

Jews In Canada

Student Information



At the outbreak of World War II there were 167,000 Jews in Canada, representing 1.5% of the population. Most lived in Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg. The majority were foreign-born and many spoke Yiddish as their first language. They were politically, religiously and economically diverse.

The Jewish community in Canada responded to the emerging Nazi threat in Europe by organizing rallies and protests to warn Canadians about the dangers of Hitler's anti-Semitic policies. In 1934, faced with the Canadian government's refusal to rescue European Jews, the Canadian Jewish Congress began public campaigns against anti-Semitism at home and abroad.

With the end of the war and the liberation of the concentration camps, the atrocities of the Holocaust became more widely known. Hundreds of thousands of surviving European Jews found themselves displaced with no homes or communities to return to. Despite this growing refugee crisis, Canada steadfastly maintained its restrictive immigration policies. In 1945 a senior Canadian government official was asked how many Jews he thought that Canada would be prepared to admit. His response, which reflected Canada's official position at the time, was "none is too many."¹

After the war, Canadian Jews continued to petition the government to admit Jewish refugees. Finally, in 1947, the Canadian government passed the Privy Council Order #1647, granting permission for 1000 Jewish orphans under the age of 18 to enter Canada. The War Orphans Project (www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/orphans/english (or french), as it was known; marked a turning point in the history of Jewish immigration to Canada. Between 1947 and 1949, 1,123 orphans emerged from the devastation of the Holocaust to new lives in Canada. In 1948, an initial wave of 40,000 other Jewish survivors also entered Canada.

According to Statistics Canada's 2001 Census, Jews now represent 1.1% of the population. Although, public expressions of anti-Semitism have decreased in recent years, the desecration of Jewish cemeteries and synagogues still occurs. The most disturbing and dangerous forms of anti-Semitism today are the anti-Semitic and Holocaust denial propaganda disseminated by neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups on their internet sites. As well, some forms of anti-Israel rhetoric exploit historic forms of anti-Semitism and anti-Semitic stereotypes.

¹ Abella, Irving and Harold Troper, *None is Too Many*. Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1983, page xxi.

Anti-Semitism

Student Information



During the first half of the 20th century racism was commonplace in Canadian society. It found expression in both the attitudes and the actions of many Canadian citizens and was more overt and widespread than it is today. The racism of the times revealed itself in anti-immigrant, anti-Semitic, anti-Asian and anti-Black feelings amongst others. As a result, minority groups found themselves segregated socially, economically and politically.

During the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s Jews found themselves barred from many public places in Canada, including hotels, beaches, golf courses and parks. It was not unusual to find public signs, which read "open to gentiles only." Some universities established quotas limiting the number of Jews to be admitted. Often, Jewish students were

required to have better grades than their non-Jewish counterparts to qualify for admission. Many hospitals barred Jewish interns or doctors and some public schools refused to hire Jewish teachers.

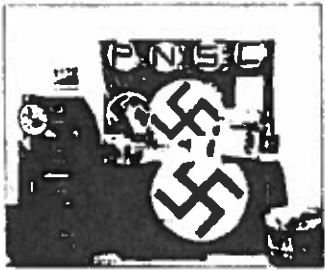
During the 1930s, the effects of the Great Depression strengthened these longstanding prejudices. With unemployment ranging between 15% and 25%, racists and nativists appealed to Canadians' fears that immigrants would take scarce jobs away from them.

Economic sanctions were felt in many different ways. Fascist and other extremist groups called for the boycott of Jewish businesses. More importantly, the majority of Canadians, not just the radical few, believed that Canada was and should be a white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant country, which meant that Jews and other groups were excluded from many professions and neighbourhoods. Many department stores, insurance companies and banks had policies of not hiring Jews. Landlords felt free not to rent or sell property to Jews or other minorities. Some property deeds, especially those in more affluent areas, were drawn up with restrictive covenants, preventing the sale of property to Jews or to other "objectionable" groups. In many Canadian communities, it was taken for granted that landowners had the right to discriminate on the basis of race and religion. Canadian courts upheld these discriminatory practices until after World War II.

This social and political climate contributed to and was reflected in Canada's restrictive immigration policies of the 1930s and 1940s. As a result, European Jews seeking to flee Germany and Austria in the 1930s found the doors of most Western democracies, including Canada's, closed to them.

Fascism & Nazism In Canada

Student Information



Nativist, Fascist and Nazi movements sprung up in Canada between the first and second world wars. These groups promoted the idea of a country free of Jews. They derived many of their ideas and tactics directly from Fascist and Nazi organizations in Germany. Organizations with anti-communist, anti-immigrant, and anti-Semitic platforms provided an outlet for many Canadians to voice their anxieties about a changing nation.

Nativists opposed immigration and saw newcomers as a threat to Canadian society. Fascism, begun by Benito Mussolini in 1920 in Italy, promoted the ideas of militarism, ultra-nationalism, anti-communism, conformity of the group and allegiance to a single leader. Nazism was the ideology of Adolf Hitler's National Socialist German Workers Party, which stressed many of the same ideas as fascism, along with racism and anti-Semitism.

There were many fascist groups in Canada during the 1930s, including the Canadian Nationalist Party of Winnipeg, the Canadian Guard based in Vancouver, the National Worker's Party of Canada, and the Canadian Union of Fascists, which published *The Thunderbolt*.



September 1933, a dozen ex-soldiers led by William Whittaker launched the brown-shirted Canadian Nationalist Party in Winnipeg. Highly militaristic and fervently patriotic, members wore swastika tiepins with their khaki uniforms and delivered fiery speeches against a backdrop of the Union Jack. They published *The Canadian Nationalist*, which featured anti-Semitic propaganda similar to that being produced in Germany that included allegations of a global Jewish conspiracy. The party and its publications played upon the poor economic conditions to denounce Jews violently and equate them with communists.

Western fascism drew support from German and Ukrainian immigrants who held a historic animosity towards Jews. In 1935, a successful group libel suit was launched that prevented Whittaker and his publication from further vilifying Jews.



As Ontario became more ethnically diverse in the 1930s, some Toronto residents began to feel threatened and complained of a "foreign invasion" and of "obnoxious and undesirable elements." Swastika Clubs sprung up, expressed their anti-immigrant sentiments and waged violent street campaigns against Jews. Defiant youths sported swastikas on armbands, sweaters, bathing suits, and bare chests, and clashed with Jewish patrons.

On August 14, 1933, violence erupted after a predominately Jewish baseball team, the Harbord Playground, won a game at Toronto's, Christie Pits. A group known as the Pit Gang lifted a swastika-emblazoned sweater into the air. That night, Pit Gang members painted a large swastika and "Hail Hitler" on their clubhouse roof. The next day, during a second game, the crowd yelled anti-Semitic slurs. Six hours of fighting ensued during which both sides called in reinforcements and fought each other with baseball bats, stones, and lead pipes. Today, the Christie Pits riot stands as the worst race riot in Toronto's history.



Quebec nationalism, Catholicism and unfavourable economic conditions fuelled French Canadian anti-Semitism of the 1930s. Most disturbing were the extremist activities of Adrien Arcand and Joseph Menard. Arcand was an admirer of Adolf Hitler and Nazi racial policies. He drew inspiration, propaganda and funding directly from the German Nazi party. Determined to help roll back the Jewish "invasion", Arcand formed the National Socialist Christian Party in 1934. A combination of German Nazism and Italian Fascism, the party espoused the values of law and order, a strong leader, and a Canada free of Jews.

In 1930, Arcand and Menard launched *Le Goglu*, one of many anti-Semitic publications that featured loathsome caricatures of Jews, historic accusations of blood-libel, world conspiracy and economic domination. Promoted as a "journal humoristique," the newspaper was similar to the German Nazi publication *Der Stürmer*. *Le Goglu* received funding from the federal Conservative Party until it ceased publication in 1933.

For a brief period between 1936 and 1938, Arcand's politics gained public legitimacy and were supported by Quebec's provincial government. His party merged with other fascist groups including the Canadian Nationalist Party of Winnipeg to form the National Unity Party of Canada. After the outbreak of World War II and as Canada declared war on Nazi Germany, tolerance towards homegrown Nazis wore thin and Arcand's headquarters were raided. The police confiscated truckloads of anti-Semitic propaganda and arrested suspected Fascists. Arcand and other members of the National Socialist Christian Party were interned for the duration of the war.