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## **XVI STUDENTS' SIT-IN, 1971**

Advocates for Increased Funding for Jewish Education

Glaser: When you were on the executive committee in 1971 after your presidency there was a student sit-in. The students claimed that there were insufficient funds for Jewish education. How was this handled?

Steinhart: I'd say hilariously. First of all, the students were a group from Berkeley and they were all nice young kids. They didn't have really any good idea what they were talking about, they really didn't know what they wanted. All they were opposed to was the establishment, that's what it came down to. They thought the establishment was assigning the funds in the wrong way, and yet if you asked them how they wanted to do it they really didn't contribute too much.

It began one day when I got a call and had to rush over to the Federation office. Mel Swig was then president. Here was this group. The first thing they had to do was sing songs.

They had a guitar with them and they had to sing songs. Finally, I got a little annoyed and I said, "All right now, kids, you've had your fun. What do you want? We've got other things to do."

So they said they wanted something like a meeting with us. And they were prepared to get arrested and go to jail, so we set up a meeting. We came to the meeting and they immediately put a tape recorder on the table. I looked at them and said, "You need a tape recorder?"

"Well, yes, we do."

And I said, "Well, we won't use one, but go ahead." They started out by asking certain questions and they picked on Mel. They were needling him in some technique a lawyer uses. I finally interrupted and said, "All right now, [thumps table]"

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we're not going to answer any more of that type of question. Let's get down to what you really want."

We discussed, and they explained what they needed. I think we told them pretty much "Well, you're not going to get it and here are the reasons you're not going to get it. You've had your meeting so now [thumps table] let's adjourn."

Mel backed it up, of course, and we left. The next thing we know we get a written sheet, a printed throwaway sheet, in which they quoted the statements that Mel and I had made. Of course they were taken off the tape recorder, but they were quoted completely out of context. So it was like saying that we said, "A, it is black." When we said "You people say it is black," they just said, "He said it was black."

That was the end of it, they disappeared. We also were a little critical of them because some of these kids were from families who were giving good sums to the charity and substance. These kids really had nothing to back up what they were doing but they were having fun.

Glaser: Did you have a feeling that they were manipulated by someone?

Steinhart: No, definitely not. They had obviously in their own sessions gone over this ground over and over again. They thought they had all the answers to all the questions we could ask, and they pretty much did. We asked a question and they gave a ready answer.

We did lay down one rule. We said, "You have a spokesman. Pick two people, they can speak for you, but we're not going to listen to all

of you." And they agreed to that and they abided by it. They were very well-behaved and were nice kids.

Glaser: During your presidency there was a report on Jewish education from a committee that was started in 1969. Was any action on this taken during your presidency?

Steinhart: I don't remember it, I really don't. I remember vaguely that there were problems with the day schools, and I forget what went into what. The day school problem probably cropped up later.

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**Melvin M. Swig**

PRESIDENT, JEWISH COMMUNITY FEDERATION OF SAN FRANCISCO,  
THE PENINSULA, MARIN AND SONOMA COUNTIES, 1971-1972

Interviews Conducted  
by Eleanor K. Glaser  
in 1991

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**Page 66: Jewish Day Schools**

Glaser: I want to ask you about Jewish education; during your administration you had a lot of difficulty. You had a sit-in.

Swig: A very unfortunate incident.

Glaser: Would you tell me about that?

Swig: Well, we had and have a rabbi out at the Hebrew Academy who wanted to run all the Jewish education in this community.

Glaser: Rabbi Pincus Lipner?

Swig: Yes. And he made some public utterances that were not in the best interests of the Jewish community at large. And he did some things with the city building department and the permits that were not in conformity with the local rules. He just did a lot of bad things, and he wasn't very happy with the Federation and the support he was

getting from them. The Federation conversely was not very happy with him because he wasn't doing the right thing, in our opinion.

So they held a sit-in because we were cutting off our allocations to him. So he sent down a bunch of kids one afternoon I guess it was, or morning, I've forgotten. Anyway, I called in Sam Ladar and John Steinhart, Bob Sinton, Lou Weintraub and myself. Lou was all for calling the cops and getting rid of the guys and doing aal that. I said "Holed the phone," as did the others. "That's not the way to handle it. That's only going to create a bigger disturbance and that's what they are looking for. Let them sit in." So we had one of our people stay overnight with them, sit in with them, so that we would not have damage and have trouble. It went reasonably peacefully.

The next morning I came down and they wanted to meet with me and I said, "Sure, I'll meet with them." And I did. They told me what was on their mind and I told them what was on mine. I had all our people there with me, I didn't do it along, and we met. And they got up. That was the end of it.

Glaser: Did you feel these young people were manipulated by Rabbi Lipner?

Swig: Unquestionably they were. They were his disciples.

Glaser: They were college kids; they weren't high school kids?

Swig: I believe they were a little older than high school.

Glaser: What was going on at the Bureau of Jewish Education through all this turmoil?

Swig: They were not sympathetic to Lipner. He was a noose around everybody's neck.

Glaser: You appointed a committee to study the situation of Jewish day schools. That resulted in the combing of Brandeis and the Hillel day schools. What was the situation with either of them that they could work better combined?

Swig: I don't remember it in full detail, but I do recall that we thought we needed a strong school that would satisfy the appetite of the local people and could provide better service and be a stronger institution. I think that's what actually happened. The two of them alone were not doing the job as well as one combined could do it. That's what I seem to remember. But that was a long time ago; I'm not exactly sure.

Glaser: What was your personal feeling about funding Jewish day schools?

Swig: I personally am not a proponent of Jewish day schools. I have always made myself clear on that. On the other hand, the community wanted it and I supported it because they wanted it.

Glaser: Why were you against it?

Swig: My personal observation is that we are a multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-religious society. Basically I feel that our children should be exposed to that way of life and shouldn't be separatists. I don't believe particularly in parochial schools. It's a personal observation. I think we should learn to get along with our neighbors and be part of the total society. I think our Jewish education can come about either at afternoon schools and/or at the various temples and synagogues. That's where I feel the Jewish education should take place. In our daily school, it should be done either in a public school or in a private, non-sectarian school. That's a personal observation. I feel rather strongly about it.

My experience tells me that it's introspective and not broad enough to be a part of the total community. I think we as Jewish people should be a part of the total community, never losing our Jewish identity. I'm not for that but for . I'm not for that but for showing our Jewish identity and being a part of a total community. I happen to believe strongly in that and I think I do do that in life and have done it. I am part of the total community very strongly, but nobody will ever think I am not Jewish. Everybody knows I am Jewish and what I stand for and what I believe in the Jewish community. I think that is important.