

JSS Report: Part II

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TO THE ADMINISTRATION OF YESHIVA UNIVERSITY:

The following is the second of a two-part report to the James Striar School Student Council by its Committee on Administration — Faculty — Student Relations. It was approved unanimously by the Council on May 15, 1969. It should be made clear that this report is not intended to be an evaluation of the University. It is, rather, the presentation of the dilemma confronting the J. S. S. student body as seen by the Council within the context of the implicit and all-pervading philosophy of the University.

ADMINISTRATION — STUDENT RELATIONS

Since the publication of the committee's first report on April 24, 1969, two significant responses have come about on the part of the administration. The first was initiated by the director of J. S. S. Rabbi Morris Besdin. Inviting the committee and the President of the Council to meet with him soon after he received the report, Rabbi Besdin made clear in concrete terms his intentions to respond to the Council's requests with specific reforms in curriculum. As discussions continue, the Council is proud to express its confidence in the dedication of Rabbi Besdin to the student body of J. S. S.

The second response was one of marked contrast and the last in a series of events the beginning of which was described in the first report. As previously stated, the committee in its quest to meet with Dr. Belkin was promised an appointment with the *Rosh Yeshiva* by Rabbi Miller some months ago. Rabbi Miller had made certain requests of the committee concerning the appointment.

These requests were:

- Not only J.S.S., but S.O.Y., F.M.C., Y.C. and Stern College be represented.
- Questions by the committee be submitted in advance, with additional spontaneous questions also to be entertained.

After numerous delays, Rabbi Miller told the committee chairman that the appointment would indeed take place no later than May 1, 1969. The committee agreed to all these terms.

One week after publication of the committee's first report, the administration lived up to its side of the bargain through a reception for Dr. Belkin attended by Yeshiva College and Stern College students. All of the above-mentioned terms were met, with one somewhat significant exception

the committee was neither informed nor invited, the purposes of the reception being undefined.

Rabbi Miller in his opening remarks, made mention of certain questions submitted by the J.S.S. committee and, while apparently handing them to Dr. Belkin, paternally made reference to the committee's unfortunate display of "the impetuosity and impatience of youth..." in not waiting for an appointment with the *Rosh Yeshiva* before publishing the first report! Rabbi Miller cited the point that the committee's questions were not of an urgent nature and need not have been pressed these five months. So urgent were these questions considered, in fact, that Dr. Belkin, in his brief remarks, did not see fit to answer a single one of them. This is apparently what Public Relations means when it boasts of Yeshiva University's "bridging the generation gap" through "a ready response to the growing concerns of the student body."² With all due respect, this committee should like to point out clearly to the *Rosh Yeshiva* that such rhetoric as he is accustomed to exercise in his day-to-day functions as the president of a university will not and cannot be expected to bridge the generation gap with his *talmidim*.

Dr. Belkin told this committee's chairman in December, 1968, that he has not granted an interview in ten years.

THE CENTRALITY OF TORAH

Of all the Yeshiva University graduate schools, only Bernard Revel Graduate School and Wurzelweil School of Social Work can claim a solid Jewish orientation. It is to the profound discredit of Yeshiva that it has often been stated that Revel is as the bottom of the University's totem-pole. While much of the blame must be placed on *Smicha* students who treat the school flippantly, the Council feels that neglect by the University administration of the admitted shortcomings of the Revel Graduate School (which Dr. Belkin has assured Dean Lander is "the heart of the University.") has disturbing implications for the University's commitment to the Jewish community. Further, it is somewhat disconcerting to note that, while Wurzelweil trains graduates specifically for Jewish social work and is one of only three Yeshiva University graduate schools to give preference to Yeshiva College and Stern College graduates, it is one of the least known of the graduate schools to laymen.

²"The Generation Gap at Yeshiva University?", a recent Public Relations publication with cover

photos of Mrs. Beverly Koval, past President of the Stern College Student Council and the president of the university against which she led an aborted student strike.

As at least one professor has put it, if Yeshiva University does not build secular graduate schools, others will. But if Yeshiva University does not build Jewish graduate schools, no one will. The entire situation reflecting on the hierarchy of accomplishments of the Yeshiva University administration does not seem to the Council to paint the picture of "the Centrality of Torah."

TORAH UMADAH

In our interview with Dean Mirsky of Stern College, we asked how his school fulfills the concept of *Torah Umadah*. He replied that it does so through its curriculum and program, which requires every student to take a minimum amount of Jewish studies while pursuing her B.A. The school also fosters an understanding of the spirit symbolized by *Torah Umadah*.

Dean Mirsky's remarks were of a deliberate nature and in agreement with those expressed to this committee by Dean Bacon and Mr. Harstein and to the student body by Dr. Belkin on several occasions. Therefore, the committee does not feel unjustified in commenting on one nuance of Dean Mirsky's statement. We would ask the administration of Yeshiva University, whose position Dean Mirsky obviously gave, why our students are learning Torah while they are getting their degrees and not getting their degrees while learning Torah. It is not pedantic to realize that Dean Mirsky's statement substantiated by the acceptance of its implications by the University's students, is more than a syntactical reversal of the *Torah Umadah* concept.

To be sure the ability to offer the Jewish student both Torah and secular educations on the same campus is no small accomplishment. However we submit that if the present shizophrenia called the double program — the mere attendance of yeshiva in the morning and college in the afternoon — represents the fulfillment of Dr. Bernard Revel's promise of *Torah Umadah*, it was an inadequate promise. A simple provision of facilities can hardly be called an effective education.

And it is the above mentioned inadequacy that has fostered the confusion of priorities plaguing the administration in its expansion efforts for the

University. Most noteworthy, perhaps, is the philosophic orientation of Albert Einstein College of Medicine, the Frankenstein's monster of Yeshiva University. Though there are no official classes on *Shabbat* at Einstein, some laboratories remain open; and outside organizations are sometimes permitted to use the facilities to conduct classes that run into *Shabbat*. This is not at all surprising when one considers that Dr. Gordon, Dean of Einstein, feels his school's major Jewish contribution to be a modern interpretation of "*Kedoshim Tibiyu*." In these times, he told the committee, it means professional excellence." And indeed, it seems that the University administration has given

Dr. Gordon good support for his somewhat distorted explication: in his "Welcoming Remarks to the Class of 1972" on September 4, 1968, Dr. Gordon said,

Questions are sometimes raised about our relation to Yeshiva University. We are legally part of Yeshiva University, and it is, of course Dr. Belkin the President, whose vision and energy are responsible for our existence. Uninformed people sometimes have concern that rigid ritual, and religious beliefs might interfere with free inquiry in a scientific school. Dr. Belkin has not permitted this to happen nor will it ever happen.

The committee would ask the *Rosh Yeshiva* either to clarify the difference between Belfer and Einstein with regard to the position of "religious beliefs" or inform Dr. Gordon of his obligation.¹

Certainly, the expansionist plans of Yeshiva University have given birth to deep philosophical difficulties. In our interview with Mr. Hartstein, he cited as one of the major reasons for Yeshiva University's expansion into the graduate field the necessity of providing a graduate education for religious students, otherwise unable to attend graduate school. In the same interview, Mr. Hartstein commented that it is no longer difficult for such students to attend graduate school. The committee must restate the question that has often been voiced at Yeshiva College: What is the justification for the continuing operation of our graduate schools? One other reason was mentioned by Mr. Hartstein and has been reported by the committee: image. According to this reasoning Dr. Belkin's decision to expand in 1945 was partially based on the expectation that "the glory of the graduate schools," as Mr. Hartstein put it, would attract students to Yeshiva College. This is hardly the type of appeal the Council believes the *Rosh Yeshiva* desires for Yeshiva College.

¹ cf. footnote 2, first report: Rabbi Miller's statement on Belfer's closing on *Shabbat*.

Nevertheless, Mr. Hartstein's office has done its best to see that this image is manufactured: Public Relations' latest production in its obvious attempt to divest Yeshiva University of any overly religious appearance and portray it as an institution of liberalism, in more than one sense of the

word, appeared in the New York Sunday News of April 20, 1969. Entitled, "New Home for Books," the pictorial description of the new Fottlesman Library employed Public Relations' classical gimmick: the coeducational fake. The series of photographs was replete with a host of mini-skirted co-eds, who outnumbered the male students shown. If nothing else, Public Relations' distorted liberal image of the University has succeeded in alienating and embittering many segments of the Jewish community. But what is worse, these distortions often militate toward self-fulfillment through the pressure of those who are thus induced to support the University.

The Council views with deep disappointment the fact that with the best of intentions and under great financial pressure, the administration of Yeshiva University has sold the soul of this institution to the Federal Government and the highest bidder. Though we must respect the experienced view of Mr. Sam Hartstein to the contrary, we feel we have cited some of the many signs pointing to the moral demise of Yeshiva University.

But we have not been alone in this appraisal. On October 27, 1957, guests at the Yeshiva University Charter Day Dinner, at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel heard the Guest of Honor, apparently gauging the plans of his audience with great accuracy, say,

It is a particularly great honor to receive an award associated with Yeshiva University. For few other educational institutions in our country have made such an extraordinary and enduring achievement in so short a time. I am a graduate and a member of the Board of Overseers of another great American University which started as a theological seminary and gradually broadened its scope of educational activity to become one of the foremost universities of our time. The story of Yeshiva seems certain to parallel the story of Harvard . . .

The speaker was the late then-Senator John F. Kennedy. The committee humbly reminds the administration of the words of *Sblomo Nameleeb*: "*Im Hasben lo yuneh vayit, shav amlu yonav bo*."

It is with an appreciation of the attendant irony that the James Striar School Student Council assumes the role of plaintiff for a student body deeply dissatisfied with the University as an institution of Torah. Indeed, it is to the everlasting shame of the University administration that we, the students of J.S.S., have come seeking the Jewish experience to find its realization only in the classroom and finding nowhere else to turn, must ourselves press for reform in a direct petition to you, the administration of Yeshiva University.

Finally, let us say that "the impetuosity and impatience of youth" has not yet led us to forget that for every assertion of student indignation there is a patently professional reply from the administration. The fact is, however, that notwithstanding these tired clichés, the problems lie on. Frankly, this Council has wearied of benign oratory. The response required is action. We implore the *Rosh Yeshiva* to initiate it.

The committee wishes to express its appreciation to the following deans for their kind cooperation:

Dr. Harry Gordon, Einstein College of Medicine.
Dr. Morris Teicher, Wurzweiler School of Social Work.

Dr. Joseph Gittler, Terkauf Graduate School of Humanities.

Mr. David Mirsky, Stern College for Women.

Dr. Arthur Romar, Seifer Graduate School of Science.

Dr. Bernard Lander, Bernard Revel Graduate School.

The James Striar School Student Council Committee on Administration-Faculty-Student Relations:

Harvey Myerson
Howard Shub
Andy Solomon, Chairman
Ralph Suiskind

The Council eagerly awaits the reply of Dr. Belkin. All others quoted directly or indirectly in the report have been offered the right of reply. The only reply received follows.

The James Striar School Student Council
Committee on Administration —
Faculty-Student Relations
Gentlemen:

It takes more than one party to engage in an argument, and I have no desire to argue with "The James Striar School Student Council Committee on Administration-Faculty-Student Relations." My office door is open to any and all students who wish to discuss any matter, and I would be pleased to meet and speak with the committee members again, as I have in the past, individually and collectively. It is a much better forum for meaningful dialogue.

For the record, may I state that the student officers who officially represent the James Striar School were invited to, and were present at the President's Reception, as were the officers of the SOY, EMC, TIW, Yeshiva College and Stern College Student Councils. The timing of the Reception was dictated by the difficulty of arranging a suitable date to meet the schedule of Dr. Belkin and the more than sixty people involved. There was an opportunity for the students to direct any question on any subject to the *Rosh Yeshiva*, and there were such questions and responses by Dr. Belkin.

There is a question I would like to address to you. You write that I apparently "handed your questions to Dr. Belkin. Does pique over the use of the words 'impetuosity' and 'impatience' (which should or should not have been used to describe the absence of a meeting which was to take place a week after the publication of the report) give a committee the right to question the honesty of even an 'administrator'?"

Thank you for giving me the right to reply.

Sincerely yours,

(Rabbi) Israel Miller,
Assistant to the President
for Student Affairs