

starvation.²⁵ On 29 June, *Falastin* hinted that what Palestine, 'the beloved nation', needed was the bliss of independence but that 'we dare not spell it out'. The same issue carried an article contributed by a reader in which he emphasised that words cannot stand in the face of finance, science, zeal and national solidarity of the Zionists. Only action can stand in the face of action. The writer suggested the establishment of a national Palestinian land company financed by a group of wealthy Palestinians to buy lands that were not under cultivation and to exert pressure on the government to confine cultivated land sales to peasants. He concluded by calling for unity and co-operation to defend the country.

In these articles, published in the early part of the second decade, two things merit remark. The first is the implicit and permeating feeling of admiration for the advanced technological and organisational methods employed by the Zionists. The second is the underlying and sometimes explicit realisation that only through acquiring knowledge, skill and organisation could Arab opposition to Zionism be effective.

The First Arab Congress

The political stirrings and cross-currents of political ideas and aspirations culminated in the convening of the First Arab Congress in Paris during June 1913, which included an impressive number of prominent political personalities from the Levant.

It was an attempt at articulating a political programme demanding partnership and equality between the Arabs and the Turks within the Ottoman Empire. Delegates demanded recognition of the Arabs as a nation entitled to autonomy within a decentralised Ottoman state and to representation on all legislative and executive levels. They also demanded cultural independence and promotion of the Arabic language to the status of an official language.

Among the participants listed in the book published on the proceedings of the Congress, there were a number of Palestinian notables and students. The more striking aspect of the Palestinian presence in the Congress were the telegrams sent from Palestine to the Congress. These telegrams revealed the existence of two literary groups in Jaffa. *al-Multa' am al-'Adabi*²⁶ (The Literary Meeting Place) and *al-Jam'iyya al-Khairiyya al-Islamiyya* (The Islamic Benevolent Society). Telegrams were also sent by the inhabitants of Nablus and Haifa who pledged their support and called for reform and decentralisation. Other telegrams from the headmen and local notables of Beisan and Jenin urged the Congress to declare its opposition to the sale of lands in their district

which they claimed were usurped from them by the Ottoman *ancien régime*. The signatories considered the delegates as 'representative of the Arab Nation', and the loss of the Beisan lands as a threat to the whole Arab Nation.²⁷

It was extraordinary that the First Arab Congress did not discuss fully the Zionist danger in Palestine and that no resolutions were passed in relation to this important and preoccupying issue. The fact was that the incipient Arab national movement was contemplating ways and means to attain political independence for the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. In a paper published in *Middle Eastern Studies*, Neville Mandel reported contacts between certain members of the Arab Decentralisation Party and the Zionist Executive. These contacts must be viewed, 'within the context of the nationalists' search for allies against the Turks'.²⁸ However, the Palestinians were unwilling to endorse the policy of taking the Zionists as temporary allies in the struggle against the Turks. In its issue of 9 July 1913, *Falastin* rebuked a leading figure of the Arab Congress, Sheikh Ahmad Tabbara, 'For he did not mention what dangers were connected with the immigration of the Zionists into the country and what problems for the future are being brought by the Government's attitude on this issue'. What is of interest to us in this context is the degree of Palestinian participation in the attempts at the 'Arab-Zionist entente'. According to Mandel, 'Some Arab notables were disturbed by the (anti-Zionist) popular mood. One such notable was Nassif Bey al-Khalidi, a native of Jerusalem, who in 1914 was Chief Engineer in Beirut.'²⁹ Nassif Bey's efforts to convene an Arab-Zionist conference were unsuccessful.

Zionist contacts with Palestinian Arabs in Constantinople were also abortive. Their demands were unacceptable to the Zionists. The Arabs desired the Zionists:

- (i) to assist Arab education, by supplying expertise and funds; (ii) to give assurances that the fellaheen would not be deprived of all their land or proletarianised by the Jewish settlers; and (iii) to find large capital sums to finance extensive public-work projects for the development of the Arab provinces.³⁰

In Palestine itself there were unmistakable signs of a hardening of Arab anti-Zionist feeling, in the months immediately following the Congress. In August, *Falastin* informed its readers that it had to increase the number of its pages in order to publish the increasing number of petitions and protests against Zionist encroachment. On 12 August,