

## **WHY DR GLYNNE IS WRONG**

A summary of the events involving Dundee Hebrew Congregation, now known as Tayside and Fife Jewish Community, from 1980 to 1991.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Professor Abrams is a historian with an interest in the small Scottish Jewish communities. One of the chapters in his book “Caledonian Jews” describes the history of Dundee’s Jewish Community (1).

In this book, and in a later article in the online publication Northern Scotland, “Jute, Jews, Jam and Journalism” he comments on the decline in the Community’s population in the last part of the twentieth century and its later re-vitalisation (2).

He hypothesised that one factor in the multifactorial explanation for the period of decline might have been that the events, to be described below, had caused a **perception** of significant anti-Semitism.

Dr. Glynne wrote a response in Northern Scotland, “Dundee Responds” (3). She alleged that Professor Abrams describes Dundee as an anti-Semitic city. He made no such assertion. Dr. Glynne also used “The Day it Hit the Fan” (4) as her main source and in order to support her case she attempts to discredit its author.

She omits much essential information in order to do so. Since she misleads her readers, a response is necessary. This is why the author, who wrote “The Day it Hit the Fan”, and was a main participant in the events described, has prepared this article.

The remainder of this article will be divided into the following sections:

- The Nablus Twinning (1980-1981)
- The First Lebanese War (1982)
- The Neo-Fascist problem (1983-1991)
- Consideration of Dr. Glynne’s Commentary
- Summary

## 2.0 THE NABLUS TWINNING (1980-1991)

The twinning between Dundee and Nablus was George Galloway’s brainchild. At that time he was the secretary-organiser of the Dundee Labour Party and his friend Graham Ogilvie, then a student aided him. Dundee District Council’s Labour Councillors agreed to their proposal.

The first that the author heard about the proposal was a question by a reporter. Subsequently a reporter from the Dundee Courier and Advertiser asked for a statement. Since there was no information, a noncommittal statement was made, making the following three points; that the Dundee Hebrew Congregation would not oppose anything which brought people together in peace and friendship, that the Council could use the twinning constructively, or that it could use it destructively. When asked to amplify the author explained that constructive meant an attempt to bring Israeli Jews and Arabs together in an amicable way, destructive meant promoting the P.L.O. The Courier reported only the first part of the statement.

The administration attempted to use the Community in the person of the author and his wife to promote their agenda, but when it became clear that their intention was to promote the P.L.O. by encouraging other towns to twin with cities in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza in an effort to put pressure on the U.K. Government to recognise the P.L.O. as the de facto government of the Palestinians, a decision was taken to oppose the twinning, a move that attracted publicity.

The author, on behalf of the Dundee Hebrew Congregation began the second phase of the dispute by objecting to the display of the P.L.O. flag. When he learned that there was a twinning handbook that gave guidance to local authorities on how to initiate and advance a twinning, the information was used to demonstrate that the Council had ignored every guideline in the handbook, without exception. The handbook had been designed to avoid the situation that developed in Dundee and in particular it stressed that twinings should not be initiated for political reasons. The phase ended with a public protest meeting which was attended by the executive of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, representatives of the Jewish Communities of the other Scottish cities and finally, but most important members of Dundee's public

It was during this phase that the first anti-Semitic incidents took place and they continued. An approach, which was ignored, was made to the Labour Councillors to make a joint statement deploring this development. They preferred to take refuge in the mantra that "there is no anti-Semitism in Scotland" despite the fact that Mr Galloway himself had received a letter of support from a rabid anti-Semite. His rejection of what was said in the letter was robust and he advised the Labour Councillors, the Independents, and the Conservative concerning what he had done. He did not advise the Jewish Community about what had taken place nor did he draw the incident to the attention of Tayside Police.

The third phase began with the successful collection of signatures for a petition against the twinning. Then a delegation of Councillors visited Nablus. During the visit a younger member of the delegation made extravagant statements that he has since denied but which were confirmed by eyewitnesses at the time. The Councillors also said that they had been introduced to Jews who were living happily with their Arab neighbours in Nablus, unaware that they had been introduced to Samaritans. The author also made a visit to Nablus (twice), Judea and Samaria more generally, and Gaza. The debate became less intense as time went on and the twinning lost its topicality. Since it appeared that further twinings had been inhibited, which was the main object of the exercise, there was no point in pursuing the matter further from the Community's point of view. The Labour protagonists too seemed to think that they had extracted as much as they could expect from their actions, and the matter dropped out of the public domain.

Since Israel administered Nablus at that juncture, it seemed prudent to co-ordinate the Community's campaign against the twinning with the Israeli embassy, which was informed of every step of the controversy.

### **3.0 THE FIRST LEBANESE WAR (1982)**

The initial stages of this crisis coincided with the Falklands War. The general public were more interested in that war than in events in the Middle East. When the Falkland's War ended, there was intense debate in the letters columns of the Dundee Courier" and the Dundee Standard". The latter publication was the newspaper of the Dundee Labour Party. George Galloway and his supporters mounted a strong campaign

against Israel and its policies as well as attacking their opponents in a personal way. The Labour party correspondents indulged in gross misrepresentation. One example is the claim that 600,000 people had been displaced when the population at risk was 20,000. They also claimed that Beirut had been destroyed. The author was able to go to Beirut during this period. Beirut is a city about the size of Glasgow, most of which had been untouched by the hostilities and people were in the streets going about their business in their usual way. One area had however been devastated and this was the area in which the P.L.O. had made its headquarters. It had been turned into an arsenal and there was photographic evidence that civilian facilities were used to store ordinance. They denied that northern Israel had been subjected to rocket attack despite evidence to the contrary. But the worst was equating Israel and the I.D.F. to the third Reich and the Nazi forces. This was a fairly widespread phenomenon, which prompted Conor Cruise O'Brien to write in his column in the Observer that when people began to "beat the Star of David into a Swastika" something was seriously wrong. He called the phenomenon Judeophobia as he was inhibited, probably by the threat of legal action, from calling it anti-Semitism.

There was correspondence in the Dundee Courier and when hostile statements were made, the author would respond. Some of the responses were written to explain the historical background to the events as they unfolded, and they were published as written.

The situation with the Dundee Standard was different. When hostile letters appeared in its columns the response was always edited and the meaning changed to what the editors wanted the letter to say. While they might have argued that this was an editor's privilege, if they had been challenged, abbreviation is different to distortion.

The Dundee Standard's material became increasingly personal, often amounting to abuse and this was intensified in a debate on "Radio Tay" with George Galloway who made an attack on the author's professional integrity.

Shortly afterwards one of the Councillors published a letter in the Dundee Standard that said, in effect, that if this article's author did not adopt the narrative stated by George Galloway and other members of his coterie, he would have something in common with the guards at Auschwitz. This was an example of what Conor Cruise O'Brien complained about.

Your author chose to respond with a personal letter to the Councillor, offering to meet him to discuss the situation and drawing his attention to Conor Cruise O'Brien's column. The reply came in the form of an abusive letter from the Councillor's solicitor who had a personal interest in the Dundee Standard and who was a Labour activist. This letter threatened legal action if your author did not offer an immediate apology together with a retraction.

From their point of view, the timing was unfortunate as the author, as the Member of the Board of Deputies representing Dundee, was required to attend a meeting at the Board on the following weekend. It was an easy matter to obtain informal legal advice on the issue and some of the lawyers consulted were eminent Q. C.'s. The consensus was that, while the author's response to the original letter was fair comment, the Councillor's letter could be regarded as libel. In due course the Councillor's solicitors were advised that this was the case and they answered that they were now waiting to hear from the author's agents.

The next step was to consult an independent solicitor for disinterested advice, which was that none of the letters were libellous. When asked about the content of the Councillor's letter he replied that "it was in the worst taste possible" but that did not make it defamatory. He added that if they tried further action "we would brief Counsel" and "our man would know the law".

While the solicitor said that the lawyer's letter on behalf of the Councillor should have been ignored, from a political point of view the exchange had the advantage of promptly closing the debate.

## **4.0 ACTIVITIES AGAINST NEO-FASCISTS**

This period is divided into two phases; the first concerns the National Socialist Action Party (N.S.A.P.) and the second the British National Party (B.N.P.). The first N.S.A.P. posters appeared in March 1983. They were systematically monitored but initially no public statements were made. The organisation's recruiting material was obtained and it was immediately clear that members were being invited to obtain firearms. Tayside Police was informed immediately and they took a serious view of the situation.

The author shared the information with the leaders of Dundee's main political parties as well as with officers of the Community Relations Council (C.R.C.). The author was elected, subsequently, to the C.R.C.'s executive and later became its chairman. Most of the author's activities against the neo-Fascists were carried out as an officer of the C.R.C., and on behalf of the C.R.C..

When the N.S.A.P. infiltrated its publications into the Dundee public library they were removed by Councillor Bill Roberts who was responsible for the library. The N.S.A.P.'s press officer complained to the Dundee Courier in a letter which threatened to give it, the N.S.A.P., a veneer of respectability and at that point it became necessary to share what had been found out with the public. This information was published in the Dundee Courier.

Those responsible for the Dundee Standard had been working along the same lines and their material was published in the Dundee Standard but because the Standard had a small circulation it had less impact than the material in the Courier.

Since these neo-Fascist groups target all minorities the action against them was undertaken by the C.R.C. and such action was not restricted to matters of specific Jewish interest.

The C.R.C. campaign emphasised that this was primarily an educational responsibility since the N.S.A.P. specifically targeted young recruits. They attempted to recruit new members outside one of the main schools in the city.

The C.R.C. was supported strongly by representatives of all the parties in the District and Regional Councils, and this included those who had supported the twinning. They were no less committed to the campaign against the neo-Fascists and as a result the relations between them and the Jewish Community became much more relaxed. It was even possible at a later date to hold a civic service in the Shul to which many of those who supported the twinning came. Although not stated openly the twinning became a matter of history.

The wider public supported the activities of the C.R.C. and it is important to recognise that Tayside Police performed the public a great service by identifying those who were involved in neo-Fascist actions and securing prosecution when the law had been broken.

It was confirmed that the Dundee members of the N.S.A.P. had outside help and it was even demonstrated that they had been coordinating their actions with the parent movement in the U.S.A..

In due course the N.S.A.P. seemed to run out of steam but their place was taken by the B.N.P.. This organisation indulged in death threats as well as defacing property with graffiti. While some of these threats were directed at the author, he was not the only one to receive them. One assumes that the motive for these threats, as far as the author is concerned, was to intimidate him. While he was anathema to these people as a Jew, they also objected to his campaign on behalf of the C.R.C.. They were unsuccessful.

The author chaired an anti-racist meeting. The main speaker was Ray Hill who had been the "Searchlight" mole in the B.N.P.. He confirmed the dangerous nature of these groups. B.N.P. activists armed with clubs and iron bars were bussed in from Glasgow but the Police intercepted them and successfully protected those at the meeting without causing a public disturbance.

Similarly when John Tyndall the leader of the B.N.P. attempted to hold a national meeting in Dundee the Police intercepted the members trying to attend, and again stopped their aggressive actions without causing a public disturbance.

Two local establishments had been hired by trickery for this event and when the managers found that they had been tricked they refused entry to the B.N.P. members and in one case invited the Community Relations Officer and his Chairman (the author) to use the facility to monitor the events at no cost to the C.R.C..

All these events generated publicity and Dundee's public fully supported the actions of the C.R.C., which included the Jewish Community among the other minorities.

## **5.0 CONSIDERATION OF DR. GLYNNE'S COMMENTARY**

Dr. Glynne begins by alleging that Professor Abrams accused Dundee of being an anti-Semitic city. He did no such thing. Dr. Glynne's stated objective was to refute her fabricated allegation, presumably assuming that her readers would take what she says at face value. Had her goal been simply to demonstrate that Dundee's general population is neither xenophobic in general nor anti-Semitic in particular she would have all that she needed for this purpose in "The Day it Hit the Fan".

The text of this book states that support for the twinning between Dundee and Nablus was, by no means, monolithic. There were expressions of disgust when the anti-Semitic incidents became public knowledge and the public was well represented at the protest meeting. The ease in collecting signatures for the petition in the Murraygate also confirms the good will of the general public towards the Jewish Community. That no accusation of anti-Semitism had been made concerning the twinning reinforces the argument that the public's response was evidence of genuine sympathy rather than a politically correct gesture. It can be added that the author was awarded a prize for services to patient care in Tayside and, slightly later, a heart-warming send off from the

Regional Authority and the general public on his departure for Israel, none of which would have been possible in a population with hostile attitudes to Jews.

The actions of the neo-Fascists were unequivocally racist and anti-Semitic and the public response to them was forceful and unequivocal in turn. All the local Authorities and services supported the C.R.C.'s work in this respect. The general public encouraged the C.R.C.. The Police acted with determination against them. The text of the book makes it quite clear that former supporters of the twinning would not tolerate any neo-Fascist activity in general or specifically directed against the Jewish Community. This last point was made on the cover of the book as well as in the text and taking all this into consideration Dr. Glynne would have had ample material to support her presumed goal. Her failure to do so suggests that she might have had another motive. This would be to sanitise the District Council's clumsy handling of its twinning.

Dr. Glynne has a personal political agenda. She is a recognised member of a pro-Palestinian organisation and the twinning is consistent with this political outlook. Her text also suggests that she has Socialist sympathies. She should have informed her readers of this.

Since Professor Abrams used *The Day it Hit the Fan* as a source document, Dr. Glynne's tactic is to discredit the author and by doing so devalue his account of events. Her chosen method is to ignore the author's text and depict him as a paranoid eccentric, which is why there is no mention of the C.R.C. in what she writes.

It does not seem to have occurred to Dr. Glynne that foreign affairs is not a part of a District Council's duties. Nor does she recognise that the administration has a duty to protect its constituents both as citizens and as ratepayers. Policy is made by the majority party on the District Council and the administration at the time of the twinning failed to discharge its duty to Dundee's Jewish Community. Had they met the Community's representatives before initiating the twinning they would have been advised about the risks and dangers in what they were about to do. Even if it would not have been possible to devise a compromise, steps could have been taken to mitigate any ill effects from their actions. The twinning handbook recommended such a procedure and their failure to follow this guideline indicates either ignorance of the handbook, which is inexcusable, or alternatively insensitivity to the issues involved.

The situation was aggravated when the predicted anti-Semitic incidents took place and the administration failed either spontaneously to act individually, or to accept the invitation of the author to make a joint, strong, public statement to condemn these affronts. They preferred, when the issue was raised, to take refuge in the mantra that "there is no anti-Semitism in Scotland", a statement which is easily refuted.

Dr Glynne also fails to recognise that the Jewish Community did not experience any of these problems until after the publicity surrounding the twinning. Dr. Glynne seems to endorse the administration's view that the author, on behalf of the Community should have remained silent to avoid these incidents. This is an unacceptable view, since it argues that one should accept that it is legitimate for intimidation to inhibit free speech. Nor does she find it anomalous that the administration's activities were strongly influenced, if not directed, by people, who had not been elected to public office.

With reference to the First Lebanese War, Dr. Glynne takes the author to task for what she describes as uncritical support for Israel. Dr. Glynne is in no position to attack others for "uncritical support" concerning matters in which they have an interest. She herself was prepared to support a drunken student who urinated on another student's property, an Israeli flag, as a gesture of pro-Palestinian solidarity. One might draw an

analogy with a court of law and ask whether Dr. Glynne believes that it is part of the defence Counsel's responsibility to reinforce the case for the prosecution.

In any case, the thrust of the argument against the administration's actions during the Lebanese War was to refute the mendacious propaganda, which was directed to the public, and particularly the identification of Israel and its supporters with Nazis. And in quoting a chapter heading from *The Day it Hit the Fan* she demonstrates that she failed to recognise a sarcastic and humorous statement in recognition of the situation in which a local authority was behaving as though it was a significant force in foreign affairs. Since there are numerous humorous passages in *The Day it Hit the Fan* there can be no excuse for failing to see what was implied by the chapter heading.

Dr. Glynne's attitude to the neo-Fascists is irresponsible. She does not recognise that all communities, and Dundee is no exception, have undesirable elements. Neo-Fascists are socially unacceptable and even when their numbers are small they have to be contained in the interests of the general public and to protect youngsters from contamination. As a relative newcomer to Dundee, Dr Glynne might not have been aware of the incident in a school in which a schoolteacher and her class had been held at gunpoint; an incident which ended in a fatality. But she surely knows about the incident in Dunblane in the 1990's and about repeated reports of fatal incidents involving firearms in the U.S.A..

Every effort must be taken to anticipate such incidents and prevent them, which is why the Police were informed as soon as it became clear that members of the N.S.A.P. were encouraged to obtain firearms. The Police did not take this matter lightly. Dr. Glynne also ignores the role of the C.R.C. in subsequent events nor does she give due credit to the way in which the general public supported this work.

## **6.0 SUMMARY**

Professor Abrams published an article in which he examines the demographic changes of the Dundee Hebrew Congregation, now the Tayside and Fife Jewish Community. Dr. Glynne attacked him for saying that Dundee's population was anti-Semitic, a statement which was neither made nor implied. One of Professor Abrams' source documents for this was a memoir *The Day it Hit the Fan*, by the author. Dr. Glynne's tactic was to discredit the author.

This article is a response to what she wrote. The article describes the events affecting the Dundee Hebrew Community between the years 1980 to 1991, in which the author was a major participant. These events included the District Council's twinning with Nablus, its propaganda campaign during the First Lebanese War and the steps taken to counteract the activities of neo- Fascists.

They show that the twinning was badly handled by the District Council and that the publicity generated by the resulting campaign against it led to anti-Semitic behaviour by elements in the Community, which the administration failed to address effectively although it did not condone such behaviour. The administration's poor performance in these matters is attributed to ignorance and insensitivity. This was reinforced by the administration's behaviour during the First Lebanese War, particularly in its resort to labelling those who challenged their inaccurate propaganda as Nazis.

Later, when neo-Fascists became active, a robust campaign against them was initiated. The author, who played a part in this, performed as an officer of the C.R.C., an item that is emphasised in the fore-going text. Stress is also laid on the active support of the local authorities including those who supported the twinning. The role of Tayside Police is also described and it is argued that the evidence indicates that the general public wholly supported its Jewish Community.

The final section of the article examines what Dr. Glynne wrote and in refuting her arguments also examines her possible motivation.

## **GLOSSARY**

### ***Abbreviations***

B.N.P.	British National Party
C.R.C.	Community Relations Council
I.D.F.	Israel Defence Forces
NSAP	National Socialist Action Party
P.L.O.	Palestine Liberation Organisation
Q.C.	Queens's Counsel
U.K.	United Kingdom

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