

THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE
ERUV COMMITTEE



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Mathew Lewin
by fax

17th February 1993

Dear Mathew,

Following our telephone conversation a little while ago, I find myself once again needing to put my position on record to the Ham&High.

You asked me to comment on an allegation by somebody that about half of the signatures on the pro-eruv petition were from outside the borough. I explained to you that was a malicious and untrue suggestion. I personally have checked each and every page of the petition and my staff have been through it too, analysing the signatures ward by ward. Whilst we are only human and we may have overlooked or misread some and I would always allow for an error rate of 1 or 2%, I totally reject the allegation.

Furthermore and more important, I feel that perhaps I failed to convey to you my dismay that the Ham&High were once again about to allow themselves to be manipulated. You said to me that if you run the allegation you will quote our denial and that that is 'fair' journalism and that if both sides are shouting at you you can't be far off the right course.

The fact is, and I suspect that your publication knows this only too well, that some opponents of the eruv have exploited this 'fair' journalism only too cynically. 'Somebody' makes an outrageous allegation. You admit that you cannot check it out but you are willing to consider publishing it, nay - you feel obliged to, along with a denial, knowing full well that in the minds of your readers this will plant serious doubt - after all there's no smoke without fire etc.

9 WEST HEATH ROAD LONDON NW3 7UX

TEL 071-433 3434 FAX 071-433 3934

Committee

Laurence Begner, Brian Berenblut, Edward Black, Joe Bloomberg, David Cohen, Daniel Drukarz, Jeremy Hershkorn, Michael Goldblatt, Michael Posen, David Schreiber, Syma Weinberg

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Supervisory Authority

Chief Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks and the London Beth Din

Technical Officer

Alan Perrin B.Sc.

On this particular issue I have further explained to you that the petition was delivered to Barnet deliberately in time for them to be able to vet it.

I have no doubt at all that this type of 'fair' journalism has significantly contributed to distrust, division and unnecessary anxiety among the general population, Jewish and non-Jewish alike. I cannot understand how you can live with the ethical ramifications of the stance of the Ham&High and best instanced by the *Jewish Zealots - Alarm in Suburb* headline. That unsupported headline caused alarm where none previously existed. The story, of course, has proven to be unfounded.

It remains my belief and conviction that in pursuing this policy, the paper has wittingly fanned the issue - perhaps to sell papers and/or to satisfy the personal agendas of a very small group of individuals and in so doing has caused the very 'divisiveness' and alarm that it reported. As I explained when Mr Isaaman pointed to the letters he received expressing alarm, this is 'self-fulfilling' reporting - you report it this week and by next week it's true!

Sincerely,

David Schreiber