



Sponsored by The Shalom Center
Workmen's Circle/Arbeter Ring
& Jewish Currents
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November 17, 2008
Opinion Piece for Publication
Attn: Editor
The Forward
45 East 33rd Street
New York, NY 10016

As organizers of the November 23rd conference, “Jews Uniting to End the War and Heal America,” we are greatly angered by Ralph Seliger’s opinion piece published in the latest edition of the Forward.

Mr. Seliger focused his political suspicions on two out of fifty activists who are leading workshops or plenary sessions at the “Jews Uniting” event. He ignored the participation of leading progressive Zionists such as Jeremy Ben-Ami of J Street, MJ Rosenberg of the Israel Policy Forum, Rabbis Simkha Weintraub and Rachel Kahn-Troster of Rabbis for Human Rights, and his own khaverte, Lilly Rivlin, the past president of Meretz USA (Mr. Seliger is the editor of Israel Horizons, the publication of Meretz USA).

It saddens us that Mr. Seliger does not trust Jewish liberals and progressives to hear the wide variety of views and experience that will be expressed at the November 23 gathering, and work through their own conclusions about what to do -- as Jews have done since Abraham argued with God in the Torah and the Talmudic rabbis argued with each other two thousand years ago.

Instead, he received a brochure about the event in an envelope stamped “Stop the War!” - - and peculiarly inferred from this that our conference would adopt “an uncompromisingly extreme posture” regarding U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. Based on his own negative assessments of two of our speakers’ postures towards Israel, he tarred all of the organizers of the event, and all of the participants in the event, as somehow susceptible to Israel-bashing, somehow naïve about “the difference between sloganeering and thoughtful foreign policy,” and somehow less politically sophisticated than Seliger himself.

The November 23rd event should be applauded for providing a forum for diverse voices and a safe atmosphere for thoughtful discussion within a community that has been mostly silent or reticent about the war in Iraq. Instead, Mr. Seliger has sought to discredit us in advance, in tones of condescension towards The Workmen's Circle, The Shalom Center, Jewish Currents and all of those who will be participating in our dialogue.

We urge Forward readers to contemplate the list of participants -- including key leaders of the Reform and Reconstructionist movements and of the National Council of Jewish



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Women, as well as Elizabeth Holtzman, Rep. Jerrold Nadler, Forward editorial director J. J. Goldberg, and scores of other smart, caring, expert Jewish analysts and activists -- and to join us this Sunday at Central Synagogue in NYC by registering at www.circle.org/jewsuniting, rather than persisting in the kind of fear and paralysis about the war that has silenced many Jewish voices for nearly six years.

Sincerely,

Ann Toback, Executive Eirector, The Workmen's Circle/Arbeter Ring
Rabbi Arthur Waskow, Director, The Shalom Center
Lawrence Bush, Editor, Jewish Currents