

Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

SCoJeC

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Welsh Assembly Oral Answers

Questions to the First Minister: Food Labelling

Gareth Bennett (UKIP): ... Do you agree that, as a matter of course, there should be clear labelling for food products in Wales so that all the relevant information is readily available?

The First Minister (Carwyn Jones): Yes.

Gareth Bennett: ... another related issue is the one of halal meat entering the mainstream food chain. As you know, halal meat, some 20 per cent of which comes from animals that are not stunned before they are slaughtered, is a growth industry in the UK. One issue related to this is that halal meat is only allowed for religious reasons, so that its consumption should be confined to those who have a religious belief that they need to eat halal meat. In other words, halal meat consumption should be confined to practising Muslims. But we know that, increasingly, food retailers are offering halal food as a normal part of their menu. Sometimes, it is hard even to see the labelling of halal food as such. So, you could enter a takeaway shop or a restaurant and find that you're eating food that you later discover to be halal, which was not clearly labelled as such on the menu. Is there a case that we need to adopt much more stringent measures over food labelling here in Wales so that people who are not practising Muslims do not unwittingly end up eating halal food?

Carwyn Jones: Well, I think people do understand and are able to make a choice. What shall we have next then? Should we insist that food is labelled kosher in order for people who are not Jewish to avoid eating that food? Should we label food, for example, so that it is acceptable to those who are Hindus, those who are Buddhists? Well, yes, we need to label food as accurately as possible, but I certainly don't take the view that, somehow, halal food should be singled out compared to other dietary regimes and other religions. If you're going to suggest that about Muslims, are you going to suggest the same about Jews?

Gareth Bennett: I take the point that you raise, First Minister, but there is no evidence that kosher food is entering the mainstream food market, but there is some evidence that halal food is. So, that is the reason why I raised the issue specifically of halal food. Now, I don't think we should be downplaying this issue. I remember that we had a scandal over horse meat a few years ago, and I think this lack of labelling of halal food has the potential to be, if anything, an even bigger scandal.

... The British Veterinary Association, the RSPCA and other organisations have called for an end to the non-stun slaughter of animals in the UK, which they say is cruel and painful for the animals being slaughtered. There has also been considerable academic research backing up this view. Now, it has already been banned in Denmark, Sweden, Iceland and New Zealand. It is now UKIP policy to ban the practice of non-stun slaughter entirely here in the UK. Would you agree that that is actually the best policy for the interests of animal welfare in Wales?

Carwyn Jones: No, and I do regret the fact that he, again, singles out one religious group he particularly dislikes. He starts with Muslims, he will move on to the Jewish people, he'll move on to Hindus, move on to Buddhists, because they're not exactly like him, and thankfully they're not ...

The reality is that we are an open and tolerant society. We have in Cardiff one of the oldest mosques in Britain. The population that we have here of people who are Muslim has been integrated in our society for many, many, many decades and are respected for the contribution that they have made to Welsh life—a contribution, I have to say, that goes well beyond that which UKIP or the Member has made.

To read the full transcript see

<http://record.assembly.wales/Plenary/5355#C122510>

Northern Ireland Executive

Northern Ireland Good Relations Indicators Annual Update

<https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/execoffice/ni-good-relations-indicators-annual-update-18.pdf>

Supreme Court Judgement

Lee (Respondent) v Ashers Baking Company Ltd and others (Appellants) (Northern Ireland) ...

Mr and Mrs McArthur are Christians who hold the religious belief that the only form of marriage consistent with Biblical teaching and acceptable to God is that between a man and a woman. They are the owners of a bakery business ('Ashers'). Ashers offered a 'Build-a-cake' service by which customers could request images or inscriptions to be iced onto a cake. In May 2014 Mr Lee, a gay man, wished to take a cake to an event organised by campaigners for same sex marriage in Northern Ireland. He placed an order with Ashers for a cake iced with a depiction of the cartoon characters 'Bert and Ernie' and the words 'Support Gay Marriage'. Mrs McArthur initially took the order but later advised Mr Lee that she could not in conscience produce such a cake and gave him a refund.

Mr Lee brought a claim against the McArthurs and Ashers ('the appellants') for direct and indirect discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, contrary to the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 ('the SORs') and/or on grounds of religious belief or political opinion, contrary to the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 ('FETO'). His claim was supported by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. The district judge in the county court held that refusing to complete his order was direct discrimination on all three grounds. ...

The appellants appealed ...

On 24 October 2016 the Court of Appeal dismissed the appeal, holding that Mr Lee had suffered direct discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and that it was not necessary to interpret the SORs to take account of the McArthurs' ECHR rights.

On 28 October 2016, before the order dismissing the appeal had been drawn up, the

Attorney General gave notice to the Court of Appeal, requiring it to make a reference to the Supreme Court ... The Court of Appeal concluded that he had no power to do so as the proceedings had ended. ...

Judgment

The Supreme Court unanimously holds that it has jurisdiction to hear an appeal against all aspects of the Court of Appeal's judgment ...

It grants the appellants permission to appeal and allows their appeal. The Court concludes that neither the SORs nor FETO imposes civil liability on the appellants for the refusal to express a political opinion contrary to their religious beliefs.

Reasons for the Judgment

The sexual orientation claim

The district judge found that the appellants did not refuse to fulfil Mr Lee's order because of his actual or perceived sexual orientation. The objection was to the message on the cake, not any personal characteristics of the messenger, or anyone with whom he was associated. The message was not indissociable from the sexual orientation of the customer, as support for gay marriage was not a proxy for any particular sexual orientation. The benefit of the message accrues not only to gay or bisexual people, but to their families and friends and to the wider community who recognise the social benefits which such commitment can bring. Thus, there was no discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation in this case.

The political beliefs claim

... As the appellants' objection was not to Mr Lee, but to being required to promote the message on the cake, the situation was not comparable with people being refused jobs or services simply because of their religious faith, but it was arguable that the message was indissociable from Mr Lee's political opinion. It was therefore necessary to consider the impact of the McArthurs' ECHR rights on the meaning and effect of FETO.

Impact of ECHR rights

The rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (article 9) and to freedom of expression (article 10) were clearly engaged by this case. They include the right not to be obliged to manifest beliefs one does not hold. The McArthurs could not refuse to provide their products to Mr Lee because he was a gay man or because he supported gay marriage, but that was different from obliging them to supply a cake iced with a message with which they profoundly disagreed. FETO should not be read or given effect in such a way as to compel them to do so unless justification was shown, and it had not been in this case. ...

To read the full press release see

<https://www.supremecourt.uk/cases/docs/uksc-2017-0020-press-summary.pdf>

To read the full judgement see

<https://www.supremecourt.uk/cases/docs/uksc-2017-0020-judgment.pdf>

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House of Commons Written Answers

Palestinians: Schools

Joan Ryan (Labour) [173495] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what representations her Department has made to the Palestinian Ministry of Education on removing examples of incitement from school textbooks during the review of the school curriculum in the Palestinian Territories.

Alistair Burt: The UK is currently in the planning phase of the textbook review.

The review will enable us to identify if and where examples of incitement exist. We will take steps to address any concerns uncovered by the review as appropriate once it is complete.

In my last meeting with the Palestinian Minister of Education in May I challenged him on the need to prepare their population for peaceful coexistence.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-09-11/173495/>

UNRWA: Finance

Tom Brake (Liberal Democrat) [173937] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, whether the Government plans to maintain the current level of funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency in the next departmental spending review for her Department.

Alistair Burt: The UK remains firmly committed to supporting the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, for whom we have been a consistent top 5 donor. The process for agreeing Spending Review commitments is a Treasury lead. Once this has been set out, DFID will review departmental priorities to agree the best use of its Official Development Assistance in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the wider Middle East region.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-09-12/173937/>

Palestinians: ICT

Crispin Blunt (Conservative) [173929] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to the Answer of 4 September 2018 to Question 167103 on Palestinians: ICT, what plans she has to promote the development of Palestinian IT firms and strengthen their capability to work with British businesses after the Palestinian Market Development Programme ceases in October 2019.

Alistair Burt: The programme support provided to Palestinian IT firms from the Palestinian Market Development Programme (PMDP) will cease in October 2018. The Department for International Development (DFID) has recently announced a new £38 million economic development programme for the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Part of this new programme will continue to provide support to Palestinian IT firms to connect with British businesses, for the twelve months following the completion of the PMDP. Following this, DFID will review if further support to the Palestinian IT sector is warranted and if the UK is best placed to support it.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-09-12/173929/>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-07-23/167103/>

Israel: Palestinians

Layla Moran (Liberal Democrat) [174145] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions his Department has had with the Government of Israel following the Israel Supreme Court's decision to reject an appeal on the demolition of the village of Khan al-Ahmar.

Alistair Burt: Our Ambassador to Tel Aviv discussed the issue of Khan Al Ahmar with the Israeli authorities on 17 September. We remain gravely concerned by proposals to demolish the Bedouin community of Khan al-Ahmar which the UN has said could amount to 'forcible transfer', in violation of International Humanitarian Law. Following the decision of the Israeli Supreme Court on 5 September, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office issued a statement with

France, Germany, Spain and Italy, reiterating our call to the Israeli Government not to go ahead with its plan to demolish the village – including its school – and displace its residents. We will continue to raise concerns with the Israeli authorities as opportunities arise.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-09-12/174145/>

The statement referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/khan-al-ahmar-france-germany-italy-spain-and-uk-joint-statement>

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Other Relevant Information

European Commission

Commission brings together religious leaders to discuss "The Future of Europe: addressing challenges through concrete actions"

European Commission First Vice-President Frans Timmermans hosted ... a high-level meeting with eight representatives of religious organisations from across Europe. The participants debated "The Future of Europe: addressing challenges through concrete actions".

First Vice-President Frans Timmermans said: *"Europe is home to people of many faiths, and every European has the right to practice his or her faith in peace and security. Ahead of next year's European elections, I reassured the participants in today's meeting that the European Commission will continue to stand up and speak up against any discrimination or attacks that their communities might face. Every European citizen will have a chance to shape our common future at the ballot box next year, and I invited the participants in today's meeting to engage actively in the political process and to encourage their communities to do so as well. While we may worship in different ways, our values are universal, including our commitment to democracy and equality."* ...

Today's meeting is the 14th annual high-level meeting with religious leaders organised by the Commission. ... In previous meetings, participants looked into the future of Europe through a number of challenges facing the European Union, in particular migration, terrorism and integration. This is also where they stressed the need to define common values to underpin the foundations of our Union, and find concrete ways of putting those values into good use. ...

To read the full press release see

http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-6061_en.htm

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Holocaust (Return of Cultural Objects) (Amendment) Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2017-19/holocaustreturnofculturalobjectsamendment.html>

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/marriageact1949amendment.html>

Online Forums Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2017-19/onlineforums.html>

Organ Donation (Deemed Consent) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/organdonationdeemedconsent.html>

Scottish Parliament

Human Tissue (Authorisation) (Scotland) Bill

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/108681.aspx>

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Consultations

** new or updated today

Reform of the legal requirements for divorce (closing date 10 December 2018)

<https://consult.justice.gov.uk/digital-communications/reform-of-the-legal-requirements-for-divorce/>

The future of civil partnership in Scotland (closing date 21 December 2018)

<https://consult.gov.scot/family-law/the-future-of-civil-partnership-in-scotland/>

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