

Hi all,

What follows is not a practical joke of April 1. It is a description of a meeting that we had with the treasury officials yesterday. The officials (in the presence of VERA representatives) raised five demands: 1) A certain percentage of the faculty can be fired (with retirement arrangements). 2) There will be personal contracts for at least part of the faculty members. 3) There will be differences in salaries between faculty members that belong to different departments and domains (presumably, the applied-oriented departments such as business management will get a higher salary). 4) The number of faculty members that can receive the differential payments (which we currently get on the basis of a collective agreement for fulfilling certain academic criteria) would be limited and will be substantially lower than at present. 5) The salary of pensioners in the budgetary pension plan will be linked to the index of inflation rather than to the rank (leading to an annual erosion of around 2 percent in the pensioners' salary). Again, these demands were stated by the treasury officials in an official meeting in the presence of VERA representatives including the president of TA university.

I think it ought to be clear to anyone that reads these demands that they amount to no less than the end of the academia in Israel as we see it. Of course, these demands cannot and will not be forced upon us. All of these demands violate collective agreements that we have with our employers, and Israel is still a county that obeys law and that is signed on international treaties that strictly forbid such actions. It is always dangerous to overstate situations in the midst of a serious conflict such as the one we are currently facing. Yet, there are two implications that we clearly draw this meeting.

First, the real intentions of the treasury officials are now officially out in the open. At least in the treasury's eyes, all the reforms that are currently proposed by the Shochat committee are just the first step in the direction that is stated by the demands above. No matter what we do, we have to ensure that future reforms will not lay a foundation in this direction.

Second, we must reach a long term agreement that will protect us from the enemies of the universities. In order to sign a long term agreement, the two demands that we raised in this crisis must be FULLY met. We demand a full compensation for the erosion in our salary AND a mechanism that will prevent future erosion in our salary. Any agreement that will not guarantee these demands will push us further in the slippery slope toward the goals that were so clearly exposed by the treasury officials. We will continue the strike, with all its dire potential consequences, until such an agreement is reached.

Obviously, we stopped the meeting with the treasury officials after hearing their demands. No meetings are currently scheduled. We will resume meetings when serious issues, pertaining to our demands, will be on the table.

Best, Asher Cohen