



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

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The Kosher Meat Wars of the 1920s and their Aftermath¹

It is now clear to everyone that if Rabbi Cohen knew his prohibition to be substantial ... he would come to a din torah and prove that the shoḥtim are forbidden. Why has he not done so? This is the best demonstration that his prohibitions are false ... and that the [prohibited] shoḥtim are really kosher. – Circular in the name of “The Rabbis and Shoḥtim of the Va’ad ha-Kashrut” (1924)²

In this chapter, we will be talking about something I have dubbed the “Kosher Meat War.” The people involved, did not call it a “war,” but rather “the Kosher Meat Question.” However, when they finished it, they spoke of “making peace [*sholom*],” and so I feel justified in this title. One does not make “peace” unless there has been a “war.” The Jewish people of Montreal, and especially the rabbis, *shoḥtim*, and butchers must have felt as though they had gone through a war by the time they were done.

At the very end of 1922, and the beginning of the year 1923, the Jewish Community Council [*Va’ad ha-’Ir*] had just been inaugurated. The organizational meeting of the *Va’ad ha-’Ir* took place on October 29, 1922. The first election for the *Va’ad* took place on December 17. For about three months, more or less, the coalition that Hirsh Wolofsky and others had brought together to create this new institution held.³ However, even while the coalition was holding itself together, it was held by a thread. There were a number of fault lines in the *Va’ad ha-’Ir*. One of them was between the rabbis. The rabbis involved in the leadership of the *Va’ad*, particularly Hirsh Cohen and Yudel Rosenberg, had to have retained vivid memories of the insults, accusations, and hurt feelings of the previous few years, in

which they had acted as sworn enemies. Another fault line was between the other rabbis and Rabbi Herschorn, who, in 1921, had acted as an interloper in the kosher meat supervision scene in Montreal. There were further fault lines among the *shohtim*. There were militant *shohtim*, whose leader was Rabbi Getsel Laxer,⁴ who were loath to take orders from other people. This was particularly so because Rabbi Laxer felt himself to be the equal in intellect and halakhic learning with the supervising rabbis. Why should these rabbis have the “easy” jobs, which paid more money than the *shohtim*’s hard physical labour on the killing floor. These *shohtim*, therefore, did not particularly like the hierarchy that was being imposed upon them by the *Va’ad ha-Ir*.

The butchers themselves also had their reservations about the *Va’ad*. Most of the Jewish butchers of Montreal in the early 1920 ran small, marginal businesses. In order to be a Jewish butcher, one did not have to invest all that much money. One also did not have to know all that much English, since almost all of the clientele would be able to, and would even prefer to, communicate in Yiddish. For many new immigrants, Jewish butcher shops marked their first step in their new country. The businesses were marginal, firstly, because there was plenty of competition. In the 1920s, there were over eighty butchers serving the Jewish community. This meant one butcher shop for every five hundred Jews. Some of them were quite successful, which meant that they sold approximately four thousand pounds of meat per week. If the markup was one cent, or even one-half cent per pound, this would enable to butcher to make a decent living. There were other butchers, however, who sold as little as five hundred pounds per week, and who obviously were eking out a marginal living.

They were organized in a group known as the “Association of Jewish Butchers of Montreal”⁵ in order to advance their own interests. From the point of view of the consumers they served, the Association was nothing less than a monopolistic “cartel.” The muckraking journalists of the *Keneder Odler* called it the “Butcher Trust.”⁶ In an era of widespread support for antitrust legislation to curb the likes of John D. Rockefeller’s Standard Oil Trust, branding an organization as a “trust” was a certain method of creating tension and even hostility within the community.

Thus it is clear that the public distrusted them and rightly assumed that the butchers wanted to get out from under the supervision of the *Va’ad* because they were afraid that the *Va’ad ha-Ir* was going to be too

strict with them. They were in fact correct. At one session of the Finance Committee of the *Va'ad ha-'Ir*, one of the members stated that the Jewish butchers of Montreal cannot take close supervision because, if one looked closely at the halakhic observance of these men, many of them would not pass muster. In January of 1923, there was a mass protest meeting because there was a rumour in the community that the "Butcher Trust" wanted to raise the price of meat by two cents per pound.

Finally, as a result of all of these inherent fault lines, in February 1923, Rabbis Yudel Rosenberg and Sheea Herschorn, and seven *shohtim*, led by Getsel Laxer, left the *Va'ad ha-'Ir*. Having seceded from the *Va'ad*, they proceeded to reform the United Synagogue organization which had been founded and presided over by Rabbi Glazer,⁷ and after him by Rabbi Rosenberg until the Montreal rabbinate united in 1921.⁸ Thus the *kashrut* supervision in Montreal was divided. On the one side stood the *Va'ad ha-'Ir*, and on the other stood the United Synagogue.

Why did Rabbi Rosenberg and the others secede? Beyond the fault lines previously described, we would do well to pay attention to the reasons articulated by Rabbi Rosenberg. We do not have a direct statement of his, but a great deal can be discerned from the rebuttal to his arguments published in the *Keneder Odler*, which enjoyed a media monopoly within the Montreal Jewish community and which remained consistently on the *Va'ad's* side. For the *Keneder Odler*, Rabbi Rosenberg and his partisans among the *shohtim* and butchers were traitors [*fareter*], and the paper also took upon itself the right to defrock Rabbis Rosenberg and Herschorn, consistently calling them "the former rabbis." To all of this, Rabbi Rosenberg and his group could only reply by means of handbills or circulars, few of which have been preserved. Nonetheless we are able to understand at least some of Rabbi Rosenberg's articulated positions on this issue.

His first objection was technical in nature, such as the inadequate number of inspectors [*mashgihim*], errors in slaughtering, etc. Secondly, he was dissatisfied with his salary. Rabbi Cohen was getting \$60.00 a week, whereas Rabbi Rosenberg was getting only \$45.00 a week. He obviously did not relish playing second fiddle in a financial sense. Finally, as we remember, Hirsh Wolofsky had built the coalition that founded the *Va'ad ha-'Ir* on the premise that both religious and non-religious Jews had to cooperate to make the organization a success. This meant that the educational institutions to be supported by the *Va'ad* included not only

the Talmud Torah and yeshiva, but also the Yiddishist Folks Shule, Peretz Shule, and Arbeiter Ring Shule. Rabbi Rosenberg said that he felt uncomfortable with non-religious elements sharing control over the *Va'ad ha-'Ir*, as well as giving money raised through the production and sale of kosher meat to the non- and even anti-religious Yiddishist schools.

The war was not just a propaganda war.⁹ It was not merely fought with newspaper editorials and handbills. It was also a physical conflict. There was violence among butchers; there were threats to *shohtim* loyal to the *Va'ad ha-'Ir* to desist from slaughtering or else harm would come to them. Rabbi Cohen accused his opponents of hiring gangsters to enforce the closing of certain butcher shops or to make sure that others remained open. All this is in line with a pattern of violence we have seen previously during Rabbi Glazer's sojourn in Montreal,¹⁰ as well as with Rabbi Rosenberg.¹¹ Leah Rosenberg, Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg's daughter recalls violence directed against her father because of the kosher meat controversy:

We became victims. Just before Yom Kippur a crowd gathered outside our home and threw stones. Father finally went out and faced the people. He told them their behavior was unforgivable and not to be taken lightly a day before Yom Kippur. The people were petrified and left.¹²

The scene described by Leah Rosenberg, though undated, presumably dates from the "Kosher Meat War." Newspaper reports from that period indicate that Rabbi Rosenberg was attacked on the street and that, moreover, any bearded Jew, who by his attire might have been suspected as belonging to Rabbi Rosenberg's group, could not show his face on the street with impunity.¹³

On March 8, 1923, the *Keneder Odler*, reported that a Mr. H. Cohen, who managed the butcher shop of the Consumers' League on 25 Roy St., loyal to Rabbi Cohen and Jewish Community Council [*Va'ad ha-'Ir*],¹⁴ had been assaulted on Main Street [St. Laurence Boulevard] near Pine Avenue. Witnesses said that the assault was perpetrated by a butcher, whose name was given to the police.¹⁵ The *Montreal Star* reported that the victim was hit on the head from behind and left unconscious and was still confined to bed several days later. Three of the officers of the Jewish Butchers' Association were arraigned in this case on a charge of attempted murder.¹⁶

Just a week later, the *Keneder Odler* reported that there were also threats received by *shohtim* loyal to the *Va'ad ha-'Ir*, warning them to desist from slaughtering or else harm would come to them. All the *shohtim* received the following letter, delivered to their home addresses:

Mr. —————

If you will go and slaughter for the Canadian Packing Company, you will be shorter by a head.

Signature Unclear

The slaughterers who received the threat were reported to be certain that this was the work of Getsel Laxer, one of the prominent *shohtim* on the opposing side, who had threatened them in the slaughterhouse.¹⁷

The charged nature of the situation can be ascertained from the minutes of the *Va'ad ha-'Ir* conference held in Prince Arthur Hall on April 5, 1923. During that meeting, the leaders of the Consumers' League offered to picket the opposition's butcher shops. A Mr. Lachavitsky felt impelled to specify that the picketing should be peaceful in nature and that "anyone bringing in violence shall be held personally responsible."¹⁸

On April 29 of that year, a headline in the *Keneder Odler* proclaimed that the opponents of the *Va'ad ha-'Ir* had hired gangsters to get their opponents out of the way.¹⁹ More threatening letters, similar to those that had been sent to the *shohtim* in previous weeks, had been received by several members of the *Va'ad ha-'Ir*. They had been handed to a private investigation agency for further action. In an open letter from the *Va'ad ha-Rabbonim*²⁰ to the *Va'ad ha-'Ir*, Rabbi Hirsh Cohen accused his opponents of hiring gangsters to enforce closing of certain butcher shops or to make sure that others remained open. In that letter he stated:

Horrible things [concerning] those who call themselves butchers have reached our ears, which no fantasy could eclipse. Hear and be amazed:

A group of butchers and *shohtim*, with the approval of rabbis have hired gangsters. They have given them a \$100.00 deposit and have promised a further \$200.00 so that the gangsters should clear away the other *shohtim*. They have justified²¹ [their action] with a permission [*heter*] since "blood has a double meaning"²² and since they [their opponents] cause them loss of money, they could spill

blood. [It is] only through a miracle that other *shohtim* threatened to reveal [the plot] and that they watched out at night that this should not take place, [otherwise] the murder would have come to pass.²³

At the outbreak of this kosher meat war, the *Va'ad ha-Ir*, in its public statements, asserted that from 60 to 70 per cent of the kosher meat trade in Montreal was in its hands. Presumably the rest was going to the other side. While it had every reason to minimize the damage it had suffered, its statements of income from late 1922 and early 1923 show that the *Va'ad's* public statements were more or less accurate. I am going to present to you income statements from two roughly comparable periods.²⁴

TABLE 1

<i>Length of Period</i>	<i>November 8, 1922– March 2, 1923</i>	<i>May 31– September 30, 1923</i>
Total revenue of <i>Va'ad</i>	\$23,485.62	\$16,460.02
Income from kosher slaughtering	\$21,911.02	Not specified
Payments to <i>shohtim</i>	\$13,220	\$8,400
Payments to rabbis	\$3,228	\$2,295
Payments to <i>mashgihim</i>	\$1,280	\$1,608.50 ²⁵
Subsidy to United Talmud Torahs	\$2,200	\$250
Subsidy to Jewish Peoples' School	\$580	\$75
Subsidy to Peretz Shule	\$550	\$60
Subsidy to Arbeiter Ring Shule	\$115	\$15

We should recall, when reading these figures, that Hirsh Wolofsky, when he projected the income of the *Va'ad*, had predicted that the United Talmud Torahs would receive some \$20,000 yearly.²⁶ While the initial reality was considerably less than the dream, nonetheless, assuming the first income statement (which roughly corresponded to the period in which the *Va'ad* held together) to constitute one-third of a year, the school system would have benefited from an infusion of nearly \$7,000, which would have constituted a considerable part of its budget. When the *Va'ad* began losing income, roughly one-third between the two income statements, the first thing that went was the educational subsidy. After

that, they began cutting salaries. Rabbi Cohen's salary went from sixty to forty-eight dollars per week. They fired the secretary, who was getting fifteen dollars per week and replaced her with a "girl" to simply answer the telephone at three dollars a week, so that the office would remain "open." They had to get a bank loan for \$800.00, which they renewed every three months. As the kosher meat war was prolonged, the interest-free loans they had received from various synagogues and benefit societies were an important factor in keeping the enterprise afloat, and when the benefit societies demanded their loans back, it was a serious blow to the *Va'ad*, which was in no position to pay them back. As well, other people were suing the *Va'ad* for unpaid rent. Thus we read in the finance committee's minutes for February 21, 1924:

Madame Boucher has taken action to recover rent for January to May 1, 1924 amounting to \$240.00. It was decided in order to gain time that we hand this to our lawyer. Carried.

At the next meeting, February 28, 1924, there was a follow-up to this item:

Mr Nadler²⁷ reports having given the case of Madame Boucher to Mr. Louis Fitch²⁸ who promised to try to drag the case for about two weeks.

If the *Va'ad ha-'Ir* was reduced to having to tell its lawyer to muddy the waters for a couple of weeks, then the cash-flow situation had decidedly gone from bad to worse. Ultimately the *Va'ad* succeeded in compromising on the rent with Madame Boucher for the sum of \$150.00, of which \$50.00 was to have been paid in cash, and then two further monthly payments of the same amount. The *Va'ad ha-'Ir* had clearly been seriously challenged.

As for the Jewish butchers of Montreal, most sided with the secessionists. They obviously saw an advantage for themselves in freedom from the *Va'ad ha-'Ir's* control. At the beginning, very few butchers sided with the *Va'ad*. The first butcher shop adhering to the *Va'ad ha-'Ir* only opened its doors on March 2, 1923. Nonetheless, though the butchers themselves were initially with Rabbi Rosenberg and his colleagues, the public and the media (*Keneder Odler*) were wholeheartedly on the side of the *Va'ad ha-'Ir*. Thus the *Va'ad* possessed a built-in advantage. The *Va'ad ha-'Ir*, pressing that advantage, declared a boycott against butchers selling meat other

than that which it certified as kosher. It declared that the meat certified by Rabbis Rosenberg and Herschorn was not kosher.

In response to this move, the other side began a price war. Kosher meat was then selling in *Va'ad ha-'Ir* butcher shops at 14 cents per pound. The Association of Jewish Butchers began selling their meat at 8–10 cents per pound. In the meantime, there was a war of headlines. The *Va'ad ha-'Ir*, on March 20, claimed to control fourteen butcher shops (of approximately eighty). On March 22, it claimed twenty-four. On March 25, it claimed twenty-seven. It was advertising in the *Keneder Odler* practically on a daily basis, giving the names and locations of *Va'ad ha-'Ir*-affiliated butcher shops. The public was clearly coming in on the *Va'ad's* side and apparently not buying meat from the other butchers, even at bargain-basement prices, because it was their goal to break the “Butcher Trust.” Even though “Butcher Trust” prices were currently low, the public sensed that the “Butcher Trust” could not be trusted not to jack up prices if the issue were decided in its favour. Many butchers concluded that the right side of this issue was the side the customers were on.

By this time, it was obvious that the conflict was going nowhere. Thus the Association of Jewish Butchers began sending out peace feelers to the *Va'ad ha-'Ir*. But at this point the *Va'ad* was extremely angry and felt it had achieved the upper hand in the struggle. In the *Va'ad ha-'Ir's* minutes there are very harsh words, particularly against the opposing *shohtim*. They were referred to as “Laxer and his gang.” There were calls for negotiations, but by April of 1923, the *Keneder Odler* was reporting that hopes for peace between the two sides were in vain.

In the months and years that followed, there were numerous attempts to mediate between the two sides. A number of Jewish mutual-benefit societies attempted to mediate. There were attempts to get eminent rabbis from outside Montreal to mediate the dispute. For this purpose, they tried to get Rabbi Bernard Levinthal of Philadelphia, acknowledged by many as the dean of the immigrant Orthodox rabbinate in North America. He did not come. In his place, he sent Rabbi Hayyim Fishel Epstein of St. Louis. When Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, chief Ashkenazic rabbi of Palestine came to North America in 1924, he went to Montreal to attempt mediation. He, too, failed.²⁹ All attempts of this nature were to no avail.

There was, however, a certain tide in this conflict. The *Va'ad ha-'Ir* claimed the loyalty of more and more butchers. On June 20, 1923, the

Va'ad ha-Ir listed seventy-two butchers on its side. On July 25, it was able to produce a list of *holdout* butcher shops that were still affiliated with the other side, which contained only eleven names. It is thus clear that the *Va'ad ha-Ir* had an advantage in the conflict. It was nonetheless hurting very badly. It could not make ends meet on its reduced income. It was in no position to subsidize Jewish education. Moreover, because of the overwhelming nature of the kosher meat war, it had no time or attention to spare for the other issues that were facing the Montreal Jewish community of this era, most particularly the School Question.³⁰ There were voices within the leadership of the *Va'ad ha-Ir* advocating abandonment of the kosher meat war entirely. For them, this issue meant the ruination of the organization and its concept. The really important issue for them was not kosher meat, but rather the School Question. Perhaps the answer was for the *Va'ad* to get out of the kosher supervision business entirely. This sentiment was actually expressed as a resolution at a meeting of the *Va'ad*. It was defeated, with fourteen for the resolution, and forty-four opposed. Nonetheless, the fact that this idea was brought to this point in a serious way shows that, even though the *Va'ad ha-Ir* had an advantage over its opponents, it was seriously hurt.

The other side was obviously hurting much worse, but they carried on with the fight. We know of this in a number of ways. The main front in the kosher meat war was, obviously, kosher meat. However, there were other "fronts." One of them was kosher milk. Every Spring, the three major dairies of Montreal, Guaranteed, Borden's and J. J. Joubert, got together and hired rabbis to certify the *kashrut* of a batch of milk for Passover, which has especially stringent rules with respect to *kashrut*. In one meeting of the Finance Committee of the *Va'ad ha-Ir*, Mr. Nadler reported that the best deal he was able to reach with the dairies was \$600.00, which barely covered the cost of the supervisors' salaries, printing of labels, etc. However, he said, we cannot do any better because Rabbi Rosenberg had approached the companies and offered to do the job gratis.

What saved the other side? First of all, the butchers were a fickle lot. The *Va'ad ha-Ir* went from zero to seventy affiliated butchers in only a few months. Not all of these butchers were with the *Va'ad* because they particularly wanted to be. As one person in a Finance Committee meeting stated succinctly, "In America, the butchers are for the dollar. The rabbis are for the dollar." Certainly Montreal's Jewish butchers in the 1920s were

in business to make a profit. They swayed from side to side with the wind. The *Va'ad* was acutely aware that there were a lot of butchers affiliating with it for opportunistic reasons, who were not religiously or morally "reliable." There was talk of having stricter standards for accepting butchers. Clearly, whatever standards for the certification of *kashrut* were in place, there were butchers who did not pass muster.

Thus, by the Fall of 1923, the number of butchers claimed by the *Va'ad ha-Ir* fell from a high of seventy-three in midsummer to fifty-eight. This countertide was noticed by the *Keneder Odler*. Through articles and editorials, readers were told that those who bought meat from "traitor" butcher shops were rebelling against God, their city, and the schoolchildren of the Talmud Torahs. Women were warned not to sell their souls to the devil before the High Holidays by buying non-kosher meat from these "traitors."

A good example of the rhetoric of the *Keneder Odler* in this period deals with yet another front of this "war" – kosher chickens. On September 16, the *Keneder Odler* reported that:

The renegades who have sought to destroy all that is holy and dear to Montreal Jews seek now also to help the chicken dealers in their struggle against order. The former rabbis Yudel Rosenberg and Herschorn have sent to the city mayor a protest against the decision that the eight slaughter rooms be under the control of the *Va'ad ha-Ir*. It is interesting that in Yudel Rosenberg and Herschorn's protest, they say that they represent three-quarters of Montreal Jewry. This was between *Rosh ha-Shana* and *Yom Kippur* when ordinary flesh and blood people guard themselves from telling a lie. However it seems that former rabbis are not plain flesh and blood people, and what others cannot do, they may.³¹

By the Spring of 1924, the war had come to a relative standstill. The *Va'ad* was certainly hurting badly but was still limping along. The other side was almost certainly worse off but continued with the struggle. The butchers wound up roughly evenly divided, with only a slight advantage to the *Va'ad ha-Ir*. The *Keneder Odler* counted the number of butcher shops on the side of the *Va'ad* at this point as between forty-five and fifty. Considering that there were approximately eighty or eighty-five Jewish butcher shops in Montreal, the other side must have claimed the allegiance of some thirty to forty butchers. Ultimately, neither side was strong enough to decisively defeat the other. All sorts of interventions had been tried

and failed. What, in the end, succeeded in bringing an end to the kosher meat war? It was the Quebec Superior Court. What the Montreal Jewish community had been unable to decide on its own was decided for it by the secular court system of the province. The court's decision in two important cases brought about the necessary conditions for the final denouement. One of these cases involved kosher meat; the other involved kosher chicken.

First in chronological order is the kosher chicken case. Because the *Va'ad ha-Ir* controlled the licences for the eight chicken abattoirs in Montreal, Rabbi Rosenberg and his associates went to court. On September 26, 1923, the *Keneder Odler* reacted to this move editorially by stating:

Lately they [the "traitors"] have been seeking through the courts to coerce the butchers away from the *Va'ad ha-Ir*. The renegades have brought the matter into court. They wish to extract from a lawyer a *hekhsher*³² for their deeds, something they cannot expect from rabbis. However they will truly obtain from the lawyers the very same *hekhsher* they got from the rabbis.

A suit was brought in Quebec Superior Court before Judge Louis Coderre against the City of Montreal. The suit charged that the City, in limiting the number of kosher chicken abattoirs to eight, while allowing other poultry abattoirs to operate, was discriminating against Jews. The suit was not brought directly by Rabbi Rosenberg, but rather by a chicken dealer. In the archaic language of the law, the case was brought by "Dame Hattie Vineberg, of the City and District of Montreal, wife separate as to property of Julius Friedman, of the same place, and the latter to authorize his wife for the purposes hereof,³³ the same Dame Hattie Vineberg there carrying on business as poultry dealer under the name and style of J. Friedman and Co., and Leib Simon Woloz, of the same place, slaughterer of cattle and poultry." The suit argued that the bylaw provision limiting the amount of Jewish poultry slaughtering establishments while allowing anyone else to set up a chicken abattoir was unconstitutional, "particularly as creating class and religious distinctions to the prejudice of the Jewish citizens," and would result in "great and irreparable injury insofar as it affects the trade of Jewish poultry dealers within the City of Montreal." On April 11, 1924, Judge Coderre found for the plaintiffs, Dame Hattie Vineberg et al., and declared the article limiting the amount of kosher slaughtering establishments for poultry as unconstitutional, awarded them court

costs, which amounted to \$272.85. The City of Montreal did not appeal this decision. The bylaw was suitably amended in May 1924. That was an important blow against the *Va'ad ha-Ir's* control of kosher poultry. Now anyone could set up a kosher poultry abattoir.

The next case was of even more importance. It was a case from the kosher meat front of this war. It involved Rabbi Getsel Laxer and other *shohetim* vs. the Association of Jewish Butchers of Montreal. The Association, most of whose members were now on the *Va'ad's* side, had reneged on its contract with Laxer and the others to supply them with meat on the grounds that the *Va'ad ha-Ir* had declared the meat they had slaughtered non-kosher. This case was brought before Mr. Justice MacLennan. In this case as well, the court found for the plaintiffs. Thus the *Va'ad* found itself unable to enforce its control of the kosher meat industry of Montreal in court. This largely negated its relative advantage over the opposing side in terms of number of butcher shops, etc. Finally, on December 2, 1925, the *Keneder Odler* carried an extremely brief notice to the effect that the kosher meat question in Montreal was solved. There was no editorial comment at that time or at a later date. The minutes of the *Va'ad ha-Ir* from this period have disappeared.³⁴ The minutes of the *Va'ad's* Finance Committee, which are extant, simply state: "Mr. Nadler related how *sholom* was achieved." After fully two years of conflict, in the end everything came back together. Starting in December 1925, the *Va'ad* reverted to the *status quo ante bellum*. Rabbis Rosenberg and Herschorn went back on the Rabbinical Council of the *Va'ad ha-Ir*, with Rabbi Rosenberg resuming his role as vice-chairman. The "renegade" slaughterers went back to work together with their erstwhile foes. The butchers, not particularly happy at this turn of events, resumed their pursuit of the dollar.

A final financial statement will show the situation. We will compare the four-month period at the beginning of the operation of the *Va'ad ha-Ir* (November, 1922–March, 1923) with the eleven-month period from January 1 to November 30, 1925.³⁵

TABLE 2

<i>Time Period</i>	<i>Total Revenue</i>
November, 1922–March, 1923	\$23,485
January 1, 1925–November 30, 1925	\$29,805

It is quite easy to see from these figures that the opposing sides were bleeding to death financially, so that, in the end, there was no alternative to *sholom*.

Once they got back together again, I think it is fair to say that pretty much everything was as it had been. *Shohtim* were earning approximately \$40 per week. Rabbi Cohen got his \$60 per week and Rabbi Rosenberg his \$45. The tensions that had given rise to the conflict had not gone away, of course.

Thus, in 1927/8, Rabbi Laxer led another secession movement of *shohtim*.³⁶ The difference between the two secessions was that in the former incident, Rabbis Rosenberg and Herschorn seceded with the slaughterers. In 1927/8, in contrast to 1923–25, only *shohtim* seceded. The rabbis held together and maintained their solidarity. Rabbi Rosenberg's solidarity with the *Va'ad* at this time cost him his relationship with Rabbi Laxer. They had been allies, partners and neighbours. From the late 1920s until Rabbi Rosenberg's death in 1935, however, they did not speak to each other.

The *Va'ad ha-'Ir* was nearly killed almost as soon as it was born. It survived its first couple of years by the skin of its teeth. It was still not completely on firm ground when the Depression hit. At that time, Rabbi Cohen, if you will recall,³⁷ spoke of people asking him for work, of distributing most of his income in charity. There had been a brief moment of prosperity in the late 1920s, prior to the Depression. During that time, Rabbi Rosenberg, in a very optimistic move, bought plots of land in Palestine,³⁸ but that moment passed.

The Depression adversely affected Montreal's Jewish community and institutions. Nonetheless the *Va'ad ha-'Ir*, which experienced a further severe crisis and was reorganized in 1933,³⁹ continued to survive by the skin of its teeth, though particularly among the *shohtim* there was great restiveness.

There was also great restiveness among the chicken slaughterers. At a meeting in 1926, Rabbi Cohen addressed the *Va'ad* concerning the problems of the *shohtei oifes*.⁴⁰ As the minutes state:

Rabbi Cohen then spoke about the *shohtei oifes*. He explained that about thirty of them had organized and formed a union, and that they had come to the *Va'ad ha-Rabbonim* asking to be taken under the supervision of the *Va'ad ha-'Ir* and the

Va'ad ha-Rabbonim. In this way they hope to strengthen their union. It is Rabbi Cohen's personal opinion that this is a very difficult matter to undertake. More complex than dealing with the *shohteï gasos*,⁴¹ as the *shohteï gasos* had agreed to divide their salary equally among themselves. And he doesn't see how this could be worked under the same system with the *shohteï oifes* as the amounts of their earnings are varied. Some earn thirty dollars per week. Others only five dollars. He also did not see how the *Va'ad ha-Rabbonim* could promise not to allow any other *shohtim* outside of the union provided they were capable to slaughter chickens in Montreal.

Once again, the confusions, tensions, and fights did not cease. The fault lines were papered over but remained.⁴² The butchers in the 1930s and 1940s were no more amenable to supervision than they had been in previous decades. There are, in fact, numerous reports of individual butchers being caught in flagrant violation of the rules and regulations of the *Va'ad ha-'Ir*.

The consumers themselves were often restive. Jews in Montreal, who for years had witnessed accusations and counter-accusations of the type previously mentioned, were often suspicious of the motives and tactics of rabbis, slaughterers, and butchers. One of the major tactics of the consumers was the boycott of kosher butchers who were still thought to be constantly plotting together to raise the price of meat for consumers.⁴³ An example of violent behaviour in connection with kosher meat in Montreal is a handbill from one of the recurring kosher meat boycotts, this one in the year 1933. Following is the full text of the handbill:

DO NOT EAT ANY MEAT!
THE MEAT IS DRIPPING WITH HUMAN BLOOD!

On Saturday night, the butchers struck and wounded several women and men who had peacefully crowded into the butcher shops. One woman and two men lie wounded in hospital. One of them, Mr. Klein, received a [blow from a] butcher's file in the head and is in critical condition.

JEWISH WOMEN AND MEN: DO NOT PURCHASE ANY MEAT
DRIPPING WITH HUMAN BLOOD, WITH THE BLOOD OF THOSE
WHO ARE FIGHTING FOR CHEAPER MEAT.

DO NOT SCAB, AND DO NOT BETRAY [EITHER] YOURSELVES OR
THE JEWISH MASSES OF MONTREAL.

Strike for cheap meat. Do not buy any meat until the strike will have been won.

Come in masses to a protest

MASS MEETING

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 20

8:30 P.M.

IN CARMEN SILVA HALL

Protest against the gangster methods of the butchers and of those
who stand behind them.⁴⁴

In examining the text of the handbill, it is worth noting that the language is suffused throughout with the rhetoric of the militant labour movement, which was a potent force within the immigrant Jewish community of Montreal.⁴⁵

Nonetheless, despite all these crises, the *Va'ad* persevered and soldiered on, providing a means whereby the rabbis of Montreal and their community could attempt to form a solid, working relationship. The ultimate success of the organization is that it continues its work to this day, though it has changed structurally and ideologically in some important ways which are part and parcel of the “turn to the right” of North American Orthodox Judaism in recent decades.⁴⁶

