

Alternative Jewish Voices has been thinking about that phrase, "from the river to the sea."

Last Saturday Wellington had a big, many-lingual demonstration seeking justice and safety for Palestinians. There was another today on the steps of Parliament, urging our government to stand up and protect the endangered people of Gaza. Then MP Golriz Ghaharaman tabled a motion calling for Aotearoa-NZ to recognise the State of Palestine. 138 countries have done that already.

We spoke at both rallies, and we thank everyone present for their warm welcome. We closed today by wishing for "a just peace for everyone who lives between the river and the sea." Meanwhile the NZ Jewish Council was busy calling Green MPs antisemitic for using exactly the same words. Hmm.

This morning several American rabbis launched an initiative for Gaza, calling for "a just peace that guarantees equality, justice and freedom for all who live between the river and sea."

Is the NZ Jewish Council calling these rabbis antisemites? Inciters of hatred? Have they undermined the security of the NZ Jewish community?

Jeff Halper's new book is called *Decolonizing Israel, Liberating Palestine: Zionism, Settler-Colonialism and the Case for One Democratic State*. He uses the term "river to the sea" when he discusses people's fears about co-existence with Palestinians. Does that make Jeff Halper (an Israeli) a Jew-hater?

From the river to the sea is geography – there's a river on one side and the sea on the other. Governments, political parties and popular movements Israeli and Palestinian have at times used expansionist, excluding slogans in their politics. We condemn that because it takes us further from a just solution - but not every reference to geography is hateful. We have been at, spoken at, Wellington's rallies and we have heard no hatred.

As a term of liberation, the phrase may be politically threatening because it unifies a space that successive Israeli regimes have fragmented. It unifies national consciousness, population counts and resistance - as in today's national strike by Palestinians.

It is not a term we fear, because we don't view freedom as a zero-sum business. Power may be finite, or privilege – yours may necessarily be at the expense of mine. But freedom? Freedom belongs in that wonderful economics of abundance – the more we have, the more we can make.

'From the river to the sea' may indeed rub some people the wrong way, but the term is in wide use, including mainstream Jewish use. Rather like 'apartheid.'

We contend that the Jewish Council is policing language much as Israel polices its spacial divisions to preserve its privilege and power.

We wish a just peace for all who live between the river and the sea.

Alternative Jewish Voices of New Zealand

