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## Brain power, not power games

By Yaron Ezrachi

The longest senior faculty strike in Israel's history laid bare the Finance Ministry's failure to counteract the faculty's influence on the management of the universities.

The senior faculty's uprising against the universities' presidents - who asked the National Labor Court for injunctions against us - proved that the treasury's erroneous policy had failed. This policy, based on the Maltz and Shochat committees' reports, strove to weaken the universities' rectors and Senates and strengthen their presidents' power to twist the faculty's arm with administrative means.

The treasury's attempt to use pay as a threat to force senior faculty into accepting the controversial recommendations of the Shochat committee was a total failure. The Finance Ministry is still holding the university heads hostage, as they depend on it to return the funds brutally slashed from the higher education budget in recent years.

The strike exposed the paradox, that strengthening the universities' administrative heads by enabling them excessive flexibility vis-a-vis the senior faculty, would strengthen the treasury. Weakening them would weaken the treasury's ability to force on Israel's academia an uninhibited privatization philosophy and hierarchical business management patterns.

Therefore the next stage of the struggle for the future of Israel's science and academia must begin with an effort to restore the power that was robbed from the Senates when the Maltz report was forced on the universities. Only thus would the universities' managements and senior faculty be able to stand up together against the arbitrary rule of officials who don't distinguish between contract workers and a scientific community who gave up a profitable career for an academic vocation.

Although the senior faculty were forced to focus on wage issues, it was clear to every one of us that the struggle was about who would run the universities - the politicians and their envoys in the treasury, or the research and science community.

Now it transpires that a university president who favors treasury suggestions that damage academic principles, but cannot adopt them because of the rector and Senate, is stronger than a president who can bend the rector and Senate.

Israeli universities will only be able to continue to advance science, education and cultural values if there is a sound system of checks and balances between public and private funding and between

administration and faculty. This system must be affiliated with the state or market, but not be their captive. At the same time, we must put an end to political appointments in the Council for Higher Education and the Planning and Budgeting Committee. We must reinstate these bodies' power and prestige so they can act as a buffer and bridge between the politicians and academia.

The main lesson from the strike is that although the academic community must reorganize itself if it wishes to act effectively, the fastest way to prevent strikes or shorten them is to bring about a cognitive and administrative reform in the Finance Ministry. Such a reform would replace the strategic power games, wrapped in economic and statistical rhetoric, with fair, professional work which is not guided by unbridled privatization and capitalistic ideology.

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