

The Council Of The Jewish Community Of Thessaloniki



This picture was taken when the Community Council signed the deal for the development of a large plot of the Community in Ptolemeos Street.

First from the right, standing, is Benroubi, next to him, second from right, standing is Nahmias, the lawyer.

Fifth from left, standing, with the moustache is Benousiglio, and fourth from left, standing is Alberto Saoul, who was as well in the Landed Property Committee.

First from the left, seated is Sakis Voutiras, the lawyer. I am third from left, standing. Behind me, second from left is Perahia, the general director of the Community.

Until the Colonels' Junta interfered, the Jewish Community's management was really in the hands of people who were taking advantage of it in a terrible way.

All the people that were righteous didn't want to get involved because they were saying "they are all thieves in there". But we were also very busy. When you have to go to the shop in the morning and in the evening, you don't have time to get involved in communal affairs.

When the colonels came there was one of them that must have been a Jew. He had left the army by then, but was in the same class with Papadopoulos.

He was from Giannena or Chalkida, I can't remember. Since the colonels had put their hands on to everything, when they were about to get involved with the community, they asked him, "Who do you think that we should put there in order to have a good management?" He gave them a few names. Mine was among them.

Suddenly, I get a note saying that I am appointed member of this committee of the Community. That's when I started getting involved with public affairs, and I still do up until today.

At the beginning, I was a member of the Landed Property Committee, together with three or four other businessmen. We did quite a good management, and not only with the landed property of the Committee.

We also looked for the landed property that was not in our possession, which we owned, but hadn't regained yet. We had two lawyers who were involved solely with these issues.

We managed to find quite many. Things were quite confusing, but we managed to clear them up. I stayed there from 1970 to 1972.

When the colonels left and we had elections, the electoral body elected me for the 20-members communal general assembly. Elections take place every four years.

At some point after the communal assembly, I was assigned member of the Community Counsel which consisted of five people. I was the cashier. Later, after four years I was elected the president of the assembly.

Around 1990 I got into the Landed Property Committee. I remained its president for eight years. I wasn't working anymore, so I was able to pass by every day, see what problems there were, the issues of the day, and to try as much as I could to solve them.

On these eight years, I am not trying to be a macho here, I managed to triple the earnings. First of all, things were happening normally, legally. The law had changed and the moratorium for rents had been abolished.

I had my system, and without having a go or hurting any of the tenants' feelings, I managed to triple to earnings. In the end when I resigned, they didn't want to let me go.

But I didn't agree with the spirit anymore. There was a Youth committee. I like the conciliatoriness and I like to chat. They had different opinions. All right, so I took my hat and left.

Close to Aristotelous Square there used to be the Alliance School. After the war, when the community got compensation from the Germans (because the community did get some compensation), there were two claims.

One claim was from Alliance for the landed property there. The other one was from the Jews of Thessaloniki that stayed in Israel and never came back. They argued that since they came from Thessaloniki too, they had the same rights. In the end they got something back.

The bigger claim was Alliance's, for the land there. From the time of the Turks you couldn't, if you weren't a Turkish citizen to own land. That was the law. That's why Alliance had bought this land putting the name of the Community upfront. Later, when the Community built on it, they claimed it.

They said "this land was ours". They managed to block the money that the German government was about to give to the Jewish Community. In the end, the community and Alliance came into an agreement: "from the money that we will get, we will immediately give you half of it and the rest we will slowly return it to you".

The president at the time was Dick Benveniste who was completely against. "These thieves had stopped us and didn't allow us to take our money, etc".

After Dick died, I was still at the Community's council, and I told them "Guys. What we are doing is not fair. Don't forget what we owe to Alliance. We promised them some things and we will keep our promise".

And that's how things happened in the end. While I was still there, we paid them back. We owed them a couple of last payments which we gave them too.