

## Anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism

Sir, No one could disagree with your Leader piece, or Andrew Carey in his column (both 6 May), that anti-Semitism, whether it comes from the extreme right or the hard left, must be unreservedly condemned. Both articles fall into the trap however of conflating anti-Jewish racism with legitimate opposition to Zionism. Anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism are not, as your Leader claims, 'organically connected'. To argue this is to dehumanise the millions of Palestinians who have suffered dispossession and discrimination at the hands of Zionism over the last 70 years.

Zionism means different things to different people, but at its simplest is support for a Jewish state in historic Palestine, a land that already had an indigenous Arab population. Many Jews themselves do not support such a notion, which is a fairly recent invention, a response to European anti-Semitism in the late 19th century. Prior to this time diaspora and assimilation were dominant themes in Judaism. It follows that Christians can also be opposed to Zionism without being anti-Semitic. They can also oppose the actions of Israel in its almost half century of military occupation in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, and its 10-year blockade of Gaza, without being anti-Semitic.

Speaking on Radio 4 recently, Rabbi Laura Janer-Klausner asserted that anti-Zionism was clearly anti-Semitic since it was denying Jews their rights of national self-determination. But national self-determination does not have to equate to statehood; it might for example mean full rights within a bi-national state.

Moreover, national self-determination cannot be permitted to the exclusion of another nation's equivalent right, which is exactly what Israel has been doing to the Palestinians since 1948. To

highlight the colonial nature of Zionism is not in itself anti-Semitism.

Another canard raised in this debate, including by Carey, is the suggestion that Israel's supporters are guilty of anti-Semitism when they hold Israel to a higher standard on human rights than, say, North Korea and Sudan. But this overlooks the fact that these other 'rogue' states are not preferred political and trading partners of the West, nor (as in Israel's case) do they receive Western arms.

Nor do these other nations claim, as Israel does, to be a pluralistic democracy fully integrated into the community of nations. So what is anti-Semitic about highlighting Israel's discriminatory policies against its 20 per cent Palestinian minority, or the illegality under international law of its military occupation, settlements, separation barrier and Gaza siege? This is simply holding Israel to account against the standards it supposedly sets for itself!

At the heart of this debate is a confusion about what anti-Semitism actually means. It has never been defined as a term (there is no official EU definition as some claim) and it remains highly subjective. In 2003 an Oxford academic suggested a simple definition (which incidentally ignores on the basis of common usage that Arabs are also Semites): 'hostility towards Jews as Jews'. This seems reasonable, but sadly the term has now been politicised (and as a consequence devalued) by the inclusion within it of legitimate criticism of Israel. The term needs to be re-claimed, or else genuine anti-Semitism will be lost in the fog.

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*Embrace the Middle East*