

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

Director's Report

AGM – 7 June 2009

Once again we have had an extremely busy year, with little let up on either the political or the communal front. No sooner was the AGM over – literally – than we began to distribute the newly published *Scotland's Jews* to MSPs, schools, libraries, and other public bodies.

Then the “holidays” began with the frenetic week-long Interfaith Pilgrimage, when more than 30 members of 11 communities within 7 different faiths in Scotland, held 23 meetings with 35 leaders of religious, political, and other groups, and visited 14 key locations in Israel and the West Bank. This attracted publicity on BBC Newsnight and Radio Scotland, as well as the press, and planning has now begun for a second pilgrimage aimed more at civic society. We are grateful to the Church of Scotland and others for their support.

In addition to their funding for these projects, we were also successful in obtaining a further Scottish Government grant of £100 000 over the three years to 2011, principally to support our Outreach work, and the publication of MEMO and MEMO+. That funding, together with support from BEMIS for MEMO and from the Jewish Leadership Council for daily political monitoring, has enabled us to employ temporary part-time project workers to take on some of the load, and I would like to thank Sharon Mail and Fiona Brodie for their assistance. We have also recently written to communal organisations inviting them to propose projects to share in the outreach funding, and at time of writing have had several expressions of interest.

At the same time, all the day-to-day political activity continues. We know that we have influenced policy on several fronts, including Child Protection, religious education, and the next census, and our next goal is to promote legislation to allow MRI scans to be used instead of surgical post-mortems. We have spoken personally to all the relevant Ministers who have assured us of their support.

Unfortunately we have also had to cope with the fallout from the war in Gaza. This resulted in a significant peak in antisemitic activity – 16 events in January compared with only 10 in the whole of 2008. We have briefed the police and the Government about this and are assured of their concern, but we have our own concerns about the increased stridency of anti-Israel rhetoric that either crosses into explicit antisemitism or at least creates the climate for others to do so. Not a day passes without such postings on the websites of supposedly respectable newspapers.

Finally, my personal thanks principally to Leah Granat, on whose shoulders most of the hard work devolves, whether monitoring parliament and the media, drafting consultation responses, editing Four Corners and maintaining the website, or attending interminable meetings – often in two places at once! Our thanks too to all those who have supported, advised, and assisted us throughout the year – to all those throughout the community who are happy to be consulted on their areas of expertise; to all the members of the Executive and Council who respond willingly to our frequent requests for advice and guidance; and especially to Walter Sheader who plunged into the deep end as chair, and has been a valuable source of level-headed advice throughout the year.

Ephraim Borowski
Director