

The workers were threatened by the complete loss of their jobs if they joined the strikers as the labour force in the harbour was mixed and the Jews would have replaced them immediately and permanently. As for the municipal workers the matter was in the hands of the Mayors who were not as resolute in the defiance of the Government as other Arab sectors were. Under considerable pressure, the Mayors agreed to meet to discuss the situation and take concerted action, but the Government cancelled the meeting. On 31 May they met in secret and subsequently half of them decided to go on strike.²⁴

Despite popular demands, Government employees were not asked by the Higher Arab Committee to join the strike. Instead the senior officials and judges submitted a strong-worded memorandum to the Government in which they recommended the stoppage of immigration and advised that the trouble cannot be removed by force, but only by removing the causes of it.²⁵

Responsibility for the failure of the Government employees to join the strike, which would have crippled the Administration, must necessarily be attributed to the lack of militancy on the part of the Arab Higher Committee. Out of the ten members on this Committee only one, 'Awni 'Abdul Hadi was interned in June in a 'concentration camp' at Sarafand because of what Wauchope described as his organising capabilities.²⁶ Despite Hajj Amin's position as the President of the Higher Committee which was nominally leading the Arabs in their anti-Government strike and non-payment policies, Wauchope showed appreciation and gratitude for the Mufti's moderation. On 7 June, Wauchope reported these feelings to W. Ormsby-Gore, the new Colonial Secretary:

It is a remarkable fact that the religious cry has not been raised during the last six weeks, that the Friday sermons have been far more moderate than I could have hoped during a period when feelings of the people are so deeply stirred, and for this the Mufti is mainly responsible.²⁷

Five days later Jamal Husseini, Shibil Jamal, Dr 'Izzat Tannus and 'Abdul Latif Salah were granted visas to England, and the first three were given a letter of introduction by Wauchope to Sir John Maffey of the Colonial Office. These leaders were willing to negotiate a way out of the impasse in Palestine which would be acceptable to the British Government and the Palestinian Arabs at the same time. During one of their interviews at the Colonial Office, they admitted that the leaders

were largely now in the hands of the people, and they mentioned threats which had been made against Jamal Husseini himself and Awni Bey in the event of any weakening on their part'.²⁸

Punitive Measures

The British authorities were convinced that the Strike had the 'full sympathy of the Arabs', that they could see 'no weakening in the will and spirit of the Arab people'.²⁹ and that the armed bands were backed by the villagers. Peirse and the military concluded that:

It was quickly evident that the only way to regain the initiative from the rebels was by initiating measures against the villages from which the rebels and saboteurs came... I therefore initiated, in co-operation with the Inspector-General of Police, village searches. Ostensibly these searches were undertaken to find arms and wanted persons; actually the measures adopted by the Police on the lines of similar Turkish methods, were punitive and effective.³⁰

These punitive measures were not only distasteful to the Palestinian Police but were also instrumental in bringing about a greater degree of cohesion and identification between the villagers and the rebels. The pro-Government Mayor of Nablus informed Wauchope that 'During the last searches effected in villages, properties were destroyed, jewels stolen, and the Holy Qoran torn, and this had increased the excitement of the *fellahin*'.³¹

Two days later the *'Ulama* interviewed Wauchope and made vigorous representations on the same subject. They further informed the High Commissioner that the Arabs were aware that by attacking His Majesty's troops they commit suicide, but, as Your Excellency is aware, a desperate man often commits suicide'.³² The object of Arab disorders was simply 'letting their voice reach England and induce the British people to help them in considering their desperate position, for they would rather commit suicide or be shot down by British troops rather than suffer Jews to become dominant in Palestine.'

Although largely a peasant movement armed resistance was not restricted to the rural areas. Before the British troops entered Nablus in late May, barricades were erected across the main roads and in the narrow alleyways of that ancient Arab town. The camp of the troops and the Fort were heavily sniped from the steep slopes of the surrounding mountains which directly overlooked them. A similar situation arose at Tulkarem and the village of 'Aqraba. Around