

## **Board of Deputies of British Jews**

**Minutes of Board Meeting –  
Sunday 20 May 2012 at 2.15pm in British Medical  
Association, Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9JP**



**173 Deputies and 1 under-35 observer attended.**

### **Introduction by the President**

The President welcomed Deputies and guests to the last meeting of the Triennium and wished everyone a good Yom Tov for Yom Yerushalyim. He welcomed 15 new Deputies attending as observers and also those Deputies who have joined the Board over the last few months. He noted the increased interest in the Board and the elections and the fact that an expanding Board necessitated a larger venue for meetings, hence the move to the Great Hall of the BMA. He also referred to the live streaming of today's meeting.

There were no amendments to the Minutes, although Past President Lionel Kopelowitz questioned whether they needed to be so long.

Jeromé Freedman, the Chair of the Constitutional Committee was appointed returning officer and Edward Cohen and Bernard Shaffer were appointed scrutineers for the Honorary Officers' elections. The President referred to the formalities around the elections, hustings and voting.

### **The President's Statement**

The statement had been circulated but the President made a few additional points.

The elections have seen unprecedented interest at synagogue level with contested elections, including at his own synagogue where 10 candidates stood for five places. The President expressed his pleasure at being re-elected.

He referred to his meeting, with his French and German counterparts, with Francois Hollande, since elected as France's new President. This underlined the access that the Board and EJC have with European leaders.

On the Moty Cristal case, the Board was working closely and carefully with Manchester colleagues and others. The response was under careful consideration and there was no question of the Board not addressing this serious issue.

The President referred to one matter that was not in his statement; the refusal of the IOC to agree to a one minute silence in memory of the Munich massacre in 1972. The IOC has not behaved well on this issue, either at the Munich Games or since, and this decision was deplorable, notwithstanding the real practical difficulties in arranging a minute's silence and the risks of disruption. But it should also be noted that for the first time ever, the host city will be participating in a formal commemorative event, at Guildhall.

## Election of President and Treasurer

**Lionel Kopelowitz (Past President)** announced that Vivian Wineman (Hampstead Garden Suburb Synagogue) and Laurence Brass (Bushey Synagogue) had received the requisite 20 nominations for the positions of President and Treasurer respectively, and being unopposed, were duly elected for the 2012-2015 Triennium.

## Election of Honorary Officers

As Returning Officer, Jeromé Freedman explained the hustings and voting procedures. The five candidates, Jonathan Arkush, Jerry Lewis, Laura Marks, Alex Brummer and Denise Lester then drew lots to decide the order in which they would speak.

- **Jonathan Arkush (Borehamwood United Synagogue)** delivered his election address and then took questions on; the JLC (Roger Winfield – Liberal Jewish Synagogue), the idea of a separate Israel committee (Tony Cotton - ), maintaining ‘cabinet responsibility’ as an HO (Paul Edlin - Glasgow) and strengthening the fight against attacks on Israel (Jonathan Sacerdoti – Spanish and Portuguese Jews Congregation).
- **Jerry Lewis (Hampstead United Synagogue)** delivered his election address and then took questions on; reconciling his long service with the need for making room for newer and younger Deputies (Roger Offenbach - Bushey United Synagogue), increasing the number of women Deputies (Richard Verber – UJS), maintaining a culture of civility (Jonathan Hoffman – Woodside Park United Synagogue), why there was little evidence of change or strategic review during his years as an HO (Hester Abrams – Brondesbury Park United Synagogue), the lack of change at the Board during his time as an HO and his poor working relationship with staff (Stuart MacDonald - ), the idea of Deputies visiting an abattoir to see shechita first hand (Richard Cohen - Loughton Federation Synagogue).
- **Laura Marks (Movement for Reform Judaism)** delivered her election address and then took questions on; defending Jewish custom and practice from a Reform standpoint (Anthony Spencer (Shenley United Synagogue), working with the JLC (Roger Gewolb - St John's Wood United Synagogue), the recent visit of the UK Task Force on Israeli Arabs to Israel (Rowel Genn – Borehamwood United Synagogue), how to manage change at the Board, with little experience of the Board (Jack Gilbert – Sandys Lane Synagogue), prioritising the many areas of the Board’s work whilst refocusing on social and environmental activism (Stephen Games – Muswell Hill United Synagogue), the timing of Mitzvah Day and the AJEX Parade on the same day (Norma Donn - Edgware United Synagogue), justifying seeking senior office at the Board having only just become a Deputy (Trevor Gee – Finchley United Synagogue), having a separate Israel Committee (Tony Cotton - ).
- **Alex Brummer (United Synagogue)** delivered his election address and then took questions on; the lack of proficiency in Ivrit of children attending Jewish schools (Herman Hirschberger - Belmont United Synagogue), engaging with more young Deputies to bring about change at the Board (Ilana Fenster - ), improving perceptions of the Board in the Regions (Sheila Gewolb – Cardiff United Synagogue), making one’s mark quickly (Ann Zinkin), whether the PSC should be allowed a platform in Parliament at taxpayers’ expense, given their extreme views (Jonathan Hoffman – Woodside Park United Synagogue), interfaith (Tony Cohen – Leeds Representative Council).

- **Denise Lester (South Hampstead United Synagogue)** delivered her election address and then took questions on; practical ways to effect change in the Board (Jack Gilbert – Sandys Lane Synagogue), engagement with the Regions (Bernard Shaffer – Representative Council of North East Jewry ), whether social justice was a core issue for the Board (Neville Sassienie – Movement for Reform Judaism), concrete ideas to improve the Board (Flora Franks - British Emunah).

Voting then took place and the meeting continued as the count was undertaken.

### **Questions on the President's statement and Executive Report**

**Michael Samuels (South Manchester)** said people should join the Co-op in order to exercise their right to have a say. Boycotting a shop that people may not use in the first place would have no impact.

**Alan Mays (Golders Green United Synagogue)** in his valedictory speech urged a more candid dialogue between Israel and the Diaspora so as not to lose the hearts and minds of a generation that did not accept the concept of 'Israel right or wrong'. This did not require any compromise of Zionist principles, as his own case showed, since he was about to make Aliyah. The President wished him hazlacha.

**Ann Godfrey (United Synagogue, Women)** considered that the hustings were not handled as well as they might have been, and should be reviewed.

**Louis Rapaport (Manchester Reform Synagogue)** affirmed the excellent cooperation between the Manchester Representative Council and the Board over Moty Cristal. He also referred to the Co-op and said that even if people didn't shop there, they may still receive flyers about Co-op services such as the travel agency. They could make their feelings known by contacting the Co-op and voicing their upset at the policy on Israeli companies. He also asked Deputies to write to the DG of the BBC regarding the proposed cancellation of the Jewish radio programme that has been broadcast since 1991. It has both Jewish and non-Jewish listeners and serves an important purpose in promoting good relations between the community and others.

**Roger Offenbach (Bushey United Synagogue)** expressed some confusion over the apparent contradictions in responding to the Co-op; shunning its stores, but joining the organisation.

**Bernard Silver (Western Marble Arch Synagogue)** referred to efforts in the late 1970s to introduce an anti-boycott Bill, scotched apparently by the FCO. There is something similar in the USA and it is effective. Boycotting boycotters is neither logical or effective.

**Jonathan Sacerdoti (Spanish and Portuguese Jews Congregation)** referred to the recent BBC survey that polled people in a number of countries and found that Israel was considered the third most unpopular nation in the entire world, including North Korea, with only Iran and Pakistan being scored worse. He noted that a Knesset Committee was discussing the perception and treatment of Israel in the UK, with UK delegates attending, and yet he had heard nothing of this through the International Division, or who was attending from the UK. The issue was not being properly addressed.

In answer **the President** agreed with Louis Rapaport's comments on the Co-op, Moty Cristal and the BBC. He said in response to Roger Offenbach that joining to Co-op allowed members to state their opposition to the policy from within, and this was proving effective at regional meetings. Boycotting Israel must be seen to have consequences. He noted Bernard Silver's comments about legislation and said this is also

effective in France and might have merit here, although seeking legislative amendments is extremely difficult, as the issue of Universal Jurisdiction showed.

Regarding the BBC poll, surveys by the JPR and BICOM revealed indifference by many Britons, and an unfavourable view of the Palestinians' obstruction to the peace process. People do express frustration with Israel, without generally seeking to question her right to exist or defend herself. As long as the conflict continues there will continue to be anti-Israel activity, but we are also seen as effective campaigners.

Before handing over to the Chairman of the International Division, Paul Edlin, to deliver his report, **the President** thanked him for his conscientious service over the course of two terms as an HO.

### **International Division Report**

**Paul Edlin** expressed his sadness at presenting his last report as Chairman of the Division, and his thanks to the President and his fellow HOs. The report had been circulated with the meeting papers.

He referred to the recent EJC meeting in Prague and concerns over the situation for Jews in Hungary and in Malmo, Sweden. The communities there were happy for the EJC to help make their concerns known. He also referred to the improved bilateral relations with CRIF in France, and the Zentralrat de Juden in Germany.

**Sharon Arad (Kenton United Synagogue)** asked that Deputies support the Israeli Paralympic Athletes, some of whom are war disabled.

**Jonathan Hoffman (Woodside Park United Synagogue)** criticised the statement issued by the Movement for Reform Judaism regarding the visit of Israel's Foreign Minister. It was wrong to object to the visit of a democratically elected member of Israel's government.

**Paul Edlin** reaffirmed the Board's position in support of the democratically elected government and people of Israel.

**Peter Sheldon (United Synagogue)** raised the issue of an Israel committee and how it would fit alongside the current Divisional structures.

**Paul Edlin** agreed with the need for such a committee and regretted that attempts to establish one had been frustrated to date, but this was something to be reassessed with the incoming HOs and Divisions.

**Sam Alston (LJY-Netzer)** asked what other issues were dealt with beyond anti-Semitism, as important as that is.

**Paul Edlin** referred to work pioneered by the President of the EJC to promote tolerance, Holocaust education and Jewish studies.

**Norma Glass (Swansea)** expressed her concern at the content of an interfaith talk at an Anglican church in Swansea at which the Archbishop of Canterbury's advisor Reverend Rana Khan spoke of Palestine, without any mention of Israel. Copies of the speech had been handed out, so there was no mistaking what he said.

**Paul Edlin** said that was clearly wrong and such behaviour had to be challenged, something the Board frequently does. He advised that the Chairman of the Defence Division will seek clarification on this point with the Church of England.

**Jenny Pizer (Movement for Reform Judaism)** responded to Jonathan Hoffman's criticism of the MRJ's statement on the visit of Avigdor Lieberman. The statement differentiated between his role as a democratically elected member of the Knesset and the government of Israel and his personal views and the views on which he has stood as member of the Knesset. The MRJ cannot condone the views that he expresses publicly both in Israel and outside of Israel about the minority groups in that country. They don't represent the views of the vast majority of that population.

**Malvyn Benjamin (Hendon United Synagogue)** argued that such criticism was inappropriate and damaging and he noted that William Hague does not object to Mr Lieberman's visit.

**Paul Newgass (Exeter Synagogue)** warned against the malign influence of Baroness Ashton and stressed that the Board should deal with the FCO, who were the real policy makers.

**Paul Edlin** said that the President of the EJC will be meeting Baroness Ashton and that engagement should be used to inform her opinions. She claimed that she did not compare the Toulouse massacre with Gaza but her opinions are still problematic. Some had called for her dismissal, but that was premature.

**David Safir (Movement for Reform Judaism)** raised the matter of the invitation by the Swiss Interparliamentary Union to Hamas representatives and the apology to the Israelis that followed. Had this been raised at the meeting with the Swiss Ambassador?

He also asked whether the UK might replicate the role of the US Government's Antisemitism Envoy, Hannah Rosenthal.

**Paul Edlin** said that the apology had come from the Swiss Interparliamentary Union and not the Swiss Government. Despite strong representations from the Board, the Ambassador did not give any commitment regarding future conduct.

Regarding an antisemitism envoy, this has been broached with the FCO and this was something to look at in relation to the current role of Sir Andrew Burns, the UK Envoy on post-Holocaust issues.

In respect of the issue of Jews from Arab lands, he thanked members of the Division, Sidney Assor and Edwin Shuker for their significant contributions to the Board's work.

**Jacob Levy (David Ishag Synagogue)** expressed concern for the remaining Jewish communities in Arab countries, and the possible risks they faced in the Arab Spring, where action may be taken against them.

**Paul Edlin** noted these concerns as a real issue moving forward.

He then referred to the Claims Conference to which he and Ben Helfgott have been delegates. Certain concerns about the collection and distribution of assets had been raised over time, including by Herman Hirschberger, and as a result the Gruder Inquiry had been initiated. Along with the President, the concerns had been conveyed to the Claims Conference and there looks as if there has been something of a breakthrough, although the details cannot yet be revealed.

**Herman Hirschberger (Belmont United Synagogue)** asked for details of any response to the Gruder Report, whether a list of survivor owners has been issued, whether they would be fully compensated and whether slave labourers would now be adequately compensated too.

**Paul Edlin** said that the response to the Gruder Report, such as it was, was given some time ago, but the breakthrough now was more significant in terms of a possible means to settlement of claims. Compensation to slave labourers was pitifully small but there was no more money to give.

**The President** concurred and said that the Claims Conference is trying to support significant numbers of survivors in the former Eastern Bloc countries, Israel and elsewhere, without huge reserves to do it. They have been assiduous in returning to the German Government to extract better terms and more funds. There are two sources of funds, one is compensation from the German Government and the other is the application of assets recovered but not distributed. So establishing a fund for claimants of assets will reduce the funds for other victims. The Claims Conference had provided opportunities for claimants of assets to come forward but these were regarded as inadequate and have been reviewed. The issue arose again following the reunification of Germany. A new opportunity to make claims will help to alleviate these complaints.

### **Election Results**

**Jeromé Freedman** announced the results of the Honorary Officers' election. The total number of valid votes cast was 222 and the quota was 55.5. The successful candidates in order of achieving their election were as follows: Laura Marks who becomes the senior vice president, Alex Brummer and Jonathan Arkush. Voting details would be posted shortly on the Board's website.

### **Personal announcements**

Mazel tov to Danny Stone on becoming a father, to Flo Kaufmann on the arrival of a grandchild and to Ivan Sloboda who has become a first-time grandfather of twins, and to Sheila Levitt on her 78<sup>th</sup> birthday.