

Labour Negotiations in Toronto's Jewish Garment Industry, 1931- 1944: Conflict & Cooperation
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In 1930s Toronto, Jews owned the majority of the city's garment shops. Jews also formed an increasingly significant percentage of the sector's workforce. Indeed, Canadian Jews both owned small businesses and worked in the textile or garment industry for decades in the early and mid 20th century.¹ These two groupings of Jews set out to make their livings together, in the same sector, forming supposedly opposite ends of labour-management tensions. While a fair amount of scholarly attention has been paid to the Canadian Jewish labour movement, surprisingly little has been written about Canadian Jewish business communities' reactions to the Jewish labour movement; even less has been written about how Jewish small business owners organized and interacted with their co-religionists, fellow immigrants in the so-called *shmatta* trades. This paper aims to begin to close that gap by examining Toronto's Jewish business community's responses to the labour movement within the garment industry from roughly 1931-1944, and to analyze the organized industry's reactions to labour demands. It finds, more specifically, that labour agreements between the manufacturers and workers were unusually non-confrontational and successful. Despite major setbacks relating to business conditions during the difficult Great Depression and wartime years, unions managed to achieve many of their demands while still finding solutions acceptable to management. Management negotiated poor business conditions, the new costly governmental regulation the Industrial Standards Act, and the effects of the war while still maintaining largely positive relations with the union. Toronto's Men's Clothing Union and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers held regular negotiations with the

¹ Ruth Frager, *Sweatshop Strife: Class, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Jewish Labour Movement of Toronto, 1900-1939*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992, p. 56; Daniel Hiebert, "Jewish Immigrants and the Garment Industry of Toronto, 1901-1931: A Study of Ethnic and Class Relations," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 83, no. 2 (1993): 248.

Men's Clothing Manufacturers' Association of Ontario (MCMAO), a consortium of clothing manufacturers drawn from most shops within Toronto that organized together to better negotiate with unions in the garment industry. The push-and-pull nature of these labour negotiations shows the fraught relationship between the labour force and the manufacturers, yet also gives clear evidence that these two communities willingly worked together to create a set of guidelines that could be acceptable to all parties. The case of Toronto's immigrant Jews shows that labour relations between workers and owners could be remarkably amiable, at least where the bonds of ethnic, religious, and familial relationships across the great divide were tight.

In the early 20th century, economic and social challenges within Eastern Europe motivated a wave of Jewish immigration to North America.² Toronto's Jewish community increased from about 3,000 in 1901 to 35,000 in 1915, and newcomers mostly relied on existing community structures to find work.³ Entrepreneurship or working for other Jews was often the best choice for new immigrants, as Toronto's Jews were barred from some industries altogether, and limited to low-paid roles in many others. Even when it was possible for Jews to work for non-Jews, they often preferred continuing to work within the community.⁴ Jewish enclaves emerged within several sectors, due to connections stemming from community ties. Early success from a few entrepreneurs allowed Jewish entrepreneurs to both hire their co-religionists in their factories and encourage others to follow suit.⁵ This led to a second wave of Jewish entrepreneurs and shop owners, usually those who had previously worked in Jewish-owned shops before raising enough capital to start their own.⁶

² Frager, Ruth. *Sweatshop Strife*. 12.

³ Hiebert, *Garment Industry of Toronto*, 253.

⁴ Frager, Ruth. *Sweatshop Strife*. 13.

⁵ Hiebert, *Garment Industry of Toronto*, 247.

⁶ Hiebert, *Garment Industry of Toronto*, 261.

The garment industry itself was especially popular for new Jewish immigrants for three main reasons. First, many Jews had already been doing needle-work in the towns, cities, and rural zones they lived before emigrating, so many held some degree of experience.⁷ This made the industry a natural choice for those arriving in a new country with few other skills. Second, the nature of pay scales based on piecework rather than a set hourly wage made it easier for Jews to take time off to observe the Sabbath.⁸ Not all shops used a piecework system, but such work was available for those who felt it suited their needs. Third, garment factories were relatively cheap to set up. A shop could be started, and the necessary equipment purchased, with as little as a few hundred dollars (~\$4000 in 2017 dollars).⁹ This made the garment industry more accessible to new immigrants without access to large amounts of capital.

Once these three factors established the garment industry as a viable choice, the practice of hiring relatives, friends, and new immigrants from the homeland kept Jews entrenched within the industry. By the early 1930s, Jewish entrepreneurs owned over half of the garment firms in Toronto, and about half of garment employees were also Jewish.¹⁰ A full third of Toronto's employed Jews worked within the garment industry in 1931.¹¹ This hyper-concentration within one industry meant that market downturns within the industry tended to have major impacts on the broader Toronto Jewish community, which may have served as a catalyst for labour agreements.

Collective bargaining within Toronto's Jewish garment industry started well before 1931, and was not originally based in Toronto. In 1914, a labour organization called the Amalgamated

⁷ Frager, Ruth. *Sweatshop Strife*. 16.

⁸ Hiebert, *Garment Industry of Toronto*, 255.

⁹ Hiebert, *Garment Industry of Toronto*, 255.

¹⁰ Hiebert, *Garment Industry of Toronto*, 261.

¹¹ Frager, Ruth. *Sweatshop Strife* 16.

Clothing Workers was established in the United States.¹² It was founded to support the needs of workers in the men's garment industry. Toronto garment workers felt that the American-based organization was not meeting their needs, so in 1915, they founded their own chapter of the ACW. The ACW would later spread to other Canadian cities, representing garment workers across multiple manufacturing centres.¹³

Formalized organization was not limited to workers alone. In 1919, a large group of men's clothing manufacturers in Toronto founded their own organization, the MCMAO. The MCMAO was founded to provide an organized voice to work with the union while still finding solutions acceptable to manufacturers. They were committed to working together with the union to find mutually acceptable solutions where possible.¹⁴ The first union contract between the ACW and the MCMAO in 1919 established wage rates, a board of binding arbitration for disputes headed by an impartial chairman, and a moratorium on strikes or lockouts – grievances were instead to be handled by the impartial arbitration board, as strikes only led to decreased profits and wages for all.¹⁵ It also established preferential union shops, meaning that the unions had the first right to supply labour when the shops needed more workers. Managers were not allowed to hire people off the street: the union held a list of unemployed members that were to be contacted first.¹⁶

Despite a remarkable alignment between management and labour and the existence of mutually acceptable policies to protect the overall industry, serious tensions continued within the industry. The Depression caused a large increase in unemployment and underemployment, and a

¹² Frager, Ruth. *Sweatshop Strife*. 26.

¹³ Frager, Ruth. *Sweatshop Strife*. 27.

¹⁴ Minutes of the Associated Clothing Manufacturers, 6 and 21 Aug 1919, in Frager, Ruth. *Sweatshop Strife*. 27.

¹⁵ Collective Agreements, 1919-65. Men's Clothing Manufacturers' Association of Ontario fonds. Fonds 31, box 7, series 5, file 52. Ontario Jewish Archives, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

¹⁶ 1919 ACW agreement in the holdings of the Associated Clothing Manufacturers, in Frager, Ruth. *Sweatshop Strife*. 27.

decrease in market demand for new clothing. The average pay for a full week's work fell between 30 and 50 percent between 1929 and 1934, and the busy season shrunk to as low as six weeks twice per year.¹⁷ Under a piecework system, slack periods could be devastating for employees; when there was no work to be done, they would not get paid. These poor market conditions set the stage for the main focal point of this paper, labour negotiations and general meetings between the ACW and the MCMAO between the Great Depression and the end of WWII.

Poor labour conditions caused by the Great Depression served as a catalyst for increased discussions between the ACW and the MCMAO in the early 1930s. By 1931, the MCMAO had accepted that the Great Depression was more than a temporary market blip. The busy season was significantly shorter than it had been in previous years, and market demand was much lower. The union, which had been willing to accept temporary cuts to hours given the market downturn, had started pressuring the MCMAO about when the situation would be remedied. However, the manufacturers were also severely struggling. MCMAO members consistently articulated worry over the “the difficulty of present conditions” in nearly every one of their monthly meetings between 1931 and 1934. Members discussed topics such as “the expenses of the present time,” “the market at the present time,” the necessity of reducing costs, and how various changes to business practices could not be made “until the situation was cleared up.”¹⁸ Despite the wage decreases that had already taken place, the union often felt that it needed to accept further cuts to prevent the manufacturers from going out of business and causing the workers to lose their jobs

¹⁷ Evidence Given by Miss Winifred Hutchison before Price Spreads Commission on Jan 23 & 24, Re: Conditions in Needle Trades, in Frager, Ruth. *Sweatshop Strife*. 21.

¹⁸ “April 30, 1931”. General Meetings Minutes, 1931-34; “November 10, 1931”. General Meetings Minutes, 1931-34; “December 16, 1931”. General Meetings Minutes, 1931-34; “May 16, 1933”. General Meetings Minutes, 1931-34; “August 2, 1933”. General Meetings Minutes, 1931-34; “March 20, 1931”. General Meetings Minutes, 1931-34; “April 30, 1931”. General Meetings Minutes, 1931-34.

altogether.¹⁹ However, the union continued to ask for concessions on areas increasingly relevant during a period of unstable job security, such as unemployment insurance or overtime pay.

Given that manufacturers and employees were both struggling financially during this period, labour demands tended to be paired off against each other. The MCMAO would agree to provide new protections in exchange for concessions elsewhere. Both sides understood that the other was struggling, and were willing to engage in give-and-take as a show of cooperation and good faith. The proposals would be rejected or accepted as all-or-nothing groups. One key example was the fight for how to handle “redundant workers.” In April 1931, the ACW requested an unemployment insurance fund for workers who were let go. The MCMAO originally argued that they should wait for the Government to settle the matter, because a small group like the Association would not be able to adequately organize such a major undertaking.²⁰ Within the same negotiation, one member of the MCMAO requested the right to let workers go after installing new machinery that made them redundant. The MCMAO President, Mr. Lowndes, pointed out that the union would never consent to people suffering, so the Labour Manager said that unemployment insurance could be used to take care of these people. The MCMAO then came to an agreement that unemployment insurance should be considered together with the right to lay workers made redundant due to technological improvements (as opposed to workers let go due to reduced demand).²¹ In this case, the proposals were both rejected. The matter of unemployment insurance was not resolved in 1931, and the MCMAO was not given the right to have mass layoffs of workers.²² However, the way that the proposals were negotiated showed that both sides were willing to engage with each other. The fact that the

¹⁹ “March 20, 1931”. General Meetings Minutes, 1931-34.

²⁰ “April 30, 1931”. General Meetings Minutes, 1931-34.

²¹ “April 30, 1931”. General Meetings Minutes, 1931-34.

²² “May 7, 1931”. Collective Agreements, 1919-65. Men’s Clothing Manufacturers’ Association of Ontario fonds. Fonds 31, box 7, series 5, file 52. Ontario Jewish Archives, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

matter was left unresolved does not altogether mitigate the way that the groups understood and appreciated how their gains may harm the other side.

Although demands for protections ancillary to direct wages tended to be paired off against each other, during the Great Depression the MCMAO was often able to unilaterally reduce labour costs. In an environment where jobs were nearly constantly being cut, the union had very little bargaining power to maintain higher wages. The ACW held the policy that losses should be shared among as many people as possible to minimize the impact on their lives. The MCMAO [correctly] believed that the ACW understood that the manufacturers were suffering too, and were willing to accept general wage reductions more willingly than the alternative of mass job losses.²³ During the same April 1931 internal MCMAO meeting discussed above, a member of the MCMAO requested a general wage reduction. The MCMAO President said that Mr. Hillman, founder and long-lasting president of the ACW, was opposed to wage reductions, but might be convinced to accept a move to piece-work, which usually resulted in lower costs. Another member stated that given that wages went up when the cost of living went up, the MCMAO should have the right to reduce wages when the cost of living went down. The president replied that piecework would accomplish an earnings reduction due to the scarcity of work during weak periods. He argued that if costs could be brought down, the MCMAO could also commit to providing more work for surplus labourers, which would make the situation more palatable for Mr. Hillman.²⁴ The MCMAO also considered a 10% reduction in the cost of cutting, to be achieved not by a straight cost reduction but by charging cutters for making mistakes. The MCMAO believed that framing arguments as something other than wage

²³ General Meeting Minutes, 1937-38. Men's Clothing Manufacturers' Association of Ontario fonds. Fonds 31, box 4, series 4, file 8. Ontario Jewish Archives, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

²⁴ "April 30, 1931". General Meetings Minutes, 1931-34.

reductions made it easier for the union to accept that they were being made in good faith.²⁵ However, in line with their general philosophy of sharing losses for the sake of the broader community, the union negotiated a collective wage reduction of \$2 per week, or more than 10%, rather than allow the disproportionate impact on already-struggling families of charging for individual mistakes.²⁶

In fact, the union was willing to accept pay reductions when there was no viable alternative, but returned to the bargaining table in force in May 1933. By then, the market had begun to recover, although it would be a long time before it reached its 1928 levels. The union complained that shopkeepers were simultaneously raising prices of products and cutting wages, especially given that wages had decreased 30% over the past three years. The union took the position that the combination of higher prices and cheaper labour was going to lead to protests and strikes from labour, who felt taken advantage of given the wage concessions that they had made. Although the MCMAO discussed the situation, they did not take any action immediately.²⁷ In August, the union requested a 25% increase in wages as well as the long-awaited inception of unemployment insurance, still left unresolved from 1931.²⁸ Although the MCMAO claimed that an increase in wages would not be possible without raising prices even further, they ultimately settled on a 10% wage increase. Unemployment insurance had still not been granted, as the MCMAO still thought that it would be too logistically difficult for clothing manufacturers to expand their mandate to provide insurance.²⁹ Over the next year, labour continued to restore wages to where they had been through a series of negotiations and increases.

²⁵ “November 10, 1931”. General Meetings Minutes, 1931-34.

²⁶ “December 16, 1931”. General Meetings Minutes, 1931-34.

²⁷ “May 16, 1933”. General Meetings Minutes, 1931-34.

²⁸ “August 2, 1933”. General Meetings Minutes, 1931-34.

²⁹ “September 14, 1933”. General Meetings Minutes, 1931-34.

Although some manufacturers increased prices, other decided to absorb the cost increase.³⁰ Despite individual members expressing dissatisfaction about giving in to union demands, the MCMAO members ultimately decided to make wage concessions. Given that the market situation had improved, making wage increases affordable again, there was no longer a mutually acceptable justification to keep wages low. The MCMAO wanted to maintain relatively good relationships with the ACW, so decided to allow a wage increase.

When the Great Depression had ended, it left significant market discrepancies between the two major production centers, Toronto and Montreal, in the costs of materials and wages.³¹ Reducing this discrepancy was the MCMAO's major aim between the Great Depression's end and the start of WWII. The ACW was the major union for both cities, but negotiated on behalf of Montreal workers separately from Toronto workers. With lower wage and materials prices in Montreal than in Toronto, yet equivalent prices for finished garments, the MCMAO claimed that it was too difficult for its member businesses to sell their products while still making a profit. Although some manufacturers had been grumbling about wage discrepancies or cost discrepancies between the provinces for years, more fundamental concerns related to the Depression – the very existence of the clothing trade - had been more pressing.³² The union did not care about price and cost equalization with Montreal, and was willing to accept it if an agreement could be reached with Montreal manufacturers and suppliers.³³ Their main concerns were with modifying the workweek from 44 hours to 40 hours, increasing wages, and the establishment of the long-wanted unemployment fund. The MCMAO did not want to make any of these changes, but was willing to accept some of them in exchange for equalization

³⁰ “April 24, 1934”. General Meetings Minutes, 1931-34.

³¹ “The Clothing Business”. *Canadian Jewish Review*. April 3, 1931.

³² “March 20, 1931”. General Meetings Minutes, 1931-34.

³³ “March 9, 1938”. General Meetings Minutes, 1937-38.

agreements with Montreal.³⁴ The pairing of a 40-hour work week and establishing an unemployment fund against wage equalization between Toronto and Montreal became the largest issue discussed by both parties between 1934 and 1939, and was a rare case of a failed negotiation due to bad faith.

The ACW and MCMAO were often able to come to largely amicable agreements, but the case of the unemployment fund was a notable exception. The ACW had been fighting for unemployment insurance for years, with the MCMAO consistently refusing due to logistical and cost issues.³⁵ The federal government's Industrial Standards Act of 1935 was speculated by both the MCMAO and the ACW to mandate a mandatory unemployment fund, and the MCMAO agreed with the union to pre-empt the legislation by setting one up immediately. However, the MCMAO decided internally to lobby government officials before the Act was finalized.³⁶ In 1936, they hired counsel to go over the wording of the Industrial Standards Act to see what they were and were not legally mandated to fund.³⁷ Deciding that they were not mandated to fund unemployment insurance themselves, they discontinued the fund.³⁸ The union was furious with what they perceived as a betrayal, which caused them to drag out the resolution of the MCMAO's issues in retaliation.³⁹

The newfound animosity between the ACW and the MCMAO made coming to a consensus on other issues much more difficult. The issues of the 40-hour workweek and wage equalization with Montreal went unresolved for over a year, leading to increasing frustration. The MCMAO insisted that they would deal with both issues together or not at all, similarly to

³⁴ "March 19, 1935". General Meetings Minutes, 1935-36. Men's Clothing Manufacturers' Association of Ontario fonds. Fonds 31, box 4, series 4, file 7. Ontario Jewish Archives, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

³⁵ General Meetings Minutes, 1931-34.

³⁶ "May 21, 1935". General Meetings Minutes, 1935-36.

³⁷ "January 21, 1936". General Meetings Minutes, 1935-36.

³⁸ "March 17, 1937". General Meetings Minutes, 1937-38.

³⁹ "March 17, 1937". General Meetings Minutes, 1937-38.

how the MCMAO and ACW had resolved unrelated issues in the past. However, the union was less willing to work with the MCMAO than they had been previously, and claimed that when Toronto accepted a 40-hour week they would then move on to discuss the potential for wage equalization. The MCMAO refused to accept any effective increase in wages for hours 41 through 44 given that their wages were already higher than Montreal's, and claimed that it was increasingly difficult to compete given their higher costs. The MCMAO ultimately but begrudgingly agreed to a 7.5% wage increase, but it did not accept a 40-hour workweek.⁴⁰ The MCMAO decided that the current negotiations were not working for either side, so their attitude towards the next round of union negotiations would be to accept whatever decisions had been made within the ACW's Montreal agreement, if that also led to equalized wages between the two cities.⁴¹ When Montreal agreed to pay time-and-one-half for overtime, the MCMAO's thoughts of requesting time-and-one-quarter were dropped.⁴² A 1937 revision to the Industrial Standards Act introduced the mandated unemployment fund that everybody had expected from the 1935 version, resolving – albeit not through labour negotiations – the source of animosity.⁴³ Overall, the MCMAO's experiment with trying to get around labour negotiations had proved to be a failure, with other critical issues sitting unresolved; they returned to the bargaining table with renewed vigour.

Throughout the 1938 wave of negotiations, both sides significantly reduced their final demands. The MCMAO decided that they would focus on allowing lower-paid apprenticeships to take place within their factories and a few other smaller issues, but temporarily gave up on the

⁴⁰ "April 18, 1938". General Meetings Minutes, 1937-38.

⁴¹ "April 18, 1938". General Meetings Minutes, 1937-38.

⁴² "July 19, 1938". Annual Meetings Minutes, 1938-44. Men's Clothing Manufacturers' Association of Ontario fonds. Fonds 31, box 4, series 5, file 1. Ontario Jewish Archives, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

⁴³ "April 18, 1938". General Meetings Minutes, 1937-38.

idea of wage equalization after a decline in Montreal wages.⁴⁴ The MCMAO had expected Montreal wages to rise and Toronto's to fall, which would have left them in a better bargaining position to fight the union for general wage equalization; however, Montreal's wages actually went down, leaving the MCMAO in an even worse bargaining position.⁴⁵ With Montreal wages lowered, the union would not be willing to support the necessary wage reductions to equalize. The union also reduced their demands, asking only for a 40-hour workweek and a greater contribution to the unemployment fund. Both parties ultimately agreed to bring the idea of the 40-hour workweek, as well as the percentage of a worker's salary that the shops needed to supply to an unemployment fund, to arbitration, as it had gone on for some time without any hope of resolution.⁴⁶ Arbitration did not actually take place until 1940. The arbitrator decided that manufacturers and workers would split the cost of unemployment insurance, which is what had already been written into their 1937 collective agreement.^{47,48} Relative to their initial positions, it was decisively a tie.

Major changes took place after the start of WWII. With the introduction of military clothing production, slack periods and underemployment dropped to a minimum. The case of equalization with Montreal was no longer a major concern for the MCMAO, while fighting over the details of unemployment insurance was much less relevant for the union. The union switched to fighting for sickness and death insurance. While the MCMAO acknowledged the usefulness of such a product, their main justification for resisting the idea was that they were not an insurance

⁴⁴ "July 19, 1938". Annual Meetings Minutes, 1938-44.

⁴⁵ "April 18, 1938". General Meetings Minutes, 1937-38.

⁴⁶ "July 19, 1938". Annual Meetings Minutes, 1938-44.

⁴⁷ "May 3, 1940". Chairman's Decisions, 1931-46. Men's Clothing Manufacturers' Association of Ontario fonds. Fonds 31, box 6, series 5, file 34. Ontario Jewish Archives, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

⁴⁸ "??, 1937". Collective Agreements, 1919-65. Men's Clothing Manufacturers' Association of Ontario fonds. Fonds 31, box 7, series 5, file 52. Ontario Jewish Archives, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

company and did not want to take on burdensome duties as if they were.⁴⁹ The union also claimed in 1941 that cost of living expenses had increased 15-20% while arbitration had only increased wages 7.5%.⁵⁰ Changes to the 1940 collective agreement stated that during the war, the union had the right to have frequent cost of living advances, so long as the MCMAO also had the right to rescind them just as quickly if conditions changed.⁵¹ However, wartime price controls on production meant that shops had fewer ways to compensate their profit margins for raised wages.⁵² The MCMAO ultimately agreed in principle that sickness and death insurance were valuable products for their workers that should be researched further. However, they maintained that a further wage increase was not warranted as the cost of living had only increased 10%, although the manufacturers would be willing to make up the 2.5% difference.⁵³

During the war, the MCMAO was reluctant to make any long-term agreements. They fretted over the inherent instability of the industry during wartime conditions. The issue of sickness and death insurance continued to be an unresolved point of contention. The manufacturers had not even agreed to support such an initiative at all, while the union was arguing for an even larger contribution than there had been for unemployment insurance. After the union complained to the MCMAO that the matter had been dragged out for long enough, both parties agreed to send a compromised proposal to their respective constituent members.⁵⁴ However, this did not lead to a speedy resolution either. In 1943, the union again complained that the MCMAO was stalling on properly discussing the matter. The union modified its demands to only half of what was previously asked, and hoped that the MCMAO would be

⁴⁹ "July 24, 1941". Annual Meetings Minutes, 1938-44.

⁵⁰ "July 24, 1941". Annual Meetings Minutes, 1938-44.

⁵¹ "??, 1940". Collective Agreements, 1919-65.

⁵² "August 15, 1944". Chairman's Decisions, 1931-46.

⁵³ "July 24, 1941". Annual Meetings Minutes, 1938-44.

⁵⁴ "July 14, 1942". Annual Meetings Minutes, 1938-44.

willing to meet it halfway. The MCMAO responded that the reasons for the delay were wartime instability, and that it was unwise to make changes too fast given present conditions.

Despite the MCMAO's desire to be cautious with agreement changes during unstable periods, it strongly favoured morale-increasing policies during the end of the war. For example, the Union raised the issue of holiday pay in 1944, and the MCMAO quickly agreed to provide one week as a temporary measure to improve wartime morale.⁵⁵ Later meetings of the Wage Negotiation Committee in 1944 established that even those who suffered from illnesses, worked part-time, or transferred shops mid-year would be eligible for pro-rated holiday pay. Unlike most negotiations between the union and the MCMAO, this was unanimously agreed to be a good idea with no need for further discussion. Maintaining a good wartime spirit was critical, and even those who were normally in favour of minimal pro-labour policies were "very strongly in favor" of any policies that enabled workers to better contribute to the war effort in any way possible.⁵⁶ This was especially true for the MCMAO given its deeply Jewish roots and ties to the remnants of European Jewry: Toronto's Jews maintained some degree of connection with their countrymen both in Toronto and back in Europe.⁵⁷

Although the relationship between the union and the MCMAO was often littered with delays or disagreements, it generally led to good results. The willingness to submit to arbitration led to fewer strikes than comparable industries had, and the arbitration committee dealt with each strike.⁵⁸ The arbitration committee was a mix of Toronto Jews pulled from the MCMAO, the ACW, and other industries altogether; efforts were taken to ensure that it was as balanced as possible between the parties. The committee sometimes found in favour of the strikers, and

⁵⁵ "June 15, 1943". Annual Meetings Minutes, 1938-44.

⁵⁶ "June 5, 1944". Annual Meetings Minutes, 1938-44.

⁵⁷ Frager, *Sweatshop Strife*, 58.

⁵⁸ Chairman's Decisions, 1931-46.

sometimes in favour of the managers, meaning that it maintained at least some degree of neutrality. For example, a 1939 sergers' (hemmers') strike happened when they complained that the rate they were being paid on overcoats was too low. Given that the sergers violated the collective bargaining agreement, the arbitration board fined them \$2 per worker.⁵⁹ The arbitrators also took the manufacturer's side in a dispute about workers taking time off to cash checks during the workday: given the physical dangers to the paymaster, carrying large sums of cash was not reasonable, so the minor inconvenience of visiting a bank was deemed to be acceptable.⁶⁰ However, the board found one firm to be at fault in a case where workers walked out after not having enough work to do. Even though the workers stopped working, it was only to leave time for garments to accumulate for the next day's work. The firm was fined for allowing its employees to be unbalanced enough within the assembly line that such a problem could arise, by calling in workers in an unbalanced proportion.⁶¹ There was fewer than one strike per year, no matter how minor, across all the garment manufacturers within the MCMAO during the period. This is in sharp contrast to New York City's garment industry's labour movement, which used striking as their major organizational weapon during the first half of the twentieth century.⁶² Despite delays or disagreements, bargains were generally struck between the two groups.

Although the MCMAO was positioned as an "opposite" to the ACW, they ultimately used many of the same organizing techniques and tactics to achieve their collective goals. They formed an organization for collective negotiation so that they could hold more power by working together. One member mentioned that if the members would fully trust each other with

⁵⁹ "October 11, 1939". Chairman's Decisions, 1931-46.

⁶⁰ "November 26, 1940". Chairman's Decisions, 1931-46.

⁶¹ "January 23, 1941". Chairman's Decisions, 1931-46.

⁶² Dubovsky, Melvyn. *When Workers Organize: New York City in the Progressive Era* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1968), 42.

information, good results could be reached regarding normal wage rates or collective agreements.⁶³ Owners lamented that if one house reduced stock prices, all others had no choice but to follow suit, and that the union was able to work together to achieve a common goal while the manufacturers struggled among themselves. They agreed that the whole effort of the MCMAO should be to reduce the cost of producing garments in the market for all manufacturers.⁶⁴ These attitudes and methods of collective bargaining are remarkably like those used by the union, and show that similar thought processes were being used to achieve similar cross-industry results. The MCMAO believed in the utility of collective action, even if they did not support all the concessions that the union was trying to draw from it. This was likely in part due to the backgrounds of MCMAO members, who had usually been unionized workers before they owned their own shops and were still heavily involved within broader Toronto Jewish community life with its emphasis on social organization.⁶⁵

The story of labour unionization and managerial responses to it within the Jewish garment industry in the 1930s and early 1940s is a complicated one. The shopkeepers and workers usually knew each other privately, and most shopkeepers had started out as workers before raising enough capital to open their own small shop.⁶⁶ This led to a degree of community solidarity that made it easier for the union and MCMAO to work together than might have happened without the community bond. The MCMAO formed voluntarily, and were not union-busting in nature; in fact, early anti-union manufacturers left the organization upon learning that they would be working with the unions to come up with solutions acceptable to all.⁶⁷ The business community responded to labour pressures largely through attempting to work with them

⁶³ "June 8, 1937". General Meetings Minutes, 1937-38.

⁶⁴ "December 21, 1938". General Meetings Minutes, 1937-38.

⁶⁵ Hiebert, *Garment Industry of Toronto*, 261.

⁶⁶ Hiebert, *Garment Industry of Toronto*, 261.

⁶⁷ Frager, Ruth. *Sweatshop Strife*. 27.

and to find acceptable compromises. They often had disagreements that stretched on for years, but the arbitration board was always available as a last resort and was mixed on who they favoured. The MCMAO was a way for shopkeepers to effectively self-advocate through community organization and collective bargaining, creating a middle-class parallel to the working-class story of the 1930s Jewish labour movement.