

The Board of Deputies of British Jews
1 Torriano Mews
Kentish Town
London NW5 2RZ

1st October 2018

For the attention of Marie van der Zyl, Deputies President

Dear Marie,

In an open letter, dated 16 May 2018, written to the Board by Liberal Judaism community leaders, it points out that - contrary to its own claims - the Board does not speak for the whole of the Jewish community in Britain. The letter referred to the Gaza border incident where innocent Palestinians had been killed and the decision by the USA to move its Embassy to Jerusalem as examples of the Board issuing statements without adequate consultation. It said the Board's credibility depends wholly on its willingness to listen, to hear from and reflect the values of all sections of the community - which it fails to do. Events unfolding at the time of writing, substantiate this.

A vote of no-confidence in the Board's VP Sheila Gewolb is being organised because of comments she made - without due consultation - which were critical of Israel's new Nation State Law. The malcontents say she breached the IHRA definition of antisemitism and should be removed from her post.

Whereas once the Board had some relevance, today its status is considered as 'peripheral' and there are many groups of Jews, both large and small, which the Board does not represent. The Charedim, we are told, are the fastest-growing section of the community. London's vibrant Charedi community is approximately 50,000 – the largest strictly Orthodox community in Europe. They have accused both the Board and the Jewish Leadership Council (JLC) of "chutzpah", because they "only represent a very particular part of Jews who are pro-Israel". A group of Charedi activists will demonstrate outside the Board of Deputies' annual fundraising dinner in November to object to the notion that the Board represents all strictly Orthodox Jews.

There are initiatives afoot to set up a new body of 'Board of Deputies of mainstream British Jews' which Professor Geoffrey Alderman believes is feasible, given the higher birth rates in that community. But, as the well-informed Professor calculates, they need not wait that long. It would be 'perfectly possible' for every Charedi synagogue to demand affiliation to the Board now, and use their voting power to gain immediate control. They could then disqualify all female deputies, he says. Certainly something to think about.

The Board does not represent Jews who are not members of a synagogue, nor those that are but have opted out of paying the voluntary contribution. It does not represent the Jewish grandparents who are denied contact with their grandchildren. (Previous letters to former President Jonathan Arkush on this subject fell on deaf ears.) Typical of the younger generation is Newham councillor Joshua Garfield who was unequivocal when he said "The Board of Deputies, under its current leadership and present political stances, does not

represent me and in no way speaks for me as a British Jew.” And the Board most certainly does not represent Mrs Roslyn Pine!

The question of confronting unfairness and intolerance, be it racism or other forms of prejudice, is the subject of the contribution by Alyth Synagogue’s Rabbi Mark Goldsmith in this weeks Jewish News (27 Sep 2018). He quotes the Leviticus “holiness code” which is “a mandate to every Jew to be a person who stands up and speaks out when they see injustice, whether it affects them directly, or they become aware that it is happening to another person.” The Rabbi claims that “Jews ... aim to confront injustice head on and with respect. We do not admire those who keep silent.” When I reported to you and your husband the racist hate mail letters that had been sent to me by your father Barry Kaye, there was no sympathetic intervention.

Rabbi Goldsmith declares his support for two minor TV celebrities (one a soap actress, the other a presenter) who were ‘attacked’ through social media for expressing their opinions. I wonder whether I would have similar support if he knew about the injustice of the upsetting abusive attacks I received from Mr Kaye.

I shall end with a final quote from the esteemed Rabbi: “It is a constant Jewish duty to do what we can to make the world fairer and more just. We will never achieve that by just staying *shtum*.”

Yours sincerely,

George Rooker,
Historian