

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE DELEGATES OF THE JEWISH
COMMUNITY COUNCIL OF VICTORIA HELD AT BETH WEIZMANN
COMMUNITY CENTRE, 306 HAWTHORN ROAD, SOUTH CAULFIELD,
MONDAY 10 MAY 1999 AT 8.00 PM**

PRESENT : As per Register
APOLOGIES : As per Register
IN THE CHAIR : Mr Robert Redlich

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Plenum and declared the meeting open.

Mr Redlich asked whether there were any matters arising from the Minutes of 23 March 1999.

Mr Michael Dubs, Jewish Community Services Inc, wanted an amendment made on Page 9 "..... that the comments made by Mr A Zeleznikow had been made with the full approval and encouragement of JCS and the prior approval and encouragement of the JCCV Executive." Mr Dubs wanted it noted that the comments that Mr Zeleznikow had made, were made on his own behalf and not necessarily the views of the JCS.

There being no further matters relating to the Minutes, the Chairman asked that the Minutes be MOVED for ADOPTION, SECONDED and CARRIED.

The Chairman advised that the correspondence was of a routine nature and was available for the delegates to peruse.

Mr Redlich stated that at the March Plenum there was election for the position of Arts and Culture Chairman. The only nominee for that position was Mrs Sandra Littmann. As there was no quorum at that meeting, the Executive was unable to confirm her election. Mr Redlich asked for the confirmation of the Plenum that Mrs Sandra Littmann be elected Chairperson of Arts and Culture. This was approved.

Mr Redlich called upon Dr Philip Bliss to deliver his report.

REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT, DR PHILIP BLISS

Dr Bliss began his report by expressing condolences to Dr Geulah Solomon OAM and Mr Keith Solomon on the tragic passing of their son in Israel. Dr Bliss expressed condolences to the Leonard and Fookes families on the tragic passing of Rodney Fookes and to the Mandie and Danos families on the passing of Mrs Minnie Mandie.

The President reported that the last six weeks had been incredibly busy not only with so many events and functions to attend but with the increasing

tension of the Aleph Melbourne debate. It had been a very active six weeks for the JCCV. JCCV Noar began the last holiday with a disco at Silver's for 13 to 17 year olds. This was an alcohol and drug free environment which was secured by the JCCV Security Group; over 550 young people attended; JCCV Noar will repeat the discos at least on every holiday period.

The commemoration of Yom Hashoa was held on Monday 12 April 1999 at the Robert Blackwood Hall at Monash University, Clayton at 8.00 pm. and was one of the most moving and relevant evenings that we had had for a number of years attended by well over 1500 people. Dr Bliss said that all those concerned should be very proud, especially those involved in the youth content.

On Sunday 18 April 1999 Dr Bliss attended the Katzetler Farband and Partisan service at the Carlton cemetery. That evening Dr Bliss participated at the Re-enactment of the Great Debate concerning the creation of Mount Scopus Memorial College. Again a very successful evening, very well attended and very well received.

The President reported that under the auspices of the JCCV, the Jewish Day School Counsellors met in April to discuss issues such as street parties, the drug programmes in schools and the emergency programmes.

The JCCV also ran a fundraising workshop with presentations by Mr Anton Block, Lisa Comben from Dunhill Madden and Butler and Mr David Zerman. The JCCV is very grateful for all their input and the effort of this well-attended session which dealt with the changes in Fundraising and Appeals Act 1998 for organisations involved in fundraising.

The JCCV will be running a similar workshop on "GST Implications for Non-Profit Organisations" and this will be on 6 July 1999 and run by Guests Accounting.

There will be a Drug Symposium on 6 June 1999 and Presentation Skills Workshop on 27 May 1999. For details of all of these, please contact the JCCV office.

The Community Development Committee had been meeting, again very successfully, under the Chairmanship of Mrs Vicki Gordon.

The Jewish Professionals Council has held three Jewish Values sessions with fifteen to twenty people attending on average, covering a range of topics, and again contact the JCCV office for future events.

The President attended the VAJEX Remembrance Service at Mount Scopus. He commented that it was a little sad to see so few attending. He suggested that it may not have been well publicised. An excellent address was delivered by The Hon. Mr Walter Jona AM.

Last week the State Zionist Council of Victoria, Executive Council of Australian Jewry, Zionist Federation of Australia and Jewish Community Council of Victoria co-hosted the 51st Yom Ha'atzmaut Cocktail reception at the Windsor Hotel. Over 500 people attended this very pleasant evening with presentations being made to the Premier, Mr Jeff Kennett and the new leader of the Opposition, Mr Steve Bracks. Dr Bliss congratulated all those involved in the planning.

The JCCV will be co-hosting a public function with the Jewish National Fund of Victoria (JNF) and State Zionist Council of Victoria on 27 June 1999 for Mr Leket from the JNF.

Over the last two Mondays Dr Bliss has attended with some of the Executive special evenings run by the Victorian Multicultural Commission. One was on the new government initiatives on drugs and the other on the media. On both evenings it became very obvious that for most communities in Victoria, little of the information and connections had filtered through, and both sessions became one of complaint rather than a PR exercise for the Commission. Some very useful contacts within the Commission have been made and the Jewish community could assist many of the other communities in setting up structures that would help them to develop. It is hoped that over the next few months inter-community contact could be established to help many of these other groups.

The JCCV Appeal will be held at the end of May.

Please note that the Johannesburg Male Choir will be performing for one night only at the Melbourne Concert Hall on Tuesday 8 June. Tickets are available through the JCCV office.

The Chairman asked whether there were any matters relating to the President's Report.

Mr Pinchus Ringelblum, Jewish Secular Humanistic Society commented on the Memorial Service conducted by the Katzetler Farband held at the Carlton cemetery on Sunday 18 April. Hundreds of people attended. He added it was gratifying to see so many young people attending. There were two to three hundred young people from Jewish schools and organisations and there were also two non-Jewish schools, with an interest in studying the Holocaust. The Katzetler Farband has taken it upon itself to stimulate interest among non-Jewish schools to get involved in this study as well as participating in the Commemoration.

Mr Romy Leibler, Council of Orthodox Synagogues of Victoria referring to a recent article in the Australian Jewish News, commented that were a journalist or a member of Parliament to describe Judaism as racist, the community would expect that the officer for anti-Defamation, the President of the JCCV together with the community at large to lodge a protest in the

strongest terms possible. The community would demand that such comments be retracted. Mr Leibler added that the community was able to cope with comments and attacks that were laid from external sources but when made within the community the concerns were far deeper.

Mr Leibler quoted from Page 29 of the Australian Jewish News :**"the President, Dr Bliss stated the following : If we deny this application, namely the application for the affiliation of Aleph then we give in to the bigots and homophobics in our community"**.

Mr Leibler asked that the President clarify his remarks. Either the comments were wrongly attributed to him in the Jewish News, he was misquoted or Dr Bliss made those comments and was prepared to issue a public statement in the Jewish News regarding a retraction and an apology.

Dr Bliss answered by saying that he would be addressing that very issue and a number of others when the Aleph Melbourne debate got under way.

Mr Erwin Lamm, SZC welcomed the Chairman back. Mr Lamm felt that had Mr Redlich been at the last meeting, the Plenum would not be in the position it was now in. Mr Lamm was addressing the position that the President of the JCCV should take. He expressed the view that a person who took the position of President of an organisation should do so in an unbiased and neutral way and set aside the ideologies of the organisation which they represented.

Mr Lamm felt that the President of the JCCV did not speak as a President should and added that if Dr Bliss wanted to remain the President of the JCCV he would have to radically change. He referred to remarks that Dr Bliss had made in the Australian Jewish News on 30 April 1999 about Maccabi playing football on a Saturday. Mr Lamm endorsed that he wanted the President censured and called for an unqualified apology. Mr Lamm added that he would not allow Dr Bliss to call him a bigot or homophobic. He felt that it was completely out of order and stated that if Dr Bliss wanted to remain as President of the JCCV then he needed to apologize.

Mr Redlich asked for decorum to be observed in the light of the sensitivity of the discussion.

Dr Bliss replied to Mr Lamm that over the past six weeks he had received abuse from both the Orthodox and non-Orthodox. His comments were not directed at any one group and at this stage he had no apology.

Mr Redlich asked whether there were any other matters arising from the President's Report.

Mr Lamm said that he wanted to correct the impression that he made abusive or insulting remarks to Dr Bliss. He added that the remark on Page 29 says : "if the motion is not carried". It clearly implied that if the motion was

defeated, those who voted against it were bigots and homophobic. Mr Lamm felt that this was not language that a President or even an individual used. Mr Lamm felt an apology was in order.

Mr Redlich accepted Mr Lamm's assurance that his remark was not intended to be offensive.

Mr Landsberger, Elwood Talmud Torah suggested that in view of the hour the Agenda be moved forward to the Special Resolution.

Dr Goldfeld asked whether the JCCV had any information or would comment on the editorship of the Australian Jewish News following the resignation of David Bernstein.

Mr Redlich stated that the issue would be dealt with after the Special Resolution if time permitted.

There being no further matters relating to the President's Report, the Chairman asked that the Report be MOVED for ADOPTION, SECONDED and CARRIED.

Mr Redlich advised Mr Philip Sheezel, Vice-President Victoria Maccabi would not be reporting on the Community Centre. The Chairman advised that both the Treasurer's Report and the presentation on mediation had been deferred to the next meeting.

Mr Redlich asked speakers to speak briefly to the point and observe requirements in relation to decorum.

Mr Redlich clarified the status of the category of classification under which Aleph Melbourne was seeking admission to the Jewish Community Council of Victoria. He explained that the motion called for Aleph Melbourne to be accepted as an affiliate of the JCCV. At the present time there was no category of membership known as affiliates. Mr Redlich explained that according to the motion that was passed in October 1995, associates are entitled to one delegate and no voting rights and they pay a nominal affiliation fee. There is no provision in the Constitution for any of these categories because the Plenum in its Resolution passed a motion that Constitutional amendments be prepared to reflect these categories of memberships and those Constitutional amendments have never come before the Plenum. At present there are a number of associate members which have been participating at Plenum meetings for some years but without the formality of the Constitution reflecting their status. It needs to be recognised by everyone for the purpose of debate that we are talking about the admission of Aleph Melbourne to a category that is the lowest category known as associate membership.

The Constitution has not been formalized to reflect that category. The Executive assumes that for the purpose of this discussion that the Plenum will proceed on the basis that the motion as to whether or not Aleph Melbourne should be admitted will be debated and in the event that it is voted upon, that it will be voted on in a way in which we vote for any Constitutional amendment, as we have voted for all the other associates who are presently participating in Plenum meetings. If the requisite two thirds, a majority of those present and voting is in favour of the admission of Aleph Melbourne then in due course Aleph together with the other associate members will be ratified when we bring the formal Constitutional amendments before the Plenum.

Mr Redlich advised that the debate would proceed. He again asked for co-operation.

Mr Redlich called upon Dr Philip Bliss to move the motion.

DR BLISS' MOTION

Last Tuesday at the celebrations at the Windsor Hotel I met a senior civil servant who happens to be from overseas and Jewish. He has taken a great interest in our debate. Although he is married with children he happens to have a brother and a sister who are both gay. When he told his mother two years ago that he had become an Australian citizen, she responded, "John, I don't mind telling my friends and mishpochah that your brother and sister are gay but I refuse to tell them that you are Australian".

We all have our own hang-ups and built-in prejudices. Its only natural and over the last six heavy weeks I have been surprised at where the support and the opposition has come from to accept Aleph Melbourne into the JCCV. Believe me when I say that my phone has not stopped ringing from the time of the last Plenum meeting. My overwhelming impression is that this is far more a generational attitude than it is a religious one. In fact I have had as much abuse directed at me from the non-Orthodox as I have from those who quoted Leviticus 18.22 ad nauseum. My impressions are that of nearly everyone I have spoken to, on the whole most people under 35 really do not understand why on earth we should even have a debate to accept Aleph Melbourne into the JCCV. By far the greatest resistance is from older men in our community and unfortunately most of our affiliates seem to be run in the main by old men in our community.

Why do I as President of the JCCV propose the motion to accept Aleph Melbourne as a member of the JCCV? The answer is both simple and yet very complex. Let me deal with the simple. When the application first appeared before the Executive we had discussions on the merits of the case and whether the application fulfilled the three requirements as laid down by the Constitution of the JCCV. It did then and it does now and at that particular Executive meeting the application was approved for presentation to the Plenum. It was again approved at our last Executive meeting although only

with a majority view. The Executive is fully aware and understands the genuine concern by some Orthodox Jews for the approval of the Aleph application. I decided to propose the motion for the very simple reason that I believe that Aleph's application should be accepted by this Plenum for the following reasons and I speak personally.

When I came into office six months ago one of my goals was to reach out to unaffiliated Jews and to try and make those who for whatever reason are on the fringe of our community feel welcome and to hope that they would participate freely. It would therefore be totally hypocritical of me and my Executive to deny membership to a group just because they happen to be controversial. The JCCV is not a religious body. In fact our Constitution forbids us to discuss matters of Halacha. Therefore the issue of homosexuality and the Torah is not one for my Executive nor for this Plenum to give opinions.

Were we to enter the minefield of Halacha, then you know as well as I that most of the affiliates in this Plenum would not be eligible to join. For over sixty years the Progressive movement has been part of the roof body and they can do some amazing things to Halacha. The Secular group does not believe in G-d and I am not even going to mention sport and Shabbat. The point is not to denigrate any of our affiliates of course not. The point is that we are all Jews, we come in all sorts of packages and no one is better than anyone else. We must and can only give our views on the suitability of Aleph's application on the three requirements for affiliation as written into our Constitution and they are as follows :

- (1) whether the organisation is Victorian
- (2) whether the members of Aleph are Jewish and
- (3) whether the aims of Aleph have a Jewish content

In considering these three requirements it is important and only fair that this application is treated like any other application. The answer to the first two requirements are an obvious yes. I and the majority of my Executive are satisfied that the third requirement has been met for the following reasons. It is Aleph's stated aim to organise Jewish events with their members to attend Shabbaton, communal Sederim and celebrations of other Jewish festivals.

It would be enough just to have a meeting place for Jews to socialise to comply with our Constitution. What message is this Plenum giving to our younger members if we would deny Aleph's application? If we deny this application then we give in to the bigots and homophobics in our community. This application is being dressed up as a matter of Halacha and it is not.

While the Executive is very aware of some religious views on homosexuality, the application is not one for promoting homosexuality but for an organisation that is offering both Jewish content and counselling for Jewish men who are gay. It is for gay Jews who feel they are being ostracized by the community and if we deny them membership then they are dead right. If we say "no" to Aleph then we say "no" to many other Jews in our community; their families and friends who love and support them and Jews in our community who hold

the ideal of inclusiveness and tolerance. We will say "no" to most of the community under 35.

We condemn the JCCV for being a remote irrelevant organisation. How ironic it is that in Israel, gay partners are accepted for army and superannuation benefits. In fact the Israel government is far more advanced than nearly all other governments in accepting gay relationships. In Great Britain for over six years now, both Central Council Offices and the British Board of Deputies have gay and lesbian groups affiliated with them. And guess what? The sky didn't fall in and it is a total non-event.

The JCCV must be seen to be inclusive. We are an intelligent, well-educated community. If we as Jews deny membership to Jewish gays then we will be seen as narrow-minded, insular people and not representative of the whole community. We will have failed in our role as an umbrella body for Victoria's Jewish community.

When we accept the application of any organisation it is not because we support their cause, whether political, religious or social. We have accepted applications in the past because they were Jewish and they were an organisation of like minds. This is no different to Aleph. You may or may not agree with their reason for coming together but Aleph's reason for joining the JCCV are as valid as any other group who now enjoy affiliation with us. We cannot as a roof body be intimidated by threats of walk-outs or withdrawal of funds otherwise we will be prisoners of any group who wishes to flex their muscles real or imagined.

We can only consider Aleph's application on exactly the same basis as every other organisation already affiliated. We cannot and must not change the rules.

As President of the JCCV I fully endorse the motion to accept the application from Aleph and I do so, so that this community will be seen to be fair, open-minded and welcoming. Thank you.

Mr Redlich called on Mr Tony Levy to second the motion.

MR TONY LEVY'S SECONDING OF THE MOTION

Mr Chairman, it is appropriate that I should second the motion tonight because tonight the issue is about tolerance.

I am, as you know, the Chairman of the Anti-Defamation Committee of this Council and Anti-Defamation is concerned with tolerance. It is tolerance that we are talking about tonight.

Tolerance is an essential Jewish value. How could it be otherwise? We who have been the subject of intolerance down through the ages, how can we be intolerant of others? Especially how can we be intolerant of someone within

our own community? We require tolerance, we are entitled to tolerance, we require the right to be able to worship in our own way. We require the right to dress differently, to wear kipot, to wear whatever we choose to wear, whatever we want to wear as Jews. We require the right to be able to speak whatever language we wish to. Then how can we deny the rights, how can we deny that tolerance to others in the community?

Mr Chairman, gays too have been persecuted. In this century I can only remind you that the Nazis persecuted gays, that they were made to wear a distinctive badge, that they were put in concentration camps and that they were killed. Only in recent weeks we have seen the successes of the Nazis. The Neo-Nazis don't hesitate to target gays as well as ourselves and other ethnic groups. Virulent Anti-Semites are almost invariably also virulently anti-gay. We cannot be seen on this issue to side with our own worst enemy.

Mr Landsberger has asked in what capacity I am speaking. I am seconding this motion. I am not doing so as a representative of B'nai B'rith because I am not a representative of B'nai B'rith, but I can say to you that B'nai B'rith has always done the right and proper thing in allowing its delegates to have a conscience vote because this is a matter of conscience. I ask you all to consult your consciences when you vote and to vote according to your conscience, free of prejudice and free of any pressure. I strongly urge you to vote in favour of Aleph being admitted.

Mr Redlich then called for speakers both for and against the motion. He called on Rabbi R Lubofsky AM to speak against the motion.

RABBI LUBOFSKY'S ADDRESS

I thank you Mr Chairman for the opportunity of speaking. I have but a short time at my disposal and of necessity must speak in headlines. I believe that at no time in my career as a rabbi have I had to deliver a speech of such gravitas. This may well be a turning point in the life of our community.

Like speakers before me I reject outright the cheap jibes of the President of this Council, Mr Philip Bliss that I and those who think like me are bigots and homophobes. He will no doubt splutter some vacuous attempt to deny or mitigate this vile diatribe but I think we know where he stands. He thinks that because he is Progressive with a big "P" or a small "p" all who disagree with him are either tribal or neanderthal.

You should know that I do not stand here alone but on my side I have Isaiah and Jeremiah and Amos and Hoseah as well as our most contemporary thinkers.

The Aleph group is part of the gay movement and I emphasize the word "movement". Consisting of homosexuals and lesbians they have achieved much for themselves. They have become a powerful force in politics, the economy and the so-called "new morality". They represent the cutting edge

of the permissive society. It is an organisation with a philosophy, an ideology framed within a sophisticated agenda for which this evening they seek your approbation.

In society at large they have been granted equality and parity and now they approach the Jewish Community Council of Victoria to admit them as a constituent. Be aware or be forewarned that there is an agenda for the future that has not yet been revealed to you and to which, if they are voted in, you will become accessories. In due course when they will implement these objectives you will become accessories after the fact. More of this soon.

This is supposed to be a Jewish Council not a Council of Jews. You will have difficulty in defining "Jewish" and there will be many divergent attitudes.

Few will disagree with the proposition that we have a Jewish civilization. Hitler already referred to it and tried to wipe it out. It has its principles and concepts that made of the Jewish people a civilizational dynamic. Its moral and ethical codes have served us well. We have survived where others have succumbed and disappeared because we were willing to make sacrifices for it and if needs be, to give up our life for it, to stand up and to be counted and if needs be stand out as mavericks in the world and in the society in which we live. Its written systems of laws governing marriage, the laws of affinity, consanguinity, etc. all of these referred to in a rather disparaging tone in Leviticus 19 is the cornerstone of Western civilization.

There is however, despite this an abstract infrastructure that is as vital to this system as breathing is to a human being, a natural law, a law of nature that axiomatically guarantees its continuity. The biological world "eos" meaning life, the animal world, the vegetable world is divided into male and female. Each has a highly technical complex in-built system whereby to reproduce the species. This is the norm, normalcy. If it cannot reproduce, even if those constraining elements are biologically pre-determined, it is deemed abnormal, maverick, non-conformist or whatever adjective you feel appropriate but the whole edifice of Jewish life is fundamentally predicated on man and his wife, parents and child, grandparents and grandchildren. Without this premise there is no people and there is no Judaism.

It is much more than the precept to be fruitful and multiply. It declares "breathe" so that you can live. There is no way in any shape or form that this undisputed Judaic constitution can recognise or grant parity to a way of life that would deny this fundamental and which has the unadulterated chutzpah, in my opinion, to demand parity. The totality of Jewish civilization from its beginning until now has outlawed the man to man sex act. I do not use the word "homosexual" in this context because undoubtedly it will be brought to your attention that being a homosexual is much more than simple intercourse and I agree with that contention but sexuality and sex are its *raison d'être* and Judaism outlaws this. Some Jewish gay men have Jewish or non-Jewish partners, the majority are single and many of these are promiscuous.

Any individual member and I repeat this, and listen to me carefully because I will have no other opportunity, I have been retired and I have recycled or exhumed myself in order to be present this evening. Any individual member of the Aleph society can join any of the organisations represented here and become its President. He or she may be a delegate to this forum and even become President of the JCCV. Indeed there was a Jewish community in Australia that was so led but this is not what they seek. What they are saying is this : "The world outside has changed its moral posture. They accept us. Indeed we are courted and cosseted by politicians and leaders of commerce. You the JCCV do the same. Stop being so bigoted and insular and join the world, or to use the expression of the two previous speakers, the proposer and the seconder of the motion, be fair and be tolerant. Out there "vox populi vox deum – the voice of the people is the voice of G-d". Let man and society not sacred writ or ancient traditions decide the moral priorities of Judaism. Change them. He who separates the sacred from the profane and Israel from the nation, let their permissive morality be yours. Some of you are of the opinion that Aleph is no different from any other group that might want to join the JCCV and this has again been mentioned, in my opinion superficially and naively by the two previous speakers. It is not so. However divergent and distinctive such groups might be, they cannot compare with a gay movement which seeks to remove the foundations, the underpinning of the Jewish way of life. It takes away the basis of Jewish civilization.

Be assured that sooner than you think they will be participating in the sex education at Jewish schools. This is their programme. They will have every right to do this as you will have granted them parity. Isn't it just as well that Mount Scopus College is no longer the community school under your control? Statisticians have informed the gay movement that 3-10% of the population have some homosexual proclivity. This means on average three thousand potential candidates out of our community of fifty thousand. We are not just waiting and our schools are an important area of propaganda. I am not being alarmist. I say this with authority and I am not going to quote my source, as I feel it was given to me confidentially.

When they will have a special float for the Gay Parade, I personally find the Sydney event an obscene display of moral depravity, the more progressive amongst you, to show what humanitarians you really are, will be standing there and waving to the crowd. Above a flag will fly bearing the message with the good wishes of the Jewish Community Council of Victoria. Alongside on the pavement will be a small group of Jews with sad not gay faces, also waving a flag which says : "where ignorance is bliss, it is folly to be wise".

Gays and lesbians have the world to support their cause. They have each other for friendship and partnership, their families for support and companionship and many amongst the community will recognise their special needs and lend a hand. They have absolutely no need for the imprimatur of this Jewish community. I regret to say this but I detect in their mindset a

steely aggression and not a little arrogance which is willing to countenance the collapse of this Council, and collapse it will, as but a small price to be paid for the determined march to gain equality. Do not allow them to impose their sexual morals on this community and to grant them this parity. They have no alternative. Indeed there is none. What they live is another lifestyle. Not an alternative lifestyle. Don't tamper with the Ten Commandments.

Dr Bliss, I ask you to forget about Vayikrah 19 but I ask you to look at the Ten Commandments. We usually mistranslate number seven as "do not commit adultery". In fact this means any aberrant sex, adultery, incest, sodomy, bestiality, the whole lot is included in this prohibition – Commandment number seven of the Ten Commandments. This JCCV has no right to meddle with the fundamentals of Judaism. I urge you all to recognise, to stretch out the hand, to assist the individual gay and lesbian, but vehemently to reject the admission of its organisation, and particularly its ideology into this Council.

Mr Redlich called upon Mr Benno Henenberg, B'nai B'rith to speak against the motion.

Mr Benno Henenberg, B'nai B'rith stated he was speaking in a personal capacity. In his experience there was no controversy where one party was 100% right and the other 100% wrong. A compromise was always the best solution.

Mr Henenberg addressed the members of the Aleph Melbourne group. He felt that they had come a long way and after long years of enduring contempt, derision and persecution they had arrived at the point where homosexuality was not an issue anymore. At least not here in Australia and also the Western world. What used to be a criminal offence not very long ago was now accepted as an alternative way of life. They were free to form an association and had done so and had formed Aleph Melbourne to help and support Jewish homosexuals. Mr Henenberg felt that this change in attitude was great but he did not have the same feelings in regard to the groups application to join the JCCV. Mr Henenberg stated that Aleph must have known that their application would create great turmoil and upset the community.

Mr Henenberg asked Aleph to withdraw their application at this present time to prevent a split in the community. He felt that in a year or two Aleph could apply again; their application may find more support. He stated that if this compromise was rejected, he would move an amendment to the original motion, apart from the options to reject or accept the affiliation or association of Aleph Melbourne, to put a third option to defer the application on the ballot paper. Whatever the outcome he fervently hoped that the unity of the Melbourne Jewish community would be preserved.

Mr Redlich called on Mr Michael Barnett from Aleph Melbourne to speak for the motion.

Michael Barnett introduced himself as President of Aleph Melbourne.

Michael Barnett presented two messages, one from Aleph Melbourne that appeared in the Australian Jewish News on 7 May 1999 as well as a Press Release issued by the Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth, Chief Rabbi Professor Jonathan Sacks.

The message from Aleph Melbourne read : "Aleph Melbourne is an organisation whose objectives are to provide guidance, support and companionship for gay and bisexual Jewish men through social activities, anonymous telephone support and personal contact. The organisation was founded in January 1995 and currently has in excess of 50 members.

Aleph Melbourne is an organisation with admirable ideals. It provides assistance to individuals struggling with their identity and self, strengthens their Yiddishkeit and gives them a sense of belonging. It also welcomes these individuals unquestioningly and brings them back into the Jewish community. Any organisation achieving even some of these ideals is to be admired and applauded.

In January this year Aleph Melbourne sought to affiliate with the Jewish Community Council of Victoria (JCCV). We did this because we believe that our affiliation with the JCCV will foster the council's stated aims and objectives. It will do this by bringing people who may otherwise feel alienated from the community into an accepting and non-judgemental environment. In this sense, Aleph's four year existence has proven to be amongst other things, an outreach organisation for individuals in Melbourne who identify themselves as both Jewish and gay.

Many Jews choose to eat non-kosher food or to drive on Shabbat. However nobody chooses to be gay, or lesbian or an encapsulating word "homosexual" just as nobody chooses to be left-handed. Fortunately for left-handed people they are no longer discriminated against. Homosexuality is not a lifestyle choice, this being a common misconception, but an innate part of an individual's character.

Jewish homosexual men need Aleph Melbourne as there is no other place for us within the Jewish community that is specifically sensitive to our needs. Needs created by an insensitive environment. So the question is : Why should certain delegate members of the JCCV wish to exclude Aleph Melbourne from affiliation? Given that our members are Jewish and the group promotes the Jewish ideals of tolerance and inclusion, our application fulfils the JCCV's own criteria for affiliation.

Failure to include Aleph Melbourne in the JCCV would be a win for fear, intolerance and prejudice."

Mr Barnett then read from a Press Release issued by the Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth, Chief Rabbi Professor Jonathan Sacks in reaction to the London bombings : Further to comments made last Saturday at St Johns Wood Synagogue expressing shock and sadness at the Soho bombings, Chief Rabbi Professor Jonathan Sacks said : "Once again human beings are being murdered because of who and what they are. These bombings are not just attacks on specific communities. They are attacks on our humanity and diversities. They remind us of the hatred that still survives towards minorities. As I said to the British Sikh community in the wake of the Brick Lane bombing : We as Jews know what it is to be afraid of attacks just because we are Jews, just because we are different. As we pray for the victims of these three outrages, we stand with the people of Brixton, Brick Lane and Soho ready to fight for all people to live without fear, knowing that a society that cannot live with difference cannot live at all."

Mr Barnett stated that it struck him as an interesting observation that the majority of the people objecting to their application did not really know what they were objecting to. They had not met homosexual persons or knew much about homosexual lifestyle or had not ever experienced what homosexuality can bring to people. We are not asking you to accept this as your preferred lifestyle, but this is our way of life.

He asked how can a person object to something they knew nothing about? People base their knowledge about homosexuality from what is presented in the media. Mr Barnett stated that the media is not necessarily accurate and therefore asked why a person would wish to base their judgements on an inaccurate source of information. Given that, he asked that those present should not base their vote on what other people had presented but to vote on their conscience and not be influenced by other organisations.

Mr Redlich called upon Mr Orenstein, South Caulfield Hebrew Congregation to speak.

Mr Earl Orenstein stated that he was a delegate from South Caulfield Hebrew Congregation and did not want to speak for or against the motion.

He found it distressing that people were getting personal in their remarks and he called for this to stop. Mr Orenstein stressed that this was not an issue that required anyone to make personal comments or to insult members of the community no matter how people felt or how they were going to vote. He believed that most of those present had been given ample time to be instructed by their constituent bodies on how to vote. He expressed surprise that the B'nai B'rith delegates had been allowed to vote a conscience vote. Mr Orenstein asked that the vote be taken as he was sure that everyone had already decided on how they were going to vote.

Mr Redlich called on Mr Symons, Mizrahi to speak against the motion.

Mr Symons stated that his objective was to foster unity in the Jewish community. He believed that all organisations should allow and encourage homosexuals to be admitted to organisations as individual members and believed they already do so. Such a vote would not be against the individual, it would be against the organisation being admitted to the JCCV.

Mr Redlich called on Mr Peter Kolliner, VUPJ to speak for the motion.

Mr Kolliner, Chairman of the Victorian Union for Progressive Judaism explained that at the Plenum on the 23 March he chose to abstain from voting. He did so because he was not convinced that sexual preference alone was a valid reason for a group of people to associate themselves into an organisation. Not being convinced regarding their *raison d'être* he could hardly vote for their admittance.

Mr Kolliner stated that the debate which was raging within the community together with the debate at the Plenum had clearly shown how wrong he was. The prejudice their application had evoked shows just how right they are to form themselves into a self-help group and this prejudice is the most eloquent form of persuasion as to why they must be admitted into this Council.

The plethora of letters and articles in the Jewish News, the time devoted by learned Rabbis preaching either for but usually almost exclusively against Aleph's admission are tangible and visible almost tactile demonstrations of a degree of homophobia he did not believe possible in this community.

Mr Kolliner stated further that we are Jewish, we are a community and this is our Council. This Council is the roof body of Jewish organisations and Aleph is a Jewish organisation, it is as simple as that.

Amongst our members are those who do not observe all the strictures of the Halacha. There are those who do not believe in the existence of G-d, we have members who by definition are only here as women and we have members whose claim to membership is that they are sports people. Up until now we have managed to co-exist happily, huddling under the cover of this umbrella organisation and never has our Constitution been so closely examined with regard to how it can be used to exclude any specific group.

Mr Kolliner heard a rumour that if the vote was to succeed, then a group of our members would collectively withdraw from the JCCV. If this is true, then we have democracy by coercion. In effect we are being told we will abide with the vote provided the vote is the way we want it to be. The VUPJ is desperate for philosophical reasons for the vote to be one which affirms Aleph's membership. However, if this does not happen and Aleph were to be denied membership, we would not withdraw. We would continue to work hard towards the betterment of the wider Jewish community in Victoria as well as of course our own.

Mr Kolliner explained that present at the Plenum were three groups of people – those who no matter what he said would vote “no” as they are incapable of being persuaded, there are those to whom my words have no relevance as they have already decided to vote “yes” and there may be those whose mind is still open and who are capable of being persuaded. The vote is by secret ballot, nothing will happen to any of us whether we vote “yes” or “no”. He urged delegates to vote with their hearts and their mind.

Mr Kolliner stated that as Jews we know all about being excluded from a community. We have often chosen to form self-help groups because of our being excluded and how ironic it would be if we Jews chose to exclude from our number another group of Jews purely because of our prejudices. Let us admit Aleph.

Mr Redlich called upon Mr Romy Leibler, Council of Orthodox Synagogues of Victoria to speak against the motion.

Mr Leibler stated the point of view of the Orthodox is that every Jew is to be welcomed and encouraged to attend, to become a member and participate in Jewish life through the synagogues, the almost thirty Orthodox congregations of which half are members of this Plenum. No Jew will be discriminated, barred or prevented from attending, being a member or participating in a synagogue by virtue of his or her level of observance or non-observance or by virtue of his or her individual sexual preferences. This applies equally to Jews who drive to the synagogue on Shabbat, eat non-kosher food or conduct a sexual relationship with the same gender, all of which are prohibited by Jewish law.

As a member of this Plenum, were a Jew to be discriminated against in any forum whether it be his eligibility to become a member of the synagogue, attend a Jewish Day school or enter Montefiore Homes because of his sexual preferences, we would support the JCCV and the Executive wholeheartedly for defending his rights. Similarly we would expect the JCCV to intervene on his or her behalf if a member of the Jewish community were prevented from joining any society whether it be the Melbourne Cricket Club or Atheneum Club because he is gay, Jewish or both.

In other words we the Orthodox are neither prejudiced, homophobic nor discriminating. However, tonight we are not debating the rights of individuals to be a part of our community. We are being asked to accept the affiliation of a group whose entire platform, or as Rabbi Lubofsky said, their entire *raison d'être* is based on homosexuality which is contrary to Jewish values.

At the last Plenum, Mr Erwin Lamm was being kind in opposing the Aleph Society to affiliate with the JCCV; he used the analogy of a group of wine tasters requesting affiliation based on their identity as Jews. Mr Leibler stated that he would go one step further. Would you allow a Jewish Society of Adulterers to join the JCCV? Would you allow Jews for Jesus to join the JCCV?

What would the State Zionist Council say if Albert Langer turned up and said he wants to register Jews against Zionism? The things I have just mentioned may be comical but they have one thing in common, they are contrary to what we, the JCCV stand for. If you recall the aims that Phil Symons referred to in the Constitution, mainly Jewish continuity and Jewish values, these are the things that we have to support and homosexuality and the Aleph Society's raison d'être has nothing to do with that whatsoever.

Mr Leibler believed that it was important for us to be positive. It is true that this motion is extremely divisive and does have the capacity and potential to divide this community and indeed this Council and therefore I plead on behalf of everybody present to vote for unity, vote for Shalom Bayit and understand that there are a large proportion of people in this room who are unable under all accounts to accept this motion. For the sake of Achdut in this community, Mr Leibler asked the delegates to seriously consider the future of this organisation, an organisation which is very close to his family. My late grandfather of blessed memory was the President some fifty years ago and my father was also the President of the Board for several years and I know that my father also shared these views in relation to the Aleph Society and it would indeed be a great travesty for this community, for this Council were it to collapse in the event of this motion being accepted.

Mr Redlich called on Ms Gabi Crafti, State Zionist Council to speak for the motion.

Ms Crafti expressed the view that no woman had spoken during the proceedings. She believed it was important that someone under the age of 25 speak. This was to let people in this community including members of Aleph know what some people my age are thinking on this matter.

Ms Crafti stated that there had been a lot of talk about Constitutions, definitions and semantics. She voiced the fact that she did not understand everything and that she thought many people her age did not really care what is written in the JCCV Constitution. What is important in this matter is a turning point for this Jewish community.

Ms Crafti asked what would the consequences be tonight if we as a Plenum were to turn around to a group of people who are Jewish and say : "You are not welcome in this community" because that is the paradigm that we are looking at. Ms Crafti stated that she was quite surprised and perhaps it was her naivete that this debate had been dressed up as an issue of religion because her understanding of what this community was about, was that religion is a very important aspect of how we relate to each other but religion is not for everyone the 'be all and end all' of what it means to be Jewish.

Ms Crafti was speaking not as someone who perhaps does not go to shule every Saturday but who knows from speaking with her friends who do wear kipot, who do call themselves Orthodox, that this is not entirely an issue of

Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy is a part of this community, a very strong part. Halacha is a very important part of this community.

Ms Crafti reported that she had spoken to Michael Barnett and asked him whether he was looking for Halachic authorisation for what he did?. In reply Mr Barnett said that he and his organisation were looking to become part of this community. If we say "no", we are saying that "you can't be part of us, you are on the outer". That is what it comes down to. It doesn't come down to whether it is Halachically correct or not, because maybe it's not. Its quite possible that it is not. Ms Crafti acknowledged that she was not as intelligent or as wise and experienced as some people present at the Plenum but she thought that people her age had a valid point in this community and were entitled to voice their opinions. She stated that she was given that opportunity on the State Zionist Council.

Ms Crafti thought the argument was an interesting one that if you are gay you can join a shule, you can go to a rabbi, you can play sport with Maccabi. Ms Crafti felt that if she were gay she would not feel comfortable going to some of the rabbis in this community. With all due respect she thought that when you are part of a minority you sometimes need to band together; this has been said over and over again and we know this better than anyone. This is not just the issue of sexuality versus religion. This is an issue of identity; people struggling with identity wanting to stay Jewish.

Ms Crafti stated in her last point that she could name many people who would rather run straight out the door of this community, who have no other issues other than it's just tough being Jewish. Here we have a group of people who against all odds, with many problems to face in this world saying : "In spite of all our problems, Judaism and our Jewish identity is just as, if not more important than everything else". Ms Crafti stated that this is what it comes down to, it's not Constitutions, it's not only Halacha; there is a lot more to it than that. It is an issue of community. Who are we to say "you are not to be part of this community" as opposed to this religion.

Mr Redlich called on Mr Erwin Lamm, State Zionist Council to speak against the motion.

Mr Lamm stated that he was in agreement with Peter Kolliner that there are three categories, the 'no's', the 'yes's' and the 'ones in between'. Mr Lamm said that he wanted to talk to the ones 'in between'.

Mr Lamm felt that Gabi Crafti made an eloquent appeal that we should recognise the gays as Jewish – he stated that nobody had said that they should dissolve, hide or stop being Jewish. Mr Lamm pointed out to Aleph and Gabi Crafti that there are forty organisations that are Jewish and are not members of the Board. We can still call them Jewish. Nobody stops anybody from being Jewish, you can be Jewish in twenty different ways.

Mr Lamm felt that Ms Crafti was wrong, that we cannot simply disregard the Constitution because otherwise we would not have to vote, we could make it by whoever is stronger.

Mr Lamm felt that Dr Bliss was also wrong, and that he would have been knowledgeable in regard to the Constitution and should have quoted from it correctly. Mr Lamm pointed out that the Constitution does not say any organisation of a Jewish content but says it should be Jewish ideas and ideals. Mr Lamm referred to Peter Kolliner's remarks on how terrible it would be to use coercion by saying you will disaffiliate if you lose. Mr Lamm pointed out that in 1959 Temple Beth Israel decided to secede from the Board because they were not satisfied with certain rules and regulations. There was no coercion, no blackmail, they simply decided at this time that membership was not what they wanted. They returned a year later. So it has happened before.

Mr Lamm referred to another group of Jews in Victoria called Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism and the Board banned them in 1952. They were Jews, nobody doubted they were Jewish but they certainly did not stand up for Jewish ideals. Now here if we believe that Aleph does not stand up for Jewish ideals, we say to this community as a Body : "we do not want you".

Mr Lamm expressed the view that Aleph was a movement with a programme. He felt that a letter had appeared in the Australian Jewish News from Canada, the UK, Mexico, that it was an organised campaign.

Mr Lamm protested on behalf of his grandchildren, who were under 35 and did not agree with Aleph. There are very many proud Jewish people in the Zionist Youth irrespective of age who disagree with it. Some are for it, that is what we are debating.

Mr Lamm wished to stress to those who were not committed that we have a Board, as good or as bad as it is, he asked that the delegates be careful and not to throw out this good for the sake of somebody who comes along and says : "I am lost, I am looking for my brethren". They don't look for their brothers, they have their own brothers. They don't have to come here.

Mr Redlich called upon Rebecca Forgasz to speak for the motion.

Rebecca Forgasz thanked the Chairman for giving people who are not delegates permission to speak, and was grateful for that opportunity.

Ms Forgasz stated that she had great respect for Rabbi Lubofsky in many ways, for his knowledge and if discussion was about foundations of Jewish life, she knew that one of the Ten Commandments is you shall keep Shabbat and another one of the Ten Commandments is "I am the Lord your G-d". There are people here who object to the affiliation of Aleph who sit together with people who don't abide by this commandment. It is part of the philosophy of their organisation to openly disagree with it. Ms Forgasz

congratulated them for doing that because in the state of the Jewish world today this kind of community gathering is a remedy for the kind of fragmentation and division that we have seen in the Jewish world. It is the only hope that we have if we want to be a united Jewish community, for us to be able to sit down and talk about issues that make us all Jewish regardless of whether we are Orthodox, Secular, Reform or anything else.

Ms Forgasz asked whether every organisation present was going to submit some kind of audit as to how they fit in to someone else's idea of what Jewish ideals are. She believed that many would find that several of the organisations present every month do not function according to their ideal. Ms Forgasz felt this should be of more concern than Aleph. If the organisations are going to continue to come every month, there is no other reason not to sit with Aleph other than they are gay. If you do not discriminate against individual homosexuals, then why don't you admit a gay group?

Ms Forgasz stated that if these organisations did not discriminate against individuals then they did not discriminate against a group - what was the difference? The fact is that historically and in the present, there is discrimination against gay people in this community. Ms Forgasz referred to Peter Kolliner's remarks regarding the reason why Aleph was established; as a lot of people have been driven out of this community because they are gay.

Ms Forgasz asked whether Aleph could be blamed for not feeling welcome when they are faced with the attitude placed in front of them. People are driven away from their families, from their communities because they are gay. They have nowhere else to go. Being Jewish is really important to them and they don't want to go necessarily and join some generic gay movement. It is important to them to remain Jewish so they go to a Jewish gay group because it is the only place in this community where they can be Jewish and they will not be ostracized for their sexuality.

Ms Forgasz reiterated what had been said in celebrating Shabbat, Chaggim, Aleph brings a lot of Jewish men back to Judaism in a way that a lot of organisations don't necessarily do for their members. She was not condemning what any organisation does, every organisation does great things in their own way.

Ms Forgasz urged people who are for this motion to speak up because she did not want the message that came out from this meeting to be the message as a vote only of people who are against. She urged people in favour of the motion to speak out. Ms Forgasz felt that this was not a divisive motion. Division had arisen from people who had made inflammatory remarks about this motion and she did not want anyone to think that if they voted against allowing Aleph to be affiliated with this organisation that it would be a unifying move. It would be just as much a divisive move as you think it will be to let them be affiliated.

Ms Forgasz said that Peter Kolliner stated that his organisation (VUPJ) would not walk out if the JCCV does not vote to affiliate. I respect that as there are important issues to be discussed. Those organisations who have said that they think that Aleph should be affiliated, if you are going to stay here, I want to tell you that you risk being affiliated to an organisation which a lot of other young people my age will find an embarrassment to have as their roof body.

Mr Redlich called upon Mr Harold Zwier, Australian Jewish Democratic Society to speak for the motion.

Mr Zwier's address is attached.

Mr Redlich called upon Rabbi Chaim Gutnick, ~~Council of Orthodox Synagogues~~ of Victoria to speak against the motion.

*President, Rabbinical Council
Victoria
RGR*

Rabbi Gutnick expressed his thanks to Dr Bliss for his invitation to address the meeting. Rabbi Gutnick stated that Dr Bliss deserved a double thanks because he was sure that he knew that he would opposed the motion, his motion, and yet Dr Bliss asked him to come along.

Rabbi Gutnick stated that he did not come here tonight to discuss homosexuality. He felt that it would be ludicrous for him to make decisions whether G-d is right or not or whether my Torah is right or not. He thought everybody knew where he stood on the subject.

There have been very strong arguments, both in the Jewish paper and here tonight about the right of admitting for affiliation the Aleph organisation.

Rabbi Gutnick stated that he did not know of any subject in life that you could not debate for and against, and this subject too with plenty of logical opinions for and against.

Rabbi Gutnick explained that he had come not so much as a rabbi, not so much as a religious Jew but as a member of the Melbourne Jewish community and in an appeal for this Plenum to reject the motion.

Rabbi Gutnick called for those present to be practical. Whether rightly or wrongly for whatever reasons, the Rabbis of this community feel very strongly that if Aleph is allowed to enter into this Plenum, to this organisation, the Orthodox synagogues would have no alternative but to withdraw from the JCCV. Rabbi Gutnick stated that those present would think that they were wrong, but we are not blackmailing anybody, we are telling you the facts. Rabbi Gutnick stated that the Plenum had to weigh up one of the most fundamental things of this organisation which is the roof body of the Melbourne Jewish community, to see to it that the community is united and represents at least the majority of Jewish people.

Rabbi Gutnick apologised to Aleph, and explained that if they persisted with their request to join this organisation and the President of this organisation voted for their entry because the Constitution of the JCCV permitted it or obligated him to do so, Rabbi Gutnick wished to inform him that they also had a Constitution and their Constitution did not allow that to happen. Rabbi Gutnick referred to comments that there were non-religious Jews present. This was true. Rabbi Lubofsky correctly stated there was a vast difference between the transgressions of other sections of the Jewish belief and homosexuality, in this we are very strong.

Rabbi Gutnick stated that the Plenum had to decide whether they wanted to have a few people join the organisation and then witness the break-up of the organisation, and the break-up of the unity of this community or as we sometimes have to do, we have to withdraw, we have to compromise in order to have peace and unity in this community.

Rabbi Gutnick would have liked that this motion should never have been put on the table, the Executive should have seen to it that this debate should never have come about. Rabbi Gutnick appealed to Aleph to withdraw their motion. It did so on behalf of not Orthodoxy and not the Rabbinate but on behalf of the unity and the welfare of the Jewish community. He asked that the issue not be forced because by Aleph trying to join this organisation they were going to disrupt the unity of the Jewish community which is fundamental for this organisation. Rabbi Gutnick asked when voting took place to consider what he was saying and what the implications of this were.

Mr Redlich called upon Dr Howard Freeman, Temple Beth Israel to speak for the motion.

Dr Freeman stated that Aleph Melbourne did have a Jewish ideal in his view but many present tonight will fail to recognise it. He believed that Aleph Melbourne was established to protect the civil rights of its members and to provide counselling for those who needed it. It is in that sense a caring organisation. He stated that after some debate tonight it proves how much it is needed. Homosexuals have been given civil rights by all Australian governments most recently even by that of Tasmania. It is the law of the land that discrimination on the grounds of sexuality is totally unacceptable.

Dr Freeman stated the Halacha recognises that the law of the land is the law but notwithstanding that it may be in conflict with Rabbinic poskim. He believed that Aleph Melbourne had a legitimate function to perform and it should be admitted into the JCCV – a profoundly non-sectarian organisation. The JCCV is not a religious body and it should not be required to make decisions on a Halachic basis but rather on the basis of non-discrimination and even acceptance of diversity.

Mr Redlich called the meeting to order. He apologized to those who still wished to speak. Time did not permit continuance with the debate. One of

the speakers proposed an amendment to the motion to make provision for the vote to record the wish of those to defer voting on the motion. He called for a seconder for the motion. A seconder could not be found. The motion then lapsed. It had been resolved at the last Executive meeting that the vote should be by secret ballot.

Voting took place and the results were 46 against and 39 for Aleph Melbourne affiliating with the JCCV. The motion was lost.

There was no time to discuss any other agenda items.

THE MEETING CLOSED AT 10.45 PM

MR HAROLD ZWIER'S STATEMENT – 10 MAY 1999

At the Jewish Community Council of Victoria (JCCV) Plenum Meeting held on Monday May 10 1999, there was a debate on a resolution to affiliate Aleph Melbourne, a Jewish gay support group to the JCCV. The following statement was made by Harold Zwier for the Australian Jewish Democratic Society (AJDS).

The Jewish Community Council of Victoria is the roof body of Jewish organisations in Victoria. When we look inside the council; when we come together at our regular meetings; and when we are seen by our community and the wider community we expect to see a reflection of our whole community in all its diversity. This council fulfils its role best when it is allowed to represent all the shades and nuances that permeate our community and make it so special.

This council is not here to represent the views of one organisation to the exclusion of others. It is not here to declare the correct political line. It is not here to favour the secular over the religious, the Orthodox over the Reform or one Jewish school against another. It does not tell Maccabi that no sport is to be played on Shabbat. It does not tell the Secular Humanists that they must believe in G-d or the Reform that women and men should be separated in the synagogue.

In our opinion, those people who believe that this council is here to guide us "united" towards the one "correct" way forward, do not understand that this council is, or should be, a forum for the whole community. A forum in which we can passionately disagree on many things but still agree to be part of the forum. And each of us contributes our part however large or small.

But if one Jewish group raises its hand and says "we have a part to play in the council" who are we to say "no you don't".

The Australian Jewish Democratic Society (AJDS) strongly supports the affiliation of Aleph Melbourne to the Jewish Community Council of Victoria (JCCV).

I have on occasions been in sub-committees that have had to make sensitive decisions. And on each such occasion I have tried to consider a "what if". "What if our decision was open to public scrutiny? Would we be happy with our deliberations and our decision?". Well, tonight our deliberations and decision are on public display.

"What if we reject Aleph Melbourne's affiliation tonight?". This is not a question of deciding issues by public pressure. It is about being willing to argue and defend the outcome of tonight's vote to our whole community Jewish and non-Jewish.

The AJDS has given the issue of affiliation serious consideration. In 1987 our application to affiliate to this council failed because the AJDS's political views were not acceptable to a certain minority of delegates. Times changed and we have now been part of the JCCV for almost six years.

And times have changed in the community around us.



The discrimination suffered by homosexuals, not even openly discussed in the past, is nowadays not acceptable. Not in the wider community and not in the Jewish community.

Yet here we are having this debate.

In 1987 the AJDS was opposed because of our political views. Tonight, Aleph Melbourne is being opposed because of the people that they are.

Some delegates are uncomfortable with the idea of supporting the affiliation of Aleph Melbourne because they are worried that it will be seen as an endorsement of the aims, objects and lifestyles of its members. This is not the case. Look back and remember some of the other organisations that have affiliated to this council. There was no requirement in the past to agree with all the views of the AJDS or the Secular Humanists nor with the beliefs of the Reform or the practices of the Orthodox. A vote for affiliation is not specifically a vote of support for the organisation. Rather it is a recognition that the organisation represents a defined group in the Jewish community that is not otherwise represented in this council.

Tonight we urge all delegates to vote for the affiliation of Aleph Melbourne. Not merely as a gesture of tolerance but as a wholehearted confirmation of the diversity of our Jewish community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. R.', located in the bottom right corner of the page.

