INTERVIEW WITH BRAM PORTNOY

WORLD UNION OF JEWISH STUDENTS REPRESENTATIVE AT SUMMER U.

by Yvette Nahmia

It's 2.10 a.m., and I'm sitting in the Summer U office along with other members of the newspaper staff, preparing today's issue. To tell you the truth, I'd rather be spending my time in the conference room, where it seems that you're enjoying yourselves at the Karaoke party. But, ma la-asot?!

I shouldn't be complaining. After all, interviewing Bram Portnoy, who is the WUJS representative at Summer U, was both enjoyable and informative. In case you haven't met Bram yet, I'll briefly introduce him to you. Bram works in the WUJS office in Jerusalem, where he's in charge of different projects. Most unions have utilised, I believe, the Shabbat Olamit Choveret, which he co-authored with Clare Goldwater. In addition, he represents Network - the North American Union - on the WUJS Arevim executive board, and is currently organising a Sephardi Jewish students congress for next summer. Here, in Summer U, he has taken up the role of educator: he runs a study session on 'Nietzsche, Nazi Ideology and the Chosen Race.'

YN: So Bram, WUJS turned 70 years old this year. It was 70 years ago when young Albert Einstein, along with a small group of Jewish students, founded the World Union of Jewish Students. Have you planned any special activity to celebrate the occasion?

BP: *Our 70 year old history will be celebrated in all programmes organised by WUJS for this year.*

YN: What activities have you planned for the forthcoming year?

BP: *Our first activity on the calender is the annual Congress, which will take place in Jerusalem, starting on December 27th.*

YN: Will it be a large gathering of Jewish students?

BP: *Yes, we expect more than 300 students, coming from at least 30 different countries. It will be a* great opportunity to discuss the issues that concern us, attend stimulating lectures on Judaism by top educators, and set out further goals. In fact, we expect some of the educators who are here to be in Jerusalem aswell.

YN: I've noticed that we usually have the same educators in most of these gatherings. Do you think we've run out of educators?

BP: *No, we have not run out of educators. We keep inviting the same ones because students respond warmly to them. Moreover, every year we have new people participating who have a lot to gain from the contact with these wonderful people. However, I personally think that we could have more substance introduced in education. In my study session, I use texts which render the discussions more concrete. It seems to me that they now stand on firm ground, rather than being up in the air.*

YN: Does WUJS leadership consider Jewish education a priority on the agenda?

BP:*Yes, in fact Jewish education is the first item on our agenda. Actually, David Gold - who is the Chairperson of WUJS - has written a book called 'A Cry In The Dark', in which he describes his vision concerning the future of Jewish youth. In it, he calls for increasing substantive education, in order to combat Jewish illiteracy, and achieve a Jewish revitalisation.*

YN: This is great news. Has this book circulated yet?

BP: *It has just gotten out of the publishing house. We are sending it out in the upcoming weeks.*

YN: I heard that Kol Isha was very successful. How many participants attended it?

BP: *We had seventeen participants. Hopefully, the Unions will take up a much stronger co-operation with WUJS, and achiev higher numbers in the future. In the WUJS office, we are talking of the possibility of a one week Women's Conference.*

YN: What will it focus on?

BP: *Women's role in Judaism, Women's Leadership Training Seminar, the role of women in Israeli society. Many prominent women will address the participants. We are planning it for the end of July.*

YN: Why? Are there any other projects planned?

BP: *We have two exciting programmes scheduled, 'Aviv' - a five month programme in Israel for high school graduates and university students. It combines study, tiyulim, work options, leadership training seminars, kibbutz, Gadna, and volunteer internships. It is an international English speaking programme, the cost of which is $3000.*