

## Tensions Within:

### How the Toronto Jewish Community Dealt with The Canadian Nazi Party in the 1960s

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The 1960's were a time of heavy political activism in North America. In both Canada and the United States, mass political and social movements defined the decade. The 1960's also saw a resurgence of Nazi and fascist radicalism across North America. While neo-Nazism was dangerous enough to Jewish people as individuals, it would also create a divide in the Jewish community in Toronto. This divide emerged from a difference in opinion on how to deal with the surge in Neo-Nazism during the sixties, and in particular, with the Canadian Nazi Party leader, William John Beattie. In his 2000 work on the Jewish experience in Canada after the Holocaust, historian Frank Bialystok suggested that this difference in strategies or approaches to combatting neo-Nazism in Canada led to a division into two very distinct parties. "From 1945 to 1960," he wrote, "there were two Jewish communities in psychic, if not always geographic terms: the established community, defined as those who were born or raised in Canada in the pre-war period, and the survivors."<sup>1</sup> "Established" Jewish Canadians felt less threatened by the Nazi party of Canada in comparison to the second group, the Holocaust survivors. "Established" Canadian Jews had not experienced the turmoil in ghettos, concentration camps, hiding, or witnessed the mass murder of their loved ones firsthand. This distinction is not meant to discredit the experiences of anti-Semitism Jews in North America faced, but it is understandable how the

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<sup>1</sup> Bialystok, Franklin. "Neo-Nazis in Toronto: The Allan Gardens Riot." *Canadian Jewish Studies* vol. 5 (1997) include page numbers, and page quoted.

resurgence of the swastika in the quiet calm of post-war Canada could outrage Holocaust survivors in particular. This paper argues that the political and social impacts of neo-Nazism in 1960's Toronto on the Jewish community divided the community between two distinct parties, but also created a larger Jewish activist movement that would become influential to the passing of legislation on a federal scale. It will focus on specific instances of Nazism in Toronto, with most of the focus being on the Allan Gardens Riot of 1965, and the counter action on the parts of the Canadian Jewish Congress, and anti-Nazi activist groups, many of which were formed in this period, weaved together with the growing division in the Jewish community, and how they differ from one another.

Bialystok's organizing of the Canadian Jewish community into two camps comes from an inherent difference between the survivors of the Holocaust and pre-war, established Jewish Canadians living in the Toronto area. This difference, he believes, was a critical factor in the rise in Jewish activism in 1960's Toronto. He states "Ultimately their experience created a gap between themselves and Canadian Jews as evidence by their separation in neighbourhoods, community organizations, and most importantly, in the articulation of ethnic identification."<sup>2</sup> The survivors of the holocaust were adamant and voracious in their fight against Beattie's party, using espionage tactics to bring him down. This creates a narrative about the adaptation of survivors to Canadian life, a life that differed greatly from their lives in Europe, and their response to the fear of oppression. In Canada, that fear seemed nearly non-existent, due to the protection they were afforded under Canadian law, which would give them a stage to voice their concerns peacefully, and to utilize the laws protecting human rights. This utilization of Canadian laws would come to play a large role in 1965, in the events leading up to the Allan Gardens riot, and would help

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<sup>2</sup> Bialystok, Franklin. "Neo-Nazis in Toronto: The Allan Gardens Riot." *Canadian Jewish Studies/Études juives canadiennes* 5 (1997), 4

widen the divide. Bialystok believes the distinction between the two played an important role in their separation. He states “As ‘survivors,’ they assumed an identity that was a more accurate reflection of their experiences and moreover was one of pride.”<sup>3</sup> This is the same pride which would later lead to the fighting off of Nazi’s during the Allan Gardens riot, and their persistence against oppression.

The distinction between the groups comes from the difference in the way they conducted themselves during the months leading up to the riot: those who favoured the use of the legal system and those who chose to partake in vigilantism. The most active voice for the use of the legal system to combat Beattie was the JCRC. They wished to use the law to defend the community against the Neo-Nazi's, believing the law would deal with Beattie accordingly. The survivors, on the other hand, formed groups to take matters into their own hands, a decision that would ultimately divide themselves from the JCRC. In a Canadian Jewish Congress document, entitled Report on Neo-Nazism and Hate Literature, the CJC wrote “there are people in our midst, who are determined to act on their own in dealing with the Neo-Nazis with little regard for the consequences to the community.”<sup>4</sup> The Canadian Jewish Congress was staunchly opposed to the use of violence in order to defend themselves against Beattie. They favoured the legal approach, and put their faith in the legislature. They stated that “our campaign for legislation against hate propaganda will go on and we shall continue to seek positive support from all elements in Canadian society.”<sup>5</sup> The CJC had coupled their already existing fight for rights with

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<sup>3</sup> Bialystok, Franklin. "Neo-Nazis in Toronto: The Allan Gardens Riot." *Canadian Jewish Studies/Études juives canadiennes* 5 (1997), 5

<sup>4</sup> Canadian Jewish Congress (1965) [Report on Neo-Nazism and Hate Literature] Canadian Jewish Congress, Ontario Region Fonds: Community Relations Committee Series. Anti-Semitism Sub Case Series, 1965-1966, The Ontario Jewish Archives (box 5, folder 1) Toronto, Ontario

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

their action against the Nazi Party, which to the vigilante groups would seem like it was not enough to successfully prevent the Canadian Nazi Party from spreading their messages of hate.

This does not mean that the CJC was inactive on the Nazi problem. In 1965, the CJC's Community Relations Committee noted that "shortly after the April 20 'Nazi' announcement, the JCRC almost moved to send out mass mailing to the entire Jewish community through the UJA mailing list to point out what congress was doing about [the neo-Nazi problem] and to reassure the community, but at the time it was estimated that this could not be done in the time at our disposal."<sup>6</sup> The JCRC felt that they could not work fast enough to inform the community, based on the rapid speed to which Beattie's speech at Allan Garden's approached. If they had sent out the mailing, perhaps the community divide would not have been as great. What the CJC lacked was communication with the large Jewish community. The vigilante groups would have a much easier time in reaching the community, as they were more grassroots. Word of mouth travelled fast within the community, and the amount of people who were present in Allan Gardens would be the ultimate proof of this.

Where the CJC failed to reach the community, it seemed that vigilante groups like N3, and C.O.I.N. were successful in drawing in the community to derail Beattie's planned speech at Allan Gardens. These groups received widespread support from a variety of sources, including local rabbis and synagogues. On June 2, 1965, the Beth Emeth Bais Yehuda Synagogue Newsletter expressed their support for those considered vigilantes by the CJC. The pamphlet released by the Synagogue triumphantly declared:

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<sup>6</sup> Unknown (1965) [Problems Facing the JCRC] Canadian Jewish Congress, Ontario Region Fonds: Community Relations Committee Series. Anti-Semitism Sub Case Series, 1965-1966, The Ontario Jewish Archives (box 5, folder 1) Toronto, Ontario

The events at Allan Gardens this past Sunday was a good example of proper Jewish thinking, in rising up in public indignation in order to prevent poison from spreading. History has taught us the cruel lesson of waiting until it's too late to do anything about a situation.<sup>7</sup>

The support for the vigilant action of Jewish people at Allan Gardens was clearly supported by some of the most influential people in the community, which would have had a large impact on the congregation. Later that week, the CJC released a report on neo-Nazi activity in Toronto, and in it, the CJC condemned the vigilantes for the way they conducted themselves during the riot. "The Canadian Jewish Congress accuses these persons and groups of irresponsibly creating a tense and inflamed situation," it thundered, "which involuntarily was bound to erupt into violence and which unfortunately did so erupt."<sup>8</sup> What the CJC does not consider is the potential consequences of letting Beattie speak freely, without open opposition, in a public forum. However, the irony of the situation is, if the vigilantes had let Beattie approach the podium and speak, he would have faced the legal consequences for hate speech, and for holding a rally in the park without a government permit.

While the CJC actively condemned vigilante action against Beattie, they also took initiatives to halt Beattie and the Nazi party, in the form of espionage against the party. The CJC hired a man named John Garrity, a private detective whose goal was to infiltrate the Nazi Party, and report his findings to the CJC. In an article titled My Sixteen Months as a Nazi, Garrity outlined the time he spent with John Beattie's Nazi Party. In it, he detailed how he gained

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<sup>7</sup> Beth Emeth Bais Yehuda Congress (1965) [Synagogue Newsletter] Canadian Jewish Congress, Ontario Region Fonds: Community Relations Committee Series. Anti-Semitism Sub Case Series, 1965-1966, The Ontario Jewish Archives (box 5, folder 1) Toronto, Ontario

<sup>8</sup> Canadian Jewish Congress (1965) [Report on Neo-Nazism and Hate Literature] Canadian Jewish Congress, Ontario Region Fonds: Community Relations Committee Series. Anti-Semitism Sub Case Series, 1965-1966, The Ontario Jewish Archives (box 5, folder 1) Toronto, Ontario

information on the party, and their plans for future rallies. Garrity stated “I have provided the congress with the names of most known Canadian Nazis; with tape recordings of Nazi meetings I’ve bugged through tiny radio transmitters, with detailed accounts of Beattie’s movements and plans.”<sup>9</sup> While the CJC may have condemned the vigilante groups for engaging in their own forms of espionage, the CJC had access to a more sophisticated style of espionage, and the work Garrity, who was a professional private detective.

The CJC had been aware of the rise of Neo-Nazism long before the Alan Gardens riot. The CJC stated “in April of 1964, we revealed the names of about a dozen persons who were known to us through investigation to be distributing hate material in this area.”<sup>10</sup> However, it is painfully clear from the events that would take place a year later at Allan Gardens that the CJC’s efforts were not nearly as effective as they had hoped. Neo-Nazism was still on the rise in Toronto, and the rest of Canada and the US. Leaders of the American Nazi party like George Lincoln Rockwell, and its Canadian counterpart John Beattie were a product of the fervour of the early 1960’s. Although, the Toronto chapter was significantly less successful in spreading hatred, and was quelled with relative success, which can be directly linked to the efforts of Jewish Torontonians before, during and after the Allan Gardens riot.

The Alan Gardens riot of Sunday May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1965 was the symbolic tipping point for Jewish Canadians and Nazi party. The riot itself lasted a total of fifteen minutes, ending with

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<sup>9</sup> Garrity, John (1966, October 1) [I spied on the Nazis] Canadian Jewish Congress, Ontario Region Fonds: Community Relations Committee Series. Anti-Semitism Sub Case Series, 1965-1966, The Ontario Jewish Archives (Box 5, Folder 13), Toronto, Ontario

<sup>10</sup>Canadian Jewish Congress (1965) [Report on Neo-Nazism and Hate Literature] Canadian Jewish Congress, Ontario Region Fonds: Community Relations Committee Series. Anti-Semitism Sub Case Series, 1965-1966, The Ontario Jewish Archives (box 5, folder 1) Toronto, Ontario

seven arrests, none of whom were Nazi sympathizers or Nazi party members. Most were Jewish protestors, and many of those injured had nothing to do with the riot at all. John Beattie was taken into police protection, out of fear of violence against him, and was unable to begin his speech. While his police protection disallowed him from spewing his violent hate messages, it also prevented him from actually being arrested, as he did not break any laws. Those who engaged in the violence of Allan Gardens, mainly Jewish protestors became the law-breakers, and were arrested for breaking the law. However, they still managed to accomplish their goal of preventing Beattie from speaking at the Garden's, although it might not have been a very decisive move on the part of the vigilantes.

Bialystok has convincingly argued that the riot immediately destroyed certain images of the city of Toronto, and brought it into perspective the actual weight of the Nazi Party's message. "In the immediate aftermath of the riot," Bialystok writes, "the city was in shock. In the civil, conservative climate of 'Toronto the good,' a riot in a public park was outrageous."<sup>11</sup> Media outlets became enthralled with the story, no one could believe that a place like "Toronto the Good," could devolve into such chaos. To the survivors, the suppression of Beattie's hate filled Nazi Party was considered a win for their community, while Congress would see it as a blow to the reputation of Jewish Torontonians. However, there was something they could both agree on: no one wanted the riot to devolve into the violent riot that it inevitably did.

One dilemma presented by the fallout of the Allan Gardens Riot is a debate that still continues today. The issues is this: when is it okay to limit free speech, and is speech ever free? Legal scholar Jeremy Waldon presents this dilemma as being "the kind of speech we are

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<sup>11</sup> Bialystok, Franklin. "Neo-Nazis in Toronto: The Allan Gardens Riot." *Canadian Jewish Studies/Études juives canadiennes* 5 (1997).

interested in regulating is hate speech, and that word can be distracting too. It suggests we are interested in looking at and regulating the passions and emotions that lie behind a particular speech act.”<sup>12</sup> This is a concept the CJC advocated for during the rise of Neo-Nazism. Despite the content of their hate propaganda, the CJC believe that limiting Beattie’s ability to speak freely would only serve to cause more problems for the community. Beattie broke no law by appearing at the rally.

In a document from the Canadian Jewish Congress’s community relations series, an unnamed author wrote that “Beattie did not speak at any point. He was attacked and chased before he had a chance to. It would difficult to establish therefore how he was ‘disturbing the peace’ which is the charge laid against him.”<sup>13</sup> Beattie was ushered out of the park by rioters and police without ever having a chance to speak.

Beattie was charged for using hate speech in 1966, for again, trying to plan a riot in Allan Gardens. As outlined in his court documents, Beattie was charged under section 13 of by-law No. 21379, which addresses the use of defamatory language against racial or ethnic groups in a public space which could cause a disturbance, i.e.: a riot.<sup>14</sup> However, Beattie’s charges would be dismissed on a technicality. The judge’s ruling stated that “the area of freedom of speech belongs to the residual powers reserved to the federal parliament... that since this matter was not

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<sup>12</sup> Waldron, Jeremy. 2010. “Dignity... IGNITY AND DEFAMATION: THE VISIBILITY OF HATE”. *Harvard Law Review* 123 (7). The Harvard Law Review Association: 1596–1657.

<sup>13</sup> Unknown (1965) [ Problems Facing the JCRC] Canadian Jewish Congress, Ontario Region Fonds: Community Relations Committee Series. Anti-Semitism Sub Case Series, 1965-1966, The Ontario Jewish Archives (box 5, folder 1) Toronto, Ontario

<sup>14</sup> Beattie, William John (1966) [ Roy Soplett v Willaim John Beattie] Canadian Jewish Congress, Ontario Region Fonds: Community Relations Committee Series. Anti-Semitism Sub Case Series, 1969, The Ontario Jewish Archives (box 5, folder 15) Toronto, Ontario

assigned exclusively to the legislature of the provinces under that act, the government of Canada's the only legislative authority competent to deal with the question."<sup>15</sup> While this might be true under federal legislation, it presents the problem of when to limit speech, and who should be in charge of preventing and reprimanding those who speak hatred to others. Beattie and his followers were guilty of supporting, and representing a very dangerous, and very painful time period in the lives of Jews and non-Jews alike.

In total, the 1960's became a defining decade of Bialystok's narrative of the holocaust survivors in Toronto and juxtaposes them with the lives of the established Jewish community. The introduction of vigilant Jewish action into Toronto's quiet post-war society created a new dynamic in the way oppression was challenged by all Canadians, for which the Canadian Jewish Congress and the vigilante groups were responsible. Jewish people were clearly divided on how to properly deal with the threat of Nazi hate speech on the part of John Beattie and the Nazi party of Canada. On one side, the long standing, and trusted Canadian Jewish Congress believed that the community should have faith in the efforts of the CJC were the best way to approach the situation. They believed that they had a better understanding of the laws surrounding hate crimes, and therefore knew what needed to be changed, and could lobby for those changes more effectively.

From the events that unfolded in Allan Gardens, it is clear that the Canadian Jewish Congress's methods would have been more effective in suppressing the Canadian Nazi party. The survivors were successful in preventing the Nazi Party from doing their demonstration in Allan

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<sup>15</sup> Beattie, William John (1966) [Regina v. William John Beattie, Judgement] Canadian Jewish Congress, Ontario Region Fonds: Community Relations Committee Series. Anti-Semitism Sub Case Series, 1969, The Ontario Jewish Archives (box 5, folder 15) Toronto, Ontario

Gardens, but because of their prevention efforts, John Beattie was not able to be arrested under the criminal code. If the survivors had stuck with the CJC model, and relied on law enforcement to protect them, less would have been done to prevent John Beattie from speaking openly.

Yet the militant and sometimes violent protest climate of the 1960's as a whole, in which the Allan Gardens riot fit into perfectly, brought of the very serious question of when is it okay to limit free speech into the Canadian perspective. The Nazi Party of Canada, it seems, was within their limits under the criminal code, to speak openly about their hatred for Jews and Black people, as were the vigilantes in their outspokenness about the crisis itself.

What is most clear about the conflict that unfolded in 1965 is that the legal system was not adequately prepared to deal with conflicts involving hate speech. The question surrounding hate speech and hate crime would become a debate that is still being argued today. Even with the introduction of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the 1980's, there is still no clear definition of when speech should be limited, as everyone is afforded the right to free speech under the charter.