

The Albert Einstein Involvement

by Arthur H. Reis, Jr.

Professor Albert Einstein, one of the greatest minds of this century, was highly involved in the founding of Brandeis University and influenced the shape of the University as we know it today.

In January 1946, when the opportunity arose to acquire the land and the charter of Middlesex University, a group of New York trustees headed by Rabbi Israel Goldstein called on Einstein at his home in Princeton, New Jersey, to seek his involvement. It was clear that an effort to develop a Jewish university needed a world-renowned person like Albert Einstein to succeed and to give the effort the greatest possible credibility. On January 22, 1946, Einstein agreed to the effort remarking in a letter to Dr. Goldstein, "I would approve very much the creation of a Jewish college or university provided that it was sufficiently made sure that the Board and administration will remain permanently in reliable Jewish hands. I am convinced that such an institution will attract our

best young Jewish people and not less our young scientists and learned men in all fields. Such an institution, provided it is of a high standard, will improve our situation a good deal and will satisfy a real need. As is well known, under present circumstances, many of our gifted youth see themselves denied the cultural and professional education they are longing for. I would do anything in my power to help in the creation and guidance of such an institute. It would always be dear to my heart."

On February 5, 1946, Einstein gave his consent to the establishment of the Albert Einstein Foundation for Higher Learning, Inc., which was incorporated in the state of Delaware on February 25, 1946. But almost from the beginning of Einstein's involvement, the struggle and the differences between various parties became more obvious. Abram Sachar would write later about this time, "The Einstein name was an enormous asset, but the old man had rather austere views of what such a university should be and there were temperamental clashes with Dr. Goldstein almost from the outset."

In the spring of 1946, many potential contributors to the new university visited with Einstein at his Princeton home. What Einstein wanted was not to be a fund-raising figurehead but the true inspirational leader, bringing a first-class faculty to Brandeis and fashioning its academic programs. Einstein was especially worried about Goldstein's ability "to structure the University and begin making commitments." It was in the development of the Educational Advisory Committee that the tensions with Goldstein grew. Einstein had a sense that Goldstein was making commitments to the staffing of that committee and to the discussion of possible names for president of the University without Einstein's input. Einstein wrote on July 1, 1946, to Goldstein, "When I allowed my name to be used in connection with the establishment of a Jewish-sponsored university, an undertaking of tremendous significance, I took it for granted that no important step would be taken concerning the organization without my consent."

Part of the problem was also the tensions in the Jewish community as to who would support this venture. It is clear that Dr. Stephen Wise, one of the great leaders of this time, had little respect for Goldstein and wrote to Einstein, "As a friend, I say to you, you ought not to tie yourself up with the Foundation bearing your name, and the Jewish university, unless there be some completely trustworthy person, like our friend Otto Nathan, standing at the side of Dr. Israel Goldstein, to give him the benefit of his own wise judgment and your judgment, and thus to ensure for him at once a place for him in relation to the proposed university... You must also have someone beside Dr. Goldstein whom you can trust." Nathan was eventually appointed to the Advisory Committee as Einstein's representative, but matters grew worse in August 1946 and came to a head in September 1946 when Einstein decided to resign. Goldstein knew that if Einstein disengaged himself from the new university venture, all would be lost, so he himself decided to resign after seven months of intense work to start the University. Einstein reconsidered and remained as part of the Foundation that was now headed by S. Ralph Lazrus of New York City. George Alpert, a Boston lawyer, became head of the Board of Trustees.

Sachar wrote that in June 1947, "Dr. Einstein was

becoming as uneasy with the procedures of the Boston leadership as he had been with Dr. Goldstein's." Einstein's representative, Otto Nathan, was not diplomatic in his relations with the Boston Trustees of the University, and they resented the decisions Nathan made. Einstein was becoming more worried about the fund-raising goals and what was actually achieved, and found it intolerable to continue. In June 1947, for the second time, he withdrew his participation. Alpert said that Einstein had withdrawn because Einstein's candidate for president of the new university, Dr. Harold Laski of England, was turned down by the Board. Alpert remarked to the world that, "to foist on the University a thoroughly unacceptable choice as president, a man utterly alien to American principles of democracy, tarred with the Communist brush. This would have condemned the University to impotence from the start." Einstein countered that he had in March 1947 "mentioned to Mr. Alpert that, in case the Board would take such actions, I was considering to inquire of Professor Laski whether he might be willing to come over here to help us in organizing the University.

Mr. Alpert not only did not object to this suggestion, but approved of it." Einstein felt that Alpert had publicly lied about the situation and demeaned him. Sachar wrote later that "Albert Einstein's cold anger never thawed out."

After he became President, Sachar tried to meet with Einstein several times but was rebuffed at each experience. On July 4, 1949, Einstein wrote, "Thank you for your kind letter of June 26. After my experiences with the untrustiness and untruthfulness of certain of the Board of Trustees, I do not feel justified to induce a younger colleague—even indirectly—to accept a position at Brandeis University." On May 20, 1953, Einstein was invited to accept an honorary degree but replied to Sachar, "what happened in the stage of preparation of Brandeis University was not at all caused by a misunderstanding and cannot be made good any more."

Finally, in the last correspondence of Einstein to Sachar in January 1954 he wrote: "If you would be simply a private person who had written delightful books, I would gladly accept your kind offer to visit me. Under the prevailing circumstances, however, it is not possible for me to do so. As you are informed about the relevant past events, you will easily understand."

Einstein died on April 18, 1955. ■