

Peter's Memorial Party

Sowing Seeds

Now, let me see. What have I got left to do? Something from Mothercare for Karen's new baby, a replacement battery for my watch, a dictionary and a pack of biro. I can get all of those at Churchill Square and stay warm while I do so.

Oh no, those nutters again. "Freedom for Palestine!" Freedom to blow people to pieces, more like! I'll give them a wide berth. Oh bugger it, they're everywhere. My way is blocked by a tall, handsome middle-aged gent sporting a badge proclaiming 'Free Palestine'. His specs are perched half way up his forehead and there's a faintly mocking twinkle in his eye as he hands me a leaflet.

'And what do you think about our government's policy on Palestine, Sir?'

'Well, I hope we support the Israelis against those Palestinian terrorists' I reply defiantly. Oh dear, I shouldn't have said that. Now I can see I'm going to freeze to death out here.

'But what about the terrorism of the Israeli occupation?' says the tall gent, rubbing his hands.

What on earth does he mean by that?

'You can't describe people defending themselves against terrorists as terrorists themselves,' I exclaim.

Oh God, here we go. Now he's going to give me a lecture. Prepare for hypothermia.

'Look, I'm in a hurry. I've got to go now,' I protest.

But he won't let me pass. They ought to prosecute these people for obstruction and harassment. It's a disgrace.

'Maybe you should stay just a minute to hear the other side,' says the tall gent, ever so politely.

Well, I suppose there *is* another side – there always is. It'll look as if I'm prejudiced if I don't listen to him.

'Look at these maps,' says the tall gent, pointing to the leaflet he has just handed me. 'This graphically illustrates what has been happening to the Palestinians over the past fifty-five years. The Israelis have systematically been dispossessing the Palestinians, and the process continues today. This is what causes the terrorism.'

How do you answer such propaganda? Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East, so you can be quite sure it is the only country in the region which

respects human rights, and especially the right to property. *I* know what it is. These people hate Jews. Tell him *that* and I'll stop him in his tracks.

'What you're saying sounds anti-Semitic to me,' I say.

To my surprise the tall gent doesn't flinch, but answers calmly: 'We have nothing against Jews. Some of our supporters are Jews. But we *are* opposed to the illegal occupation of Palestinian territory and the oppression of the Palestinian people.' At this moment the tall gent is distracted by someone calling 'Peter' and I make my escape.

It's evening now, and I'm loading the washing machine. Better just check I haven't left anything in my pockets. Hello, what's this? "The dispossession of the Palestinians is the root cause of the Israel-Palestine conflict." It's the leaflet from that loon in Churchill Square. I must admit, it's professionally laid out. Perhaps I'll just have a read. At least I might discover how they manage to make black into white.

And now it's 3 a.m. and I'm wide awake. I can't get that man and his leaflet out of my head. It must take some conviction to stand for hours in the cold like that. He *did* seem reasonable and sincere. Why am I so reluctant to believe him? Could there possibly be a grain of truth in what he said? Perish the thought.

But that's precisely what it won't.