

The British Government maintained that they were under the obligation to carry out the administration of Palestine in accordance with the Articles of the Mandate. MacDonald and Passfield, however, promised to act on land sales and Jewish immigration after Sir John Hope Simpson, the land expert, had investigated the situation and submitted his recommendations.

The British Government described the talks with the Delegation as inconclusive. The Palestinian leaders, though clearly convinced that their mission was a failure, refused to publicise their belief that it was not possible to effect a radical change of British policy by peaceful means. Instead they declared that they were hopeful that the British Government would eventually accept their demands for the sake of peace in Palestine.

The despatch of Sir John Hope Simpson to Palestine reflected the Government's serious view of the plight of the landless peasants and unemployed workers in Palestine. A number of surveys were conducted by various committees in that period. According to a report on the 'Arab farmers' economic condition' submitted by the Commissioner of Lands in Palestine, the two burdens which weighed most heavily on the Arab cultivators were excessive taxation and indebtedness to Government and to money lenders.<sup>11</sup> These two factors were closely interrelated, and their interplay forced the Arab farmers to sell their lands to the Zionists.

#### The Plight of the Fellaah

A consistent campaign in the Arabic Press emphasising the same facts reported by the Commissioner of Lands was directed against the Government's policy and complicity, which facilitated the implementation of the Zionist plans for the gradual conquest of Palestine and the dispossession of the fellahin. An article by a farmer from Tulkarem, published in *Falastin* of 24 August 1930, explained the interplay of factors that forced the Palestinian peasant to sell his land to the Jews:

I sell my land and property because the Government compels me to pay taxes and tithes at a time when I do not possess the necessary means of subsistence for myself and my family. In the circumstances I am forced to appeal to a rich person for a loan which I undertake to refund together with an interest of 50% after a month or two. . . I keep renewing the bill and doubling the debt. . . which eventually forces me to sell my land in order to refund my debt out of which I

took only a meagre sum.

During October 1930 the Press drew attention to the Administration's neglect of the unemployed Arabs,<sup>12</sup> while spending large sums of money to relieve the Jewish workers, and complained against the granting of concessions for the exploitation of the country's resources by Jewish and foreign concerns.

Before Simpson submitted his report and recommendations, Chancellor found it necessary to take action in respect of immigration and land sales which was calculated to have a tranquillising effect upon the Arabs. The action was prompted by investigations which revealed that the Jews had 'recently bought or acquired options over large areas of land and acquisition of land by them is now proceeding at such a rapid rate. . .'<sup>13</sup>

On receiving Chancellor's legislative proposals Shuckburgh anticipated that actions designed to protect Arab peasants were bound to detonate 'further Jewish agitation on what may well be a most embarrassing scale'. The interests of the local inhabitants in Palestine were not, according to Shuckburgh, the paramount consideration:

We have there to consider (or are always being told that we ought to consider) not merely the existing population, but the 14 odd millions of Jews all over the world who regard themselves as potential Palestinians. The embarrassing results of this position are obvious. But they are inherent in the Zionist policy, and must be faced.<sup>14</sup>

The accuracy of Shuckburgh's assessment of the situation became apparent in October 1930 following the publication of the report of Sir John Hope Simpson,<sup>15</sup> and the Statement of Policy by His Majesty's Government on Palestine, later known as Passfield's White Paper, which was based on Simpson's findings and recommendation.

According to the Simpson Report the amount of cultivable land available in Palestine — excluding the Beersheba Sub-District — was only 6,544,000 *dunums* considerably less than the figure given by some Zionists (16,000,000) and appreciably below the estimate c. 10,952,000 given by the Commissioner of Lands.<sup>17</sup> From that basic calculation Simpson drew two far-reaching conclusions:

1. If all the cultivable land in Palestine were divided up among the Arab agricultural population, there would not be enough to provide every family with a decent livelihood.