

Maria Tarasova Chomard, Université Paris 8
Association Française d'Études Canadiennes (AFEC)

ICCS Research Report

**Project : Comparing Jewish Anarchist Mutual Aid Initiatives In Montreal and Toronto: the
Role of Cooperation**

Abstract

Constituting an important element of the Canadian Jewish diaspora, although relatively overlooked by the historiography, the Jewish anarchist movement was instrumental in operating two mutual aid initiatives in Eastern Canada in the first half of the twentieth century. Based in Montreal and Toronto, these initiatives and the communities overseeing them were largely inspired by the anarchist humanitarian work for the benefit of political prisoners. The latter was heralded by the universal anarchist Emma Goldman, a frequent visitor of Canada. Locally, however, both groups were rooted in a complex relational network, ranging from the socialist Jewish organization Workmen's Circle (*Arbeiter-ring*) to Zionist milieus and smaller anarchist communities mainly of Russian and Italian origin. Drawing on archival findings from the Jewish collections of Montreal and Toronto, as well as testimonies and scholarship on Jewish radicalism in Canada, the essay ambitions to measure the limits of this multi-scale cooperation and its consequences for the local anarchist presence. Through a comparative analysis of the Montreal and Toronto movements, the study attempts to explain the differences in their evolution, as well as to identify the possible, only partly overlapping reasons for their decline circa 1940.

Keywords: Anarchism, Jewish radicalism, mutual aid, Workmen's Circle, Montreal, Toronto.

Abstract

Un élément important de la diaspora juive canadienne, bien que relativement occulté par l'historiographie, le mouvement anarchiste juif a été responsable de la mise en œuvre de deux initiatives d'entraide dans l'Est du Canada au cours de la première moitié du XX^e siècle. Basées à Montréal et à Toronto, ces initiatives et les communautés dont elles émanaient se sont largement inspirées de l'effort humanitaire anarchiste au profit des prisonniers politiques. Ce dernier a été promu par l'anarchiste universelle Emma Goldman, visiteuse fréquente du Canada. Cependant, au niveau local les deux groupes étaient enracinés dans un réseau relationnel plus complexe, de l'organisation socialiste juive *Workmen's Circle* (*Arbeiter-ring*) aux milieux sionistes et aux petites communautés anarchistes principalement d'origine russe et italienne. S'appuyant sur les découvertes des collections d'archives juives de Montréal et de Toronto, ainsi que sur des témoignages et de la littérature sur le radicalisme juif au Canada, l'essai ambitionne à mesurer les limites de cette coopération multi-échelles et ses effets sur la présence anarchiste locale. À travers une analyse comparative des mouvements de Montréal et de Toronto, l'étude tente d'expliquer les différences de leur évolution ainsi que d'identifier les raisons, seulement partiellement communes, de leur déclin autour de 1940.

Mots-clés : Anarchisme, radicalisme juif, entraide, *Workmen's Circle*, Montréal, Toronto.

Maria Tarasova Chomard is a Ph.D. fellow in History at University Paris 8 Vincennes — Saint-Denis, working at Institut d'Histoire du Temps Présent (CNRS). Her dissertation in progress focuses on the twentieth century Jewish anarchist humanitarianism in the U.S. and Canada. She is a 2022 laureate of the Graduate Student Scholarship of the International Council for Canadian Studies.

E-mail: mtarasova02@univ-paris8.fr

In May-June 2022, as the laureate of the Graduate Student Scholarship awarded by the International Council for Canadian Studies, I was able to make a research visit to the archives of Montreal and Toronto. The choice of destinations has derived from the focus of my research: these two biggest cities of Eastern Canada having historically constituted the centre of Jewish Canadian life, I expected their archives to be a great source for my ongoing Ph. D. dissertation on the ideological and labour aspects of the Jewish diaspora in Canada and the United States. The Canadian context was naturally a priority during this chapter of my research journey. Relatively little-studied until now, the case of the Jewish anarchist movement in Canada is however an important example of an ethnic minority group, marginal from the point of view of its radical politics as well as its limited participation numbers, having contributed to the Canadian nation-building since the turn of the twentieth century. Inversely, the host society and the country's social and political landscape shaped the Jewish anarchist diaspora, influencing the personal and political choices of its members.

Following the recent historiography by Franca Iacovetta (2004), Travis Tomchuk (2015), Ira Robinson (2016) and Pierre Anctil (2017), my dissertation in progress ambitions to contribute to the discussion on the Canadian Jewish radicalism. Approaching the subject through the prism of early twentieth century anarchist mutual aid initiatives, it aims to provide critical insights into the movement's institutional and humanitarian history. Research in the Canadian archives was instrumental in achieving this objective as it revealed the particular attitudes of the two most long-standing Jewish anarchist groups in Canada both to the organization of their activity, including humanitarian work, and to the choice of allies.

This research note aims to give a brief account of the history of Jewish anarchism in Eastern Canada, supplementing it with the recently discovered details and comparing the movement's development in Montreal and Toronto. It will specifically analyze the role of cooperation in the establishment of the two initiatives, following the movement's links to the general Jewish left as well as to anarchists of other origins. The cooperation factor, along with those of the geographical location and the local sociopolitical context, will then be used to explain the modalities of the movement's evolution, and to compare the reasons for its eventual decline both in Toronto and Montreal.¹

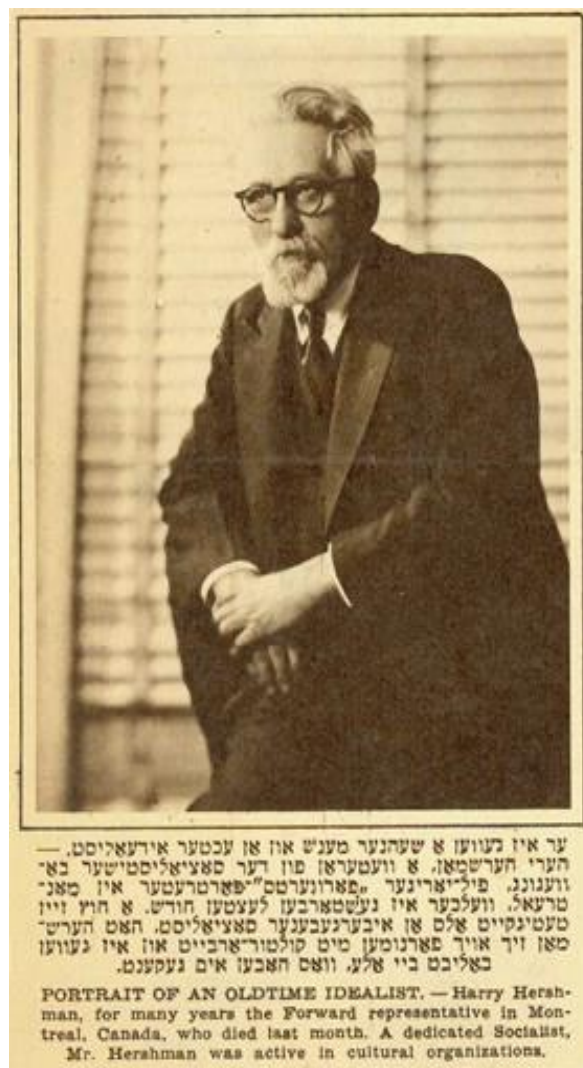
Montreal: a Radical Fringe

In the Jewish community of Montreal, early twentieth century anarchism is infallibly associated with the name of Hirsh Hershman, founder of the first Yiddish-language bookstore on Saint Lawrence

¹ For a more comprehensive view of Jewish anarchism in Canada, this note may be supplemented with the account of the shorter-term activity in Winnipeg (ca. 1907–1919). See my article “‘The Fertile Soil of Growth, Life and Ideas’: Russian-Jewish Anarchist Solidarity in the Canadian West,” to be published in *Canadian Jewish Studies / Études Juives Canadiennes*, vol. 34 (Fall 2022).

Boulevard. Founded in 1902, Hershman's shop immediately became a place of gathering for local free-thinkers, and it is supposedly on its basis that originated Montreal's first "anarchist" group. Although inspired by the opposition to hierarchy, constraint and privilege, theorized by the Russian anarchist philosophers Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin—the latter's famous book even gave the group its title, *Mutual Aid*,²—in reality this newly created society was not limited to the anarchist ideology. Rather, it was a broad assembly which included different streams of political and philosophical thought and encouraged debate.³ Still, the anarchist faction, named *Arbayter Fraynt* ("The Worker's Friend"), held a significant position within the Mutual Aid group. For instance, it is under its auspices that the Jewish community of Montreal established its first connection with the U.S. Jewish labour movement, inviting a renown New York-based anarchist Chaim Weinberg on a lecture visit.⁴ *Arbayter Fraynt* was also instrumental in organizing several Jewish and labour protest events, including the anti-Judaic Yom Kippur ball (1905)⁵ and the first May Day workers' parade (1906),⁶ carried out jointly by the Mutual Aid group.

The harmonic coexistence was, however, short-lived. As early as 1905, the local Jewish left began to segment as a result of the new immigration wave that followed Russia's anti-Jewish pogroms and the First revolution of



Clipping of Harry Hershman's obituary by B.J. Sack, undated.

Source: Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives, CJC0001 H. (Harry) Hershman papers, File 1.

² Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (London: Heinemann, 1902).

³ Harry (Hirsch) Hershman, "À l'occasion des vingt-cinq ans du mouvement ouvrier juif à Montréal / 25 yor yidish arbeter bavegung in Montreal," *Unzer Vort*, 23 décembre 1927 - 2 mars 1928, trans. Pierre Ancil published in *Bulletin du Regroupement des chercheurs en histoire des travailleurs du Québec*, vol. 26, no. 1 (Spring 2000), 50.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵ "A protest against superstition," the only Yom Kippur ball held in Montreal was meant as the Jewish free-thinkers' form of opposition to the religious tradition of fasting and prayer during the holiday of Yom Kippur. See Rebecca Margolis, "A Tempest in Three Teapots: Yom Kippur Balls in London, New York and Montreal," *Canadian Jewish Studies / Études Juives Canadiennes*, 9 (2001), 38–84.

⁶ Hershman, "À l'occasion des vingt-cinq ans du mouvement ouvrier juif à Montréal," 58.

1905.⁷ Trying to accommodate the various tastes of the newly arrived, which ranged from traditional Orthodox Judaism to social democratic secularism and radical Zionism, Hershman's store started offering a wider range of left-wing publications and even selling religious literature around Jewish holidays.⁸ Unwilling to tolerate such contrasting ideas, local politically-minded Jews left the Mutual Aid group. Instead, they adopted the U.S. example, adhering to specific ideological networks that had recently started their extension from New York to the rest of North America.

In 1905, Montreal's Zionists inaugurated a chapter of the Labour Zionist *Poale Zion* movement, the first one in Canada. The socialists, mostly of Bundist background,⁹ formed in 1907 the local branch no. 151 of the Workmen's Circle (W.C., Yiddish title *Arbeiter-ring*)—a social and cultural left-wing Jewish organization.¹⁰ The anarchist *Arbayter Fraynt* was the last to crystallize as a separate political movement, migrating to a new, specifically anarchist bookstore founded in 1908 by Louis Elstein¹¹ and affiliating itself with the New York-based American Anarchist Federation.¹²

Still, once dominated by anarchist ideas, the new Jewish political context evidently favoured the Zionist and socialist initiatives. Indeed, the two organizations quickly became the centre of the local Jewish activism, offering concrete institutions to support the community based on the principle of mutual support, including the Workmen's Circle loan syndicate¹³ and the *Poale Zion* school later named after the Yiddish author and playwright I. L. Peretz.¹⁴ The anarchists appear to have stayed out of these new initiatives, whose principles they did not share. Hersh Novak, a contemporary, recalled that the anarchists' only attempt at cooperation had been made with regard to the Peretz school, but after their objection to its educational plan—too Zionist and thus non-assimilationist according to the cosmopolitan anarchist standards—was ignored, they altogether withdrew from the project.¹⁵

⁷ The Jewish population of Quebec increased more than tenfold between 1901 and 1911, from approximately 7,000 to over 75,000. See Ira Robinson, "Historical Introduction to the Jewish Community of Québec," *Federation CJA*, accessed June 20, 2022, https://www.federationcja.org/en/jewish_montreal/history/; Margolis, "Le Montréal yiddish, un siècle d'évolution," in Robinson and Anctil (eds.), *Les communautés juives de Montréal : Histoire et enjeux contemporains* (Sillery: Éditions du Septentrion, 2011), 95.

⁸ Israël Medresh, *Le Montréal juif d'autrefois / Montreal foun Nekhtn* (1947); trans. Pierre Anctil (Sillery: Éditions du Septentrion, 1997), 96.

⁹ Bund, or the General Jewish Labour Federation of Lithuania, Poland and Russia (*Algemeyner Yidisher Arbeter-bund in Lite, Poyln un Rusland*), was a secular Jewish socialist party organized in Russia in 1897 on the basis of Marxist ideas. The party opposed Zionism and supported *doykayt*—"hereness," or the right of the Jewish diaspora to fight for equal rights in their place of residence.

¹⁰ "Our History," *The Workmen's Circle*, accessed June 20, 2022, <https://www.circle.org/about-us>.

¹¹ Hersh Novak, *La première école yiddish à Montréal, 1911–1914* (1938, 1957); trans. Pierre Anctil (Sillery: Éditions du Septentrion, 1999), 173–74.

¹² Candace Falk (éd.), *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years*, t. 2, "Making Speech Free, 1902–1909" (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 556.

¹³ Jewish Public Library (JPL) Archives, Montreal, Workmen's Circle Fonds, Series 6, File 19, Workmen's Circle Loan Syndicate Ledger, 1928–1966.

¹⁴ A specific school for Jewish children was of particular importance to the Jewish left of Quebec, as the province's bi-confessional school system, until 2000, stayed limited to Catholic and Protestant education. The first secular Jewish school in Montreal appeared in 1911. See Novak, *La première école yiddish à Montréal*, 70.

¹⁵ The Bundists, too, refused to support the Zionist school project and in the 1930s created their own socialist-oriented *Avraham Reisen Shul*. *Ibid.*, 32, 58.

Although Montreal's anarchist movement continued its existence well into the 1930s, it appears to have eventually lost its institutional status and become a marginal political force with only six identifiable permanent members—all of them women. This female assembly was clearly influenced by Emma Goldman, a famous anarchist and feminist who frequently visited Montreal during the first half-twentieth-century. It is Goldman who called on her female correspondents to set up fundraisers for political prisoners and exiles in Russia, thus involving them in the international anarchist relief effort; and it is she who came up with popular activities to back these fundraisers, including theatre performances.¹⁶ Several of Goldman's female comrades were involved, in parallel, in other streams of activism—a circumstance that the anarchist used to benefit her cause, for instance, relying on the influential Workmen's Circle member Rose Bernstein to organize and advertise her lecture tours. Indeed, Bernstein being the chairlady [*sic*] of the Women's branch no. 829, it is likely at her behest that the mostly non-anarchist group acted as the organizer of Goldman's visit to Montreal in 1934.¹⁷ These connections also worked in the opposite way: being a close friend and something of a love interest to Hanane Caiserman, general secretary of the Canadian Jewish Congress, Goldman appears to have acted through him to co-opt his wife Sarah, a prominent Labour Zionist leader, as anarchist fundraising secretary.¹⁸ Not having much regard for Mrs. Caiserman herself as suggests her correspondence,¹⁹ Goldman probably expected the activist's name, well-known in the local Zionist milieu, to attract more contributors. Still, despite these strategies, the "Queen of the Anarchists" appeared dissatisfied with the local effort, often condemning the inertness

¹⁶ In early 1935, while in Montreal, Goldman created a "drama group" whose goal was supposedly to study and perform Jewish theatre plays. However, it seems that the group ceased its existence after Goldman's departure, in May-June of the same year. See Emma Goldman to Marjorie Goldstein, Saint-Tropez, May 26, 1935; Goldstein to Goldman, Westmount, June 7, 1935. International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam, Emma Goldman papers, General correspondence, Folder 88 [Goldstein, Marjorie. (Montreal, Canada; Westmount, Canada). 1935, 1937–1939].

¹⁷ JPL Archives, Sholem Krishtalka Collection, S 1, F 58 [Flyer: Emma Goldman, "Living My Life," Womens' [*sic*] Branch 829, Workmen's Circle]. On Bernstein's involvement in the Jewish women's movement in Montreal, see JPL Archives, Workmen's Circle Fonds, S 2, F 65 [Jubilee and convention booklet, 50 years, Workmen's Circle, 1958], 53–4.

¹⁸ "Relief Fund Financial Account, Paris Section," *Bulletin of the Relief Fund*, Nov. 1927. Walter P. Reuther Library Archives, Detroit, LR000130 Industrial Workers of the World Collection, 1905–1972, B 155 F 2 [Bulletin of the Relief Fund, March, Nov. 1927].

¹⁹ While always good-humoured in her letters to Hanane Caiserman, dubbed "dear gracious Man," Goldman merely referred to his spouse as "the lady you call your wife" and admitted that her "affections" for her were "sorely tried." Goldman to Caiserman, Toronto, April 6, 1935. IISH, EG papers, F 61 [Caiserman Wittel, Chanane Ben Meyer. (Montreal, Canada)].



Flyer advertising Emma Goldman’s presentation of her book *Living My Life* on Friday, May 18th, 1934, in Montreal’s People’s Kitchen. In the left bottom corner, Workmen’s Circle Women’s branch no. 829 is listed as the organizer.

Source: Jewish Public Library, Montreal, fonds 1099.

as much of the local public—allegedly either conquered by the Communist ideas post-October 1917²⁰ or trapped “under the iron heel of the Catholic Church,”²¹—as of the organizers themselves.²²

It does seem that the initial aversion of Montreal’s Jewish anarchist group to political compromise resulted, with time, in the opposite effect: finding themselves on the margin of the local labour movement, its members gradually moved away from anarchism and towards the more mainstream left-wing organizations. Even the few loyal women who stayed in touch with Goldman until her death in 1940 eventually left the labour movement altogether or joined other streams of activism where they had no leverage as anarchists. Curiously, the women’s further paths often coincided with those of their husbands. Thus, Goldman’s principal correspondent Gertrude Zahler appears to have abandoned all political activity, as earlier did her husband Max to focus on his enterprise Zahler Industries Inc.²³ The aforementioned Rose Bernstein moved on to fully embrace her charge of the Women’s branch as well as take on other

responsibilities within the *Arbeiter-ring* alongside her husband Meyer Bernstein, president of the

²⁰ Emma Goldman to Abe Bluestein, Montreal, Jan. 19, 1934. IISH, EG papers, F 58 [Bluestein, Abe. - The Challenge. (New York, USA; Paris, France). 1934–1938].

²¹ Goldman to Víctor Martínez, Montreal, Nov. 22, 1934. IISH, EG papers, F 120 [Martínez, Víctor. - Cultura Proletaria, Periódico de ideas, doctrina y combate. (New York, USA). 1934–1936].

²² E.g. “...outside of the Bernsteins we have absolutely nobody here [in Montreal].” Goldman to Marion Seltzer, Montreal, Jan. 25, 1935. IISH, EG papers, F 150 [Seltzer, Marion and Clarence R. (Toronto, Canada; Pickering, Canada). 1934–1935, 1938].

²³ Goldman to Warren S. van Valkenburgh, Montreal, Jan. 29, 1935. IISH, EG papers, F 36 [Warren S. van Valkenburgh, also: Walter Starrett, and Sadie Robinson. (New York, USA; Atlantic City, New Jersey, USA). 1935–1938]; Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives (CJA), Montreal, Jewish Immigrant Aid Services (JIAS), Migration Series, Box 96, File 23544 [Wisbord, née Zahler, Frieda, Isidore, Max].

Loan Syndicate.²⁴ Lena Shlakman, another Jewish anarchist and Goldman's supporter, became equally involved with the Workmen's Circle community, supporting her husband Louis Shlakman, socialist and vice chairman of the branch no. 151.²⁵ Discouraged by its lack of real power in the local community and ultimately disbanded, the original Jewish anarchist movement ceased its existence in the late 1930s.²⁶

Toronto: Integrating the Community

In Toronto, the institutionalization of anarchism came relatively late compared to Montreal's case, but it proved to be more efficient. The first references to anarchist activity in the province of Ontario evoke a Jewish group *Royter krayz* ("Red Circle"),²⁷ organized in Toronto and supposedly little connected to both the general North American anarchist movement and the local Jewish left. Namely, anarchists were absent from Toronto's first Workmen's Circle branch no. 220, founded by socialist territorialists in 1908.²⁸ It was not until 1910 that Toronto's Workmen's Circle orbit welcomed the anarchist branch no. 339, counting forty-two members at its peak²⁹ and organized by recent Jewish immigrants from other anglo-saxon countries. Namely, the branch founders Morris Langbord³⁰ and

²⁴ Namely, Bernstein became more involved in the Workmen's Circle school direction, becoming in the 1940s a member of its School Committee and joining, alongside her husband, the fundraising-related Campaign and Special Names committees. See JPL Archives, Workmen's Circle Fonds, S 3, F 84 [Correspondence, miscellaneous, 1946–1976], 89 [Minutes (photocopies), 1941–1969].

²⁵ JPL Archives, Workmen's Circle Fonds, S 2, F 64 [Souvenir book, Meyer London Branch 151, 1907–1932], 42.

²⁶ Despite this decline, the movement has recently experienced a revival. In 1991, a newly organized Montreal's Jewish anarchist group held a Purim party, attended by about thirty people. The group's members do not appear to have a direct link to the original local Jewish anarchist movement but claim to share its political ideas. CJA, 34-SC 1243 [Purim party of Jewish Anarchist group, Feb. 24, 1991].

²⁷ Michel Nestor, "Sur les traces de l'anarchisme au Québec (dès origines à 1910)," *Ruptures*, no. 1 (Autumn 2001); Roz Usiskin, "The Winnipeg Jewish Radical Community: Its Early Formation 1905–1918," *Jewish Life and Times: A Collection of Essays* (Winnipeg: Jewish Historical Society of Western Canada, 1983), 163.

²⁸ "100 Years of Workmen's Circle Photographs – the early years," *Toronto Workmen's Circle — Arbeiter Ring*, <https://toronto-workmens-circle.org/media/photos/>.

²⁹ "Julius Seltzer" in Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 328–30.

³⁰ Merle Zita Langbord Levine, *My Memoirs* (Toronto, 2019), 6–7.



Workmen's Circle anarchist branch no. 339, Toronto, undated. International anarchist Rudolph Rocker with partner, Milly Witkop-Rocker, are seated in the centre. In the first row standing are Joe Desser (second from left) and Morris Langbord (second from right). Their respective spouses, Sophie and Becky, are seated from either side of the Rockers.

Source: Toronto Workmen's Circle Archives, uncatalogued. (*A better quality image may be requested.*)

Joseph (Joe) Desser,³¹ although born within the Russian Empire's Jewish Pale of Settlement, had for at least five years resided in London, England, where they had become acquainted with the anarchist ideas propagated by the local militant Rudolf Rocker. Julius Seltzer and his wife Marion, also active members of the anarchist branch, had prior to their arrival in Toronto spent ten years in New York, the core of American anarchism. Seltzer later recalled his political views being influenced by multiple anarchist lecturers of New York, most prominently by Johann Most.³²

Inspired by the anarchist ideology, the new branch did not, however, seem to align its agenda with the international anarchist relief effort. Emma Goldman, also a frequent Toronto visitor, claimed to be in charge of the local fundraisers for anarchist prisoners and exiles worldwide, while "the

³¹ "Millie Grobstein" in Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 77–9.

³² "Julius Seltzer" in *Ibid.*, 328–30.

me[m]bers of the *Arb[eter] Ring* to which the few comrades bel[o]ng” only “from time to time raised a little money.”³³ The branch’s primary focus, according to Goldman as well as to some of the members’ descendants, were the joint Workmen’s Circle projects which included a Yiddish Peretz school—much less Zionist-oriented than that of Montreal³⁴—but also a youth summer camp *Yungvelt* (“Young World”) founded by Morris Langbord.³⁵ This active involvement at the local level regularly provoked criticism on the part of Goldman, who argued that while the anarchists of Toronto devoted most of their efforts to the Workmen’s Circle, the latter only rarely supported their undertakings for the anarchist cause and rarely satisfied their requests. As an example, she cited the failed attempt to employ anarchist Mark Mratchny as Toronto’s Peretz school teacher circa 1928.³⁶

In response, while on a visit in Toronto in 1934, Emma Goldman organized a strictly anarchist, English-speaking Libertarian Group independent from the Workmen’s Circle. Its goal was to carry on anarchist propaganda in English, sell literature, organize forums and lectures, including those by Goldman, and conduct fundraising drives for anarchists abroad.³⁷ The novelty of the creation was its international character: the group included not only Jewish anarchists (Joe Desser, Julius Seltzer, Ahrne Thorne), but also at least one Italian (Attilio Bortolotti),³⁸ one Bulgarian (last name Vasiliev) and one English member (Dorothy Giesecke née Rogers). Its secretary, Carl Nylander, was a Swedish radical. It is likely that the division was followed by some kind of conflict between the Workmen’s Circle anarchists and the new international group. It was said that the two institutions did not maintain much cooperation,³⁹ and most importantly, Joe Desser, the lynchpin of the Libertarian Group, became completely absent from the Workmen’s Circle publications from the mid-1930s onward. Unlike his former counterpart Langbord of the anarchist branch, or even the Libertarian Group’s activist Seltzer, he was not mentioned among the founders and directors of the Workmen’s Circle presented in 1943.⁴⁰

The Libertarian Group was short-lived: it appears to have disintegrated with the beginning of World War II in 1939, as the police began a wave of aggressive raids against the Canadian left. The

³³ Goldman to Alexander Berkman, Montreal, Feb. 17–18, 1935. IISH, Alexander Berkman papers, General correspondence, F 34 [Goldman, Emma . December 1934-February 1935].

³⁴ Morris Langbord, one of the leaders of the anarchist branch no. 339, recalls having been involved in the local Workmen’s Circle Peretz school since 1918. See Langbord, “Greetings from a longtime activist” (*Bagrisung fun a lang yorikn tuer*), *Shul bukh* (Toronto: Arbeter-ring, 1936), 99. Toronto Workmen’s Circle Archives, uncatalogued.

³⁵ Item 6027 [Camp Yungvelt staff (Pickering, ON), 1942]; Dorothy Dworkin Fonds 10, Item 14 [Arbeiter Ring, Camp Yungvelt, group gathering Toronto, ca. 1915]. Ontario Jewish Archives (OJA), Toronto.

³⁶ Goldman to Berkman, Montreal, Feb. 17–18, 1935. IISH, AB papers, F 34 [Goldman, Emma . December 1934-February 1935.]. Mratchny’s real name, M. Klavansky, does appear among the teaching staff in the Toronto Workmen’s Circle School and Education Committee booklet of 1927–1928, with a note *tsaytvaylik* (“temporary”). Goldman’s criticism supposedly referred to the temporary character of the position. See *Arbeter ring shul un bildung komitet* (“Arbeter-ring School and Education Committee”), Toronto, Canada, 1927–8, 1. Toronto Workmen’s Circle Archives, uncatalogued.

³⁷ “Millie Grobstein” in Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 77–9.

³⁸ Bortolotti, also known as Art Bortell, was the co-founder of the local Italian anarchist group *Il Gruppo Libertario*. Organized around 1931, it counted a dozen members. See “Attilio Bortolotti” in *Ibid.*, 175–88.

³⁹ Dorothy Giesecke to Goldman, Scarboro Bluffs, Ontario, Feb. 18, 1938. IISH, EG papers, F 64 [Giesecke-Rogers, Dorothy 'Giesecke', and Laddon, Esther. - Toronto Libertarian Group. (Scarborough Bluffs, Ontario, Canada)].

⁴⁰ Item 3054 [Founders and Directors of the Workmen’s Circle Centre, Toronto, 1943]. OJA.

latter, in the eyes of the Canadian government, were automatically associated with the Communists, who became the officials' target and faced internment in the wake of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. The Libertarian Group members were thus forced underground, taking the precaution to burn all "seditious literature," including most of the group's archives.⁴¹ Further discouraged by the death of Emma Goldman in 1940, left without guidance, some chose to abandon the anarchist movement while others left Canada to join the more established radical scene of the United States.⁴² As for the original anarchist branch no. 339, it, too, temporarily vanished from the spotlight, the Workmen's Circle wartime publications bearing no reference to its activity. It resurged in 1959 only to announce its merger with the more neutral Bundist branch no. 485.⁴³

Although the life expectancy of the two local movements, those of Toronto and Montreal, coincided, the Toronto group has proven to be more vibrant and efficient throughout its existence according to the accounts of contemporaries.⁴⁴ In addition to Goldman's theory about Toronto's population being more secular and thus more favorable—or at least more tolerant—to the anarchist ideas, it is likely that this efficiency was also the result of the group's greater involvement with the local left, both Jewish and non-Jewish. The genesis of institutionalized local anarchism within the Workmen's Circle, although proved restrictive with regard to the movement's international agenda, earned it a distinct place in the local sociopolitical framework. This initial cooperation with the more established Jewish left-wing institution provided anarchists with local connections, hands-on organizing experience, as well as a platform to reach the radical-leaning public who would later constitute the social base of the Libertarian Group.⁴⁵ Moreover, the latter's creation, while it drove the local movement away from the Workmen's Circle and into an independent position, paradoxically reinforced its standing. Rooted in Toronto's radicals' connections with the more general anarchist milieu both locally and internationally, it acted as a balancing force, preserving the movement from being completely absorbed by the Jewish left-wing agenda—a frequent outcome faced by the

⁴¹ "Millie Grobstein" in Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 77–9.

⁴² See Daniel Panneton, "The surprising history of anarchists in Ontario," *TVO Today*, Nov. 10, 2020, accessed June 17, 2022, <https://www.tvo.org/article/the-surprising-history-of-anarchists-in-ontario>. This was, namely, the case of Ahrne Thorne who later became the editor of New York's anarchist newspaper *Freie Arbeiter Stimme*.

⁴³ *Program*, Workmen's Circle Peretz School (*Arbeter-ring Peretz shul*), 1959. Toronto Workmen's Circle Archives, uncatalogued.

⁴⁴ Even before the creation of the Libertarian Group, Goldman considered the anarchist movement of Toronto "inspiring and encouraging," characterized by "the fine spirit and hospitality and general good comradeship." In comparison, the activity in both Montreal and Winnipeg seemed to her "very slow and not at all satisfactory, in any sense." See Berkman to Michael Cohn, St. Cloud, Jan. 11, April 8, 1927. IISH, AB papers, F 15 [Cohn, Michael A. 1927–1930].

⁴⁵ In 1932, Joe Desser, then a member of the board of Directors of Canada's Workmen's Circle, collected "more than 200 names of people in and around Toronto who left their names for further information in connection with E[mma] G[oldman]'s lectures in Toronto." Valkenburgh to Harry Kelly, [New York City], Aug. 30, 1932. IISH, EG papers, F 42 [Correspondence of W.S. van Valkenburgh, also: Walter Starrett, and Sadie Robinson (New York, USA) with Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman - *The Blast* (San Francisco, California, USA), *Mother Earth* (New York, USA; Saint-Cloud, France). 1931–1932].

anarchist Workmen's Circle branches not only in Canada, but across North America.⁴⁶ Joining forces with the vibrant local anarchist community of diverse backgrounds, English-speaking and attentive to the movement's needs beyond the local context of Toronto or the strictly Jewish diaspora, the movement acquired a promising force, compromised however by the context of war, the nascent Second Red Scare as well as by the natural loss of key members and organizers such as Goldman.⁴⁷

Thus, the comparative study of the two local chapters of Canadian Jewish anarchism, those of Montreal and Toronto, in the early twentieth century has established an important common feature: the two initiatives met the same end, effectively disintegrating towards 1940. The development of the two movements has, however, proven to be very different: from the dates of their creation to their institutional status, choice of allies and, in part, the priorities of their activity. This example of two initiatives of the same nature, born of the same ethnic diaspora, guided by the same ideological aspirations and developing simultaneously in the context of Canada, sheds light on the diversity of evolutionary paths that may apply to similar immigrant groups based in different geographical areas of the same host country. In doing so, it raises the question of particular characteristics, pertaining both to said areas and the members of their respective immigrant population, that could cause such evolutionary discrepancy. While incomplete sources naturally limit a researcher's ability to provide a definitive answer, this essay has attempted to identify some explanatory elements in the case of the Jewish anarchist movement, which include the different religious landscape of Quebec and Ontario; the porousness of the local labor movement streams, both within and outside the Jewish diaspora; and the scope of prior and maintained connections of local activists to anarchism-specific international networks.

⁴⁶ In addition to the anarchist movement of Montreal, the milieu of Winnipeg, Detroit and St. Louis have met the same fate.

⁴⁷ Travis Tomchuk, *Transnational Radicals: Italian Anarchists in Canada and the U.S., 1915–1940* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015), cited in Panneton, "The Surprising History of Anarchists In Ontario."