

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

Chairman's Report, June 2008

Coming back to the Chair of the Scottish Council after a gap of almost four years I can appreciate just how much progress the organisation has made and the way in which it has consolidated its links with all aspects of Scottish civil society constantly working for the well-being of the Jewish community in Scotland.

Our recent high profile work exposing the anti-Semitic blogs in the *Herald* and *Scotsman* newspapers obtained widespread Parliamentary support for our stand. We continue to defend shechitah and advise on legislation about looted art. Alex Salmond paid us an early visit after taking up office as First Minister and listened closely to our concerns and aspirations.

Our Parliamentary work involves regular briefings and consultation responses. We would not have achieved the successes we have without these visible signs of our involvement in the mainstream of Scottish life. Our submissions on fire regulations and water charges for small charities met with much understanding and will inform any new legislation and operating guidelines.

An important part of ScoJeC's work is outreach to the small communities beyond the Central Belt. We spent a busy but rewarding Purim/Shabbat in Aberdeen recently meeting members of that community and learning about the challenges they face in maintaining Jewish life in that part of the country. Our justly praised magazine *Four Corners* keeps the small communities in touch and there are more plans for regular activities in Dundee, Aberdeen and the Highlands.

Our website – www.scojec.org – contains a wealth of information about the Jews in Scotland as well detailing our work with such organisations as the Church of Scotland, ethnic minority bodies like BEMIS and the Scottish Trades Union Congress. We continue to provide a communal service on disclosure and our monitoring service on items of interest to ethnic minorities (*MEMO* and *MEMO+*) continues to be widely read and much appreciated well beyond our community. ScoJeC has also taken a leading role in the Interfaith Pilgrimage to Israel which will take place early next month.

This success has also enabled us to attract grants from statutory bodies including the Scottish Government as well as from Jewish trusts in Glasgow and beyond. We are also grateful for the continuing support of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. As some of these grants have to be spent on specific activities, such as publications and outreach work, we still have concerns about funding our core activities which remains a priority. We remain grateful to Edward Green of Edinburgh who has greatly assisted our fundraising activity.

Our current level of activities owes much to the vision of our Director Ephraim Borowski who works tirelessly for us in a voluntary capacity. We were thrilled that his work for the Jewish community in Scotland was recognised by the award of an MBE. The task of the Director, Chairman and Management Board is made lighter by the constant hard work of our Public Affairs Officer, Leah Granat, and we are grateful for all she does for us. She initiates much of our consultation and briefing work and her regular presence in Edinburgh ensures that we are able to influence political debate as required.

Let me also thank our Hon. Treasurer, Daniel Clapham, for all his work for the Council and for his personal support. Stephen Kliner has helped by chairing meetings while I have been in Israel and I would like to pay tribute to my predecessor and successor John Cosgrove under whose chairmanship the organisation so successfully developed. I have enjoyed my own role with ScoJeC and I wish my successor and all those involved with the organisation every success in the future.

Dr Kenneth Collins
Chair