actually murdered. That was about 1919 or so. I remember it very distinctly. I was carried on my father's shoulders to run away, you know. It is vividly imprinted in my memory. I will never forget that occasion.

Dave Ship would have remained in Russia and continued his education there had his mother not decided to come to North America because her younger brothers were in the United States. She "had to be a mother to her younger brothers who had established themselves in the dress manufacturing business in the U.S.", said Ship. However, immigration to the States was closed by that time and Dave and his parents came to Canada instead in 1930, in the middle of June. There were universities here, his parents had been told, for the young Ship to attend. But in 1930 "things didn't turn out exactly so. During the Depression period times were hard", he recalled.

Not everyone went into hiding during the pogroms and the persecutions following abortive revolutionary activities. Those who lived in cities or near them were more often than not involved in some 'political' or 'progressive' organization which brought them into contact with the local police.

Art Browner though he was born in a shtetl in 1900, went to live and learn the tailoring trade in Lodz, a city in Poland. During the First World War his father brought him back to the little shtetl where he felt Art would be safer. After a while he "couldn't find the little town interesting, so he went back to Lodz. He said:
... in Lodz, I mean in especially the big cities at that time, everybody was interested in politics. So naturally I was one also. So in the beginning I was a Zionist, I mean a Poale Zionist. Then I became a Left Poale Zionist because they were more progressive.

It was in 1922 I remember, or maybe it was in 1923, I went out on May Day demonstration and I was amongst the Left Poale Zionists. It happened so that the police concentrated on the Jewish people there and they organized a pogrom. Whole groups of people were cut off from each other and not only the police were hitting us but the people, gentile people, came out of their houses with sticks and bars and were also hitting us.

I nearly got killed by a policeman. He gave me one on this side of my head with his gun. And I couldn't move my hands anymore. If it was not for another policeman, a mounted policeman who came over and told him to stop, maybe he would kill me. So he saved me.

Then they took me and others to the place where they washed us, we were bleeding. I was in the police jail overnight there and then my father took me out. I came home and I was two weeks in bed because I was beaten black. They hit my head with bars. I had eight bumps. I took the bumps out when I came here.

In the meantime my uncle in Toronto found out - it was written in the Jewish journal - I was in trouble, so they tried to bring me over here.

Aside from Browner there were several others who left the Old Country because of their progressive activities there. Amongst my informants at least two revolutionaries stand out and since one of them, Sidney Sarkin, was inspirational in this study, more space will be accorded him. Before I go on to speak about Sarkin I would like to mention others like Joshua (Joe) Gershman, James Blugerman, Norman Massey, Bertha Guberman, to name but a very few, who were active in the fight for social justice in the Old Country and who were in the leadership in this country. In Chapter VIII on the working conditions in the Needle Trades, we will see how these and others spent their nights and days in the cause of their fellow human beings.
Immigrants on their way to America get a free meal in Warsaw
Source: Roskies & Roskies 1975:270
Sidney Sarkin's father had travelled to Canada a few times before he died in 1914 in Lithuania. On one of those trips to Canada he had become a Canadian citizen. Sidney's mother had two sisters in Canada and one in the United States. The sister in the United States had never seen Sidney's mother because she had left Lithuania before his mother was born. Consequently, when Sidney's father died the family in Canada pressed the family in Lithuania to leave and come to this country. But there was also another more urgent reason for leaving. Sidney had already at sixteen been in and out of jail three times because he was considered a troublemaker and rebel. It was feared that the next time he was thrown in jail it would cost him his life, times in Lithuania being rather uncertain. And so it came about that in January 1921 Sidney arrived in Montreal at the age of 17 after having left Vilna some three months earlier.

Sidney had aunts, and uncles who were well-to-do and were prominent businessmen: one owned a fish-packing company in Halifax and the others clothing factories in Montreal. His father had died at the beginning of the First War and during the war years it was impossible to do anything about moving the family from the Old Country. As soon as the war was over tickets were sent to Sidney's mother. They were to sail from Le Havre, France. However, all the efforts of the British Consulate in Vilna were useless in obtaining transit visas for the family to travel through France in order to sail from Le Havre. The Consulate suggested they go to Berlin and try there. Sidney, his brother and mother arrived in Konigsberg, which is no more on the map but which was a leading city in Germany at the time. Because of the Polish corridor which was established after the Treaty of Versaille, Polish transportation was unavailable.
They therefore took a ship from Konigsberg to get to another German city and then to Berlin. In Berlin they were faced with a general strike known as the Kup Putsch of the Junkers of Germany. Sidney said:

For the first time in my life, you know, what I had learned as a youngster that if the workers want all life to stop, I saw happen before my very eyes. Everything was stopped. Transportation, water, communication, electricity, all the stores, everything. It even became a joke about the Chancellor - they said he couldn't wash himself when he got up in the morning. It was announced in our hotel that there will be at 10 o'clock a demonstration by the workers of Berlin.

And I have seen a million and a half people, workers, marching twenty-five abreast, just like the German army was, you know. All trained, marching. Have you ever seen them marching? Using a special step that is how they marched. You couldn't see a policeman anywhere ... and there were about forty mass meetings and speakers addressing the crowds. ... To make a long story short, they finished the Putsch of Kup!

The British Consulate in Berlin tried to get in touch with the French Ambassador but to no avail could visas be obtained. His mother was disappointed but the boys enjoyed the chance to see Berlin: the museums, the theatres, the shows. All went far beyond the dreams of young boys. After a month in Berlin the Cunard Line Agents were able to obtain berths on a ship sailing from Antwerp to Liverpool. They stopped in Brussels on their way to Antwerp and discovered the wonderful world of chocolates. From Liverpool they sailed to Montreal where the family met them.

The ship which brought Sidney and his family was a big ship. To further their discomfort, they were confined below decks for the entire rocky voyage which took two and a half weeks, because they were seasick.

For Rose Barkusky the experience was different. As it happened, she set out from Vilna approximately four years later, April 1925.
On the way to the new world

Source: Harney & Troper 1975:13
Her papers came from Canada, from her prospective husband who was also her uncle. She came to Canada to be the maid in the household of a well-to-do family. Her story goes:

My mother went as far as Warsaw with me by train. Then she put me on another train with a family that was going to Canada - a woman with five children, the oldest being my age, the youngest breast feeding. ... ... So my mother asked her to keep an eye on me. Also she had another girl from Warsaw going to Canada. So she had to keep an eye on that one too. Her name was also Rose.

So we went from there to Danzig which was the border and the British Consulate was there. You had to go through all this washing and cleaning. We had to go through all sorts of baths and delousing. I came to the British Consulate, he put a stamp on my passport and we sailed to Southampton. Everything was by boat in those days. In Southampton we went through the same thing - doctors, examination, and all sorts of things. We were on a cattle boat and everybody was sick. But the other Rose and I were the only ones on deck. We couldn't stay below because it was impossible. Three days it was very rough. ... ... On deck was the kitchen and a Polish fellow was sitting and peeling potatoes. And we couldn't walk on deck because the boat was going up and down. And when I looked out on the horizon there was a boat going too. And then you know she went up and she went right down like this. And I let out a scream! So the Polish fellow says, 'What are you screaming for? What's the matter?' I says, 'I think the boat went down.' I showed him and said in Polish, 'There, there's a boat there and I think it went down'. So he started to laugh. He said, 'If you had been on that boat and looked at ours you would think the same thing.' I turned to Rose and said, 'Let's go downstairs'.

The boat was a cattle boat. I don't know what it was hauling. The food was potatoes and herring and that's all. Anyways we came to Southampton.

From Southampton we came to Hull, Quebec on a big boat. It was an American boat and the sailors were all Norwegian. There were a lot of Jewish immigrants and it was very nice.

I was stopped in Hull. One of the nurses asked me to wait. I see everybody is going and I'm sitting there. I didn't know and I didn't speak a word of English. Anyways she said the doctor wanted to speak to me. I said to myself: I went through all the doctors in Europe, I even had a doctor's certificate from home to say I was alright. So it ended up they thought I had a goiter. But a couple of doctors examined me and said I could go.

... I came to Montreal and there the Jewish Immigration met me because I was a girl of 17 years old.
Joseph Brandes in *From Sweatshop to Stability* (YIVO:XVI:1) states:

... in the half-century from 1880-1930 almost 3 million Jewish newcomers arrived (in America). It was a phenomenon replete with the historic tensions of transplanting entire population centres, of circumstances pressing the migrant away from his native land and pulling him toward a new haven.
CHAPTER VI

TRANSFORMATION OF BEING: A SENSE OF PEOPLEHOOD

Introduction

In order to understand the Jewish communities as they existed at the time the last mass influx arrived in Canada in 1921, I found it necessary to research available histories of Jewish communities living in Montreal and Toronto. Demographic studies of the cities were looked at as well. The histories which have been written are typically of people who took an active part in the life and times, who were instrumental in starting and leading organizations and erecting buildings. They are the histories of Jews who came to Canada and rose to a number of high positions in various walks of life: commerce, dentistry, medicine, politics, religion, banking, the arts, sports, education, etc. It is from these early histories and studies which one must attempt to understand the communities as they existed prior to the mass migrations. Unfortunately, in these so-called historical accounts, the working class Jew is relegated the space of a footnote. For example, a recent publication, The Jews of Toronto, by Stephen A. Spiesman has been aptly renamed "Some Jews of Toronto" by a reviewer in The Canadian Jewish Outlook, a monthly publication. Spiesman fails to deal with and dismisses summarily 60% of the Jewish population of the time. He footnotes a remark on the sweatshop phenomenon in Toronto and Montreal by stating: "For sweatshop conditions in garment factories in Montreal see The Jewish Times 1903, p.73". (The Jewish Times was a newspaper published at the turn of the century). That is the sum of his contribution about the majority of Jews who lived and worked in clothing factories.

Utilizing these secondary sources I will:
1. give an overview of the historical setting in Montreal and Toronto immediately antecedent to and at the time of arrival of informants, and

2. utilizing demographic studies show the movement of these immigrants in Montreal and Toronto over a period of twenty years from the time of arrival.

In so doing, the network of crystalized groups, institutions and organizations which formed the matrix of the Jewish ethnic group will unfold.

The first task, as Florian Znaniecki states, is that of description (1968:14). From describing a system we can go on to explaining change. The process of change, both in these cities and in the people, informs the next chapter.

**Brief Account Of Mass Migrations**

The early history of the Jews in Canada from the mid-18th century to the early 1900s is documented in a number of books (Refer to Bibliography). Insofar as immigration into Canada was concerned, the period up to 1918-1919 was not a difficult one, in that there were few restrictions. The basic principle of Canada's immigration policy was selection of desirable immigrants - desirables were those who came from Northern Europe (Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians and citizens of the United States). They took precedence over Eastern Europeans, Southern Europeans and Orientals, the latter two considered undesirables. However, during the period of great expansion when Canada made an effort to attract immigrants, many of the less desirables were permitted entry.

The year 1919 saw a number of changes in immigrant policy. 1919 was a time of unrest - soldiers returning from the war, not enough jobs, not enough money. It was the time of the Winnipeg General Strike. In 1919 an Order-in-Council was adopted:
Freight train carrying emigrants

Source: Dobroszycki & Kirshenblatt-Gimlett 1977:138
...which prohibited the landing of skilled and unskilled labor in British Columbia (PC #1202) and the landing of former alien enemies (PC #1203). On June 19, 1919 the government promulgated another Order-in-Council (PC #1204) which prohibited the landing of Doukhobors, Hutterites and even Mennonites.

(Belkin 1966:102)

In 1920 a further Order required the payment of landing money, $250 per person, and in 1923 one had to fulfil an occupational test to enter Canada. A further restriction was the requirement of a continuous journey:

If the immigrant comes direct from the country of his birth, he will be permitted, under certain conditions to land in this country; but should the man and his family have left the country of his birth and gone to England and have lived in England say for fifteen or twenty years, brought up his family under English customs and taught them English ideas and the language of that country - if that man attempted to land in Canada with his wife and family, he would be barred from entering the Dominion because he didn't come directly from the country of his birth (ibid: 102-103).

The speaker was S.W. Jacobs, K.C., M.P., a Jew, in an address in Parliament in 1921.

The First World War had shaken Europe and 1917 spawned the Russian Revolution. East European Jews, who had begun emigrating in the mid-1880s, began to leave in droves. They went to Palestine, to England, to France, to the United States and Canada. The bulk of the Jewish immigrants to Canada came before 1921, when various restrictions, some mentioned above, went into effect. After the war the prospective immigrant had to have a close relative in Canada. According to Census of Canada 1921, the number of Jewish immigrants to Canada had reached 116,893, the largest number, by city, going to Montreal:

Montreal: 42,667
Ontario: 47,458
Manitoba: 16,593
Saskatchewan 5,328
Alberta 3,186
B.C. 1,654
Yukon & N.W.T. 7

After 1921 there were no more mass migrations to Canada.

Some immigrants in a short period of time were able to settle down to lives which afforded them a measure of comfort and security. For the vast numbers who disembarked at Canadian ports, after weeks of privation, sick and tired, frightened, babbling in foreign tongues, life in Canada and the United States was not exactly placid.

Who, seeing them in their outlandish garb as they came into the ports of the Atlantic seaboard, could have imagined that their children and grandchildren, and they themselves, would gain distinction in all the fields of American life: industry, philosophy, commerce, yes, and even gangsterism and rascality, the great American game of taking the public for an expensive ride? But at that time, certainly, they looked tired, and poor, and terribly bewildered (Goodman 1961:14).

Even though they came with their dreams and their eternal hope, little did it occur to them that their grandchildren would be so far removed from their sweat and toil one day as to be unaware of their beginnings. Their great belief in social justice for the future of all humankind never allowed them to doubt their generations to come. And some of the children and grandchildren have forgotten their roots, have disowned their grandparents, have built edifices so grandiose and spectacular as to appear foreign in the sight of the humble tailor. One woman, lying in her hospital bed, told me with tears in her eyes that she had not been sent an invitation to her grandson's Bar Mitzvah because she would shame the guests.

The first wave of immigrants arriving in the mid-19th century
affected the structure of the Canadian Jewish community. The social and cultural background of the East European Jew was different from those of the settled community and they were unable and unwilling to mingle with their non-Jewish neighbours as the earlier settlers had done.

The Jews who came were Polish, Lithuanian, Galician, Russian, White Russian, Romanian, Austrian and Hungarian. Though the majority of Polish Jews went to Toronto, by and large there was a mixture of people in most parts.

Montreal was the only Jewish community of any significance in Quebec although Jews have lived in Sherbrooke, Three Rivers, Quebec City and the Eastern Townships since the British conquest.

(Helfield, 1973:26)

The majority of these immigrants were poor and came carrying all their worldly possessions on their backs, so to speak. Benjamin A. Sack vividly describes the life of the immigrant:

His level of living was low, comparable to that of the contemporary immigrant belonging to other ethnic groups. Only by unremitting toil could the families of Jewish workers manage to exist, only by suffering endless privations could they eke out daily bread. Theirs was a life of unrelieved bleakness and dreariness (1965:221).

Historical Setting

Montreal

As mentioned above, Montreal was the only Jewish community of any significance in Quebec. The Jews concentrated in Montreal because they could speak either Yiddish or English, whereas in the rest of the province French created a problem. In other provinces, this difficulty did not exist and thus the above figures give population by provinces rather than by city.

The majority of the working class Jews were involved in
industry, especially the clothes manufacturing industry. Aside from these occupations, there were peddlers, storekeepers (butchers, bakery owners, fish store owners, etc.) who were a very low middle class. A definite line of demarcation existed between the workers and this middle class, on the one hand, and the Jewish upper strata on the other. Previously the divisions among, for example Montreal Jews, had been denominational - Sephardic, Ashkenazic and Reform; now religious differences became unimportant in light of the acute social differences which were developing in the Jewish community. The German and Polish immigrants of the earlier decades had become acculturated and Canadianized, whilst their Eastern European counterparts were considered unacclimated immigrants. The earlier settlers were, on the whole, on a much higher level in the existing social structure than the new immigrants who were, more often than not, struggling in poverty (Kage 1940:42). "Uptown and downtown became terms of precise social demarcation" (Sack 1965:212).

In 1901 the Jewish population in Montreal was 6,975 and in 1911 it was 28,838. Shifts in areas of settlement of Montreal Jewry began taking place. As shown on Map VI the earlier settlers, no longer in the depths of poverty, began to move northward, away from the Montreal waterfront. The newcomers took up residence in the deteriorating residential area surrounding Dufferin Square (Seidel 1939:51).

By 1901, as shown on Map VII, the Jewish community was well established with a population of close to 7,000. The Jewish area of settlement at this time was enclosed in the area bounded by Duluth on the north, St. Denis on the east, Craig on the south, and St. Lawrence Boulevard on the west. By this time the first extensive cultural ghetto of the Montreal Jewish community had come into existence, the bulk of the population
MAP VI

Early Jewish Settlement in Montreal 1900

Source: Steven B. Paull 1974
MAP VII

First Area of Jewish Settlement in Montreal, 1901

Source: Steven B. Paull 1974
being East European immigrants (Paull 1974:10).

Toronto

The picture in Toronto was not much different from that of Montreal, except that Montreal as the port of entry for most immigrants had the added burden of being a clearinghouse for Jews en route to other parts of Canada.

The following Table will show that the massive flight of Jews from Russia multiplied the Jewish population of Toronto more than five-fold, to a figure of 18,000 in the first decade of the 20th century:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Year</th>
<th>Jewish Population</th>
<th>Percent in Toronto</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) 1851</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) 1861</td>
<td>1,186</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) 1871</td>
<td>1,333</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) 1881</td>
<td>2,443</td>
<td>534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) 1891</td>
<td>6,501</td>
<td>1,425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>16,401</td>
<td>3,103*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>75,681</td>
<td>18,294*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>126,196</td>
<td>34,770*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>156,726</td>
<td>46,751*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Metropolitan Toronto

a) Jews by religion
All other census years Jews by ethnic origin

(Bain 1974:90)

At the end of World War I the borders of Revolutionary Russia were sealed. The major source of Jewish immigration after that was from Poland. Polish government policy, instituted almost immediately upon the achievement of independence, systematically sought to eliminate Jews from the economic life of the nation. Success was met to such a degree
that by 1926:

... the Jewish artisans of Warsaw pointed to some melancholy statistics. Of 2,800 Jewish shoemaking establishments, 2,060 were closed. Of 3,000 tailoring shops, 2,560 were closed. Of 100 brush factories, 50 were closed. (Sachar 1958:358).

Fed by the masses of impoverished Polish Jews, the Jewish population of Toronto grew steadily to reach the figure of 46,571 by 1921. As figures concerning the distribution of Jewish population by ward are not available from the Canadian Censuses of 1911 and 1921, the distribution of Jewish population by Federal Constituency was alternatively examined by Bain and he found that the three Federal constituencies of Toronto Centre, Toronto West and Toronto South contained within their bounds 90% of Toronto Jewry in 1911 and 84% in 1921.

Within these ghetto areas several anomalous sectors were found which were free of Jewish inhabitants. These exceptional islands represent rooming houses owned by Anglo-Saxon Protestant males. Throughout the first four decades of this century I have observed a reluctance on the part of Toronto Jews to inhabit rooming-houses or flats, and instead showing a decided preference for single-family dwellings. This is not a totally unexpected phenomenon as even single Jewish men, or men awaiting the arrival of their families, could find cheaper and more socially compatible accommodation in the homes of relatives or fellow landsmen (Bain 1974:32-33).

One question put to all my informants was: with whom did you live when you arrived? In all cases where single men or women came to Canada they lived with friends or relatives and not on their own. Once members of their family arrived, or they got married, they moved into family dwellings.
TORONTO 1921

1 “The Ward”  
2 Eastern Ave. — King St. Macedonian Community  
3 Kensington Market — Spadina Area  
4 Henderson — Manning Italian Community  
5 Niagara St. — Queen St. Area  
6 “The Junction”
The concept of the Jew embraces a range of ideas and I would offer that there is no one universally accepted definition. One can go from the broadest, that one who stems from Jewish forebears is a Jew, to the narrowest, most rigid Halakhic (Jewish Law) view that a Jew is one who was born of a Jewish mother or convert. In between there are various shadings of Jewish identification. No definition is universally accepted.

Ethnicity comes from the Greek word 'ethnos' meaning 'people' or 'nation' and I shall refer to a group with a shared feeling of peoplehood as an "ethnic group" (Francis 1947:393-400). Early man identified himself as a member of a group, his 'people', and it was not difficult for him to establish a geographical location, or speak of the shared religious, political and moral values of his people. He was aware of his ancestors and could differentiate between himself and others (aside from physical differences). These are elements of the classic 'folk society', as in Robert Redfield's terms. With the march of civilization, with population increases, migrations, wars, creation of cities, proliferation of religious variations, political groups, etc. this sense of peoplehood has been shattered and fragmented. Certain elements are extracted from the whole which unified a group of people. With these changes, ideologies developed which corresponded to the old traditions. In looking at its various forms, as they apply to the Jewish communities which developed in Canadian cities, I will attempt to describe the realities as they existed.

The sense of ethnicity has proved to be hardy. What were some of the essential elements in the nature of the Jewish immigrant which compelled him to merge and tie his individual identity in some ancestral
group of people? Polanyi says: "Our believing is conditioned at its source by our belonging" (Bock 1969:445). The Jews are not the only group of people who have proven hardy in this and other lands. Perhaps a look at their lives and struggles in Canada may give us an insight into why certain groups of people submerge their identity in a wider one and others tenaciously cling to theirs.

What is a sense of identity? Such a question is a difficult one for a person who has entered history, who lives in a city, who specializes at his work, who has come in contact with other cultures. Such a person is forced to cling to his ethnicity and mould its shape more narrowly even as he participates in history. He is a 'stranger' in Alfred Schutz' terms and he undergoes 'crisis' as he approaches and tries to be accepted, or at least tolerated, by the group he comes in contact with (Schutz 1964: 91-105).

Further, how one identified oneself to others is closely related to how one is identified by others: Who, What, is he? Who, What, am I? In this way one's sense of peoplehood is reinforced and one's expectations are fulfilled.

In bringing his religion and his traditions from the shtetl to the New World, the immigrant Jew brought with him his culture and his heritage. Even though Jews came from different parts of Europe they believed in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Whether they were Russian radicals or Polish teachers, they all spoke Yiddish (though the Russian frowned upon the pronunciation of the Polish). This by no means should imply that all was smooth-sailing amongst the East European Jews who came to Canada. Socio-economic divisions existed; but despite the differences, each Jew in his own inimical way, clung tenaciously to his identity.
How did the immigrant Jew maintain his ethnicity, his sense of belonging? What elements did he extract from his past and why? Were these sufficient to give him that feeling of being a part of the group, his people, even in a foreign land, learning a foreign language, wearing foreign clothes? How did the Jew maintain his social-psychological identification with his fellow Jews in Canada?

The mass immigrant came directly from the shtetlach of Eastern Europe and refused to be totally assimilated in his new environment. Rather he brought with him much of his heritage and traditions which had been so very strong in Europe. Why did they not discard their old-fashioned ways and adopt the new ones? The Jews who had come from Germany, France, England, had become 'Canadianized', why not the newcomers, the 'greenhorns'?

Previous settlers had not come en masse. Isolated families had migrated from here and there in Europe. With the waves of immigrants, and the type of immigrants (poor, destitute, sheltered and ignorant of the world), 'assimilation' of any sort would have been impossible and even disastrous. Out of convenience on the one hand, and fear of persecution on the other, the Jews banded together and lived in one major residential district in the large cities. The Jewish areas of settlement were characteristically Jewish, with autonomous social and educational institutions. The culture of Yiddish language was widespread; storefronts bore signs in both Yiddish and English. As we shall see below, the network of organizations and social relationships permitted and encouraged the members of the Jewish community to remain within the confines of the group for all of their primary and some of their secondary relations throughout their lifecycle - from the cradle to the grave.

In 1926 the Jewish communities of Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg were the most active and viable. By this time these communities had
Sign over the premises of a ritual slaughterer, 1910

Source: Harney & Troper. 1975:102
received two or three waves of immigrants from Eastern Europe. As the Table below will show, population figures for these cities indicate the numbers increased every decade.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Year</th>
<th>Winnipeg</th>
<th>Toronto</th>
<th>Montreal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>1,145</td>
<td>3,103</td>
<td>6,597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>8,754</td>
<td>18,294</td>
<td>22,154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>14,390</td>
<td>34,770</td>
<td>42,802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>17,153</td>
<td>46,751</td>
<td>56,920</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Compiled from Census data for the years 1901-1931)

In 1926 Arthur Daniel Hart wrote:

In all communities the congregation has been the means of bringing the members together and all charitable and philanthropic work originated there. It is to the credit of the Jew that just as soon as a 'minyan' (ten men) can be gathered together in some small community, it is practically sure that in a short time a synagogue will be built (1926:81).

In 1926 there were 125 synagogues in Canada, from Victoria, B.C. to Sidney, N.S. In the three major cities the breakdown was as follows:

- Montreal 33
- Toronto 11
- Winnipeg 7

Most of the congregations were Orthodox with only three Reform. According to Hart, some of the synagogues in Montreal and Toronto were large enough to accommodate some five hundred to six hundred people. These synagogues were not built overnight, neither were they the work of one or two individuals. Historical documents show that many members of the Jewish community were involved in raising these edifices (Hart 1926:81).
Building a house of prayer was the first requirement in a Jewish community. Within its walls not only does one pray, but children are educated, the needy are looked after, and social relationships are established. Through it a consciousness is developed. The history of the Jews of Canada cannot be recounted without speaking of the philanthropic endeavours of those who came early to this country and who had little need themselves of any assistance. It is through such efforts that immigrants found not only food and shelter but in many cases the chance to live in freedom in Canada instead of facing deportation (See Belkin 1966 and Kage 1940).

Perhaps in no part of Jewish life is so much devotion shown as displayed in rendered assistance to those in need. Charity is a fundamental part of the Jewish faith, and in philanthropic endeavour and welfare work the Jews of Canada take just pride in the fact that they have upheld and are upholding the best traditions of their race (Hart 1926:81).

Those who came first needed no assistance,

... consequently there was no demand for assistance for their co-religionists, but they subscribed, what was in those days, munificently to the existing calls for relief ... (to) ... the indigent of Montreal in 1795, ... the English Church in 1801, ... to the relief of war sufferers in 1813 and 1814 (ibid:81).

Not until 1848 when there was a considerable influx of Jewish immigrants into Canada, was there need for a purely Jewish organization - the Hebrew Philanthropic Society - which was formed in Montreal. In 1873 it was reorganized into the Young Men's Hebrew Benevolent Society, and in 1923 it became the Baron de Hirsh Institute. It handled all philanthropic work, including immigration aid, colonization and education.

The Russian, Roumanian and Polish immigrants who arrived in Canada between 1880-1890 taxed to the utmost the resources of the Society and assistance was also furnished by the Mansion House Russian Committee and the Jewish Colonization Association of Paris; but it was only a
very short time before these immigrants had become established to such an extent that they were organizing relief for those who followed them (ibid:193).

As the years past and the need for charity reached a much greater scale, more societies came into existence and the result was naturally much overlapping of work which led to formation of a centralized organization in 1914 in Montreal called the Federation of Philanthropies. Other cities followed.

As the communities grew in size and as the flow of immigration increased in volume, various activities were initiated by the Society to take care of not only the poor and needy in the community but of the indigent arrivals and of education of the children who did not know or have command of the English language. The Jewish community not only increased in numbers but became more and more heterogenous. Thus, various groups arose, called lantsmanshaften, composed of countrymen, neighbours, fellow townsmen from the Old Country.

In the cause of brevity one has to dispatch the work of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies by quoting only some of their activities and the areas in which they worked. This will convey an inkling of how the people felt and struggled in those early days.

By means of various campaigns and educational propaganda as to what the Federation aimed to accomplish, it created a greater interest by members of the Jewish community in all activities for social betterment, and brought the community to a realization of its responsibility to those in need of aid.

One of the outstanding results achieved by Federation has been the crystallization of a COMMUNITY CONSCIENCE ... It had also by means of its various departments, and particularly by its budget system, created a COMMUNITY INDEX - an index of the distress prevalent in the community
and an index of the measure in which distress is met. (ibid:198).

In the evolution of these, the modus operandi of the Federation was gradually changed to suit particular conditions in the community, but the changes had always been toward a greater cohesion and unity.

No needy person was turned away. No homeless child was deprived of the home that it was our duty to provide. No tubercular fighting the white plague was refused aid ... said the Chairman of the Executive Council of the Federation for the year 1924 (ibid:198).

The Baron de Hirsh Institute, mentioned above, was the other philanthropic organization which continuously and consistently pursued its career of usefulness in the community, working for the poor, and particularly the immigrant poor, in every way, providing schools, family welfare, and when needed provided free burial as well (See Belkin 1966, Hart 1926, Rosenberg 1939).

Aside from these two philanthropic organizations a vast network of other organizations had started in all the major cities by the year 1924 which were not only committed to alleviating the sufferings of the poor in the community but also the health, education and culture of the people. A number of hospitals were opened, fully equipped, to look after people from childbirth to old age. The Zionist Organization of Canada started in 1887, Canadian Jewish Congress, Jewish Immigrant Aid Society, Big Brother Movement (Jewish Branch) in 1914, Young Men's and Women's Hebrew Associations were formed in Montreal and Toronto, Hadassah was first started in Toronto in 1916, and Hadassah of Canada in 1925. These organizations, and many others, were involved in all phases of Jewish life and provided a means of establishing social relationships within the community (Belkin 1966, Hart 1926, Kage 1940, Rosenberg 1939).
In Chapter II I discussed the particular emphasis Jews placed upon learning. I also showed how the boy had the place of honour at five years old when he started to go to Jewish school. The education of the girl, on the other hand, was neglected and no honours were accorded her for learning to read and write. No such discrimination was found in reviewing Jewish education in Canada.

Some of this valuation was transferred to the secular aspects of life when these immigrants left the confines of the Pale of Settlement and came to live in North America. The process of preservation familiar to the social psychologist was the mechanism whereby the group value oriented toward religious learning was transferred to the sphere of secular learning without losing its hold upon the group (Murphy, et al 1937:99, 812-814).

It is not surprising, then, to find when researching histories of Jewish communities in Canada that every city had a number of schools, ranging from the very orthodox, the Talmud Torahs, to evening and Sunday schools, to secular progressive day schools. By 1926 there were Talmud Torahs in Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Regina, Edmonton, Saskatoon. There were Hebrew Free Schools, there were Jewish People's Schools. Aside from these, a network of Jewish secular schools were run by two of the largest fraternal organizations in operation at the time: the Arbeiter Ring (Jewish Workmen's Circle) and the Poale Zionist movement known as the Farband.

These latter organizations had a network of schools as well as social clubs and libraries. Ideologically the Workmen's Circle was known as a socialist-inclined organization, whilst the Poale Zionists leaned partially toward nationalism as the Zionists expressed it. But Poale Zionism, as the name implies, means workers, and they believed
that the coming society, even in Palestine, should be a socialist society and they considered themselves socialists. However, amongst them there were variations – right, left and centre. The same situation obtained in the Workmen's Circle insofar as it was a reflection of the different socialist groupings around on a world-wide scale (Sarkin).

Prior to 1912, Jewish children who were left orphans and dependent upon the public were placed in non-Jewish homes or institutions. With the Jewish population of Canadian cities growing larger and more progressive, it became a foregone conclusion that such a condition would not long be allowed to remain. The Jewish character of looking after its own soon asserted itself and led to the inauguration of Jewish orphanages for the purpose not only of feeding and housing these unfortunate dependents but also of educating them and bringing them up in the faith of their forefathers (Hart 1926:227).

For some of the young men and women in the community there was the Federation of Young Judea of Canada, an organization concerned with the needs of the people, Jewish education which equipped them for effective service to the community, and which took the form of a club or groups of clubs and actively participated in Zionist work (ibid:289).

In order to understand the diversity of groupings within these organizations it is necessary to look at the composition of the immigrants. Amongst the immigrants there were the plain folk who came to Canada looking for a new place, a new role, and new freedoms. There were also socialists who had participated in the development of the Jewish revolutionary movements in the Old Country. Some of them had run away from jail terms, arrests, and so on, as was the case with Sidney Sarkin. Many of them brought with them their interests and ideas in the socialist movement. There were social democrats who were followers of Karl Marx and others in
in Germany. From Russia there were followers of Plekanov, an outstanding ideologue of the socialist movement. Thus we find a cross-section of people with vision, with understanding, who came with the masses of immigrants. As Zalman Shneur reminds us, they were:

A people pledged to life,
Pledged to uprooting the evil within life.

(Goodman 1961:13)

Amongst them were also a number of writers, painters, philosophers, who found conditions in the Old Country intolerable, especially the series of pogroms which took place. These were people who participated in the struggles in the New Country, who expressed the bewilderment, despair, joy, hopefulness, and who gave leadership to the masses, such as Sholem Aleichem, Abraham Raisin, Salman Libin.

Sidney Sarkin said:

These workers' organizations and the trade union movement, helped the immigrant to find jobs, educated them so they were able to defend themselves against the terrible exploitation of the times, against anti-Semitism, against the miserable conditions under which they had to work. These immigrants brought with them their Jewish heritage, and culture started to bloom.

What were the mechanisms, social and cultural, which pulled the immigrant towards the ghetto?

Initial shelter for the 'greenhorn' was almost always found in the home of relatives or lantsmen. Thus his introduction to the Jewish ghetto took place immediately upon arrival. When the time came to find a residence of one's own, relatives and friends, whose knowledge of the city was limited to Jewish areas, were the main information vehicle of the search process. Consequently, "... the spatial bias of informational sources focussed the residential search process upon the Jewish sector of the urban area" (Bain 1974:41).
Drugstore on Spadina Avenue, Toronto c.1920

Source: Harney & Troper 1975:103

Photographic Reproduction: Joshua Berson
To a large degree the roots of residential segregation lie in the duties and obligations imposed upon the individual Jew by the religious and dietary requirements of his faith. Individual prayer is not encouraged in the Jewish religion. Rather, the orthodox Jew must pray daily, in the presence of nine other adult male Jews. Thus, to be within walking distance of a synagogue was of paramount importance to the orthodox Jew because on the Sabbath and High Holidays he is not permitted to ride on buses or cars. Adherence to dietary laws also stressed the need for accessibility to kosher butcher shops, bakeries and grocery stores. At the turn of the century the Jewish community can be considered as devoutly orthodox in religious observance.

Judith Seidel described life in the Jewish areas of settlement in Montreal:

St. Lawrence Blvd. is filled with people at all hours of the day and evening, for here are all the food shops - kosher meat and fish markets, herring and delicatessen and dairy and bakery shops, where the housewives of the area, as well some who dwell further afield, do their shopping (1939:63).

With subsequent immigrants arriving in the first two decades of the 20th century one finds a wider spectrum of religious observance within the immigrant community. As mentioned above, anti-religious and non-religious elements came to play an integral role in Jewish life. Certainly, proximity to stores catering to the culinary and material tastes of the Jew constituted a positive attraction for even the most rabid Jewish socialist, however, we must delve beyond the oft-stated explanation of residential segregation which is predicated upon the religious needs of the Jew. "For the pious and the anarchist, the followers of the Berditchev Rebbe and the disciples of Marx, all located within the realm of the Jewish ghetto" (Bain 1974:40-41).
As the Table on the following page shows, language difficulties too created an irresistible magnet binding the immigrant Jew tightly to the Jewish core of the city. As most Jewish immigrants were fluent in Yiddish, an adequate social life and employment opportunities were largely limited to the confines of the Jewish community. Subsequent usage of Yiddish as the language of work and social intercourse further impeded the adoption of English for many Jews and perpetuated the necessity of living near Yiddish-speaking compatriots from the Old Country. It is not the purpose here to over-emphasize the importance of language by claiming that it acted as an impediment to moving out of the ghetto or learning to speak English. None of my informants arrived in this country knowing how to speak English. Yet all of them today speak English as well as Yiddish.

Prior to the increase in Jewish population Jews were found on the editorial boards of Canadian daily newspapers - the Montreal French daily "La Press" and the "Montreal Daily Star" (Hart 1926:457). With the increase the foundation was laid for a Jewish press, both in Yiddish and in English. As early as 1891 a first attempt was made but only four issues were printed. It was not until 1897 that the English bi-weekly, "The Jewish Times", came into being. By 1922 there were a number of publications in Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg (For details see Hart 1926:457). Some of these are still in press today.

Political debate centered around Jewish concerns and issues. The centre of high culture was the Yiddish theatre, not Massey Hall. The Jewish ghetto was separated from the rest of the city socio-psychologically and physically.
### Mother Tongue of the Canadian Jewish Population

10 years of Age and Over, 1921-1931

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother Tongue</th>
<th>1921 Number</th>
<th>1921 Percent</th>
<th>1931 Number</th>
<th>1931 Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yiddish</td>
<td>84,732</td>
<td>90.72</td>
<td>124,408</td>
<td>95.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>3,264</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>2,452</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>3,370</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>1,547</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>696</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>943</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romanian</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungarian</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuanian</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovak</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danish</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* less than 0.01 per cent

In a thesis entitled, *The Development and Social Adjustment of the Jewish Community in Montreal* (1939), Judith Seidel has traced the sociological growth of the Jewish community in Montreal. It is of interest to note the patterns of settlement in the 20th century, and the close relationship between economic status and areas of settlement. As immigration continued into the 20th century, the new immigrants took up residence in the traditionally Jewish areas of settlement, while the more established population began moving in a northward and westward direction. By 1921 the old area of Jewish settlement (as shown in Map VI page 123), had begun to decline. Throughout that decade there was a marked drop in Jewish population in all the major 'downtown' areas of Jewish residence, and a shift of population towards Mt. Royal Avenue. In the year 1939 there were four major areas of settlement of Montreal Jewry. The first area of settlement, as shown on Map IX following, was bounded by Mt. Royal on the north, St. Denis on the east, Sherbrooke on the south, and Park Avenue on the west. This area contained most of the newly-arrived Jewish immigrants, and was therefore the lowest area socio-economically (Paull 1974:10). The second major area of settlement, as shown on Map X following, lay further north of the first area. Although slightly more affluent, this area was also very much inhabited by immigrant families. The third area, Map XI was Outremont and the fourth area (not shown) was Westmount (Seidel 1939:23-25).

There was a similar pattern of residential shifting in Toronto. Early Jewish settlers in their desire to gain acceptance within the framework of the dominant social system displayed residency patterns congruent with those of the general populace when not restricted to a
First Area of Jewish Settlement in Montreal 1939

Source: Steven B. Paull 1974
MAP X

Second Area of Jewish Settlement in Montreal 1939

Source: Steven B. Paull 1974
MAP XI

Third Area of Jewish Settlement in Montreal 1939

Source: Steven B. Paull 1974
specific location by the direct linkage between place of work and residence. With the advent of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe in the latter decade of the 19th century two distinctive Jewish communities arose in the city of Toronto which differed greatly in regard to length of settlement, socio-economic status, and degree of conditioning to mainstream Canadian social mores. This dichotomy was directly manifested in the residential sphere by the year 1901 as the older, prosperous, more acculturated group adopted a dispersed pattern of residence, while the Russo-Polish immigrants concentrated in a small area on the Western fringe of the central business district.

In the first two decades of the 20th century the continued persecution of East European Jews increased the population of Toronto tenfold: from 1,425 to 34,770. Rather than trying to integrate into the dominant societal framework,

... the Eastern European Jews created a richly diversified, yet culturally introverted network of social, religious, cultural and welfare institutions within which the individual Jew was effectively isolated from the general societal milieu. Attracted by the comfort and security of familiar values, language, and institutions, the Jewish immigrants voluntarily settled within the district identified as the realm of Eastern European Yiddish culture (Bain 1974:84-85).

Summary

This chapter has looked at ways in which the early Jewish immigrants settled in Toronto and Montreal where they desperately attempted to eke out a living.

The networks discussed permeated all life, reaching out to most members of the community. Within the areas of Jewish settlement the immigrant Jew could meet and talk to his fellow Jews, he could walk to
synagogue to pray, his relatives and friends could help him find a job or a place to live; shopping (and on credit) was in the vicinity; his children received religious and cultural instruction; there were cultural centres and theatres, young adult associations, old folks' homes and hospitals. There were few threats to his beliefs and values within the ghetto. He may starve in 'America' as he did in Europe. However, he may do so without the added fear of persecution from the non-Jewish population.

For the first few decades the immigrant had no need of a psychologist or psychiatrist; his neighbours were well-equipped to handle any problems which might arise. Demographic studies which have been done in Montreal and Toronto, show that the Jewish people did not begin moving out of the ghetto until the early 1950s.

It is in this milieu the Jew finds himself upon arrival in the New World. The people I talked to arrived anywhere from 1905 to 1930. In most cases there was someone to meet them on arrival, and if their journey took them to another city, then Jewish immigration agents were on hand to assist in helping them continue their travels or stay in the city. Montreal became the Ellis Island of Canada: most of the immigrants who came during the period under review were forced to pass through the city of Montreal as those arriving in the United States had to go through Ellis Island. This put a great strain upon the members of the community and made superhuman demands on its resources.

In the following chapters I will discuss the role of the needle trades, how and why the majority of Jewish immigrant workers went into the clothing factories of Montreal and Toronto for thirty to forty years of their lives.
CHAPTER VII

THE NEEDLE TRADES: A SHORT HISTORY

Introduction

The next two chapters are concerned with the Needle Trades, so called because the main operation in the assembly and decoration of apparel is sewing. The needle trades is a phenomenon of the late 19th century. It was not until the sewing machine was invented and accepted that an industry developed. Several factors contributed to the development of this phenomenon which will be discussed in this chapter.

Even though the industry itself did not develop until the 19th century, the tailor goes back to the Talmud where the Hebrew word for tailor, hayyat, is found. A Jewish community had to have a tailor "whose presence was necessitated by the obligatory ritual commandments such as sha'atnez (Baron, et al 1975:191). Sha'atnez is a material made from wool and linen. According to Jewish Law it is forbidden to mix diverse kinds (cf. Leviticus 19:19 and Deut.22:10). Wool comes from sheep which is animal, and linen comes from flax which is plant. Therefore the two cannot be woven together to form one, even as man cannot lie with beast to form something else.

Therefore in order that the Jew should not break this sacred law the Jewish tailor was depended upon first of all to have knowledge of this law, second to recognize such a material and third not to use it in the making of a garment. (Sha'atnez was used for interfacing and interlining clothes. When ready-made clothes became available, the very religious Jew would carry a pocket knife to make a small slit in the lining of the garment to ascertain that sha'atnez was not used to interline or interface it)
The last chapter dealt with the masses of immigrants who left their homelands in different parts of Eastern Europe and came to Canada. I have talked about their lives being changed thereby bringing about discontinuities. These discontinuities were felt both in the individual and in the group. For the individual the biological continuity was broken or disturbed. For the group the historical, the sense of being 'one people' was shaken by members of their natal community emigrating to various parts of the world: United States, Canada, Palestine, South America. Arriving in North America meant most of all the shattering of what Barbara Myerhoff refers to in *Number Our Days* as the "sense of unity of being a simple person". An example of this would be a young girl in Poland learning to embroider fancy clothes for the rich: she spends her training time sitting among other young girls in the home of the teacher. The same girl transported to a factory setting on Spadina Avenue in Toronto. Or the apprentice tailor in Russia running errands and looking after children between which he learns the trade. The same tailor in North America is bent over a 'whorring' sewing machine ten to twelve hours a day, surrounded by similar workers, and not earning one cent for the six to eight weeks that he is supposedly 'apprenticing'.

The worker of the Old Country left behind his simple life. Here he found himself a member of a larger family. For the majority it was an awakening to discover that they can fight for better working conditions and that the odds against getting beaten up and thrown in jail were less here than in the Old Country. They got beaten up over here not because they were Jews but because they were striking workers.

Life as a factory worker was not easy or simple in North America. It was far more complicated than what it was in Europe. They had to learn a new and different language; they had to take public
Girls learning sewing in the old country

Source: Roskies & Roskies 1975:128

T. Eaton Co. men and women working together 1904

Source: Harney & Troper 1975:78
transportation; they bought milk in bottles; they had to take lunch to work instead of either having their wives bring them lunch or going home to eat. Women left home for the first time to travel and work with other women and men. Most of all were the changes which took place in their social relations. The set pattern which evolved for immigrants was as follows: they arrived, were met by a lantsman, accommodation found. Once they were settled the first priority was finding a job — any job. Who does one turn to? The friend or relative who met you or your neighbours. It seldom went past this primary group. Once you found a job your next priority was to become somewhat independent, that is, paying your own way and not living off relative, friend or neighbour. You work hard, you perhaps save a little. Maybe you have someone still in the Old Country to bring over. So you save for a ticket or two. Soon you have enough saved for a better apartment, a few pieces of furniture, a little privacy and you move. Even though immigrants did not become rich overnight, or even in a decade, nonetheless social and geographic mobility was available through hard work. It was this mobility which contrasted so much with the stable rhythms of the Old Country. One could argue that hunger and persecution did cause disruption in Europe. However, this did not bring about social mobility. It only contributed to geographic dislocation.

In Canada the three major centres of the needle trades were Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg. New York City was the garment manufacturing capital of the world at the turn of the century and the slightest tremor in that mecca caused rumbles to be felt in every clothing manufacturing town and city in North America. It was in New York that the garment union came into being. It was in New York where young men
and women died in the tragic fire of the Triangle Shirt Waist Factory because working conditions were so bad that a simple electric wiring was not fixed; it was to New York that young people went when they could not find jobs in Montreal and Toronto. It was in New York that all the Jewish newspapers were first published — newspapers which were the organ of the cultural and union life of the people. By the 1920s Montreal and Toronto began to assume some of these roles.

**The Sewing Machine & The Garment Industry**

Not everyone was a tailor in Eastern Europe and not all who came to North America went into the needle trades. However, there were a number of people involved in other occupations who tried to find work in these occupations and who ultimately were forced into the garment manufacturing trade.

In order to understand how and why so many immigrant Jews (and subsequently other immigrant groups) went into the factories, one has to appreciate the manifold operations and consequent pervasiveness of the trade. It is not enough to be able to picture a person bent over a sewing machine furiously running garments through nimble fingers at lightening speed. This is only one small cog in the vast operation of manufacturing a complete wearing apparel. Some background will be given in order to understand the sociological aspects and implications of the needle trades.

In the late Stone Age people made garments by sewing together animal skins with leather thongs. Holes were made in the skins and the thongs were pulled through by the use of an hooked tool very much like a crochet hook. This was in northern Europe. In southern Europe, fine bone needles from the same period indicate that people were already wearing
woven garments and ancient civilizations of the Middle East had already developed weaving and embroidery. An important breakthrough occurred in Europe when the iron needle was invented.

Garments continued to be sewn by hand until cloth was factory produced in the 18th century. This stimulated the invention of the sewing machine. The first attempt was in 1830 by Barthelemy Thimonnier of Paris who produced 80 machines to manufacture army uniforms. However, these machines were destroyed by angry tailors who feared unemployment. This machine was improved upon and a subsequent sewing machine was invented by an American Elias Howe. But he felt the repercussions of angry American tailors and seamstresses. He took his sewing machine to Europe where he sold part of his patent. In 1851 Isaac M. Singer of Pittsburg designed a machine and the objections of tailors and seamstresses were finally overcome. Previous machines were handpowered but Singer designed the foot-powered machine. Whereas today some sewing machines sew 8000 stitches per minute, machines in the 19th century and early 20th century sewed 20 stitches per minute. Today we have programmed sewing, gang sewing and tandem sewing (Solinger 1974:750).

Technology made strides also in the tools for cutting the fabric. In 1860 the band-knife machine was invented in England which cut through several thicknesses of material at one time. This increase in cutting productivity gave impetus to the invention of the spreading machine which spread cloth from bolts of material in lays composed of hundreds of piles. Further, by the end of the 19th century button-hole machines were developed. However, these were not used for high grade garments (op.cit.)

Before 1905 all pressing was done by a stove-heated flatiron. In 1905 the first pressing machines were built which had no pressure, heat
or steam controls such as those built after 1940. Today one presser can operate four machines simultaneously as they shut off automatically (Solinger 1974:755).

The only major breakthrough in the making of clothing and footwear since primitive man was the flat-iron and the iron (later steel) needle. The textile manufacturing industry went forward but the developments in the technology of the sewing machine remained virtually at a standstill.

What were the social implications of the invention of the sewing machine? Even though the first garments made on these machines were of poor quality, they provided clothing for a large number of people who could not otherwise afford to buy material and have a garment made. Further, the advent of the machine changed the nature of craftsmen's shops and made them into small factories.

Cutting, sewing, pressing were three major phases in the manufacture of clothing. Under the rubric of these three categories one finds dozens of different operations. For example, in order to 'cut' or 'chop' a coat, the cloth has to be spread out, it has to be marked, it has to be cut, it has to be trimmed. Each of these jobs involves different types of operations and one would not find a marker doing the cutting or chopping. Pressing is not the process of removing wrinkles from a piece of cloth. It is the pressing of seams before and after the garment is sewn together. There are underpressers: those who press the garment between sewing operations; and there are over or finish pressers: those who press the finished garment. Sewers or operators as they were called, could be operators of pants, coats, cloaks, shirts, blouses, vests, and within each of these further division of labour is found: pockets, sleeves, lining, belts, buttons, collars, cuffs, trimmings, etc.
When the immigrant came off the boat he may not have been a tailor and being specialized in the operation of a particular aspect of the trade was even further removed from his mind. 'Sectionalization' or 'section work' was a term not yet part of the vocabulary of the immigrant Jew, or any other people, at the turn of the century.

The needles trade industry concerns itself with the manufacture of men's, women's and children's clothing. It is not involved in manufacturing furnishings, bed sheets, tablecloths, etc. It is an industry which began in the 1880s with the manufacture of coats and cloaks and was soon followed by the making of ladies' suits and then skirts. It was after World War I that the dress manufacturing industry took off.

In the United States, even before 1880, there appeared in the women's clothing industry the beginnings of the system of contracting. According to Louis Levine it was "the mental and industrial habits" of the Jewish immigrants which were responsible in some degree for the growth of such a system (1924:14). As noted in the chapter on the Shtetl, Eastern Europe had not been touched by the Industrial Revolution. These immigrants worked as artisans, journeymen and small craftsmen, some of them never having seen the inside of a factory. In their desire to find employment in the New Country, these people accepted work in 'outside' shops.

In Canada, in 1935, Frank R. Scott in a report on "The Nature of the Industry" wrote:

Today the making of men's outer clothing is carried on mainly in clothing factories, whereas not so many years ago it was done by hand in the home. The earliest clothing factories of which we have record in Canada, a few of which were established in Montreal and Toronto by 1875, operated according to methods midway between home and factory manufacture (Scott & Cassidy 1935:1).
Scott includes in his report an excerpt from an article by R. P. Sparks, in the Manual Of The Textile Industry In Canada, "The Garment & Clothing Industries, History & Organization":

The garments were cut on the premises of the wholesale clothing houses, tied into bundles with the linings and trimmings, and sent out into the country to be made up. Farmers for miles around would drive into the towns, carrying home the bundles of cut garments and these would be put together at home, being brought back a week later when the payment would be made on the basis of so much a garment (Scott & Cassidy 1935:1).

However, this method of manufacture was unsatisfactory because supervision was not possible and because only very rough and ill-fitting garments were produced. In order to build up the industry and market a better quality of ready-made clothes "contract shops" or "outside" shops were established in the towns and cities which, according to Scott, "progressively took over the actual manufacturing operations, apart from the cutting of the cloth". These shops then found a new and partially trained labour supply in the immigrants from Eastern Europe who began to settle in Montreal and Toronto in the latter part of the last century. These shops were known as 'outside' shops and those who owned them 'contracted' with the owners or manufacturers of 'inside' shops to make up the cut garments at so much per garment. Thus the owner of the outside shop assumed the role of middle man. He was paid so much per garment and he paid his workers less thus making himself a profit.

An 'inside' shop on the other hand was one which was directly connected with the selling department of the business. In some 'inside' shops garments were cut, made up, bushelled and examined, that is, the entire manufacturing process was done in one place. In some other 'inside' shops only the cutting and examining of garments were done and
the cut garments were 'contracted' to outside shops. The industry was consequently centered in the hands of the large manufacturers and owners of the inside shops.

By the turn of the century the industry in Canada had progressed to the point where these inside shops had increased. However, the contracting business, as late as 1935, was still going strong, "so that today" wrote Scott, many shops still have no cutting departments and do only specialized contract work on vests, pants or coats" (Scott & Cassidy 1935:2).

In addition to this form of employment in the early days it was a common sight to see men either trundling their sewing machines in push carts or carrying them on their backs, as they did in the Old Country. A tailor could work in a factory for weeks or months using his own sewing machine. When his services were no longer required he would pack up his machine and start looking for other work.

The only machine used in the trade for many years was the sewing machine and the cutting machine. Because the technology lagged behind the development of techniques for spinning and weaving textiles it required little overhead and capital investment for an enterprising man to start his own contracting or even go into partnership with someone. The sewing machine was cheap and could be bought on an installment plan or rented at a monthly rate. It did not take up much space in a small apartment or room. Power and energy was supplied by the worker himself because the machines were operated by foot. Further operating a sewing machine or using a needle is not a complicated process and therefore did not require extended training. This proved beneficial to the large manufacturer who did not have to worry about supervising the work or adjusting his work force according to style and season. For it must be
remembered that the garment industry did not offer work twelve months of the year. Work was seasonal. A worker would be employed for six to eight weeks working at a furious pace, for ten to twelve hours a day and then have nothing to do for three or four months.

This farming out of cut garments to be finished at home in an outside or contractor's shop also became known as the 'bundle brigade'. This then was the beginning of the sweat shops: of kitchens, attics, cellars, bedrooms, being converted into factories where the entire family and a few hired hands would work endless hours finishing bundles of cut garments.

Beginnings Of Jewish Involvement In The Industry

Joshua (Joe) Gershman was born in 1903 in Sokolow, a small town in the Ukraine. For many years he was editor of the Vochentblatt, a Canadian Yiddish weekly newspaper. When I asked him how the needle trades began in Canada, he said:

... very few of the Jews came with money and they didn't come as manufacturers and bosses. It has to do with a certain, I don't know what you would call it, whether a trend or a characteristic. I don't want to use the term characteristic because this is, in my opinion, politically wrong. It is not only limited to Jewish people. You see the first immigrants who came to this country didn't want to work all their lives for somebody else. They wanted to be on their own. And in the needle trade it was the easiest way.

If you know the trade, as soon as you get yourself two machines you can become yourself a small contractor. You take out work from bigger manufacturers. And in this way you gradually work yourself up to three machines, four machines. And even before they had these little factories there were the sweatshops where they used to have a machine in the bedroom or in the kitchen and do the work at home rather than work in a shop as a worker.

Many of them for instance in the cities of Toronto and Montreal (I know quite a few of them) started as workers and they had been very militant. But we knew. We worked
with them in the union. Some of them have been members of the Executive of the union. They fought for increases in wages; were excellent union men. But at the same time they would, in private discussions say, "I'm not going to stay in the shop very long. I'm not going to work for the lousy boss. I can be a better boss than him and treat my workers better than he does!" This is the kind of talk that went on. So this is the way it developed, you see.

There are some manufacturers here - take the boss of the big Tip Top Company, uh, what's his name? - he started with two machines in his kitchen. Dunkelman. Dave Dunkelman. He was a nobody and he worked himself up into one of the biggest clothing manufacturers in Canada.

You couldn't do that, you couldn't open a tool factory, could you? Or you can't run a pulp and paper industry in this kind of way! So naturally in this kind of trade it is very easy to become a boss. And because of that they came there. A great number of them came. Lantsman-shaften mainly. Also many people had uncles and brothers and grandfathers who had already been with manufacturing in the Old Country and they took them in also. This is the way it developed.

The needle trade industry, the clothing industry in Canada, had a small percentage of non-Jews, the owners. But that was at a time when it was very small. Canada didn't have eight million people then - less than eight million. But with the growth of the population, when the industry became important and independent, and could actually survive on what it produced and sold in Canada, never mind exporting, this has been developed mainly by Jewish manufacturers.

Ben Butel is the owner of a clothing manufacturing firm in Montreal. His business is both national and international. Ben was born in Austria. In 1918 Austria lost the war and the part that Ben came from was handed over to Romania. In 1921 he came to Canada. He had just turned 18. He worked as a peddler on his own for five and a half years. Whilst doing this he started looking into the possibility of investing a little money "now and then with somebody, to do a bit of manufacturing", said Butel. He saved enough money to bring over his sister, father, mother and later another sister and brother. He made a decent living from peddling. In 1925 he started to manufacture men's clothing as a side
line and in 1927 he gave up peddling in the country and came into Montreal to do business. He gave the peddling business over to his brother. I asked him to tell me how he started manufacturing. He said:

First I rented a place with a cutting table. Then I engaged a man to do the cutting. And there is such a thing in the clothing industry that you don't have to have your own machinery. You give it out to a contractor, you see. I never knew anything about tailoring, about clothing, about a thing. When my hired men asked me that they need some trimmings - you know what I mean by trimmings? - collars, canvasses and so on - I didn't know what they were referring to. Then when the parcel came in I used to sneak behind to see what's in it, so when they'll ask me the next time I'll know what its all about. And I have made up my mind that I'll try it for a year or two. If I'll break even I'll go on. If no, I didn't give up my business in the country and I could go back and do it. Thank God I started to make a modest living. Didn't have to worry for the month's rent or the money to give the family to live on.

Conditions were very poor in Canada in the early twenties. Then in 1929, 1930, 1931, 1932 you know we had the big crisis. Thank God I never suffered; that I started to make a modest living. I didn't have to worry about paying my bills, that I can't pay the rent, or won't be able to support my family that I had - father, mother, brothers and sisters. We were all living together.

I started making a little money every year - even during the Depression time I didn't go like this (he indicates with his thumb downwards), but I went the other way. And I'm in the game to this day.

Bertha Guberman spent most of her life in the needle trades in Winnipeg. Her explanation of the phenomenon of the garment industry being in the hands of Jewish immigrants goes as follows:

In the garment trade there were a few gentile employers but most of them were Jews. These Jewish employers had themselves come up from the ranks of the workers and they knew the tricks of the game. It's the easiest thing. A miner could never dream of
Pedlar's license

Source: Harney & Troper 1975:88

Street peddler

Source: Harney & Troper 1975:89
becoming a mine owner or a railway worker can never dream of becoming a railway magnate. But the needle trades worker — their psychology was not of a worker at that time. It was a psychology that: some day I'll get out and become an employer myself; which a lot of them did!

Because what do you need? You buy a machine and you have a corner in your basement and you start working. And you enslave yourself day and night and when you have a little cash you rent a dump someplace and you open up a shop. So the Jewish employers in the needle trades, most of them came up from the ranks, and they worked up and they know how to exploit.

"So he was so long a boss", said Pauline Chudnovsky, "that he enlarged his belt!"
CHAPTER VIII

THE NEEDLE TRADES: LONG HOURS, LOW PIECE RATES AND SWEATSHOP CONDITIONS

Introduction

Jewish immigrants left the towns and cities of Eastern Europe and emigrated to 'America' 'to be free. In this chapter we will see what it cost them. Brandes says:

In this process of emancipation - and freedom was not without its cost - what price would be required: in servitude to the machine, in sacrifice of tradition, in depersonalizing conformity, in urban squalor? (1976:1).

In this chapter I will explore how the woman coped and managed to work at home and in the factories. How she viewed herself and the world in which she and her family and friends functioned. The contribution made by women in the building and struggles of the needle trades union is hereby acknowledged. Unfortunately I cannot fully present and discuss the energetic and vital role they played in the clothing unions. Women predominated the trade and were not only in the vanguard (e.g. Triangle Shirt Waist Factory 1911 in New York and the garment workers' strike of 1912), but also instrumental in the fight to improve conditions in the shops and factories.

I will also explore how men carried on their affairs; how they looked upon what they did in the public sector; how they tended in their recollections to streamline their lives, from being born to participating in public affairs, with historical events. For example, one man said: I came at the time of that famous Wall Street Crash!

I will look at the various options open to the immigrant Jew who may or may not have had knowledge of the tailoring craft. I will also look at the struggles of these people to organize the unorganized,
Newsboy

Source: Harney and Troper 1975:90
to fight for better working conditions; their humiliation and their
victories in the struggle to unite themselves and those around them.

Perhaps by the end of this chapter we may discover why the
trade is so inviting to immigrants and what lures it offers those
who came to this Continent ignorant of its language and customs.

The Early Days

By the early days I mean the first few years after informants
arrived in Canada and that period of time it took them to adjust to a
new and different environment. Most of them were met by relatives and
friends, usually lantsman, members of their natal community. Some who
had neither were met by Jewish Immigration Aid Society people. Some
immigrants after surviving the trials and tribulations of bribing their
way across borders and somehow managing to pay for their passage found
themselves being put back on the ship and deported to their last port.
Many of these unfortunate people were 'saved' by the Jewish community if
their plight were known and if something could be done to legalize
their entry.

Mr. Shano was born in 1884. He remembers when Laurier was
elected the first time to Parliament in 1896. He never told me his
first name. The day I visited him at Maimonides Hospital in Montreal
was not a very good day for him. He was not as lucid as he sometimes
is. "You know when I'm rested then everything comes into my mind", he
said. As a result he had difficulty remembering. However, he told me
of an incident which he said he would never ever forget:

Sometimes ... sometimes I can dream up something
about what I had done. .... I think I was
instrumental in saving a man from being sent back to Europe because he didn't have a place where to stay here. I was a boy then going around with newspapers, here in Montreal, and in the two months vacation that we get from school - I went to school here - I used to go down to the wharf, on the boats, and sell magazines to the sailors. By going on a boat I met a Jew to be sent back to Europe. It didn't take long. When I came down from the boat I met a Jew, a Consul from Mexico, and I told him about it. He didn't take half an hour and the man was gone.

(Shano laughs as though he were part of a conspiracy)

That time I remember. But that's not the question. The question is that he got free. That means I was instrumental in saving his life; from having him sent back. I was a boy then going around with papers, you know. That's about every bit of 75 years ago. These things you really can't forget.

He happened to strike me on the main street in later years. He recognized me. He didn't know what to do with me!

Shano and Blugerman were the oldest men I spoke to and they were the earliest arrivals amongst my informants. Shano arrived here when he was young enough to go to school. Blugerman arrived in 1908 when he had finished technical school. Unfortunately Shano could remember very little. Blugerman on the other hand amazed me with all he could recall:

I arrived in Toronto in the spring, in March 1908. I was 23 years old. On arrival, brother and I, we were well looked after by Uncle Hyman Chaikoff and for a few weeks we were welcome guests and nobody thought anything about looking for a job. We couldn't speak a word of English. My uncle was working steady as a foreman in a cabinet factory and the auntie with her children was cooking anyways. The bread and milk and the meat was five cents, ten cents, fifteen cents, and a basket of tomatoes that we were so proud of, cost us a double basket, twentyfive cents. So there was no problem at the time when a fellow is working steady like my uncle. So we were well taken care of.
So uncle started to look for something for us to do. I had picked up cabinet-making at the Technical School and my older brother, Joe, was half a mechanic in the Technical School when he finished in Odessa.

Uncle found me a friend of his, a tailor, a Max Persutsky, at Church and Dundas Streets who agreed to take me in to teach me the tailoring trade. Uncle bought me an old bicycle for $8 so that I could travel from Kensington Avenue to Church Street to the tailor store to become a tailor.

My first job was to use the bicycle and deliver things. Mr. Persutsky gave me lessons on how to underpress garments that he was making to order. In other words, he was teaching me the beginnings of the tailoring business by being a seam presser - an underpresser with a hand iron.

Uncle told his friend that I can work in the factory free for two months without any payment as long as I learn something to do. I realized that I can already be an underpresser and I suggested to uncle to see if he has a friend in the T.Eaton Company in the men's clothing or the ladies'.

In 1908-1909 Blugerman worked nine hours a day as an underpresser. He started at 8 a.m. and worked until 6 p.m. His uncle had a friend who worked in the men's department of T. Eaton Co. who spoke to the foreman "who happened to be a Canadian: a lovely Canadian gentleman who gave me the job", said Blugerman. He was told the minimum wage was $6 per week for an eight hour day for an apprentice. However, there were others who worked longer hours. He worked there for nine months and became an overpresser, that is, he pressed finished garments. He still did not know how to speak English and all his business with the foreman, a Canadian, was conducted through an interpreter.

Within the year Blugerman met Gerty Soren who was an operator in the ladies' department at Eatons and "we decided to get married because Eatons was paying married people a minimum of $9 a week", said Blugerman.
Jimmy Blugerman's story is a success story compared to those of others. When Samuel Nemetz arrived in Fort St. John in 1919 he had only $10 in his pocket instead of the required $25. He was arrested and was to be deported. The Jewish Immigration Aid Society tried to help him. His uncle's lawyers tried to help him. A sister whose husband had left her stranded with a baby and taken off for the United States was of no help either, because as Sam said, "they don't take notice of those kind of people. You got to have somebody else that works", meaning somebody who has a job, who can support you. He had another sister, "she was working making pants in a shop. ... her application they accepted. Otherwise they might have sent me back to Antwerp there. That's what they did at that time", said Nemetz.

Nemetz lived with his sister and her husband and two children. He did not earn any money for the first few months that he worked twelve hours a day "learning the skills" of tailoring. His story is as follows:

I arrived in Montreal on January 1919 from Katherineslav, Russia. In the Old Country I was a journeyman shoemaker and was a good machine operator. In Montreal my brother-in-law suggested that I change this work and start as a tailor and get myself a job as a tailor. Accordingly, to his advice, this is what I had done. I found a job in a tailor's shop with the help of some lantsman.

In this shop I worked for a number of weeks without pay. In those days we were told we were learning the job, we had no skills, so we received no pay. The shop was a contractor's shop.

I remember it was an old shop. I came in there. They introduced me: a father, son and daughter. They were contractors. They took on the contract from somebody else and they are making the garments. So they give me a job. I was glad that they accepted me. They had to teach me so they can have the benefit from
me. I could sew; make a seam; make it straight. That I could do. And I was quick too. There were a lot of parts in a garment.

In the contractor's shop where I started, I worked from 7 in the morning until 6 in the evening. But the others were already at work when I got there at 7 and they were still working when I left at 6 in the evening.

After six weeks of working in the contracting shop—and as for the hours I worked without pay you are in a better position to figure that out. With the help of a neighbour of mine, I was fortunate to get myself a job in an inside shop. It was known as Levinson's factory. The Levinson shop was officially a union shop. The hours were from 7 in the morning to 5 in the evening. Saturday was not a working day but we worked on Sunday from 7 a.m. to 12 noon. It was known as a union shop under the United Garment Workers' Union.

In spite of it being a union shop no union official had the right to come into the shop. The shop had a Shop Committee which made it its business to see to it that the hours of work were kept. This Committee looked after beefs and complaints. However, we lacked the right to collect dues. So we used to do it outside of the shop on the steps. At that time it was 25¢ a month.

Together with low earnings and still long hours, the work was also seasonal. The most you got was about eight months of work—either winter or summer garments. Thus we never earned enough to keep body and soul together. It is because of these scandalous conditions that there developed folk sayings about not being able to see one's child awake because we left when the child was asleep and returned late in the evening when the child was asleep.

Samuel Nemetz is here referring to the poem, well-known to all in and around the needle trades, by Morris Rosenfeld "Mayn Yingle", My Little Boy. It is also a sad and beautiful Yiddish song:

I had a little boy  
A little son so fine  
And when I look at him I think:  
The whole world is mine.

But seldom, seldom do I see him  
My lovely one, awake.  
I always find him sleeping,  
I see him only at night.
My toil drives me out early,
And brings me home so late.
O, strange to me is my own flesh,
And strange my own child's glance.

(Translated from the Yiddish as cited by Ruth Rubin in Voices Of A People 1963:353.)

Albert Abramovitz said that some Jewish newspapers described life here as being 'like a paradise'. He said such a rosy picture was painted for them. It described life here in a way ...

...that a worker in my trade, or in the dresses, or in the cloak industry, could make about $350 a week. The furniture that they discard here is much better and nicer than the rich ones in Poland buy when it is new!

When you read articles like that ....

Abramovitz came to Toronto because he had no family left in Poland. He had a brother in Montreal and one in Toronto. One of them sent him his papers and ticket to come here. When Albert arrived in Montreal his brother did not meet him. There had been a foul up in communication. However, he had his brother's address and so he took a cab to his place. But his brother had left for Winnipeg! He stayed with a friend for a few days and then left for Toronto to be with his other brother. He lived with his brother and family for two or three months and then "rented a room and got a little job" making $7 or $8 a week which was just enough to get along. How did you get the job? I asked. Did you find it yourself? "It's a little story by itself", said Albert:

My brother was married to the sister of the son-in-law of one of the biggest clothing manufacturers in Toronto, Tip Top. When I was at the office of the son-in-law there was a brother to my sister-in-law by the name of Harry Tate who came up to see me. My brother asked him: Do you know whether Cohen can take him up? Harry Tate said: Cohen has no more factory. He is out of it and Dunkelman took over the whole thing, the Tip Top. But Cohen's brother has another factory that is doing contracting. I'll talk to him. Maybe he'll give him a job.
So he spoke to this other fellow who said I should come up and see him on such and such a day, he has a job for me.

And this is the way I got my first job. I went up there, but there was little work at that time in contracting and I didn't get the job which I should have gotten. He gave me what I learned later on was a girl's job. Not that a man couldn't do it but because it didn't pay enough they usually took in girls for that job. They gave me a job on special machines but they only gave me $7 a week which was very little even in those days when the dollar was a dollar and a penny counted.

It was an understood and accepted fact that a man must find a job in order to support himself if he is alone or support his family, whether it be brothers, sisters, father, mother, or wife and children. For the female immigrant the lines were not always so well defined. Some who came tried to find work and found they were hopeless at the task. Others were young girls who should have remained in school but were forced to go out and earn a living. Still others never had the opportunity of going to school, whether day or night, but found themselves plunged into working all day in a factory and all night at home. Those who came with husbands and children sometimes managed to find someone to take care of their children whilst they went out to work; or else they took in roomers and boarders to augment the meagre salary. However, the latter was no guarantee of steady income. These roomers and boarders were usually in similar straits and if out of work were seldom thrown out of the house. So one ended up not only getting less money each week but having an extra mouth to feed as well.

Bluma Kogan's father came to Toronto in 1909 from Proskola, in the province of Davidornia. The family was very poor and since the father had cousins here he made application to emigrate to Canada. Friends in Toronto got together the money for him to come. After he had been here a few years he sent for three of the six children. Bluma said:
Sylvia Klein's family, (showing her husband, the pocket-maker and oldest daughter Molly); Grandfather is in the back.

Courtesy: Claire Klein Osipov, front centre

Photographic reproduction: Joshua Berson
My sister Dora, my brother Morris and myself came here first. I began to work, my brother began to work, and my sister Dora was too young to work. Anyhow we chipped together things. We took a little piece of very dirty quarters to live. And I worked there day and night after work to make it livable. I collected horse manure from the streets and bought some lime and made a paste and plugged up holes in the home. It was raining into the rooms, I plugged those holes up. After that I bought some paper and papered. And it looked a little bit brighter.

In the first room was a great big old stove. It was dirty and not working. Somehow we got rid of it and bought a smaller one. I remember there was a closet behind where the stove was. It was very, very filthy, full of cockroaches and rats and was very, very bad. And my father and myself worked there. We plugged up all the holes, papered it and put light and it became bright and clean. When people came in they didn't recognize it.

The front room was large with a table to eat and a stove to heat and a sink with water. It was off the street, a couple of steps and a door to come in. We didn't have a bathroom. The bathroom was someplace outside.

Bluma Kogan worked all her life in the factories of Toronto.

On the other hand Sylvia Grafstein Klein came from Oftravske, Poland in 1921. She was only 16 years old. Her cousin, with whom she lived for a short period, said to her: "Silvie you haven't got a trade. What are you going to do?" Sylvia said she was prepared to go out and look for work. So her cousin took her to a place where they made purses. Sylvia said:

So I start making purses. ... I spoil them. The man said to me: "What did you do in Europe?" "Well" I said, "I didn't do. I lived with my grandparents." So he said to me: "You come back some other day."

And that was Sylvia Klein's short-lived effort at holding a job. She got married soon after to a pocket-maker who worked in the needle trade industry for forty years. Sylvia never went out to work. She raised five children on one man's meagre income. An extravagance on the part of her fiancé in the form of a diamond engagement ring, kept the family
in food many a time. Her children recall today how the ring, which she still treasures, went in and out of the pawnshop every time their father was out of work or on strike.

Hyam Liebovitch was a cabinet maker in Romania and when he came to Montreal he looked for work in the same trade. Through a friend he found a man who needed a good carpenter to build a store on St. Catherine Street West. He worked there a couple of weeks but 'nobody got paid', said Liebovitch. "He went bankrupt and they closed up the place with my tools and everything. Can't touch nothing and you get no money either."

Liebovitch said:

I went over to the guy. I couldn't talk in fact no English. I spoke a couple of words. I told him its my tools. I have no money. I have to make a living. I cannot leave my tools and they owe me money also. I went away. After three weeks I was able to take my tools out but I couldn't get any money from the guy.

So I figure I will see what I can do again. I went to look for a job. A month, two months, four months go by and still no job. So I went - there's a show at St. Catherines and St. Lawrence, the Midway I think they call it. It used to cost 15c to go and see a show. I went in there and met some boys and we made friends and one said to me: "I'm looking for a job, he's looking for a job and you are looking for a job. If we could find some jobs! Where could we find some jobs!"

Well he heard of this job where they are looking for young boys to carry advertisements around to the houses. I said: Let's go down. We could lose nothing! We went down there and we took the job. We didn't ask what the price was and they didn't tell us what they gonna pay. We are working for two weeks carrying around the advertisements: steps up, steps down, and nu, I don't have a coat, no jacket, just a uniform jacket and here it was cold wintertime and freezing. What did I do? I had a big handkerchief, a red handkerchief and I covered my mouth, my face. The hat I pulled down over my ears. And we went down to carry the advertisements. We finished two weeks. I was waiting for the two weeks already so we could get some money. I come to the end of the two weeks and they give me $1.35. I look them over and I said: "What is this? Charity? I worked two weeks!"

"That's the price. You like it, keep it. If not, go."
That's what the man said to me. I take the $1.35 and I throw them right back in the face. I was not scared. I go away from there and I say to the boys: "What are we going to do? We were working two weeks and we cannot .... he does not want to give us more than $1.35 pay a person for two weeks." I said I am not going to collect. I'm going to knock his teeth out. I'll go back and I don't give a damn what is going to be!"

The other boys were like Canadians because they had been here a long time already. So they said: "Don't start it. You could get arrested. And who is going to take you out? You are going to be in trouble." So I went back to the man and I said: "Look" and I give a hammer with the hand on the desk. I said: "Are you going to pay me or not, once and for all?" He saw that I was mad. He went and took $2 and throw me in the face. So I took the two dollars and I went away. I went away. I come home. I nearly cry. I have to keep up my sister and myself and I was living in an uptown home with a poor family. The name was Mrs. Breitman. And she said: "Don't worry. You're a young man. My son is working. He's a presser. He makes a living for us. We'll give you to eat. We'll give you a room. We'll keep your sister and don't worry about it. Don't worry about it."

I said: "Look, I cannot you should keep me up when I haven't got the money to pay." So what I used to do? I used to get up in the morning at six o'clock and go looking around for a job.

Liebovitch went to a piano factory and asked for a job. He could not speak English. There was an Italian foreman there who had worked in Romania and Bucharest and who could speak Romanian. He was told he would be making only one component of the piano. He did not have much choice so he took the job. After working two weeks he received his pay envelope. The first week's pay was withheld for security. He found only $5 in the envelope. He said:

I started to scratch my head. I said: What the hell is going around in here. They told me in Canada they sew a button and make five dollars. I'm a cabinet maker with golden hands. I can't even make a living around here. What am I doing? I think I will try and get out of Montreal and go to the United States.

He could not cross the border into the United States. For a year he was without work and his landlady supported him and his sister.
By an accidental turn of events he found himself knocking out walls and building windows from which he was able to make some money. He came as a cabinet maker who prided himself on never using nails and ended up being a building contractor.

**Working Conditions**

At the turn of the century immigrants were striving to establish a foothold in their new environment. Some who had been here a little longer and had perhaps come with a little money made efforts towards becoming self-employed and hiring others to work for them. These began as small enterprises with two or three machines in the kitchen or bedroom. These small 'factories' sewed or finished the cut garments. The cut garments were 'bundles' which were picked up from larger shops where they had the space for cutting tables on which to spread and mark and chop the cloth. A cutting room required a little more capital investment for long tables, for spreading machine, for a cutting knife machine. In the early period of the industry such a shop would employ the aristocrats of the trade, so called because they had an important job to do. A cutter, if he knew his trade well, could save the boss a lot of money by cutting the garment prudently. These men (they were all men in the cutting room) wore black pinstripe suits, vests and a watch fob across their waists: hence the name aristocrat.

From the cutting room bundles of cut garments would be picked up by small contractors and taken home to finish. In many cases this would involve either the nuclear family or extended family, such as father, mother, sons and daughters, or father, mother and either of their brothers, sisters, cousins. Conditions in these contracting shops were terrible. People worked, ate and slept sometimes in the same room.
Carving:  My Memories of My Baba

Carver:  Sidney Sarkin

Photographer:  Joshua Berson

Sidney Sarkin 1980

Photographer:  Joshua Berson
They often worked from early in the morning to very late at night finishing these garments because the contractor or boss of his little factory got paid by the garment. If he got a dollar per dress how much would he have left to pay his employees after his overhead? If they were members of one family and lived together then it was not quite so bad. But when one of his employees had himself or a family to support, as Samuel Nemetz, then the pittance received in relation to the hours worked was far below subsistence level. Most informants told me they stayed away from the contracting shops because it never paid them to work there. Owners of cutting rooms and manufacturers used to play one contractor against another and thereby get work done for even less money.

Members of families who were at home anyways and those who could not leave children to work outside were the ones most victimized by this system of contracting. Next came the poor immigrants, like Nemetz, who were told they did not have the necessary skills.

Profile of Sidney Sarkin: His Early Days & How He Became A Cutter

On arrival from the Old Country, immigrants were first taught to make a home for themselves, to get work, to find a job. In Sidney's case there was an alternative. His family was well-to-do and wanted him to have an education. However, coming from a socialist and revolutionary background, he felt he must "immediately go into the workers' movement, join a union and become a proletarian". Members of his family in Montreal were owners of a number of clothing factories and two jobs were held open for him and his brother on arrival in 1921. Sidney rejected the offer with much thanks and his family finally conceded that he should go his own way.

He started working for Rubin Brothers, cousins of his by marriage, as a sweeper at $5 a week. His main concern at the time was
not to be misunderstood by his fellow workers: being a cousin of the boss immediately put him in a category apart from them. Also he had just arrived from St. Johns, New Brunswick, where his mother's sister lived, and the family having wealth, he was dressed in the latest and best fashion. Sidney said:

It aroused the sentiments of the workers when I used to go and wash myself; that such a nice-looking fellow, so well-dressed, is being treated by his cousin in this manner - as a sweeper! And I was tickled pink because you see that meant I had made contact with the workers. The women, the girls, used to watch me going into the washroom and used to hand me a towel to clean myself ... ... That is how I broke the ice. They did not look upon me as the boss' stooge but as one of them.

Sidney made the same impression on the cutters, the aristocrats of the needle trades. In connection with the needle trades at that time, there were regulations prevailing as far as the cutters were concerned. The contract with the cutters is part and parcel of the collective agreement. It allowed one assistant to every ten cutters. Everyone who came from the Old Country, unless he already possessed a trade, started by sweeping in the factories. From cleaning the floor, your next position was message boy to the cutters. If you showed promise and were destined for the cutting room you moved closer to the handling of the scissors by cutting undercollars. Then you became an assistant cutter and finally a cutter. From sweeper to cutter took a period of five years.

The cutting room at Rubin Brothers was made up of a section of nine men, the majority of whom were Jews, with one Englishman and one Frenchman. Amongst the Jewish cutters there were two brothers named Barkin. They had both come back from fighting in the First World War. One brother had applied at the outbreak of the War to join the Navy. On the application form he had to fill in his religious denomination. He was terribly disappointed to find out that Jews could not enlist in the
Canadian Navy. They could join, fight and die in the Army but not in the Royal Navy! It appears the man had grown up in Canada and considered himself a Canadian and it was consequently a great disappointment. This was Sidney's first acquaintance with 'honest-to-goodness Canadians' and they became close friends.

The friendship helped Sidney along towards the cutter's table. After a month of sweeping, he became part of the cutting room; he was allowed to chop (cut) cloth and the undercollars of the garment. As mentioned above, the apprenticeship period was five years. However, in Sidney's case a concession was made and with the consent of the union. (If you are not listed, as a cutter with the union, you cannot accept a position as a cutter). Sidney said:

During the 1910-1920 period, the clothing industry as a whole was moving slowly into the hands of the Jewish people, not only in the numbers of workers employed but also in ownership. For example, there was an English firm which employed fifty cutters, which was unheard of, and fifty cutters in those days produced, that is, cut thousands of garments per day. They used to pile the cloth up, some 20 to 30 high, and cut them with electric cutting machines. The English actually had the monopoly of the cutting trade but it was beginning to shift. There was keen competition from Jewish-owned small shops which had lower overheads, greater production and brought down the price of the garment. Thus the larger firms could not compete.

Also Jewish workers tried their damndest to get their sons into the cutting trade instead of being operators. Through begging the bosses, and also because of the fact that they were faster and more productive than the average, it finally came to a point where they managed to get one of their sons into the cutting room. Thus in the period between 1921-24 the English were practically cleaned out of the cutting rooms.

However, in Toronto the cutting trade was firmly held in the hands of the English and they employed every means in their power to keep out Jewish workers. As late as when Sidney became a Business Agent (that
is, an officer of the trade union) in 1935, there were only three Jewish cutters out of approximately three hundred. As far as the other operations in the clothing factory were concerned the Jews held the absolute majority both in Montreal and Toronto.

Point Of A Needle

Our knowledge of the past comes to us either through those who have survived it or from the writings of those who have experienced it. The knowledge I am speaking of is that of feelings, fear, pain, joy, terror - these cannot be found in archeological digs nor in history books. The shards found in such places are mute insofar as human feelings are concerned. Here is a story of a day in the lives of those who worked in a clothing factory, by Zalmon Libin:

POINT OF A NEEDLE

Strangely quiet in the shop today! Not because of slack time. There's the hum and commotion of the wheels of sewing machines; there's the clacking of shears; there's the whistling and whining of steam. But these are the turmoil of dumb noises - the unchanging speech of cold iron which is without knowledge, without feeling, without understanding, and which remains indifferent no matter what happens.

But the workers themselves are quiet.

Operators, basters, finishers, are seated at their work like mutes, sadly quiet ... ...

Abe, the jester, utters no quips and there is no laughter. Sam and Hymie, always at odds with one another, are not wrangling today and are no source of joy to anyone; Hanna the finishers, is not singing; Dave, her accompanist, is not humming and no ear is turned toward them. ... ...

Among the men there is no discussion of the news of the day. ... ... among the women there is no gossip-mongering ... Quiet - all are seated as if transfixed - all seem to be mourning ... On the faces of all there is the sign of secret suffering, giving the impression
that all of them are sorrowing over the death of a dear one and that they are engaged in sewing shrouds.

The cause of this breathless silence is a cut in wages - a fresh and still bleeding wound in the hearts of the workers, left there last night by the foreman, the employer's dull and rusted knife ...

And no one speaks, no one laughs, no one jests, and no one sings ... ... Everyone is preoccupied with this fresh wound. Everyone is embittered, irritated, everyone alone with his pain.

There is quiet in the shop.

Dolbin, one of the operators, is steeped in his work but his thoughts are figuring the extent of his loss and keep on measuring the cost, in blood-money, which the decreased pay envelope will reveal ... it will be quite a sum ... he is hurt and deeply vexed. ... ... On top of this, Dolbin has another worry; he has drawn a bad lot, a pack of sorrows, and he cannot extricate himself - his bundle of work consists of such cheap, hard cloth. Once he has driven the needle in, he must labour and sweat to draw it out again. The pattern, too, is difficult and from time to time he must rip open what he has sewn with such outlay of effort and blood. ... ...

Dolbin tears his hairs, bites his lip till he draws blood. ... His heart grows faint with dismay and pain.

Other workers who had drawn their bundles of cloth at the same time Dolbin did, are through and many, in fact, are finishing their second bundles ... He, Dolbin, is still labouring over the first lot ... he feels that his limbs are growing numb.

He is as pale as a corpse... his limbs are trembling from suppressed rage and hurt.

Finally he finishes the work, wipes the sweat from his face, and, with a curse, carries the completed work downstairs to the office.

Abe, the jester, suddenly discovers that the point of his needle has broken. He has no other needle;
to run out to buy one will be a loss of time.
He knows that Dolbin has several needles in the
drawer of his machine. But he also knows that
Dolbin is as mad as the devil and he will, under
no circumstances, lend or even sell a needle. Abe
walks over to Dolbin's machine and tries to find
a needle.

The drawer is locked. Abe hits on an idea:
he removes the needle from Dolbin's machine and
inserts in its place the needle he has taken from his
own machine.

The "hands" in the shop smile faintly as
Abe resumes his work.

Dolbin returns, bringing back the same
bundle of work .... His pale face is spotted with red
flushes, his eyes flash with terrifying light.

Everyone knows what has happened .... No one
dares to ask a question .... A sudden shiver runs over
Abe's body. ....

Dolbin hurled the bundle beside his machine,
flung himself into his chair, dug his hands into his
hair and sat, bewildered, beaten as by an overpowering
blow.

"Do them over?" someone asked.

Dolbin remained silent.

"The whole damned business?" someone else wanted
to know.

Dolbin said nothing but his eyes were suddenly over­
run with tears.

Dolbin picks up a garment ... his hands are trembling
... he examines his work and sighs - sighs so strangely
that it seems as if the place from which the sigh escaped
was a rent in his heart. In silence he puts the garment
in place under the needle.

The wheel turned - there was a screech from the
broken needle.

"What's this? Who did it?" And Dolbin cast a
wild and terrifying glance around him.
Abraham turned pale.

"You, Abe?"

"You have a few others ... I'll pay you ..."

A pair of large steel shears flew straight at Abe with terrific force ...

A shout of terror breaks from all the workers.

The shears pierce Abe's shoulder, pierce deep into the flesh and remain there ... ... blood flows ...

Abe's head falls forward ... there is an outcry and wild commotion.

Dolbin stands up, a terrifying figure.

"Serves you right ... don't grab ..." he says and his body shakes as if from cold and he smiles with a frozen, diabolic smile.

Suddenly the boss ran in.

Apparently some one had informed him about what had taken place because he had no sooner come in than he was shrieking:

"All because of a needle! Murdurers, cut-throats, the whole gang of you should be sent to Sing-Sing"

(Translated by Henry Goodman, 1961:138-141)

One of my informants went through life meeting one misfortune after another. Greenberg is the man whose mother died in Eastern Europe jumping off the roof. She needed medical attention and thought, poor woman, she could get it this way. When Greenberg came to Montreal he found it hard trying to get a job. When he did find something it usually did not work out or did not last too long. It took him three or four months to find something else. He started by working in different contracting shops.

"Tell me about the contracting shops, Mr. Greenberg" I said.
He told me:

The contracting shop was no good because I worked in a contracting shop and they used me for $2.50 a week. I used to work hard, you know. I was young. I was worth more than that much but that is all they paid me. What could I do? I worked for Oliver and Sons. I worked all week. I used to go in at seven in the morning and work till eleven, twelve at night.

At that time I made about $5 or $6 a week. But he didn't want to pay me. He had a brother always used to fight around. Sometimes he used to take three weeks until I got a dollar from him. He didn't want to pay me at all. But I couldn't help myself. At least the dollar or two that he gave me was something.

... You want me to explain this to you? This Oliver had a shop, but he didn't pay the workers. You see the contracting business was no good. He wanted to keep the money himself. The bundles we used to work on he got from the factories and we used to work on them for him. There were about a dozen people working for this Oliver. And it was a shop not in his house.

The thing is, you see, when it came to pay day, he says he hasn't got the money. So you ask how can we eat? How can we eat? There was a man, he was a veteran also who worked for him. He was a head operator. He was a big shot and he worked for him and when it came to pay he says to the boss: 'Pay me what's coming to me'. The boss says: 'I haven't got no money'. The operator says: 'You are taking money from the manufacturers, why don't you give me for a living? I don't get out of the shop until you pay me'. The boss says: 'I haven't got!' So one of his brothers wanted to go fight with the operator. But the operator says, 'I'm not afraid. If you fight with me, eye for eye, and if you don't pay I'll knock the whole thing out!'

So Oliver paid him but the others who were weak he didn't pay. What could you do? I got $2, $3, sometimes; and sometimes nothing. What could I do and I worked till eleven o'clock at night.

Greenberg moved around for a year unable to find a steady job or one which would pay him living wages. His brother-in-law took him up to S. Rubin Co. and for less than minimum wages, anywhere from $3 to $5 a week, he worked as a replacement for people away sick or with
an overload of work. Sometimes, because the foreman was a nice man and 'gave him a chance' he was able to work until eleven and twelve at night and make a little overtime. By the time Greenberg worked himself up to $35 a week he got sick and discovered he had tuberculosis of the bone in his leg which subsequently had to be amputated. Again he was out of work for a year and a half. He was married by now with a family and having to pay rent at $16 per month. But said Greenberg "we managed".

'Managing' appears to be the key word for all immigrants whether it was in the Old Country or the first few decades in Canada. No matter what conditions were like, 'somehow we managed' they said. How did they manage? How did they cope? That they were sitting there telling me about it was in some way a testimony of the fact.

Did people succumb, go under, die of starvation? Did luck play a part? So often people would say: I guess I was lucky, we had enough food to eat. Or, I guess I was lucky to leave Poland because all of my relatives who never came over died there. "Managing" became an art and immigrants became past masters at it. How did they do it? How did you feed a family on $3 a week?

In the early decades of the 20th century bread was five cents a loaf. "It was cheap" I was told. Even then no one bought fresh bread at five cents a loaf. "My father used to go downtown and buy a big bag of bread, day old bread, for which he paid fifteen cents, twenty cents. We used to have it for a week or so. Used to put it in the stove and cover it up", said Jennie Litvak. Some parts of meat one got for free. A whole box of tomatoes would cost thirty or thirty-five cents and a sack of potatoes even less than that.
Abe & Sylvia Klein (approximate date 1945)

Courtesy: Claire Klein Osipov

Photographic reproduction: Joshua Berson
"You remember the poverty", said Molly Klein Goldman, daughter of a tailor, "but you really didn't know you were in it because everybody else that you lived with had the same problem".

The woman's world. How did they look at their world? How did they reconcile their lives with the New World, the new hardships? The older ones managed. An older woman was content to look after home, cook for children and boarders, wash and sew. She may never have needed to learn English because she never entered the work world. Communication in the languages she knew was maintained between herself, family, friends and the few shop owners she had to deal with who were all Jewish.

But the young girls (and boys) came with great expectations: they were never going to need or want another thing! However, this is not what the New World held for so many of them. They did not get paid unbelievable sums of money for very little work! Their dreams of an education, of an easier life, of falling in love instead of employing the services of the dreaded shadchan, marriage-broker, were not in store for them. They found comfort later in their lives when they transferred some of their dreams and yearnings to their children. But at the time they came to Canada all was not rosy and comfortable.

What were their experiences and thoughts? How did they cope with the transformations of their lives and surroundings? Jennie Litvak came to Montreal when she was thirteen. What was it like when she first came and had to go out to work?

She said:
Now I remember being very miserable and crying every single day of work because first of all I was very lonely. I was new here. I was very sensitive. I wanted an education but I couldn't go to school formally, only at night. We were very poor. I used to go out at night and buy bread from the day before which I don't mind eating now but in those days if you bought some rolls you paid a penny a roll. And you bought a herring - it was very cheap you know. I used to go to bed hungry many, many times.

We used to buy bananas. Our meals consisted of things like that - bananas and Kraft cheese, and bread and rolls from the day before which you got for next to nothing. Those days bread was five cents so you got a bread from the day before for two cents, three cents, you see.

Those were horrible times. I still remember we used to go to bed hungry. Even my brother Harry who came after me and alone - we didn't all come together because father couldn't possibly bring over a family of five people all at once. So my brother Harry came next and he recalls going out to pick up some food for the next day late at night.

They went to bed hungry and got up the next morning and went to work for ten hours with perhaps a half hour off for lunch. Breakfast usually consisted of coffee and bread and butter, probably black bread. For lunch a banana with bread and butter and cheese. "When I was making $4 a week I used to get a nickel everyday" said Jennie. She got a nickel from the family coffers where everyone's earnings went. "And what would you buy with the nickel?" I asked. So she said:

Well a couple of biscuits, or even a bag of french fries. That was part of the meal because the sandwich I brought from home. So the chips helped. My friend's sister lived near where we worked and we used to go there for lunch sometimes. They had a little store where they served food. We would go upstairs to their small kitchen and finish our meal. We had the privilege of getting a drink. Those were good days.

After a day's work dinner might consist of a soup made on the weekend with a piece of meat. Or sometimes a stew. Chicken was only on very
special occasions. Most of the time it was herring, tomato or an egg. Sometimes if you had a relative who was better off than yourself, you were invited to dinner and "we could have more of a decent meal" said Jennie. On weekends, Jennie and her father visited lantsman, the Goldenbergs, "and there we would get nice food, my father and I, because they had a wholesale grocery so there was no problem of a nice meal or nice sardines". Every weekend Jennie used to take her ironing there, have a good hot bath and sometimes Mrs. Goldenberg would even sew her some clothes; and for these privileges, as she calls them, "those were good days" and the family 'managed'.

Father was the boss and was very strict. Girls were not allowed to put on make-up and lipstick. The young men they associated with had to have father's approval.

Everyone's earnings went into the common pot. Groceries were bought on credit and a careful list was made both by the grocer and the woman of the house. At the end of the week when husband and children brought home the pay check, then the grocer, the butcher, etc. were paid off. Sometimes these merchants had to wait more than a week to get paid. Jennie Litvak said:

My mother was never able to buy any groceries for cash. She used to buy and mark everything down and at the end of the week when my father got the pay and I brought home the few dollars then we figured out how much we can pay this week. And many times my mother needed an extra dollar, for let us say, for us to buy something, or something extra that she wanted - well she would add on a dollar to the whole figure so that my father wouldn't even know. She had to do it to get the extra dollar. And the man in the grocery co-operated. It was the corner grocery. She needed that and that went on for quite a few years.
Pressing room at the T. Eaton Company, Toronto 1904

Source: Harney & Troper 1975:76

Jewish tailors making Eaton-brand clothing, 1912

Source: Harney & Troper 1975:77
How did a little girl remember the times? Molly Klein Goldman was born in Toronto where both her immigrant parents met and married. She said:

You remember the poverty but you really didn't know you were in it because everybody else that you lived with had the same problem. I know I didn't see very much of my father because he was always - if he wasn't working, he was on strike; if he wasn't striking he was picketing for better working and living conditions. And frankly speaking whenever I meet people today who are a little bit ashamed of their background, I'm not ashamed to say that I am very proud of the fact that my father took a stand. At least he did something.

"At least he did something" said Molly, one of five children raised on the pay of a simple pocket-maker who died of cancer just when he was ready to retire and enjoy life after forty years in the garment industry. "Politics and the human situation was always present" said Molly. When her father came home from work and would try to tell the family what was going on, they never really absorbed it all. "When you are young it's another story!" said Molly.

Bluma Kogan who started working in ladies' jackets in 1913-14 worked from eight in the morning to six in the evening and then went to night school. What was it like working in a clothing factory? How was the day divided up? Did the workers have a coffee break, lunch hour, sick pay, time to see the dentist? Bluma said:

I was doing ladies' jackets - suits, not skirts but the jackets. I did the lining, sleeves, pockets, and I was doing pretty good work.

I remember we were - it was a large factory - about 150 people: operators, cutters, finishers, button-sewers, pressers. We all belonged to the union. (After several weeks of working there the chairlady of my section said: Bluma, you have to belong to the union.)

I got up in the morning and made my breakfast and breakfast for the family. I'm the oldest. So I
suppose I got up about 7 o'clock because at 8 o'clock I had to be there. I had to take the street car and go there. Maybe I even got up before 7 o'clock. And my father was preparing lunch for us. I didn't come home for lunch, it was too far to go and also it meant paying carfare. I took my lunch, it was a sandwich and I ate it at the factory. At 6 o'clock I came back and helped along my Dad with the meal and washed the dishes. I also washed the clothes and ironed and mended socks and everything else.

And some nights I went to school.

As far as the working conditions and being happy - all I can say is that I made a living and that factory was large. It was a big place with many sections and it was a fairly good building. After that I got rotten buildings and sweat shops but this first one was in fairly good condition.

Women who went out to work suffered more. Not only did they have to cope with a house and family but hold down a job as well. All of these areas were demanding. From 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. she belonged to the factory. In the rest of the time left to the day "she managed" to do all the other chores, as well as socialize. She woke up early to cook and feed her husband and children and send them off to school and work with food in their stomachs and food in their lunch bags. She ran to work and in cold, dirty, demeaning surroundings she created clothes for Canadian people. Bluma Kogan told me about the sweat shop she worked in. She said it was on Spadina Avenue. "Do you know Toronto a little bit?" she asked. "I know Spadina", I said. She laughed and repeated "You know Spadina! EVERYBODY knows Spadina Avenue! All European countries know Spadina Avenue."

The photograph shows how crowded the factories were: men and women practically rubbing shoulders and breathing into each others' faces. It was cold in the winter and with no windows open the air was
not only fetid but difficult to breathe because of the dust from machines, from the movement of thousands of pieces of cloth, from the fact that factory floors were seldom swept and washed down. Where would they put all the piles of material, cut, unfinished, waiting to be sewn or moved? Some on tables, some on the floor, some on hangers by each operator. Sarkin said that lung disease was rife amongst fur and garment workers for this reason. Also, Gershman said:

... there was overcrowding and unsanitary conditions in the needle trades. ... The factory where I worked in Winnipeg paid very low wages. It was very dirty kind of work, you know, dressing and dyeing furs; it's raw fur. You get in raw hides, of different kinds of animals, particularly skunk. You see, skunk is a very, very fine fur. It is like sable. When you process it and produce it nicely, you can dye the white stripes to the similar blackness of the rest of it and it then becomes very valuable fur. But it stinks terribly. It is skunk! It comes with fat and so you have to process it; then the dyeing of it. You are always dirty.

There was no recourse for the worker except to quit working in such a place. But this meant learning to handle another operation with a new fabric and when jobs were difficult to come by, particularly during the years preceding the crisis, as it was called, of 1929, you stuck it out and took your chances insofar as your health was concerned.

Bertha Guberman spent the better part of her life in the needle trades, either as a worker in a factory, an executive member of the union, or a member of a political party which required her to travel to parts of the world. She started to work in 1924 and worked until 1939. In 1950 she went back into the industry and worked until 1972. She had to go back because it required two pay envelopes to raise a family. "... a fly could not survive unless a worker's wife and children laboured too, at pitifully lower wages" (Brandes 1976:6). Bertha was determined to give her surviving daughter the education she had missed. I asked her
about conditions in the factories. She said:

As far as conditions in the needle trades were concerned they were bad. . . . . The sanitary conditions at the time when I first started working were awful. You'd find one toilet for men and women in any of the shops. The shops were mostly located in dilapidated buildings which were firetraps, and sometimes the toilet was on another floor. For example, in one shop I worked in, I worked on the 4th floor and the toilet was on the 3rd floor; so it served two floors of shops and when you came to the toilet you had to bring your own toilet paper and soap. Well, I know I always had a container of soap and a towel. I would say that on an average some 30 to 40 people would use one toilet and if you went to the bathroom there was no time for stalling, you know.

In one place I worked the employer would stand and watch to see how long you go to the washroom. And he'd ask: "Did you smoke in there?" Well most of the people when we had a coffee break would run to the toilet. And the same at lunch break. And in emergencies you went during working hours - but only if it was an emergency because you would be stopped. By the time of my last job in the industry there were two separate toilets and washbasins but still everyone would run again at coffee break and lunch hour.

If conditions in the shops were bad for men they were worse for women. Some of my informants told me about wearing crosses around their necks pretending to be French girls so that the boss would be more amenable to hiring them. Jewish girls were considered in some instances to be rabblerousers and trouble makers and therefore were often refused employment. In some cases where there was a union the girls had recourse. However, in most instances the shops were not organized. Women worked for far less pay than men even though they did the same work. Further, young girls were the prey of foremen and bosses. Various tactics were used to intimidate them. Bertha Guberman said:

... once for instance a woman went into the washroom and it took her a little longer to do her duties. The employer went by and he saw that the lights were on. So he closed the lights on her and she got scared and
Interior of Jewish immigrant house, Toronto 1913

Source: Harney & Troper 1975:33

Jewish family in their backyard in the Ward, Toronto 1913

Source: Harney & Troper 1975:37
she fainted. They had to call the ambulance. This is a true story. It impressed everybody in the shop and they were up in arms. He never tried it again. He never dared to close the lights even when he saw the light on.

How did a young sixteen or seventeen year old girl survive in the garment factories, working ten and twelve hours a day, coming home in the dark and going to work in the dark during the winter months? These immigrants did not have private cars in which to travel. They either walked to save the carfare or took the street car if it was too far to walk.

... The girls ... you see most of us didn't know the language and the girls would stick to each other, not only be workmates but be chums out of the shop. Like after work we would go out for supper and take in a movie. Or if a girl happened to be getting married we'd chip in and make a shower or take her out. The atmosphere was much friendlier than the present. You felt a kinship to each other which I think is lacking now. ... ... If somebody missed a day's work, you'd right away phone up and find out what happened: why she didn't come in, or go and visit her. But now I doubt if this happens.

(Bertha Guberman)

How did the young married woman cope with her work in the factory and her household chores? How did she raise a family and yet spend eight to ten hours a day at the machines? Pauline Chudnovsky came to Canada with her husband and young son. She and her husband were both accredited pharmacists in the Old Country. Pauline said:

... and when we arrived in Montreal we looked for jobs. But the law is when you emigrate from one country to another you have to go to school again in order to be able to possess the language of this country otherwise you can't get a job here. So in the meanwhile time wasn't standing still and in two years I gave birth to my Hymie. My husband was looking for jobs and he found one in a cleaning...
and dyeing factory where they didn't hire very many Jewish people but they needed a chemist. It was a French-Canadian factory. He was fired from this shop and I went out to find a job. I knew a woman who was the forelady in a factory and I went there and they hired me.

At that time there were finishers, operators ... I knew how to sew because I made all the clothes for my children, little shirts and things. They paid me what was considered at that time a very good wage. I was paid not by the hour but by the week. A week was six days, the seventh was Shabbes (Saturday). I got $28 a week, it was considered good and I worked from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

My husband didn't work all the time. He had a bad heart and suffered from angina. When he did work he made good wages. At that time a person with three children getting $45 a week, it was considered a lot of money.

What were conditions like at home with a husband who was on and off the job and who was further handicapped by having a bad heart? How did Pauline Chudnovsky take care of three young sons who went to English school, Jewish school, and worked a little after school? Pauline and her husband David were well educated people, both chemists, knowing several languages, involved in the struggles of their fellow workers and friends, belonging and fighting for better working conditions through the unions. Yet they were the poor relatives, the black sheep of the family "because the others they were all well-to-do" said Pauline, "so we lived in a big house on Colonial Avenue which is considered a very poor district because the rent was low". The rent could not have been low enough because the family was once evicted for overdue rent: all their belongings thrown out of the house on to the street!

... ... yes, we rented out. I remember my boarders; rented out three rooms. I had one girl, one boy, and a married man for board and room. I cooked for them. I did everything. I cleaned for them and I also went
to work. I brought my mother-in-law from the Old Country. We sent her her papers. We actually brought her here to be part of the time in the United States at my husband's brother; but she liked me better and she decided she wanted to stay with me.

So we had four bedrooms for my mother-in-law, the three boarders, the three children; and my husband and myself we used to sleep on the floor ... the conditions were horrible!

I asked Pauline to tell me how she went to work, looked after boarders, took care of a sick husband and the three children at the same time? The conveniences available to the housewife today were certainly not invented or available to the immigrant in the 1920s. She said:

My routine was like this. I got up very early in the morning but I had a little bit of love: the children got to realize the situation and could see what was going on. So Ben went to work in a jewelry store. He was very young then. He was maybe 12 years old. And Hymie started to sell papers. And Sam went to learn a trade in General Electric. He didn't make very much but we wanted him to understand the trade. So it was easy. When Ben used to come from the jewelry store on Friday he used to hold out his wages like this in his hand and say "Here Mama, for you".

Pauline Chudnovsky's husband died many years ago. She raised her family of three boys. When I interviewed her she had just recently moved into Baycrest Terrace, an apartment for Senior Citizens. She was not very happy. She knew she would not move from there to go anywhere else to live. She did not know why she felt so weak now; but in the factory, as a young woman, she thought ...

... why can't I be a little bit sick like other people? Stay away. But I was so strong, it didn't matter how much I worked and what I did. I used to paint certain rooms in my house. Still it didn't do to me anything. I was strong. ... ...
... So my husband helped me out in the house. The doctor put him away, said he couldn't go to the cleaning and dyeing factory because of his angina. And then he said coronary. And we were frightened. So he stayed home. He did a little bit and when I used to come from work he used to cry because I had to support the family. ...

... But in one respect we were very fortunate. We were terribly in love. We were so much in love - I don't know maybe, Cathy, I am mistaken but I don't see the love today. ...

... today technology is developed, people understand more, they learn more, they are educated, but in that time it was a different time. It is like to be dead.

Sometimes I think maybe I was dead and I came out to a new world because everything is different.

Women worked in the union, were union members, went out on strikes and suffered when they lost their jobs and rejoiced when they won a strike. When it came to talking about their struggles and moments of joy somehow they minimized the role they played, subordinating the self to the event. In the cause of brevity I will cite the experiences of only two women in support of this argument: Bluma Kogan and Pauline Chudnovsky.

Bluma and Pauline are friends and they both reside at Baycrest Terrace in Toronto. I talked to both of them in Bluma's room. I was particularly interested in finding out what conditions were like in the needle trade and pleading ignorance I asked them to tell me about them. Part of the conversation went as follows:

Bluma Kogan: Now you want to know about the sweat shops. I worked on Spadina Avenue in an elevator building, very dirty, unpainted and we had to go up to the shop where there was no ... well, there was a washroom in the hall, but there was no closet for clothes. And it was very cramped,
very cramped and sweat shop conditions. I worked there for three years and that is the way it was.

A lot of people worked there. We were about twenty. I worked on dresses as an operator. There were cutters; the boss was also a cutter. There was a presser or two. There were a few finishers. And we were about twenty operators or so; twenty machines on one side and the other side: yes, in one room, all in one room.

At that time we worked about eight hours, maybe seven and a half hours; the union reduced it a little bit. The pay there was much better and much more than at the beginning. What was my pay? This was piece work. You got a dollar, a dollar-fifty, a dollar-quarter, or a dollar and a nickel for to operate a dress. There were bundles of six, bundles of ten, bundles of so many ... so they were certain we were running the machines, burr-rr-rr, burr-rr!

Were you in the dress trade Paula?

Pauline Chudnovsky: No. I was in shirts. Shirts is section work. We don't make a shirt. You make a cuffs, sleeves, or the collars or the yoke. You don't make a shirt, Cathy. I make sleeves. I used to sit and work on sleeves.

You want to know why they called those factories sweat shops? Because of the fact that twenty to thirty people were working in one room. This is a sweat shop.

Around 1914-1915 Bluma Kogan and her fellow workers went out on strike. The foreman of the factory wanted to re-organize the place. He did not like the union. So he spoke to the two owners of the shop and suggested that he take over the executive part of the manufacturing of the ladies' suits. He would re-organize it in such a way that the young people would not be needed. "He just wanted to hire the same workers on his terms", said Bluma. The union did not like it and stepped in. It explained the situation to the workers. The majority of the workers were on the side of the union and voted to go out on strike. They were on strike for six or seven long months:
It was a terrible struggle at that time in Toronto. Everybody remembers that clothing factory. Everybody knows about that strike that lasted so long. In 1916 we lost the strike. All of us got sick. I got very sick. We had colds. I didn't have shoes. We didn't have strike benefits at the time. It was poor. We lost the strike and they lost the business. Because it was a long struggle, a long big struggle and there was labour trouble and union trouble. I didn't understand very much at that time but I went with the majority, with the workers and with the union. I didn't go with the foreman. Even though I didn't understand it very much because I was young but my feeling was with the working class, with the workers.

Well, O.K. we lost and we couldn't get other jobs. Some got jobs in a bakery, some in a shoe factory and some went away from Toronto. I went to New York for a time.

But the bosses also lost! Because in the struggle somebody went and poured acid on the goods, on the garments and so a lot of material got spoiled. It was burned and spoiled. They could not meet their orders for a long time. They had to send the order to Montreal or Winnipeg or wherever. They couldn't make it because all the goods were burned. So they had to get out of the business. We lost our strike and they lost too.

How do you live? There was no unemployment insurance in those days. No strike pay. I had no shoes. The bakers were on strike and I'm a union member. The dairy was on strike. It was bad. It was bad. How do you live? You live from hand to mouth. You don't eat three good meals a day. You don't have shoes. You go with shoes that scraped the pavement.

I didn't belong to any political organization. My job was just with the union. I didn't have any particular position. I was just a member. I paid my dues in every month.

During the long strike mentioned above there were many court cases. For instance, there was a foreman who worked on finishing skirts and he managed about twelve girls. When the shop went out on strike he became a scab and did the work the girls were supposed to have been doing. There was a presser in the shop, and this foreman, Neveren was his name, took away his job:
So one morning, one Monday morning, the presser came up to the shop on Niagara Street and saw Neveren ironing and pressing and the press irons at that time were with coals, live coals. So he took this iron from Neveren and gave him a wallop over the head and that guy fell. He got burnt and he got hurt. The ambulance came and took him to the hospital. I think he was there for about four months. He was near death. We didn't want him to die. No. He recovered alright. But that was a big court case after that.

We had, I think, during that strike, we had fifty-two court cases, said Bluma Kogan.

Strikes were a long and costly business both for the workers and the bosses. The majority stuck to their principles of either remaining out on strike or looking for work elsewhere. Others went back to work. The girls who did were considered strike-breakers. So the girls in Kogan's shop organized a 'strategic business' as follows:

... everyone of us, twenty or thirty, had a place on a corner. There was a girl who lived on Kensington Avenue or Elizabeth Street - it was a long stretch to the shop on Niagara Street and Bathurst. So we were two at every corner and each one of us gave a sign that she is coming. The one nearest to where she was at the time gave us a sign. And this right up to the end where she had to turn for the shop.

We attacked her! We attacked her physically. We hit her. We said: "You scab! You strike-breaker! You take away the bread from our mouths. Go home and strike with us!"

She turned around and went home.

Pauline Chudnovsky said that the French girls used to work just for lipstick: "as long as the boss gave them for lipstick and powder they said it's enough for them". It was difficult making young French girls understand the principles involved in striking and staying out. But Chudnovsky said, her fellow workers tried to explain to these girls the situation by telling them: "Do you understand what
you are doing to people? You are taking away the bread, everything. The children are going naked and barefoot." Some of the French girls got beaten up too by the women workers. "But they made them into union girls afterwards", said Pauline.

The Role Of The Union: Organizing The Unorganized

Before I begin to discuss the needle trades union and the role played by its members I would like to say that this section in no way claims to be an exhaustive study of the garment industry. Its purpose is to show the involvement of needle workers in the union; how they shaped the union which in turn helped shape their thoughts and lives. The people are those people which inform this study, and events are those events in which they were involved. These events may not have been part of the experience of others. This does not in any way diminish the experience or affect its authenticity. Also in order to understand the role played by these immigrants in the clothing union the reader should bear in mind the traditions, the philosophical leanings, the very reason why they left their homelands in the first place: their constant search for and fight for better living and working conditions. So many of them said to me that they were not involved in 'politics'. By 'politics' they meant being a card-carrying member of a recognized political party. Yet the actions of all the people I spoke to can be subsumed under the heading of 'political action' because it concerned itself with bringing about changes in the lives of thousands of people not only in their own unions but also those of other industries as well. The majority of these immigrants came from Eastern Europe cognizant of political goings-on and whether they were personally active or not they were very much aware of the broader canvas of political events in Europe.
The struggles and achievements recorded in this section were not exclusively the struggles and achievements of the Jewish people. Other ethnic groups fought and struggled as well: the French-Canadians (who were referred to as the French), the Italians, Ukrainians and Finns to mention a few.

In 1920–21 when Sarkin joined the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America it was known as a socialist-inclined organization. The First of May was celebrated as a working class holiday. The union used to issue a special call to the workers to stop work on May Day and demonstrate. They used to organize a parade and march from the union headquarters in Montreal down to the Champ de Marche, a great big square and there the union leaders addressed the workers.

Prior to 1900 anyone who belonged to the clothing workers' union belonged to the United Garment Workers of America which was affiliated with the American Federation of Labour. In 1900 the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union was formed. In 1914, at the convention of the United Garment Workers in Nashville, Tennessee, there was a revolt within its ranks and following a split the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America was born "in conscious, militant class struggle against their own exploiting bosses, and the bureaucrats of the United Garment Workers (AFL) ..." (Schappes 1950: 23). (Note: A.C.W.A. men's clothing workers; I.L.G.W.U. women's clothing workers).

Jimmy Blugerman recalls the events of 1914 when he was involved in the split in the United Garment Workers' Union. He had been working for T. Eatons for a year and a half to two years but left there to work for private shops which were unionized and which therefore paid more money. These shops had been organized by the United Garment Workers which was an affiliate of the American Federation of Labour. In the union
shops a presser, which he was, could easily get $15 to $18 a week as opposed to $9 at T. Eatons. Blugerman said:

It was in 1914 when we, the needle workers, the men's tailors, members of the locals of the United Garment Workers of America were involved in a split that took place in the national unions of the U.G.W.A. It happened in New York, Chicago, etc. all on account of the 1914 Convention of the U.G.W.A. which took place in Nashville, Tennessee way far in the South. The delegates, the Jewish delegates from Chicago, New York, etc. were refused the right to sit as delegates at the Convention under the pretext that their locals have not paid up the full per capita tax to the General Office. But this was only a technical excuse by the leaders of the General Office from the President down, the job holders of the United Garment Workers' Union, to exclude about thirty to forty delegates, mostly Jewish delegates of the cutters' locals and the tailors' locals of Chicago, New York, etc. because they were progressive. You see what I mean? These locals were more progressive in preventing collaboration with the manufacturers and demanding shorter hours and better pay.

And so when the delegates were discriminated against at that Convention they had a conference in a hotel in the same city and decided to form a dual union, an independent dual union and they called a convention and they called it the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America. They were refused affiliation by the American Federation of Labour. The A.F.L. would give affiliation to only one and so they backed the bureaucrats of the United Garment Workers and therefore campaigned against the dual union as an illegal, so to speak, illegitimate union.

Now we in Toronto, we had quite a sprinkling in Toronto and Montreal, we had a sprinkling of immigrants that had brought with them the tradition of revolutionary spirit of class consciousness from 1908 on to 1914. We then were the leaders in Toronto and Montreal to oppose the bureaucrats of the UGWA and form unions, affiliated unions, with the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. We managed to take over shops like Tip Top, W.O. Johnsons and others. Of course, it necessitated strikes here and there. We had a hard struggle with the manufacturers who were opposing the dual union because they sensed that this union represented a more progressive rank and file union. And so we managed through strikes and negotiations to organize the most important shops in the mens' clothing
industry in the city of Toronto and this was followed in Montreal.

In 1919 the first big Convention of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America took place in Baltimore, and Toronto was strongly represented by myself and a half dozen other delegates representing already hundreds and hundreds of members of the Amalgamated established unions and union shops. It was there that the first general officers and general executive was established and from then on the Amalgamated Clothing Workers began to flourish through campaigns and strikes to become a strong union and overtake the United Garment Workers.

In 1916 the Montreal organization affiliated with the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America. Being a rebel organization it could not affiliate with the United Garment Workers of America and consequently with the American Federation of Labour.

As mentioned above, the American Federation of Labour extended its jurisdiction to one organization only in the trade. Also the American Federation of Labour was against the principles of the revolt and looked upon its leaders as arch revolutionaries who were attempting to disturb the equilibrium and philosophy of Gompersism which prevailed at the time.*

* Gompersism was the philosophy of Samuel Gompers who was leader of the American Federation of Labour and very active in United States labour. It was his contention that in this new land workers should not fight the bosses because the interests of one was the same as the other: both workers and bosses can have a piece of the pie.
In the minutes of the 1918 Convention of Baltimore some interesting facts come to light about the period 1916 to 1918 when the Amalgamated asserted its right to organize the unorganized.

Of particular importance to this study is the fact that for the first time "the Montreal clothing workers were strongly united". This was no easy task because the French Canadians in the clothing industry had never been organized before. Whereas all other nationalities were in the main immigrants, therefore adults, the French Canadians had a large number of young girls, "some of them still below their teens" and a large number of exceedingly young girls who had "the privilege of leaving school at a tender age and going straight into the factory in their home town" (See Proceedings, Amalgamated Clothing Workers' of America 1916-1918:88).

The Amalgamated "having convincingly demonstrated the power of their organization to protect themselves ... ... prevailed upon the employers to deal with the union in all matters concerning working conditions" (ibid:89). The clothing manufacturers of Montreal, who had alone determined wages, hours and working conditions, were not about to relinquish their hold. In 1916 Montreal joined the Amalgamated union. By the end of that year a series of successful strikes was brought to a close against various clothing companies. However, in January thirty-five hundred men, women and children went on strike against the Semi-Ready Clothing company which had refused to pay wage increases that had been agreed upon. "It was a lockout in every respect except in name" (ibid:89). About fifteen hundred others employed in smaller shops remained at work but they soon went out. Settlement was
not made until March 11, 1917 and those were eight weeks which will
not be forgotten by those who participated in that strike.

The real issue according to the Baltimore Convention of 1918
was the right of the workers to organize themselves for better working
conditions. Many of my informants were personally involved in this
battle. For the sake of brevity I will look at only the experiences
of a few people.

Why was it necessary to be organized? Some of the reasons
given are as follows:

The work space was unsanitary and crowded.

Workers were badly paid.

Wage cuts were further imposed by employers to
already low wages.

Work was seasonal, a season lasting from six to eight
weeks. Instead of drawing out the season employers
would expedite the work over a short period of
time. During unemployed periods, male informants
looked for work in other trades, e.g. Canadian
Pacific Railway doing hard labour for twenty-five
cents an hour.

Long hours of work. Some informants speak of working
52-54 hours a week in 1912-1916.

No unemployment or sick benefits. Jewish workers
formed their own sick benefit and burial societies
(See Chapter VI). Other workers, e.g. French
Canadians and Italians had no such insurance to
fall back on.

Manufacturers would make sure that workers out on strike
never found work elsewhere, e.g. during the First
World War when so many of the shops were out on strike,
the manufacturers who were also stockholders in
munitions plants made sure these workers were not hired.

Workers had nowhere to go to voice their grievances.

Through the union the workers could be educated, not only
about their trade but also about the language, history
and customs, politics of the new country.
In the process of organizing the unorganized many people lost their jobs, got ill, were forced to work in non-union shops for lower wages; they were treated like pariahs. But when your family is starving and your child needs medicine, you are not fussy about how you earn a wage. They suffered hardships organizing the union and they organized because they were suffering. Their strongest weapon was striking. No one who lived and worked in the period under review escaped the shadow of being out on strike, whether as a striker, an employer, family, the local grocer, the butcher — everyone was affected by it. And if one trade was out on strike it also affected workers in another trade because they stuck together by helping in relief work, taking food to striking families, setting up soup kitchens for those on picket lines, etc. Today these immigrants retell the events of some of the big strikes with a sparkle in their eyes and a tremor in their voice. They never fail to be moved all over again with what took place. Can we blame them for their pride in achieving small victories painstakingly over long periods? It is with a certain amount of envy perhaps that we listen to their dramatic stories. Are we not the beneficiaries and recipients of their struggles? Whatever the unions may be today it should be understood that they fulfilled a vital role in the lives of these immigrant Jews and no one can take that away from their eyes and their voices.

Max Yellen came to Montreal in 1912 when there "... was the walkout of 4,500 garment workers who sought a reduction in hours and improved working conditions" (Copp 1974:132). At the age of 13 he went into the garment industry even though he did not know anything about the tailoring trade. He came straight out of the yeshiva,
Hebrew School. He said:

Naturally at that time it was the only thing for the immigrants. There was no other. Either you became a peddler — which I was too young at that time — or you go to the tailoring trade. I worked in this place at the age of 13 for a month with no pay. At the end of the month I got two and a half or three dollars, something like that. And there was no union shop at that time. It was starting to form. It was then the United Garment Workers union only. Then the workers started to form and to move some of us.

In the garment workers there was right and left too at that time. And a strike broke out in Montreal. We were working at that time, if I am not mistaken, 52–54 hours.* The majority of the shops from the tailoring manufacturing was in Jewish hands with the exception of a few gentiles.

So our week consisted of from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. each day, exception of Saturdays. On Saturday it was closed until after Shabbes (Sabbath), Saturday night. That was in the winter. In the summer Shabbes was until 9 p.m. and that was too late. But in the winter days we had to go back to work after Shabbes and I think we worked 2½ hours to 3 hours and then on Sunday we worked half a day. That was the way at that time.*

So naturally that was the time when the strike broke out. We had a strike in 1912 which lasted nine weeks. Majority of these people were elderly people and that is the way they were working: $3, $4, $7. $10 was the highest pay at that time.

I remember the strike very well. We had meetings in the Coronation Hall on St. Lawrence. They were well attended as far as I was concerned. Had wonderful speakers. It was our first strike and it was for 50-hour week. Most of the people stayed out. It was very difficult. We had no money but we made a collection of $175. That was very good at that time. Many people did not have cash and took off their rings. We were out nine weeks. Fortunately it was summer.

... I remember the manufacturers were trying to break the strike and they brought in people from Toronto which they didn't know. You see Toronto had formed a union at that time.

* According to my simple calculations, allowing for an hour for lunch, it works out to 60 hours a week or more!
So the people they brought in to break the strike were union people. Oh yes! And they placed them in the finest hotel in Montreal. And the next day they were supposed to come to work. Instead of coming to work they came to the strikers in the old Coronation Hall and we had a good laugh at the bosses.

That incident I would like to remember. It was worthwhile mentioning it.

The period of the Twenties was a period of organization.

According to Abella, "the industrial work force in Canada had proliferated rapidly throughout the 1920s and was demanding to be organized" (1973:2). For workers like Sidney Sarkin, Jimmy Blugerman, Joe Gershman and others, it meant the organization and consolidation of the left wing progressive forces in the trade unions, political fields, and the mass fraternal organizations on the cultural front. It meant the organization of the unorganized workers, the struggle and movement toward industrial unionism, the struggle and movement toward social and labour legislation, the building of the political arm of the working class.

Although at the time there was already a developed trade union movement in Canada, however the basic industries, heavy industries (outside of mining) where the masses of workers were concentrated, were not organized. For example, the textile industry was an open citadel: a citadel of open shops and company unions. The automobile industry which had developed by then also was unorganized. In the needle trades there was the beginning of the dress industry which by the mid-20s developed into one of the largest industries in the trade, not only supplying markets in Canada but also overseas. Thousands of people became employed in the needle industry. In the East the organized miners of the Maritimes in Nova Scotia were affiliated with the International
Mineworkers of America. They were District 26. In the West there was District 80. But the steelworkers and other heavy industries were unorganized. These then were the main tasks facing the left wing movement, according to Sarkin. It required the organization and consolidation of their forces for an immediate programme of action. On the basis of this the Trade Union Educational League was formed, an arm of the left wing forces. Their aim was first of all to consolidate their own forces, expand them and at the same time work out plans for the organization of the unorganized on the basis of industrial unionism against craft unionism. In the first two years of establishment over 50,000 workers had been organized (Sarkin).

The organization of the unorganized was led by a number of trade unionists of whom Sarkin was one. He was involved in the co-ordination of the left wing forces in the needle trades which covered all aspects and at the same time he attended meetings, consulted and advised on campaigns in practically all the other industries with which they had established contact. This was all done under the auspices of the Trade Union Commission. Lectures, classes, mass meetings, campaigns, etc. were all part of his work. Sarkin said:

In those days the leadership devoted all of its time. We worked from morning till night - to the early hours of the morning at times - running from one meeting to another. The remuneration was next to nothing. As a matter of fact everyone of us contributed part of our salaries to these things.

Jimmy Blugerman was the first Business Agent of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers' Union in Toronto and he held that position until 1929.
Between 1920 and 1929 there was a development in the trade union movement, especially in the needle trades, where the progressive socialists led the Amalgamated and the Ladies' International Garment Workers' Union, the Capmakers' Union, the Furriers' Union. These unions had been organized through strikes and struggles in the United States and Canada. They had established the 8-hour working day, with time and a half for overtime, and a minimum standard wage. In most of these industries week-work had also been established, especially in Toronto.

The structure of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers' Union in a broad sense was based on industrial unionism. It embraced every phase of the men's clothing industry. However, there were so many operations, specific ones. For example, one could not compare the task and contribution of the cutters to any other operation. They only cut and nothing else. They had nothing to do with the rest of the garment. Then there were the general operators who were only concerned with the construction of a coat and there were many aspects to this. The operators' local was the largest. Here the bulk of the workers were found. There were also the pants makers. The making of a pair of slacks as compared to a coat was a thing by itself. It involved different operations, though less seaming. There were pockets, zipper, and that was all. The vest makers, this was a bigger job, because the construction of a vest involved more labour than pants. Thus you had a cutters' local, a pants makers' local, a vest makers' local, etc. For example, a French Canadian could belong to his French Canadian local or to the cutters' local, if he was a cutter. Each group was formed around its specific tasks. Each group had its own business agent and organizer, therefore each group was able to discuss
and decide upon its own particular beefs and policies. Each local had its own executive which dealt with its problems and which was concerned with the administration of its own local.

Above the Executive was the Joint Board which was made up of representatives of all these locals. Each local had the same representation no matter the size of its membership. Thus no one local could dominate another by having greater representation on the Joint Board. The Joint Board used to make the final decision on the basis of the sentiments and problems of the given locals.

There was also a staff of paid officers (the others were local and unpaid). The paid officers looked after the interests of the locals. These were the Business Agent and Organizer. Thus the cutters had a Business Agent who looked after the interests of the cutters' local and was acquainted with the peculiarities of the cutting trade. In this manner workers were protected and the Agent dealt directly with the firm or representative of the firm in such matters as hiring, firing, production, working conditions, etc.

It was also the obligation of the Business Agent to organize the unorganized wherever possible or to look after organizational campaigns. The French workers, for example, had an Agent who looked after their basic interests. It was his job to ensure that there would be no discrimination even outside the working environment. Above all these officers of the union was a Manager who was appointed by the General Office of the Amalgamated. Business Agents were elected whenever the Joint Board convened, which could be every year or every two years.
Six months after Sarkin had started working in the cutting room (he had moved from sweeper to assistant cutter in one month), he applied to become a member of the cutters' local. It was not so easy for an assistant cutter to get into the cutters' local. With the help and friendship he had developed, and the relationship he had established with two cutters in his shop (who had a fine record in their local), Sarkin appeared before the Executive of the cutters' local and was finally accepted. He became a full-fledged member of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers' of America.

Two years later, by the end of 1923, during the period of elections Sarkin ran as a member of the Executive and he was the first assistant cutter to be elected to the Executive Board. With this appointment his general activities outside the life of the trade union organization began.

About six months after his election, the General Executive Board member of the Amalgamated who visited the different cities and markets from time to time, came to Montreal. When he saw Sidney, a youngster on the Executive, he turned to the Executive meeting and gave them a lecture on the degeneration of the cutters' union in allowing an assistant cutter to be on the Executive. He concluded his remarks by saying that this was a precedent and a very bad precedent and should be done away with. However, the whole Executive stood up against him and Sidney remained on the Board.

It gives you the psychology at that time yet, although it was nearing the end of that period, because in a few years it was practically gone. The end of the general approach and psychology of the cutters, their friendship, their outlook, as to who should be in the leadership and who should have a say in the affairs of the cutters throughout the U.S. and Canada. This was carried over
from the former organization, the United Garment Workers, whose basic philosophy was based on craft ideology.

(Sarkin)

This was the background of the Amalgamated and when Sidney joined the cutters were known as the aristocrats and were clothed as such. They used to wear striped pants, very fine dark jackets, a vest and through the vest a golden chain and watch. This period came to an end when the Jews started coming into the trade and one found little evidence of that period of the striped pants.

The relationship which existed between the owners and the cutters was different from that which existed between the owners and the rest of the workers. The cutters were treated better, with respect, and had amongst them an understanding that so much was to be produced and no more. If one went over the production agreed upon one was called to the union Executive and fined. That was the kind of control which existed. "And", said Sarkin, "the bosses couldn't do a god-damned thing about it!" Sidney was a fast worker and there were a number of cutters who were very fast, but in order to keep themselves within the quota they used to kill time by going "umpteen times to the washroom, or sit down on a bolt of cloth with a box of chalk and sharpen the pieces. There were 52 pieces in a box". This vividly portrays the difference between the cutters' condition and the life they enjoyed and those of the operators. Even at that time the salary was $40 a week for a cutter. In the cutting room one seldom found anyone aged 60-65 years. After the age of 50 you were looked upon as "being through".
On June 15th 1922, the very first agreement in Canada was signed between the Associated Clothing Manufacturers and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers' Union. It is not an impressive-looking document, but it is a landmark of its time. What is important is that such a document was finally agreed upon and signed. A copy is appended.

Union Struggles

In 1924 trouble developed in the shop where Sarkin was employed. The shop was a union shop and was owned by his cousin. The union, through the Shop Committee, demanded action and Sidney participated in his first strike. It was the winter of 1924.

He was on the Strike Committee of the shop. On the picket line one met scabs, gangsters, and squads of mounted police. Sarkin said:

I don't want you to misunderstand. It was not the Canadian Mounted Police. It was the local police and they were mounted. It reminded me for the first time of Cossacks. The horses were well trained to use their hoofs to push back the people on the picket line.

The cause of the strike had its basis in three developments during that period:

1. The development of "that disease of contracting" (Sarkin).

2. A move on the part of the clothing manufacturers to run away from the unions by moving out into the country.

3. Manufacturers were induced by the Catholic Church offering all kinds of concessions: no tax payment from five to ten years; cheap labour because farmers were employed, etc.
Sarkin said:

The contracting system is a disease as far as any industry is concerned, but especially as far as the clothing industry because the character of the industry permits a few people - two or three - to get together with their families and take work outside from the inside shops, undertaking to produce the garments cheaper than the cost to the inside manufacturers, by working all kinds of hours within the home. It is from the conditions of the contracting shop that the term 'sweat shop' originated.

In that given period, contracting had become a menace to the general conditions of the tailors. It was a basic problem. This was one of the reasons of the 1924 strike.

For workers to go out on strike in those days was bad. If you went out in winter you were confronted with the prospect of starvation as well as standing in freezing weather on the picket lines. There was no strike pay. Strikers existed on handouts and collections of kindly people. If the strike prolonged, you and your family suffered deprivation. This was one of the main reasons why strikes were broken: the workers could not go hungry for too many weeks at a time. Another great problem which existed in Quebec particularly was the army of scabs which were brought in by employers. All sorts of methods were used by the workers to get rid of scabs because they endangered the workers' bargaining position. As mentioned above, if the strike took place in winter, as it happened in 1924, one also faced the possibility of freezing at home and on the picket line. According to several informants, employers used gangsters and police; there were bloody fights and workers were beaten up. As though this were not enough they faced court injunctions, sell-outs by top leaders, and in some instances, defeat. Nonetheless,
it was these militant workers who won union recognition, reduction in working hours, and wage increases which today the labour force takes more or less for granted.

Sarkin was an ardent picketer and it was in this his first strike that the trouble with his leg began because he had to stand for hours in freezing weather. (Twenty years later one leg of his was finally amputated after years of pain and suffering). After six weeks of cold, hunger, scabs, police brutality, the strike was lost. The Company moved out to Victoriaville, away from Montreal, and only the cutting room remained in the city.

Similar problems were faced by other workers in other shops. The progressive and left wing sections of the union called for action to eliminate the contractors. A division or difference of opinion developed between right and left wing sections of the union. Although there was much talk about the problems of contracting at that time, the right wingers were never willing to take action against it. As a matter of fact they proposed that the union organize the contractors so as to bring about collective bargaining and agreement with them which had never been worked out. The contracting problem from then on became one of the scourges of the industry and undermined the conditions and livelihood of the people employed in the clothing industry.

Two hundred and eighty people were employed in the shop which moved out to Victoriaville and they all lost their jobs. After the strike was lost, Sarkin did not go back to the cutting room which had remained in the city. He joined the ranks of the unemployed. Through
family ties he had the opportunity of getting work in an open shop. However, he could not bring himself to work in a non-union shop and for months he was 'breadless', said Sidney.

At that time, another cousin of his, Samuel Hart, owned one of the largest shops in the city which was also an open shop. His wife, Mrs. Hart, was a very fine woman and used to visit Sidney quite often. Sarkin said:

She used to, in a very nice way, ask me to go out to work. She said there was a place open at Samuel Hart and why don't I go out to work? She said that nobody was going to interfere with my ideas and thoughts. And so on ...

Sarkin went up to the union, told them his story and said that it was up to them: if they gave him a working card, meaning an official acknowledgement to go to the shop, then he would. But without a card he would not. Sarkin said:

So it became a joke at that time: the union issuing me a working card to work in a open, non-union shop! But from the point of view of status and the relationship with the workers, I felt that it should be done.

And finally after three months of being without work he started at Samuel Hart's in the trimming room. This was by now the beginning of 1925.

In this shop there was a large cutting room employing some twenty-five men. Within the first few weeks he felt he 'couldn't breathe'. He felt cramped and suffocated. No one bothered him in his work. After three weeks or a month, the General Manager of Samuel Hart called the workers together to hear a speech, the sum total of which was that times were hard and that none of them should be surprised to find in their pay envelopes, comes Friday, a cut in wages anywhere from $2.50 to
"Well I nearly busted when I heard his speech. I couldn't swallow the self-rule of the open shop where workers could not express an opinion about the conditions", said Sarkin. So he went to the back of the trimming room and told the foreman ("a nice fellow; I had nothing against him"), that he should accept his resignation. The foreman said: "What the hell is the matter with you? You have not been touched". Which was true. Sarkin had not been given a cut in wages. When he received his envelope his pay was intact. He said:

But I couldn't look at myself. You know what it means? I'm favoured in the shop because I'm the boss' cousin. He too, plain and simple foreman, couldn't figure it out. He said to me: 'you are working very easily here, right? So why leave?' and he went in and reported it to my cousin. He didn't come in to see me but Mrs. Hart called me and asked why.

But Sidney packed it up and left the job. They could not understand and he did not blame them.

Forming a union and belonging to one did not mean the end of the workers' problems. It did not stop employers from imposing wage cuts. The Canadian Department of Labour required that employers fill out a form whenever their place of business went out on strike. As the following sample will show, question #5 on the form reads: Why did the employees go on strike? The reply in the majority of cases reviewed was "opposed reduction in wages", and, "refused to accept piece work". In an article in the Hamilton Spectator, dated March 10th 1921, the headline reads: "Local Garment Workers Accept New Agreement. Reduction
in Wages Averages 15\%". The Labour Department forms are very instructive. They give us such information as to how the strike was settled. Some were settled by 'negotiations' between employers and employees, or their representatives, and the 'terms of settlement' were always the acceptance of employers' terms, e.g. 'a reduction of men's wages of $4 and women of $3.50 per week'. (See following sample).

Joe Gershman was very active in the unions: furriers, needle trades, etc. He lived in a room in Toronto and could not afford the rent. In his job as Organizer he commuted between Toronto and Montreal. He had trouble sneaking into his room when he was in town! He said that after they started to organize, he got $12 a week in wages. "Otherwise we used to live on beans and toast, toast and beans". Until they were organized they had a lot of fights with the police and with gangsters. Most of the strikes were lost, because the "forces against us were too strong. Jewish manufacturers had the press with them and they hired gangsters" said Gershman. He recalls some of the events of a particular strike:

... the first day when we called the general strike, we had a big mass meeting on Ontario Street in a big hall. Three cars came down to the centre where we had the meeting and they (the fellows in the cars) say they want to see me. Everybody saw that they were a bunch of gangsters. So they say: you shouldn't go. And I say: why not? One of them I know personally. A Jewish boy of Main Street in Montreal. We used to call him 'Joe the peye'. You know what a peye means? Sideburns! I knew these fellows. In those days I used to take a drink. And so I used to chum with them.

So they took me into the car, and this girl, a Yiddisher girl who is now a bubee, a grandmother, she fainted when she saw me going into the car. She was sure that they will never see me come back. So I went with them and we went into a bar and sat down. We talked and they said: Listen
PART I

Fill in this sheet, detach, and return to Department of Labour, Ottawa.

1. Locality in which dispute took place: Montreal, Q.

3. Business of firm or firms involved: Clothing manufacturers.

4. Occupation of employees who went on strike: Textile workers employed in clothing business.

5. Name and number of Trade Union Local: Amalgamated Association of Garment Workers of America.

6. WHY DID THE EMPLOYEES GO ON STRIKE?: against a decrease in wages.

Where the cause of strike was for an increase in rates of wages or a reduction in hours of labour, or both, state:

1. What were the rates of wages demanded?
2. What were the hours of labour demanded?
3. What were the prevailing rates of wages? Union wages.
4. What were the prevailing hours of labour?

Where the cause of strike was on account of a decrease in rates of wages, or an increase in hours of labour, or both, state:

1. What were the proposed decreased rates of wages? Average of $3.00 a week.
2. What were the proposed increased hours of labour?
3. What were the prevailing rates of wages? Union wages.
4. What were the prevailing hours of labour? 44 hours a week.

7. Date and hour employees first stopped work: Dec. 8th, 1920.

8. Number of firms involved: 1.

9. Number of employees on strike:
   Males - - - - about 125
   Females - - - - about 75
   Total - - - - 200

10. Give an account of the negotiations, if any, between employers and employees, preceding the strike:

Information furnished by: Thea Bertrand.
For whom: Fair wages offices.
we have a chance to make quite a bit of money. We know you personally, we know other boys. We don't want to go against the union but we don't want to lose the money either.

So I told them that I have a plan for them. I said: You choose two of you, I don't want to talk to all of you, only two. And I will bring one of my friends with me and we will make an appointment. The La Salle Hotel at the bar.

We treated them with dinner and told them: Listen - that must have been on a Friday - on Monday morning I'll have a group of girls begin to phone some of the manufacturers, the big shots. And they will cry on the telephone and tell the manufacturers that they are responsible that Gershman was beaten up and is in the hospital, and that the other organizer, Franky (we used to call him Jean Harlow because he was a blondie) and a few others were also beaten up. And then you guys can go in and collect your money. So these guys say that the manufacturers are not going to believe just by a telephone call. So I say: You know what? We'll do like this. Monday the girls are going to call, crying, shouting, scolding and what not. Then the next morning about 10 o'clock I'll show up together with Franky all bandaged up and the girls will be around and they will yell when they see the manufacturers coming down from the building: You murderers! You nearly killed Gershman! and all that kind of stuff.

And this is what happened. They collected loads of money, the gangsters. But we didn't win the strike.

When I talked to Bluma Kogan and Pauline Chudnovsky at the Baycrest Terrace, Pauline turned to Bluma and said:

Do you remember the Decklebaum Brothers in Toronto, the Decklebaum Brothers? They were the big ... they started from nothing and they used to tell the people, their workers, in Yiddish: "We are workers like you".

Said Bluma:

That's true. And if you want to work, you want to have money, then you have to work day and night. And that's the way it was. It wasn't because I was a Jew and he was a Jew. He was a boss and I was a worker. The Italians the same way and the Greeks. *Tsvee classen*, two classes. Maybe it is
And Bluma proceeded to explain what it was so hard for me to understand.

It is very true that Mr. Sherman, my boss, didn't come here with a million dollars or a hundred thousand dollars. He came here just as a worker and he became a cutter in a dress factory. When he accumulated or saved a little bit of money, ... that's it.

One time there was a strike (or there was slack, I don't remember). There was not much work in my trade. And I had to make a living, so I went in on Spadina Avenue to work on caps. Mens', boys', caps. And knowing how to use a machine I was pretty good at it. Okay, so I worked there for a few weeks just before Christmas and then my old place got work again. So I gave my boss notice that I am leaving to go back to my old trade, my old boss. This man wasn't a Jew. He was a gentile. And he became so infuriated and so mad, he said: How dare you to leave me before Christmas? I have a shipment to meet, so many, so many before Christmas. I say: Mr. Boss, you have a shipment to do. You want to make money on your caps. I'm just an operator and I have to make some money for myself. I'm just like you. You want money and I also want money, so I'm leaving.

He said, and by this time he got so mad, he got so mad because I opened my mouth. And he said: All you Jews that came here ought to be taken together on a boat and dumped in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean!

By that time, you know, he got so mad that he was going to hit me, I think. I was standing by the door holding just like this (and Bluma went over and stood holding the door knob) - just in case he comes to hit me, I would run away. Well he didn't come to hit me but he was just about to do it, so I went away. I say I want my pay. I worked last week and I want my pay. He said: Get out of here! Anyway I got out and I was afraid to come back for my pay. So I got some friends to come with me and of course he had to give me my pay.

That was Spadina Avenue!

Bluma Kogan never got married. She spent her entire life working in the needle trades. At the end she had given over fifty years of her life to the garment industry. She started as a young girl of
fourteen and when I spoke to her she was receiving a pension from the union of $70 a month.

Organizing the unorganized was not the easiest way to make a living in the Twenties and Thirties. The Canadian government and the Canadian people were afraid of the spread of the October Revolution, the Russian Revolution. The 1919 Winnipeg General Strike had thrown a deadly fear into the government to the extent that "every capitalist and every bourgeoise in Canada was looking under his bed to make sure there wasn't a Bolshevik there!" said Sarkin. Consequently, every form of binding, spreading, broadening the trade union movement, organizing the unorganized, was looked upon by the federal, provincial and civic administration as revolution. "Not what you have today, the right of organization: that all you have to do is call upon a labour board to take a vote in a shop, who is for and who is against" (Sarkin). In those days it was just the opposite. The might of the whole state, the police, all kinds of intimidation, arrests, charges of conspiracy, were the order of the day. Sarkin recalls:

... and you never knew when you were going to be picked up. We were picked up umpteen times. We were thrown into police headquarters and that is my own experience. No such thing as a cell, but a general room with a few cots and you had, pardon me, the urinal running right through the middle. Some of us were beaten up as well.

The following is an excerpt from a poem "Not To Be Borne" by Helene Rosenthal, the daughter of an immigrant tailor:
It was easier
to recognize him as my father
after he had died.

... ... ...

I remember on his deathbed
how he ran
barefoot through the tall field
to his mother
crying to be healed;
how he returned
to the empty village in Galicia
and found her gone.

Nor was I comfort
earlier or
too late. Hate nursed
the hurt inside
the factory of the new world
damned
his pulse. His veins
stitched pants together,
threaded
the machine with protest.
Blue serge, khaki
trod him, herringbone
and twist and common drill
on Mr. Dunkelman's parade-ground;
where the drum-majors were all union
executives
who raised production, piece
work rate
that sapped his frame.

... ... ...
... each dawn the conscript drudge
rebound into the rhythm of
"the shop:" Tip Top Tailors
where he trudged a
quarter century, Gehenna he
brought home each night. Cold supper
even Yahweh wouldn't eat
with us on Friday, shabby
shabbas of our
lost Israel.

... to tell the truth,
what lingers
more real than epitaph, is
that the only growth
he ever experienced
was cancer.  

(Yates 1970:72-73)
Summary

Utilizing personal examples and the writings of authors, I have attempted to convey how real the suffering was of those who worked and organized the needle trades.

In closing this chapter I would like to say that not all Jews who immigrated to Canada during the period under review eked out a living 'slaving for the bosses'. Some of them started their own tailoring shops, slaved for themselves and exploited their fellow Jews. I had difficulty accepting and understanding this phenomenon and asked this question of several informants. Max Dolgoy's answer sums up generally the feeling of informants on this question:

Well, exploitation has one answer whether it is Jew, Gentile or whoever. The Jewish manufacturer happened to be a working man himself, he knew all the loop holes and every angle: how to get around, how to play, who to play up for and who to play up against, and play one against the other and so on. And that's how they succeeded. Some of them failed also. They failed, you know.

There is no difficulty in understanding this. It's the dollar - that's the thing that talks. It doesn't matter who you are. You're in business to make a dollar. You don't produce dresses because somebody goes around naked. You produce dresses because you are selling it and you've got to make your profit as a result.

These few pages do not do justice to the struggles and losses, victories and gains, of the Jewish immigrants employed in the garment factories of Montreal and Toronto. Here we find a small slice of life in the factories and cameo of what union struggles were like. Were a wider picture possible it would encompass the role and influence of international unions (e.g. International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, the American Federation of Labour, etc.), the intimidation of Canadian
organizers, the blackmail, the threats and beatings which were suffered by union workers in their attempts to fight for Canadian unity and issues. However, this requires another study.

Today in Canada we have the 8-hour working day, the 44-hour week, we get paid not by piece work but on a weekly or hourly basis; we receive sick benefits, medical benefits, unemployment insurance, old age pension, holidays and holiday pay, to mention a few. Today these garment workers proudly show me their union card and tell me they receive a monthly union pension. Within the span of thirty years, Jewish immigrants, side by side with others, fought for their basic human rights. They were also fighting for our basic human rights.
In this thesis I have tried to recount, as much as possible in their own words, the rich experiences of Jewish immigrants who came from Eastern Europe to Canada and who subsequently went into the garment factories of Montreal and Toronto. There emerged three areas of interest:

1. life for these Jews in Eastern Europe at the turn of the century,
2. factors contributing to push them out of Europe and pull them toward North America, and,
3. their adjustment in this country.

I have shown that these immigrants not only cut the road, they paved it for generations that followed. They not only picked up and left their families and home, they pioneered a new kind of life, using themselves as guinea pigs. So many generations of Jews, if one were to count only those living in Canada today, would not have been born had these people not had the fortitude to leave. They found themselves at that particular and special juncture in history where so many of them were personally involved in revolutionary activities in Russia. As a result they brought this revolutionary fervour with them when they came to Canada, and watched very closely the events in the Old Country which led up to and followed the Russian Revolution of 1917.

For these immigrants to succumb to the poor working conditions in the garment factories of the New World would be to take a step backward. They had not escaped from the poverty, hunger,
dislocation and fear of Eastern Europe, and the Czars and Cossaks, only to become slaves in a rich, new land. They had not crossed borders illegally, bribed officials, risked jail and death, survived the agony of crossing the Atlantic Ocean in a fetid, overcrowded cattle boat, only to drown in the quagmire of the sweat shop.

I have shown in the preceding chapters how these people found themselves at the crossroads where either life was going to be the small hell as before, only this time with variations, or life was going to be better, if not for themselves then at least for their children and grandchildren. So many of them said to me: "We were not fighting for ourselves. We were fighting for our children, so they wouldn't grow up without food and clothes. For us - we knew the Messiah was not going to come in our lifetime!" This was their hope. This was their dream.

Not all Jewish immigrants were caught up and involved in the revolution and the fight of the Russian people against Czarist terror. Nonetheless the record must show that few Jewish immigrants who came out of the Pale were against the overthrow of the Czar. Splits existed amongst the Jews and in the organizations they belonged to: splits for and against those who were to assume political power once the Czar was ousted. However, during the few years when the Russian people were fighting for their lives I would doubt that any immigrant Jew was not on their side.

Even though this has not been a comparative study I would like to point out certain features, some peculiar to the immigrant Jews, others not, which can be drawn from this work.
1. These immigrants burnt their bridges behind them to the extent that they never looked back or regretted leaving the Old Country. For some of them there was no going back because they would have had to face jail sentences for various 'crimes' such as draft-dodging, running away from the Czar's army, being involved in revolutionary activities, etc.

Further, unlike other and subsequent immigrant groups who came to North America (Lewis 1966:xii), there never existed a two-way migratory pattern between the home country and Canada even for those who could return. Once these immigrants came their concerns lay in finding a job, getting settled and bringing over a relative who might still be living in Europe. No one ever spoke of travelling back and forth to visit friends and relatives, to spend a few weeks or months 'vacationing at home', as one is wont to find among members of immigrant groups such as the Italians, Puerto Ricans, Greeks, and others.

Maintaining close ties at the turn of the century and during the first couple of decades was a difficult matter. Much time needed to be expended in travel, both for mail and people. One did not travel directly to any place: always through, via, past, around, because of difficulties of transit visas, border passes, unfriendly governments, lack of embassies in a country which had no diplomatic relations with another, and so on.

Also, having once travelled on a cattle ship was enough for most people. They sometimes doubted they would ever reach dry land again when they made their first momentous crossing.
2. These immigrants were the 'survivors' of Hitler's extermination camps. Very few of those left behind in Eastern Europe lived through World War II. "Over 35 million people were killed, more than half of them civilians" says Davidowicz in *The War Against the Jews 1933-1945*, (1979:xxiii). All informants were aware of this when they talked to me about relatives and friends who were never heard from again after the War began. Barbara Myerhoff in *Number Our Days*, states that these Jewish immigrants out of the Pale felt 'survivor's guilt'. Citing Bruno Bettelheim and Elie Wiesel, both survivors of the Holocaust, she says:

... one's own survival, when loved ones are being destroyed, is not experienced as a simple triumph or stroke of good luck, as the literature coming out of Hiroshima and Hitler's Europe demonstrates so clearly. It is an extremely problematic condition, often arousing the most severe even crippling anguish, "survivor's guilt".

... "How do I deserve this? In what ways am I better or worse than those who perished?"

Survivor's guilt can be crippling ... Instead it served as a transformative agent that made it impossible for them to lead the unexamined life.

... Survivorhood accounted for other, positive features ... (it) ... caused them to intensify their dedication to social justice; they not only sought evidence of morality in a shattered, disordered world, but also worked to establish it. Such activity - "collecting justice" Lifton* calls it - is common among survivors, and of course these people's traditions had always emphasized it.

(Myerhoff 1978:23-25)

Myerhoff's elderly Jews questioned why they and not their brothers and sisters had been spared. They blamed themselves for not having done enough to bring the others out of Europe. The pain and

hurt of all those who suffered and never got a chance to escape became part of the heritage the survivors brought with them. And somehow this pain and this guilt translated itself in their determination to fight, to save, to struggle, to ensure some small measure of social justice: if not for themselves then certainly for their children and grandchildren.

I once quarrelled with Myerhoff's concept about Jewish immigrants and their guilt feelings. None of my informants had said "Why me?" or "What did I do to deserve to be here?". It was so close to me I did not realize that the anger, the righteous indignation, the bending backwards of these people to bring about social change, was their way of somehow alleviating that suffering, that burden they carried about with them, inside of themselves. Life was not meaningless; it was full of meaning.

Today some of the children of these informants tell me with a degree of resentment how their fathers neglected them. Night after night they never saw their fathers who were busy going to meetings: he would go straight from the factory to union, cultural or political meetings. If he was not at meetings he was out on strike or raising money to feed the strikers. On a weekend he might have some time for his family. These children, grown men and women today, feel their parents gave too much of themselves to the cause of social justice and too little to the family.

Why? Were they in some way consciously or unconsciously paying a debt? Accounting for their being alive? Salving their guilt?
I do not think even they can give an answer to these questions. And does it really matter?

3. The Pale of Settlement is no more. There is no more that vast piece of land called the Pale of Settlement. The land itself is still there today, called by some other name(s), with other people living there. But there are no more Jewish settlements with an arbitrary cordon around them. Lucy Davidowicz states:

(The Second World War) ... brought death to nearly 6 million Jews, to 2 out of every 3 European Jews. Though one-third of them managed to survive, though the Jewish people and Judaism have outlived the Third Reich, the Germans nevertheless succeeded in irrecoverably destroying the life and culture of East European Jewry.

(1979:xxiii)

Those who came here brought with them their way of life, not just the obvious and visible accoutrements like language and dress but also their strong identification with tradition, their rich sense of the past. They also brought with them their joy, their happiness in celebrating life and its continuance; they brought with them, each within his or her own thoughts, the poverty, the hunger, the pogroms, the needless deaths which so many of them suffered through. Some talked about these. Others could not.

The Jews of Eastern Europe were unique in that within a matter of a decade or two the shtetlach and cities from which they had emigrated were gone. The Russian Revolution came and the Pale was legally abolished. The Second World War and Hitler came. This wrote the final chapter of the history of the East European Jew. Where we can say there are no more Jewish communities in Eastern Europe we
cannot say this of the Italians, Greeks, Portugese and other immigrant groups to this country.

These Jewish immigrants who left Poland, Russia, Romania, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Galicia, in their struggles in the New World did not write 'finish' to miserable working conditions in Canada. Working conditions have changed for some trades and industries whilst others, like the garment industries, remain almost as bad as before. Today other immigrants continue to be intimidated and stopped from organizing the unorganized, from attempting to run their own lives; and they are still being sold out by those in positions of authority. Ethnic minority groups, such as the Jews, the Ukrainians, the Chinese, the East Indians, the Finns, to name a few, built railroads, developed industries, raised buildings and cities, pioneered frontiers. They did all this not with monetary capital investments but with the investment of their blood, sweat and sometimes their lives. However, their names will not go down in the Halls of Fame as Builders of Our Country. As Montero says in her opening words in We Stood Together:

Canadian history is a passionate, turbulent affair. Unfortunately, most of our historians have recorded it largely through the exploits of the "national dreamers" - the men who forged Confederation, built the railways and set up huge industrial empires.

(1978:v)

What continues to evolve for me in this study is the link these immigrants form between the Old Country and the New World; between the Past and the Present; between Yiddish as mamalokshen, mother tongue, and English; between passive acceptance and active
rejection; between so many 'thens' and so many 'nows'. For me they lived at a time when the Jews of Eastern Europe were waking up from a long, long sleep. There exists such a contrast between the life they led before and after the turn of the century. I can go to one of them and be told what it was like then which is so different from what it is now. I cannot begin to understand my present knowledge and how it is tied up with my social values without recognizing their presence in some form or other. How can I as a Jew condone or justify racial inequality? I would be negating the suffering and very existence of these people and what they stood for. Can the children of these immigrants accept their 'good life' today without acknowledging the sacrifice, first of all, of all those who died in the gas chambers in Europe and then of their parents and grandparents who escaped in time? This sacrifice cannot be forgotten. It must not be carried around as a burden of guilt, as an albatross. On the other hand, we should not forget that others too feel pain and hurt; others are capable of love and joy; that humankind has not reached that stage of peaceful co-existence where hurting is no more. We continue to inflict pain and death. Only now we do so in a more sophisticated manner.

Elie Wiesel, the well-known author and survivor of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, said in a recent radio interview that the 'pogromchicks' (those who instigated and participated in the pogroms in Eastern Europe), were novices compared to Hitler and his henchmen. The question is: did it stop with Hitler? Did we, the people of the world make sure it will never happen again? One fails to realize not only the enormity of technology involved but the fact that it required the efforts
of innumerable people, working at hundreds of different levels, to operate extermination camps and gas chambers. And to think that all of these people functioned 'like so many cogs in a wheel, like so many tiny moving parts in a machine without gumming up the works'. The analogy is bad. Cogs and machine parts cannot think. Human beings can. And thinking people have corroborated, by their very act of participation/non-participation, the extermination of close to twenty-five million other thinking, breathing, loving, hoping, paining, human beings since the turn of this century!

As an anthropologist vitally involved in oral history my purpose has not been to establish facts or attempt to test theories. For this reason I have not found it necessary to make reference to the founding fathers of the discipline. Critics of oral history, for example some historians, and those who would claim such a vehicle as being subjective or biased, find the introduction of feelings, impressions, attitudes, emotion, behaviour, opinions as beclouding the historical perspective. These 'human interest' aspects of the ordinary, everyday lives of people cannot be submitted as 'having happened', as so much empirical data. Further, history has been for so long the accounting of what happened to the Big People, a recording of the Great Tradition from the point of view of those who made it and participated in it.

This thesis has focussed on workers, not on the employers and bosses or the well-to-do. This was done on purpose. As Oscar Lewis says in his Introduction to La Vida:
Most studies of national character have focussed upon the middle class, on the assumption that this class reflects the dominant values of the society. However, I am suggesting the possibility that studies of the lower class may also reveal something that is distinctive of a people as a whole.

(1966:xv)

I have tried to focus as much as possible on the individual human being rather than dealing with aspects and levels of, for example, patterns of culture, organization, community life. It was not always possible to make the separation of individual and family or community; but wherever possible the feelings and experiences of people were given priority.

Robert F. Harney (n.d.) in a pamphlet "Oral Testimony and Ethnic Studies" states:

By excluding immigrants from the record because they did not have the leisure or language skills to memorialize themselves, we have condoned the practice of seeing the newcomers through the eyes of the assimilators, controllers, and exploiters, and of regarding the immigrant himself as a dangerous and unreliable mute.

Harney's pamphlet was published recently by the Multicultural History Society of Ontario and was available a few months ago at the Ethnic Studies Conference held in Vancouver in the Fall, 1979. Many studies and books have recently been published utilizing the testimony of immigrants. Perhaps it is all being done in what Paul Cappon calls deprecatingly "the spirit of nationalism" (1978:8). At the same time Cappon tells us it is necessary for Canadians to "appropriate the components of their culture". I feel this study is one way of accomplishing this.
The kind of life these Jewish immigrants lived in Poland and Russia does not exist today, whether in the Old Country or in Canada. It is no more. Today there are no more Jewish immigrants working ten and twelve hours a day in the needle trades. I have tried to recapture their lives. To put it down. To make it come alive for you the reader as it came alive for me through the words of these people. I was warned to be ever cognizant of the fact that I hear the voices and the words of these immigrants and that you only see them flat on a page; that for me what they have to say has so many nuances, inflections, meanings and that for the reader it is always only one dimensional; that the sighs, hesitations, laughter, tears, anger sound only in my ears. By telling you how I feel I hope I have in some measure conveyed how they felt. It cannot be that difficult because we have all somewhere inside of us feared, pained, felt joy and loved deeply.
APPENDIX

Agreement between the Associated Clothing Manufacturers and
The Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America.

Here as the parties hereto desire to enter into an agreement for
the following purposes:

(a) To operate preferential Union Shops.
(b) To adopt the principle of collective bargaining.
(c) To submit to arbitration in cases of disputes.
(d) For promoting the best interests of the clothing industry.
(e) For the creation and maintenance of friendly and harmonious
relations, co-operation and good-will between employers and
employees.
(f) For fixing and adjusting wages and working hours.
(g) For the prevention of strikes, stoppages of work, lockouts, etc.
(h) For the expeditious settlement of all grievances, controversies,
and disputes which might arise between both parties.
(i) For the maintenance of high order of discipline and efficiency
by the willing co-operation of the Union and employers.
(j) For the maintenance of good standards of workmanship and conduct.
(k) For the assurance of proper quantity, quality and cost of
production.

IT IS HEREBY AGREED:

1. That this agreement shall be effective from May 1st, 1922 and for
three years thereafter, but notice may be given in writing by either party
to the other ninety days prior to May 1st in each year intimating any
amendment or abrogation, or any adjustment of the existing wage scale;
and further that this agreement supersedes any other agreement which
may exist between any manufacturer and the Amalgamated or any individual
member of the Union and in binding upon both parties in rendering valid
any individual bargain which may have been entered into, providing the
manufacturer concerned becomes a member of the Associated Clothing
Manufacturers and subscribes to this agreement.

(a) The Union serves notice that at the time of any wage discussion
it at the same time may bring up the question of an unemployment fund
in good faith.
(b) It is agreed that should an emergency arise in this respect
warranting a discussion of the wage scale at any time during the
first year of this agreement, but not earlier than six months from the
date of its adoption, the question may be opened by either side for
settlement by negotiation.

2. That during the life of this agreement there shall be no lockouts,
strikes or stoppages of work either in the factory or in any section
thereof, concerning any matter in controversy or any grievance of any
kind whatsoever.

3. That forty-four hours will constitute a week's work in the shops of
the members of the Associated Clothing Manufacturers, with the exception
of the House of Robberlin, where forty hours will constitute a week's
work.

4. That overtime shall be dispensed with as far as possible, but when
overtime is necessary in a department or section of department, the
same shall be paid at the rate of time and one-half.

5. That, recognizing the necessity for deciding controversies or
grievances, both parties agree to the appointment of a Board of Arbitration
to be selected as follows:
Two representing the manufacturers,
Two representing the union,
One to be selected by the parties so chosen.

The fifth party so agreed upon shall be considered the Chairman
of the Board and shall in case of disagreement in his decision.

6. That the expenses incidental to the Board of Arbitration shall be
borne equally by the parties to this agreement.

7. That the decision of the Board of Arbitration or a majority thereof
shall be final and binding upon both parties.
6. That any employee feeling himself aggrieved shall present his complaint to the shop chairman, who shall take the matter up for adjustment with the shop superintendent. In the event that they are not able to agree, the shop steward shall report the matter to a representative of the Union, who in turn shall take the matter up with a representative of the employer. In the event that these two are unable to agree on an adjustment, the grievance shall then be presented to the Board of Arbitration within three days.

In order that the presentation and adjustment of these grievances cause as little confusion as possible, it is hereby agreed that the time for presenting grievances to the shop steward and by him to the shop superintendent, and for the adjustment of these grievances, shall be after the regular working hours. Exception is made, however, in such emergency cases as require immediate action.

9. That the members of the Associated Clothing Manufacturers agree to operate preferential Union shops. When additional workers are needed application shall be made to the Union. If the Union is unable within forty-eight hours to furnish such satisfactory workers as are needed, the manufacturers shall then be privileged to secure such worker or workers as they can.

(a) The provisions for preference heretofore require that the doors of the Union shall be kept open for the reception of non-union workers. Initiation fees and dues must be maintained at a reasonable rate and any applicant must be admitted who is not an offender against the Union, and who is eligible for membership under its rules. If any rule be passed that imposes unreasonable hardship, or that operates to bar desirable persons, the matter may be brought before the Board of Arbitration for such remedy as it may deem advisable.

(b) It is agreed that no employer will place obstacles in the way of legitimate efforts of the Union to recruit new members. If the Union undertakes in co-operation with the employers to draw up objective rules and regulations for the sending of workers to jobs, and to organize and conduct an efficient employment office, a committee composed of one representing the manufacturers and one representing the Union shall proceed with an enquiry into the operation of an efficient employment office.

10. That in the case of new workers being employed these weeks will be considered a probationary period, if the new workers are regularly employed in the trade. In the case of apprentices or workers taken from other trades, the probationary period will be five weeks.

11. The full power of discharge and discipline lies with the employer. It is agreed that this power should be exercised with justice and with regard for the reasonable rights of the employee. The power of discharge shall be exercised only through a fully authorized and responsible representative of management. If the Union after investigation finds than an employee has been discharged without just cause and that it cannot reach an adjustment with the representative of management, it may bring the case before the Board of Arbitration.

12. That whenever an employee shall absente himself from work without giving an acceptable reason to the employer, upon the second business day of his absence the employer may consider his position forfeited. In case of absence a reason therefor must be promptly given to the foreman by messenger, mail or telephone. No employee having reported for work shall leave during the day without the consent of the foreman.

13. That workers who are absent on account of sickness shall be reinstated in their former positions within a reasonable time if proper notification has been given to the Company.

14. That changes of work from one occupation or department to another may be made by an employer, provided that the individual worker does not suffer through such changes.
15. It is agreed that a market contract shop committee shall be established with power to make rules and regulations governing contract shops and that in as far as possible of arrangement, work for outside contract shops shall go to shops accredited by the market shop committee. This is to be done as soon as satisfactory arrangements are made for making the work in accredited shops.

16. It is agreed that the manufacturers shall have the privilege of developing workers through the apprenticeship system on a basis to be determined by representatives of the manufacturers and the Union.

17. The Union agrees that when proper production scales cannot be adjusted for any one shop or section thereof the employer may appeal to the Board of Arbitration for the installation of such scales.

18. It is agreed that equal division of work shall be observed as far as practicable in slack seasons, and that scales of production must be observed during such seasons; and it is agreed that the manufacturers will co-operate with the Union to preserve discipline among its members in regard to their obligations to the Union.

19. That in accordance with the spirit of this agreement both parties pledge themselves to co-operate in making the arrangement successful, and to use their influence and effort for the promotion and development of good-will; it being understood that it is not the intention that this agreement shall operate in any way as to restrict output, impede processes of manufacture or management but shall encourage maximum production and minimum cost and fair and equitable treatment to any individual concerned in it.

Signed.

For the Association.

Witness

Witness

For the Amalgamated.
GLOSSARY OF YIDDISH WORDS
(unless otherwise specified)

Ashkenazie - derives from the Hebrew word Ashkenazi, which means German.

belfer - assistant to teacher; carried children to and from school and generally looked after their well-being.

baba, bubee - grandmother.

Bund - Jewish Labour Bund, socialist labour organization which functioned in Eastern Europe and Poland until World War II.

chavre - comrade

coloniste - Jewish pioneers who settled in the Ukraine.

dameskey - a ladies' tailor, one who makes only ladies garments.

davin - to make a blessing, to pray.

drushka (Russian) - a horse and coach.

gaon - intellectual leader, often with temporal power.

gemora - Talmud.

groshen - a penny.

guberniya (Russian) - province.

hand worker - an artisan, a craftsman.

hayyat - Hebrew word for tailor.

Haskalah - Jewish Enlightenment movement which flourished during 19th century.

Hassidim - followers of Hassidism.

Hassidism - Jewish religious movement which began in Eastern Europe in the 18th century.

homesh - the first five books of the Bible.

kasha - buckwheat.

kheyder - traditional Jewish school for young children.

konchik - a leather whip generally with a handle made from the foot of an animal used to hit a child with.

lamden - scholar, erudite man, a learned man.
lantsman (pl.lantsleit) - countryman, neighbour, townsman from the Old Country.

luftmensch (pl.luftmenschen) - a dreamer, one who has his head in the clouds, no roots.

mamalokshen - mother tongue.

matza (pl.matzos) - unleavened bread eaten during Passover.

melamed - a children's teacher.

mestok - a poke, a jab.

mishma (pl.mishmoren) - a period during the night for studying.

Mitzvah (pl.mitzvos) - a good deed, a religious commandment.

peye (pl.peyes) - sideburn curls worn by religious young men.

Rambam - (abbr.for Moses Ben Maimon; Maimonides 1135-1204). Philosopher, medical writer and halakist, wrote on controversial matters such as the nature of God, the higher religion of the 'perfect man' etc. At one time the leading philosophical works were permitted only to those over 25 years of age and forbidden under pain of excommunication to those younger.

reb, rebe, rabbi - title given to a learned and respected man.

Sephard - the Hebrew word meaning Spain.

sha'atnez - proscription against wearing clothes made of wool and linen.

shabbes - Saturday, Sabbath.

shadchen - matchmaker or marriage broker.

shir - lesson.

shmays - hit, bang, wallop.

Shotnya Zotnias (Russian) - The Black Hundred, an organization rampant in Russia during the late 19th and early 20th century.

shtibl (pl.shtiblach) - literally a small room, a side room in a synagogue.

ta'am - flavour, good taste.

tallis - a striped, tasseled shawl worn by male Jews during certain prayers.

tallis-kotn - four-cornered tasseled undergarment worn by religious male Jews.

Talmud - Hebrew 'teaching', consists of Mishnah and Gemora.
Tanach - the Hebrew Bible.

tetila - a flexible pointer usually taken from a corset, made of bone or ivory and used by the teacher when teaching Talmud.

tsve classen - two classes, referring to upper class, middle class, lower class.

yeshiva - higher education.

zaida - grandfather.

zect - a board, a committee.

zman - six month period, approximately March/April to September/October, corresponding to Passover to Feast of Tabanacles, and vice versa.
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF REFERENCES CITED

Abella, Irving, Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour, University of Toronto Press, Toronto.


Canada Census of 1921, Volume I: Population.

1924
Cappon, Paul, ed., 1978
In Our House: Social Perspectives on Canadian Literature, McClelland and Stewart, Toronto.

Copp, Terry, 1974

Crowe, Jean Margaret, 1980
"Lifeline" in Canadian Weekend of The Vancouver Sun, March 1, pp.2-6.

Davidowicz, Lucy S., 1967
The Golden Tradition: Jewish Life and Thought in Eastern Europe, Beacon Press, Boston.

Dobroszycki, Lucjan and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimlett, 1977

Fauman, S. T., 1952
Factors in Occupational Selection Among Detroit Jews, Unpublished, microfilm.

Francis, E. K., 1947

Gergel, N., 1951

Gilbert, Martin, 1969
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher/Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hann, Kealey, Kealey, Warrian</td>
<td>Sources in Canadian Working Class History 1860-1930</td>
<td>Dumont Press, Kitchener. 1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hart, A. D., ed.</td>
<td>The Jews of Canada</td>
<td>Jewish Publications Ltd., Toronto and Montreal. 1926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanc, Shimon, ed.</td>
<td>Wlodawa &amp; Region, Sobibor Yiskor Book, in Memory of, The Book Committee, Central Townsmenship of Wlodowe and vicinity in Israel, Tel Aviv.</td>
<td>1974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kage, Joseph</td>
<td>With Faith and Thanksgiving</td>
<td>Eagle Publishing Co. Ltd., Montreal. 1940</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lewis, Oscar, 1963

Montero, Gloria, 1977
The Immigrants, James Lorimer & Co., Toronto.

Murphy, Gardner, and Lois Murphy, T. M. Newcomb, 1937

Myerhoff, Barbara, 1978
Number Our Days, Clarke, Irwin & Co. Ltd., Toronto.

Paull, Steven B., 1974
A Study of the Historical Development of the Jewish Community of Montreal, Unpublished undergraduate thesis, Department of Religion, Sir George Williams University, Montreal.

Rosenthal, Helene, 1970

Rosenberg, Louis, 1939

Roskies, Diane K. and David G. Roskies, 1975
The Shtetl Book, Ktav Publishing House, Inc., U.S.A.

Rubin, Ruth, 1963

Sack, Benjamin G., 1965
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Publisher/Publication Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sachar, Howard</td>
<td>The Course of Modern Jewish History</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schappes, Morris U.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Synthetic Story of the Amalgamated in Jewish Life, September, 23-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seidel, Judith</td>
<td>The Development of Social Adjustment of the Jewish Community in Montreal</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>Unpublished M.A. thesis, McGill University, Montreal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speisman, Stephen A.</td>
<td>Jews of Toronto: A History to 1937</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>McClelland and Stewart, Toronto</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Wigoder, Geoffrey, ed.,

Wittlin, Alma S., In Search Of A Usable Future, The MIT Press,

Wyman, David S., Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis 1938-1941,
1968 University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst.

Zborowski, Mark and Elizabeth Herzog,
1962 Life Is With People, The Jewish Little-Town of
Eastern Europe, International Universities Press, Inc.,
New York.