



A change in a nuisance by-law of the [town of Hampstead](#) resulted in expressions of hatred against Jews. There are those who might explain this phenomenon as due to Quebec being a pit of hatred against Jews. But the actual facts regarding the situation of Jews in Quebec raise another possibility: the reactions reflect more the reality of separation than active anti-Semitism.

The Town of [Hampstead](#) , with a population of over 7,000, is a town in southwestern Quebec, Canada, on the Island of Montreal. It has a bylaw that forbids excessive noise on days “when most residents are not working and want peace and tranquility. These days include Labour Day, Canada Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas. It recently added Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to the list, creating controversy in Quebec. Hampstead’s population is roughly 85 per cent Jewish.

The Town was founded in 1914 as an exclusive garden city. There are no retail shops within municipal boundaries. Houses were assigned relatively large lots to allow space for trees and shrubbery. The town's roads were designed with curves in order to slow down traffic and to create an interesting and intimate landscape. Hampstead is the home of many affluent citizens. It competes with a few other suburbs for first place in the rankings of highest average household incomes in Canada.

The religious orientation of the inhabitants is 4% Protestant compared with a Canadian average of 38%, while 84% are Jewish compared with a Canadian average of 1.2%. Almost 90% of the population uses English as their preferred official language.

Fred Chano, a Hampstead resident for 14 years, brought the [attention of the media](#) to the change in Hampstead's noise bylaw by mowing his lawn on Yom Kippur. He also contemplated bringing his case to the Quebec Human Rights Commission.



"Today I am going to be mowing my lawn, not that it needs it so much, but just to state a point that enough is enough. Citizens need to be respected regardless of their religious beliefs or views," said Fred Chano, who broke Hampstead's nuisance bylaw Saturday.

Apparently this disgruntled citizen was more motivated by the denial of a construction permit than by the by-law. As explained by [Craig Steinberg](#) , "The resident who wanted to do loud construction work, not "mow his lawn" (in fact he doesn't even have grass he has flowers as his lawn), did not have a permit and was not allowed to work because he does not have a permit. Even if this nuisance by-law didn't exist he would not be allowed to do the construction work.

Craig Steinberg continues: "This by-law is not new. The town council (unanimously) did add 2 holidays to the already existing list of Easter and Christmas etc... because the town is predominantly Jewish they should have the opportunity to observe the holiest of holidays in peace just like the "secular society" of Canada imposed it's Christian holidays on everyone since it is a primarily Christian population. If one is to take the religion out of government argument then you should be outraged that Christmas is a statutory holiday. I don't see any articles ranting about that.

The Hampstead by-law does NOT impose Jewish or any other religious values on anyone. It treats secular, Christian and Jewish holidays in exactly the same fashion. What these different holidays have in common is that they are days when most Hampstead residents are not at work. In the case of the statutory holidays they are not at work because the Federal government legislated that. In the case of the Jewish holidays it is because 85% of Hampstead residents do not work on those days. No one is complaining that the Federal government made the three most holy Christian days statutory holidays. Most Canadians are Christian so that is understandable. Most Hampstead residents are Jewish so it is equally understandable that Hampstead residents would want the same peace and tranquillity on their holy days. Should Hampstead residents who are Jewish get less respect than their Christian neighbours?

Mayor William Steinberg felt it necessary to issue a [statement](#) on the change in Hampstead's Nuisance By-law at the October 3, 2011 Town Council Meeting.

Mayor Steinberg said: Recent media reports have painted a false portrait of Hampstead's Nuisance By-law. What began with a fairly benign complaint about the lack of a building permit quickly spiraled out of control on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday of last week. It became fodder for debate on television, radio and in newspapers across Quebec. Some of the information was correct, but much was not. It is important for us to provide some clarity.

Hampstead's nuisance by-law, like those of most municipalities, has several provisions to limit excessive and disturbing noise. It does not allow construction work on weekdays before 7am or after 9pm. On weekends, it does not permit it before 9am or after 6pm. The same hours apply to excessive noise from leaf blowers, lawnmowers, and similar noisy equipment. In addition, the by-law bans such work on days when most residents are not working and want peace and tranquility. These include Labour Day, Canada Day, Thanksgiving, New Year's Day and other legal holidays. They also include Christmas, Good Friday and Easter Monday. Since our community is about 85% Jewish, we have included three additional days when most of our residents are expecting a quiet, restful atmosphere. Those are the two days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. This by-law, in its current version, has been in effect for over a year and it has been well respected. We do not ban work indoors nor quiet outdoor work.

It does not ban work in general but only excessively noisy and disturbing work. It is not related to any one religion but to times and days when most residents want peace and tranquility, whether those days are secular or religious holidays. The common factor is that most residents are not at work on those days or at those hours.

It is unfortunate that the Town of Hampstead is being accused of imposing the religious views of our majority on the minority when we are just being even-handed. It is, and will always remain, our responsibility to respond to the needs and wishes of residents of this community. We have done just that. Hampstead is a secular town which has not, does not and will never discriminate against any minority.

Criticism of the Hampstead noise by-law, however, was expressed loudly on the internet, by provocative francophone journalists, and by open-line radio talk-show hosts. Theconcordian.com gave its opinion that Hampstead noise bylaw screams injustice: Municipal councils should not regulate when I can mow my lawn

They gave the case against the by-law by quoting constitutional lawyer Julius Grey who said that instituting a bylaw dictating “when you may or may not mow your lawn based on a religious consideration goes beyond the powers of a municipality.”

Whether the government is federal, provincial or municipal, religion should not be allowed to influence political decisions directly. That line must be clearly defined. A public holiday is a date that every society member shares, regardless of ethnicity, culture, or religion. Municipalities simply should not be placing individual cultures holidays in their public calendar.

TheLinkNewspaper stated that the religious freedoms of Hampstead residents took a hit last Thursday when the Montreal town’s councillors modified its “no noise” bylaw.

“I think it’s completely asinine,” said CJAD radio host Dan Delmar. “People who are religious can observe privately, no matter what religion they are—there’s no reason why government should get involved in anyone’s religious practices.”

The need for some tranquility in a residential neighborhood is understandable, but Jewish and non-Jewish residents alike should be allowed to mow their damn lawns whichever day they bloody well want—so long as it’s at a reasonable hour. Government intervention into personal and religious affairs like this is just uncalled for.

The Town of Hampstead is infringing on religious freedom. A town banning lawn mowing three days a year is barely worth mentioning—but the fundamental principle behind the action is out-of-line and frankly worrisome in a secular society like Canada's.

From <http://www.themetropolitain.ca/articles/view/1026> we get: Statutory holidays on which municipal workers don't work is one thing. But to overlay that with a veneer of religion to satisfy specific groups is quite something else. Freedom of religion, in the words of James Madison, is also freedom from religion. The idea is to live and let live. Allow the broadest possible latitude in which everyone can fend for themselves. Religious strictures should never be imposed by any governmental authority.

Mayor Steinberg should be aware that the very word, Jew, is not so much a religious appellation as a national one. It stems from Judea, the ancient name of Israel. Hijacking Jewishness in the name of religion should be anathema. No government has a right to make an assumption or imposition of religiosity.

[Quebec politicians](#) also weighed into the debate.

Municipal Affairs Minister Laurent Lessard questioned whether the Hampstead regulation is legal. "Municipalities have the power to regulate noise pollution," he said. "You cannot make rules on any other basis ... the law doesn't allow for that."

Kathleen Weil, the minister in charge of cultural communities, said she was "surprised" that Hampstead added Jewish holidays to its noise bylaw. "I've never seen a municipal noise law based on religion," she told reporters prior to question period.

Richard Martineau [devoted his morning LCN show](#) to the topic, inviting as a guest a blogger known for his mocking depictions of the Hasidim of Outremont. On his show's official Facebook page, Mr. Martineau wrote, "A Hampstead resident cannot mow his lawn and do renovations because it would bother his Jewish neighbours who are celebrating a religious holiday" and asked whether people thought that was reasonable.

It was an invitation to anti-Semites to vent their hatred. One commenter on Mr. Martineau's called for the Olympic Stadium to be turned into a concentration camp, and as of midday Monday the comment had not been removed by Mr. Martineau. Another wondered if Hitler was right and suggested Jews should move to Israel if they're unhappy in Quebec.

Popular radio and TV host Benoit Dutrizac jumped on the story, mocking the notion that Jews celebrate the New Year in the fall. "You're in Quebec, it's Jan. 1," he said when his guest explained what Rosh Hashanah was. Mr. Dutrizac complained that the lawnmower bylaw was evidence that "the Jewish community has all the rights and Quebec society has to shut up." And he ended the segment by inviting listeners to head to Hampstead and disrupt the holiday.

Honk your horn, make some noise, fart, whatever, any kind of noise to show the Jewish community that it is not the Jewish community that is in charge in Quebec. It's not them who will determine how we will live as a society in Quebec. That's just not true. It's not true that they are going to impose their religious concepts, their religious precepts on the entire society. There are some damned limits."

Montreal blogger [David Ouellette](#) , who describes himself as a member of the little-known Jewish branch of Quebec's Ouellette clan, catalogued a dozen rabidly anti-Semitic comments.

If you do not know what I mean is that you missed the yellow journalism campaign to TVA, LCN, the Journal de Montreal and 98.5 FM.

We will show their sales to these Jews who is the master here. We are at home

It's time to show who are the masters at home, let us not make this crappy band of Jews

The next Jew who knocks at my door I made it myself justice

That is why there ade partuot war or there are Jews.

That returns the waste at home! dirty Jews lepers

According to Hitler, the Jews are a race of "noise" or "vermin" to be rid of ((cest not me who invented it did) but it says it all

Did not that it was the Jews who control the world ca not surprise me at all ...

When a concentration camp are you on Calisse Ecours sacraments of parasite which is they want to québec. On should all crammed into the Olympic stadium ordeal worse all shaved

Adolph was right?

I can not believe that there is the world that defend these Jews! They should be gassed, it would solve the problem!

Some made a more expressive [protest](#) at the nuisance by-law. Peter Mann from Hampstead reported that at 5:05 p.m. Saturday, he was startled by the cacophony of car horns blaring outside my window. A parade of rednecks in nine vehicles, escorted by Montreal police cars, passed by, honking and displaying Quebec and Palestinian flags. These vehicles had makeshift signs proclaiming "La dignité aux Québécois."

Kathryn Gabinet-Kroo added that it is unlikely that these people were Hampstead residents. Would non-Jewish Hampsteaders have made such a concerted effort to upset their neighbours? This means that people who were not affected by this bylaw drove across town to contravene it. One man even leaned out of his car to photograph my husband pushing his 94-year-old father to the synagogue in a wheelchair.

Another more calming view about the Jewish situation in Quebec was expressed by [Robert](#)

[Libman](#)

, a

former MNA and leader of Quebec's Equality Party. He is also a former mayor of the city of Côte St. Luc and Montreal city councillor as borough mayor of Côte St. Luc/Hampstead/Montreal West.

The recent controversy about a noise bylaw in Hampstead is the latest opportunity for provocative francophone journalists and open-line radio talk-show hosts such as Richard Martineau to rile people up with misinformation and innuendo, appealing to the lowest common denominator in the population.

But listening to some commentators in the French media, one would have thought the municipality of 7,000 residents, or the Jewish community itself, was spreading its tentacles throughout Quebec to impose this bylaw on the rest of the population.

Whether this is a ploy for cheap ratings or because they themselves have a personal axe to grind, it doesn't take much to rile up some hotheads, most of whom have never met a Jewish person in their life. The phone lines light up, letters to the editor pick up, and the perception of intolerance spreads, tarring all Quebecers with the same brush.

But is this really reflective of the population and Quebec society at large, or is it a case of a vocal minority overshadowing the silent majority? From a purely personal point of view, having been thrown into the maelstrom of Quebec nationalist politics at a young age, I believe it to be the latter.

As the only Jewish member of the National Assembly out of 125 MNAs for five years, and leader of the Equality Party – which was certainly at odds with nationalist Quebec – I sensed no trace of anti-semitism directed at me. From the other MNAs of all stripes, to the civil service, to the very core of the institution that is the Quebec government, barely any hint of anti-semitism.

Years later, as mayor of a municipality and a member of the executive committee of Montreal city council, I never experienced even a trace of anti-semitism from fellow councillors, the civil service or the institutional municipal structure of the largest city in Quebec.

While I was working with B'nai Brith Canada, we published an annual [audit of anti-semitic incidents in the country](#)

While Quebec had its share, they certainly didn't overshadow any events elsewhere – or the Holocaust-deniers, hate groups and neo-Nazi organizations that exist in the rest of Canada.

But perception is reality in Quebec nationalist politics, and it is too often influenced by the same provocateurs from similar media circles. They stir the pot, with the result that often a non-story becomes a much bigger story. The heat is turned up and people get duped into responding to a distorted portrait of the story, or a leading question. In the Hampstead case, it was Quebec Immigration and Cultural Communities Minister Kathleen Weil. Put on the spot, Weil gave an uneducated answer: she said that she had never seen nuisance bylaws based on religion. That threw even more oil onto the fire. Such incidents are widely reported and further deepen the impression that Quebec is a hotbed of anti-semitism.

We turn to Morton Weinfeld, professor of sociology at McGill University, for the best understanding of the situation of Jews in Quebec based on [his article](#) published on Dec. 2007 and recently repeated on [vigile.net](#)

The Jewish case in Quebec is unique in North America. The community is socioculturally segregated to a high degree from the mainstream society. Although this does not constitute anti-Semitism in any direct variant, it plays a role in shaping attitudes about Jews in Quebec.

Quebec is a French-speaking and historically Catholic province. It has retained its distinct identity though shifting the focus from religion to the French language and culture. French Quebecers have historically seen themselves as a besieged island of French surrounded by a sea of continental English, and with good reason.

There are about ninety-two thousand Jews in Montreal, home to almost all the Jews in the province. Jews in Quebec are very successful by most socioeconomic indicators, notably education, occupation, and income. They remain largely isolated from the surrounding francophone French-speaking milieu in Quebec.

On the other hand, the Jewish community in Montreal is very "institutionally complete." By every

indicator of Jewish identity it is a very "Jewish" community, more so than American Jewish communities and also arguably more than the Toronto community, and certainly more than Vancouver or Calgary.

Moreover, Jews are social actors and play a role in shaping their fate. It is misleading to focus on them only as passive victims and objects of anti-Semitic prejudice. There is an interaction, and in Montreal the very vibrant and positive Jewish identity may also be linked to the isolation and insularity of Jews from the surrounding francophone milieu. For a variety of reasons the Jews in Montreal attempted to integrate more into the English-speaking segment of Quebec society, or at least chose English over French as their predominant language. So there may well be a tradeoff, with enhanced cultural-survival prospects associated with lesser sociocultural integration.

From the 1960s the rise of French nationalism and specifically the independence movement weakened the demographic base of the population as significant numbers of Quebec Jews migrated to other provinces, fearing insecurity or loss of status as English speakers should Quebec become independent. In the 1960s the Quebec Jewish population numbered about 115,000, and by 2006 about 92,000.

The Quebec intelligentsia, however, are quick to demonize those who criticize them. A Quebecoise scholar named Esther Delisle, a non-Jewish philo-Semite, wrote her doctoral thesis at Laval University in Quebec City on the topic of French anti-Semitism in the 1930s in Quebec. She exposed in particular the currents of anti-Semitism-editorials, letters, articles, and cartoons-in a leading French daily, *Le Devoir*. As a consequence of this thesis she could not get a job as an academic anywhere in Quebec.

Delisle had committed the sin of washing her group's dirty laundry in public. The Quebec intelligentsia closed ranks and attacked her. Around the time that her case was just subsiding, satirist Mordecai Richler published a famous article in the *New Yorker*, then a book titled *O Canada, O Quebec* in 1992. These works lampooned Quebec nationalism and Quebec's restrictive language laws. But with these latest writings Richler the outsider-who spoke very little French to boot-attacked Quebec nationalists and ridiculed their excesses in front of the Americans. They were furious. To make matters worse, Richler also used the suspect Delisle as a research assistant, and he cited some of her own work with reference to anti-Semitism in the 1930s.

Many Quebecois thought Richler somehow represented the official Jewish community, which he of course did not. But it also was no secret that the Jewish community, like some other minority groups in Quebec, was strongly federalist in orientation and opposed to Quebec independence.

What, then, is the state of Quebec anti-Semitism today ? There are surveys not in the public domain that find conventional measures of anti-Semitic attitudes several percentage points higher for francophones than anglophones in Canada. On the other hand, as also noted, Jewish life in Quebec is thriving. Montreal is awash in synagogues and communal institutions, notably Jewish day schools that have historically received significant financial support from the provincial government in Quebec, unlike the United States or Ontario.

The attitudinal anti-Semitism in Quebec can be juxtaposed with data on a kind of (voluntary) social segregation. One study found that in Canada, 34 percent of English-speaking Canadians had no contact whatsoever with Jews ; among the French-speaking it was 68 percent.[20] There is extensive sociocultural segregation of Jews in Quebec that is different from that in English Canada, the United States, and even France. Although this is not anti-Semitism in any direct variant, it plays a role in shaping attitudes about Jews in Quebec.

This, then, is the unique context of "Quebec anti-Semitism." In no way has it led to any serious level of anti-Semitic experience in the day-to-day lives of Quebec Jews. And, as suggested, the harms of this high level of sociocultural segregation may also have ironically helped nurture the high levels of communal Jewish solidarity and cultural vitality.

Never-the-less, several high-profile incidents are troubling. The first was the April 2004 bombing of a Jewish school's library in Montreal. It turned out the bomber was an eighteen-year-old Lebanese immigrant to Quebec. This event, related to the Middle East, is an example of imported global anti-Semitism. The Montreal Jewish community was traumatized by the event.

A second event could be construed as playing on older indigenous Quebec themes. A few months after this bombing, the Quebec provincial government decided to increase its funding to Jewish day schools from 60 to 100 percent of the secular portion of the school costs. As mentioned earlier, the absence of a firm wall separating church and state does not preclude government funding of religious schools in Canada in those provinces that accept to do so.

That decision led to an explosion of controversy in the French media in Quebec. Many French-speaking Quebecers did not know that there was any funding to any private schools with a religious or ethnic character or to private schools in general. People thought the Jews were getting a special deal, though Greek private schools had long also benefited from the same program. Eventually there was such an outcry that the government reversed its decision.



Editorial cartoonists took part. In one cartoon by Serge Chapleau that appeared in *La Presse* on 18 January 2005, the francophone education minister in Quebec, Pierre Reid of the (federalist) Liberal Party, is depicted as a stereotypical Hasid with text saying he was "very moved by the fire in the [Jewish school] library. Minister Reid increased the subventions given to the Jewish schools." The cartoon shows him taking a phone call from someone who is obviously a Sikh, saying, "What are you saying Mr. Singh ? Your cafeteria had a fire ? Sorry, that doesn't fit within our regulations." In other words, the minister is using the excuse that a cafeteria does not qualify for financial aid as a library does.

Before this decision some wealthy Montreal Jews held a meeting to raise money for the Liberal Party in Quebec. This was the theme of a second cartoon, by Garnotte in *Le Devoir* on 19 January 2005. Its header in English was "Money and the ethnic vote, part II." In 1995 Jacques Parizeau, the outgoing sovereigntist premier of Quebec, uttered the infamous phrase when he blamed the defeat of the independence referendum in Quebec in 1995 on "money and the ethnic vote." These were seen as code words for Jews, Italians, Greeks, and their money, since the major organizations of these three groups had lobbied against separatism in Quebec during that referendum campaign.

The cartoon itself shows the federalist Liberal premier of Quebec, Jean Charest, slipping on a banana peel outside a building labeled as a "private Jewish school." Education Minister Reid is depicted as also walking out with an open briefcase brimming with money. What is not certain is whether this money is going to the Jewish schools or coming to him from Jewish donors. The bubble has Parizeau saying "That's what I call slipping on your own banana peel." The message is that the provincial Liberal Party brought this on themselves. The cartoon makes the link between Jews, money, and a payoff.



Such cartoons might be considered to be hard-hitting, fair comment and not anti-Semitic in any real sense. At the same time, it seems highly unlikely that such cartoons, and certainly the one with Reid depicted as a Hasid, would appear in English papers in Canada or the United States. Many Jews would indeed find such cartoons offensive.

A third event took place during the summer 2006 war in Lebanon. A large "peace" march was held in Montreal that became a de facto rally opposing Israel's offensive against Hizballah and focusing uniquely on the plight of Lebanese victims. Among the leaders of the march were prominent Quebec politicians, notably Andre Boisclair, former leader of the Parti Quebecois, Gilles Duceppe, leader of the Bloc Quebecois, and Denis Coderre, a federal Liberal MP, along with union and other officials. The sight of fifteen thousand marchers in a de facto anti-Israeli protest led by major Quebec politicians was frightening to many Jews, and remained a sore spot despite clarifications by the politicians present that they were not supporting Hizballah and were simply promoting peace.

Marginality remains an ongoing feature of Quebec Jewish life.

Further reading:

[Five Jewish institutions targeted in Montreal vandalism attack](#)

[Canada: Nearly Two-Thirds of Religiously Categorized Crimes Target Jews](#)

[Wave of Hate Crimes Strikes Montreal](#)

[Anti-Semitic Incidents Increase Five-Fold in Canada](#)

[Anti-Semitism in Canada reached record high in 2009](#)

[A Look Back at Canada's Anti-Semitic History: Frederick Charles Blair](#)