

The granting of a new labour schedule and rumours of proposed partition of the country by the Peel Commission were subjects of Arab protests.<sup>71</sup> In view of the growth of nationalist feelings on both sides Wauchope saw little hope of maintaining security without a large and permanent garrison.<sup>72</sup> Tension was accentuated by a hunger strike declared by 180 political internees in Galilee which threatened to snowball after the declaration of a sympathy strike in Acre and Haifa.

While urging the Government to release all political internees and protesting against the issuing of immigration schedules, Hajj Amin was able to do so 'in a friendly way', and to offer co-operation on settling the dwellers of the tin-shacks in Haifa on *waqf* lands.

As the rumours regarding the recommendations of the Peel Commission became more persistent Hajj Amin's moderation gave way to a more militant and defiant attitude. On 22 June, the Mufti, accompanied by four of his closest lieutenants, arrived in Damascus where he received all the prominent nationalist leaders, journalists and politicians of Syria and Lebanon in addition to a few Iraqi Arab nationalists and the Sa'udi Arabian Consul. According to a report by the usually well-informed British Consul in Damascus, Hajj Amin's discussion centred around two inter-related subjects. These were a 'general review of the pan-Arab political position' involving the 'immediate merging of the Palestine Istiqlal party in the Syrian National bloc... in all its aspects',<sup>73</sup> and the impending scheme for the partition of Palestine. Hajj Amin raised objections to partition, and a majority of the politicians was against the acceptance of 'Abdullah as sovereign of the proposed Arab State of Palestine. A Pan-Arab Congress was to be convened to discuss the future of Palestine at a later stage. Apart from the Syrian politicians and journalists, Hajj Amin had more than one lengthy private meeting with Syrian and Palestinian rebel leaders such as Mohammad al-Ashmar and Sheikh 'Attiyeh and other persons known for their gun-running activities. Moreover, the Mufti was reported to have stated on several occasions that he would 'declare war on the British on the 8th July',<sup>74</sup> following the publication of the Royal Commission's report. Days before the report was due to be published Ragheb Nashashibi and Ya'qoub Farraj resigned from the Higher Committee ostensibly on the ground that the Mufti was acting without reference to the rest of the members of the Committee. They also deplored recent acts of terrorism and hinted that the Mufti was responsible for these acts. The fact was that their continued membership on the Higher Committee would have restricted their freedom of action when the Government announced the Partition Scheme. In

league with 'Abdullah, the National Defence Party intended to accept the proposed partition<sup>75</sup> and annex the new Arab state to Trans-Jordan with 'Abdullah as sovereign. With the aid of the British Government the Defence Party expected to assume political leadership after Hajj Amin had been removed from the scene by Government order. On hearing of the resignation of Nashashibi and Farraj, the Mufti returned to Jerusalem and British military authorities immediately predicted that he would, soon attempt to terrorise the opposition by political assassinations.<sup>76</sup>

#### Peel's Partition Plan

On 7 July, the Royal Commission Report was published together with an official announcement that the British Government had accepted in principle its recommendations.

The Report recommended that the Mandate should be abandoned and that the country should be divided into three parts: an Arab state comprising those parts of Palestine predominantly Arab; a Jewish state comprising the predominantly Jewish parts; and certain areas comprising those parts that were of particularly strategic or religious importance were to remain under British Mandate. In view of the fact that the proposed Jewish state would include the best land in Palestine, the Report recommended that the Arab state be assisted by an annual subvention from the Jewish state.<sup>77</sup>

The Zionists protested that the Partition boundaries were not to their liking, but Weizmann was in favour of the scheme. In an interview with Ormsby-Gore, he promised 'to do his best to get the Zionist Congress to accept partition'<sup>78</sup> and help the British in getting Arabs out of Galilee into Trans-Jordan. The French were also reported by Weizmann to be in favour of 'the idea of partition and of the establishment of a Jewish State as assuring a bulwark for Western democracy at the eastern end of the Mediterranean.'<sup>79</sup>

The Report was received with indignation by the majority of the Palestinian Arabs who were adamantly opposed to the creation of a Jewish state on what they regarded as Arab land.<sup>80</sup> In view of the vehement Arab reactions to partition, the Nashashibi faction refrained from making any public declaration in favour of the scheme.

On 8 July the Higher Committee rejected the partition scheme and appealed to the Arab rulers as well as to the Arab and Muslim worlds, to whom Palestine belonged, for solidarity. They communicated their rejection of partition to the League of Nations and submitted that the Royal Commission had asserted what they repeatedly claimed, namely,