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News

Activists Protest Non-Union Construction At Jewish Theological Seminary

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Activists protest Gilbane outside JTS on May 1.

Activists held a protest on Monday outside the Jewish Theological Seminary in Manhattan against the contractor that the rabbinical school hired to manage a massive construction project on campus.

JTS, the flagship seminary of Conservative Judaism, hired the contractor Gilbane to build a new library and residence hall as part of a major refiguring of its facilities. Gilbane has received widespread criticism for hiring non-union subcontractors at job sites across New York City.

The seminary has come under growing pressure in recent weeks for its decision to hire Gilbane. An article on the leftist blog Jewschool accused the seminary of hypocrisy in hiring the firm. In late April, JTS students and other

activists sent a letter to the board of trustees demanding that the school cancel Gilbane's contract.

At Monday's protest, organized by the Workmen's Circle and the NYC Community Alliance for Worker Justice, activists called on Gilbane to select subcontractors for the JTS project who are either unionized or meet union standards.

JTS said in a statement that Gilbane's practices were in line with industry norms. "Gilbane operates under an open shop model, which utilizes a combination of union and non-union labor, and is consistent with the citywide trend toward open shop on projects of this kind," the seminary said. "Gilbane upholds the same strict wage and safety standards for both its union and non-union subcontractors, requiring all subcontractors to comply with living wage requirements and provide certified payrolls."

Contact Josh Nathan-Kazis at nathankazis@forward.com or on Twitter, @joshnathankazis.