

enterprises. In Weizmann's considered opinion the MacDonald Letter was a decisive factor 'which enabled us to make the magnificent gains of the ensuing years'.²⁵

Not unnaturally, the Arabs read MacDonald's 'Black Letter', as they called it, with distress and indignation. They took the Letter as proof of Zionism's decisive influence on Whitehall and Westminster and hence the futility of expecting any degree of justice from Britain.

The political notability were hard hit by the MacDonald Letter and did not hesitate to tell Chancellor, in their first interview with him after the publication of the 'Black Letter', that their position before the public had become 'precarious and anxious'.²⁶ At the end of the interview the Arab leaders handed Chancellor a memorandum of protest in which they professed their loss of confidence in HMG and their vehement objection to what they considered a sanctioning of Jewish boycott of Arab labour. In turn they were considering boycotting the Jews by virtue of the principle of reciprocity.

In their manifesto to the Palestinian public, the Arab Executive declared that they were turning to the Arab and the Muslim worlds for help as they had given up all hope and confidence in Britain. The Arab Executive called for 'lawful and active' struggle to restore the Palestinians' violated rights. On 3 March 1931, Reuters news agency reported that Arab indignation over MacDonald's Letter was rising to fever pitch. Under popular pressure the Arab Executive had decided the previous day to boycott Jewish products and to encourage national handicrafts and local goods.

Settling the Palestinians across the Jordan

At this point Weizmann decided to visit Palestine ostensibly to promote an Arab-Jewish rapprochement. When the Zionist leader arrived in Palestine, the Arab Executive boycotted him and vigilantly watched every move he made. They published a declaration in the Press denouncing anybody who dared to defy public opinion on a matter that involved recognition of Zionism, the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate. Furthermore, they accused him of contemplating bribing some Arabs with the intention of exploiting them for propaganda and fund-raising purposes.²⁷ The Arab Executive were not far off the mark as Weizmann had informed Chancellor that he believed that most of the Arab leaders could be bribed.²⁸

Chancellor took a dim view of the possibility of achieving an Arab-Jewish entente through bribery and suggested instead a meeting in London attended by both parties and representatives of HMG. Weizmann

did not follow the matter through and directed his attention to a question which really interested him, namely, 'developing land in Trans-Jordan for the settlement of Palestinian Arabs'.²⁹

MacDonald's Letter dealt a severe blow not only to the traditional political leadership but also to the underlying assumptions of their conciliatory policies of the 'Black Letter'. The Administrative Officer of Nablus Area was reporting that the Arab extremists used the Letter as a means of regaining their political prestige. The implications of the Letter were unmistakable: the Palestinians were compelled to adopt a new strategy of 'closer alliance and cooperation' with the Arab and Muslim³⁰ worlds to achieve 'Palestinian independence within the framework of Arab unity'. This set the stage for two political forces which were already assuming greater importance and initiative, namely, Hajj Amin and the Arab nationalist radicals.

An Islamic Revolutionary Scheme

In May 1931, the British authorities in Palestine began receiving secret information regarding a certain revolutionary scheme throughout the Arab and Islamic countries to deliver the Arab countries, particularly Palestine and Syria from foreign suzerainty.³¹ The preliminary reports indicated that Amir Shakib Arslan, the prominent Lebanese Druze personality, was the leader of the movement and that he was in touch with all the major Arab Nationalists in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt and Palestine and with various potentates in the entire Arabian Peninsula and the Islamic countries. According to these reports Hajj Amin and Shaukat Ali, the Indian Muslim leader, were parties to this 'scheme'. The 'scheme' itself consisted of organising gangs in Trans-Jordan, wadi Sirhan and Sinai Province for guerrilla operations in Syria and Palestine, perhaps simultaneously.

The neighbouring countries would extend material assistance, and forces from various Arab countries would co-operate to renew the Syrian Revolution, perhaps, gradually.

A month later it was reported that Arab dissensions in Palestine and the incompatibility of various Muslim elements militated against the 'scheme's' early materialisation. These reports also indicated that Arslan was in very close touch with Moscow which regarded Palestine as the principal base for Soviet activities in the area. This was significant as the Comintern had succeeded, in the wake of the 1929 events, in achieving a semblance of unity between the Arab and Jewish Communists in Palestine.³²

Two factors gave added weight and credence to the police reports