

CONCLUSION

It is unfortunate that the strikers have failed to work together for the improvement of education at the secondary and post-secondary levels. The best strategy would have been to join forces toward the common goal of saving the education system before it is too late. Unfortunately, instead, the principle of the survival of the fittest worked once again.

The government has treated both strikes with apathy and indifference at best, conceivably as part of a larger plan to privatize all social aspects of society. Israel has an economy that is knowledge based. Thus, it is of concern that with an economy less problematic than in the past, the government is unwilling to invest in education, which everybody understands to be crucial to Israel's future. ■

The Relative Strength of Israel's Private Colleges

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The development of private higher education in Israel has been strong. Until the 1990s, the system had no private higher education; yet it now includes 9 institutions, with 6 more seeking government authorization. The institutions hold 26,860 enrollments, 13.1 percent of the country's total of 310,937 (2005), and that percentage is increasing.

Israel's public sector, however, remains much stronger than its private sector. Israel still lacks private universities, only colleges (usually without notable research orientation). In contrast, the public sector's 87 percent share of total enrollment is located not only in colleges but mostly in universities; the 7 public universities, all research institutions, are listed among the world's top 500 institutions. Thus, a theme that private higher education now has noteworthy strength is not based on cross-sector comparison but on comparison with the past, even the recent past.

Officially, private colleges are labeled "nonbudgeted," meaning not subsidized by government. The label avoids the use of "private," regarded by many citizens as an illegitimate concept for higher education. Such circumvention is found in other countries as well, often settling on "nonpublic." That private "universities" are not permitted is a sore point for some aspir-

ing Israeli private colleges and their supporters. One defiant private college declares it will soon call itself a university. Another uses stationery showing an address of University Road.

Compared to the rest of the Middle East, Israel was early on initiating private higher education. It is also regionally strong in terms of its share of private/national total enrollment. However, almost all surrounding countries have now launched private sectors. And if compared globally, Israeli private higher education is a late developer, and its 13.1 percent share of national enrollment is less than half that of the world average.

COMPARING PRIVATE AND PUBLIC COLLEGES

Most of Israel's private-public comparisons concur with private-public contrasts in other countries. Private institutions tend to be smaller and more geographically concentrated; not uncommonly they have higher student socioeconomic levels. Perhaps the most prestigious Israeli private college may depend on tuition for 80 percent of its income, a far higher rate than in public institutions. While, there is no government funding, private colleges would like to be able to compete for public research funding and have government directly subsidize students, although they do not ask for regular institutional subsidy. So, even amid the partial privatization of public institutions, private-public financial contrasts remain strong.

Perhaps the most striking Israeli private-public distinction lies in fields studied. Even leaving universities aside, the differences far outpace the notable global differences. A good example is concentrated enrollment in a few fields. Israel's private

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colleges have 79 percent of their enrollment in just two fields—legal studies (49 percent) and business management (30 percent). The comparative figures for public colleges are 0 and 11 percent, respectively. The Israeli private higher education network remains mostly in a narrow niche. As in the great majority of countries, the peak and breadth of the academic system lies on the public side.

Yet, in other respects, private-public differences do not appear so sharp in Israeli colleges. For example, while 62 percent of private students are in Tel Aviv and the rest of the rather privileged geographical center of the country, 41 percent of public students are there as well. Sixty-five percent of private students are identified as from the upper strata, but public students are not a close reflection of the Israeli class and demographic profile either. Only 2 percent of private students are new immigrants, but the public figure is only 5 percent. In some respects, then, Israel's private-public gaps are not so large.

PRIVATE COLLEGES AND GLOBAL PATTERNS

Comparisons between the private sector in Israel and elsewhere show the relative strength of Israel's private colleges. Considering quality, while most of the country's private colleges are not so well regarded academically, they appear to post good results for students entering the job market—a typical goal of private higher education institutions worldwide. Moreover, if at least 4 of Israel's 9 private colleges are credited with academic soundness, that is a rather large share in the global context, where most private institutions are regarded as quite low. These Israeli institutions may even be candidates to claim “semi-elite” status within the private sector—based on a reasonable degree of academic quality, appeal, seriousness, credibility, and entrepreneurialism. Such achievements do not characterize most of the world's private institutions.

Extraordinary in the global context is that some of Israel's private colleges have high-quality faculty, even figures of vaunted national stature. Indeed, Israel's public universities complain that they find it increasingly difficult to recruit top talent as some private colleges can pay much more. Related and equally extraordinary is that Israel's private higher education receives substantial philanthropy, so rare outside the United States. This policy helps provide ability to hire their esteemed faculty and also to build very attractive facilities, provide flexibility, and gain credibility.

Not only do Israel's private colleges have enviable positive

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characteristics uncommon in most of the world, they also lack the most negative characteristics. Israel does have the fly-by-night demand-absorbing private institutions. Additionally, Israel remains apart from the burgeoning international tendency to permit for-profit education, though it conforms to a wider reality wherein several of the nonprofit institutions have for-profit characteristics and are charged by critics with being for-profit in reality.

THE GOVERNMENT ROLE

As commonly found in other countries, private colleges complain that their strength is undermined by government regulation. In fact Israel's regulatory debate largely follows contours rather common elsewhere.

Israeli private colleges regard the national Council of Higher Education as a greater obstacle than the Ministry of Education. Yes, they find government difficult to deal with as political coalitions transform and ministers change often, but at least government is sometimes responsive to political pressures from private colleges and their families and likes the idea

of increasing higher education access without additional public cost and of service to the job market. In contrast, the private colleges believe that the council focuses largely on academic concerns more appropriate for public universities and colleges, thus establishing restrictions and undercutting the speed, flexibility, and innovation private colleges need, as well as system differentiation, experimentation, access without public expense, and market tests for determining the value of private colleges.

Public higher education institutions often oppose private colleges' aspirations to strengthen themselves as they wish. Public institutions sometimes do assert that regulation can help the private colleges, as with quality assurance. Often, however, they seek to protect public institutions and values in society at large. They further argue that private colleges in fact enjoy ample autonomy (setting enrollment numbers, tuition levels, and faculty wages and opening new programs). In other words, private colleges already have the autonomy to strengthen themselves.

Echoing a common international tendency, public universities are vocal proponents of regulation over private institutions; but public colleges are especially fearful of private competition, which focuses on teaching and training in popular fields. Unlike universities, the public colleges do not sit at the system's academic pinnacle, far above private colleges. Instead, private colleges' strength is a threat to public colleges. ■

Rankings, Diversity, and Excellence: A European Policy Challenge?

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The headline in the *International Herald Tribune* (November 23, 2007) said it all: “To compete, Germany aims to rebuild strength in research.” The article recounted how, having assessed the performance of German higher education institutions in worldwide rankings, the government started a program to create its own “Ivy League.” The “excellence initiative” follows similar moves by France, Russia, and Denmark, among others. On the same day, the European Union passed a resolution reaffirming the need to “accelerate reform of universities in order to . . . foster the emergence and strengthening of European higher education institutions which can demon-