

By early 1920 it was evident to all parties in Palestine that an anti-Zionist outburst was imminent. In January British Naval Intelligence reported that emissaries from Damascus were frequently proceeding to Jaffa.

These hasty visits are thought to foreshadow an attempt at simultaneous disturbances throughout Syria and Palestine on the lines of those organised in Egypt.¹²²

The report further asserted that anti-Zionism was responsible for a decided rapprochement between Christians and Muslims. As for the *fellahin*,

They allege that the Jewish colonists are subsidised from without and have been granted privileges by the Administration which were denied to others, and state that they cannot compete against such advantages, and would therefore be ultimately squeezed out of existence.

By February the process of polarisation had been accomplished. In a letter to Curzon, Weizmann pointed out that 'there is no doubt that anti-Zionist and anti-British propaganda amongst the Arabs run parallel'.¹²³

On 27 February 1920 a big Arab political demonstration was held in Jerusalem with the knowledge of the authorities. Despite Zionist protestations, General Bols, the Chief Administrator, took the view that organised processions could be controlled and that they acted as a safety valve.¹²⁴ A second demonstration was held on 8 March amidst considerable excitement owing to the recent proclamation of Prince Faisal King of Syria and Palestine:

The speeches were of a violently political character. . . There was an incident said to have been caused by a Jewish boy trying to force his way through the processions. This started a quarrel and there was some stone throwing. A few Jews were injured, but the police quickly regained control and the demonstration dispersed without further accident.¹²⁵

On 1 March two Jewish settlements at Metulla and Tel Hai near the Syrian border were attacked by armed Palestinian bands¹²⁶ probably organised by the Palestinians in Damascus¹²⁷. Captain Joseph

Trumpledor, a prominent Zionist soldier, and six other Jews were killed during the raid. The incident which was indicative of the Palestinian political mood, and a glimpse of coming events, failed to spark a general anti-Zionist uprising owing to the deteriorating political situation and the imminent collapse of the Arab regime in Damascus.

Describing the situation in Palestine on the eve of Easter 1920, the Palin Commission Report stated:

The whole native population Arab and Christian, was in a condition of active hostility at once to the Zionists and the British Administration, their sentiment influenced by a sense of their own wrongs; their fears for the future, and the active propaganda of various anti-British and anti-Zionist elements working freely in their midst. The signs and warnings had not escaped either the Zionists or the Administration.¹²⁸

The Spark

On 11 March as a result of Zionist pressure brought to bear on the Chief Administrator, demonstrations were prohibited, a measure which must have added to the already widespread Arab resentment. The approach of Easter week with its inevitable religious disorders, and the coincidence of the Christian and Jewish festivals with the Muslim Nebi Musa Pilgrimage caused serious anxiety to the Jewish Community and the Administration. On that occasion Muslim pilgrims assembled bearing their local banners from the surrounding villages at Jerusalem. The Pilgrimage had always been officially recognised by the Government who used to provide the necessary troops and a band in honour of the ceremony. In view of the political excitement and the prevailing tension, it was not surprising that Palestinian Arab nationalist circles were determined to turn any Arab gathering into an occasion for protest and agitation against Zionism and the Administration. Thus, when the Hebron pilgrims arrived on 4 April, their procession was halted more than once, to hear speeches by 'Aref al-'Aref, Musa Kazem, the Mayor, Hajj Amin al-Husseini and other prominent Muslims. The Palin Commission report stated that the practice of delaying the procession to hear speeches, was first introduced in 1919. In 1920, however, the speeches were of a flagrantly political character culminating in the exhibition of the portrait of the Emir Faisal, who was greeted as 'King of Syria and Palestine'. The crowd at this point was gradually worked up into a high, inflammatory condition and it