

# Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

## Director's Report 2006

Once again the Council has had an extremely busy and successful year, and the report from our Public Affairs Officer, Leah Granat, can only skim over the surface. As well as the large number of meetings we attend and documents to which we respond, what is in many ways even more important is the recognition the Jewish Community now has in political and other circles in Scotland. Our strategy is simple – we do not just turn up when we want something; we are seen to be participating in the political process even when there is no direct differential effect on the Community. That is recognised and appreciated, and it greatly eases the way when we do want to raise a matter of communal interest.

The vast majority of this networking, as well as attending formal meetings and the constant drafting and redrafting of documents, is done by Leah. But before that, her day starts with a thorough trawl through the Scottish media to produce a daily digest of stories relevant not just to us but also to minority communities at large. This, together with information about current business at Holyrood, Westminster, and sometimes Brussels, is collated in *MEMO*, the weekly briefing that we produce on behalf of BEMIS. And then, on top of what is already more than a full-time job, she also edits *Four Corners* and has taught herself the skills to keep our constantly improving web-site up to date.

All of this is important, not just for the recognition that it brings, but also because it is only thanks to our collaboration with BEMIS that we can afford to pay Leah a salary that even half recompenses her efforts. I am delighted therefore to report that the value of *MEMO* has also been recognised by the Scottish Executive; we are very grateful to the Equality Unit for funding to support the development of the new *MEMO+Plus*. This monitoring role also enables us to bring material to the attention of relevant UK communal bodies such as the Board of Deputies and the CST, whose Director recently said that our digests are the first thing he reads in the morning, and that they are the best he has seen in 30 years.

The back-room work may not be as visible as manoeuvring the *Get* clause through the Parliament, which we finally achieved, despite a last minute ambush, very shortly after the 2005 AGM, but it is just as important. The law does not just consist of statutes; it is the subsidiary legislation that spells out the detail, and it is thanks to Leah's eye for detail that we discovered that the associated Statutory Instruments (SSIs) seriously misrepresented the intention of the clause. It has taken almost a full year, but corrected SSIs have at last now been laid before Parliament.

We continue also to have input behind the scenes on other matters of importance to the Community, ranging from the implementation of the new Charities Act, through plans for the next census, to the proposals to replace the current Disclosure regime. We also continue to represent communal interests on a host of committees and working groups including the Scottish Committees of the CRE and EOC, Scottish Equalities and Human Rights Coalition, the Scottish Churches Committee Child Protection Group, the Policy Officers Network, and others.

In all these contexts the Community must be able to speak for itself. We have had recent unfortunate experience of organisations claiming to represent the Jewish view – and getting it wrong. The Scottish Council is the Community's protection against this, and the fact that we have the democratic underpinning that we do is crucial to our being able to speak with authority. That is also recognised by the media, who have reported our statements on a range of issues including the local effects of the Lebanon war, the use by the Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh of stereotypical anti-Semitic images in a poster, and St Andrews University's award of an honorary degree to ex-President Khatami of Iran for promoting interfaith understanding, no less!

In conclusion, may I reiterate my thanks to our Executive and Council, to the various Scottish communities and their representatives, to the Board of Deputies and other UK bodies for their input and support. But I make no apology for having devoted most of this report to Leah's dedication, commitment, and efficiency. It is she who does the vast majority of the work, and it is she who deserves the gratitude of the Council and the Community.

Ephraim Borowski