

THE FOUNDATION DOCUMENTS OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY COUNCIL OF MONTREAL*

Ira Robinson

This article examines the founding document of the Jewish Community Council of Montreal in the context of the North American kehillah movement of the early twentieth century. It also situates the document in the context of the internal dynamics of the Montreal Jewish community of the 1920s.

On September 30, 1922, a pamphlet was printed by Hirsch Wolofsky, publisher of Montreal's two Jewish newspapers, the Yiddish daily *Keneder Odler* (KO) and the English weekly *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*.¹ The pamphlet, bilingual in Yiddish and English, was entitled "A Kehillah For Montreal: Outline of Plan for the Formation of Such a Body."² It aimed at the organization of a communal body which would adequately control and represent the burgeoning Jewish community of Montreal, then the largest in Canada.³ The boldness of this plan can only be understood against the backdrop of other attempts and failures to create such a Jewish community organization in the North American context.

One of the major tasks facing all ethnic communities in North America in the early part of the twentieth century was the formation of communal structures appropriate both to that community's traditions as well as to the social and political realities of North America.

Jewish Political Studies Review 8:3-4 (Fall 1996)

This was a difficult matter to achieve. The centuries-old modalities of Jewish communal consensus, which had developed in traditional Jewish communities, had been dealt significant setbacks by governmental regulation and societal expectations as well as the inroads of modern, secularist modes of discourse within the community itself.⁴ In North America, moreover, the growing Jewish communities faced more than radically different economic and political structures. They also had to deal with the significantly different and, at times, opposed interests of two distinct groups: the already established, acculturated Jewish community and that of the more recent immigrants.⁵ It is in this atmosphere of pressure and change that Jewish communities in Montreal and elsewhere in North America in the early twentieth century, experimented with setting up a comprehensive internal communal structure, known popularly by the Hebrew word for community — *kehillah*.

Arthur Goren's examination of the *kehillah* experiment in New York City was the first to thoroughly study this phenomenon.⁶ It constitutes an admirable beginning for any investigation of the North American *kehillah* experiments. However it is limited in that it does not go far beyond the boundaries of New York. Though it is true that New York City constitutes the largest and, in many ways the most influential Jewish community in North America, it is also true that one cannot always extrapolate from the New York experience to that of other communities. Another factor of importance which militates against a too-close adherence to Goren's New York model for our purposes is the issue of the difference in internal dynamics between the Canadian and United States Jewish communities.⁷ As a preliminary exercise toward a broadening of the investigation of these problems, this writer has, in a previous article, looked in a comparative way at two less studied North American *kehillah* experiments: Philadelphia and Montreal.⁸ In this study, we will concentrate on the founding documents of the Montreal communal experiment without, hopefully, losing sight of the fact that Montreal's effort has to be seen in a North America-wide perspective at the very least.⁹

The *kehillah* movement, wherever it appeared, was an attempt to deal with the disparity between the older, more acculturated elements of the Jewish community and the power structures they had built up and new ones emerging from the newly immigrated Eastern European Jews. It was essentially an original form of cooptation on the part of the settled establishment seeking to retain its essential power in vastly new circumstances. The *kehillah* was designed, as an acute contemporary observer, Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, wrote, to be a "Jewish social pacifier," an agent of control.¹⁰

In both New York and Philadelphia, the impetus for the establishment of *kehillah* structures arose from serious public accusations against the immigrant Jewish community and public defenses of that community on the part of the leadership of the recently founded American Jewish Committee (AJC), which sought to be the semi-official voice of organized American Jewry. The AJC leaders saw an opportunity to establish order within an immigrant Jewish community some of whose religious (Orthodox) and political (socialist) trends had profoundly disturbed many of them.¹¹

With the establishment of the New York Kehilla in 1908, and its counterpart in Philadelphia, in 1911, the AJC's challenge was to work to bring the Eastern European Jews into a framework basically under the control of the established Jewish community while respecting the "American representative method." In both New York and Philadelphia, the *kehillot* eventually encompassed, at least formally, most Jewish organizations in the city. However the delegates of these organizations possessed little power of their own since the organization was tightly controlled from the top by the AJC.¹²

The issues the *kehillot* in both Philadelphia and New York attempted to face were, most prominently, the chaotic states of the kosher meat industry and of Jewish education — issues which were not liable to impinge upon the areas of primary interest to the powerful established Federations of Jewish charities because they were within the "religious" sphere, which the Federations had excluded from their purview. *Kehillot* served as well as a lobby group before the authorities in matters concerning Jewish religious rights as well as immigration rights in general.¹³

In attempting to deal even with these limited issues, the *kehillot* in the United States suffered from important structural flaws, which no doubt contributed to their relatively short lifespan. For an organization, one of whose important goals was to structurally include the Eastern European immigrant community, the *kehillah* did its work almost entirely in English.¹⁴ More importantly, the *kehillot* never had any serious financial resources of their own. This was especially the case in Philadelphia. The Philadelphia Jewish Community's total income, from 1911-1914, totalled only \$2,830.¹⁵ Finally, the *kehillah* concept was actively opposed, or at best not supported, in both cities by secularist and labor groups which constituted an appreciable and articulate segment of the immigrant Jewish communities, as well as by elements within the Orthodox religious community, suspicious of the motives of the largely acculturated leadership of the AJC.¹⁶

The *kehillah* movement in the United States was effectively destroyed during World War I by the controversy which raged within American Jewry on the issue of the American Jewish Congress, pitting the American Jewish Committee, on the one hand, against Louis Brandeis and the Zionists, on the other, over the issue of democratic "representation."¹⁷ Naomi Cohen, in her critique of the Kehillah of New York, stated: "The *kehillah* did not matter very much in the life of the immigrant Jews. It was not their own, it came from on high rather than from the inwardness of their experience. It was too distant, in contrast to the *landsmanschaft*; it did not touch on the necessities of survival, in contrast to the unions."¹⁸

It is perhaps ironic and certainly instructive that the New York Kehilla's organizational life came to an end in 1922 — the very year a Jewish community council was being set up in Montreal. As we shall see, the founders of the Montreal communal experiment had looked closely at what was happening south of the border and thought they could do better.

In order to properly understand the context of the Montreal communal experiment it is necessary to backtrack to the year 1907. In that year, two major events occurred which served to lay the groundwork for the organization that was to come. On the one hand, Hirsch Wolofsky, a recent immigrant, founded KO. In his autobiography, Wolofsky claimed that it was that event which transformed Montreal from a Jewish settlement to a community.¹⁹ Secondly, and no less significantly, a group of immigrant Orthodox congregations united in an organization called *Adath Israel* and hired as its rabbi Simon Glazer, who had come from Lithuania and had previously served congregations in Sioux City, Iowa, and Toledo, Ohio.²⁰ Both were to become bitter rivals for the leadership of the Montreal Jewish community.

The driving force behind many initiatives within the Montreal Jewish Community, Wolofsky utilized his position as editor and publisher first of KO and then of both of Montreal's Jewish newspapers to good advantage. Wolofsky, whose paper has been described by Ruth Wisse as an "establishment tool" of the business community,²¹ positioned himself as a figure acceptable to the more acculturated elements in the Montreal Jewish community as well as to a broad spectrum of the Yiddish-speaking immigrant community.²² From that position, he began an editorial campaign to create a Montreal *kehillah* on the model of New York as early as 1912.²³ As the English-language *Chronicle* editorialized in 1914: "In Montreal we have the same problems coming to the fore as in New York, and they require to be solved in practically the same way."²⁴

Wolofsky's competitor for the role of central organizer of the Montreal Jewish community was Rabbi Glazer. In 1907, soon after Rabbi Glazer came to Montreal at the behest of the "United Orthodox Congregations," he claimed the office of "chief rabbi" of Montreal and, his detractors claimed, of the Dominion as a whole.²⁵ In practical terms, Glazer claimed as "chief rabbi" to control the ten cattle slaughterers, fifteen chicken slaughterers, and thirty-eight kosher butchers in the city. This was reported by the *Montreal Star* of August 28, 1907.²⁶ Immediately Glazer's claim to be "chief rabbi" of Montreal was hotly denied²⁷ and his efforts the next year to have the city license kosher meat markets were opposed.²⁸

The source of the opposition to Glazer's pretensions, in the first instance, appears to have been the rabbis and leaders of the longest-established Montreal congregations, Meldola De Sola of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue and Herman Abramowitz of Shaar Hashomayim. Together with Lazarus Cohen, President of Shaar Hashomayim, the two rabbis attempted to set up a committee which would undermine Glazer's claims and reassert the power of the Jewish establishment in the kosher meat industry.²⁹ The anti-Glazer initiative had the support of other leading members of the established community,³⁰ and was supported editorially by Wolofsky.³¹

For tactical reasons Glazer had to be opposed by an Eastern European rabbi, one who would be recognizable as a rabbi to the immigrant Jews who made up the vast majority of Montreal Jewry. Neither the Sephardi De Sola nor Abramowitz, trained at New York's Jewish Theological Seminary, qualified. Though both were staunch upholders of the Judaic tradition, their rabbinic qualifications were not such as to command the absolute respect of the immigrant Jewish community. An ideal candidate was at hand, however. He was Hirsch Cohen, younger brother of Lazarus Cohen.³² He had come to Montreal in 1890 and attempted to become a merchant but failed to establish himself in business. He then went to Chicago, where he learned the art of kosher slaughter (*shehita*).³³ Cohen returned to Montreal to spearhead the fight against Rabbi Glazer. With the support of the city's Jewish elite, and of Hirsch Wolofsky's paper, he became the city's *de facto* chief rabbi while Glazer effectively became a media "non-person."³⁴

From the perspective of KO, the years before and during World War I saw repeated strife in the kosher meat industry as time and again slaughterers, butchers, and wholesalers were condemned for purveying non-kosher meat, price-gouging or defying the Montreal *kashrut* committee and the city's Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations, headed by Rabbi Cohen and backed by Abramowitz, De

Sola, Lyon Cohen (Lazarus' son who inherited his communal position) and Wolofsky.³⁵

Because of the media-control exercised by the KO in Cohen's favor, the opposition to Cohen, led by Glazer, tried, unsuccessfully, to launch a Yiddish newspaper of its own. They were ultimately forced to attempt to put forward their point of view as best they could through handbills and circulars. In 1918, presumably discouraged by the opposition to him and his organization by the communal establishment, Glazer left Montreal for Seattle.³⁶ As his successor, the "United Hebrew Congregations" chose Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg, a Polish rabbi then living in Toronto, who inherited Glazer's organization as well as his problems with Cohen and his allies.³⁷ From 1919-1921, Rabbis Cohen and Rosenberg slugged it out in a community of divided religious loyalties. After some time, however, the two feuding rabbis took steps to confront together the chaotic situation of the kosher meat industry in Montreal and create a united rabbinate and religious council.

Wolofsky editorially approved of all of this, but had much bigger plans for Montreal Jewry. On September 11, 1922, Wolofsky published a proposal for the organization of a communal organization which would solve the kosher meat problem in the city and defeat the "butcher trust."³⁸ Previous attempts at solving this had failed and Wolofsky thought he knew why. A central feature of his proposal was that the proposed communal organization would include not merely motivated religious Jews, organized in their synagogues, like previous attempts, but also the non-religious Jews, who were in the majority in the community. Some of these Jews, who were not necessarily either pro- or anti-religious, affiliated more with *landsmanschaften* or mutual benefit associations than with synagogues. Others still, called "radicals" (*radikaln*) because of their socialistic sympathies, had their primary affiliation with the Jewish unions.³⁹ It should be remembered that in both New York and Philadelphia, this "radical" element of the Jewish community had remained aloof and it is likely that this factor was in Wolofsky's mind when he formulated this facet of his program.

On September 30, Wolofsky printed his detailed proposal for a democratically elected community organization with equal representation on a 33-member executive for three classes of Jews: religious Jews (*shul yidn*) representing the synagogues, members of mutual benefit societies and unions, which comprised both religious and "radical" elements, and individual members who, considering the relatively high annual dues they were to pay (\$5-25/year), would come from the more well-to-do elements of the community who were, presumably, going to play a prominent, if not dominant, role

in the organization.⁴⁰ It was an interesting juxtaposition of the class-representation system of many traditional Jewish communal organizations in the Old World and the modern democratic traditions of the New.⁴¹

The benefits of a unified community were painted in bright colors by Wolofsky. For the religious, the community would avoid the rampant scandals in the city's kosher meat industry by taking affairs away from individual interested parties and put them into the hands of the presumably disinterested community council. By collecting a moderate fee for its supervision of the kosher meat industry of Montreal, Wolofsky felt that enough income would be generated not merely to pay the salaries of the rabbis, slaughterers and other personnel, and the community council's overhead, but also to defray the expenses of Jewish education in the city.

Wolofsky attempted to make the radicals' participation in the council worthwhile to them by promising to use the profits envisaged by the communal regulation of the city's kosher meat industry to support financially all the Jewish schools of the city — both the religiously oriented Talmud Torahs as well as the "radical," Yiddishist schools. As he stated: "The children in these schools, while not brought up along religious lines, are being taught to be proud of their Jewish heritage. They are being instilled with the true Jewish spirit. Such schools deserve the support of all sections of the community."⁴²

The "radicals," argued Wolofsky, had previously been in a position to destroy any communal solidarity since they tended to purchase their kosher meat wherever it was sold the cheapest. Giving them a stake in the communal organization would potentially create an unbreakable united front against the abuses of the butchers.⁴³

Other projects envisaged by Wolofsky for his *kehillah* included arbitration of labor disputes, a notable feature of the hopes of the New York and Philadelphia communities, the uniting of the city's "loan syndicates" into a Jewish chartered bank, and creating a Jewish hospital, among others. The Jewish community council would also be able to represent the Jewish community before the government of Quebec, especially on the then pressing issue of the status of Jewish children in the Protestant school system.⁴⁴

The implementation of Wolofsky's plan came relatively quickly. On October 29, the organizational meeting of the Jewish Community Council (*Va'ad ha-'Ir*) took place. There were some differences between the October 29 plan and Wolofsky's September 30 document. The first is the name. The word *kehillah* was decisively removed. It is likely that the recent organizational demise of the New York Kehillah influenced that removal. The only major substantive differ-

ence from Wolofsky's projection in the plan actually approved was that the three groupings Wolofsky had originally proposed were changed. Jews of Montreal were to vote for a 33-member executive composed of three groups: Orthodox Jews, representing the synagogues, "householders" (*ba'alei batim*) representing the societies and loan syndicates, and the workers, representative of local workingmens' organizations. Each voter was allowed to vote for up to eleven candidates on each slate. On December 17, the elections for Council representatives took place. Over 4,000 voters elected a council presided over by Wolofsky, who headed the slate of "householders," Lyon Cohen, who headed the synagogue slate, and Joseph Shubert of the workers. The rabbis of the city led by Hirsch Cohen also organized themselves into the "Rabbinical Council" (*Va'ad ha-Rabbanim*) of the Jewish Community Council.⁴⁵

Almost immediately the council's structure cracked along the previous fault-lines. The secession of Rabbi Rosenberg and his followers precipitated a "kosher meat war" which lasted until 1925 and seriously threatened its very existence.⁴⁶ Though the Jewish Community Council survived this test and later ones as well intact, it never came close to fulfilling Wolofsky's dream. It never attained any real influence in the community outside the realms of kashrut and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Jewish education. It remains in existence to the present, though it is now almost exclusively a *kashrut* certification agency — a far cry from its original ambitions and rates a bare mention in passing in the standard organizational study of the Canadian Jewish community.⁴⁷

Despite this, the Jewish Community Council of Montreal was, relative to the other North American *kehillah* experiments, a success in terms of its longevity and relative effectiveness in those areas this organization claimed as its own in common with the other *kehillah* experiments. One major reason for this seems to be the Montreal group's lack of connection with a national representative body which did not exist in Canada at this time. The Canadian Jewish Congress, though it was founded in 1919, did not possess an effective organizational presence in the decade of the 1920s.⁴⁸ Another major reason would have to be the relatively successful attempt to appeal to all sections of the immigrant Jewish community, in their own language, by offering them — religious and "radical" alike — a stake in the system. Finally, though Montreal, like New York and Philadelphia, boasted a Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, on whose turf the Jewish Community Council was careful not to impinge, the fact that the settled, Canadianized Jewish community in Montreal was far less substantial relative to the immigrant commu-

nity than in Philadelphia or New York meant that a *kehillah* structure in Montreal had far better chances of longevity.

This brief essay has shown important homologies in these various attempts at setting up Jewish communal structures in North America in the early twentieth century as well as substantial differences in setting which may help explain the differing fates of the *kehillah* experiments in Montreal, New York, and Philadelphia. A more detailed investigation into the extant papers of the Montreal Jewish Community Council will certainly give us further insights into the process of building Jewish communities in North America.

Notes

- * Research on this article was aided by a grant from the Department of Multiculturalism, Government of Canada.
- 1. On Wolofsky, see his autobiography, *Hirsch Wolofsky, The Journey of My Life* (Montreal: Eagle Publishing, 1945). On the Montreal Jewish press in that era, see Louis Levendel, *A Century of the Canadian Jewish Press: 1880s-1980s* (Ottawa: Borealis, 1989), pp. 17-22, 55, 60.
- 2. The pamphlet is extant in the Wolofsky papers of the Canadian Jewish Congress Archives, and the Jewish Canadiana Collection of the Jewish Public Library of Montreal.
- 3. On the development of the Montreal Jewish community, see B. Sacks, *History of the Jews of Canada* (Montreal: Harvest House, 1965). Cf. also Michael Brown, *Jew or Juif?* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1987); David Rome's series of publications entitled *Canadian Jewish Archives* new series (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress, 1974ff.); Pierre Anctil and Gary Caldwell, eds., *Juifs et Realites Juives au Quebec* (Quebec, 1984); and Gerald Tulchinsky, *Taking Root: the Origins of the Canadian Jewish Community* (Toronto: Lester Publishing, 1993).
- 4. Cf. Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto: The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation, 1770-1870* (New York: Schocken, 1978).
- 5. On this process in the United States, see Naomi W. Cohen, "The Ethnic Catalyst: the Impact of the Eastern European Immigrants on the American Jewish Establishment," in David Berger, ed. *The Legacy of Jewish Immigration: 1881 and Its Impact* (Brooklyn, 1983), pp. 131-148.
- 6. Arthur Goren, *New York Jews and the Quest for Community: The Kehilla Experiment, 1908-1922* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970). Cf. *idem.*, "New York Kehillah: a Response," *American Jewish History* 80 (1991):535-546. On the significance of the *kehillah* experiment in the context of North American Jewry, see Daniel J. Elazar, *Community and Polity: The Organizational Dynamics of American Jewry* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995).

7. Tulchinsky, *Taking Root*, pp. xix-xx.
8. Ira Robinson, "Two North American Kehillot and Their Structure: Philadelphia and Montreal," *Proceedings of the Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division B, *The History of the Jewish People*, volume 3, *Modern Times* (Jerusalem, 1994), pp. 139-146.
9. A good case could be made for a comparative study of the North American *kehillot* and parallel attempts at creating a Jewish communal structure in the interwar Polish Republic. On these communities, see Robert M. Shapiro, *Jewish Self-Government in Poland: Lodz, 1914-1939*, Doctoral Dissertation, Columbia University, 1987.
10. Cohen, "Ethnic Catalyst," p. 154.
11. Cf. Naomi Cohen, *Not Free to Desist: A History of the American Jewish Committee, 1906-1966* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1972), chapters 1 and 2.
12. See the constitution of the New York Kehillah in Daniel J. Elazar, Jonathan Sarna and Rela G. Monson, eds., *A Double Bond: The Constitutional Documents of American Jewry* (Lanham, MD: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs and University Press of America, 1992), pp. 306-308.
13. Cf. Goren, *New York Jews*, p. 66ff.
14. Cf. *Third Annual Report of the Jewish Community of Philadelphia for the Year 1913-1914* (Philadelphia, 1915), p. 5. It may be for that reason that there is literally nothing concerning the Philadelphia Kehilla in the major Yiddish language survey of Jewish life in Philadelphia during this period. Cf. Rosen, "German Jews vs. Russian Jews," *Jewish Life in Philadelphia, 1830-1940*, ed. Murray Friedman (Philadelphia: Balch Institute, 1983), p. 203.
15. *First Annual Report of the Jewish Community of Philadelphia For the Year 1911-1912* (Philadelphia, 1913), p. 3; *Second Annual Report of the Jewish Community of Philadelphia for the Year 1912-1913* (Philadelphia, 1914), p. 3; *Third Annual Report*, p. 3.
16. Goren, *New York Jews*, p. 50.
17. Cohen, *Not Free to Desist*, p. 91ff.
18. Cohen, "The Ethnic Catalyst," p. 154.
19. Wolofsky, *Journey of My Life*, p. 47.
20. On Glazer, see David Rome, *Canadian Jewish Archives*, n.s. 37 (1986), pp. 51-82.
21. Ruth Wisse, *A Little Love in Big Manhattan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 89.
22. This is indicated by his control of the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*.
23. KO, September 23, 1912. Cf. *Canadian Jewish Times* (Montreal), December 20, 1912 and January 24, 1913.
24. *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, July 31, 1914.

25. This assertion was made by Maxwell Goldstein, affiliated with Temple Emanu-el, in "Jewish Affairs in Canada," July 16, 1909, p. 16.
26. The title of the article was "Jews Complain of Sunday Law."
27. *Montreal Star*, September 3-4, 1907.
28. *Ibid.*, April 9, 1908.
29. *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, March 12, 19 and 26 and April 19, 1915.
30. Cf. note 25 above.
31. KO, April 7, 16 and 18, 1915.
32. On Cohen, see KO, November 19, 1950.
33. KO, September 14, 1930.
34. Neither KO nor the *Chronicle* reported his activities and he was forced to issue circulars to announce his activities and give his side of the argument.
35. E.g., KO, May 9 and 13, 1910; January 5 and 11, 1914; March 11, 1914; April 1 and 7, 1915.
36. On Glazer's subsequent career, see Joseph P. Schultz and Carla I. Klausner, "Rabbi Simon Glazer and the Quest for Jewish Community in Kansas City, 1920-1923," *American Jewish Archives* (April 1983), pp. 13-25.
37. Ira Robinson, "Kabbalist and Communal Leader: Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg and the Canadian Jewish Community," *Canadian Jewish Studies* 1 (1993):41-58.
38. KO, September 11, 1922.
39. KO, September 18 and 20, 1922.
40. Wolofsky, "A Kehilla For Montreal."
41. Cf. Salo W. Baron, *The Jewish Community* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1942), vol. 2, p. 38ff.
42. Wolofsky, "A Kehilla for Montreal."
43. Cf. *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, October 6 and 13, 1922.
44. Cf. David Rome, *On the Jewish School Problem in Montreal, 1903-1931*, *Canadian Jewish Archives*, n.s. 2 (1975).
45. KO, October 10 and 30, November 1 and 2, December 11, 17 and 18, 1922.
46. Cf. Ira Robinson, "The Kosher Meat War and the Jewish Community Council of New York, 1922-1925," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 22, 2 (1990):41-53.
47. Daniel J. Elazar and Harold Waller, *Maintaining Consensus: The Canadian Jewish Polity in the Postwar World* (Lanham, MD: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs and University Press of America, 1990), p. 99.
48. Cf. Pierre Anctil, "H.M. Caiserman: Yiddish as a Passion," in Ira Robinson *et al.*, eds., *An Everyday Miracle: Yiddish Culture in Montreal* (Montreal: Vehicule, 1990), pp. 78-79.

A KEHILLAH FOR MONTREAL

Outline of plan for the formation of such a body

By H. Wolofsky

September 30th, 1922

When I speak of a Kehillah for Montreal, it must be understood that it will not refer only to Montreal, but will represent all Canada. For, while it is true that the Kehillah will function only in this city, it will really be taken as the authority for all Canadian Jewry to follow. As we are the oldest and largest Jewish community in this country, it is really our duty to be the pathfinders for all other Canadian Jewry. Thus, a Kehillah in our city will really serve the best interests of all Canadian Jewry.

Why Do We Need a Kehillah?

Every Jew in Montreal knows and is convinced that some lack in our communal life must be responsible for the present chaotic condition of affairs.

Many will find an excuse for the licentiousness now existing, by blaming it on America. In America, they contend, there cannot be that care taken to make Jewish life as Jewish as possible. It is only when a catastrophe comes upon us, such as the recent Kosher butcher scandal, that we admit that something must be done the better to regulate our communal life. Public opinion must be respected.

And while the average Jewish citizen desires a change only because he hopes to improve the economic or cultural aspect of Jewish life in the city, the religious Jew, on the contrary, is anxious to strengthen Jewish religious life and to prevent a *Chillul Ha Shem*, such as the recent meat scandal from recurring.

Thus is born the idea of a Kehillah.

Now, we ask ourselves, how is such an organization to be brought about? And how is it to be organized so as to please all sections of the community? And even those who are wavering between sections? It is such questions that I have undertaken to answer in the course of this article.

While I do not expect my ideas to be taken up without argument, nor my advice to be followed implicitly, I do desire to help those, who are interested, to find a way out of the present tangle.

I feel sure of one thing, and that is that I can prove both the necessity for the formation of a Kehillah in this city and the useful purpose that such an organization could serve.

How System Would Come Out of Chaos with the Formation of a Kehillah

Every section of the Jewish population of Montreal helps to form a vital link in the chain that is the community as a whole. The respect accorded to any one section redounds to the credit of the whole community. On the other hand, no disgraceful act can be perpetrated by any Jewish citizens, without being felt by the community as a whole. For it is an accepted truth that all Jews form one body. They are looked upon as one body.

And so, too, if we separate the body into its component parts, we find that each part in itself is of no value, but that in conjunction with the others it can make a perfect whole.

We will begin with the religious section in the community.

Taken by itself, the religious group is unable to carry out any of the changes it desires. Let us take, for example, the terrible meat situation. I have been given to understand that *trefah wurst* is being sold all over the city and that most of the restaurants are using *trefah meat*.

The Talmud Torahs are always in financial difficulties, the teachers being underpaid. The Hebrew Schools are constantly before the public begging for money, and such a state of perpetual *schnorring* reacts unfavorably both upon pupils and teachers. The children, seeing the religious leaders cheapen themselves with all sorts of publicity in their attempt to obtain funds for the schools, seeing the kosher meat business ridiculed by press and public, finding no religious atmosphere either in their homes or elsewhere, begin to look upon the Jewish religion as more or less of a hoax — as something to get away from as soon as they grow up. Thus, the internal strife in Jewish affairs is driving the Jewish youth away from Judaism. Thus we see the weakness that exists in one of the links in the Jewish chain that is suffering from the present chaotic condition of affairs. Let us examine the other links before we attempt to prescribe a remedy.

There exists a link in our chain of which many of us are in complete ignorance. I refer to the unions of Jewish working men, who form a large part of the community. This group, desiring the perpetuation of a Yiddish culture, operate schools of their own, and these schools, too, suffer from the general upheaval. The children in these schools, while not brought up along religious lines, are being taught to be proud of their Jewish heritage. They are being instilled with the true Jewish spirit. Such schools deserve the support of all sections in the community, but unfortunately, one section of the community is often quite ignorant of what the other section is doing, and help is not always forthcoming. So the teachers in these schools, too, are underpaid, and the schools are obliged to come begging for money. And the Jewish child, seeing how little his elders care to keep up the schools, begins to look upon them as of little value compared to the regular schools, which are properly equipped and conducted.

I would even say that the economic situation of the Jewish workingman could be improved under the proper management of a Kehillah. Even strikes, especially when they occur in the shop of a Jewish employer, could be more easily adjusted, were there a duly-elected Kehillah, a true "Vox Populi" functioning in our midst.

Then there is the matter of Sick-Benefit societies.

There are in Montreal, at present, about 50 Sick Benefit Societies. If all these little societies were to unite in one big organization, they would not only increase their usefulness, but they would reduce expenses, while constituting a real power amongst the people. But it would take a strong senior body to effect such an organization, a body that would be stronger than the petty "politicians," who hold office in such societies, and who will not permit a strong organization for fear of losing their "jobs."

The same may be said of the local "Loan Syndicates."

Were all the local loan syndicates to be united into one strong body, Montreal Jewry could have one strong chartered Jewish bank that would be a credit to the whole community. Under the aegis of a Kehillah organization such a bank — the bank of the whole community, would be patronized by the community and would thus be put in a position to help those in need of financial assistance with larger loans. There is no doubt but that such a strong financial institution would improve the economic situation of the community.

Thus I could go on indefinitely multiplying cases that would prove, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the efficacy of an organized Jewish community — a Kehillah. But the suggestions I have already made will suggest other cases to my readers. Therefore, we will go on and examine the formation of such an organization, in all its practical possibilities.

The Present Prospects for a Kehillah

There is no need to emphasize that now is the psychological time for the formation of a Kehillah in Montreal. All sections of local Jewry feel the need of it.

Let us examine, then, what the Kehillah must undertake to do.

1. The Religious Aspect

To finance the *Beth Din*, so that the religious leaders need not be worried by financial difficulties, but can devote all their attention to:

- (a) The observance of the rules of *Kasheruth* by butchers, etc.
- (b) Questions pertaining to the Law, to marriage and divorce.
- (c) The proper conduct of the Talmud Torahs, Yeshivah and Jewish religious education in general.

All monies collected for *Kasheruth* to be turned over to the *Beth Din* for distribution under the supervision of the Kehillah.

2. The Economic Aspect

To prevent profiteering amongst Jewish merchants, especially those dealing with the necessities of life.

3. The General Cultural Aspect

(a) To make the Peretz Schule, Folk's Schule, etc., free from financial worry, so that they will not be obliged to seek for funds by means of tag days or other undignified methods. Also to put these schools upon a uniform system of teaching, so that the best results may be obtained.

(b) To establish new Jewish institutions such as a Jewish Hospital, etc.

(c) To lay the foundation for a Jewish parochial school.

(d) To organize the Sick Benefit Societies and Loan Syndicates upon a solid foundation of greater usefulness.

(e) To prevent unnecessary strikes and, should such occur, to use their influence as a Senior body to bring about a settlement.

With the formation of a Kehillah, other opportunities for usefulness in the communal welfare, than those I have mentioned, would crop up and be dealt with, from time to time.

The Method of Procedure

A city must be divided into three equal divisions embracing:

- (a) All religious Jews through their affiliation with the Synagogue.
- (b) All members of local organizations, unions and benefit societies.
- (c) All private Jewish citizens who are to become individual members of the Kehillah organization.

How the Organization will be Subsidized

Every organization and synagogue to be taxed \$100 yearly for the maintenance of the Kehillah.

Private members to pay from 5 to 25 dollars per annum.

First, a conference of all organizations and synagogues must be called, which will, in turn, appoint a special committee to study the question of a Kehillah from all its angles. This special committee is to be given a certain period of time in which to study the matter and bring in a report to a second general conference. Should this report and all its recommendations be accepted, the conference can then proceed to arrange for a special Campaign Week.

The Following Committees Will Be Required at Once

(a) A Committee to get in touch with all organizations and synagogues and arrange for their support of the Kehillah idea.

(b) A Committee to arrange for a Campaign Weeks that shall yield as large a number as possible of individual members.

(c) A Provisory Committee to carry out all the plans for organization. Every society and organization is to have one representative in the Kehillah, but the executive is to be elected from amongst the whole community.

Each of the three above-mentioned parties is to have ten representatives on the executive and one chairman. These three chairmen forming a Praesidium.

The Election of the 33

The election of the thirty for the Executive and the three for the Praesidium is to be held in the following manner:

A conference shall be called:

- (a) Of all individual members of the Kehillah and nominations held for 10 Directors and one chairman. Doubtless these nominations will exceed ten, since every Montreal Jew or Jewess over 20 is to be allowed to vote.
- (b) Of all synagogues, to nominate their Directors and chairman.
- (c) Of all organizations to nominate their Directors and chairman.

Then each group of names of those nominated is to be submitted to a special ballot, in which all Jewish citizens will have a voice, and then the eleven from each group, thus finally chosen, will really be the choice of the whole community.

As soon as the ballots have been cast, the 33 chosen as the Executive will take over the matter of *Shechita* and the *Beth Din*, and will also appoint the following committees: Educational, Rabbinical, Talmud Torah, Economic and Financial, with a chairman for each committee.

The chairmen of these committees are to meet no less than once a week. The representatives of the various organizations, etc., are to meet at least once a month to receive and discuss reports, etc.

A general meeting of all members is to be called semi-annually. A special bulletin shall be issued monthly by the Kehillah to its members, to report all that has occurred during the month, to state in addition, the income and expenditure for the month, and to show how many meetings have been attended by members of the Board of Directors or of the Praesidium.

These can only be tentative suggestions, depending upon the wish of the members and of the form of constitution the organization will adopt.

The Financial Aspect

It has been estimated that the local community consumes about 600 heads of cattle per week, but I will make a more conservative estimate and put it down at 500. Up to now, wholesalers have paid \$225 per head for *Shechita*, which covered all points connected with the *shechita*. Let us say that of this money, the Kehillah will receive only \$1.00 per head, because of the *Rebbonim Shochetim*, *Mashgechim* will have to be assured of a decent livelihood first. This will bring the income of the Kehillah to about the following:

\$1.00 per head from the shechita money for the year, about	\$25,000.00
3,000 members paying membership dues from \$5-\$15 or	
at a conservative estimate, a total of	30,000.00
About 100 organizations, synagogues, etc., paying a yearly	
toll of \$100 each	10,000.00
The slaughter of fowls, which at the present rate	
of 2¢ per head tax for Talmud Torahs would bring	
in about \$10,000, but once the <i>shochetim</i> are paid	
a regular salary, this could be raised to	<u>20,000.00</u>
Making a total income of	\$85,000.00

This sum may not seem large enough to carry on with, then we are certain that the Kehillah could raise another dollar per head on *Shechita*, adding another \$25,000, which would bring in a total income of \$110,000.00 per annum.

Expenses

(a) *Salaries and Rental:*

Executive offices for the Kehillah and <i>Beth Din</i> , rent, etc.,	
about.....	\$1,500.00
Salary of the Manager, about	3,000.00
Bookkeeper and stenographer, about.....	1,500.00
Collector of <i>Shechita</i> and Members' Dues, about	1,200.00
Sundries, telephone, postage, printing.....	<u>1,500.00</u>
Total.....	\$8,700.00

(b) *Assistance of necessary institutions:*

The Talmud Torah and Yeshiva an annual deficit of.....	\$30,000.00
The Folk's Schule and Peretz Schule, about.....	15,000.00
Bulletin and Propaganda, about.....	<u>1,500.00</u>
Total.....	\$55,200.00

Therefore, the income being about 85 thousand dollars and the expenditure about 55 thousand dollars, leaves a surplus of about 30 thousand dollars if only one dollar *shechita* tax is collected for the Kehillah and a 55 thousand dollar surplus if \$2 is collected. This surplus must go into such necessary Jewish institutions as a Jewish hospital and others for which the need will surely arise and especially for the first Jewish Parochial School.

Then, another means of income for the Kehillah can be found.

Up to the present, there seems to have been no system regulating the Jewish laws of marriage and divorce and many grave mistakes have been made. The Kehillah can easily prevent such mistakes by making stringent regulations and taking care to see that they are observed. All couples intending to get married, will have to announce their intention to the Kehillah manager, who will have the banns published in the Bulletin at a charge of \$5.00, if no obstacles arise to prevent the marriage. This will net the Kehillah at least a thousand dollars (\$1,000) per annum, while putting marriage on a legal basis, both from the point of view of Jewish Law and of civic jurisdiction.

No religious divorce is to be granted by any Rabbi, without the consent of the Directors of Kehillah, to whom all the circumstances must be revealed and who will do all in their power to bring about a reunion of the estranged couple. For this a regular charge could be made.

Another matter that has been sadly neglected, is that of registering the birth of Jewish children. The Kehillah will require every *mohel* to announce the birth of boys, while parents will announce the birth of girls, which will

then be registered by the Kehillah in the regular way. The Kehillah will issue a certificate to the properly-trained *Mohel*.

The Kehillah will obtain a charter permitting it to operate and be available for the furtherance of worthy communal projects.

The Kehillah will obtain a charter permitting it to operate and it will also strive for the passage of legislation that will make the sale of *trefah* for *Kosher*, or of *chometz* for *Pesachdig*, etc., a criminal offence.

As I have previously stated, I place these suggestions before the public merely with the desire to show, that our local communal affairs can be honorably adjusted and conducted under the supervision of a Kehillah, to the credit of every Jew in the city and to the advantage of all our necessary institutions. Doubtless, many of these suggestions will have to be elaborated upon or changed, but the Kehillah idea proves itself a practical undertaking.

I hope to see the first conference called immediately after *Succoth*, and with everyone attending the Conference prepared to offer intelligent advice or assistance, so that the affairs of Montreal Jewry may be placed upon a dignified, practical and thoroughly business-like basis, in accordance with the best Jewish traditions.