

## **Canadian Jewry: The Response to the 1972 Munich Massacre**

The Olympic Games allow athletes to demonstrate their exceptional abilities to the world as well as providing a unique experience to represent their country. These games not only celebrate sports, but can also be seen as a symbol of peace, freedom, and unity among nations. The 1972 Munich Olympic Games did not demonstrate the unification of nations, instead it reiterated the fear of persecution still very vivid in the minds of the Jewish athletes; something Germany was proud of during the Holocaust although this time they were innocent. During the 1972 Games, a group of radicalized Palestinians, known as “Black September” attacked the Israeli national team. They demanded the release of 234 Palestinians and Red Army members imprisoned in Israel in exchange for the lives of the Israeli athletes. Israel was not going to submit to the terrorists’ demands and in the end the radicalized group killed 11 members of the Israeli team. These attacks occurred during a time when negotiations were underway for peace between Israel and its surrounding Arab countries in the Middle East. The Canadian public responded empathetically by hosting memorials from Vancouver to Ontario; the patronage originated from within the Jewish sector which included varying avenues of support from religious institutions (Reform, Conservative and Orthodox), communal organizations such as the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) as well as some youth groups. The rapid responses from the Jewish community prompted non-Jewish associations to initiate action in representation of the CJC, one is The Canadian Council of Churches (CCC). This paper will examine the Canadian Jewish organizational response to the event that took place. It will also explore necessary topics within such as the commemoration of the event by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Jewish institutions as well as non-Jewish establishments. This topic will allow for further analysis of the response from the Canadian government and the Canadian public (non-Jewish) in addition to the lack of one from the IOC. Although the focus is the response of Canadian Jews, the non-Jewish responses warrant further investigation in order to piece together the

response as a whole. This research will afford the opportunity to further explore the reaction of the Canadian Jewish population to the Munich Massacre through organizations and media to develop a more concrete understanding of the strong connection that Canadian Jews have with the state of Israel.

The Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) was founded in 1919, for some time, it was the main organization that lobbied for the rights of the Jewish people and their communities until it dissolved in 2011. The actions of the CJC were an integral part to unveiling the Canadian Jewish response to the Munich Massacre; they were a political body whose job was to represent Canadian Jews and express their support for fellow Jews abroad as well as the State of Israel. The crisis in Munich caused an uproar of anger from the Canadian Jewish/non-Jewish public, as will be seen later, which in turn motivated the CJC to react appropriately. The Jewish organization demonstrated their support for the latter submitting demands to the IOC to stop the remainder of the Games, requests to the Canadian government to take evasive action, arranging memorial assemblies, and later on initiating commemorations rejected by the IOC. On September 5<sup>th</sup> 1972, the CJC promptly responded to the Olympic incident by issuing a request to IOC president, Avery Brundage, as an effort to end the rest of the Olympic Games as it is not possible to continue the events in an atmosphere of terror.<sup>1</sup> The appeal was turned down.

Unsatisfied with the results of their appeal, the CJC took it upon themselves to honour the Israeli athletes by holding a memorial ceremony at Nathan Phillips Square. In an effort to obtain the downtown quarters, a letter was written to the City of Toronto by National Director of Community Relations of the CJC, Ben G Kayfetz, urgently stating “We plan to hold a memorial assembly to mourn the deaths of the 11 Munich athletes who were killed at the Olympic Games earlier this

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Jewish Congress, 8 September 1972. FA 2-IOI-S-662-S. Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee National Archives, Montreal.

week. The entire community of Toronto is invited to this event.”<sup>2</sup> Once permission was granted by the City, an advertisement was published in the *Globe and Mail* on the same day the event would be held which was sponsored not only by the CJC but additionally listed the Canadian Zionist Federations (CZF) as well as the B’nai Brith (BB).<sup>3</sup> The speech was given by the Israeli Consular General, Menachem Lehat, to over 5,000 people on September 7, 1972. The number of people in attendance with such short notice is representative of the care Canadian Jews have towards fellow Jews, also symbolizing the connection the communities have among each other. Jews are known to have a strong connection to Israel as is seen through the Zionist movement; they also demonstrate strong network relationships with one another such as exhibiting high friendship patterns and being highly concentrated residentially.<sup>4</sup> The quick response to the Munich crisis by the CJC clearly reflects their mandate, demonstrating they are capable of fighting for the deserved rights of Jews in Canada and abroad.

The sympathies expressed by society prompted the CJC to react locally and nationally by funding events, such as memorial services, to show support for the athletes who perished and their families. The Vancouver region opened up a *Book of Condolences* to be signed by people wishing to express feelings of sorrow in addition to a memorial fund which was established to remoralize the tragic death of the Israeli athletes.<sup>5</sup> In Winnipeg, an interfaith service was held in attendance by over 700 people and condolences were conveyed by their Municipal government.<sup>6</sup> In Montreal, a memorial service was held on the evening of September 7<sup>th</sup> where over 6,000 were in attendance; it was followed by a candlelight ceremony.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Kayfetz, B G, 6 September 1972. FA 17, S5-4-6, 75. The Ontario Jewish Archives, Toronto.

<sup>3</sup> The *Globe and Mail*, 7 September 1972. FA 17, S5-4-6, 76. The Ontario Jewish Archives, Toronto.

<sup>4</sup> Schnoor, Randal, 09 November 2014. “Lecture.” Toronto.

<sup>5</sup> Canadian Jewish Congress, 15 September 1972. FA 2-IOI-S-663-S.

<sup>6</sup> Canadian Jewish Congress. FA 2-IOI-S-663-S.

<sup>7</sup> Canadian Jewish Congress. FA 2-IOI-S-663-S.

The Greater Vancouver Jewish Youth Council responded to the Munich Massacre initiating and sponsoring a silent Torch-Light March for their community on September 12<sup>th</sup> in commemoration of the eleven slain athletes.<sup>8</sup> As many as four hundred community members marched to the Vancouver Jewish Community Centre where a service was held; the service finished by burning the symbol “eleven” and singing Hatikvah, the Israeli national anthem.<sup>9</sup> Further research into The Greater Vancouver Jewish Youth Council was clouded as many searches were conducted but the exact name could not be located except for the information that was obtained from the CJC archive material. The significance of the march being organized by youth demonstrates the importance of the connection with Israel that is instilled in Jewish youth via most youth programs.

The CJC was not the only actor who participated in conveying their sympathies on behalf of the Israeli athletes. On September 6 of 1972, the Globe and Mail addressed the sentiments of Torontonians by publishing their thoughts on the Munich Olympic tragedy in Letters to the Editor. In this section, one offered his support on behalf of the Israeli athletes by saying “the only response that would have been appropriate would have been to cancel the remaining schedule of the Olympic Games”, something the CJC requested just a day earlier. The President of the IOC, Avery Brundage, showed no sympathy nor support for the crimes that just occurred, he said “The Games must go on as a means of keeping the Olympic spirit alive and bring nations closer together.”<sup>10</sup> Further investigation of the statement Brundage declared at the 1972 Munich Games uncovered that it was used prior at the 1936 Berlin Olympics thereby demonstrating the ongoing racial attitude of the IOC. Brundage insisted that despite the little unpleasantness to which Jews in Germany were being

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<sup>8</sup> Canadian Jewish Congress, 25 September 1972. FA 2-IOI-CR-589-CR

<sup>9</sup>Canadian Jewish Congress. FA 2-IOI-CR-589-CR

<sup>10</sup> The Globe and Mail, 7 September 1972. “Letters to the Editor”. FA 17, 5-2, 77. The Ontario Jewish Archives. Toronto, ON.

subjected to, he could find no hard evidence that Germany was discriminating against its Jewish athletes and therefore the games must go on.<sup>11</sup> The public was more concerned about the murders as was reflected in their opinions above, but, it appeared that the only thing of concern to Avery Brundage was the delay that was caused to his precious Olympic Games.<sup>12</sup> The IOC being a non-profit organization meaning annual salaries are compensated directly from the public. That being said, the majority of their support comes from sponsorship and memberships with a portion of revenue received from ticket sales in addition to licensing.<sup>13</sup> Athletes and large companies are among their sponsors; if the Games would have been cancelled they could have lost the trust of their sponsors and membership holders along with the revenue that accompanies them.

The CJC were not the only ones expressing their sorrows. Various authorities extended their sympathies to Israel and the families of those lost. The Canadian government extended their “deepest sympathies on behalf of the government and people of Canada to the relatives of those who have been killed. We share your sorrow and distress.”<sup>14</sup> There were also sorrows expressed by the German Ambassador to Canada, The Anglican Church of Canada as well as by the President of the Latvian National Federation. The Canadian government expressed the most concern to Israel; these nation-states have similar political bodies in which governmental policies are embedded in democratic principles.

Honouring a tragic event in contemporary society is done to remember political issues such as terrorism in an effort to fight it, but more importantly, commemoration is a way to honour and

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<sup>11</sup> Alexander, Edward, 1996. *The Jewish Wars*. New Brunswick University Press, New Jersey. Pg. 87.  
[https://books.google.ca/books?id=cORN\\_jFRjSMC&pg=PA87&dq=the+games+must+go+on&hl=en&sa=X&ei=JkjVe72CoqOyAS05IG4CQ&ved=0CDAQuwUwAg#v=onepage&q=the%20games%20must%20go%20on&f=false](https://books.google.ca/books?id=cORN_jFRjSMC&pg=PA87&dq=the+games+must+go+on&hl=en&sa=X&ei=JkjVe72CoqOyAS05IG4CQ&ved=0CDAQuwUwAg#v=onepage&q=the%20games%20must%20go%20on&f=false)

<sup>12</sup> Reeve, Simon. One Day in September: The Full Story of the 1972 Munich Olympics Massacre ...

<sup>13</sup> Lubin, Gus, 17 February 2010. "Olympics Inc: Inside the Secretive, \$6 Billion World of the International Olympic Committee." <http://www.businessinsider.com/olympics-inc-inside-the-business-of-the-ioc?op=1>.

<sup>14</sup> Canadian Jewish Congress. FA 2-IOI-S-662-S.

pay respect to those who perished. Tributes to the Munich Massacre provide an opportunity to examine who is remembering (the IOC/Jewish religious institutions) and for what reasons; this allows us to recognize who is committed to remembering. The IOC has failed to make an effort to commemorate this tragedy despite many requests from Jewish/non-Jewish sources. The IOC has rejected requests to commemorate the 11 Israeli athletes on several occasions including the 1976 Montreal Olympics,<sup>15</sup> the 1996 Atlanta Olympics in addition to the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary at the London Olympics<sup>16</sup>. In response to this ignorance, Jewish institutions among all denominations (Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox) have organized commemoration ceremonies, most of which took place in Ontario and Montreal. The lack of acknowledgment from the IOC provoked support from non-Jewish lobbyists such as the CCC, the Canadian government, and the media including CTV and Rogers.

Prior to the beginning of the Montreal Summer Olympics of 1976 (July), the CCC's general secretary, Dr. Donald W. Anderson, addressed a letter to the CJC showing support for the Canadian Jewish communities by requesting a moment of remembrance at the 1976 Montreal Games for the athletes who perished in Munich. Once the document was received by CJC, they in turn forwarded a copy of the letter to Mr. Roger Rousseau who was the Commissioner General and President of the 1976 Games.<sup>17</sup> The contents of the letter were as follows "We are requesting that those who lost their lives be remembered during the opening ceremonies, possibly by a short silence or in some other way. We realize that the details of the opening ceremony is fixed in form. However, we understand that your committee has the power to make deviations in the ceremony."<sup>18</sup> The CCC noted the power that the IOC had to alter the program and used this as leverage as an effort to have

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<sup>15</sup> Canadian Jewish Congress. 21 May 1976. FA 2-IOI-3939.

<sup>16</sup> Hill, Joanne, 31 July 2012. "Opening Olympic ceremonies ignore Munich Massacre." Jewish Tribune <http://www.jewishtribune.ca/news/2012/07/31/opening-olympic-ceremonies-ignore-munich-massacre>.

<sup>17</sup> Canadian Jewish Congress. FA 2-IOI-3939

<sup>18</sup> Canadian Jewish Congress. FA 2-IOI-3939

their appeal as per their late request. This attempt did not materialize, but, it influenced Jewish actors to attempt to find a solution.

Refused requests submitted to the IOC by the CJC in 1972 and the CCC in 1976 impelled the Jewish community and its leaders decided to take the necessary steps that the IOC did not to commemorate the 11 athletes. The Jewish Community of Canada organized a memorial service that took place during 1976 Montreal Summer Olympics on behalf of the Munich athletes; the event operated out of CJC headquarters in Montreal.<sup>19</sup> Montreal's Conservative Synagogue, Shaar Hashomayim, hosted the event on July 12, 1976; it was overseen by an Honour Committee led by Mr. Allan Bronfman, Federal and Provincial ministers including Rt. Hon. Pierre Elliott Trudeau as well as the Chief Justice of Canada, Rt. Bora Laskin, of whom some were in attendance.<sup>20</sup> The service was led by Reform Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut, Chairman of the Canada-Israel committee and leader of the family members of those who were killed in Munich; a total of 4,000 were in attendance.<sup>21</sup> The event was televised globally and it was estimated that close to 200 representatives of news media all over the world reported on the event.<sup>22</sup> This event is unique in that the organizers and attendees were not all Jewish and it was broadcasted on the global level. The government officials that were present signifies Canada's political involvement with the Munich Massacre and its commitment to commemorating the athletes as an effort to maintain in addition to strengthening its political ties with Israel. Memorial services were also held in London, Ontario at the Beth Tefilah and Or Shalom synagogues, which are Orthodox and Conservative institutions respectively.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Canadian Jewish Congress, 3 August 1976. FA2-IOI-3949

<sup>20</sup> Canadian Jewish Congress. FA2-IOI-3949.

<sup>21</sup> Canadian Jewish Congress. FA2-IOI-3949.

<sup>22</sup> The mass media coverage included representatives from England, Israel, France, the United States Japan, Denmark, Italy, Germany, Mexico, Sweden and several others. Canadian Jewish Congress FA2-IOI-3949

<sup>23</sup> There was minimal information regarding the London service, however, it was documented that the two congregations placed an ad in the memorial section of the London Free Press and that the program was planned by the Community Relations Committee of the Council. These events listed no dates but it was

Canadian Jewish/non-Jewish organizations did not forget the Israelis like the IOC did in subsequent Olympics from 1976-2012. The London Olympics marked the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Munich Massacre, the IOC rejected all requests for a minute of silence saying “There are 21 Arab delegations that will leave if we say something.”<sup>24</sup> The rejection of the IOC to commemorate prompted B’nai Brith Canada to send letters to the CEOs of Canada’s television networks requesting a tribute to the Munich victims.<sup>25</sup> On July 27, 2012, the day of the opening ceremonies in London, CTV and Rogers Media Inc. answered their requests dedicating an hour of their programming honouring the Israeli athletes.<sup>26</sup> The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs commended Canada’s Olympic broadcasters for their passionate stand in support of a moment of silence for the 11 members of the Israeli national team who were murdered in Munich.<sup>27</sup> The same day, 26 B’nai Brith softball teams in Toronto and Winnipeg held a moment of silence before commencing their game.<sup>28</sup> The IOC has deftly managed to avoid commemorating the Munich deaths in all Olympiad years and continues to do so today.<sup>29</sup>

The 1972 Munich Olympic Games was anything but a celebration of achievements or unity among nations; it brought instead sadness and sorrow to the Jews of the world. The Canadian Jewish response to the Munich Massacre was represented mainly by the CJC and their efforts to

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published in the CJC’s inter-office reports of August 3, 1976 which also housed the information of the memorial service held during the Montreal Olympics. Canadian Jewish Congress FA2-IOI-3949.

<sup>24</sup> Sherwood, Harriett, 26 June 2012. “Munich Olympics massacre: the fight for remembrance”.

<http://www.theguardian.com/sport/2012/jun/26/munich-olympics-massacre-fight-for-remembrance/>

<sup>25</sup> Hill, J.

<sup>26</sup> Hill, J.

<sup>27</sup> The Centre for Israel and Jewish affairs, 27 July 2012. “The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs Commends CTV and Rogers Media Inc. for Commemorating the 40th Anniversary of the Munich Massacre”.

<http://www.cija.ca/centre-publications/press-releases/the-centre-for-israel-and-jewish-affairs-commends-ctv-and-rogers-media-inc-for-commemorating-the-40th-anniversary-of-the-munich-massacre/>

<sup>28</sup> Hill, J.

<sup>29</sup> Reeve, Simon, 2000/2011. *One day in September: The Full Story of the 1972 Munich Olympics Massacre and the Israel Revenge Operation “Wrath of God”*. Arcade Publishing, New York.

[http://books.google.ca/books?hl=en&lr=&id=bKZa91YO\\_4YC&oi=fnd&pg=PT1&dq=canadian+Jewish+response+munich+massacre&ots=DluIIOF0db&sig=oi6-NM3avVzNePex6CBANgG\\_mic#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.ca/books?hl=en&lr=&id=bKZa91YO_4YC&oi=fnd&pg=PT1&dq=canadian+Jewish+response+munich+massacre&ots=DluIIOF0db&sig=oi6-NM3avVzNePex6CBANgG_mic#v=onepage&q&f=false)



conduct local and national memorial services in 1972 such as the one in Nathan Philips Square and commemoration ceremonies in 1976. Although the CJC failed in all attempts to have the IOC publicly recognize the murders of the Israeli athletes, it did not fail completely. The rejection prompted their efforts to continue within Canada which gained support from non-Jewish associations such as the CCC as well as the Canadian government. They responded efficiently issuing statements to the Canadian Public grasping the grass-roots meaning this crisis had to the Jewish community and the rest of Canada. Although the CJC was the main body of support on this issue, there were other areas that it came from, including the Reform, Conservative and Orthodox synagogues. The differences among the religious denominations shows that the Reform synagogue was the most involved holding memorial services at their synagogue in 1972, 1973, and also the head Rabbi leading the prayer services in 1976 in Montreal. The Conservative synagogue in Montreal only housed the service, no religious leaders were found to have participated. With regard to the Orthodox synagogue, their involvement seemed to be very little as there was only one synagogue mentioned in all of the primary documents. Once the CJC dissolved in 2011, B'nai Brith Canada was the main actor in initiating requests and responses regarding commemoration. The Canadian Jewish response to the Munich Massacre has remained strong throughout the continuous denial by the IOC; it has shown its dedication to honour the athletes through organizations and media thus demonstrating Canadian Jewry's grass-roots connection to Israel.