

and the National Committees to boycott the Government and refrain from entering any negotiations until the Arab demands were conceded. A similar manifesto in Jenin declared that no party or Committee had the right to negotiate with the Government or take any decisive step without prior consultation with a national convention. On 8 May the Convention of the National Committees was held in Jerusalem. The Arab radicals carried the day, and the convention resolved not only to continue the Strike but also to press for 'no taxation without representation'. The aim of the Palestinian struggle was declared to be 'complete Palestinian independence within the framework of Arab Unity'.¹⁹ The Arab Transport Committee urged that government officials (Arab) should be asked to join the strike but no resolution to that effect was adopted.

It soon became evident that women and students were playing a major role in maintaining morale and providing personnel for the organisation of relief, demonstrations and medical aid.²⁰

Two days after the Convention the student committees held a convention in Jaffa, and resolved to support the national demands, to boycott British and Zionist goods and to withdraw from the British Baden-Powell Scout Movement. On the same day several bombs exploded near government offices and on the following day outside the Central Police Station. Already there were signs that disorders were spreading to the rural areas of Palestine. A conference of the rural National Committee was held at Nablus where it was resolved to advocate the non-payment of taxes, to denounce the installation of Police stations in some villages at the expense of the villagers, and to establish National Committees in all the Arab villages of Palestine. On the same day Wauchope reported to the Colonial Secretary that 'The whole population of village and towns is united'. In the same telegram Wauchope predicted that henceforth each week would see the manifestation of resistance to authority. 'In spite of more than 600 arrests', Wauchope stated, 'arson, shooting, bomb throwing and destruction of railways continue and will grow in intensity'.²¹

At that point Wauchope was authorised to play the only card left in his hands; namely, the appointment of a Royal Commission of Enquiry to investigate the causes of the unrest after civil order had been re-established. He soon found out, however, that the politicians, the Mayors and the non-political leaders were powerless 'in view of the strength of public opinion all over the country, to call off the strike'.²²

Wauchope's predictions proved to be accurate; demonstrations in

the big towns, shouting of slogans against Britain and Zionism increased, clashes with the Police strengthened Arab bitterness against the Government and the Arab youth organised the National Guard in an effort to maintain morale and defend the shops and the population in a prolonged strike.

A Full-Fledged Revolt

More threatening still were the developments that were taking place in the countryside where discontent expressed itself in two forms: non-payment of taxes and violence. Air Vice-Marshal Peirse reported that:

At village meetings in the Northern districts the people identified themselves with the strike movement. On the 18th May a large meeting took place at Abu Ghosh, between Jerusalem and Jaffa, which was attended by several thousands of people from neighbouring villages. The general feeling abroad was that the time had come when the Jewish question had to be settled once and for all and that it was necessary to sustain the struggle against the Government until the national political aims had been realised.²³

On 18 May the Government announced a new Jewish Labour Schedule of 4,500 immigrants for the next six months which influenced Arab public opinion and committed the Palestinians to further defiance of the British. On the same day it was announced in the House of Commons that it had been decided to appoint a Royal Commission to investigate the causes of unrest in Palestine but that the Commission would not proceed to Palestine until the strike was called off and order restored. The announcement did not produce the desired effect as the Arabs were committed to continue the strike until the Government announced the stoppage of Jewish immigration.

Military reinforcements began arriving from Egypt and Malta. On 23 May sixty-one Arab activists and strike organisers were arrested. No sooner had the news spread than demonstrators took to the streets of Nablus where Police killed four of them and wounded seven. Armed villagers also headed for Tulkarem, and a battle took place at Bal'a where four of them were wounded including a woman who was carrying water to the fighters. These incidents turned the peaceful strike in Samaria to a full-fledged revolt.

The stepping up of the armed resistance exerted greater pressures on the Arab bodies that had refrained from joining the general strike: the municipalities, government employees and workers in Haifa's harbour.