

# Portrait of a Jewish Professional Revolutionary The Recollections of Joshua Gershman

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[See table of contents](#)

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# **PORTRAIT OF A JEWISH PROFESSIONAL REVOLUTIONARY:**

*The Recollections of Joshua Gershman.\**

Edited, and with an introduction,  
by Irving Abella

(From interviews conducted in 1973, 1974 and 1975 by Irving Abella,  
David Chud, and Elaine Mitchell)

## **Introduction**

The Jewish labour movement in Canada had its origins in the bloody pogroms which swept across Eastern Europe in the latter part of the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth century. Millions of Jews were uprooted and forced to flee for their lives. Many of these, destitute and despairing, came to Canada and began scratching out meagre existences in the crowded tenements of Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg. Of necessity most took jobs in the sweatshops of the garment industry. Out of these arose the Jewish labour movement.

Undoubtedly the key factor in its development was the geographic concentration of the Jewish working class. In a few square blocks along the Main in Montreal, in the Ward in Toronto, and north of the CPR tracks in Winnipeg lived the vast bulk of Canada's Jewish proletariat. As the historian of the Jewish labour movement in the United States commented about the American experience:

It was the dense concentration of Jews which provided the basis for the emergence of a mass Jewish labour movement. A culturally and socially

\*For many years Joshua (Joe) Gershman was editor of the *Vochenblatt*, a prominent Communist, and a leading figure in the left-wing of the Jewish community. Though he is hardly the typical product of the Jewish labour movement, many of his experiences are representative of those of the vast number of penniless Jewish immigrants who filled the union halls in the years following the First World War. Multiplied thousands of times, Gershman's story is that of the Jewish worker in Canada.

homogenous mass went through a common historical experience — immigration, proletarianization, exploitation — and was capable of a common reaction.<sup>1</sup>

The Jewish labour movement in Canada was made up of unions in the needle trades, the various fraternal organizations associated with them, and the Jewish sections of such radical parties as the Socialist Party of Canada, the Social Democratic Party, and later, the Communist Party and the CCF. Though it exhibited the characteristics of other ethnic labour organizations — particularly the Finnish and German — in a very real sense the Jewish labour movement was unique. No ethnic group dominated a single industry the way the Jews dominated the garment industry, and none expended as much energy and funds on behalf of progressive candidates and causes. This gave the Jewish labour movement an economic and political clout far beyond what its relatively small membership warranted.

Many Jewish immigrants came to Canada convinced Socialists. Some had even served an apprenticeship in the revolutionary movements of Czarist Russia. But to most, the Jewish labour movement provided an introduction to Socialism. To the forlorn, exploited Jew, steeped in the Old Testament, it held out great appeal; it had, in the words of one participant, the prophetic ring of the coming of the Messiah. Although within its ambits the Jewish labour movement contained a host of competing ideologies — anarchism, communism, labour zionism, and cultural Yiddishism or "Bundism" amongst others—its underlying central ideology was nonetheless fundamentally socialist.

To many immigrants who had become alienated from traditional Judaism, the Jewish labour movement provided a new home — and perhaps even more, a new spiritual temple. It represented a way of life that was totally encompassing. Indeed, for most urban Jews it constituted their first real introduction to Canadian life. It served not only as an agent for economic benefits, but also as a cultural shelter. The fraternal organizations allied to the movement provided the immigrant worker with a familiar milieu while he or she was overcoming the trauma of dealing with alien institutions, a new language, and a vastly different way of life. Thus educational and cultural programmes were an essential part of the activities of the Jewish labour movement. Much time and money was devoted by the Jewish trade unions and their affiliated fraternal organizations in providing

<sup>1</sup>Elias Tcherikower, *The Early Jewish Labour Movement in the United States* (New York 1961), pg. 344.

their rank and file members with English lessons, lectures, plays, and reading material.

Because of their historic experience, Jews have tended to be overly sensitive and responsive to oppression and threats to religious and political freedom. Thus Jewish labour rejected out of hand the "pure and simple" trade unionism of the AFL and the TLC. In its stead it substituted a concern for social justice — not only for its members, but for all workers, and even for all Canadians. Jewish unions were in the forefront of most of the progressive movements in Canada since the First World War. And unlike other unions, intellectuals played a key role in Jewish unions, not only as advisers and teachers, but also as purveyors of new social ideas. In this sense then, the Jewish labour movement was reminiscent of the union practices in the mid-nineteenth century which culminated in the Knights of Labor. In the twentieth century, these activities culminated in the CIO, in which Jewish labour played an important role.

Predictably there was much ideological turbulence within the movement. Indeed, it was a major battleground in the bitter conflict between the Socialists and the Communists which raged with such fury in the years following the creation of the Communist International in 1919. The Socialists were entrenched in such unions as the International Ladies Garment Workers, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, the Millinery Workers, and several others. They had their own fraternal organizations — the Arbeiter Ring (Workmen's Circle) for the non-Zionists, and the Poeli Zion for the Zionists—and their own newspapers and periodicals, the most influential of which was the *Forward* from New York.

The Communists had significant elements in some of these unions but their strength was concentrated in the Trade Union Unity League and, later, the Workers Unity League. They also dominated the United Garment Workers and, for a time, the Fur and Leather Workers. The United Jewish Peoples Order (UJPO) was their fraternal organization, and their major newspapers were the *Freiheit* from New York, and the *Kampf* (later to be called the *Vochenblatt*) in Canada.

The internecine war between these two factions was unrelenting and rancorous. It dominated the movement for much of its short history and weakened it immeasurably. The incredible energy and time spent fighting amongst themselves, many of the major protagonists now ruefully concede, could better have been used fighting Jewish labour's real enemies.

Today the sewing machines still hum on Spadina and along the

Main but the sounds of Yiddish — the chatter, the sighs, the laughter, the imprecations — are stilled. Little has changed in these areas except the language of the workers. Now one can hear Greek, Italian, and Portuguese, where not long ago only Yiddish could be heard. The Jewish labour movement was a one generation phenomenon. It has often been said that the Jewish factory worker was neither the parent nor the child of a worker. Unquestionably, the social mobility — and in fact, the deproletarianization — of the Jewish worker was astonishingly rapid. Workers scrimped, saved and sacrificed to make certain their children would never work in a factory. And the educational activities were so successful that they undermined the movement. Many immigrant workers felt confident enough to strike out on their own and became successful merchants, manufacturers and professionals. And if they did not, they made sure their children would.

Yet, despite their new wealth and social position, many remained concerned with the interests of the worker. Although they had a new enhanced status, few severed their relationship with the movement. Although there are no longer any Jewish unions, the Arbeiter Ring, the Poelai Zion and UJPO are still functioning organizations. Naturally very few of their members are workers. Despite their own material success, these men and women are still possessed of the universal dream of a socially just and egalitarian society that so dominated the Jewish labour movement.

In its short history Jewish labour contributed much to the quality of life — not only of Canadian workers — but of all Canadians. It pioneered new collective bargaining techniques and industry-wide general strikes. It stimulated and for a time underwrote much of the cultural and humanitarian activities of organized labour in Canada. It also lobbied energetically, and often alone, for enlightened human rights and progressive social legislation. Long before it became fashionable, the Jewish labour movement took the lead in demanding a less restrictive immigration policy. It educated and acted as a social escalator for thousands of new immigrants and saved thousands of others from the death camps by helping them come to Canada. And of course it played a key role in the growth and development of the Communist Party and the CCF. What would the former have been without such products of the movement as J. B. Salsberg, Harvey Murphy or Joshua Gershman, or the latter without David Lewis?

When the history of labour in Canada is finally written, the Jewish labour movement will stand out in its contributions to the betterment of Canadian society. Without doubt it was the conscience of the Canadian labour movement.

## The Recollections of Joshua Gershman

I was born in a small town in the Ukraine called Sokolov. I was raised in a non-Orthodox family. As far as my father and my mother are concerned, they were not atheists. My father maybe wouldn't know what an atheist is. But they were secular people, you would say, worldly people. They did go to synagogue, but they weren't religious people in that sense. We didn't get a religious education at home. I did get religious education through one of my grandfathers with whom I lived for a number of years.

My father was a merchant and my mother was a seamstress. We were quite poor. My father left for Canada in 1913. We remained a family of four sisters and two brothers. I started to work while going to school when I was ten, in a dying factory, dying cloth. In those days the poor Jews used to buy up army clothes and in order to be able to sell it, because people didn't want to wear khaki stuff, used to dye it and change the colour.

Then I went to live with my grandfather in a bigger city where I went to the Yeshiva where I got mainly a religious education. While being in the Yeshiva an uncle of mine, who was a socialist, taught me Russian, though our language at home was Yiddish. Our town consisted of about 65 Jewish families. But we were very active. All of the young kids had a Jewish drama group. We built a Jewish library; my father was very much in love with Sholom Aleichem and in our house every Saturday afternoon we used to have a gathering of young people and my father used to read Sholom Aleichem to them. My father was also very much in love with dancing so he together with another group brought in a dance master from a bigger city and they used to teach people dancing. All of the young people of my age in those days were very much concerned with Jewish culture, with Jewish history, with Jewish traditions. But from a very very early age all of us had been very socialistically inclined.

It was a time of the struggle against Czarism. It was not too many years after the 1905 revolution that was a failure. And in all of these small Russian towns there were underground Socialist movements. My uncle was one of the leaders of this kind of movement. He used to come to us occasionally in smaller towns. In those days I didn't know, but lately I've learned that he used to come to us not so much to see us, which he was very glad to do, but he came to a smaller town in order to run away from the police, so that he wouldn't be so noticed and so on.

During the revolution I joined the revolutionary movement and I went back to our town. We had a lot of hardships mainly because of

pogroms, various bands of Ukrainians and others who were fighting the Bolsheviks carried out pogroms particularly in smaller towns but also in the big cities. At that time (I was already sixteen years of age), we organized Jewish self-defense groups and we used to guard our town all night and all day with weapons. My mother, though she had not been a political worker, she had not been politically developed in that sense, but because of her very close ties with the poor — and not only Jewish ones — she was elected the first Chairman of the Committee of the Poor. I became a revolutionary so to speak right from the Yeshiva straight into the revolutionary movement, not belonging to any party, only to the revolutionary movement. Particularly after the Bolsheviks were successful, and they drove out the various counter-revolutionary bands and the pogromists, the overwhelming majority of Jewish communities in all towns and in all cities were on the side of the Bolsheviks. That's why you have this phenomena of so many Jews — young people in particular, but not only the young — right from the start playing a very important role in stabilizing the Bolshevik regime so to speak in all of these cities. We sided definitely with the October revolution and the Communist party, though the majority of us never belonged to the party in those days.

My father was in Canada, in Winnipeg. My mother and all of us naturally were very much concerned because we hadn't heard from my father all the years of the First World War. By that time we had already learned that immediately after the war Jewish representatives from Canada and the United States came to Europe to make connections with families in the old country and mainly in Warsaw. I went to Warsaw. My family — my mother, the children — remained in the same town in Sokolov. I went to Warsaw and I worked for the Joint Distribution Committee. This is a big Jewish organization of assistance mainly to European countries.

I was working at that time in the Joint Distribution Committee in Warsaw mainly with thousands and thousands of refugees from the Ukraine who were waiting for possibilities to go to Canada, the United States, or to Latin American countries. It was very difficult because the quota in the United States for Jews was filled and it was even difficult to get permission to come to Canada. I was working with the Joint to help get passports for these people because all of us didn't have any passports. I came to Canada actually on a Polish passport. The majority of us in those years had Polish passports. They were not fake passports. This was done with the agreement of the Polish government and we had agreements from the countries

where we would go. I had to wait in Warsaw a year and a half till I finally got permission to go to Canada and even then when we were ready to take the boat to Canada, we had difficulties. Our passports were not recognized when we came to Antwerp in Belgium and several hundred were living on a ship for about three months because Canada didn't want to recognize our passports. And very many of us in that group decided that instead of waiting to get permission to go to the States or to Canada, left for Argentina, Brazil and other countries.

But I stuck it out because I had no reason to go to any other country and my main purpose was to come to Canada. I arrived in Canada in December 1921. I came to Winnipeg where my father lived, but on my way to Canada, because it took in those days eighteen days to come by boat to Canada, my father died. So I came to Canada and my father was dead.

My mother and the children remained in the old country in the same town and when I came to Canada I looked around. My mother and the children decided that they are not going to come to Canada since my father died and we had an understanding that I will stay in Canada to settle his little bit of an estate. He was a farmer in Canada, not a merchant, so the farm had to be sold and a few other things had to be done. It was agreed that I would remain here until I settled the estate and then I'll go back. But immediately after I arrived I had different kinds of propositions. Friends of my father wanted to give me something to do. One knew I was in the Yeshiva for several years wanted me to become a Hebrew teacher in the Talmud Torah in Winnipeg but I was already a socialist-minded person so I refused that and went looking for a job, and a 'landsman' of ours took me into a shop where I learned a trade as a fur dresser and dyer. This was my first job in Canada.



*J. Gershman (second from left) as a fur dresser and dyer, 1922.*



*Fur dressing and dying* — particularly *dressing* — is a very filthy kind of a job — smelly, you know. The highest that a worker could make in those days was eighteen dollars a week. I started with eight dollars a week. It was eight hours a day, including Saturday, and there was no overtime paid, straight time for overtime because there was no union at that time. And while working in the shop I went to night school to learn English and I immediately became active in the Jewish cultural field in Winnipeg. But this activity was mainly in the left wing movement. The rift between the left and the right in the labour movement was just sharpening between those who recognized that the October revolution is the greatest thing that happened in the history of mankind and those who were against the October revolution — against the new Soviet regime. And I naturally sided with those who not only appreciated but thought that this was the greatest event in history. But in Winnipeg there was a kind of tolerance between right and left. And though people have differences of opinions they have more tolerance in Winnipeg than in any other city that I know of. I had many many good friends, many of them among the right wing elements — young people particularly.

Winnipeg at that time was called the “Litte” (or Lithuania) — the “Vilna” of Canada. Vilna in Lithuania was the intellectual centre of the Yiddish-speaking world. The right-wing Jews in the Peretz



*Yiddisher Arbeter Kultur Ferband, Winnipeg. J. Gershman (second row, fourth from left) Secretary.*

School had their own cultural centre. We left-wingers founded the Freiheit Temple Schule (School) in opposition to them.

We also organized the Yiddishen Arbeiter Kultur Farband — The Jewish Labour Cultural Association, of which I was the secretary. So we were, so to speak, two rival groups in the cultural field. But both groups carried on a tremendous work in developing the Yiddish language, the Jewish culture and the Yiddish language naturally — drama groups, orchestras, even a mandolin orchestra.



*J. Gershman (standing on far left) with the teachers, shule committee, and the graduating class of the Winnipeg Freiheit Temple Shule in the late 1920s.*

We didn't have our own newspaper but at that time there was a daily newspaper in Winnipeg called the *Yidisher Vort*. That paper too, was possibly the only one in the North American continent that tolerated differences of opinions — the only one. Insofar as the papers generally are concerned, it seems in Winnipeg like in all other Canadian cities a great number of Jews who read Yiddish read the American Jewish papers. So there was a division. Our people used to read the *Freiheit* which was a left wing Jewish paper from New York and the others read the *Tag* and the *Forward* the other two dailies from New York. But the *Freiheit* had a considerable number of readers in Winnipeg. They were the people in Winnipeg interested in the revolutionary movement. The difference between the left and the right in the Jewish community was that among the left you would say that the overwhelming majority were workers: not only workers in the Needle Trades but people who were working for the CPR and

CNR, machinists, mechanics, engineers. And there were members of unions in the building trades, many of them with a tremendously important history, participants in the 1919 general strike in Winnipeg with a wonderful record in the fight for labour.

One of the leaders of the strike in a sense of speaking from the Jewish point of view was a man by the name of Mazlov. He was also from the Ukraine, was an excellent journalist, publicist, orator and he was one of those who had been arrested during the general strike.

There are many important individuals in Winnipeg, personalities that should be recorded somewhere. There was a man — when I came to Canada he was already over 60 at that time — who had a very extraordinary history. He was a very religious Jew. His name was Noiech Levine. He was the father-in-law of Feivish Simkin who is a very prominent Jew in the City of Winnipeg. He was the publisher of the *Yidisher Vort* in Winnipeg for many years. Feivish Simkin was a scholar and an anarchist ideologically so they used to fight. This old man immediately after the October revolution sided with the October revolution and he joined the Communist Party in 1922, the "Workers Party" they used to call it then. He was one of the first original members of the Workers Party of Canada. He was very orthodox. He was fanatic and extreme when he was Orthodox and he also became a very fanatic Communist, something that I couldn't stomach in those days. At the same time he made tremendous services not only for the labour movement but for the Jewish community in Winnipeg. He is an historic figure in that sense. His whole family — all of his daughters and sons were with the labour movement. There are other people of the right wing because of the relationship between left and the right and because of the general atmosphere in Winnipeg — its tolerance — who got to know each other better than we would know each other, now or later. We used to work and be quite friendly with men like Alter Cherniak. His son is now a member of the Cabinet in the Manitoba Government, Saul Cherniak. Alter Cherniak was a very learned man, educated man. He and his wife were organizers and leaders of the Peretz Schule. He considered himself a pupil and disciple and follower of Dr. Chaim Zhitlovsky who was a great Jewish writer and thinker. There are now people still alive who call themselves Zhitlovskyana. He wrote many many important books and developed his own philosophy of Jewish life mainly in the direction of socialist minded people. In the later years of his life he was more with the left wing in the United States than the right. By the way, he used to come to Canada very often and it's a very interesting coincidence that

he was on a lecture tour in Canada when he died in Calgary. There are so many things to talk about Winnipeg. . . .

My activities started that way and I got very involved. I joined the Communist party in 1923 and the more I got involved the less time I thought of going back. And other things that happened prevented me from thinking of going back. The estate hadn't been settled in time and what not, so I began to feel a Canadian and be responsible in the Labour movement and in the Jewish community — in the left wing section of the Jewish community. We started to organize a union with Pearl Wedro, Meyer Klig and the Naiman brothers who were Zionists but worked together with us in the trade union movement. Max Dolgoy was the secretary of the Cloakmakers union in Winnipeg and he helped us also in the Furriers union. We organised the union and we had to call a strike. And though my shop was not on strike because my shop was in fur dressing and dying, not manufacturing and the strike was in manufacturing, I participated in it. My bosses were very good friends of mine. Not only this, I was even in love with the daughter of one of them who thought I might even become his son-in-law. And they were very friendly. They had to call me in and tell me that they can't help it that I have to leave the shop because the manufacturers refused to give them the skins to dress and dye because I am one of the leaders of the strike. So anyway we lost the strike and after we lost the strike they called me in and they told me the story and they were very nice and I understood. So they gave me, instead of severance pay — in those days there wasn't such a thing — they paid my fare to get to Toronto and look for a job.

During the strike I was arrested about fourteen times and I wasn't even a citizen yet and I was afraid I would be deported. But at that time there was a Jewish alderman by the name of John Blumberg. He was a labour alderman and he helped us a lot. Whenever I appeared in court he kept on postponing the case till the strike was over. There was real battles. The manufacturers used to bring the scabs in taxis, we used to fight them. The police used to look on the other side when we beat up the scabs. The Winnipeg Police were on our side.

Don't forget it was only about four or five or six years at the most after the general strike in Winnipeg and the Winnipeg Police Force were very sympathetic to the general strike in 1919 because it was the army that broke the strike in 1919, not the police. The Winnipeg police even now are very, very friendly to labour, very much so. And there is even a fellow, a furrier, a friend of mine in Toronto, who remembers the way I beat him up in that strike because he was a scab.

He was a youngster at that time and he agreed later that he had made a real mistake but when I beat him up the Police — there were about three or four policemen near me — they looked the other way. Even when they arrested both of us — and this is very interesting — I said to the policeman I want to light my pipe because I smoked a pipe at that time. So he left my hands loose and while my hands were loose, I started to beat up the scab again and they didn't say anything. This was a very interesting period. Winnipeg had a wonderful spirit. In that sense it is a most unusual city.



*J. Gershman, Winnipeg, 1923.*

The strike was of great importance precisely because we lost it. Because there is no such thing in the labour movement, and this is an accepted position by the labour movement — there is no such thing as a lost battle. This was the first strike that the furriers ever had in Winnipeg and it was a general strike which succeeded to take out all the workers and it laid the foundation for a union in Winnipeg for fur workers. So even if you lose, the experiences that you gain, that the workers gain, are sufficient and worthwhile. I lost many strikes.

So to speak my period in Winnipeg ended in the beginning of 1926 when I came to Toronto. In Toronto I started to work in a shop called Schnauffers. By that time I was already more experienced and in Schnauffers I used to make \$24, \$25 a week even \$28 a week which in those days was quite a nice wage. I used to live on Bellevue Avenue; four boys together we had a room. We lived very nicely. We dressed ourselves nicely. So I was in Toronto working for Schnauffers and became active in the left wing movement in Toronto, mainly the trade union movement but also in the cultural field. At that time we had the Trade Union Education League of which Tim Buck was one of the main leaders. In those years all the left wingers belonged to it, even Zionists. Max Federman who later became a prominent anti-Communist was together with me in the Trade Union Education League in 1925-1926.

This league lasted for quite a while. Actually it changed to the Trade Union Unity League and in 1929 it changed its name to the Workers' Unity League which was an independent Canadian trade union centre not affiliated either with the AF of L and later with the CIO. The CIO developed a little later but the Workers' Unity League was the pioneer in the struggle for industrial unionism.

My main concern was to organize unorganized workers and organize them in the strikes. But in 1927 I was offered a position to work in the United States, I was a member of the Communist party naturally and in those days the Communist party had the inner struggle between Maurice Spector who was the editor of *The Worker*, the official organ of the Communist party. He was carrying on one side of the struggle with Jack MacDonald the secretary of the party. They aligned themselves to the Lovestone group in the United States.

The main postulate of the Lovestone group was that the United States of America and all those countries which associated with it, like Canada, were entering a period of permanent prosperity. That's why the Communist party had to change its policy of continuous crisis. There was no question that the Lovestone group leaned more to Trotskyite ideas and ideology, particularly in its opposition to

what, even in those days, they already called "Moscow control" — domination from Moscow. Lovestone went to Moscow, and he had a conference with Stalin and he came back claiming Stalin agreed with him. But at the 1928 American Party convention the Fosterites got a majority, and many people who supported Lovestone left the Party. Both Spector and MacDonald were defeated in Canada. J. B. Salsberg sided with Lovestone more than with Foster. It was also, on his part, a combination of political deviations that could have been classified either as Lovestoneite ideas or Trotskyite ideas and so on. In general terms, Salsberg was a dissenter on many, many questions, and that's why he did not go along originally with the idea of organizing or establishing a separate trade union centre in Canada.

Eventually he did go along, but that was always a strange thing with Salsberg, that originally he did not go along with the idea that he must sharpen the struggle against the class collaborationists in the needle trade unions like in the Amalgamated and the Clothing Makers Union, the Dressmakers, the furriers, etc., but he was against establishing a separate centre like the one that we established in those years — the Workers' Unity League.

In 1927 I went to work for the party as a professional revolutionary. At that time the party gave me permission to leave, and to transfer to the American party to Philadelphia. But I was not actually legally in the United States though I was already a Canadian citizen. I got my Canadian citizenship in 1927 and I had to be transferred from Philadelphia to Chicago because of political developments at that time. This had to do with Palestine, with the position of the Communists, in those days, which in my opinion now, in retrospect, was wrong.

At that time, there was actually a pogrom on the part of Arabs against Jews in Palestine. We interpreted this as a revolutionary act, though many Jewish young people and others, people who went to Yeshiva and so on, they weren't in the battlefields, were slaughtered, murdered by Arab terrorists. We did not make a differentiation the way I would do now between the justified aspirations of the Arab people and the deeds of terrorist troops who just came out openly in support of that. At that time there was a very strong movement against us among some Jewish people and the office of the *Freiheit* in Chicago were raided by Jewish extremists, and the manager did not want to remain. So I had to be transferred actually in 48 hours, to go and take over the office from Philadelphia.

The point I'm trying to make is that if I would have to take a position on a similar event now I wouldn't take the same position

irrespective of whether my party would tell me yes or no, because I would have my independent position on that, I think we were wrong in those days on that question.

Anyway I had to go, so I was transferred to Chicago and I was working in Chicago until I was arrested because an informer informed the Immigration Department. They called me in and I was not actually legal in that sense because in those days you didn't require much to go to the States and work in the States but I never even reported at the time that I am in the States. So they gave me several weeks to wind up my business and go back to Canada. The arrangements were that I should come back to the United States after that, but when I came to Canada in 1929 I came from Chicago to Winnipeg. I got a telegram from the party that I should report in Toronto to the National Office because they wanted to discuss with me certain things. So I came to Toronto and then they gave me the proposition to remain in Canada at least temporarily. They had already arranged with the American party that they were loaning me out to Canada because I was at that time already a member of the American Communist party. So the American party agreed to loan me out to the Canadian party.

You either belonged to one party or another, not to both. They showed me a letter from the American party that asked me to be so kind to remain here. This was when J. B. Salsberg was the general organizer of the Industrial Union of Needle Trade Workers, but he had disagreements with the party at that time and he left both the party and the Workers' Unity League and the Industrial Union of Needle Trade Workers. So I took over his position. It was the end of 1929 and since then I got involved with Canada so much that I never went back to the United States to work there. I was assigned to work as the organizer of the Industrial Union of Needle Trade Workers to Montreal and Toronto, I was commuting, you know, going from one city to another.

I was working in these two cities, organizing mainly dressmakers or those other needle trade workers. At the end of 1930 there was the Second National Convention of the Industrial Union of Needle Trade Workers where Salsberg was present as a guest but not as the organizer. But he participated and at the Convention I was elected as the general organizer of the Industrial Union of Needle Trade Workers and I was also a member of the national board of the Workers' Unity League and I assisted not only to organize workers in my own union but also other workers.

In 1931 and '32 we concentrated mainly in the organizing of dressmakers in Montreal and Toronto. We had a general strike of



dressmakers in Toronto where we won. We had a general strike in Montreal, close to 10,000 French Canadian workers, the majority of them French Canadian girls. In that strike, we lost. We had several strikes in Winnipeg where I used to go too, because I was the general organizer. There was no general strike, but there were many shop strikes that we won, particularly in cloaks and dresses.

The situation wasn't the same in every city. In Toronto, the main difficulty we had was because there were many unions in the industry, the ILGWU and the Furriers Union, the United Garment Workers Union, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union and there was constantly a clash between us and the old time unions. This was one difficulty. Then there was the stubbornness of the manufacturers who didn't want to recognize the union. We succeeded with the dressmakers because we organized over 90 percent of them in Toronto, solid, very devoted and loyal people.

In Montreal we had many more difficulties. It was the time of the Bennett regime, our union was raided by the police, many times. Workers were terrorized on the picket line by police and by gangsters hired by the bosses. Jewish manufacturers behaved very badly.

They were vociferous Red-baiting and labelling every leader of the union as Communists who are not interested in the interests of the workers and so on. In 1933 there was a dressmakers strike and the response was terrific. The main difficulty was that the French Canadian girls who were a majority in the shops were very backward and under the influence of Church. I will give you an example. We started to organize shop by shop in Montreal, which had and still has the largest shops in the dress industry in Canada — several hundred in one shop. We had shop strikes, before we called a general strike. Most of the shop strikes we won: we didn't win all the demands, but we signed shop agreements, individual agreements with manufacturers. This will give you an idea of the backwardness of some of the French Canadian girls or rather the pressure that they were under. Once we had settled the strike — the name of the shop was the Diana Dress who were doing a better line of dresses. Very fine workers; the girls were really good operators and finishers. We got them in those days an increase of \$3.50 a week which was a big thing. The shop was very happy and satisfied. We had a short strike in that job in order to get that. They settled the strike on Thursday. The girls got their raise next week. Monday, a week after we settled the strike, five girls with the shop chairlady, a French Canadian girl, beautiful person, came down together with the shop committee. The girls, brought me back, brought *me* back, not the boss, the increases they got in the new pay

envelope and they said we have been to Church yesterday (this was on a Monday morning, they were waiting for me 7 o'clock in the morning) and they said we were in Church yesterday and we were told by the priest that this is dishonest money and they begged that I should return the money back to the boss. You can imagine this kind of backwardness, that's why we had so many difficulties. We had to go visit many parents of these girls and convince them that it's O.K., that it's all right to belong to the union, that they will, because they now belong to the union, assume the dignity of labour. They will prove themselves more important. Many parents agreed with us but the Church really worked against us. The Jewish manufacturers hired gangsters to beat up the union organizers and beat up workers on picket line. The gangsters, quite a number of them were Jewish boys, from St. Lawrence and the Main, in Montreal, and I knew them and they knew me for years. So the day arrived to beat me up. They came to see me and they told me, Joe, what can we do? We wouldn't like to lose a job. We need the money, but at the same time we don't want to beat you up, we don't want to beat up two other organizers, Frank Breslow and Leo Robin. So I told them I have a proposition for you. I said, next day about 9 o'clock in the morning, some of my girls in the union, strikers, will call up the President of the Association of the Dressmakers Guild and they will cry on the telephone and abuse the manufacturers for beating up Gershman and Frank Breslow. So that they'll know that this happened, I won't be on the picket line because you are going to beat me up and you collect your money and that's all. They said, that's a good idea, but the manufacturers won't go for that. They have to see it. So I said, O.K., I'll do some more for you. I'll bandage myself and so will Frank. Leo didn't have to because he was in another part of the city at that time. And we'll show ourselves on the picket line, all bandaged up with a sling around my arm. And so I did, so did the two of us. The boys collected the money. And after a couple of days I took off the bandages, I didn't want to expose them right away. So the gangsters organized a big dinner in the LaSalle Hotel in Montreal where we had a real feast and everybody was happy.

But we lost that strike and the Jewish manufacturers were so bitter, that the Jewish girls who lost the strike lost their jobs, had to put on crosses. They had to, like Christians, put on the little chain with the cross in order to get a job, telling the manufacturers that they are not Jewish. The Jewish girls were more active, more militant, and they knew that the bosses had no trouble with the French Canadian girls (I told you the French Canadian girls were quite backward,

though there were a few very developed people and very progressive, intelligent girls too), but the Jewish girls were all militant. They had to put on crosses and go to different kinds of shops and try to get a job by telling the boss that they were not Jewish.

Also we had the Jewish establishment, which is very powerful against us. The Canadian Jewish Eagle, the *Kanader Adler* which was printed in Yiddish, which was a daily in those days, was the bosses' paper and they carried on a strong anti-communist propaganda against the unions led by communists, organized by Moscow. Also, since I became National Organizer and Secretary of the Industrial Union of Needle Trades Workers, I was the only Canadian delegate to a plenary session of the profintern of the Red International of Trade Unions in 1930-31, and this was used against me and against the union because they said "well, the guy went direct to Moscow to get instructions" and so on. So all of these were elements that helped the reactionaires. And besides it's not a small industry. In Montreal, the dress industry even in those days was already huge, big, and many manufacturers spent tens of thousands of dollars to defeat a union, something that not all the dress manufacturers in Toronto would have done, even if they could afford it. This was one of the reasons why we lost in Montreal.

This was the time of the unemployment in the dirty '30s, the hungry '30s and particularly because of the Duplessis terror, the padlocking various organizations and so on. The terror against the unemployed people was terrible. There was a time that in our headquarters at 286 St. Catharines Street in Montreal — it was a huge big hall — and after office hours when we didn't have meetings in the evening, we used to let in 50, 100 or sometimes even more unemployed people to sleep on the floor in our office. Some of the workers used to bring them in the morning some sandwiches. So we participated in organizing the unemployed and we participated in organizing at that time the trek of unemployed people to Ottawa. In Montreal we organized the tremendous number of unemployed people in the organization and the police were arresting everyone and we used to protect people who were in danger to be evicted because they couldn't pay rent. One day an unemployed worker by the name of Nick Zimchuk, a Ukrainian, had been shot dead by a policeman because he refused to be evicted. The Government and the police knew that we were going to make a big thing out of it so they were trying to steal away the body from us because we had announced to the press and the radio that we are going to have a huge funeral demonstration. So we organized a huge body of guards, to guard the

body till next morning when the demonstration was announced. I used to be very friendly with Fred Rose, later a Member of Parliament, who was at that time the leader of the Communist party in Quebec. We had been the ones in charge of organizing this demonstration and so the police used to follow us wherever we went. So we decided to go not far from the funeral parlour where the dead body of Nicholas Zimchuk was lying, we decided to go into a steam bath, a Jewish steam bath on Colonial Avenue. Two minutes later the police arrived and we spent the entire night from midnight till six in the morning. We spoke with them, drank with them, and even joked with them. They were sure that something was going to happen, then they'll take away the body and there would not be the demonstration. But we fooled them. The whole thing was a hoax. While they were watching us in the steam bath, the body remained in the funeral parlour. In any case we had a real army of people to defend the body then too. The funeral was one of the biggest demonstrations Montreal ever had, over 10,000 people participated in that demonstration. Many people were arrested, police interfered. But he was buried and I think I was the only speaker at that funeral. . . .

In retrospect, I think that the decision made in those years by the Profintern, the Red International of Trade Unions, in favour of establishing separate trade union centres outside of the orbit of the official trade union movement was a mistake.

It's my opinion, and it's a very ticklish kind of question because we can show, and justifiably so, that in the years of the Workers' Unity League, we were instrumental not only in organizing close to 50,000 workers and leading the majority of these workers in very important strikes, that there was a tremendous value not only sharpening the class struggle but in actually winning better conditions for the workers in these particular industries. We can also claim quite a bit of credit that by our experiences in organizing the Workers' Unity League, we led up to the later foundation, the basis for the organization of the CIO. In spite of this, in my opinion, in retrospect, the very fact that in 1934 and in '35, we had to decide to liquidate the Workers Unity League and go back into the fold of the AF of L and the CIO, proved that, in my opinion, in my personal opinion, that while there were terrific achievements recorded by the Workers' Unity League, and in the unions that we helped to organize, in the needle trades and the furniture and steel and many others, from the point of view of the long range perspective. as a revolutionary party and a revolutionary movement, in my opinion, it was a mistake.

One thing I want to make very clear. We had close fraternal ties

with the Profintern — the Red International of Trade Unions. Certainly we had very close ties but the ties did not mean that we are taking directions from Moscow, that's nonsense, this still goes on. We never took orders from anyone!

In 1935 I became editor of the party's paper. The name of the paper in those years was *Der Kampf*, "The Struggle", and I was also the secretary, for a number of years of the national bureau of the Jewish Communists which was a subcommittee of the central committee of the Communist Party. I never had a conflict about being a Jew and being a Communist. I became a Communist because I am a Jew. Originally this was the reason I joined the Communist movement.

During the time of the, what people call the Stalin-Hitler pact, I was not disturbed at all. I think it has been proved historically that if not for that pact the Soviet Union would have not been in the position they were. That does not mean that they didn't commit mistakes in the Soviet Union, but they would not have been in the position to help us, all our allies, to defeat Hitler. I was convinced that the Soviet Union in 1939 had no other alternative but to sign the pact with Germany. It was not a friendship pact, it was a non-aggression pact and a non-aggression pact is not signed on the basis of friendship, of seeing eye to eye on everything. The War was a war prepared against the Soviet Union and I think they did a terrific job in the interests of socialism for the world and the interests of humanity by signing that pact, and as I said, it does not mean that they didn't commit mistakes, and terrible mistakes by receiving false information, by killing off important military men. Many other things happened, but basically they didn't bother me at all; on the contrary, as a Jew on whom could I depend to defeat Hitler? Not on those who built up Hitler. The United States of America, England, France helped to build up Hitler with the hope and with the idea that Hitler was going to fight Russia, the Soviet Union. So should I depend on them that they will save Jewish people from fascism, or the Canadian Prime Minister in those days, Mackenzie King who openly stated that his greatest hope is that after Hitler attacked the Soviet Union that these two are going to choke each other, destroy each other. And he was at that time officially an ally of the Soviet Union. There is no secret that Mackenzie King was a great admirer of Hitler so I had no scruples. Nothing bothered me. On the contrary I was extremely happy when the Soviet Union was attacked by the Germans.

When the Canadian Government decided that because originally, the Canadian Communist Party, as most of the Communist

parties of the world, did not recognize the breaking out of the second world war as an anti-fascist war, and because we did not recognize this war and we were not in favour of the war, naturally the Canadian Government decided to clamp down on us. So at that time we reorganized our party into two kinds of leadership: one that still more or less worked publicly, and one that went underground right away, so we should be sure to have some kind of leadership in case something happens. The government did not limit its repressive measures to the party. They went after the mass organizations. For instance, they actually confiscated practically all the Ukrainian Labour Temples in the country, and they threatened to — and they did — arrest quite a number of leaders of the mass organizations of various ethnic groups led by communists, and other groups led by communists. The same thing applies to the press. When this happened, some of the leaders of the communist party were interned. So after the internment, we re-organized ourselves by going underground. The name of the paper at that time was not *Der Kampf* any more, it was *Der Veg*, (The Road). We changed the name but we decided at that time not to wait until the government will come down and take me away. We decided that I should be the one to go underground first. Sam Lipschitz would remain with the paper. At that time we had our own shop where we printed our paper, the Yiddish paper. Lipschitz stayed with the paper and with the shop, and I went underground. I was working in a different city till the government closed down the paper officially. Sam Lipschitz came to see me in the place where I was, which at that time was in the country. Together with me was a very good friend of mine, a leading Jewish Communist from the United States. He had to run away from the United States because of some other problems he had there and he was with us for quite a number of years secretly. Nobody knew about it. But he was not far from the place where I was hiding and I called him in and Sam came and we had a discussion: "What are we to do?" So we agreed to start publishing a new paper. But how are we going to do it? We cannot publish a paper in any other city but Toronto because of printing facilities and other things. So we agreed that I will edit the paper from Montreal, because the place where I was, was not far from Montreal. I would send material through our messengers to Toronto. We had liaison; people had been in touch with us, safe people, and Lipschitz went back and conveyed the message to the Party.

They established a special committee and we have decided to name the paper *Vochenblatt*. A simple name, without any mention of struggle: no ideological content, nothing — simply the Canadian

Jewish Weekly, *The Canada Yidishe Vochenblatt*. And for a period, I think, of about six months, I struggled and edited the paper from my place in hiding.

It was very complicated because I had to be supplied with material and I had to know what's going on. I've written myself under three-four names and I used to have to give it to my contact. And the contact had to mail it to Toronto. When this became dangerous we decided not to mail it, so we had a person take the train into Toronto during the night and bring down the copy. And then it was decided that this was becoming really very difficult so the comrades discussed the question of how to find a way of bringing me to Toronto. It was very difficult for me to get a place in Toronto that would be a safe hiding place. The only place they could find for me in those days was actually in the red light district of Toronto on Mutual Avenue. I lived in an apartment, a basement apartment. There were a lot of stories about that apartment.

Charlie Rosen was working openly. Charlie Rosen was my contact in Toronto. And when I came to Toronto, before I moved into Mutual, I stayed with Harry Disenhouse at his place for about six weeks. But it became very dangerous there. Finally, they got this place. The first night I moved in, a woman (the building, I think was six stories), a woman threw herself down and she fell at the window of my apartment and here come the police and detectives. And none of them asked me my name. And I wasn't going in my name because in those days, during the time of the war, you have to have a registration card, so I had two registration cards. I had a registration card in my own name because in case something happens, they shouldn't be able to say that I violated the regulations. I had registered and I had a registration card under the name of Harris. This was separate but they didn't even ask me. But you can imagine what I lived through that night. I stayed at that place on Mutual Street. So I decided I would tell the janitor or the superintendant that I would like to have an apartment not in the basement. So finally — it took me about three or four months — he transferred me onto the third floor. So that was even worse because detectives used to be in that building every day, which is the safest thing for me, mind you, because the only kind of detectives that were there — they were knocking at my door five times a day — were people who were looking for pushers, for drug pushers. But the only thing that worried me at that time was in case they look under the mattress and other places and they find material there — articles I had written, clippings, newspapers and so on. So actually, I think I stayed there for nearly eight months. And one day,

detectives came in and they asked for a certain person and I told them I am not that person. Who are you? So I show them my Harris card and he says but you look exactly like the man we are looking for. I waited until the evening, I had the telephone in my apartment and I called one of my contacts and I told him I must get out right away. Charlie Rosen made the arrangements. And the question was, where will I go? We decided that one of our comrades will rent an apartment in a very respectable section and we'll help him pay the rent. So this was done and we lived in a beautiful apartment on Heath Avenue, in [Forest Hill] Village. So two comrades rented the place but at that time, already, it started to be a little easier, the surveillance wasn't enforced and so on. Because it started to be easier, we took liberties and we were doing things that we shouldn't have done. So one day, I was asked to attend a meeting of trade unionists during the day in a certain place and in the car, in the same car, were myself, Salsberg and Charlie Rosen. Salsberg was underground but Charlie was not though he was not too "Kosher".

The police had been following Pearl Wedro at that time and Pearl was at that meeting. And after we left the meeting, the comrades in that car were supposed to let Salsberg off in another place and take me to Heath Avenue. Our car was stopped, a fellow came out — it was during the summer — shirt without a tie and so on and he immediately introduces himself as Mr. Archer. He was more than a sergeant of the RCMP and he arrested us and we were over two months in the Don Jail in the cells, myself, Salsberg and Charlie Rosen. At that time, negotiations were conducted because this was already after the Soviet Union went into the war and negotiations had started between the Communist party and the government. At that time, it was not called the Communist party, it was called the Labour Progressive Party. Negotiations by J. L. Cohen, the man who negotiated for us, succeeded and our people were released from the internment camps and we were released from Don Jail. So this was it, how it is to work underground. It's very interesting, but not in a country like Canada.

Actually you take very little chances in Canada in being underground; not like the underground you read about in novels and in history of revolutionary movements under Czarism. For instance, there's a difference to be underground in Canada — now even. Let's suppose, for the sake of argument we would have to go underground now in Canada and to be underground, let's say in Portugal or in Spain or in Greece. This has to do with a certain amount of democracy that we enjoy in this country — bourgeois democracy — but there is a big difference in this too. Communists recognize it's not the same thing to



be interned even in the time of the war in Canada and to be in concentration camps let's say in Spain, or in Portugal or Greece and so on, or in any of the Latin American countries. But it's a very interesting experience. You have to re-adjust your life, and you cannot always read good materials so for the first time in my life I started to read for enjoyment. Most of my life when I was through with my work that I had to do, I had to read what I needed in order to be able to write serious stuff. In the underground, I used to read detective stories all the time. I never read detective stories till then all my life, and I never played cards. I don't play cards since then either. But when I was underground with the few people I did see, I started to play cards, but that's all. It is boring naturally at times and it also depends on the connections you have, who your contacts are and the various possibilities of furthering your thinking by not remaining to talk only to yourself. You always have to have communications, a terrific thing in such a situation. You have to have people to communicate with, you see. . . .

Our position on the war was very significant. Our main slogan before 1941 was to convert the war into an anti-fascist war. I think in as far as this is in retrospect, the Communist party position was correct, not to support the war right from the start because there were all the dangers and all the possibilities that this war — if Hitler would not commit one mistake after another — would develop into a war only against the USSR, for which reason they had built up Hitler. I think that the pact, what they commonly called the Hitler-Stalin Pact, was a very important step in the direction of the defeat of the Hitler military machine. If not for that, the Soviet Union would have been crushed. There's no question in my mind that this was a very correct step taken by the Soviet government and it was *correct*. But it had a bad effect on some of our supporters who supported the war. But we made great gains after the Soviets became our allies during the war, when it became so customary and the style to bless the Red Army and so on. We even became part of the Jewish Establishment. We were the leadership of Canadian Jewish Congress on various committees.

Myself and Salsberg were on the Joint Public Relations Committee of Congress and B'nai Brith. Lipschitz, myself and Salsberg were members of the executive committee of the central region of Canadian Jewish Congress. We were very respected and listened-to people in Congress and other bodies. I would say that as a result of the Stalin-Hitler Pact, as it was commonly called, the Communist party in Canada, the left wing in Canada lost very little, and the little we have lost, we have regained more than double during the time of the later

part of the war when the Soviet Government became our allies.

We had our own organization, the United Jewish Peoples Order (UJPO) which spoke in the name of the left-wing elements of the Jewish Community. It was a wonderful organization, but since the revelations of the 20th Congress of the Communist party it is not the same. We lost many of our best people.

I would say that the revelations as they affected the Jewish part of the movement — because in as far as the general movement in the Communist party in Canada for instance, while the Communist party in Canada and some other countries had been confronted with an inner struggle after the 20th Congress, not in every section of the party or in every province was the effect the same. A lumber worker in B.C. didn't give a good god damn whether Harold Pritchett was a communist or not. Because of what happened at the 20th Congress, Pritchett was no longer good any more for him? Nonsense! Pritchett is a good trade unionist; he's a Communist but he's fighting for my interests and he didn't give a damn. It did not affect the Communist party in British Columbia. It didn't lose a single member because of the 20th Congress. It did affect the Jewish movement more because of several reasons. First of all because quite a number of those dissenters or those who were terribly upset were Jews. Secondly, because it affected our basic approach — I'm speaking of myself, of people like me — of the basic Leninist-Marxist approach to the Jewish question. Now, I would say, speaking for myself or people like me, up till the time when Salsberg left the party — I would include Salsberg as one that was thinking the same way about it — we were very much disturbed about certain happenings in the Soviet Union, as far as the Jewish community, long before the 20th Congress. We have written about it, not publicly. We raised questions but we did not know the enemy. Our enemies of the revolutionary progressive left-wing movement still now don't want to believe me, for instance, if I say that I did not know that the Russians killed so many Jewish writers. But I didn't and so men like me and Salsberg and many others who remained in the UJPO were very much disturbed quite a number of years before the 20th Congress. But when this happened, after the 20th Congress, the problem was, what's next for an organization like the UJPO?

We agreed, prior to the 20th Congress, that certain things that were happening there are no good. What are we to do? We have to fight for corrections. We have to fight — first of all to find out what actually happened and then fight to improve the situation, to rectify things and so on.

I was, at that time, the Secretary of the National Bureau — the Jewish Bureau of the Communist party which is a sub-committee of the central committee of the party and I called a meeting. Tim Buck came to the meeting and was very conciliatory. I have suspicions that he knew what had happened in Russia but he didn't tell us.

Now what happened is that the majority of those who left the party left because they were deeply hurt, honestly believing that they cannot associate themselves any more with people who have not only committed those kind of crimes but with people that are not ready to fight now. I disagreed with them. I met with Salsberg practically daily for hours before the last convention of the party when he was still president and I told him I'll make a statement in every convention. And I did that. I remained with the party not because I agree with everything that is being said here and everything that the party does. I don't on many things, particularly on the national question. I maintain there has been a distortion in the Soviet Union and a violation committed and crimes committed and it has to be rectified. But Salsberg was already aligned with people not only in Canada but in other countries as well, and I happened to meet them in Paris myself. I know exactly who he met there. They had grand illusions — grand ideas that they can organize together. He went on with the great idea that he will become one of *the* leaders of an international movement against Moscow domination. And this was his line, so he naturally cannot work towards maintaining unity within the left in the Communist party. He has to be outside and this is what led up to the split in the United Jewish Peoples' Order, which by the way, took place only in Toronto. In Montreal, the UJPO lost maybe even more members than in Toronto but not in the form of a split. What happened in Montreal was that those who left, I would say over 90 percent of those who left the UJPO in '56 to '58, were members of the Communist party. Although the majority of them were assimilated Jews, they came to the UJPO because the communist party told them that it's important for us to have an organization like the United Jewish Peoples' Order and belong to and become active there.

This all happened right after Tim Buck gave the report to the 20th Congress and he lied to us. He didn't tell us the exact truth what happened at the Congress. We had a real problem at that time in our party.

The majority of those who left in Toronto were middle class people, very nice people, even now, very good friends of mine — very fine people. I would say to summarize: the overwhelming majority (I would say 75 percent) of those who left the United Jewish Peoples'

Order in Toronto, were honest, genuine, deeply hurt, not only disappointed, that such things could happen in a socialist country. And they were even more hurt that they did not feel that the Canadian movement, the Canadian party and those who followed the party were genuinely interested to fight. That is the main thing. In other words, they lost complete confidence in any possibility that from this here corner something will come out that they will be able to go along with or live in peace with themselves. That's why I'm always against labelling anybody, those who left, condemning them, with the exception of Salsberg and Lipschitz. I met Lipschitz and Salsberg in Moscow during that year and Salsberg and Lipschitz know that I have been hurt even more than both of them because of my general affinity with Jewish cultural activities and devotion — my love of the Yiddish language which is more than they will ever have and the many other reasons, many other reasons. But I told them in Moscow — they went back before me — that I am going to remain inside no matter what and fight. That's what I'm doing. That's why I'm in hot water all the time. But I am fighting.

Salsberg still parades publicly as the man who left the Communist party because of the Jewish question in the USSR. That's not true. At the convention, the last convention where he was still there, I was instrumental in making the central committee of the executive committee of the party agree that Salsberg should get equal time with Tim Buck, who was General Secretary of the party at that time, to put forward his case. Actually I didn't expect he would put forward his case only on the Jewish question in USSR because he had differences on democratic centralism and many other things and so on. But this was one of the main issues. So they agreed with me and the convention voted to give him equal time with Tim Buck. He got the floor immediately after Tim Buck, spoke much longer than Tim Buck and his entire speech he didn't even mention the Jews in the USSR. The only guy that spoke at that convention very sharply condemning everything and demanding and banging on the table on the Jewish question was me. But he still parades on that reputation which is false — and Lipschitz too.

I was, immediately after the 20th Congress, in Moscow — this was after Salsberg was there with an official delegation of our party. When I came back I wrote articles in our paper and Salsberg also wrote a series of articles. The difference between my articles and his was that he told the readers and the people of Canada or as many as he could reach what he was told by Khrushchev, and Khrushchev made some silly statements which I condemned in those days and I con-

demn them now. In my articles, I wrote not what I have been told; rather I wrote a series of eight articles about what I told them had to be done in order to rectify the terrible mistakes and crimes they committed not only against other nationalities in the Soviet Union but particularly against the Jews because I feel very strongly about it. I think since 1957 I'm a different Gershman than I was up to the 20th Congress — to put it as simply as possible. I put it like this and I said that at the meeting of the central committee of the Communist party of Canada where I was a member. I said up to the 20th Congress I used to go along with them. I used to say the movement's my party right or wrong — which by the way is not only the Communist movement. There are other parties too where people say the same thing, but I'm speaking now about the Communist party. So until the 20th Congress I used to say it's my party, right or wrong. Now I say this: it's my party, but the things that I am convinced that they are right and correct and necessary I'll just give as much of my time and energy and my life as always since I'm in the movement. But things that I'm not so convinced that I'm right, I'm willing to listen and to be convinced that I am wrong and the other ones are right. But in things that I'm sure that are wrong, I will not keep quiet but I'll fight, and on that basis, I remained in the Communist party after Salsberg left.

There is an unwritten understanding between me, till three years ago when I was still a member of the Central Committee of the party, that I will continue to dissent on questions, particularly on the Jewish question of the USSR or on the national question. It is not only a Jewish question, by the way, but we have agreed that I'll continue as a leading person in the Communist party and the position that I owned in the Jewish Movement on the basis of disagreeing.

I remained in the Communist party because basically I agree with the Communist party practically on every question but on the Jewish question or on the national question. I maintain that they are a distortion of the international Communist movement particularly in the Socialist country on that question and I fight it openly the best way I can and I am being tolerated yet. I have been defeated at the last convention of the Communist party. I was not re-elected to the Central Committee but mainly this was on the national or the Jewish question mainly, this had to do with other things, with Czechoslovakia and other things that I don't go along with, that I don't see eye to eye with the Communist party here. But on Canadian questions with the policy of the party, I am in full agreement, I may not agree with certain tactics even now of the Communist party of Canada, let's say electoral tactics I don't agree with, I go along with it because here

I recognize democratic centralism and the party makes a decision, a majority decision, like in a lot of parties you have to carry it out. But on things that I feel very strong, particularly on the Jewish question because I'm a very deep traditional Jew of a secular character . . .

And to me it's very important. My position on Israel, the Six Day War, is not the same as the Communist party. I have disagreements with them on that. And I succeeded in a way, for the party agrees not to discuss with me or with the people who are gathered with me or share my opinion the character of the War. History will decide but I maintain that Israel had no other alternative in 1967 otherwise Israel would be wiped out, though I am critical of some Israeli policies since the war. In my new period in my political life which I have now entered I see things not only in black and white but also grey. . . .

When Kosygin was in Ottawa several years ago, I was invited as a guest to the reception for Kosygin arranged by the Soviet Embassy in the Skyline Hotel, I spoke to Kosygin, only in the couple of minutes that you have when you all line up to shake hands.

I spoke in English. I can't understand Russian. And while I do not agree with every formulation that Kosygin made on Jews in the Soviet Union, in the main I agree with it because it wasn't his fault. If I would have been at the press conference I would ask him a question and he would have given me different answers. I wouldn't ask him why don't they allow Jews to leave the Soviet Union, I think Jews who want to leave the Soviet Union should have a right to leave. I would ask him how come the young Jews who have been raised and brought up under Socialism want to leave the Soviet Union. *That* is the answer he has to give me.

Though I am now well over 70 I am still busy all the time and still edit the *Vochenblatt*. Above all I still feel my Communism and my Jewishness very strongly. And I still fight injustice everywhere I see or hear it. You might say that I still am something of a professional revolutionary. . . .

*Editorial Note:* In May of 1977 Joe Gershman was officially censured by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Canada for publicly supporting Euro-Communism and especially for his persistent — and damaging — attacks on the Soviet Union for its callous treatment of its Jewish population. Following a trying month-long trip to Russia, stating that he had neither seen nor heard anything to change his mind Gershman flatly rejected a Central Committee edict that he retract his criticisms. In October of 1977, after 54 years in the movement, Joe Gershman resigned from the Communist Party of Canada.