

Let's define anti-Zionism

submission by Blake Alcott

We've done good work defining anti-Semitism to show it should not be conflated with anti-Zionism. It's the colonial-settler, apartheid, expulsive nature of the state we're fighting, not that it self-defines as Jewish.

Because we assert "It's not antisemitic to oppose Zionism", we have to be clear what Zionism and anti-Zionism mean. The political Zionism most of us oppose is the project of a Jewish state *in Palestine*, moreover 'Jewish' not just due to its flag and holidays but due to its privileged set of ethnically-defined citizens and much much more.

Anti-Zionism therefore denies the legitimacy – the rightness – of that state. It is not merely opposition to particular Israeli regimes or sub-sets of its policies, much less only to its 1967 occupation of even more territory than it had already occupied in 1948. No, by advocating right of return and equality for all, while accepting Israel's self-definition, we are denying the right of this state to be there. And the logical equivalent of this denial is our alternative project of an un-partitioned Palestinian state based on the abrogated, trampled rights of the indigenous Moslem, Christian, Jewish and Druze Palestinians.

But we ourselves should not blur this distinction between anti-Zionism and anti-Israeli policies. Limiting the criticism to policies, not Israel itself as the cause of the policies, unfortunately usually does mean acceptance of an ethno-religiously defined Jewish state on some part of Palestine. This isn't anti-Zionism. It is indeed part and parcel of the West's two-state solution, and it is safe from the charge of antisemitism.

Upon failing to show that anti-Zionism is antisemitic, the Zionists will fall back on the charge that it is 'extremist' and endangers Jewish Israelis existentially. We can reply that if anti-Zionism is extreme, so is Zionism, and that there is no existential problem because Jewish Israelis would retain their citizenship in the successor state.

The present witch-hunt actually offers us a chance: By equating antisemitism with rejection of Israel, in other words with anti-Zionism, it offers us an opening to re-enter the all-important discourse around Israel's right to exist. We can first 'own' the label 'anti-Zionist' then experiment with saying Yes, anti-Zionism means the 'end of Israel' – its *replacement* by a human-rights-based democracy.

It is also a chance to refute the clever claim of witch-hunt ringleader Jonathan Freedland that anti-Zionism is necessarily a denial of 'the Jews' right to self-determination'. Even if for reasons that are not antisemitic one rejects this idea, our case doesn't depend on rejecting it in principle. Our criticism is that it takes place on somebody else's land at their horrible expense. It's the Jewish state *in Palestine* we reject.

It will take some skill to dodge the words 'elimination', 'annihilation' or 'destruction' of Israel that the Zionists in mock horror throw back at us. But as Omar Barghouti recently said, "If freedom, justice and equality would 'destroy' Israel, what does that say about Israel?"

Israel knows that anti-Zionism and its strategic programme BDS mean the end of the real-life state of Israel. That is why it is investing so much against the boycott and in this antisemitism farce.

Awad Abdelfattah was recently in England speaking to student Palestine Societies, PSC branches, MPs and also Jeremy Corbyn. He is Secretary-General of the Tajamoal/Balad Party, founded by Azmi Bishara and part of the Joint List. He courageously said that we cannot any longer shy away from de-legitimising Israel.

Of course the Labour Party cannot yet go that far, and we should tolerate for a while longer its public-relations constraints. But we can prepare the ground for it, always looking at all Palestinians, always going back to 1948 and 1917, always asking what's wrong with a standard democracy in Palestine, and unashamedly inserting the concept of the end of Israel – free but at the same time careful speech.

Over the last decades we've won acceptance of calling Israel 'colonial', 'settler-colonial', 'racist', 'apartheid', and of saying it committed 'ethnic cleansing'. The next discourse-battle is over Zionism itself, opposition to which means rejection of Israel as such, a negative rejection we should however always turn into a positive vision of a de-partitioned democratic Palestine.