

**The Traditional Leadership's Dilemma**

Storrs lost no time in sending for the Mufti to instruct him to dissuade those under his influence from adopting the second decision. He also sought to break the new organisation by calling on the Mayor and other leading figures of the Christian-Muslim Arab Committee who held official-posts in the Administration

to opt for an administrative or political career, the two being for the present incompatible. The Mayor seemed grateful for this warning, which enabled him to say that he thought he would be more useful to his country as President of the Municipality.<sup>70</sup>

The efficacy of Storrs' threats demonstrated the inadequacy of the traditional political notability to lead the populace in situations of conflict. When faced with a choice between a salaried government career and an uncertain future as popular political leaders, the elderly notables opted for the safer and more remunerative alternative.

In 1919 the realities of a long-term pro-Zionist British policy in Palestine became undeniably clear, and Palestinian political circles were confronted with a grave choice that could not be sidestepped or ignored. The alternatives were acquiescence or defiance.

Although the opposition to Zionism was virtually universal among the Palestinian Arabs, an important sector (class or group) of elderly notables took the course of acquiescence, and new forces began to compete with the propertied notables for political leadership. These comprised the active and vocal members of the educated middle classes in addition to the 'young bloods' some of whom were members of the urban and rural upper classes. In January 1919, the first Scout organisation and the first Arab Women's Club were founded.<sup>71</sup>

The struggle between the quiescent elderly propertied notables and the activist young educated members of the middle classes became apparent in the Palestine Arab Conference which met in Jerusalem between 27 January and 10 February 1919. The Conference, which comprised delegates from Muslim-Christian Societies from various parts of Palestine, was called to discuss the presentation of Palestinian demands for self-determination before the Peace Conference and to voice Palestinian Arab fears regarding Zionism and the prospect of Jewish domination.

According to a report on the Conference filed by Captain J.N. Camp of the British Intelligence, eleven out of the twenty-seven delegates were pro-British, two pro-French, two delegates with uncertain political

sympathies and the remaining twelve were pan-Arab or pro-Arab.<sup>72</sup> The conference was presided over by Aref Pasha Dahudi Dajani and dominated by the notables of Palestinian towns mostly representing the propertied classes and vested political and economic interests. The most outstanding members of the Pan-Arab group were two young intellectuals belonging to the urban middle classes, 'Izzat Darwaza and Yusuf al-'Isa, editor of *Falastin*.

Camp reported that, from the outset, the Conference was subject to strong pressure from outside. 'The pan-Arab influence of certain members of the Muntada al-Adabi and Nadi el-Arabi was very persistent'. The struggle inside the Conference was between the pro-British bloc and the pan-Arab bloc, and the split owed its origins to economic factors as well as to a generation gap:

Young Moslems, members of the various Arab Societies agitate for an independent Palestine, which would form part of a great independent Arab State. Moslem villagers and Moslems who own any considerable amount of property are nearly all pro-British.

Camp asserted that the fear of Zionism was

the main reason that leads the young pan-Arab element to favour its union with an independent Arab Syria, for with Palestine joined to an Arab Syria the people of Palestine with the help of other Arabs would be able successfully to resist Jewish immigration.<sup>73</sup>

Herein lay the dilemma of the pro-British Palestinian Arabs: although they were opposed to Zionism (the report spoke of 'the unalterable opposition of all non-Jewish elements in Palestine to Zionism'), they were actually helping the Zionist cause by being loyal to a pro-Zionist Britain. They adopted the Zionist position: namely British rule and separation of Syria and Palestine.<sup>74</sup>

In view of this dilemma it was not surprising that Camp should have reported:

I have personally heard many Arabs, both Christians and Moslems, declare that they will forcibly resist any attempt to set up in this land a Jewish State or anything resembling it. The pan-Arab young bloods, very bold in speech, say so openly, the elderly declare that they will sell out and leave the country. I do not think the threat of the young Arabs is to be taken lightly, as they might cause much trouble