

## **Notes for concluding speech at Palestine Support Evening, 9.12.00.**

The Palestinian cause is arguably more difficult to get across to westerners than any other case of oppression.

This is ironic, because in some ways the situation could not be more simple. One group of people were encouraged to go to a land inhabited by another and take it over. This process continues to this day in the oppression of the Palestinians, whether within Israel, in the West Bank and Gaza or beyond the boundaries of Palestine.

Why should it be so difficult to persuade British people and others in the West to come off the fence and recognise an evil which is so glaringly obvious if you look? Arabs constantly express their astonishment to me about this problem. Here we are setting ourselves up as the champions of human rights and international law, and yet we fail to take active steps to solve this problem.

The difficulty is that Zionism has been extraordinarily successful in portraying Jews as victims. The false corollary is that they therefore cannot be aggressors. The simple reflection that all people, of whatever background, are capable of good and evil, gets drowned in a sentimental and unrealistic idealisation of anything Jewish.

For some reason (perhaps a mixture of guilt and prejudice against Arabs) westerners are bad at thinking straight on this issue. Thank God, therefore, that there are Jews, including Israelis, who stand up and speak against this nonsense. I'm thinking of people like Noam Chomsky, Norman Finkelstein, Akiva Orr, Ilan Pappé, Israel Shahak, Rabbi Marc Ellis, Uri Davies and many more.

We in Brighton & Hove Palestine Solidarity Campaign believe that we should reach out to and engage in dialogue any Jews who are prepared to ready to listen to us.

Let us go out from this meeting determined to press the Palestinian cause by whatever means we can. Don't ever forget that whether we see it in our media or not, there is a massive system of injustice going on out there. Sure there will be times when we think it prudent not to speak out. But let's have the courage to do so when the time is right. How easy it is to keep quiet when people are spouting nonsense about 'Arabs', 'terrorists', 'Muslim extremists' etc. Don't let them get away with it.

This doesn't mean that you have to have all the answers. Nor does it mean saying that Palestinians are always right. Of course they aren't. At the very least it means tentatively questioning the ready-made clichés which Zionist propaganda has been so successful in propagating. And at best you will be able to use the knowledge you have gained today, and which you may have gathered from other sources, to contradict the self-serving lies from which Zionism draws its life-blood.

Above all, be aware that being anti-Zionist (or at least anti-Israeli policy) is in no way the same as being anti-Jewish. That is what you are likely to be accused of. Remember the names of Jews who fight and have fought for the Palestinian cause. The fact that they are usually on the left does not mean that they are wrong, nor that they are not Jewish, nor indeed that they hate being Jewish (as they often accused of being).

And remember the words of Pastor Niemöller: 'First they came for the communist and I did nothing because I wasn't a communist. Then they came for the Jew and I did nothing because I wasn't a Jew.' In a sense they've been coming for the Palestinian now for a long time, and on the whole we have thought: 'I'm not a Palestinian so I won't do anything.' But remember how Niemöller's poem ends: 'Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak for me.'