

Jewish religious aspirations, but precluding any exclusive political advantages to them which must necessarily interfere with Arab rights.⁸⁶

Should their suggestions and views be favourably received by the Cabinet, the Delegation were ready to enter into negotiations with HMG regarding the details of the scheme which would subsequently be submitted to the people of Palestine.

After much hesitation⁸⁷ and as a result of discussion with Churchill, the Delegation agreed to attend a meeting in the Colonial Office where the Zionists would be present. In a telegram to Samuel, Churchill claimed that the accepted aim of the meeting was 'to discuss the possibility of making working arrangements,⁸⁸ between the Delegation and the Zionists. In contradistinction to that version, Weizmann wrote Deedes that the Arabs 'had come, not to discuss practical details, but to hear a statement of policy as promised'. The meeting was a failure. 'They entrenched themselves behind this position and Mr Shuckburgh was unable to dislodge them.'⁸⁹

As the negotiations dragged on in London, the Palestinians lost hope of obtaining any decisive gain through diplomatic efforts. In December Weizmann passed reports, which he considered accurate, to Shuckburgh on secret Arab political meetings that took place in Palestine during September 1921. These reports revealed a number of facts about the composition, aims and tactics of the anti-Zionist 'Palestinian Arab' national movement at that particular period.

Political and Economic Factors

These reports covered meetings that took place in Hebron, Ramleh, Loubie and Tulkarem where delegates from the neighbouring villages and towns participated. The meetings provided an opportunity for coordination and cooperation between the national leadership in the cities and political activists in the rural areas. The reports indicate that the direct reason for convening the secret meetings of September 1921 was the realisation that the Arab Delegation in London stood no chance of obtaining their demands and that necessary action should be taken in Palestine. As the Arabs were too weak to confront the British troops in Palestine, there seemed to be 'only one effective method to stop immigration and to destroy the Balfour Declaration, and that is a systematic series of attacks on the Jews in Palestine'.⁹⁰ The neighbouring nationalist committees in the towns had convened the respective

assemblies attended by 30 to 50 delegates to decide whether it would be possible to prepare in the next three or four months a systematic series of attacks upon the Jewish colonies in their vicinity. These attacks were designed to frighten Jewish immigration, to convince the British that the Arabs were stubborn and meant to stick to their demands and to show the world that the Palestinian demands were just, and 'As a result of this the League of Nations will not sign the Mandate'.⁹¹

These reports revealed the basis of agitation and the grounds for resentment against the Jews. We have seen how the political factor was considered important, but the economic factor, closely connected with the political one, was equally relevant:

We must not allow a Mandate over us, as then all the rich Jews would grab everything in their hands, our commerce will be destroyed, we shall not be able to stand competition, they have many banks, and these banks assist only Jews, they are looking for concessions which will ruin us.⁹²

In another meeting a similar line of argument stood out, this time with greater emphasis on aspects which explain the tough opposition of educated and semi-educated Arab middle classes to Zionism, who provided a high percentage of the leadership of the militant wing of the anti-Zionist Movement in Palestine:

We must get rid of Jewish domination over us. The Jews are occupying important Government posts all over the land, and the Arabs are forced out everywhere. There is a general attempt by the Jewish intelligentsia to seize all the official Government positions. We must not allow this to continue. If the Balfour Declaration will be signed, we shall remain slaves to the Jews for ever.⁹³

At the meeting at Loubie (near Tiberias) the incompatibility of the Balfour Declaration with Arab political rights was stressed, and the generation gap clearly spelt out as the old Sheikhs, i.e. elderly people, were opposed to the younger generation's violent tactics. 'These old Sheikhs do not understand that they are playing with our future, but fortunately they do not have much influence.'⁹⁴

Although the *fellahin* were reported to be rather 'tired of politics', the activists were sure of their participation in attacks on Jewish colonies if they were assured that the Jews were not as well-armed as they say they were.