

Dear NEC Member,

WHY BOTHER?

Jewish friends of mine say “Why is Pete doing this? Now he is likely to lose his steward’s role with the GMB because the National notes [they have suspended him](#). Those Marxists at LAW may feel his [treatment is unfair](#) but it’s his own fault. He should shut up because he only harms Labour’s electoral chances by making a fuss. What we need now is a Labour Government, not someone stirring up a hornet’s nest.”

But a Labour Government is what I seek. Please read on – and consider my suggestion at the end as to how we might secure both Westminster and peace in the middle east at one go - by taking a few simple yet profound steps.

Firstly listen - this is what I’ve noticed. Over the past few years, every time there is any kind of election, be it local or national, the anti-Semitism rant comes forth. Soon the press are full of cries from politicians and media pundits that Labour is still riddled with anti-Semites and the Party HQ has still failed to get a grip on the problem. Even if I and the close to 1,000 who have signed my petition get expelled after the Disputes Committee meeting to discuss my case on the 20th November, it will make no odds. Because those Zionists declaring Labour is too anti-Semitic know one thing – that Corbyn should never be allowed into number 10 – and if he is, he must be muzzled so tight that he says nothing, nothing, nothing of Israel.

To see that this is so, one needs to reflect upon why the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism came to be. As many are beginning to realise, it was hatched not long after the beginning of the millennium when the Boycott, Divest and Sanction movement began to take off. BDS was founded in 2005 and as [Nathan Thrall observed in the Guardian](#) in August 2018:

“BDS has challenged the two-state consensus of the international community. In so doing it has upset the entire industry of Middle East peace process non-profit organisations, diplomatic missions and think tanks by undermining their central premise: that the conflict can be resolved simply by ending Israel’s occupation of Gaza, East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank, leaving the rights of Palestinian citizens of Israel and refugees unaddressed.”

“For many diaspora Jews, BDS has become a symbol of evil and repository of dread, a nefarious force transforming the Israel-Palestine debate from a negotiation over the end of the occupation and the division of territory into an argument about the conflict’s older and deeper roots: the original displacement of most of the Palestinians, and, on the ruins of their conquered villages, the establishment of a Jewish state. The emergence of the BDS movement has revived old questions about the legitimacy of Zionism, how to justify the privileging of Jewish over non-Jewish rights, and why refugees can return to their homes in other conflicts but not in this one. Above all, it has underscored an awkward issue that cannot be indefinitely neglected: whether Israel, even if it were to cease its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, can be both a democracy and a Jewish state.”

Haidar Eid, a professor of literature at Al-Azhar University and a co-founder of the BDS movement in Gaza has a clear view. The Guardian observes:

“To Eid, the two-state solution was an essentially racist proposal, because it was designed to preserve a Jewish ethnic majority, with legally sanctioned discrimination against non-Jews. He preferred a single, democratic, non-racial, non-religious state, which he said was a “huge compromise for Palestinians”, because it would give “citizenship and forgiveness to settlers and occupiers”. Eid objected to the PLO’s insincere threats to seek such an outcome, which he wrote off

as a misguided attempt to scare the Israelis into accepting ethnic partition: “I mean, equality is not scary! If you are against equality and justice, you are against human rights.””

I hope you have begun to appreciate that the IHRA definition is promulgated by Israel in order to prevent sanctions ever being imposed upon it. [To understand more about how Israel drives its survival by the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism, now adopted by most UK public bodies and Parties, please read [“International campaign is criminalizing criticism of Israel as ‘antisemitism’”](#) from “If Americans Knew” blog.]

The Guardian article goes on to note:

.... “Perhaps Israel’s most powerful tool in the campaign against de-legitimation has been to accuse the country’s critics of antisemitism. Doing so required changing official definitions of the term. This effort began during the final years of the second intifada, in 2003 and 2004, as pre-BDS calls to boycott and divest from Israel were gaining steam. At that time, a group of institutes and experts, including Dina Porat – a Tel Aviv University scholar who had been a member of the Israeli foreign ministry’s delegation to the 2001 UN world conference against racism in Durban, South Africa – proposed creating a new definition of antisemitism that would equate criticisms of Israel with hatred of Jews.”

“These experts and institutions, working with the American Jewish Committee and other Israel advocacy groups, formulated a new “working definition” of antisemitism, including a list of examples, that was published in 2005 (and later discarded) by an EU body for combating racism. This working definition was adapted in 2016 by **the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)**, and has been used, endorsed or recommended, with some small modifications, by a number of other organisations – including the US Department of State, which, since 2008, has defined anti-Semitism to include any of three categories of criticism of Israel, known as the “three Ds”: de-legitimation of Israel, demonisation of Israel and double standards for Israel. (More recently, the IHRA working definition has been at the centre of the antisemitism controversy in the Labour party, [which adopted it in September 2018].)”

“By the state department’s definition, de-legitimation includes “Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, and denying Israel the right to exist”. Thus anti-Zionism – including the view that Israel should be a state of all its citizens, with equal rights for Jews and non-Jews – is a form of de-legitimation and therefore anti-Semitic. According to this definition, virtually all Palestinians (and a large proportion of ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel, who oppose Zionism for religious reasons) are guilty of anti-Semitism because they want Jews and Palestinians to continue living in Palestine but not within a Jewish state...”

The second D, demonisation, includes “Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis” ... The last of the three Ds, applying double standards, holds that singling Israel out for criticism is “the new anti-Semitism”... The new definition of antisemitism has been frequently deployed against Israel’s critics..”

So note this. Labour supports the two-state solution. BDS wants (as do I and many Palestinians) a single state solution.

THOSE OF MY FRIENDS WHO THINK I SHOULD SHUT UP, should reflect upon this. The IHRA definition of anti-Semitism is there in order to maintain Israel’s ongoing racist status. It will be used come election time by (undercover) agents of Israel to suggest that (a) Labour is unfit to govern and (b) sanctions against Israel are racist and must never be allowed.

Israeli plotters have largely won: most politicians these days are terrified of openly calling for sanctions for fear they that to do so they will be branded as anti-Semites. They will be, some prominent Jews will declare, little better than Hitler. Thus the rhetoric is ramped up at election time and we see a willing mainstream media eager to savour the vile actions of the Holocaust all over again.

Those in LAW and at the Clarion magazine view with horror my comment that:

“Jews in the UK have so much leverage that they could call for the beatification of Thatcher and we would have to seriously consider their proposal”. They believe that by saying this, I conflate Jews with Zionists and completely undermine our petition.

In the [recent piece on our campaign](#) in the Weekly Worker, Carla Roberts of Labour Party Marxists observes, that “LAW, while defending Gregson against any disciplinary action, does not support the petition because it is, in parts, rather clumsily (and unfortunately) formulated.”

The stooshie that Lane and Tony Greenstein of Law refer to is my statement about Jews and Maggie Thatcher. True, my comment can be seen to be racist and glib. Glib it may be, but not racist. For from where does the leverage come? From the Holocaust, mostly.

So why do I say this? Because it is important to reflect upon that without the Holocaust, there could be no IHRA. Many in the west find it necessary to support the IHRA because they feel the guilt of the Holocaust. That the UK stood by and did little whilst 6 million Jews perished is a blot on our character. In late 1942 it was open knowledge outside areas controlled by the Nazis that Jews were being slaughtered on an industrial scale, but the UK focussed its energy on a military campaign and Churchill seldom mentioned what was going on in Poland, as millions of Jews were gassed and shot. It wasn't until after the war, at Nuremberg in 1945, that Nazi acts against the Jews became open knowledge. By then it was too late.

So the ancestors of we in the west are in some ways complicit in the genocide by failing to do enough to halt it. And before the war we turned back many refugees. Hence the guilt. And guilt is a powerful motivator. It means that Jews in the UK have significant leverage in the UK because it was all Jews who were victims, not just the Zionists.

But that leverage is exploited not by all Jews, but by the Zionists. And most particularly by those who push the IHRA – and they do it to silence criticism that Israel is racist. For Israelis know too well that if the West acknowledges that it is an apartheid country that its days as a home primarily for Jews are numbered.

So I say that Jews, rather than Zionists, have leverage because those in the Labour movement need to acknowledge the guilt we feel for the Holocaust is to all Jews, but it is that same guilt that gives power to the Zionists. We must embrace the “elephant in the room” and declare that our guilt is what Netanyahu and the Nakba-deniers deploy to keep Israeli on its racist course.

It is pointless and futile to ignore this. As long as we do, we shall never win the battle to see the IHRA abandoned and a return to the OED definition of anti-Semitism whereby it is, quite simply, “hostility to or prejudice against Jews”.

For at the same time as Labour ceases to support the IHRA, it must join with BDS in embracing the idea of a single-state solution. Those living in the occupied territories must be allowed to vote for the national elections. For who will then rule from the Knesset? An Arab Prime Minister.

The Israelis fear this so much that they will join with the Conservatives and mainstream media in flaying Labour all over again come the general election for being insufficiently anti-Semitic. They know that as long as the headlines are dominated by the slur, that many UK voters will hesitate before putting a cross in the Labour candidate's box. But they also know that even if Labour wins, it can never have the power to intervene in the Middle East in the way it did on South Africa in the 80s. It will never have the power to call for sanctions because if Corbyn even suggested it, he would need to be expelled from Labour as an anti-Semite.

So here's what I suggest: abandon the IHRA and disaffiliate the JLM; then in our manifesto go for a single-state solution; declare Israel apartheid; demand the repeal of the Nation State Law; accept the notion that Gaza and the West Bank are part of Israel and demand that Arabs living in those occupied territories become Israeli citizens with voting rights - and lead the campaign for boycott, divestment and sanctions until these aims are realised.

By nailing our colours to the mast, we shall increase our chances of victory when May's Government falls, as it must soon do. We shall make the UK's 100,000 Zionists purple with rage but we shall secure the support of 2.8 million Muslims; for most Muslims identify with the Palestinians.

And by following this course we shall begin to forge peace in the middle east and the removal of a cancer which fuels Muslim extremism the world over.

Here endeth the lesson.

Best wishes,

Pete Gregson,
Labour membership no L1156630

in the US, especially on university campuses. Israel advocacy groups have urged several universities to adopt the state department definition. At Northeastern University in Boston and the University of Toledo in Ohio, pro-Israel students and advocacy groups attempted to thwart even discussing boycott and divestment, arguing that it would create an antisemitic climate on campus. The California legislature passed a resolution in 2012 to regulate speech on California campuses; it cited examples of antisemitism that included not just delegitimation and demonisation of Israel but also “student- and faculty-sponsored boycott, divestment and sanctions campaigns against Israel”.

In 2015, an anonymous website, Canary Mission, began publishing lists of pro-Palestinian students who support divestment, often accusing them of antisemitism; the Israeli government has used Canary Mission profiles to interrogate and deny entry to pro-BDS US citizens. On several campuses, pro-Israel groups have intimidated pro-Palestinian students and faculty by placing names from the Canary Mission website on posters that state: “The following students and faculty ... have allied themselves with Palestinian terrorists to perpetrate BDS and Jew Hatred on this campus.”

Kuperwasser was unapologetic about the perceived excesses of Israel’s anti-BDS campaign at home and abroad. He was confident that Israel was taking the right approach and would succeed, as it had against past assaults: “We won the war on the conventional battlefield. To start with, our chances were very slim. We won the war on terror. Again, it wasn’t easy. I remember when we went to the big battle – the second intifada – and many generals around the world were telling me, ‘Listen, Kuper, you’re wasting your time: nobody ever won a war against terrorism,’ citing Vietnam and other cases. And I said: ‘No, we shall win this war as well. We are innovative and determined enough. And unlike many other battles, we don’t have a second option, an alternative. We have to win.’ The same goes here. We shall win.”

For Jewish Zionists in the diaspora, whether their support for Israel is critical or unwavering, the demands of the BDS movement are a non-starter. Most would say that it is tragic that 80% of the Palestinian residents within what would become the boundaries of Israel were forced into exile during the 1948 war, but the lesson of the Holocaust is that Jews must have their own state, full stop. They support the right of Palestinian refugees to return to the state of Palestine, not to Israel.

This is among the primary reasons that they are so troubled by the prospect that there will never be a West Bank-Gaza state: few dispute that refugees have a right to return to their homeland – this is, after all, the founding idea of Zionism – but with no Palestinian state there is no good liberal answer to where Palestinians should return to.

Because the BDS movement opposes a state with legally sanctioned discrimination against non-Jews and therefore rejects the idea of a Jewish state, many diaspora Jews view the threat it poses as existential. Thanks in no small part to the BDS movement, the Israel-Palestine debate is transforming from a question of how to end Israel's occupation, which most liberal Jews do not support, to a referendum on the legitimacy of Israel, which they consider a settled fact that they shouldn't have to defend. "

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"To Eid, the two-state solution was an essentially racist proposal, because it was designed to preserve a Jewish ethnic majority, with legally sanctioned discrimination against non-Jews. He preferred a single, democratic, non-racial, non-religious state, which he said was a "huge compromise for Palestinians", because it would give "citizenship and forgiveness to settlers and occupiers". Eid objected to the PLO's insincere threats to seek such an outcome, which he wrote off as a misguided attempt to scare the Israelis into accepting ethnic partition: "I mean, equality is not scary! If you are against equality and justice, you are against human rights."

Relying on states to behave morally was a lost cause, he argued; they needed to be pressured by their own people from below, through BDS activism by civil society. He recalled that it had taken more than 30 years for the international community to heed the calls for boycott, divestment and sanctions against apartheid South Africa, whose violent overreaction to indigenous resistance had been a prime driver of international solidarity. Just as the boycotts against South Africa had been stoked by the apartheid regime's killings of protesters, Eid said, "the growth of BDS has been paved in Gaza's blood. Every massacre we have in Gaza convinces me more that the only hope we have is popular resistance and BDS."

Labour supports the two-state solution. BDS wants (as do I and many Palestinians) a single state solution.

"Conflating boycotts of the settlements with opposition to Israel's existence has been a central element of the government's policy, reflecting a desire not just to protect settlements but to stem the tide of selective boycotts that could spread to Israel as a whole. "We are saying there is no difference between a settlement boycott and a boycott of Israel," Yossi Kuperwasser said. "If you want to promote the boycotting of Israel, any part of Israel, you are not a friend of Israel. You are actually an enemy of Israel. So we have to deal with you."

The government has passed a law that bars entry to foreigners who have publicly supported a boycott of Israel "or an area under its control". Its minister of strategic affairs has called for imposing financial penalties on Israeli organisations, companies and in some cases individuals who advocate boycotts of either Israel or the settlements. After Hagai El-Ad, the head of the Israeli human rights organisation B'Tselem, addressed the UN security council and called on it to take action against Israel's occupation, the chairman of the governing coalition called to revoke his citizenship and to

create a bill that would do the same to any Israeli who calls on international bodies to take action against Israel.”

“Perhaps Israel’s most powerful tool in the campaign against delegitimisation has been to accuse the country’s critics of antisemitism. Doing so required changing official definitions of the term. This effort began during the final years of the second intifada, in 2003 and 2004, as pre-BDS calls to boycott and divest from Israel were gaining steam. At that time, a group of institutes and experts, including Dina Porat – a Tel Aviv University scholar who had been a member of the Israeli foreign ministry’s delegation to the 2001 UN world conference against racism in Durban, South Africa – proposed creating a new definition of antisemitism that would equate criticisms of Israel with hatred of Jews.

These experts and institutions, working with the American Jewish Committee and other Israel advocacy groups, formulated a new “working definition” of antisemitism, including a list of examples, that was published in 2005 (and later discarded) by an EU body for combating racism. This working definition was adapted in 2016 by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), and has been used, endorsed or recommended, with some small modifications, by a number of other organisations – including the US Department of State, which, since 2008, has defined antisemitism to include any of three categories of criticism of Israel, known as the “three Ds”: delegitimisation of Israel, demonisation of Israel and double standards for Israel. (More recently, the IHRA working definition has been at the centre of the antisemitism controversy in the Labour party, which adopted a modified version of the examples accompanying the definition.)

By the state department’s definition, delegitimisation includes “Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, and denying Israel the right to exist”. Thus anti-Zionism – including the view that Israel should be a state of all its citizens, with equal rights for Jews and non-Jews – is a form of delegitimisation and therefore antisemitic. According to this definition, virtually all Palestinians (and a large proportion of ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel, who oppose Zionism for religious reasons) are guilty of antisemitism because they want Jews and Palestinians to continue living in Palestine but not within a Jewish state. Kuperwasser, for one, stands by the charge: “Anti-Zionism and antisemitism are the same lady in a different cloak.”

The second D, demonisation, includes “Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis” – as the Israeli army’s deputy chief of staff did during a Holocaust remembrance day speech in 2016, likening the “revolting trends” in Europe and Germany in the 1930s and 40s to tendencies visible in Israel today. The last of the three Ds, applying double standards, holds that singling Israel out for criticism is “the new antisemitism”. Yet practically every earlier divestment and boycott initiative around the world could be accused of double standards, including the campaign against apartheid South Africa, most of whose proponents ignored graver transgressions elsewhere, such as the concurrent genocides in Cambodia, Iraqi Kurdistan and East Timor.”

“The new definition of antisemitism has been frequently deployed against Israel’s critics in the US, especially on university campuses. Israel advocacy groups have urged several universities to adopt the state department definition. At Northeastern University in Boston and the University of Toledo in Ohio, pro-Israel students and advocacy groups attempted to thwart even discussing boycott and divestment, arguing that it would create an antisemitic climate on campus. The California legislature passed a resolution in 2012 to regulate speech on California campuses; it cited examples of antisemitism that included not just delegitimisation and demonisation of Israel but also “student- and faculty-sponsored boycott, divestment and sanctions campaigns against Israel”.

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Thus the rhetoric is ramped up at election time and we see a willing mainstream media eager to savour the Holocaust all over again.

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"Jews in the UK have so much leverage that they could call for the beatification of Thatcher and we would have to seriously consider their proposal". They consider that by so doing I conflate Jews into Zionists and undermine the whole debate.

In the recent piece on our campaign in the Weekly Worker, Carla Roberts of Labour Party Marxists observes, that "LAW, while defending Gregson against any disciplinary action does not support the petition because it is, in parts, rather clumsily (and unfortunately) formulated."

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So why do I say this? Because it is important to reflect upon that without the Holocaust, there could be no IHRA. Many in the west find it painful to refute the IHRA without feeling the guilt of the Holocaust. That the UK stood by and did little whilst 6 million Jews perished is a blot on our character. In late 1942 it was open knowledge outside areas controlled by the Nazis that Jews were being slaughtered on an industrial scale, but the UK focussed its energy on a military solution and Churchill seldom mentioned what was going on in Poland, as millions of Jews were gassed and shot. It wasn't until after the war, at Nuremberg, that Nazi acts against the Jews became open knowledge. By then it was too late.

So the ancestors of we in the west are in some ways complicit in genocide by failing to do enough to halt it. Hence the guilt. And guilt is a powerful motivator. It means that Jews in the UK have significant leverage in the UK because it was all Jews who were gassed, not just the Zionists.

But that leverage is exploited not by all Jews, but by the Zionists. And most particularly by those who push the IHRA – and they do it to silence criticism that Israel is racist. For Israelis know too well that if the West acknowledges that it is an apartheid country that its days as a home primarily for Jews are numbered.

So I say that Jews, rather than Zionists, have leverage because those in the Labour movement need to acknowledge the guilt we feel for the Holocaust and embrace the "elephant in the room" that guilt is what Netanyahu and the Nakba-deniers must employ to keep Israeli to its racist course.

It is pointless and futile to ignore this. As long as we do, we shall never win the battle to see the IHRA abandoned and a return to the OED definition of anti-Semitism whereby it is, quite simply, "hostility to or prejudice against Jews".

For at the same time as Labour ceases to support the IHRA, it must join with BDS in embracing the idea of a single-state solution. Those living in the occupied territories must be allowed to vote for the national elections. For who will then rule from the Knesset? An Arab Prime Minister.

“....Israel’s response to BDS was slow in coming, but forceful once it arrived. Yossi Kuperwasser, who goes by the nickname Kuper, led the Israeli government’s efforts against the BDS movement until 2014. He now works for the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, a conservative thinktank run by Dore Gold, a former Israeli ambassador to the UN and a longtime confidante of the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

...It was Kuperwasser who turned the ministry into Israel’s command centre for what he calls the battle against BDS. He began the job just after the 2008-2009 Gaza war, which had killed 13 Israelis and around 1,400 Palestinians, lifting BDS activity to new heights.”

“In September 2009, Israel’s international standing was dealt a heavy blow by the UN’s report on the war, written by a fact-finding mission headed by the eminent South African jurist Richard Goldstone. It found that Israel and Palestinian armed groups had committed war crimes, and that Israel had conducted “deliberate attacks on civilians” with “the intention of spreading terror”. It also determined that the ongoing blockade of Gaza – “the series of acts that deprive Palestinians ... of their means of subsistence, employment, housing and water, that deny their freedom of movement and their right to leave and enter their own country” – constituted a possible crime against humanity.

Kuperwasser said it was the Goldstone report that first alerted Israel to the grave nature of the threat posed by what it calls “delegitimisation”. In late 2009, Netanyahu identified delegitimisation as one of three critical threats to Israel, alongside Iran’s nuclear programme and the proliferation of rockets and missiles in Gaza and Lebanon. Since then, it has become common to hear senior Israeli politicians describe BDS and delegitimisation as an “existential” or “strategic” threat.”

“... Kuperwasser, however, says the threat BDS poses is very real, and that ignoring it or treating it as a nuisance will fail: “Until 2010, we tried this policy, and the results were not good.” More important, he said, measuring the impact of BDS in terms of Israel’s trade was fundamentally mistaken. “The core issue is not whether they are going to boycott us or not boycott us,” Kuperwasser said. “The core issue is whether they are going to be successful in implanting in the international discourse that Israel is illegitimate as a Jewish state.”

“Despite their totally opposing goals, the Israeli right and the leaders of the BDS movement agree on quite a lot. Both assert that at its heart the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is over Zionism and the forced exile of the majority of Palestinians in 1948, not Israel’s 1967 conquest of Gaza, East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank. Both contend that the settlements should not be treated differently from the government that created them. Both believe that the demands of Palestinian citizens of Israel for equality and of refugees for return are central issues of dispute, which were given insufficient attention by past peacemakers. Both say that Israel’s battle against BDS is not primarily an economic struggle. Both view the BDS movement as representative of mainstream Palestinian demands, despite acknowledging that the movement cannot mobilise large crowds and its main activists are not important figures in Palestinian politics. And both believe that the BDS movement will expose the true nature of the conflict to the world.

But whereas the BDS movement is betting that this exposure will lead people to conclude that Zionism is fundamentally racist and should be rejected, Kuperwasser, for one, is convinced it is the Palestinians who will be unmasked. “The Palestinians are taking a very big risk,” he said. “Because, in my mind, there is a good chance that the world will deny their conceptual framework. People will say: ‘This is what the Palestinians want?! We are totally against it ... They are crazy; they want Israel to disappear.’” If that happens, he added, the Palestinians won’t even get a West Bank-Gaza state, which he believes the PLO still sees as merely the first stage toward liberating all of Palestine.

In Kuperwasser’s view, the BDS movement and the Palestinian leadership share the same goals; the differences between them are merely a matter of tactics. “Abu Mazen understands more than the BDS movement that you have to be subtle,” he said. The PLO’s acceptance of a two-state solution, its vows to take into account Israel’s demographic concerns, its silence on the rights of Palestinian citizens of Israel – all of these, Kuperwasser added, were merely a subterfuge designed to obtain a West Bank-Gaza state, which would then serve as a launching pad for continued struggle. “The Palestinian idea of struggle is so deeply embedded in their mind that they cannot actually think about the possibility of giving up the struggle in order to make peace. I cannot tell you how many Palestinians I told, ‘Listen, with this struggle, you are paying the price much more than we do. We are flourishing. Even if we pay a price, we are flourishing.’”

The key for Israel, he said, was winning the hearts and minds of centrist liberals and progressives abroad, not people who are already in the Zionist or anti-Zionist camps. What had made it more difficult, he said, was that some Israelis and Jews were guilty of “negligence and intentional giving up of the battlefield” – not the radical left, but centrists who had naively adopted the language of the enemy. Kuperwasser singled out the former Labor party prime minister Ehud Barak, who had repeatedly warned that Israel is “on a slippery slope toward apartheid” – a warning that has also been made by the former foreign minister Tzipi Livni and the former prime ministers Ehud Olmert and Yitzhak Rabin. For Kuperwasser, these statements, intended to convince Israelis to make territorial concessions for peace, were above all a gift to its enemies.

For the BDS movement, the charge of apartheid, which became prominent after the start of the second intifada in 2000, was not merely a provocative analogy to South Africa but a legal claim, based on the crime of apartheid as defined in international conventions and the founding statute of the international criminal court: “an institutionalised regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime”.

The concept of apartheid became central to the BDS movement’s framing of the conflict. Whereas the Palestinian Authority sought to accentuate its autonomy and state-like characteristics, the BDS movement underlined the PA’s subservience to Israel. For proponents of the two-state model, the PA was a nationalist project working toward eventual independence, while in the apartheid framework it was merely an Israeli satrap. BDS leaders emphasised the de facto “one-state reality” of Israel-Palestine – which had become a common trope even among Israel’s supporters, many of whom were dismayed at the possibility that the country could eventually be forced to enfranchise the Palestinians living under occupation and thereby cease to be a Jewish state.

Increasingly among both Israel’s centre-left friends and its enemies, the idea of a single state was not a plan for the future – to be sought or averted – but an accurate description of the reality on the ground, which was becoming more and more difficult to disentangle. Jews were already a minority in the territory under the control of Israel, which regulated the Palestinians’ borders, exports and imports, customs revenues and permits for travel and work. Legally, commercially and administratively, the Jewish and Palestinian populations were interlaced.

The more deeply entrenched this one-state reality became, the more resonant the charge of apartheid, and the more difficult to imagine undoing it through partition into two states. A battle against occupation could be concluded with a simple military withdrawal, but a struggle against apartheid could be won only with the end of state policies that discriminated against non-Jews. In the case of Israel, these could be found not just in the occupied territories, but everywhere Palestinians came into contact with the state. In the West Bank, Palestinians were denied the right to vote for the government controlling their lives, deprived of free assembly and movement, forbidden from equal access to roads, resources and territory, and imprisoned indefinitely without charge. In Gaza, they could not exit, enter, import, export or even approach their borders without the permission of Israel or its ally, Egypt. In Jerusalem, they were segregated from one another and encircled by checkpoints and walls. In Israel, they were evicted from their lands, prevented from reclaiming their expropriated homes, and blocked from residing in communities inhabited exclusively by Jews. In the diaspora, they were prevented from reunifying with their families in Israel-Palestine or returning to their homes, solely because they were not Jews.

Though in public, world leaders spoke endlessly of a two-state solution, privately many doubted it was still possible. They regularly condemned settlements (since these, unlike occupation, were illegal), but they did nothing to reverse settlement growth. They called for Palestinians to have freedom, but not through equal rights and citizenship in one state – because, among other reasons, international law forbids Israel from annexing territory acquired by force. They saw Israel was subverting a two-state solution and taking measures to deprive Palestinians of rights. But they wouldn't exert any real pressure on Israel so long as it mouthed an intention to one day grant Palestinians some limited form of independence. Israel was thereby allowed to hold all the land while excluding the majority of its indigenous people, just as South Africa had aspired to do. In redefining the conflict as a case of apartheid, BDS activists saw a way out of this trap. The apartheid rubric could also undo the Palestinians' greatest weakness – fragmentation – by uniting them in a common struggle against a single, discriminatory regime."

Haidar Eid, a professor of literature at Al-Azhar University and a co-founder of the BDS movement in Gaza has a clear view". The Guardian observes:

"To Eid, the two-state solution was an essentially racist proposal, because it was designed to preserve a Jewish ethnic majority, with legally sanctioned discrimination against non-Jews. He preferred a single, democratic, non-racial, non-religious state, which he said was a "huge compromise for Palestinians", because it would give "citizenship and forgiveness to settlers and occupiers". Eid objected to the PLO's insincere threats to seek such an outcome, which he wrote off as a misguided attempt to scare the Israelis into accepting ethnic partition: "I mean, equality is not scary! If you are against equality and justice, you are against human rights."

Relying on states to behave morally was a lost cause, he argued; they needed to be pressured by their own people from below, through BDS activism by civil society. He recalled that it had taken more than 30 years for the international community to heed the calls for boycott, divestment and sanctions against apartheid South Africa, whose violent overreaction to indigenous resistance had been a prime driver of international solidarity. Just as the boycotts against South Africa had been stoked by the apartheid regime's killings of protesters, Eid said, "the growth of BDS has been paved in Gaza's blood. Every massacre we have in Gaza convinces me more that the only hope we have is popular resistance and BDS."

Labour supports the two-state solution. BDS wants (as do I and many Palestinians) a single state solution.

"Conflating boycotts of the settlements with opposition to Israel's existence has been a central element of the government's policy, reflecting a desire not just to protect settlements but to stem the tide of selective boycotts that could spread to Israel as a whole. "We are saying there is no difference between a settlement boycott and a boycott of Israel," Yossi Kuperwasser said. "If you want to promote the boycotting of Israel, any part of Israel, you are not a friend of Israel. You are actually an enemy of Israel. So we have to deal with you."

The government has passed a law that bars entry to foreigners who have publicly supported a boycott of Israel "or an area under its control". Its minister of strategic affairs has called for imposing financial penalties on Israeli organisations, companies and in some cases individuals who advocate

boycotts of either Israel or the settlements. After Hagai El-Ad, the head of the Israeli human rights organisation B'Tselem, addressed the UN security council and called on it to take action against Israel's occupation, the chairman of the governing coalition called to revoke his citizenship and to create a bill that would do the same to any Israeli who calls on international bodies to take action against Israel."

"Perhaps Israel's most powerful tool in the campaign against delegitimation has been to accuse the country's critics of antisemitism. Doing so required changing official definitions of the term. This effort began during the final years of the second intifada, in 2003 and 2004, as pre-BDS calls to boycott and divest from Israel were gaining steam. At that time, a group of institutes and experts, including Dina Porat – a Tel Aviv University scholar who had been a member of the Israeli foreign ministry's delegation to the 2001 UN world conference against racism in Durban, South Africa – proposed creating a new definition of antisemitism that would equate criticisms of Israel with hatred of Jews.

These experts and institutions, working with the American Jewish Committee and other Israel advocacy groups, formulated a new "working definition" of antisemitism, including a list of examples, that was published in 2005 (and later discarded) by an EU body for combating racism. This working definition was adapted in 2016 by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), and has been used, endorsed or recommended, with some small modifications, by a number of other organisations – including the US Department of State, which, since 2008, has defined antisemitism to include any of three categories of criticism of Israel, known as the "three Ds": delegitimation of Israel, demonisation of Israel and double standards for Israel. (More recently, the IHRA working definition has been at the centre of the antisemitism controversy in the Labour party, which adopted a modified version of the examples accompanying the definition.)

By the state department's definition, delegitimation includes "Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, and denying Israel the right to exist". Thus anti-Zionism – including the view that Israel should be a state of all its citizens, with equal rights for Jews and non-Jews – is a form of delegitimation and therefore antisemitic. According to this definition, virtually all Palestinians (and a large proportion of ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel, who oppose Zionism for religious reasons) are guilty of antisemitism because they want Jews and Palestinians to continue living in Palestine but not within a Jewish state. Kuperwasser, for one, stands by the charge: "Anti-Zionism and antisemitism are the same lady in a different cloak."

The second D, demonisation, includes "Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis" – as the Israeli army's deputy chief of staff did during a Holocaust remembrance day speech in 2016, likening the "revolting trends" in Europe and Germany in the 1930s and 40s to tendencies visible in Israel today. The last of the three Ds, applying double standards, holds that singling Israel out for criticism is "the new antisemitism". Yet practically every earlier divestment and boycott initiative around the world could be accused of double standards, including the campaign against apartheid South Africa, most of whose proponents ignored graver transgressions elsewhere, such as the concurrent genocides in Cambodia, Iraqi Kurdistan and East Timor."

"The new definition of antisemitism has been frequently deployed against Israel's critics in the US, especially on university campuses. Israel advocacy groups have urged several universities to adopt the state department definition. At Northeastern University in Boston and the University of Toledo in Ohio, pro-Israel students and advocacy groups attempted to thwart even discussing boycott and divestment, arguing that it would create an antisemitic climate on campus. The California legislature passed a resolution in 2012 to regulate speech on California campuses; it cited examples of

antisemitism that included not just delegitimation and demonisation of Israel but also “student- and faculty-sponsored boycott, divestment and sanctions campaigns against Israel”.

In 2015, an anonymous website, Canary Mission, began publishing lists of pro-Palestinian students who support divestment, often accusing them of antisemitism; the Israeli government has used Canary Mission profiles to interrogate and deny entry to pro-BDS US citizens. On several campuses, pro-Israel groups have intimidated pro-Palestinian students and faculty by placing names from the Canary Mission website on posters that state: “The following students and faculty ... have allied themselves with Palestinian terrorists to perpetrate BDS and Jew Hatred on this campus.”

Kuperwasser was unapologetic about the perceived excesses of Israel’s anti-BDS campaign at home and abroad. He was confident that Israel was taking the right approach and would succeed, as it had against past assaults: “We won the war on the conventional battlefield. To start with, our chances were very slim. We won the war on terror. Again, it wasn’t easy. I remember when we went to the big battle – the second intifada – and many generals around the world were telling me, ‘Listen, Kuper, you’re wasting your time: nobody ever won a war against terrorism,’ citing Vietnam and other cases. And I said: ‘No, we shall win this war as well. We are innovative and determined enough. And unlike many other battles, we don’t have a second option, an alternative. We have to win.’ The same goes here. We shall win.”

For Jewish Zionists in the diaspora, whether their support for Israel is critical or unwavering, the demands of the BDS movement are a non-starter. Most would say that it is tragic that 80% of the Palestinian residents within what would become the boundaries of Israel were forced into exile during the 1948 war, but the lesson of the Holocaust is that Jews must have their own state, full stop. They support the right of Palestinian refugees to return to the state of Palestine, not to Israel. This is among the primary reasons that they are so troubled by the prospect that there will never be a West Bank-Gaza state: few dispute that refugees have a right to return to their homeland – this is, after all, the founding idea of Zionism – but with no Palestinian state there is no good liberal answer to where Palestinians should return to.

Because the BDS movement opposes a state with legally sanctioned discrimination against non-Jews and therefore rejects the idea of a Jewish state, many diaspora Jews view the threat it poses as existential. Thanks in no small part to the BDS movement, the Israel-Palestine debate is transforming from a question of how to end Israel’s occupation, which most liberal Jews do not support, to a referendum on the legitimacy of Israel, which they consider a settled fact that they shouldn’t have to defend.

Beneath this principled opposition, there are also more visceral misgivings. One of the primary apprehensions of liberal Zionists about the BDS movement is what they consider to be its strident tone and uncompromising positions. Rabbi Jill Jacobs, the head of T’ruah, a rabbinic human rights organisation that works in both Israel and the US, said that she “straddles the line between progressive groups where Zionist is a bad word and pro-Israel groups where occupation is a bad word”. She said she felt alienated by the hostility of the BDS movement, which at times seemed to her downright gleeful as it publicised Israel’s misdeeds. “BDS is triggering 2,000 years of Jewish trauma and 70 years of post-Holocaust trauma,” she said. David Shulman, a renowned Indologist, Hebrew University professor, and activist with Ta’ayush (“co-existence”), a leftwing Israeli-Palestinian group that protects Palestinians from Israeli settler attacks, said that his biggest problem with BDS was “the virulent tonality” of it: “I understand it is a heterogeneous movement. But so much of it is based on hatred, which is a terrible basis for political action.”

Many liberal Zionists recoil not just at the vehemence of some BDS activists, but also at their occasional conflation of Israel and the Jewish people, which they feel smacks of antisemitism. Simone Zimmerman, a co-founder of the American Jewish anti-occupation group IfNotNow, said she found the Israeli government no less guilty of the charge: “Bibi Netanyahu goes around the world saying, ‘I am here to represent the Jewish people, and the IDF is doing what it’s doing on behalf of all the Jewish people in the world.’ And the American Jewish Committee and Aipac say we’re doing what we’re doing to keep the Jews safe. I find it hard to make the case that our critics should be more nuanced than we are ourselves.”

In the US and Europe, liberal Jews feel as alienated by the anti-Zionist BDS movement as by the illiberal supporters of Israeli policies they deplore. Last fall, the rightwing Zionist Organization of America feted Steve Bannon, the former Trump adviser whose ex-wife, in a sworn court declaration, recalled his complaint that their daughters’ school had too many Jews. Bannon had proclaimed himself a “Christian Zionist”. The “alt-right” leader Richard Spencer, an organiser of the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, at which white supremacists had chanted “Jews will not replace us”, had also declared himself a sort of Zionist, inspired by Israel’s example as an exclusionary ethnic state. Last year he said to an Israeli television interviewer: “You could say I’m a white Zionist in the sense that I care about my people. I want us to have a secure homeland for us and ourselves, just like you want a secure homeland in Israel.”

The alliance between Israel’s allies and ultra-nationalists in Europe and the US has become a central theme of the BDS campaign’s messages. In this respect, the Trump era has been good for the movement. So has the Netanyahu government, whose attacks on BDS have been among the greatest drivers of publicity and recruitment for the campaign.

Jacobs said that it had become harder and harder to be pro-Israel and anti-occupation in progressive spaces. “On the left, support for BDS is a litmus test: either you support it or you have no place.” To progressives, centre-left pro-Israel groups are increasingly viewed as Aipac-lite, supporting two states in name while in practice protecting Israel from any sort of pressure that might induce it to end a very comfortable occupation.

Sharon Brous, a leading progressive rabbi in the US, told me, “I am not supportive of BDS, but I think we haven’t treated it correctly. Boycott is a tool that we in the Jewish community use often. It is nonviolent.” American progressives have advocated a number of domestic boycotts in recent years – including one against the state of North Carolina, over a controversial anti-LGBT law. Mouin Rabbani, a senior fellow with the Institute for Palestine Studies who is not active in the BDS movement, told me, “All these years we heard Israel and its supporters ask, ‘Where is the Palestinian Gandhi?’ And then when faced with a totally nonviolent Palestinian boycott campaign, they say they can’t support it.”

Simone Zimmerman, the IfNotNow co-founder, said: “If you ask a random American Jew on the street, ‘Do you believe that people in their society shouldn’t discriminate based on ethnic heritage, and all people should have access to all the basic rights that you care about in America?’, they’d probably say yes. And then it comes to Israel, and they say: ‘Equality for all people? You’re trying to wipe Israel off the face of the map!’”

