

5 THE LULL: 1923-1929

Between 1924 and 1928 the Palestinian political scene witnessed a unique period of stagnation and paralysis. There were many factors accounting for this lull in the Palestinian Arab struggle against Zionism and the British Mandate, the most important of which was the final settlement of the Mandate in the League and the decline of the fortunes of the Jewish National Home in Palestine.

It should not, nevertheless, be assumed that this period was entirely uneventful. In any case it is worthwhile examining the actions and interactions of the Palestinian political forces in a period of political decline.

During October 1923, the Executive Committee of the Palestine Arab Congress held two important meetings in the course of which a clear political line emerged. At the first, which took place on 2 October, the proceedings were taken up by a report on the activities of the Delegation whilst in London and the results obtained thereby.¹ Far from resorting to a revolutionary or extra legal course of action now that the Mandate was brought into full operation Musa Kazem suggested that the Delegation should return to London when Parliament next reassembled.

The second meeting took place on the 26 October, at which Hajj Amin and Muhammad 'Ali at-Taher, secretary of the Palestine Committee in Egypt, were present. At-Taher declared himself in favour of a revolt as the only means of attaining Palestinian demands. Musa Kazem mentioned that one of the British supporters of the Arab cause in England had also advised this course: 'Musa Kazim Pasha, however, deprecated any action at the present juncture, being satisfied with the progress made by the Arab cause'.²

The Palestine Arab Executive adhered to their policy of non-cooperation with the Government and rejected an offer to establish an Arab Agency in Palestine which was to occupy a position analogous to that accorded to the Jewish Agency under Article 4 of the Mandate. The Executive Committee derived very little credit or prestige from its rejection since 'public opinion was so unanimous against the project'.³

The political impasse which blocked the way of the Executive Committee strengthened the position of the increasingly active advocates of the (Moderate) National Party. The first Congress of the

National Party was held in Jerusalem on 9 and 10 November and was attended by a number of notables led by 'Aref Dajani, who was notoriously opposed to the Muslim-Christian Association. There were also a number of villagers present mainly from the Ramallah sub-district. Sheikh Suleiman al-Taji al-Farouki was elected President and a Central Executive of eight members with a supervising Committee of twenty persons, appointed. The High Commissioner reported that their declared policy 'gave great disappointment to the Jews who had hoped for something approaching an acceptance of the Balfour Declaration'.⁴

The calibre of the Central Executive of the National Party was unimpressive and politically timid. A number of them were mayors, e.g. Ragheb Nashashibi, and therefore ostensibly 'non-political'.

The new party was vehemently attacked by the supporters of the Arab Executive and both parties were soon involved in mutual condemnation in the press.

Furthermore, the Governor of Samaria reported during the same month the foundation of a new party 'mainly composed of villagers with a program very similar to that of the National Party.

In Jaffa, an attempt to incite the people against the Government in the wake of the municipality's acceptance of the Rutenberg Scheme, was unsuccessful. This brought the municipality (dominated by notables and merchants) strongly on the side of the Government, and the temporary collapse of the Muslim-Christian Society in Jaffa.

Towards the end of December the Governor of Samaria reported that the political atmosphere had become less tense in the last few months, and that the people were losing confidence in their leaders: 'The leaders in consequence, feeling that their power has decreased, are inclined to be much more friendly with the Government'.⁵

Simultaneous with the decline of the prestige of the leadership of the Palestinian National Movement was the emergence of the Supreme Muslim Council as a political force. The visit of King Hussein to Amman preoccupied the Palestinian political leadership as it touched on two important issues: the Caliphate and the proposed accord between Hussein and the British known as the Anglo-Arab Treaty. The Palestinians urged the Arab King to reject the Balfour Declaration and to veto Jewish immigration. They also asked that he should confirm the rejection of the mandatory governments, to demand the independence of Syria, Palestine and the other Arab countries and to endeavour to realise Arab unity.⁶

King Hussein's visit, however, failed to introduce a greater measure of cohesion among the various Arab political forces in Palestine. A new