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Cartoon On Holocaust Draws Fire At Rutgers

By RICHARD LEZIN JONES

NEWARK, April 23— The president of Rutgers University condemned a weekly campus publication on Friday for printing a front-page cartoon that ridiculed victims of the Holocaust. But, citing legal precedents protecting student publications, he said he could not take away its university funds as some critics had urged.

The publication, *The Medium* -- a journal of news and opinion that features humor, cultural items and sexual and scatological references -- ran a cartoon depicting a bearded man wearing a hat and sitting on the edge of an open kitchen stove in a carnival setting. Under the heading "Holocaust Remembrance Week," the cartoon's caption reads: "Knock a Jew in the oven! Three throws for one dollar!"

In a statement, the Rutgers president, Richard L. McCormick, said that the illustration was "outrageous in its cruelty" and called on the editors of the publication to issue an apology. "The editors may think this is satire, but I completely disagree," Dr. McCormick said. "While this student-funded publication is protected by the First Amendment, the vicious, provocative and hurtful material the editors have chosen to publish is completely at odds with our values as a university."

The university's senate, a body made up of student and faculty representatives, issued a statement on Friday noting that it "abhors" the illustration. It was unclear whether the university would take any further action. Officials said the publication received about \$15,000 in school funding.

While noting court precedents that protect student newspapers, three Jewish groups on Friday nevertheless urged the university to re-examine the possibility of a stronger action than the senate statement condemning *The Medium*. "There's zero tolerance for making jokes, making fun or belittling the Holocaust," said Kenneth Bandler, a spokesman for the American Jewish Committee.

The editors of the newspaper did not return e-mail messages seeking comment, and no one answered the telephone at their campus offices. However, one editor, Ned Berke, defended the cartoon on Friday in *The Star-Ledger* of Newark. He said that he is Jewish, and that he viewed the illustration as a tribute to his own Jewish relatives who died in the Holocaust.

"Humor is a way of honoring them and trying to get over it and to laugh," Mr. Berke said.

Mr. Bandler said that while his group was "strongly supportive of the First Amendment," he did not

feel that any explanation could justify the contents of The Medium.

Andrew Getraer, executive director of the Rutgers University chapter of Hillel, the Jewish student organization on campus, noted that the cartoon in the most recent edition of The Medium was the latest example in a long-running series of items that have offended various groups at the school.

Last fall, for example, the publication was strongly criticized by Dr. McCormick and others on campus for a number of items in one issue that were considered racially offensive.

"But even this," said Mr. Getraer of the latest incident, "is a new low for them."

The Anti-Defamation League also criticized the publication.

"The Medium has engaged in some of the most egregious and vile attacks on Asian-Americans, African-Americans and gays," said Shai Goldstein, the New Jersey regional director. "It lacks any qualification as satire. Its level of sophistication is beneath junior high school." The controversial edition of The Medium was not on the publication's Web site on Friday, but an issue posted earlier featured the kind of fare that critics of the organization said was common. Interspersed with photos of nude women, close-ups of genitalia and explicit personals ads, were mock news stories like one about the "death" of a campus computer server unit.

By late Friday, even that issue was inaccessible online. The newspaper's site had been wiped off the Web, apparently by a computer hacker who left a link to the Anti-Defamation League's Web site. Mr. Goldstein denied any involvement by his organization.

"If that was done, that's not something that we do and we condemn," Mr. Goldstein said.

The Web site's removal came a few hours after the statement by the university senate, an action that Mr. Goldstein said had encouraged him about the university's commitment to fostering amicable relations between those of different faiths and ethnicities.

Noting that the senate's resolution called for the "expression of responsible journalism," Mr. Goldstein said of The Medium: "That isn't journalism. That isn't even bad journalism."