

Labour's New Bankroller Is Israel Lobbyist, South African Apartheid Profiteer

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The UK [Labour Party's](#) latest corporate mega-donor is a pro-Israel businessperson whose firm profited from South African apartheid.

Gary Lubner's company played an important role busting international sanctions against the South African apartheid regime in the 1980s.

Lubner even joined the police force responsible for South Africa's brutal white supremacist regime in 1977.

He was an accountant for the firm throughout its sanctions-busting period in the 1980s and his father and uncle (who were also his bosses) personally donated to the ruling National Party, which was the architect of apartheid.

[Successive annual reports](#) show that Lubner is a long-standing donor to the [United Jewish Israel Appeal](#), a lobby group with [close ties to the state of Israel](#).

The Lubners are [longstanding donors](#) to the apartheid state of Israel.

The issues raised in this article were put to Gary Lubner in detail. But a spokesperson, who did not give their name, issued only a terse blanket denial.

"These allegations are wholly inaccurate," they claimed.

"Gary has a long history of opposing apartheid and working with many progressive organizations. He and his family worked very closely with their friend Nelson Mandela to help bring about lasting change in South Africa. Anything to the contrary is simply misleading and false."

Rich donors

Last weekend, the *Financial Times* [quoted](#) Lubner, saying he wanted to put Labour – the UK opposition party headed by [Keir Starmer](#) – into government “for a long time.”

The paper reported he has already donated close to a million dollars to Labour and that he planned to donate more than \$6 million by the next general election.

The paper reported that this will make him “one of Labour’s biggest individual donors.”

Starmer thrust the party into [a financial crisis](#) when he took over from left-wing leader **Jeremy Corbyn**, who had left the party in healthy financial shape.

Starmer purged the left-wing membership base, with the result that the party lost around 200,000 members. Annual income from membership dues fell by more than \$10.5 million.

But Starmer is now filling the gap with the support of wealthy business donors like Lubner.

The *Financial Times* did not report on Lubner’s pro-Israel donations.

But it also covered up the role of the Lubner family firm – PG Group – as an important backer of the South African apartheid regime.

“Routine murders and assassinations”

Gary Lubner [joined PG Group](#) in the 1980s, shortly before the firm began playing a major role helping the apartheid government to dodge international sanctions.

South African journalist Hennie van Vuuren told The Electronic Intifada that the Lubners’ support for the ruling apartheid party came at a time “when there were thousands of children who were imprisoned without trial” and when there were “routine murders and assassinations.”

Van Vuuren said of the Lubners that “it was very much in their financial interest” to break the sanctions. “I think absolutely: they profited from apartheid,” he said. “They almost certainly provided materials to the military and to various parts of the regime.”

The spokesperson did not respond when we put what van Vuuren told us to Lubner.

Gary Lubner stayed in South Africa until the late 1980s, joining PG Group’s international arm Belron in London a couple of years later. He was [named Belron CEO](#) in 2000 and retired earlier this year.

The firm [started](#) as a glass merchant in Cape Town during the late 19th century. But by 2010 it owned brand names all over the world (including Autoglass in the UK) and its annual [sales](#) were worth billions of dollars.

Sanctions busting

In South Africa, Gary Lubner’s father Ronnie and uncle Bertie (who were also his bosses) were [sanctions busters for the apartheid regime](#).

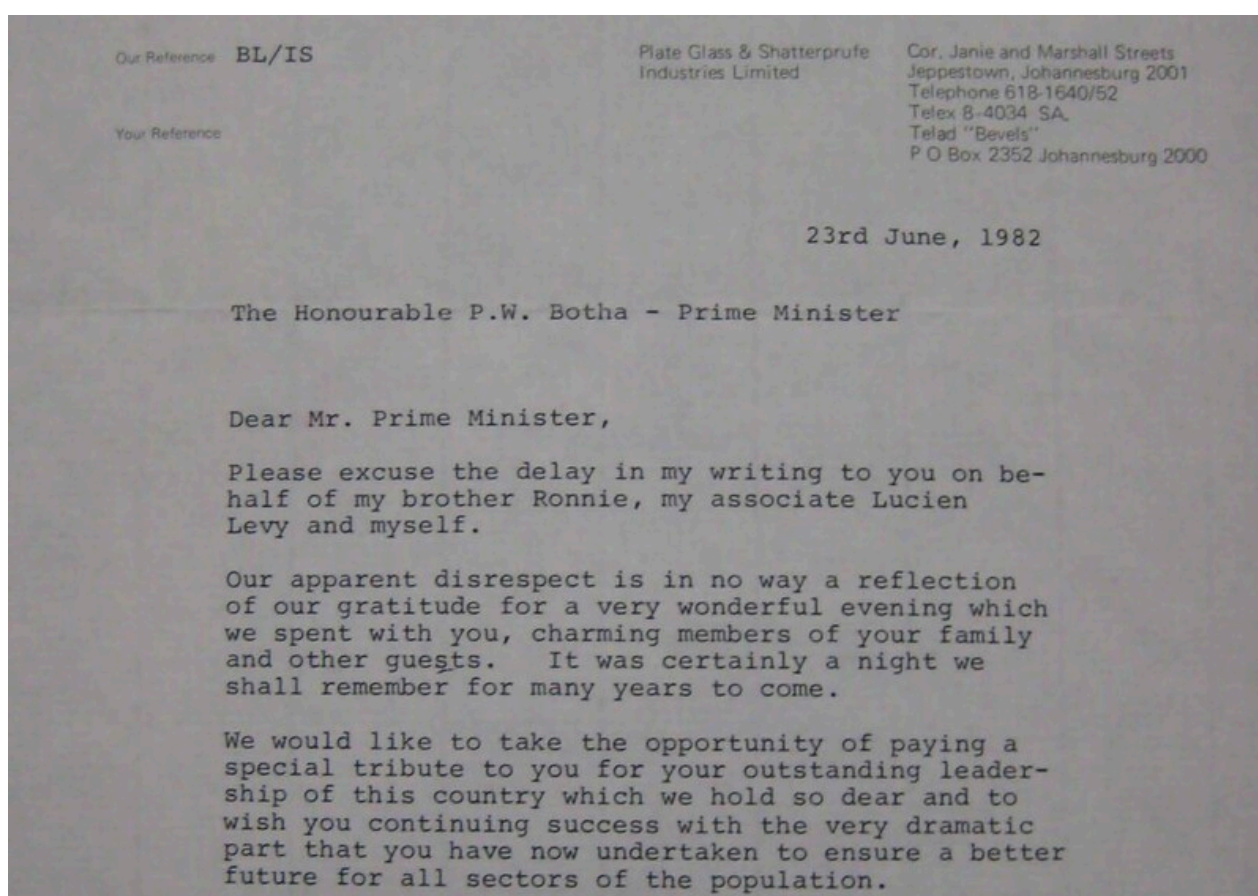
Although Gary Lubner - like many white South Africans - now claims to have been an opponent of apartheid all along, at the time his firm profited handsomely from supporting the regime.

In 2017, South African journalists published an investigation - based on [archival documents](#) - showing that the Lubners donated to the ruling National Party during the apartheid era.

In [a 1982 letter](#) Bertie Lubner had written thanking then Prime Minister P. W. Botha "on behalf of my brother Ronnie" and himself for the "very wonderful evening which we spent with you, charming members of your family and other guests."

Bertie Lubner fawned over the brutal apartheid leader, writing that "it is men with such high ideals and determination like yourself that create history."

A leading white supremacist, Botha was a [former member of the Ossewabrandwag](#), a South African Nazi group.



The letter from the Lubners to South African apartheid leader P. W. Botha. [Click here](#) for the full document.

Soon after the "very wonderful evening" in 1982, the Lubners donated to the prime minister's party, National Party archives show. The letter from the Lubners and the donation receipt can be read in full at the end of this article.

As Hennie van Vuuren's group Open Secrets [reported](#) in 2017, "Post-apartheid amnesia ensured that at the time of his death last year, [Bertie] Lubner was praised as a beloved philanthropist and iconic business leader with far too little said about his support for the establishment during apartheid."

Shortly before he died in 2016, Bertie Lubner – Gary Lubner’s uncle and boss – admitted to van Vuuren that “we unfortunately had to undertake the breaking of sanctions because we were buying a lot of our timber products” from abroad.

Van Vuuren reported in his book *Apartheid, Guns and Money*, that the Lubners “would obtain documentation showing another country as the destination of imports, and, while at sea, that documentation would be changed and the timber would be brought to South Africa.”

Van Vuuren found another document in the archives that showed the Lubners’ firm offered to donate wood-stripping equipment to South African armed forces, which would then be used to benefit their anti-communist allies UNITA, a group that was at war with liberation fighters in neighboring Angola. After he was told the items were known as “wreck benches,” Bertie Lubner responded, “Are they for torture?”

The Lubners also [played an important role in lobbying](#) in the US against sanctions on the South African regime.

Bertie Lubner was a member of the South Africa Foundation, a government coordinated propaganda group established in 1959 to “counter what the business community saw as lies peddled by anti-apartheid activists around the world,” van Vuuren reported in his book.

“A lot of what we did was behind the scenes where we had access in many ways that the government did not,” Basil Hersov, the foundation’s chair from 1977 to 1993, told van Vuuren.

Bertie Lubner justified the apartheid regime in his interview with the journalist, saying that “you had to accept it – that’s what the country’s laws were and you either lived by it or you buggered off.”

Van Vuuren wrote that, “Lubner argued that an important goal of the [South Africa Foundation] was to persuade countries to abandon their boycotts.”

Van Vuuren told The Electronic Intifada, “We don’t know exactly what they made from busting sanctions” but that they helped ensure “the preservation of the apartheid regime, and that benefited corporations like these.”

According to a South African embassy memo cited by van Vuuren, in 1985 Gary Lubner’s bosses Ronnie and Bertie Lubner led a group of prominent South African businessmen on a trip to Washington to express “interest in contributing to an independent pro-south African lobbying group.”

Van Vuuren has written that, “Ronnie and Bertie Lubner and some of their associates had indicated that they were willing to contribute up to \$15 million for various projects to improve South Africa’s image abroad.”

“His dear friend Nelson Mandela”

When all this was exposed in South Africa, the family’s sympathizers defended them, [claiming](#) that it was “a complicated affair,” that Bertie Lubner was “the Jewish community’s favorite uncle” and that despite having been a supporter of and donor to apartheid stalwart P. W. Botha, he had also later spent time with “his dear friend, Nelson Mandela.”

Former president F. W. de Klerk – also from the National Party – defended the Lubners in 2017, [claiming](#) that by donating to his party, “They did not support apartheid, they supported the abolition of apartheid.”

Gary Lubner now claims to have worked against apartheid “from inside” the regime.

In a [2021 interview](#) with the South African Jewish Museum, Lubner admitted to being a member of the South African police force during one of its most brutal periods.

He joined in 1977, not long after the Soweto Uprising of 1976 during which the white supremacist police force shot dead hundreds of Black protesters.

Lubner, who was 18 at the time, said he joined because “I had to do my conscription.” But he also said that, “when I look back now, it’s one of the best years I ever spent, as ironic as that sounds” because it “politicized” him.

As a student at the University of Cape Town he continued “doing more work for the police, because I had to do these [once-a-]month camps.”

But van Vuuren cast doubt on Lubner’s account, saying it’s “very easy in hindsight” to claim he fought apartheid but that “the hard edge of internal repression was led by the police” rather than the army, which Lubner avoided being conscripted into.

At the exact same time that young Black people were “fleeing the country on foot to go for training across southern Africa” Lubner “walked into the arms of the regime. He had a very powerful, very rich father. There’s no doubt that the Lubners could have sent him” abroad to study, but “Lubner chose not to do that.”

Gary Lubner admitted in the 2021 interview that he did not leave South Africa until the late 1980s.

As well as apartheid South Africa, the Lubner family have extensive ties to Israel.

Gary’s uncle (and late boss) Bertie Lubner was a [major financial backer](#) of [Ben Gurion University](#) of the Negev, starting in 1975. A South African fact-finding mission in 2011 [found the university guilty](#) of “institutional complicity and active collaboration with the Israeli military, occupation and apartheid practices.”

Gary Lubner’s son Jack Lubner is a [leading member](#) of [several](#) Israel lobby groups in Britain, including the [Jewish Labour Movement](#), [Yachad](#) and the [Israeli-embassy-funded Union of Jewish Students](#).

Jack Lubner is a [campaigner against](#) the Palestinian led boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement, and was an [intern](#) for the pro-Israel lobbyist [Ruth Smeeth](#), when she sat in the UK’s House of Commons. He has also played a [leading role](#) in the Israel lobby’s [recent smear campaign](#) against the British Iraqi rapper and campaigner [Lowkey](#).

The business-friendly option

In his *Financial Times* interview, Gary Lubner perpetuates the [Israeli-led smear campaign](#) against former Labour leader [Jeremy Corbyn](#). He claimed that Jack was “abused, pilloried, attacked,” by Corbyn’s supporters during his leadership.

“Starmer got rid of them, to his credit,” Gary Lubner told the *Financial Times* “It was a real cancer in the party.”

[According](#) to *The Times* of London, “Labour is hopeful that although Lubner does not have an official role, he can encourage other leading business figures to pledge support.”

This would cast Lubner in a similar role to [Michael Levy](#), former Labour Prime Minister [Tony Blair’s “Lord Cashpoint” fundraiser](#), who was also a rich, pro-Israel businessperson.

As the *i* newspaper [put it](#), “the backers of the Blair and [Gordon] Brown governments are returning to Sir Keir Starmer’s Labour ... it has finally convinced people that the Corbyn days are behind it, and it is a business-friendly option for the big donors once again.”

[This article originally misidentified the South African embassy memo as as US embassy memo. This has now been corrected in the text above. The quote about the “wreck benches” has also been clarified.]

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Featured image: Israel lobbyist Gary Lubner says he’s donating more than \$6 million to the UK’s main opposition party. ([YouTube](#))

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