

**SUBMISSION TO THE CANADIAN PARLIAMENTARY COALITION
TO COMBAT ANTISEMITISM (CPCCA)**

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Quebec Jewish Congress

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Antisemitism in Quebec¹

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1. Description of the Organization

Quebec Jewish Congress (QJC), the Quebec division of Canadian Jewish Congress, is the representative organization of the Quebec Jewish community. Its mandate is to represent and to protect the community's interests by maintaining ongoing contact with government and political leadership, with representatives of Quebec's diverse cultural communities, and with the media. QJC has historically been and remains at the forefront of efforts to protect and defend human rights.

QJC represents a Jewish community that has been part of Quebec society for 250 years. The first non-Christian European community to establish roots within the province; the Jewish presence has contributed to all facets of Quebec society. Today, the Quebec Jewish community numbers approximately 93 000 people mainly concentrated in the Greater Montreal region. United by a strong Jewish identity, its members are from diverse national origins, practice varying degrees of religious observance, ideological orientation, socio-demographic status, and language. 70-75% of the community identifies as Ashkenazi (East European) and 25-30% identify as Sephardic (North African, Middle Eastern).²

2. Historical Overview of Antisemitism in Quebec

In times past, antisemitism was endemic and widespread in Quebec (as it was in other parts of Canada and elsewhere) and it was an element of daily life. Today, it is a relatively marginal phenomenon. The *numerus clausus* no longer exists in our universities. Hotels and organizations no longer restrict access or membership. The boards of major enterprises include members of the Jewish community and of other minorities, in more than token numbers. Public life no longer has discriminatory limitations and exclusions. The Catholic Church has implemented the historic decisions of the Second Vatican Council, has set aside its derogatory

² Weinfeld, Martin (2008), Quebec Anti-Semitism and Anti-Semitism in Quebec, Jerusalem Center for public affairs, January, (Online) <http://Jcpa.org>
Accessed August 29,2009

attitudes and has entered into a mutually respectful dialogue with the Jewish community. Other churches have done the same.

Quebec has become, for its Jewish citizens, a welcoming and egalitarian society in which all can flourish.

Yet antisemitism still exists. There remain people who have negative attitudes towards Jews, based in considerable measure on a lack of knowledge of our community, as well as on erroneous impressions or perceptions. Hateful words are still spoken or written, and from time to time there are violent actions, sometimes serious, against individuals and institutions. The disease may be less virulent, but it has not disappeared.

From a broad historical perspective what emerges from a review of the historical literature is that, throughout their presence in the province, Quebec Jews have lived a paradoxical existence in which they are both accepted and rejected by Quebec society. For example in 1832, the government enacted progressive legislation that finally emancipated the Jews in the province³ becoming one of the first governments in the western world to provide equal civil and political rights to Jews. On the other hand by the end of the 19th century Jews were depicted as wanderers, Christ-killers, a cursed race, and devourers of Christian blood; antisemitic themes that have existed since the Middle Ages.⁴

In the 1920's Quebec nationalism became the primary source of antisemitism in the province and Quebec intellectuals were influenced by the teachings of the Catholic Church. The influential French-Canadian priest and historian L'Abbé Lionel Groulx⁵ relied on his Catholic faith to justify his hatred of Jews and remains a controversial figure in Quebec. Considered the spiritual leader of the Quebec nationalist movement he glorified the racial purity of French Quebec. Groulx advocated for denying Jews their civil and political rights and promoted the *Achat Chez Nous* movement.

³ Following the 1808 expulsion of the duly elected Jew Ezekiel Hart from the Legislative Assembly of Quebec, the assembly passes a law giving full political rights to the Jewish citizens of Lower Canada (the 1832 Emancipation Act), a first in the British Empire and some 27 years before Great Britain itself.

⁴ Langlais, Jacques and David Rome, 1991, *Jews and French Quebecers: Two Hundred Years of Solitude*. Transl. Barbera Young. Waterloo Ontario, Wilfred Laurier University Press, p. 70

⁵ Lionel-Adolphe Groulx (1878-1967) was a French-Canadian priest, historian, and novelist who was the major intellectual force behind French-Canadian nationalism from the 1920s to the 1960s. He exercised his influence through the politically militant Action Française and its journal *Action française* (founded 1921, later *Action nationale*).

During roughly the same period Montreal journalist Adrien Arcand led a series of fascist political movements between 1929 until his death in 1967. Arcand proclaimed himself the Canadian “fuehrer” and published and edited several anti-Semitic newspapers most notably “Le Goglu”, “Le Miroir”, “Le Chameau”, “Le Fasciste Canadien” and “Le Combat National”.⁶ Although, Groulx and Arcand had different motives for attacking Quebec’s Jews, together they represent two schools of antisemitism that thrived in the province.

The Nôtre-Dame Hospital Interns’ Strike of 1934, perhaps, most graphically illustrates the attitude towards Jews in Quebec during this blackest of periods. When, for the first time in its history, the hospital’s administration accepted an application from a Jewish intern, Samuel Rabinovitch, French-Canadian interns went on strike. Interns interviewed by a sympathetic French media reported that Catholic patients would find it repugnant to be touched by a Jew. The dispute was settled when Dr. Rabinovitch resigned from the Order.⁷ The hospital promised never to hire a Jewish doctor and the University of Montreal Medical Faculty agreed to restrict the admission of Jews.

In 1935 a synagogue in the Laurentian town of Val David was surrounded by a French mob and set on fire destroying the sanctuary and all of the religious books. Signs forbidding Jews to enter the neighboring town of Sainte-Agathe where Jews were harassed assaulted and even arrested. Abella writes that stoning of Jewish funeral corteges was common.⁸

While much is written about the religious and nationalistic roots of antisemitism in French-Canadian society, English antisemitism, in the middle decades of this century, while different in tone and rationales, fared about equally.⁹ During the 20’s, 30’s and 40’s when McGill University

⁶ In contrast to Groulx, Arcand was a staunch federalist and anglophile who received covert funds from the leader of the Canadian Conservative Party Richard Bedford Bennett (Prime Minister of Canada from 1930 to 1935) to operate his newspapers and propagate antisemitism. His texts promoted antisemitic rhetoric comparable to that of Nazi Germany. He claimed that various national and international problems hinged on one factor: the Jews.⁶ His attacks on the separate Jewish school system were one of his many crusades on the community. He later became obsessed with the “diabolical Jew.” His best-known publication, *La clé du mystère*, was even translated into German and used by the Nazis.

⁷ See: <http://faculty.marianopolis.edu/c.belanger/quebechistory/docs/jews/index.htm> Accessed August 29, 2009

⁸ Rischin, Moses, *The Jews of North America*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987, page 236

⁹ Cf. Irving Abella, *A Coat of Many Colors: Two Centuries of Jewish Life in Canada* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1990, 248 p.); I. Abella and Harold Troper, *None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Lester Publishing, 1991, xxvi-340 p.); "Entrevue avec Robert

had a quota system for Jews, the University of Montreal received Jewish law students on their merits¹⁰.

3.0 Contemporary Antisemitism in Quebec

Historically, antisemitism in Quebec was a specifically Christian phenomenon, a result of two special circumstances: the complex theological relationship between Christianity and Judaism, and the times when Jews stood out as the only non-Christian people in the province. Today, there remains a small resistant strain of antisemitism rooted in pre-Vatican II Christian teachings that has passed from generation to generation. However, antisemitism in Quebec, as elsewhere in North America, is now more often disguised as anti-Zionism and is a distinct brand of antisemitism which has its roots in the demonization of Israel and its people, the Jews.

3.1 Anti-Zionism and Imported Antisemitism

A new form of anti-Jewishness has emerged which parallels classical antisemitism, but is distinguishable from it.¹¹ Classical antisemitism is, “the discrimination against, or denial of, the right of Jews to live as equal members of a free society.”¹² The new anti-Jewishness, otherwise referred to as anti-Zionism, “involves the discrimination against, denial of, or assault upon, the right of the Jewish people to live as an equal member of the family of nations.”¹³ The coupling of antisemitism with anti-Zionism has provided a new forum in which those who attack the Jewish community can operate. Anti-Zionism is thus used as a means to mask antisemitism, without assuming its stigma. Automatic, one-sided condemnation of Israel’s unsubstantiated “illegal” actions in Gaza and Lebanon has become the mantra of numerous Quebec institutions, especially and most ironically, those that describe themselves as favoring the left i.e. trade unions, academic associations, the Quebec Federation of Women.

Comeau", in G. Gougeon (ed.), *Histoire du nationalisme québécois*, pp. 105-110; Martin Robin, *Shades of Right: Nativist and Fascist Politics in Canada, 1920-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992, viii-372 p.).

¹⁰ An example is Alan Gold, who became Chief Justice of the Superior Court of Quebec and received many other honours from Quebec and Canada.

¹¹ Cotler, Irwin, “Anti-Semitism is the canary in the mineshaft and it threatens us all” , Jerusalem Post, February 22, 2009

¹² Ibid. p. 3

¹³ Ibid, p. 4

Anti-Semites attempt to refute this assertion by pointing to members of the Jewish community that similarly condemn Israel. The criticism of Israel is not in itself antisemitic. However, when it is voluntarily blind to the human rights violations throughout the world and falsely accuses Israel of these same violations; one singles out the Jewish state for differential and discriminatory treatment.¹⁴ Furthermore, studies reveal that, “those who endorse anti-Israel statements tend to endorse anti-Semitic statements,”¹⁵ as well.

3.2 Anti-Israel Demonstrations

Many have attributed the influx of large numbers of immigrants from the Middle East to the persistence of antisemitism here, as they have brought with them the views and perceptions of their innate societies.¹⁶ For the past fifteen years in exercising the power to select immigrants, Quebec has given priority to immigration from the Maghreb in order to favor French speakers. Today, roughly 20 percent of immigrants to Quebec arrive from the Maghreb (Quebec: MICC, 2007).¹⁷ By no means do we suggest that all immigrants from the Middle East are antisemitic. However, the domestic fall-out in Quebec from international events - such as the recent Lebanese (August 2006) and Gaza (January 2009) conflicts - is such that a higher proportion of individuals in Quebec attribute the conflicts to Israel's actions in the Middle East.¹⁸ Groups supporting the removal of the terrorist organizations, Hezbollah and Hamas, from Canada's terrorist list have found greater sympathy in Quebec than elsewhere in this country.

3.2.1 Lebanese Demonstration, August 6, 2006

This new form of antisemitism was in evidence on August 6, 2006 when thousands poured into the streets to protest Israel's action in Lebanon. Billed as a peace demonstration the protest succeeded in attracting prominent Quebec and Canadian politicians and other public figures. Their presence at the demonstration was condemned by mainstream Jewish community

¹⁴ Cotler, *op.cit.*, note 10

¹⁵ Baum, Steven K. and Masato Nakazawa *Anti-Semitism Versus Anti-Israeli Sentiment*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico; (online) <http://creighton.edu/JRS/2007/2007-31.html> Accessed August 29, 2009

¹⁶ Weinfeld, *op. cit.*, note 1

¹⁷ Immigrants to Québec, ten largest countries of birth, 2002-2006 Rank Country of origin Number Percentage of immigrants

1 Algeria 17 344 8.3 ;2 China 17 226 8.2;3 France 16 397 7.8; 4 Morocco 16 034 7.7.;5 Romania 13 178 6.3; 6 Colombia 9 362 4.5;7 Lebanon 7 658 3.7;8 Haiti 7 572 3.6; 9 India 5 692 2.7; 10 Pakistan 5 326 2.5 Source: Quebec: DRAP, 2007b

¹⁸ *ibid*

organizations as legitimizing the rabid antisemitism displayed in placards and signs held by pro-Hezbollah sympathizers. In the days following the demonstrations political leaders sought to distance themselves, claiming that their participation had been conditional on the promise that no Hezbollah flags would be allowed. However unintentional, the fact remains, that the participation of high profile politicians - in what can only be described as a hate-fest against Jews worldwide – appeared to add legitimacy to the virulent hate speech that marred the event. In the three years since this event the anti-Israel, pro-Hezbollah/Hamas forces have gained a strong foothold in Quebec.

3.2.2 Gaza Demonstration, January 10, 2009

On January 10, 2009, a demonstration was held in downtown Montreal that called for the destruction of the State of Israel in support of the Hezbollah and Hamas terrorist organizations. Demonstrators chanted, “*brule brule Israel*,”¹⁹ while desecrating the Israeli flag. They chanted “*Hezbollah, à bas bas Israel*,”²⁰ and “*Nasserallah est l’aimé d’Allah et le martyre est aussi l’aimé d’Allah*.”²¹ The demonstration also resonated with traditional antisemitism as participants chanted “*Mort aux Juifs*,”²² and “*Le Palestine nous appartient et les juif sont nos chiens*.”²³

3.3 Boycott, Divestment, Sanction (BDS) Campaigns

Although relatively little news has surfaced in the mainstream media regarding Quebec boycotts of Israel, internet sites promoting these boycotts reveal that several Quebec public and para-public institutions and NGO’s have supported this unjust cause.

In addition to the predictable leftist fringe groups, over twenty prominent Quebec organizations, including the Fédération des Femmes du Québec (FFQ) and the provincial union of CEGEP teachers, have openly endorsed the BDS campaign.²⁴ Furthermore, *the L’Association pour une Solidarite Syndicale Etudiante (ASSÉ)*, one of Quebec’s largest student unions also endorsed a

¹⁹ Video recording of Gaza Protest, Montreal produced by the Quebec-Israel Committee Please refer to the attached DVD in the Appendix.

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ Montreal Police legal response to Canadian Jewish Congress complaint

²² *ibid*

²³ Video, *op. cit.*, note 20

²⁴ “*Israel ne peut pas rester impugni*”, ASSÉ et FNEEQ; (online)

http://fneeq.qc.ca/action_internationale/comm._0016.html Accessed August 29,2009

boycott on Israeli academic institutions.²⁵ “The boycott is an act of violence, though a paradoxical kind – one of recoil and expulsion rather than assault.”²⁶ Thus, to promote a boycott on Israel is to promote the notion that Jews, or the Jewish state are to be excluded from the international community on the premise that they are dangerous and unworthy of international participation.²⁷

3.4 Police Reported Hate Crime and Antisemitic Incidents

While it is difficult to precisely quantify antisemitism seemingly opposite trends have emerged. Police reported hate crimes statistics for 2007 reveal that Jews remain the primary target of religiously motivated hate crimes in Canada, accounting for more than two-thirds of the religiously motivated incidences reported.²⁸ Yet the most recent reports indicate that hate crimes against Jews in Quebec diminished between 2006 and 2007.²⁹ Similarly, police-reported hate crimes targeting Jews in Quebec have also diminished in recent years in relation to those that occur in Ontario.³⁰ It should be noted, however, that police-reported hate crime statistics measure only those incidents that fall within the ambit of the Canadian Criminal Code. As we shall see antisemitic incidents that are not within the ambit of the Code spiked during the media fueled debate on reasonable accommodation which captured the attention of the Quebec public in 2007 and 2008.

Notwithstanding the decline of antisemitic incidents in the province, studies reveal that compared with English Canada, Quebecers are more likely to harbor negative sentiments towards Jews.³¹ This does not mean that Quebecers are more willing to subscribe to the full syndrome of antisemitic ideas, but rather that they are more likely to agree with negative characterizations of Jews.³² The “*cultural basis for anti-Semitism in Quebec is strong, with*

²⁵ *ibid*

²⁶ Dershowitz, Alan M., and Anthony Julius, *This boycott is not just wrong, it's anti-Semitic*, The Times, June 12, 2007

²⁷ *ibid*

²⁸ Police-reported hate crime in Canada, 2007, p. 12; (online) <http://statcan/pub/85-002-x/2009002/article/10844-eng-htm> Accessed August 29, 2009

²⁹ *Ibid*, p.7

³⁰ Oral Interview with University of Ottawa History Professor Pierre Anctil, July 12, 2009 by David Dudkiewicz and Alana Inhaber, interns, for QJC's present submission

³¹ Weinfeld, *op. cit.* note 1

³² Sniderman, Paul M. et .al. “Psychological and Cultural Foundations of Prejudice: The Case of Antisemitism in Quebec”, *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, Vol. 30, 1993 at p. 265

*dislike of Jews strongly related to the importance attached to conformity as a value but not a nationalist sentiment.*³³ Although these sentiments exist within the margins of Quebec society, they reappear in Quebec discourse in moments of national or international crises.³⁴ .

3.5 Jewish Institution Fire Bombings

On April 5th, 2004, the library of the United Talmud Torah School in Saint-Laurent was firebombed in what was the first of a trilogy of bombing attempts that shook the Montreal Jewish community. The culprit was a young Lebanese immigrant who targeted this Jewish institution in protest to recent events in the Middle East.

In September 2006 a Molotov cocktail was thrown into the Skver-Todos Orthodox Jewish Boys School.

A third incident took place on April 4, 2007 when a failed bombing attempt occurred at the YM-YWHA Ben Weider Jewish Community Centre in Snowdon, Quebec. Together, these attacks represent a violent strain of antisemitism that has not been experienced by the Montréal Jewish community for some time. The Jewish community of Quebec was shaken by these incidents of antisemitic violence.

3.6 Vandalism

Vandalism is not unique to the province of Quebec; however, several reported incidents throughout the province have been antisemitic in nature. For example, in May of 2004 Jewish headstones were overturned.³⁵ at the Beth Israel cemetery in Quebec City. In August 2005, a synagogue at a Val Morin Orthodox summer camp was vandalized; 300 holy books were desecrated as many were found in the toilets and the lake.³⁶

³³ Ibid,265

³⁴ Tulchinsky, Gerald, *Canada's Jews: A People's Journey* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), p. 310

³⁵ Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies, Montreal Antisemitism (online) www.fswc.ca/antisemitism-Montreal.aspx Accessed August 29,2009

³⁶ ibid

During the summer months, antisemitism tends to rise in the Laurentians, as many within the Jewish community summer in this rural area. Most of these incidences take the form of vandalism; however, with the assistance of the Quebec Jewish Congress, police, municipal officials and politicians, and Hassidic community leaders have collaborated to significantly reduce tensions.

3.7 *The Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Difference (CCPARDC) (“The Bouchard-Taylor Commission”)*

In the fall of 2006, the essentially private dealings of two neighbors, an orthodox synagogue on the one hand, and the YWCA on the other, erupted into full scale media frenzy over reasonable accommodation. The mutual, but controversial, decision to replace windows in the women’s exercise room with glazed glass, escalated into a surge of what seemed like an endless series complaints that put adherents of non-Christian faiths under a negative spotlight. Premier Jean Charest appointed two respected academics, Gerard Bouchard and Charles Taylor to conduct an inquiry in reasonable accommodation.

The Action Democratique du Quebec’s (ADQ) leader Mario Dumont seized on the debate in advance of an election call to accuse the main political parties, PLQ and PQ of pandering to cultural communities and ignoring Quebecers desire to assert their national identity. While the reasonable accommodation debate was not part of the official election campaign, Dumont’s visibility in the media immediately prior to the campaign, resulted in an unprecedented win of 41 seats. The ADQ’s fortunes were dramatically diminished in the 2008 Quebec election, however, his ultimately ill-fated meteoric rise to become leader of the opposition became, in the minds of many religious and cultural minorities an indication of the latent xenophobia of Quebecers residing outside large urban areas.

Week after week the debate captured the news headlines.³⁷ The tolerance of the moderators shown to individuals spouting antisemitic and Islamophobic hate speech tarnished the hearings. Statements ranged from accusations that Jews control international finance that rabbis keep

³⁷ Over 900 briefs were submitted and 241 persons testified during the marathon 31 days of hearings. All told 22 regional forums attracted 3, 423 participants and over 800 people took part in province wide forums. Moreover 13 research projects conducted by Quebec academic specialists were commissioned and 31 focus groups were organized throughout Quebec with participants of diverse backgrounds.

Jewish women under men's thumbs, and that widespread kosher labeling raises the price of goods Quebecers buy at supermarkets.

During the hearing in September, 2007 a speaker is recorded as saying there is a "Kosher Food Tax" as part of a Jewish conspiracy to drive up prices in supermarkets which means "Quebecers have to pay for the Jews." Another speaker is applauded for saying that immigrants are "buying their way" into Quebec, citing Jews as the worst case because they are "the trampoline of money in the world." In November a man claims that the accommodation controversy in Quebec "is the fault of the Jews" alleging they control the justice system.

Throughout the debate the media made disproportionate use of the Hassidic community to characterize the Jewish community as a whole.³⁸ The image of the Hassidic Jew, who continues to wear traditional Eastern European Jewish garments, reinforces the false negative stereotype of the Jew as an unassimilated immigrant, and thus as the other, despite 250 years of shared history.

3.8 Antisemitism on School Campuses

In 2004, anti-Israel forces on school campuses began to promote Israeli Apartheid Week, unjustly associating Israel with the apartheid regime that existed in South Africa. Apartheid is a crime against humanity. Labeling Israel as an apartheid state is a deliberate attempt to undermine the legitimacy of the Jewish state itself. The anti-Apartheid campaign has garnered the support of mainstream labor unions (CSQ) and the Quebec Women's Federation, to name just a few.

4. Conclusion

Our experience in Quebec suggests that some of the antisemitism that continues can be attributed to lack of direct contact with Jews in rural Quebec. Through sustained outreach, education and sensitization programs the Quebec Jewish Congress has made significant inroads in reducing tensions in such places as Sainte-Agathe-des-Monts.

³⁸ The Hassidic community represents a minority of the Jewish community in Quebec, constituting roughly 12% of the Quebec Jewish population.

A new antisemitism in Quebec, wrapped up as it is with anti-Zionism and related movements is more problematic and will take more time and effort to understand and diminish.

We have only brushed upon the major elements of the topic of this brief and look forward to expanding on our presentation at the Commission's hearings.

5. Recommendations

We subscribe to the recommendations contained in the submission of our National body, the Canadian Jewish Congress, with appropriate adjustments to take into consideration the particular Quebec context.

In addition, we recommend greater education of immigrants on matters of human rights, cultural diversity and multiculturalism.

Montreal, August 31, 2009

Adam Atlas, President, Quebec Jewish Congress