

## Canadian *Aliyah*

That Canadians are not Americans is a truism that continually bears repeating. In ways large and small, Americans — and others — perceive Canada to be merely an ungainly appendage of the United States. After all, professional hockey and baseball teams belong to American leagues, major American corporations are just as pervasive in Toronto as they are in New York, the 'border' has always been open and undefended, and most Canadians (at least the ones we know) speak English.

But Canada is, of course, a sovereign nation with an historical tradition and institutions that are quite unlike those found within its neighbor to the south. Exhibiting an embarrassing ignorance of things so close, most Americans have a remarkably uninformed picture of Cana-

dian life, still — perhaps unconsciously — brushing off their northern neighbors as Teddy Roosevelt did some eighty years ago as "those bumptious provincials." If Canada, by some freak of history, did not become the fifty-first state, the reasoning goes, it well should have done so. One result of this historical nonsensitivity to Canadian distinctiveness is that in references to 'North Americans,' Canadians are frequently lumped together with Americans or simply ignored. Social scientists, of whom we expect a more refined degree of perspective, are themselves conspicuous offenders.

It follows, most surely, that if Canada is *not* America and that if Canadians are *not* Americans, then certainly Canadian Jews are *not* American Jews. As can be expected, Canadian Jewry has a long history of interaction with American Jewry, but in the same sweep it remains separate and distinct. Canadian *aliyah*, discussed hereunder, mirrors that distinctiveness.

There are, demographically, two facts which in themselves place Canadian Jewry at significant variance with Jews in

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America. In the first place, by and large, Canadian Jewry is a full generation younger than American Jewry. Canada experienced a proportionally large influx of Jews following the Second World War; the children of these immigrants now represent a second generation in Canada who are a full generation 'closer to the boat' than America's grandchildren and great-grandchildren of immigrant Jews. The character of Canadian Jewry is influenced by these post-Holocaust refugees, to an extent not felt by the American Jewish community.

The second fact, no doubt related to the first, is more surprising. *Per capita*, Canadian *aliyah* approaches twice that of American *aliyah*. To the best of my knowledge, this startling statistic has never been recognized in any written source nor explored in depth. For studies of western *aliyah*, Canadian immigration to Israel is a telling indicator of Jewish behavioral priority that must be scrutinized closely to understand more fully the forces behind the 'pushes' and the 'pulls' that result in immigration to Israel.

Until the British acquisition of New France in 1759, Jews, like other religious minorities, were barred entry into the colony. Once under British protection, however, Jews in small numbers soon began to immigrate, and with the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1763, the permanence of British — and Jewish — presence in Canada was sealed.

Though free to settle, Jewish numbers in Canada remained almost insignificant for well over a century. Out of 50,000 or so Jews who left Germany between 1840 and 1870, only a tiny fraction chose Canada over the United States. By official counts, Canada's Jews numbered only 154 in 1841, and that number had

only increased to 1,195 in 1871. Most congregated in Montreal, Trois Rivières and Quebec city, although by mid-century small communities in Kingston, Toronto and Hamilton began to appear.

The wave of pogroms in Eastern Europe touched off by the assassination of Alexander II in 1881, and the officially sanctioned oppression of Jews which followed, resulted in a mass exodus of Eastern European Jews which continued for four decades. The vast majority of these Jews found refuge in 'The Golden Land,' the United States of America. A few, for one reason or another, ended up in Canada. At the turn of the century, Canadian Jews numbered only 16,000. By contrast, the Jewish population of the United States in 1900 is thought to have been around 1,000,000.

Relations between Jews in Canada and their brethren in the United States were always close; family ties often straddled the border. Indeed, almost half of the Jewish immigrants to Canada entered Canada from the United States in the early part of the twentieth century. At the same time, however, there was a reverse flow: the United States attracted both many established and newly arrived Canadian Jews. Despite the drain of Jews leaving Canada for the United States, by 1921 the Canadian Jewish population was well over 100,000.

Canadian immigration restrictions were imposed following the First World War but it was not until 1927 that the Revised Immigration Act formally codified them. The restrictions were primarily aimed at the poor. Lack of funds or a passage that did not constitute a continuous, unbroken journey to Canada from the place of previous residence were sufficient causes for

deporting newly arrived immigrants. In addition, arriving from a "non-desirable country of origin" could prevent one from being admitted. Such non-desirable countries invariably included those in Eastern Europe.<sup>1</sup>

Free immigration to the U.S. had been halted by 1925. With the onset of the Depression, Canada joined the United States in tightening the screws. The Canadian government enacted severe new restrictions in 1931, all but stopping immigration except from the British colonies and from the U.S. Hitler's rise to power in 1933 sparked strong efforts by the Canadian Jewish community to have the restrictions lifted, at least for Jewish refugees. Despite the heavy lobbying and the worsening situation in Germany, the Canadian government remained firm and only a handful of Jewish refugees were admitted to Canada during these years.

Canadian immigration policy loosened up considerably after the Second World War. Over 11,000 Jews entered Canada as displaced persons between 1947 and 1950. In the wake of the Hungarian uprising in 1956, 4,500 Jews among a larger group of 38,000 accepted refuge in Canada. Immigration of *Sepharadim* from Morocco and other North African countries began in the 1950s and continued through the 1960s. All told, an estimated 40,000 Jews immigrated to Canada between 1945 and 1960. The 1961 census revealed a Jewish population of 254,000, or 1.4 percent of Canada's total population. By 1981 the figure had grown to slightly over 305,000 Jews comprising 1.3 percent of the population.

There is little information available about Canadian *aliyah* before the establishment of Israel in 1948, although some

statistics were kept by the British mandatory authorities. Still, it is not unreasonable to assume that many of the patterns of U.S. immigration to Palestine are shared by Canada.<sup>2</sup> Zionism in Canada was the touchstone of Jewish life. Unlike the United States, it was Zionist institutions rather than religious institutions which ossified into the backbone of Canadian Jewish existence, creating a nexus that touched all segments of the Jewish community.<sup>3</sup> Five of the classical Zionist youth movements (*Betar*, *B'nei Akiva*, *Dror*, *Habonim*, and *Hashomer Hatzair*) boasted active clubs in many places within Canada, and Canada's one indigenous youth movement, Canadian Young Judaea, had been established as far back as 1917. What Canadian Jewry lacked in numbers it compensated for in organization. American Zionism, or at least its institutional expression, had more than an equal counterpart in Canadian Zionism and, we can assume, in Canadian *aliyah*.

Numerically, Canadian *aliyah* figures are small. If we use the country of last residence as our standard for 'Canadian', the official total of Canadian *olim* between the years 1948 and 1966 is exactly 1,200.<sup>4</sup> Although the Six Day War was a watershed event for western *aliyah* in general, Canada's post-1967 statistics highlight an increase that almost jumps off the page. Canadian immigration to Israel shot up 688 percent from 1967 through 1969. By contrast, the American jump in that span was only 42 percent. During the boom years of western *aliyah* from 1967 through 1973, there were 3,261 Canadian *olim*. But as was the case with American *aliyah*, the high Canadian numbers presaged a steady decline in *aliyah* for the remainder of the seventies. The six years 1974 through 1979 witnessed only an

additional 1,867 Canadian *olim* settling in Israel.

Although Canadian *aliyah* numerically has reached only slightly more than 6,300 in the thirty-two years following the creation of the State, contrasted with American *aliyah*, the figure is large. While Canada's Jewish population is a mere 5 percent of the Jewish population of the United States, Canadian aggregate *aliyah* is almost 8 percent of the American total. Thus, using each country's respective Jewish population as a common denominator, Canadian *aliyah* is 60 percent greater than its American counterpart.

At least a partial explanation for the higher Canadian rate is the relatively large percentage of first and second generational representation in the Canadian Jewish population. If the American experience is any guide, the closer one is to the boat, so to speak, the more responsive one is to Zionist ideology and to Jewish identification in general. The forces of assimilation are less likely to have overpowered a Jew's self-perception of otherness; Israel is more likely to be seen as a potential alternative for personal Jewish fulfillment.

The generational breakdown among Canadian *olim* is also different than it is for Americans. In the first nine years after Israel's independence, 33 percent of Canadian *olim* were first generation Canadians. In the following ten years, from 1957 through 1966, first generation *aliyah* drops to 26 percent. The figures for American first generation *aliyah* in identical timeframes, by contrast, are 17 and 19 percent respectively. Since 1967, first generation *aliyah* among Canadians has hovered between 20 and 24 percent. For Americans, first generation *aliyah* after 1967

reflects a similar degree of representation.

A major legal stumbling block, that of dual citizenship, was never as problematic for Canadians as it was for Americans wishing to immigrate to Israel. Before the *Afroyim* case overturned existing laws regarding U.S. citizenship rights in May of 1967, Americans were not legally entitled to dual citizenship privileges. The practical effect of this was that before *Afroyim*, the acquisition of Israeli citizenship was grounds for the cancellation of American citizenship. As a result, the overwhelming majority of American *olim* in Israel opted out of Israeli citizenship, and thus neither voted nor served in the army.

The Canadian Citizenship Act of 1947, amended in 1952, stated that an individual would cease to be a Canadian citizen by acquiring nationality or citizenship "by any voluntary and formal act other than marriage." In effect, this meant that Canada would honor dual citizenship if it was acquired under the Law of Return, which automatically bestows Israeli citizenship to all immigrating Jews. A radical liberalization of the Act took place in 1976, and now (outside of a treasonous act) only fraud is still a ground for the cancellation of Canadian citizenship. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the Israeli dual citizenship issue is that over the years there have been no cases taken to court on the question. Apparently there have been few dissatisfied customers.

No numbers or statistics, of course, can accurately relate the rhythm and character of Jewish life in the Dominion of Canada. As with many other facets of Canadian existence, Canadian Jewish life is not unlike Jewish life in the United States. Both countries traditionally have had similar policies toward immigrating minorities, both countries were founded on

democratic principles, both were blessed with great expanses of unsettled land and the opportunities these afforded to the waves of newcomers. But Jewish life in Canada has never been the mirror reflection of the Jewish situation in the United States.

Canada's history is the history of coexistence, not among a plethora of religions and large and small ethnic groups, but among two nations whose language, whose religion and whose culture are as distinct from one another as Arab is from Jew. Canada was never the melting pot America aspired to be. The distinctions were too sharply defined and too internalized to be shed. English or French, Protestant or Catholic, Anglophone or Francophone. Just as Canada was confederation of provinces, so it was also a confederation of nations.

Although Jews had been given full civil rights in Lower Canada as far back as 1832 and had been guaranteed national civil and religious freedoms at confederation in 1867, the distinctions between church and state were never quite as pronounced as they were in the United States. Partially a function of its two national alteregos, Canada, legally and socially, was not, in fact, religiously neutral. The public schools often did not even feign disinterestedness on religious matters. One Canadian now living in Israel remembers that "every year there was New Testament Bible reading in the schools. In assembly every morning we sang Christian hymns." Recalls another Canadian *oleh*:

I remember going through a traumatic experience of being told I had to play Joseph in a Christmas pageant and refusing to do so . . . and being pressured by the teachers until finally I broke down. I think I cried.

Beyond the periodic anti-Semitic outbursts Jews experienced throughout Canadian history (the most outward of which came from the French Catholic community), Canadian institutions often tended to ignore the Jewish minority's presence. Canada, the consensus believed, was a Christian country and therefore Canadian life should reflect such an orientation. On more than one occasion in Quebec, Catholic dioceses prevented their congregants from selling land to Jews. 'Public' education was almost everywhere denominational. For many years in Quebec, in fact, Jews were designated by provincial legislation to be "Protestants for school purposes." Indeed, it was within the framework of public education that Canada's christianizing pressures may have been most pronounced. These pressures were generally informal, most often representing the biases of individual educators. As illustrated above, they were likely to take traditional forms: mandatory singing of Christian hymns, participation in Christmas and Easter pageants and strong admonishments for missing school during the Jewish holidays. While such practices were hardly unknown in the United States, their intensity and social pervasiveness in Canada sets them apart. Christianizing social and educational pressures were a logical byproduct of Canada's bi-national, cultural and religious duality. By rejecting the melting pot, Canada often refused to grant legitimacy to non-British and non-French groups.<sup>5</sup>

In the last twenty years, pressures on Jewish youngsters in the Canadian public schools have lessened, yet have not disappeared entirely. Even within the last decade, in cities of large Jewish concentration such as Montreal and Toronto,

overt Christian pressures in public school were still being felt.

For Jews, Canada was always something of a dilemma. It was both a host and a haven, but Canada did not extend an invitation or provide the opportunity for Jews to submerge their distinctiveness into an undifferentiated whole. Jews were neither English nor French. They had more in common with the English, for the most part, but they were never really accepted into their ken. Assimilation in Canada, even if desired, was less viable than it was in the United States. Jews were distinctly Jews, and in the big cities and in the small towns Jews tended to cling together.

For these reasons Canadian Jewry is a community unlike American Jewry. Canadian Jews tend to be more conservative than American Jews, both politically and denominationally. A higher percentage are affiliated with Jewish organizations and identify in a personal way with Zionist aspirations. And, they make *aliyah* in

greater numbers.

It should be noted that with the immigration of a number of other distinctive ethnic groups in the last twenty years, Canada's self-perception has undergone a degree of change. Less now a national confederation and more a cultural mosaic, Canada's formerly strict dichotomies have somewhat blurred. Canada's Jews have nonetheless managed to maintain their Jewish ties. This is partly due to the high first and second generational presence within the Jewish community, and partly because becoming a 'Canadian' has always been a less mythologized, less distinct, and less desirable an enterprise than its American equivalent. Canadian *aliyah*, then, may reflect the Canadian Jew's ambivalent situation. Canada was far from eastern Europe for the immigrant Jew but, like England, Australia and South Africa, it neither assisted nor expected a weakening of Jewish self-consciousness.

## NOTES

1. Joseph Kage, *With Faith and Thanksgiving* (Montreal, 1962), p. 62 ff. In this monograph Kage gives a full and detailed treatment of the history of Jewish immigration to Canada.
2. For a discussion of American *aliyah* during the British Mandate see Calvin Goldscheider's "American Aliyah: Social and Demographic Perspectives" in Marshall Sklare, ed., *The Jew In American Society*, (New York, 1974).
3. In references to early Canadian Zionism I am indebted to Michael Brown's "The First Decade of Zionism in Canada and the United States: A Comparison", (unpublished, 1981).
4. Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, Israel, Immigration to Israel 1948-1972, Special Series #489, 1975. Data on country of residence (Can.) are not available officially for 1948 and 1949. Estimates were prepared based on country of birth (Can.) data. The average ratio of country of birth (Can.) to country of last residence (Can.) 1950-56 was applied to country of birth (Can.) data 1948-49. Figures after 1972 are from unpublished official data in the files of the Central Bureau of Statistics.
5. Brown, *op. cit. supra*, n.3.