

Jewish Representative Council of Greater Manchester and Region
***From the President's Desk* August 2011 Lucille Cohen**

The Jewish Representative Council continues to strive to fulfil its role of promoting and defending the interests of the Jewish community in every possible sphere.

Since taking office in May 2010 I have become ever more aware of the significance of this council in representing Jews and Judaism to the outside world. We also provide an internal forum not only for airing communal concerns but for producing action too.

The Representative Council is the expression of the community's will and seeks not only faithfully to reflect it but to galvanise that will. I believe that we also have a purpose that seeks to educate, motivate and activate the community.

To that end it requires an ongoing injection of the leading and younger representatives of organisations to promote a dynamic interchange between those organisations whom we seek to represent and the council. We have asked last year for organisations to send an additional younger delegate in the 18-40 age group (or even up to 50) and a few organisations have taken this opportunity. However, more are still needed and so, for those who consider it important to give back, who feel a sense of duty or seek to engage with the issues confronting us, we challenge you to step up to the plate and play your part.

We understand that those with young families may find it difficult to manage a Sunday morning council meeting, so the alternative option we are now offering is to join one of our working parties. That way, anyone seeking involvement will be able to plunge straight into direct action at the deep end. In addition, anyone seeking a fast-track initiation could be paired with one of the working party members to gain an insight into the work involved.

New working parties, projects and committees have been set up this year. Among them are an **Interfaith Umbrella Liaison** group, chaired by Herzl hamburger assisted by Gordon Levy as Vice-Chairman. This group is tasked with bringing together those who are involved in some capacity in interfaith activity with a view to sharing experience and coming to a consensus in determining the goals and objectives of the council's and its members' interfaith initiatives.

Indeed, interfaith activity and education have been mandated by the council as prime courses that this council should pursue in an effort to combat antisemitism. This was the finding of our **Workshops on Antisemitism** session held at our March 2011 council meeting where a motion to that effect was passed resoundingly at the culmination of the workshops.

What this means is that despite a certain scepticism in some quarters as to the effectiveness of interfaith work, the whole spectrum of the community's delegates soundly back these initiatives as a positive step and we look to even greater participation and involvement in these activities. To that end, delegates, executive members and hon. officers are active in a wide range of interfaith organisations throughout Greater Manchester, even in areas where few Jewish people actually reside, such as Wigan. We participate in bilateral and multilateral interfaith groups across the religious spectrum and in many different areas of Greater Manchester and Region. These groups include among others : the Altrincham Interfaith Group, the Muslim-Jewish Forum, the Hindu-Jewish Association, the Salford Interfaith Network, the Media City Dialogue Group and Shalom Salam (Bury). It is our role to endeavour to dispel ignorance and in so doing, perhaps we can erode, to some degree, intolerance. In addition, delegates regularly go out to speak about the Jewish community.

Another session in September 2011 was an Open Forum on anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism looking at how these phenomena fed off each other. As a result of this, it was agreed to set up a working party on anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism in conjunction with Rabbi Jonathan Guttentag and this has become a community wide steering group which aims to produce an Israel conference on 27th November. The aim is to galvanise the grass roots, pull in the younger sections of the community and again, educate, motivate and activate the whole community in a Big Tent for Israel Conference open to participation from throughout the UK in order to reassert the centrality of Israel in Judaism and induce the community to fight back against the attempts to delegitimize Israel through pernicious boycott, divestment and sanctions campaigns.

It cannot be overstated how vital is such a move at this juncture in our history. Israel's Re'ut Report last summer highlighted the fact that the UK was the hub of hubs of international attempts to delegitimize Israel. The Conference is our community's response to that report and to say "We believe in Israel". I have never been more concerned that many of our young people today have become nervous of expressing their love of Israel and especially on campus. They have been poisoned and weakened by the incessant drip feed of anti-Israel propaganda fed to them through the British media. They engage in many worthy causes throughout the world, but Israel is not even always on their list. The time is critical if we are not to lose a generation and the propaganda battle being waged against Israel and often, by extension, the Jewish people. We are proud British citizens and proud Jews too – and that includes a pride in Israel. Manchester as a stalwart Jewish, more traditional community with a strong Zionist history as Weizmann's and Balfour's home should be leading the way.

Anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism have been shown to be inextricably linked too owing to the dramatic rise in the number of antisemitic attacks we see whenever there is trouble between the Arabs and Israel . We work closely with the CST and regularly exchange relevant information to ensure the safety of the community. We congratulate and thank the CST for all their work in this field. They work closely with Greater Manchester Police and so do many of our members who sit on the local Police Advisory Groups of the Greater Manchester Police Authority. This year we have initiated a new committee for all those who are involved in these IAGs and which is chaired by Louis Rapaport with Sharon Banister as Vice-Chairman .

Religious Education in schools is a statutory requirement and is another means by which ignorance and intolerance can be prevented. Our **Education Committee** is chaired by the council's immediate past president, Barbara Goldstone, with Jeremy Michelson, education director of the Jewish Museum, its Vice-Chairman. It is comprised of representatives who sit on the 10 Local Authorities' SACREs, i.e. Statutory Advisory Groups for Religious Education in state schools , which determine the RE syllabus for schools under their authority.

Our **Public Relations committee** meets on an ad hoc basis and deals with the written and in-person lobbying of politicians, local, national and international and especially prior to elections. Frank Baigel, a vice-president, is also our Media Analyst and is helped by Harry Lesser who monitors certain publications. More volunteers are needed in this field.

Our biggest lobbying campaign and concern of the past year has been the threat to shechitah posed by EU moves to alter the labelling of meat. If passed, this could have threatened the economic viability of the kosher meat trade. We undertook a concerted lobbying campaign which we promoted both in Manchester and the other regional communities. It was instigated by ShechitaUK under the Board of Deputies and we thank them and its director Shimon Cohen for their work in averting the current threat. The battle has probably been won for the time being but is likely to re-emerge in the form of a new sortie in the guise of the Farm Animal Welfare Bill. The council may yet have to call on the community to continue the lobbying campaign with MEPs.

We are keeping a watching brief too on international moves that may influence and spread to affect Brit Milah here. Indeed, it seems that all our ancient customs which define our identity- Kashrut, Brit Milah and our attachment to the the land of Israel, are under attack so the council is ever vigilant.

Another PR exercise we undertake is paying annual courtesy visits to the mayors of the 10 local authorities of Greater Manchester. They are in office for a year and it is our opportunity to learn from them and their mayoresses or consorts about the workings of their councils and communities and for us to share with them information about the Jewish community and its concerns. Although professing to be non-political, they are rather political animals, but are generally motivated by a love of their local communities and a sense of duty. Through these meetings we build up a coterie of councillors who understand more about the community and can dip into the Year Book or the book on Judaism while trying out the kippah when appropriate which we present to them.

Bearing in mind the economic situation, the council has instigated **JnetManchester**, a business and professional network co-ordinated by our joint Vice-President, Michael Samuels. Sponsored by the Jewish Telegraph and the idea of local businessman Jeremy Ross, it has taken off and meets regularly every month at Maccabi with excellent speakers, refreshments, and importantly, the opportunity to network.

Another highlight of the year was our participation in the Manchester Day Parade in June with a committee led by Jeremy Michelson and participation by the young people of Langdon College.

Our newsletter, **RepPresents**, is ably edited by veteran sub-editor, Roy Shinwell, assisted by Barbara Goldstone, and is disseminated in *shule* newsletters. I must thank them and all the honorary officers for the work that they undertake.

I am also grateful to our Hon Secretaries Sharon Bannister, who is involved in many communal roles with much focused on Bury, and Dr Noemie Lopian, who is involved in interfaith work and Holocaust education. Holocaust Memorial Day was a significant date in late January whereby many local authorities marked the day with ceremonies. Dr Noemie Lopian, David Arnold, Dr Sydney Baigel, Hilary Lewis and Jeremy Michelson participated in some of these ceremonies and the concern is that with local government cuts, transport to these events for schoolchildren may be cut.

The largest attendance of any event organised by the Jewish Representative Council every year is Yom haShoah, which was held this year at King David High School. The council raises the funds in a campaign headed by Tommy Schweiger and co-ordinates the Yom HaShoah Committee and the VIP reception. We invite all the local dignitaries to attend and they mingle with the survivors and their families. The ceremony and presentation this year was entitled “Choices”. Chaired by Tania Nelson, assisted by Sarah Moise and joined by members of Stage 80, the Creative Committee presented a powerful and emotionally charged evocation of the gruelling choices that had to be made in the ghetto under the Nazi jack-boot. We know that you will continue to mark this event with us.

A highlight of the calendar is the Community Sherman Lecture held annually in conjunction with the Centre for Jewish studies at the University of Manchester and this year’s guest lecturer was Professor Martin Goodman of the Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford who spoke on “Toleration in Judaism”. The professor seemed to turn a serious topic into a thoroughly enjoyable, almost light-hearted series.

In October, the Council joined the ZCC and the ZF for the annual Hamburger Memorial Lecture, in memory of Sir Sydney and Lady Hamburger. This year’s lecture filled the Hilton Suite hall as it featured one of Manchester’s sons, Israel’s former ambassador to Britain, Yehudah Avner, known when he lived here as Gubby Haffner. He provided a true *‘chizuk’* for the community as he told anecdotes from his time in Israel since 1947 during which he served five prime ministers.

Before closing, I also wish to record thanks to our Finance Committee members, chaired by our treasurer, Phil Langer, assisted by past treasurer, Linda Jacobs, and Dr Sydney Baigel. In fact, special thanks go to Dr Sydney Baigel whose unstinting efforts, helped for many years by Sonny Fromson, have enabled the publication of this Year Book. Not only does the Year Book provide the community directory that sits on every communal desk but through the community's advertising it brings in a large part of our funding. We look forward to you continued support to continue our necessary work.

In all this and in all the workings of our council our administrators form the backbone. Thank you, Karen and Susan.

Thanks go to all our hon. officers, executive and council without whom the significant work of this council would not be possible. We extend the invitation to participate to all.

Lucille Cohen,

President.

Monthly Council Meetings

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- 9th May AGM David Berkley QC, President Zionist Central Council (in place of Dr Simon Hochhauser)
- 6th June Vivian Wineman, President, Board of Deputies and Stephen Pollard, Editor, Jewish Chronicle
- 4th July David Clayton, Chairman of Governors, Delamere Forest School and Michelle Ciffer, Manager, Hershel Weiss Children and Family Centre
- 5th September Open Forum on Antisemitism and anti-Zionism: David Berkley QC, President, Zionist Central Council; Joy Wolfe JP MBE, ZCC Life President, Zionist Federation Co-President; a CST Spokesman. Sally Bass, Chairman, North West Region, League of Jewish Women
- 10th October Student Focus: Professor Philip Alexander, Centre for Jewish Studies, University of Manchester, Alex Prinsley chairman Manchester Jewish Student; Ruth Arkush, MJS Joint Campaigns Officer; Rabbi Benjy Silverstone, Aish student chaplain
- 7th November Dr Michael Finlay and Mrs Nava Kestenbaum on The Halachic Living Will and End of Life Issues
- 5th December Jeremy Ross, Presentation : Towards a Dynamic, Interactive Communal Website

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- 9th January Danny Stone, Director, All Party Parliamentary Group Against Antisemitism; Mr Eric Ollerenshaw MP (Lancaster and Fleetwood) and Mr Ivan Lewis MP (Bury South)
- 6th February Mr Tom Togher, Chief Officer of the Citizens Advice Bureau, Salford; Sally Bass, Chairman, League of Jewish Women, North-West Region.
- 6th March Antisemitism Workshops. Keynote speech, CST professional. Motion passed promoting education and interfaith activity to combat anti-Semitism. L'Chayim for outgoing and incoming directors of the Centre for Jewish Studies, University of Manchester: Prof Phillip Alexander and Prof Bernard Jackson; Prof Daniel Langton and Prof Alexander Samely
- 6th April Bruce Gill, President elect, National Association of Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education
- 8th May AGM The Lord Mayor of Manchester, Cllr Mark Hackett, on his Recent Trip to Israel
- 5th June Karen Phillips MBE DLL, CEO, Federation of Jewish Services
- 3rd July JRC and JT Communal Awards presented by Paul Harris, Editor, the Jewish Telegraph.
Winners: Volunteer of the Year, Margot Reuben, JNF Wednesday Club; Communal Organisation of the Year, Jewish Soup Kitchen (received by Marga Brodie); Young Volunteer of the Year, Michaela Labaton; Friends of the Community, Tom Griffiths, Revd. Alan Morris, Bill Williams.