

Deputising for You

I should like to thank the community for having given me the honour of serving as one of its deputies for the past triennium. If the Board of Deputies did not exist we would have to invent it. The Board was established in 1760 to deliver a loyal address on behalf of the Community to the newly crowned King George III. We are the only democratically elected communal and represent almost all mainstream strands of Jewish opinion. As such, the Board is the first port of call for Government, media and others seeking to understand the Jewish community's interests and concerns.

As well as being as widely representative as possible the Board endeavours to be effective. We use our resources, contacts and influence to achieve a huge amount in diverse areas. Readers of the weekly Community Briefing will see appreciate the scope of the Board's activities. Over the last couple of months the activities of the Board have featured repeatedly in the national press. The prominent stand against antisemitism within the Labour Party adopted by our last President Jonathan Arkush and by our then Vice President Marie Van der Zyl has been widely applauded both within our community and beyond it.

The board engages with the authorities at all levels and represents our communal interests in matters as diverse as circumcision and 'shechita' and the difficulties faced by observant Jews being forced to wait for the certification of death of a loved one. The recent judicial reversal of the 'cab rank' procedure practiced by the Inner North London coroner was largely achieved thanks to the Board's uncompromising opposition.

Jonathan Arkush was widely regarded as an effective President of the Board and a forceful, if sometimes slightly impetuous, public speaker. He retired last weekend. The election campaign to replace him was not free from controversy and resulted in two of the four candidates for President also running for a Vice Presidential position. I am delighted to say that Marie Van der Zyl, a member of West London Synagogue, was elected by a sizable majority and I have every confidence that, as only the second woman to serve as President of the Board and the first Progressive Jew ever to do so, she will provide a most welcome breath of fresh air in the corridors of communal power.

Your deputies consult with each other and with the Board of Management and the rabbinic team on controversial and important matters. We make a point of attending Plenaries whenever possible and Lana and I have both been fortunate enough to be called to speak on a number of occasions as well as asking written questions. I have been active as a member of the Board of Deputies Social Action Group (BoDSA) a sub-committee that focusses on social and ecological matters, and if re-elected for the coming triennium, I hope to continue my work in that field.

Roger Kutchinsky