Industrial Bias Against

Jews: Reality or Sensitivity?

By MURRAY FRIEDMAN

Several analyses recently—one of them by the American Jewish Committee of exclusionary patterns among 50 utilities across the country—have called attention once again to the problem of discrimination against Jews in industry.

These studies showed that the "exclusionary patterns" of many of the most significant corporations in the United States are still largely "judenrein.

THIS INFORMATION came as something of a shock to Jews who, personally, have felt less and less the sharp bars of prejudice and discrimination in recent years.

With our attention riveted on the Negro revolt and the vast efforts needed to bring this discrimination to an end, Jews have received in newspaper and national magazines only occasional reference to the problem of Jews in the "executive suites" of many of the nation's major corporations.

Nevertheless, there is a general absence of Jews from executive level positions in such industries as commercial banking, oil, coal, steel, automobile manufacturing, and insurance.

In 1960, it was found that Jews constituted between 1/2 of 1% and 1% of top management personnel in a representative sample of the nation's leading corporations.

A DETAILED study, in 1961, by the Philadelphia Chapter of the American Jewish Committee of the 1028 top officials of the city's six leading banks revealed only six were Jewish.

Over the past 25 years, some what fewer than 1/2 of 1% of corporate executives enrolled in the Advanced Management Program at the Harvard Business School have been Jewish, according to the late Prof. B. J. Selderman, a faculty member.

In contrast, Jews have made up from 12 to 15 percent of that school's student body.

The process of exclusion has become so general, however, that to recognize it requires the most careful examination by those responsible as well as by the victims.

There is the mistaken belief within many corporations that efficiency requires that executives resemble one another in outlook, attitude and background. Here religion and nationality come into the picture.

"Does he look like us?" is a standard used by one major automobile corporation. A perceptive observer in Pittsburgh has commented that in walking down the street he can usually spot an executive of certain steel, aluminum and food companies.

THE IMAGE of the Jew that sometimes exists in certain leading corporate circles is one that may have had its origin in an urban ghetto, where, when one looks with disdain upon the ability of many Negroes to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps, they forget the shock of slavery and what it has meant to be in a minority in Jewish life.

We should not forget, however, that we adopted these ways not simply because they satisfied our special style of life but as a response to a society that would not let us in.

IN THE MEANTIME, a world war against fascism and the growth of equalitarian ideas made overt forms of discrimination and prejudice unattractive, regardless of how much prejudice might linger on in the minds and hearts of many.

Patterns of exclusion adopted during the previous period became frozen into institutional forms, sometimes unconsciously, so that industry leaders often respond to charges of discrimination with sincere amazement.

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A HIGHLY SELECTIVE screening process works in other and more subtle ways. Middle management levels of the large corporation, which includes the personnel director and his staff, often believe that top management wants certain minority groups excluded even when no such intention has been stated out loud.

The president of a major company recently told an interviewer that, transmitting company policies down the line in a large business bureaucracy, getting them carried out are difficult matters.

When the personnel chief was a Protestant, he said, the company practiced a policy of non-discrimination. When he was Catholic, Catholics were brought in.

On the other hand, we know of the head of a major national organization who called in his top executives and told them that the company practiced a policy of non-discrimination and that the first man who acted otherwise should be fired. Middle echelons should have no difficulty in getting that message.

THE CAMPUS recruiting practices of large corporations and the manner in which the college placement office responds to those in another phase of a process that tends to screen out members of minority groups.

A study prepared by the attorney general's office in New York State indicates that insurance companies interviewed a substantial number of Jewish young men on campus for home office jobs but the number called for further interviews dropped sharply, and those finally offered positions were few and far between.

There is some indication that college placement officials, themselves, may be filling corporation needs along racial or religious lines. When one bank, widely thought of as a "Jewish bank"
went to a college campus for two
weeks, was sent two young
Jewish men. This arouses the
suspicion that had the request
come from a "non-Jewish bank," non-Jews might have showed
up.

ALL THIS POINTS up the fact
that mere denial by large cor-
porations that they do not dis-
 criminate is not enough. An ac-
tive policy and program of in-
forming their personnel division and Jews themselves that mem-
bers of minority groups are, in
cfactual, welcome and desired is nec-
essary.
The modern corporation must
take the time and trouble to
overcome the negative image it
has among Jews as a result of past discrimination.

Do its placement officials re-
cruit on campuses where there is
a large Jewish population such as
City College of New York or
Brandeis University? Have they
visited Hillel houses and Jewish
fraternities?

In one instance we know of,
the campus recruiter stays at a
local Christian fraternity during
his visit.

Overt discrimination is gen-
erally out—the law, if nothing
else bars this—but few corpora-
tions have been willing to move
from a policy of being "ethnic blind" to "ethnic conscious." The
development of an affirmative
program to seek out qualified
Jewish personnel is a difficult
concept to sell to business lead-
ers.

FOR THIS REASON, the wide-
spread public discussion of ex-
clusionary practices that exist
in many large corporations has
been extremely useful. Deeply
trenched cultural patterns need to be shaken if they are to be changed.
The only way we will know that
utilities and other compa-
nies mean business in their de-
nial of charges of discrimination is when they begin to take the
actions necessary to assure them-
selves of a reasonable supply of
minority personnel.

A few companies have come
to accept this and instituted the
necessary changes. Vance Pack-
ard, in The Pyramid Climbers,
notes that American Motors has
been shaking up the pattern of
hiring in the automotive field by
bringing in Jewish managers.

He also reports that Interna-
tional Business Machines has
advanced a Jew to a vice presi-
dency. One major organization
has adopted for its own purposes
an internal policy statement
which states the problem and the
cure succinctly.

IT ACKNOWLEDGES the fact
that at top levels of industry,
there is a concentration of sons of the same ethnic and reli-
gious background and few mem-
bers of minority groups. This
condition exists in spite of the
company's expressed approval of
a policy of non-discrimination.

Without attempting to go into
the causes, the statement goes
on, the need for talented man-
power requires that the situation
be changed. The company has
had a program for some time, the
statement concludes, to "objecti-
fy" the process of executive re-
cruitment so as to eliminate any
possibility that non-ability fac-
tors will interfere with standards
of merit and competency.

Where such affirmative efforts
have been undertaken, the re-
results have been beneficial not
only for Jews employed but for
the company itself.

One national organization
based in Philadelphia that re-
cently hired a Jewish director of
personnel wrote us that the man
had made a number of important
contributions in a short time.

AND IN SPITE of claims by in-
surance companies in New York
that Jews won't go into home
offices because of low pay and
slow advancement, following the
initiation of a broader program
of recruitment, there has been a
substantial increase in the
number of Jews in management
trainee programs.

Incidentally, other minorities,
including Catholics, are often ab-
sent from the executive suite of
large corporations. Confronted
with a shortage of able and well
trained people to fill executive
positions, the large corporation
is passing up a major reservoir
of talent in its failure to en-
courage employment of qualified
minority group personnel.

There is also a need for cer-
tain changes within the Jewish
community if there is to be bet-
ter representation in industry.

There is a vital need for current
information on the nature, ex-
tent and changing character of
religious barriers.

TOO OFTEN, advisors to Jewish
youth, acting on outdated infor-
mation, are steering young peo-
ple away from non-traditional
fields of work. One advisor ad-
mitted to me not long ago that
in his entire experience he has
never suggested to a Jewish
young man that he consider
banking as a career.

There is some reason to believe
that in spite of negative and in-
accurate images of Jews that
persist stubbornly in some cor-
porations and businesses, the
doors might open if a sufficient
number of Jews begin to knock.

A little over a year ago, the
Philadelphia Chapter of the
American Jewish Committee and
the Jewish Employment and Vo-
cational Service convened a con-
ference of Jewish youth (including the heads of the three business schools at lo-
cal universities) to consider this
problem. Much more of this has
to be done.

A CERTAIN AMOUNT of reluct-
ance can be seen also among
young Jewish men to test their
welcome in big industry and fi-
nance. "Who wants to be a
Robinson?" is, in effect, the
response of many.

And, given the patterns of ex-
clusion that have traditionally
existed here, it is difficult to give
these young men the necessary
assurances especially when oppor-
tunities exist elsewhere.

Such assurances must come in
a much more planned way from
industry.

The question has sometimes
been asked: "Since in many in-
stances Jews have found satis-
factory forms of adjustment to
patterns of exclusion, why not
let the matter rest?" A more so-
phisticated way of putting it is,
"Who wants the Jew to be an
organization man anyway?"

There is, of course, some valid-
ity to these questions but essen-
tially they are based on a false
psychology.

It is not a healthy thing for
Jews to make their occupational
choices on the basis of fear or a
psychology.

Given an open situation, and the
trend is in this direction, there
are Jews who will find satis-
factory careers in the large
company. This happened dur-
ing and after World War II when
engineering and research posi-
tions in industry began to open
up.

Moreover, it is also important
to remember that small scale en-
terprise, one of the traditional
ways of economic life for the
Jewish community, has been
eclipsed by the rise of the large
industry and corporation.

We stand on the verge of a ma-
jor breakthrough in historic
barriers and prejudices toward
Jews in the business field if cor-
porate and Jewish leadership rec-
ognize that they have a com-
mon problem to solve and are
about the task of doing so.

A historian and intergroup re-
alations worker, Dr. Murray Freed-
bron, director of the Pennsylvania Area Direc-
tor of the American Jewish Com-
mittee.