

Palestine Royal Commission [Peel Commission]. *The Palestine Royal Commission Report*. London: H.M. Stationary Office, July 1937 (Part I, Chapter III, pp. 56-62).

2. The Situation in 1925.

24. It is easy to be wise after the event, and we do not mean to suggest that there was no foundation for the cautious optimism prevalent in 1925. But it is quite clear to us now, with our knowledge of what has happened since, that, whatever temporary improvements in the situation may have been effected, the root of the problem remained untouched. The dominant force in the mind of educated Arabs was the spirit of Arab nationalism. It had been intensified, as has been seen, by the events of the War, and it had not in any degree been weakened by anything that had happened after it. The clearest demonstration of this was the definite, logical and unwavering attitude of the Arab Executive to the proposal to establish a Legislative Council. The first communication addressed to the Secretary of State for the Colonies (Mr. Churchill) by the delegation which the Executive sent to London at the beginning of 1922 opened with the following statement:—

“ Whilst the position in Palestine is, as it stands to-day, with the British Government holding authority by an occupying force, and using that authority to impose upon the people against their wishes a great immigration of alien Jews, many of them of a Bolshevik revolutionary type, no constitution which would fall short of giving the People of Palestine full control of their own affairs could be acceptable.

“ If the British Government would revise their present policy in Palestine, end the Zionist *con-dominium*, put a stop to all alien immigration and grant the People of Palestine—who by Right and Experience are the best judges of what is good and bad for their country—Executive and Legislative powers, the terms of a constitution could be discussed in a different atmosphere. If to-day the People of Palestine assented to any constitution which fell short of giving them full control of their own affairs they would be in the position of agreeing to an instrument of Government which might, and probably would, be used to smother their national life under a flood of alien immigration.”

In the course of the subsequent discussions it appeared that this was in fact a claim for immediate and complete national self-government, and that it was based on two main legal or quasi-legal contentions. First, it was asserted that Palestine was included in the body of Arab States which had been promised independence by the McMahon Agreement.* Secondly, it was maintained that Palestine was one of the "communities formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire" mentioned in Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, whose "existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognized subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone"—a status obviously quite different from that which Palestine then possessed. Mr. Churchill's reply to the first of these contentions was that in the view of His Majesty's Government "Palestine west of the Jordan was excluded from Sir H. McMahon's pledge". As to the second contention, "There is no question", he said, "of treating the people of Palestine as less advanced than their neighbours in 'Iraq and Syria . . . [but] it is quite clear that the creation at this stage of a national Government would preclude the fulfilment of the pledge made by the British Government to the Jewish people". In view of the open opposition of the Arab leaders to Jewish immigration, nobody could question the truth of this last statement, nor could anyone fail to draw from it the obvious inference. The Arab delegates promptly grasped it and underlined it. "The above statement", they wrote "constitutes the strongest proof that the Jewish National Home is the cause of depriving us of our natural right of establishing an independent government the same as Mesopotamia and the Hedjaz". And again, "We can find no reason for this delay [in conceding national independence] but in the eagerness of the Government to allow time to elapse during which Jews will have increased in numbers and the powers of Zionism become more established in the land."

25. We believe that the British Government and Parliament have always maintained the moral assumption on which, as explained above, the Mandate was based, namely, that in course of time Arabs and Jews could and would sink their differences in a common Palestinian citizenship. It was for the achievement of that concord, not merely for the further growth in size and strength of the National Home, that they insisted on delay. In other words a national self-government could not be established in Palestine as long as it would be used to frustrate the purpose of the Balfour Declaration. Even so, the crux was plain enough to Arab eyes. It was the Balfour Declaration and its

* See pages 19 to 20 above.

embodiment in the draft Mandate and nothing else which seemingly prevented their attaining a similar measure of independence to that which other Arab communities already enjoyed. And their reaction to this crux was logical. They repudiated the Balfour Declaration. They protested against its implementation in the draft Mandate. "The people of Palestine", they said, "cannot accept the creation of a National Home for the Jewish people in Palestine". And they refused to co-operate in any form of government other than a national government responsible to the Palestinian people.

26. The British Government were not deterred by the intransigence of the Arab Executive from pursuing the policy they had framed. The main positive proposal of Mr. Churchill's Statement of Policy was the establishment of a Legislative Council to consist of Moslem Arabs, Christian Arabs, and Jews and officials, with the High Commissioner presiding; and elections for it were held in due course in 1923. But the great majority of the Arabs refused to vote, whereupon the proceedings were nullified by Order in Council, and an attempt was made to reconstitute the Advisory Council by nominating unofficial members on the same representative basis as that of the proposed Legislative Council. The High Commissioner invited ten moderate-minded Arabs to become members, eight Moslems and two Christians. All the invitations were accepted, but under pressure from the Arab Executive seven were withdrawn. The nomination of unofficial members was accordingly abandoned: and the Advisory Council remained, and has to this day remained, a council of officials only.

27. In the course of 1923 the difficulty of securing Arab co-operation was made still clearer. Impressed by the emphasis laid by the Arab delegation in the previous year on the powers possessed by the Zionist Executive in Palestine, the Duke of Devonshire, who had succeeded Mr. Churchill at the Colonial Office, proposed that an Arab Agency should be established, "which will occupy a position exactly analogous to that accorded to the Jewish Agency under Article 4 of the Mandate". The High Commissioner was to nominate the members of the Agency "in consultation with the local leaders". This proposal, it was pointed out, was "a great concession to Arab sentiment", and it would not be pursued if it were not certain to be "loyally implemented by the Arabs themselves". The offer was explained by the High Commissioner to a gathering of 26 Arab leaders. Although several of them belonged to the moderate school, and although such conciliatory force as the "Churchill Statement of Policy" contained had by now had time to take effect, "the meeting was unanimous in declining to accept the offer of an Arab Agency which would not satisfy the aspirations of the Arab people".

28. In a telegram of the 9th November, 1923, the Duke of Devonshire enumerated the three proposals made "with a view to closer association of Arab community with administration of Palestine", the Legislative Council, the enlarged Advisory Council, and the Arab Agency. "Towards all these proposals Arabs have adopted same attitude, viz., refusal to co-operate. His Majesty's Government have been reluctantly driven to conclusion that further efforts on similar lines would be useless and they have accordingly decided not to repeat the attempt." As regards constitutional development the deadlock was complete.

29. Two years later the position was the same. The only hope of progress lay in the emergence of a moderate Arab party. But the history of nationalist movements in all parts of the world goes to show that in a struggle for national independence it is always easier for the extremist than for the moderate to secure the allegiance of his people. And the reason is plain. The mainspring of nationalism in revolt is the desire of a people not merely for freedom but for that equal status with other self-governing peoples which freedom implies. And, if freedom can be, equality cannot be, a matter of degree. Every time, therefore, that a moderate nationalist appeals to his people to accept something less than national independence, he is invariably outbidden by the extremist who demands it in full.

30. In Palestine, moreover, the prospects of a moderate nationalism, ready to acquiesce in a more or less indefinite postponement of independence, were prejudiced from the outset by the fact that the problem of Palestine was not a problem that concerned Palestine alone. We do not refer to its unique religious standing in the world, to the feeling in the hearts of countless men and women outside its borders for a land that is sacred to three faiths. We believe that this aspect of the problem has always been and still is susceptible of treatment by general consent. The religious significance of the country, it is true, is closely associated with both Arab and Jewish nationalism, and it can be perverted by reckless extremists to excite the less cool-headed adherents of both. But it need not be, and except on one unhappy occasion* it has not been up to the present, a dominant factor in the exacerbation of the problem. What we mean when we say that the problem extends beyond Palestine is that it involves not only the Arabs and the Jews in the country, but also the Arabs and the Jews outside it. The situation in Palestine, therefore, has never been stable. On the one hand, the Zionist movement, supported as time passed by a growing body of World Jewry, was unceasingly and insistently pressing

* See page 67 below.

to get more and more Jews into the country: so that moderate Arab nationalists were not confronted merely with a certain number of Jews in Palestine at a certain time. They were bound to look abroad and ahead and to contemplate, however reassuring the 1922 Statement of Policy might seem to be, at best a steadily continued, at worst a largely increased, inflow of Jews, which would drastically alter the existing balance between the races; and they were bound, therefore, to find it difficult to disagree, and to persuade their fellow Arabs to disagree, with the extremists who said that Jewish immigration must be stopped and that it could only be stopped by the attainment of independence. On the other side Arab nationalism was exposed to the pressure of events in all the neighbouring countries. North and east and south-east lay Syria, Trans-Jordan, 'Iraq, the Wahabi Kingdom and the Kingdom of the Hedjaz, all Arab lands; and south-west lay Egypt, largely Arab in blood, mainly Moslem in faith. With all these peoples the Arabs of Palestine were in constant touch. Travel by air had not become the commonplace it is to-day; but 'Iraq was already linked with Syria by a motor-service across the desert. And with Syria Palestine was intimately connected. Until the post-war settlement they had belonged for centuries to a single territorial entity. Many of the leading Arabs in the two countries belonged to the same families. Commercial and professional intercourse was close and frequent. Important happenings in Syria, therefore, instantly affected Palestine, and *vice versa*; and there was a similar, if not always quite so strong, reciprocal reaction of events throughout the Arab world and in Egypt.

31. Nowhere, as it happened, was the spirit of nationalism more acute after the War than in this area of the Near and Middle East. In all of its constituent territories, except Trans-Jordan, there were serious disturbances, and in all of them, except Palestine, there was a marked advance towards self-government. Trouble came first in Egypt, which had become a British Protectorate at the end of 1914. With this regime post-war Egyptian patriots were far from satisfied, and in 1919 the organization of the nationalist movement under Zaghlul Pasha, aiming at complete and immediate independence, led to widespread rioting and bloodshed. In 1920 the Milner Mission recommended recognition of Egypt as a sovereign independent State under certain conditions, and in 1922 this recognition was accorded by a unilateral declaration by the British Government. The Protectorate was abolished and Egypt declared an independent sovereign State, subject to the reservation of four points to the absolute discretion of the British Government pending agreement in regard thereto. These were the security of the communications of the British Empire, the defence of Egypt against foreign aggression or interference,

the protection of British interests and of Minorities, and the Sudan. The declaration was never accepted by the nationalists. A long series of political outrages followed, culminating in the murder of Sir Lee Stack in 1924. Severe measures were taken by the British Government: "terrorism" was crushed or driven underground: but in 1925, though Zaghlul was no longer in office, the nationalists could still count on the support of the great majority of the Egyptian people.

32. The situation in Syria was even more disturbed. From the first, it will be remembered, the Syrians had rejected the idea of Mandatory government and demanded national independence; and it was only after some fighting that the French were able in 1920 to occupy Damascus and compel King Feisal to leave the country. During the next four years the French Mandatory administration was organized on a basis of territorial division, under which four "states" were ultimately constituted—a large inland "Syria"; two small sea-board "states", Lebanon (where the tradition of French friendship was oldest and strongest) and an Alouite "state" north of Lebanon; and a separate enclave in the hill-country for the Druses. In each of these units elected Representative Councils had been established by 1925; the administration was in the hands of Arab ministers; and the powers of the French officials were nominally limited to supervision and advice. Despite this substantial measure of self-government a dangerous insurrection, started by the Druses, broke out in the summer of 1925. It was marked at the outset by the defeat of a French column with 800 casualties and the siege of several isolated garrisons. The most startling incident of the protracted fighting which ensued was the French bombardment of Damascus in October. By the end of 1925, though the situation had been improved by M. de Jouvenel's attempts to revert to "constitutional" methods, the trouble was not ended and guerilla warfare still continued. It was clear not only to France but to the Arab world that the task of maintaining the Mandate in the teeth of Syrian nationalism was difficult and costly.

33. The sympathy of the Palestinian Arabs with their kinsmen in Syria had been plainly shown throughout this period. Both peoples clung to the principle that Palestine was part of Syria and should never have been cut off from it. Feisal was proclaimed King by a Syrian Congress which included Palestinians. Another Syro-Palestinian Congress was founded at Geneva in 1921. In 1925 an effective "general strike" was organized in Palestine in sympathy with the Arab revolt in Syria, and another in the following year to protest against M. de Jouvenel's official visit to Jerusalem. And in 1925, when Lord Balfour proceeded from Jerusalem to Damascus, his arrival precipitated such serious rioting that French troops had to be called in and his own life was for a time in danger.

34. If the sentiment of the Palestinian Arabs was most clearly engaged in developments in Syria, it was 'Iraq that provided the most striking example of what Arab nationalism could achieve. In 'Iraq, as in Syria, agitation against the Mandate policy had persisted since the end of the War, and the confirmation of that policy at San Remo in the spring of 1920 aggravated the unrest. It culminated in the course of the summer in a rebellion so vigorous and widespread that it necessitated something like the reconquest of the country by a British army of some 76,000 men. Before the fighting was over the British Government had decided to make far-reaching concessions to the nationalist movement. In October, in place of what had hitherto been a mainly British administration, more or less on the lines of that of an Indian Province before the War, a provisional Council of State was established, consisting of Arab ministers, and the chief administrative posts in the country districts were similarly filled with Arabs, with British officials acting in both cases as advisers. This regime prepared the way for an Arab constitutional monarchy. In 1921, on the resolution of the State Council confirmed by a plebiscite, Feisal was proclaimed King. In 1922, with the approval of the Mandates Commission, the draft Mandate was discarded and in place of it a Treaty of Alliance between the British Government and the Government of 'Iraq was negotiated, under which the former, while it retained a measure of advisory control over foreign, financial and military matters, acknowledged the sovereign independence of 'Iraq and undertook in due course to facilitate its admission to the League of Nations. Thus, at the end of 1925, 'Iraq was almost, if not yet quite, a free and equal member of international society, with an Arab constitutional monarchy and an Arab cabinet responsible to an elected Arab parliament.

35. Less dramatic than events in 'Iraq, but still significant for Palestinian Arabs, was the quiet beginning of a similar regime on a smaller scale in Trans-Jordan. It remained under Mandate—an extension of the Mandate for Palestine without the Articles relating to the National Home—but the form of government was wholly different from that of Palestine. From 1921 onwards it was headed by an Arab sovereign, the Amir Abdullah, a brother of King Feisal, and in 1923 it was recognized by the British Government as "an independent government". The British High Commissioner for Palestine retained such ultimate powers as the continuance of the Mandate with its international obligations implied; but the function of the British Resident at Amman and his handful of British subordinates was to advise, not to govern, and the departments of the administration were headed by the Amir's Arab ministers and staffed almost entirely by the Amir's Arab officials. The contrast with Palestine was marked. The Arab who in 1925

looked beyond Jerusalem across the valley of the Jordan to the uplands beyond looked at a country which for ages before the War had been part of Palestine, a far poorer country in its present stage of development than Palestine, a country with a population only about one-third of that of Arab Palestine and socially and politically more backward, yet a country far more advanced than Palestine towards full national freedom.

36. So it was already evident in 1925, that, on its Arab as well as its Jewish side, the problem of Palestine could never be a self-contained, isolated problem. If at the moment Palestine could have been so cut off from the rest of the world by some cataclysm of nature that all approach to it or communication with it from outside became impossible, then perhaps the two peoples confronting each other within its narrow borders might have been forced to make the best of it and learn to live in harmony together. As it was, the Jewish community in Palestine could not be freed from its association with the hopes and fears and sufferings of Jews elsewhere, nor could the national aspirations of the Palestinian Arabs be secluded from those of the Arab world all round it.

37. Thus external as well as internal factors were already operating in those early days to keep the two races in Palestine aloof and hostile. And it is easier to see now than it was then that a conflict had been created between two national ideals, and that under the system imposed by the Mandate it could only be resolved if one or both of those ideals were abandoned. If the Jews had come to Palestine willing to fuse their life and culture with Arab life and culture, to accept the language of the majority, to contemplate the possibility of being some day ruled by that majority, then it is conceivable that they might have been as welcome and successful in Palestine as their ancestors in 'Iraq or Egypt or Spain in the early days of the Diaspora. But it would have been wholly unreasonable to expect such an attitude on their part. It would have been the direct negation of Zionism, both on its social or political and on its cultural side. The Zionists came back to Palestine, on the one hand, to escape from an alien environment, to shake off the shadow of the ghetto, to free themselves from all the drawbacks of "minority life". On the other hand, they came back inspired with the faith that the Jewish genius, restored to its old home, could do things comparable with the things it had done in ancient days. Necessarily, therefore, the Hebrew language had to be the language of the National Home: necessarily Jewish nationalism was intensified by its foundation. Enlightened immigrants might take a highly sympathetic interest in Arab life and culture: but there could be no question of a Jewish fusion or "assimilation" with it, still less of a subordination. The National Home could not

be half-national. Nor, it need hardly be said, was the idea of the Arabs acquiescing on their side in a fusion of Arab with Jewish culture more imaginable. To quote the Arab delegates of 1922 again, "Nature does not allow the creation of a spirit of co-operation between two peoples so different".*

38. The situation at the end of the first five years of the Civil Administration has been described at some length because it is important to make it clear that the situation as we ourselves found it eleven years later is not a different situation, brought about by new or temporary factors, in Palestine or outside it. It is the old situation intensified. Most of what has happened since 1925 has been a repetition, on a steadily increasing scale of gravity, of what happened before 1925. The present difficulties of the problem of Palestine were all inherent in it from the beginning. Time has not altered, it has only strengthened them.

* Cmd. 1700, p. 28.