

on this elaborate 'revolutionary scheme'. The first factor was the fear 'that the anti-Italian agitation which has been sedulously fostered in connection with alleged atrocities in Tripolitania may be converted into an anti-European movement'.<sup>33</sup> The second factor was the belief of the 'Police, shared by the Officer Adminstrating the Government, that the murder of three Jews near Ahava Yajour on 11 April 1931, was 'committed by members of a gang acting under the direction of a political organisation'.<sup>34</sup>

### The Ascent of the Activists

During the summer of 1931 Arab agitation was directed against the British and the Zionists. In the purely Arab sections, particularly Nablus, Arab discontent and hostility to British rule was most apparent. The initiative was being seized by the younger Arab Nationalist activists. A top Colonial Official described the position in the following terms:

The relations of the moderates, who so far have controlled the Arab Executive, with the extremists have long been obscure and equivocal; but there are now definite signs that the moderate element has been compelled to make some concessions to the extremists in order to maintain a perhaps precarious leadership.<sup>35</sup>

These concessions included the Arab Executive's refusal to accept 'the Government's development scheme as it was based on the Mandate and the MacDonald Letter which was unanimously rejected by the Arabs'.<sup>36</sup> A Press campaign led to a strike against the arming of the Jewish Colonies by the Government.

The Palestine Administration retaliated by suspending Arabic newspapers accused of incitement, by suppressing a strike in Nablus with troops assisting the Police and by 'breaking' a taxi drivers' strike in August. A number of activists were also arrested.

"On 18 September two conferences were held in Palestine. The first comprised the Arab journalists who had assembled in Jaffa to denounce the oppressive British policy in Palestine, which was 'inspired by the principles of imperialism and Zionism and applied since British occupation'.<sup>37</sup> They were particularly resentful of the administrative suspension of Arab newspapers and the various restrictions on the freedom of the Press!

The second conference which was held on the same day was of greater significance and of more far-reaching effect. The Nablus activists

had summoned the Conference, to protest against the arming of the Jewish Colonies, the suppression of their August demonstration, and a general review of the Palestine situation. The Conference was attended by young activists from various Palestinian towns who denounced the underlying assumptions of the policy adopted by the political notability and the Arab Executive towards the Government. It was resolved that the demands of 'the national movement should concentrate on 'independence within Arab unity'.<sup>38</sup> Propaganda should be directed at the Arab and Muslim worlds. Moreover, the Palestinians were advised to encourage national industries and boycott all imports as the customs on these constituted a considerable proportion of the Government's income which was being spent 'on oppressing the Palestinians. A Palestinian Youth Conference was called for to endorse these principles and work for their implementation!

### The General Islamic Congress

But the biggest Conference of all was the General Islamic Congress that was convened at Jerusalem in December 1931.<sup>39</sup> It was hoped that the Islamic Congress would focus international Muslim opinion on the Palestinian problem which had arisen after the *Buraq* incidents of 1929. Hajj Amin, assisted by Shawkat 'Ali and others, was the moving spirit of the movement. To the Mufti's own thinking the Congress would tend to strengthen the hands of the Palestinians *vis-à-vis* Zionism and the Mandate as well as consolidate his political overlordship in Palestine and his prestige in the Islamic world. A preliminary committee under his chairmanship sent invitations to Muslim religious and political leaders all over the world. The date of the Congress was fixed to coincide with a significant religious event.

The prospect of a world-wide Islamic Congress in Jerusalem specifically convened to demonstrate solidarity with the Palestinian Arabs irritated the Zionists. The fact that Hajj Amin would derive added prestige and power from it piqued his Palestinian political adversaries. As the enthusiasm for the Congress gathered momentum, the Nashashibi-led politicians who had organised themselves in the Palestine Arab Liberal Party exerted considerable political effort to thwart it and convened a rival 'Islamic Nation' Conference.

Against a background of festive preparations, the Islamic Congress was solemnly inaugurated by Hajj Amin, in the presence of leading political personalities in the Arab and Muslim world. His speech stressed the importance of Palestine to Islam and the Muslims. After two weeks of deliberations the conferees resolved to elect an Executive Committee