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Do seminars present objective view of strife?

08/06/2002

Why is the Indian Valley Public Library conducting a seminar on the Middle East that presents a very biased – and in my opinion, distorted – pro-Arab viewpoint?

That was the question I asked myself when I received a flier in the mail last June listing the four seminar topics and three speakers. Although on the surface the program appeared balanced, I recognized an immediate common thread: a rabbi known in the Jewish community for his leftist, pro-Palestinian leanings; a Quaker (an organization very vocal in its support for the Palestinian cause), and a Thomas Ricks, who consistently advocates pro-Arabist views and a Palestinian state with little regard for Jewish sympathies.

As a Christian who strongly supports the Jewish State and their claims to the land, I contacted the library and was referred to Deb Faulkner as the one in charge. Pointing out the program's apparent one-sidedness, I asked – as an area resident – if I could be allowed to join the forum, since I had been giving lectures on the Middle East myself on behalf of the Zionist Organization of America in churches, synagogues, homes and places of business. I use some large maps that clearly give valuable historical insight and background on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. She asked me to submit my résumé, which I did about seven weeks ago, but never heard back.

Although I missed the first two lectures (the rabbi and the Quaker), I decided to catch the next two to be given by Ricks. My worst fears were confirmed. Several times in his talk (which was about that wonderful country Iran) Ricks referred to "Palestine" as if it were a nation in the Middle East.

During the Q&A period, I asked him if he was referring to Israel, because I knew of no country in the Middle East called Palestine. He assured me there was one. When I asked where, he said on the West Bank. I reiterated that that territory is not a country named Palestine, but should be called at its fairest, "disputed territory."

He shot back that Poland was still Poland after it had been occupied in World War II. I said again that there was no Palestinian state, country or nation there now, before or ever – and that the true name for that historic Jewish land was



Judea and Samaria.

He would not budge from his stated position. And reminded his audience of some 25 people – but looking straight at me – that next week he would be speaking specifically about Palestine.



Spotting Faulkner, I asked her again about the possibility of my speaking, especially in light of the politicizing and factual misrepresentation just given by Ricks. She was clearly unsympathetic to my request and even defended Ricks' contention that there was a Palestine, until I showed her from her own map that it was a figment of Ricks' imagination. I realized finally that the point of view I represented was not going to be heard at the Indian Valley Public Library.

So I am writing this letter to the community to ask for support – especially in light of the horrendous attack on Hebrew University – to demand that our local library present a fair and balanced view of the Middle East. If they want to invite a speaker with more credentials than myself, fine. But there is another viewpoint that needs to be heard.


And I invite all those who are as angry as I am to join me outside the library at 6 p.m. Aug. 7 to protest Ricks (he's speaking at 6:30) and our library's poor decision to promote his distorted view of Middle East history.

Brian Hennessy is a resident of Harleysville.

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