

Responding to Labour's statement "No Place for Antisemitism"



Palestinians declare 'The nation-state law is apartheid' at a 30,000 strong protest in Tel Aviv

Liverpool Friends of Palestine is affiliated to the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and is part of the international Palestine Solidarity movement. We are not affiliated to the Labour Party, though a number of our members are also Labour members.

We campaign for self-determination for all the Palestinian people and call for the removal of all barriers, both physical and ideological, to achieve this aim. These include the colonial subjugation of Palestinian people and land, currently visible in the siege and occupation of Gaza, the occupation of the West Bank, the annexation of East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights (illegal under international law), and all discriminatory laws and practices within Israel. We support the demands of the Palestinian Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement – End the Occupation, Full Equality for Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel, and the Right of Return for Palestinian Refugees – and campaign to implement BDS. These non-violent punitive measures should be maintained until Israel meets its obligation to recognize the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and fully complies with the precepts of international law.

We oppose all types of racism, including Islamophobia, anti-Jewish prejudice and anti-Palestinian racism. We are anti-Zionist. We welcome a commitment from anyone who wants to oppose anti-Semitism, as we do.

It is in this context that we view the recent Labour Party statement "No Place for Antisemitism" (NPfA) which forms part of an education programme within the party.

<http://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/No-Place-for-Antisemitism.pdf>

We welcome a discussion of anti-Semitism including its historical roots. But we disagree with several aspects of the perspective on Israel and Zionism as expressed in NPfA, which adversely affect our campaign work. We hope our comments will aid discussion in the solidarity movement, outside and inside the Labour Party.

Jewish identity

NPfA states "... blaming Israel's faults on its Jewish identity, or holding all Jews in the UK and elsewhere responsible for what Israel does is antisemitic."

We agree with part of this – it is anti-Semitic to hold all Jews in the UK and elsewhere responsible for what Israel does. Many Jewish people abhor what Israel does, a growing number recognise the current reality as a form of apartheid, and some Jews are opposed in principle to the concept of a "Jewish State". Of course other people who are not Jewish may also hold these views.

But we don't agree that "blaming Israel's faults on its Jewish identity" is necessarily anti-Semitic. Israel's "Jewish identity" is not the identity of any individual Jews, wherever they live. Israel's "Jewish identity" is the formal basis of a State which systematically discriminates in favour of Jews and against non-Jews. The discrimination includes these measures:

- The "Law of Return" (5 July 1950) which gives Jews the right to come and live in Israel and to gain Israeli citizenship, a right denied to Palestinians ethnically cleansed in 1948 and their descendants;

- The "Nationality Law" (1 April 1952) which stripped most Palestinians of the citizenship they held during the British Mandate period up to the creation of Israel;
- The "Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People" adopted by the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) on 19 July 2018, which is widely recognised as entrenching apartheid. Its provisions include "The right to exercise national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people". Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described the passage of the law as "a pivotal moment in the annals of Zionism and the State of Israel. We enshrined in law the basic principle of our existence."

Once Israel defined itself as a Jewish State, the project was and remains racist. The non-racist alternative is to define itself as the state of all its citizens, which Israel refuses to do.

The History

NPfA says "In response to 19th Century European antisemitism, some Jews became advocates for Zionism, Jewish national self-determination in a Jewish state. Since the State of Israel was founded in 1948, following the horrors of the Holocaust, Zionism means maintaining that state. Jewish people have the same right to self-determination as any other people."

If this is an attempt to summarise the relevant history, it is both dangerously selective and misleading. Some Jews became advocates for Zionism in response to 19th Century European anti-Semitism, particularly the pogroms in Tsarist Russia. Zionism was a settler-colonial movement dedicated to exclusive Jewish control of land and labour and the formation of a demographically Jewish state. Our view of that history was set out in a leaflet circulated at the 2018 Labour Party Conference:

labournet.net/other/1809/Zionism.pdf

The first practical steps towards an actual 'Jewish State' came not (as NPfA suggests) after the Second World War but during the First. In November 1917 the British Government issued its 'Balfour Declaration' promising Palestine as a homeland for the Jewish people. The final draft was negotiated with British Zionist leaders without ►

consultation with the Palestinian people or consideration of their interests. A proviso “...it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country” was ignored by the Zionist movement, and never enforced by Britain. After WW1 ended Britain assumed a mandate to govern Palestine and sought to promote Jewish settlement. When Arab protests led to a restriction on Jewish immigration, Jewish terrorists took up arms against the British. Even before the British withdrawal on 15 May 1948, the ethnic cleansing of over 700,000 people and the destruction of around 500 villages had begun. Palestinians call this the ‘*Nakba*’ (catastrophe). The process continues to this day with military occupation and settlement, restriction of movement and house demolitions in the West Bank, the displacement of the Bedouin in Southern Israel and the oppressive siege and occupation of Gaza.

Therefore, we do not accept NPfA’s endorsement of the concept of a Jewish State, nor that anyone on the left can speak of 1948 without mentioning the *Nakba*, nor that self-determination for Jewish people automatically implies a Jewish State when self-determination for the Palestinian people concerns the same land. NPfA later backs away, partially, by stating “Arguing for one state with rights for all Israelis and Palestinians is not antisemitic, but calling for the removal of Jews from the region is. Anti-Zionism is not in itself antisemitic and some Jews are not Zionists”. We agree with all that. NPfA continues “Labour is a political home for Zionists and anti-Zionists. Neither Zionism nor anti-Zionism is in itself racism.” But Zionism, as it actually exists embodied in the State of Israel, which systematically discriminates against Palestinians, is racism.

The IHRA definition and examples

NPfA also links to a page on the website of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). On the IHRA webpage a 40-word ‘non-legally binding working definition’ is followed by 11 ‘contemporary examples of antisemitism in public life’.

Long before Labour adopted the definition and 11 examples, there were concerns that its wholesale adoption would stifle discussion. Kenneth Stern, who originally drafted the IHRA definition, concluded his testimony to a 2017 US Congressional hearing: “My fear is, if we similarly enshrine this definition into law, outside groups will try and suppress – rather than answer – political speech they don’t like. The academy, Jewish students, and faculty teaching about Jewish issues, will all suffer.”

A widely publicised letter (27 Aug 2018) from Palestinian unions and civil society opposing the IHRA definition and examples was included in our second leaflet circulated at the 2018 Labour Party Conference, which also discussed BDS: labournet.net/other/1808/BDS.pdf

One of the IHRA examples (no. 7) reads “Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.”

There is no obvious connection between the first and second halves of this example, which is now routinely used to denounce supporters of the Palestinians as anti-Semitic. Whatever the phrase “a State of Israel” might mean, the State of Israel, as it actually exists and has done since the ethnic cleansing of 1948 which continues to this day, is a racist endeavour. Self-determination does not include the right to prevent or obstruct the right to self-determination of another people, let alone dispossess or discriminate against them. But that is the very basis of the Israeli state. NPfA makes no mention of ethnic cleansing, nor of the Balfour Declaration which paved the way for this tragedy.

Therefore, despite aspects which we welcome, we do not accept Labour’s current view of anti-Semitism in relation to Israel or Zionism, the ideology on which the State of Israel was founded and which it continues to embody.

Liverpool Friends of Palestine
August 2019



Palestinians by the Apartheid Wall