



RABBIS & THEIR COMMUNITY: STUDIES IN THE EASTERN EUROPEAN ORTHODOX RABBINATE IN MONTREAL, 1896–1930

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ISBN 978-1-55238-681-1

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The Founding of the Jewish Community Council of Montreal (Va'ad ha-'Ir)¹

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. – Hirsh Wolofsky (1922)²

In this chapter, we will be looking at something slightly different. In the previous chapters, we have largely been concentrating on rabbinic personalities. Now we are shifting our focus from rabbis and their controversies to something broader. Just as one cannot understand the Montreal Jewish community and its development without understanding who the rabbis were and what they stood for, it is similarly impossible to understand the rabbis without knowing something about the broader communal situation they faced. That broader picture will be depicted in this chapter, which will culminate in the founding of the Jewish Community Council of Montreal, known in Hebrew as the *Va'ad ha-'Ir*.³

Before we get to the *Va'ad ha-'Ir*, however, there are some broader questions that need to be discussed. The broadest of them all is how does one organize a Jewish community in North America, or, indeed, anywhere in the world in the twentieth century? In small communities, the process may be relatively easy. If there are few synagogues in town, if Jewish organizations are also few, then the process of establishing a Jewish community and Jewish leadership is relatively simple to comprehend. If, however, we are speaking of the larger communities in the early twentieth century, of the magnitude of Montreal, Chicago, New York, or Warsaw, the

question becomes how does one deal with a complex array of Jewish opinions, ideologies, and organizations? How does one construct a community containing the very stringently Orthodox, the militantly anti-religious, as well as all those in between? All call themselves Jews; all have cogent claims to membership in the Jewish community. Another question to be answered is who takes the lead in organizing such a community, since certainly, as in all organizational endeavours, someone must take the lead? Thus when we talk about the Eastern European Jewish immigrant community of Montreal, getting together in 1922/3 in order to found an organization known as the *Va'ad ha-'Ir*, it is important to know what sort of models they had at their disposal to inform their decisions.

The man who stood behind the creation of the *Va'ad ha-'Ir*, and who will soon be introduced, as well as his co-workers, understood that there were several possible models for the creation of an organized Jewish community in North America from which to choose. The first question that needed to be answered was: who takes the lead? In the United States, the first group to attempt to organize the large Jewish communities of New York, Philadelphia, and elsewhere in the twentieth century consisted of the people who coalesced around an organization called the American Jewish Committee.⁴ The American Jewish Committee was made up largely, though not totally, of Jews stemming from the older, mid-nineteenth-century immigration of Jews to the United States. The immigrants in this group had largely come from Germany and not from Eastern Europe, and there were as well a significant number of native-born Americans among them. They therefore had an extra generation to acculturate themselves in North America – an extra experience at being “American.” In the first decade of the twentieth century, Russian anti-Jewish pogroms, particularly the Kishinev Pogrom of 1903, created a mass outrage within the American Jewish community. That outrage fostered a feeling that the American Jewish community needed to create an effective leadership group that would be able to lobby the American government on issues relevant to the Jewish community. The founders of the American Jewish Committee understood that “organization was in the air,” and that if they, the acculturated and the affluent, did not come to the fore and lead, others, less “Americanized” surely would come to fill that need and carry the community in possibly irresponsible directions. In their view, the Eastern European Jews had, first of all, not sufficiently

assimilated American values, and thus were not to be considered worthy representatives of the American Jewish community.⁵ In asserting their leadership of the American Jewish community, the founders of the American Jewish Committee co-opted certain Eastern European Jews to their body. Nonetheless, the model offered by the American Jewish Committee was one of an elite choosing its own organizational structure and people, while asserting that its structure and people represented the American Jewish community as a whole.

While the American Jewish Committee was, and remains to this day, an important factor in the organizational life of American Jewry, there were yet other models from which to choose. Another model available was that of Federations of Jewish Charities. Starting in Boston in the 1890s, cities containing large numbers of Jewish organizations decided to federate in order to more efficiently raise funds. Jews in cities with federations would not have to give separately to each individual institution. Rather they would give once a year to a federated Jewish charitable appeal, which took upon itself the task of a fair and just allocation of Jewish charitable funds. The federations thus achieved, through the power of allocation of funds, considerable power and influence within the Jewish community.⁶

There was yet another model of communal leadership that originated within the Eastern European Jewish community itself, starting in the first decade of the twentieth century. By that time, the mass immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe to the United States had been ongoing for more than two decades. That meant that the immigrants who had arrived in the 1880s had been in America for sufficient time to begin to feel "at home." Many of them had by then gone beyond the hand-to-mouth existence of their first years in the New World. They were on their feet financially and had largely assimilated what being a Jew in America meant. While retaining a respect for the German-Jewish leadership that claimed to speak on their behalf, they began to insist that their voices be heard in the councils of American Jewry. They claimed, as Americans, their right to representation in these councils. They felt that, in a democratic society, the Jewish masses had to have their say, not only the upper classes. Out of the struggle of the newer Eastern European immigrant Jewish community to find its authentic leadership voice, arose one of the most interesting political movements in American Jewish history. It was called the "Kehilla" movement.⁷

“Kehilla” is the classical Hebrew word for community. European Jewish communities were often called “*Kehilla Kedosha*,” or “Holy Community.”⁸ Perhaps it is because the people behind the American Kehilla experiment were not necessarily “holy” people, that the adjective “Holy” was dropped from the title. What the leaders of the American Kehilla movement wanted to do was to make sure that all Jews and all Jewish organizations would be represented in the communal leadership, not merely the German-Jewish elite and its institutions. This especially applied to the organizations created by the Eastern European immigrants: their synagogues, *landsmanschaften*,⁹ and loan societies. These were organizations that were not typically represented in the Federations of Jewish Charities, which were dominated by the Jewish monied classes, overwhelmingly of German-Jewish descent. In their totality, however, these Eastern European organizations were important in the lives of thousands of Jews. Jewish trade unions, in the garment industry and beyond, also demanded representation. The idea of the Kehilla movement was to make use of all of these organizations and their potentials and to make sure that all their constituencies were represented. Furthermore, the Kehilla movement wanted to do things that the established American Jewish leadership groups had tended to neglect. A good example is Jewish education. Federations of Jewish Charities in North American cities (Montreal Jews founded a Federation of Jewish Charities in 1917 as part of this trend) were founded mainly to support the areas of social welfare and immigrant aid. They did not, however, significantly support Jewish education. For the elite, Jewish education was not a pressing issue. There was not much worry about how to make Jewish children Jewish in these circles at this time. It was fairly well assumed that living in Jewish neighbourhoods and being exposed to the services of the synagogue would take care of the Jewishness of the children, as though it could be absorbed by a sort of osmosis. Jewish education, moreover, was felt to be the domain of the individual congregations, rather than the community as a whole. In any event, these elite organizations did not want to touch Jewish education, though they did agree that education aimed at the Americanization (or, in the case of Montreal, the Canadianization) of the immigrant population was highly desirable. Insofar as Jewish education was controlled either by Orthodox Jews, or by Jews of radical political and social inclinations, it was not really attractive to them. Indeed, by and large, the Jewish

federations would not seriously support Jewish education until the 1960s, when the process of acculturation to North America had fully run its course, and there began to be a generally perceived need to educate children Jewishly. On the other hand, for the Eastern European immigrant community, Jewish education for its children was considered of vital importance from the very beginning. Thus it is significant that the Kehilla movement, from its inception, supported important initiatives in the field of Jewish education.

The Kehilla movement started in New York in 1908. From there, it spread to Philadelphia,¹⁰ St. Louis, Denver, and other cities throughout the United States. In all these places, there was a coming together of the German-Jewish elites and the Eastern European emergent leadership to create an organization that would be, as much as possible, inclusive of all Jewish organizations in the city and address community needs that the federations were not addressing.

One of these needs was *kashrut*. The conflictual situation found in Montreal with respect to *kashrut* certification was to be replicated throughout North America. Another need, already mentioned, was support for Jewish education. Still another feature of the Kehilla system was an attempt to create a mechanism whereby labour disputes between Jewish workers and Jewish bosses could and should be settled within the community without recourse to strikes. This might be done either through facilitation of negotiations, or else through a more formal arbitration board, which could create a just situation for both labour and management within the Jewish community.

The Kehilla movement was a wonderful dream. Certain parts of it came into reality. Thus, for example, the highly influential New York Board of Jewish Education began as a bureau of the New York Kehilla. However, the Kehilla ultimately foundered during World War I. First of all, the movement split over the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which promised the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine. In the aftermath of the Balfour Declaration, the Eastern European Jewish community in North America, whose sympathies, save for a small radical fringe, were fairly solidly on the side of the Zionists, split off from the German-Jewish elite, which was fairly solidly non- or anti-Zionist. The Eastern Europeans demanded that their Kehilla lobby the United States government to support the Balfour Declaration, and, by extension, the creation of a Jewish

homeland in Palestine after the war. They did so with the battle cry of American democracy. Their side had the majority of the votes, though the German-Jewish elite had in fact provided most of the financing. In general the elite groups were afraid of the possibility of accusations of “dual loyalty” against the Jews and opposed this move.

Ultimately, the Eastern European and Zionist leadership pushed for the creation of an American Jewish Congress, which was to demand that Jewish rights in Palestine be established and formally recognized in whatever international order would come into being after the war. The German-Jewish elite, which disliked Jewish nationalism and even objected to the widespread knowledge that a “Jewish vote” existed, was horrified. The split between the elite and the masses ultimately destroyed the Kehilla movement’s viability. By 1922, the New York Kehilla had dissolved; the Philadelphia Kehilla had gone out of existence several years before this. The Kehilla movement, however important it is for our story, was thus ultimately a failure.

Within the Montreal Jewish community, the largest and most influential Jewish community in the Dominion of Canada, there existed the same sort of split between an acculturated, Canadianized and fairly well-to-do minority, which was in charge of Montreal’s Federation of Jewish Charities, and the Eastern European immigrant majority. However, relatively speaking, the former group were less numerous and generally less influential relative to the totality of the Jewish community than was the case in the United States. The question confronting the Montreal community was the same as that posed in the United States: who would organize the Canadian Jewish community? Starting in the first decades of the twentieth century, there were a number of attempts to do so.¹¹ Thus the Canadian Zionist Federation sought to create a Dominion-wide communal representation on the basis of its cross-Canada network of societies. B’nai B’rith, for its part, claimed that Zionism was unable to unite all elements in the Canadian Jewish community and put forth its own counterclaim to leadership in the creation of an organization to represent Canadian Jewry. Ultimately, neither the Zionists nor B’nai B’rith were able to create by themselves a Canadian Jewish representative organization.

Nonetheless, as in the United States, World War I was crucial as a catalyst in the organizational development of Canadian Jewry.¹² In the same way as an American Jewish Congress was organized to articulate the political positions of the Jews of the United States, so there was a

movement to create a Canadian Jewish Congress to be the voice of Canadian Jewry, expressing its demands for the postwar world. Of course, beyond expressing its support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine, the Canadian Jewish Congress also sought to address other issues relevant to the Canadian Jewish community, such as anti-semitism. The Canadian Jewish Congress thus promised to be the democratically elected, organized voice of Canadian Jewry. However, like the Kehilla movement, as well as the American Jewish Congress movement, the Canadian Jewish Congress movement did not take hold immediately.

To be sure, the Canadian Jewish Congress had a successful inaugural meeting in Montreal in 1919, which has a well-deserved place in the annals of Canadian Jewry. However, what is less well known, and of extreme importance for our subject, is that, after its initial meeting, the Canadian Jewish Congress petered out. The next time the Canadian Jewish Congress held a plenary meeting was in 1934. Between 1919 and the thirties, there were certainly efforts, especially by H. M. Caiserman,¹³ to keep the organization going, but lack of money and lack of interest caused these efforts to ultimately fail.

Thus the people who were engaged in creating the *Va'ad ha-'Ir* in 1922 were doing so in the year the last of the American Kehilla organizations ceased existing. They were not unaware of this event, for they were keen observers of the North American Jewish scene. From the perspective of 1922, moreover, the Canadian Jewish Congress movement had likewise more or less petered out. How were they to proceed?

One factor that they surely had to take into account was the existence of the elite-sponsored Federation of Jewish Charities, which dealt largely with health and social welfare issues. A second factor to be dealt with was the school issue. The position of Jewish children within the constitutionally mandated denominational school system in the province of Quebec had raised questions as early as 1903.¹⁴ Now, in the 1920s, the question returned with added political force and divided the community between those acculturated elements, largely those who constituted the leadership of the Federation, who saw in the Protestant school system a major Canadianizing force for Jewish children, and those, largely among the immigrant population, who advocated Jewish schools for Jewish children. Then, too, there was the chaos in the religious community. Since 1907, there had been two warring factions within the Montreal Jewish community – one led by Rabbi Hirsh Cohen,¹⁵ and the other led first by Rabbi

Simon Glazer,¹⁶ and, after him, by Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg.¹⁷ Between the two factions there were continual charges and countercharges, with particular reference to the certification of kosher meat.

By 1921, Rabbis Cohen and Rosenberg and their followers came to the decision that it was better to unite Montreal's Orthodox rabbinate. They thus began to jointly advertise butchers under their supervision. They co-opted Rabbis Garber and Zalmanovitz and, together, began calling themselves "*di hige shtot rabbonim*" [rabbis of the city]. There was also an attempt to create a lay leadership that would support this united rabbinate. This was known as the *Va'ad ha-'Ir ha-Dati* (the Religious Community Council).¹⁸ However, there was a man in Montreal who observed these developments and who had a much broader vision. This man's name was Hirsh Wolofsky.¹⁹ Wolofsky was the Jewish media baron of Montreal. He was the publisher of Montreal's Yiddish-language daily, the *Keneder Odler*, which had been published since 1907. By 1922, it was a fairly well-established voice in the community. He also published Montreal's English-language Jewish weekly, *The Canadian Jewish Chronicle*. He thus possessed a "bully pulpit," in the two languages that then counted within the Montreal Jewish community.

Wolofsky was a man of considerable and broad vision. He had to be because the Montreal Jewish community had barely sufficient room for one viable Yiddish daily. In New York, in the era of the 1920s, the Yiddish reader had the luxury of choosing a Yiddish newspaper according to his or her ideology. Communists would read the *Freiheit*; Socialists the *Forverts*. If you were Orthodox, you would read the *Tog* or the *Morgen Journal*. Each of these newspapers spoke for part of the community only. The *Freiheit* could thus damn the capitalists, and if the capitalists did not like it – *tant pis!* The *Tog* could support Orthodoxy, and if the Communists didn't like it – so much the better! However, a publisher in Wolofsky's situation could not afford to alienate anybody. To make his *Keneder Odler* a success, he needed to think on a whole-community basis. Thus Wolofsky's newspaper attempted to be respectful of both religion and non-religion; of labour and management alike. Wolofsky charted a course to keep his publications afloat and was successful in so doing.

This situation was likely the source of his insight that the uniting of the rabbinate of 1921 could lead to even bigger things. He saw beyond the religiously oriented *Va'ad ha-'Ir ha-Dati*. He envisioned what he called a

Kehilla. In both the newspapers he published, and in a separate, bilingual pamphlet issued on September 30, 1922,²⁰ he put forward his views in an essay entitled in both languages “A Kehilla For/Far Montreal.”

His use of the term “Kehilla” is significant, in that this was the same year – 1922 – in which the most prominent example of the American Kehilla movement was going under for the last time. Wolofsky was no fool, and he was certainly well aware of what was going on in the Jewish world. No one, indeed, could have been better positioned than he to find out such things. He had obviously decided that, in Montreal, there were possibilities for a Kehilla-like organization within the Jewish community. Whereas the attempts to unite Jewish communities in the United States through Kehillas had failed, he, Wolofsky, would succeed in Montreal. His prospects for success were good, he felt, because his plan would give each and every Jew in Montreal’s Eastern European immigrant community a stake in the success of the venture.

He started his essay by thinking big. As he stated,

When I speak of a Kehilla for Montreal, it must be understood that it will refer not only to Montreal but will represent all of Canada. For while it is true that the Kehilla will function only in this city, it will really be taken as the authority for all Canadian Jewry to follow.

We need to remember that, at this point in history, Canadian Jewry did not have an effective organizational leadership because the Canadian Jewish Congress, which might have created that leadership, was practically moribund. Therefore what Wolofsky was saying was that the “Kehilla for Montreal” was bound to have an influence far beyond Montreal’s boundaries.²¹

In analyzing the problems of Montreal’s Jewish community, Wolosky saw that it was divided into a number of groups. All of these groups had their individual problems and issues. In the Kehilla he envisioned, all of these groups would benefit. The first thing the Kehilla had to do was to remedy what he termed “the present chaotic condition of affairs” in the community. He continued:

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.

The crux of Wolofsky's idea was that the kosher meat crisis, which gave the impetus to organization, could be leveraged. First of all, he wanted to prevent what he called a "Chillul Ha Shem"²² that the kosher meat accusations, traded back and forth, had caused. But, while he agreed that kosher meat was a valid part of what needed to be fixed, he also emphasized that thinking in a broader perspective was necessary. As he stated:

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*²³ 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 Hebrew Schools are constantly before the public begging for money, and such a state of perpetual *schnorring*²⁴ reacts unfavorably both on pupils and teachers. The children seeing their 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 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.

That, then, was the challenge faced by the religious community. The next group Wolofsky discussed were the Jewish workers:

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.

He was, therefore, able to see the merit in all sides. The Yiddish schools may not have been religious, but, because they taught what he termed "the true Jewish spirit," "such schools deserve the support of all sections of the community."

He further stated:

I would even say that the economic situation of the Jewish workingman would 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.

Yet a third factor in Wolofsky's thinking was the existence of the Jewish sick benefit societies and *landsmanschaften*:

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.... The same could 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 Kehilla organization such a bank – the bank of the whole community, would be patronized by the community and would thus be in a position to help those in need of financial assistance with larger loans.

Once again, Wolofsky was thinking big, going far beyond the kosher meat issue that had started his process of thinking.

What was to be the task of the Kehilla? Its first goal would be to finance a *Beth Din*,²⁵ so that the religious leaders of Montreal need not be worried by financial difficulties but could devote all their attention to matters of *kashrut*, marriage and divorce, as well as the supervision of Jewish education. There was, as well, to be an economic aspect. Jewish merchants, in the face of Kehilla pressure, would not dare charge exorbitant prices for the necessities of life. In cultural terms, the Kehilla would support the entire spectrum of Jewish schools in Montreal. All of them would be financed in a dignified manner so they would not have to constantly beg the public for funds. The Kehilla would also be in a position to establish new institutions, such as a Jewish hospital.

The Kehilla could also "lay the foundation for a Jewish parochial school" – in other words Wolofsky looked forward to the time when there would be an opportunity to establish a day school that would give secular as well as religious instruction to Montreal's Jewish children.²⁶ This stance was of

some importance, because, in the 1920s, one of the major political issues facing the Jewish community was the “school question.” Broadly speaking, the support for separate Jewish schools came from the immigrant community, and support for Jewish childrens’ education in Montreal’s Protestant schools from the older, acculturated community. Wolofsky’s support for the establishment of Jewish parochial schools therefore constituted a stand that would arouse some opposition within the “uptown” community. It was also a stand that gained him the support of Montreal’s *Po’alei Zion* [Labour Zionists], a key group in facilitating the organization of the Eastern European Jewish community of Montreal. As David Rome has commented, the *Po’alei Zion* supported the formation of the *Va’ad ha-Ir* “because they foresaw it could become an important representative instrument, in the absence of a Congress, in the campaign for separate schools.”²⁷

Wolofsky also wanted the Kehilla to organize the Sick Benefit Societies and the Loan Syndicates “upon a solid foundation of greater usefulness.” The Kehilla, finally, would have the task of settling strikes and preventing unnecessary ones.

How was this wonderful scheme to be organized and financed? Organizationally, Wolofsky sought to divide Montreal Jews into “three equal divisions,” to be equally represented in the Kehilla council. This division was not to be merely symbolic. There was not to be one Kehilla president; rather, there was to be a three-member presidium, as well as an elected executive of thirty – ten from each division – each representing one of the three groups.²⁸ In Wolofsky’s Kehilla scheme, representatives would thus be chosen in accordance with the threefold division as follows:

- a) all religious Jews through their affiliation with the Synagogue [*shul yidn*],
- b) all members of local organizations, unions and benefit societies,
- c) all private Jewish citizens who are to become individual members of the Kehilla organization.

What Wolofsky could not, and did not, do was to assume that his Kehilla would be representative of the acculturated, affluent Jewish community that was known collectively in Montreal as “uptown.” Wolofsky was very

careful not to tread on the turf of the people behind the Montreal Federation of Jewish Charities, which certainly did not include any substantial representation of the immigrant community in its leadership. Thus in all that Wolofsky projected for his Kehilla, there is no mention, either by name or function, of the Baron de Hirsch Institute. There was no project to take over the functions of the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society. Wolofsky was therefore not looking at the sort of social welfare issues already covered by the institutions of the Federation. His purview was basically educational and cultural – issues neglected or ignored by the Federation. His Kehilla would be doing things that would be supplementary to, and would not clash with, the things already being covered by the Federation.

A key question Wolofsky addressed was the financing of his projected organization. The Kehilla was going to be financed through kosher meat:

It has been estimated that the local community²⁹ 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 \$2.25 per head for *Shechita* which covered all points connected with the *shechita*. Let us say that of this money the Kehilla will receive only \$1.00 per head, because of the *Rebbonim* [*sic*] *Shochetim*, *Mashgachim* will have to be assured of a decent livelihood first. This will bring the income of the Kehilla to about the following: \$1.00 per head from the *shechita* money for the year, about \$25,000.00.

After listing that figure, for which he had some precedent and justification, Wolofsky continued his estimate using figures that could only, even at the time, been called “highly speculative.” He thus envisaged 3,000 members paying individual dues, for a total of \$30,000, one hundred organizations, such as synagogues, paying \$100 apiece, for a total of \$10,000, and, finally, he dared venture into the loosely regulated – if at all – poultry-slaughtering market and estimated that, in the end, it could be made to contribute \$20,000 annually to the funds of the Kehilla. He thus estimated that his Kehilla would have \$85,000 income per year. As we will see in the next chapter, events proved that he was dreaming in Technicolor.

What was his Kehilla going to do with all that money? Approximately 10 per cent (\$8,700) of that money would be going to overhead. Of the rest, \$30,000 would go to the Talmud Torahs and the Yeshiva. The Folks Schule and the Peretz Schule would divide approximately \$15,000.

That would have constituted a considerable proportion of the annual budget of these institutions. It would have also left a surplus of approximately \$30,000, which he would allocate to such things as a Jewish hospital “and others for which the need will surely rise.” This, then, is Wolofsky’s vision.

His pamphlet was written in September of 1922. On October 29, a preliminary meeting was held to begin the practical organization of this body. It convened 164 delegates representing seventy-three different organizations. At that meeting, Wolofsky’s idea was adopted almost in its entirety. There were, however, several important exceptions. The first of these exceptions concerned the name of the organization. He wanted it to be called a “Kehilla,” but it ultimately saw the light of day as the *Va’ad ha-Ir*. The name was changed partially at least because the demise of the Kehilla movement in the United States may have discredited the name. With respect to the name ultimately adopted, *Va’ad*, it seems at least possible that they were looking at the example of the new, halutzic Jewish community of Palestine – the *Yishuv*. Indeed, as Wolofsky states in his memoirs, it was his trip to Palestine, in 1921, that gave him the name.³⁰ The Jewish community of Palestine had just established its own representative organization called the *Va’ad Leumi*.³¹ It was the *Va’ad Leumi* that ultimately emerged, in 1948, as the Provisional Government of the State of Israel. Another indication that the Jewish community of Palestine was the inspiration of the founders of the *Va’ad ha-Ir* was the name the organizers of the *Va’ad ha-Ir* chose for the Jewish court of arbitration they set up: *Mishpat ha-Shalom* [the Justice of Peace]. It was likely inspired by the contemporary attempt by Jews in Palestine to set up an internal judiciary system, independent of either traditional rabbinical courts on the one hand or the court system of the Mandatory government on the other. This system was called *Mishpat ha-Shalom ha-Ivri* [Hebrew Justice of Peace].³²

The new *Va’ad ha-Ir*’s basic governance structure remained basically true to Wolofsky’s vision, especially in its division of representation into three equal parts. The three divisions, however, were somewhat different. Instead of one of the divisions consisting of unaffiliated, private members, the three divisions now consisted of: a) synagogues, b) labour organizations, and c) loan syndicates and sick benefit societies. Efforts were to be made by the founders of the *Va’ad ha-Ir* to make sure that there were women as well as men elected as representatives.

The October 29 meeting determined that there would be elections for representatives to the first *Va'ad ha-Ir* on December 17, 1922. In these elections, there were seventy-five candidates for the thirty-three council positions. Approximately ten thousand Jews voted in these elections, or approximately 25 per cent of the total Jewish population of Greater Montreal. This voluntary turnout demonstrates the degree to which the idea had stirred the Jewish community.

The main contribution Wolofsky made to the founding of the *Va'ad ha-Ir* of Montreal was his idea that organization of the Eastern European immigrant Jewish community would not succeed unless it went beyond the religiously observant community. He therefore made sure that all segments of the community had a stake in the organization's success. The financial engine of the *Va'ad ha-Ir* was kosher meat. Religious Jews certainly patronized kosher butchers out of conviction. However, the non-religious elements of the community, who purchased their meat from Jewish butcher shops out of habit and not out of conviction, needed incentives to continue their kosher meat purchases. For them, the knowledge that the dollars they spent at the meat market would help their own schools – the Peretz and Folks Shules – and not just the Talmud Torahs made a discernible difference.

Wolofsky's idea took form fairly quickly. The supervising rabbis, slaughterers, and *mashgihim* [supervisors], instead of being paid directly by the slaughterhouses or the butchers, a situation prone to conflict of interest, were now paid by the *Va'ad ha-Ir*. Slaughterers were to receive approximately forty dollars per week. Rabbi Hirsh Cohen, as head of the Rabbinical Council attached to the *Va'ad ha-Ir* received sixty dollars per week from the *Va'ad*, along with his other sources of income. Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg started out at forty dollars per week, immediately asked for a raise, and then received forty-five dollars per week. The *Va'ad* also immediately began making payments to the Jewish schools of Montreal. In the first three months of its operation, the *Va'ad* paid over \$2,000 to the Talmud Torahs and a somewhat lesser sum to the Yiddishist schools. A good beginning had been made.³³

Unfortunately the good fortune that had accompanied Wolofsky's idea so far did not last. Within three months of the beginning of the *Va'ad's* operations, the organization nearly self-destructed.³⁴ It was blown apart because Rabbis Rosenberg and Herschorn and their supporters among the slaughterers, prominent among whom was Getsel Laxer,³⁵ seceded from

the *Va'ad ha-Ir*. Why did they do it? To begin with, there were many hard words and feelings in the past few years between the different factions of rabbis and slaughterers, as we have seen in previous chapters. These could not be, and were not, forgotten so quickly. Secondly, there was the issue, which Rabbi Rosenberg brought up in his propaganda, of how far an organization that had taken upon itself to supervise the supply of kosher meat should be in the power of Jews who had no religious commitment. Whatever the reasons, the result was a kosher meat war that began in 1923 and lasted until 1925. It was not literally called a "war" by those who participated in it. They preferred to call it the "Kosher Meat Question" [*di bosor kosher frage*]. On the other hand, when it was finished, the parties involved made a "peace" [*sholom*]. One does not make "peace" unless there has first been a "war." This kosher meat war will be described in the next chapter.