

collective fines, demolition of houses and what was euphemistically termed 'excesses'⁵⁶ added to Arab resentment against the Government. According to O.G.R. Williams of the Colonial Office, these measures 'provoked a very considerable amount of ill feeling not unmingled, I think, with contempt for His Majesty's Government'.⁵⁷

The Peel Commission

The reasons that induced the Higher Committee to call off the strike and the rebellion were connected with their assessment of the seriousness of the military situation after the arrival of the new British division. In view of the destitution caused by the rebellion and the arrival of the citrus season, which touched on the interests of many members of the political notability, any decision to extend the Strike was bound to be controversial as was borne out by the opposition to boycott the Peel Commission shortly afterwards.

Simultaneous with the departure of the Royal Commission of Enquiry to Palestine on 5 November, the Colonial Secretary announced in the House of Commons the Government's decision that there would be no suspension on immigration during the course of the Royal Commission's investigation.

On the following day the Higher Committee denounced in vigorous terms the Colonial Secretary's statement which they viewed as a breach of faith and as contrary to what they had been expecting. As a result of this affront, the Committee declared its resolve not to co-operate with the Royal Commission and asked all the Arabs of Palestine to abide by its decision.

The decision to boycott the Peel Commission exposed the inherent weaknesses of the Palestinian national movement. Although the National Committees were strongly in favour of a firm stand, the Nashashibi faction resented the tough lines represented by the boycott decision. 'Abdullah went out of his way to have the decision rescinded and Ibn Sa'ud threatened that he would sever all relations with the Higher Committee if the latter did not appear before the Royal Commission.⁵⁸

Encouraged by the attitude of 'Abdullah and Ibn Sa'ud, the Nashashibi opposition to the boycott of the Peel Commission began to make itself felt. On 24 December *Falastin*, the organ of the Nashashibi Party, criticised the Higher Committee's decision to boycott the Commission and a few days later Hasan Sudki Dajani, a prominent member of the Nashashibi faction, announced his intention of giving evidence before the Royal Commission. Behind the increasingly bold dissident

stand of the Defence Party lay the apprehensions of the propertied classes which were largely identified with it, that the new radicalism of the Mufti and the growing power of the extremists would inevitably lead to a total armed confrontation with the British aimed at achieving national independence. The expected upheaval would inflict severe losses to their interests and properties and should the impending rebellion achieve its aims Hajj Amin would, no doubt, reign supreme.

Faced with a lack of consensus inside their own shaky ranks and with strong pressures from the Sa'udi monarch, the Higher Committee had to succumb once more to the good offices of the Arab rulers. The decision to boycott the Peel Commission was abandoned on 6 January 1937, and the Arab case was largely presented by members of the Arab Higher Committee. Unlike Jewish and British evidence before the Royal Commission, Arab evidence was presented in the course of a few days in a manner not altogether appealing to a Western political tribunal.

The Arab Demands

In their statements before the Commission the Arab leaders asserted the inclusion of Palestine in the McMahon pledge to King Hussein, denied the validity of the Balfour Declaration and held that they never admitted the right of the powers to entrust a Mandate to Britain, which was inconsistent with the principle of self-determination embodied in the League of Nations.

The Higher Committee demanded the removal of the Mandate and the establishment of a national independent government. In their conclusions about the 'underlying causes of the disturbances' of 1936, the Royal Commission stated that the desire of the Arabs for national independence and their hatred and fear of the establishment of the JNH were the basic causes of all the Palestine disturbances. Additional causes were provided by the fact that the neighbouring Arab countries had attained national independence while the no less deserving Palestine had not. 'The intensive character of Jewish nationalism'⁵⁹ accentuated Arab fears of Jewish domination in Palestine.

Unlike the Arabs, the Zionists were opposed to Palestinian independence 'since a free Palestine in present circumstances means an Arab State'.⁶⁰ Jewish nationalism, the Commission Report stated, could not refuse 'allegiance to the British Government, which alone protects it from the enmity of the Arab world'.⁶¹

On 29 December Wauchop reported that the situation in Palestine was one of political tension and that