

Object of Commission is to carry out subject to General Allenby's authority any steps required to give effect to Government declaration in favour of establishment in Palestine of a national home for Jewish people... and at the same time allay Arab suspicions regarding true aims of Zionism.<sup>25</sup>

Before the Zionist Commission reached Palestine the Palestinian Arabs were able to transform their feelings of shock and apprehension into organisational effort, as a means of promoting the expression and the effectiveness of their opposition to Zionist aims in Palestine. Inevitably the temptation to imitate the enemy's techniques was present. From Jerusalem, Clayton reported to his superiors:

Moslems are still nervous regarding progress of Zionist movement. There are indications that Moslems think that British Authorities intend to set-up a Jewish Government but that France will intervene and oppose a Zionist State, . . . Christians share Moslem's apprehensions. There is a movement in Jaffa amongst the Moslems and Christians to appoint an official committee to further Christian and Moslem interests on similar lines to Jewish Committees.<sup>26</sup>

This movement culminated in the emergence of the Muslim-Christian Committees which were similar to Zionist and Jewish organisations in an effort to act as a counter-force to the Jewish organisation. Muslim-Christian Committees were mainly dominated by the leading notables and merchants in the major cities and towns of Palestine.

The British officials in the area endeavoured to create a conciliatory atmosphere on the eve of the Zionist Commission's visit and made a concerted effort to bring forth an Arab-Zionist entente.<sup>27</sup> These efforts were directed at the traditional centres of political influence and power. Thus towards the end of March the Commander-in-Chief of the British forces paid a visit to the Mufti in Jerusalem which 'produced an excellent effect throughout Moslem community'.<sup>28</sup>

Clayton lost no time in convincing pro-British Syrian politicians in Cairo, working for an Arab state in Syria, that Weizmann was working for a 'British Palestine'. He succeeded in persuading 'Fawzi el-Bakri, an-El Azm, a Nashashibi, an Abd el-Hadi, Dr Farouk. . . to communicate with their friends in Palestine to quiet their fears and reassure them'.<sup>29</sup>

Yet when Weizmann and his Zionist Commission reached Palestine during the first week of April 1918, he discovered that 'Arab agitators lost no time in proclaiming that "the British had sent for the Jews to

take over the country".<sup>30</sup>

In a more optimistic frame of mind Clayton expected 'that meetings between members of the Commission and leading local notables will do much to dissipate apprehension of Christians and Moslem committees in Palestine'.<sup>31</sup>

Clayton's hopes notwithstanding, the Commission's visit did little to promote an Arab-Zionist entente. In a long report to the Foreign Secretary (Balfour), Ormsby-Gore gave a detailed account of the reception accorded to it by the various communities, as well as its activities and the problems thereof. The report, though restrained, did not fail to reflect Palestinian opposition to the Balfour Declaration and the JNH policy:

. . . It would be idle to deny the existence of a good deal of mutual suspicion on the part of both Jews and Arabs. . . The Arabs are generally apprehensive of expropriation by the Jews and the loss of social and political prestige; on the other side the Jews are frightened of Arab fanaticism, intrigue and attempts at domination'.

#### A Symptomatic Incident

Ormsby-Gore then reported a symptomatic incident signifying the political deadlock in the triangular Arab-British-Zionist relations in Palestine. The incident was referred to as the 'language controversy', which was precipitated by a recommendation submitted by the Arab majority of the Municipal Council of Jaffa (nominated by the Military Governor) that Arabic should be regarded as the only official language. The Jewish minority (two out of nine members) protested and the British Military Governor refused to enforce the Council's recommendation. The 'language controversy' engendered political tension in Jaffa and barred the establishment of friendly contacts between the Zionist Commission and the town's notables. It also pointed out the course of action the Arabs were likely to adopt in representative councils, and the incompatibility of Palestinian Arab self-determination with the Balfour Declaration and Zionist aims in Palestine.

In Jerusalem, however, Storrs managed to arrange a meeting in his office between the members of the Commission and a representative gathering of the leading personalities of the City. This gathering included the three chief members of the Husseini family who,

from the official positions which they hold and from the universal respect they command, not only in Jerusalem but in the whole of