

Arab traffic and travel were imposed and a strike was observed in Jerusalem as a protest against the establishment of a Police post in the *Haram* in January 1939. Arab protests against British troop brutality and ruthlessness abounded¹³³ and the Palestinian propaganda offices in Damascus and London (The Arab Centre) were busily engaged in distributing pamphlets and photographs in this connection.¹³⁴

During February 1939, however, London became the centre of attraction as people followed the news of the Conference with interest and hope.

As the Arabs refused to confer with the Jews, Chamberlain opened negotiations with the Arab Delegations in the morning of 7 February 1939, and with the Jewish Delegations in the afternoon of the same day. On 9 February Jamal Husseini put forward the Arab demands which called for the recognition of the Arab right to independence, the abandonment of the JNH, the immediate cessation of Jewish immigration and land sales, the abrogation of the Mandate and its replacement by a treaty of alliance with an independent Arab Palestine.

Weizmann on the other hand called for the maintenance of the *status quo*, i.e. the continued implementation of the Mandate and the Balfour Declaration and the refusal of the Yishuv and the Zionists to accept a minority status in Palestine.

Spurred by a feeling that Britain was about to jettison the JNH policy 'largely because of the strategic necessity to Great Britain of Arab friendship and alliances in the Near East'¹³⁵ the Zionists directed a great deal of argument 'to showing the usefulness to Great Britain of a loyal, industrious and progressive ally, namely the Zionists, in this part of the world'.¹³⁶ The Zionists also began to look more and more towards the United States, and the Arabs began 'to regard America as their enemy'.¹³⁷

In the course of the discussions the Government put forward proposals embodying the termination of the Mandate and the convening of a Round Table conference in the autumn which would lay down the constitution of an independent Palestine under British protection in which the Jewish minority would be safeguarded by guarantees.

The Arabs demanded the immediate implementation of the proposals, as they were apprehensive that the proposed delay would give the Jews an opportunity to pressure the Government into abandoning a scheme acceptable to the Arabs yet again. Not unexpectedly, the Jews angrily rejected the proposal and the Government withdrew the proposal on the ground that it had been 'misunderstood'.

Toward the end of February, Cairo's *al-Ahram* published a report that as a result of the London Conference, Palestine would become independent and that a treaty would be concluded with Great Britain on the lines of the Anglo-Iraq Treaty. Spontaneous demonstrations of jubilation took place; Chamberlain and Hajj Amin were cheered; in some villages bonfires were lit and in the Nazareth area the rebel leaders ordered 'a temporary cessation of terrorism'. The Arab *fellah* saw in Palestinian independence a guarantee against eviction and subservience to the Jews. 'What the fellah wants', wrote MacMichael, 'is a severe restriction of immigration and land sales and some safeguard to prevent the Jews from ever securing a political or economic mastery over him'.¹³⁸

An Arab election was matched by violent Jewish opposition: 'On the morning of 27 February a series of bomb outrages occurred almost simultaneously throughout the country. 38 Arabs were killed or fatally wounded and 44 were injured'.¹³⁹ The Zionist 'moderates' became as militant and as uncompromising as the Revisionist extremists.

As the Conference went on it became clear that no agreement would be reached as the Arabs wanted independence while they were in the majority (two-thirds of the population) and the Jews opposed Palestinian independence as long as they were in the minority. Attempts to 'save' the Conference by attempts to obtain concessions and compromises from the Mufti ended in failure.

The 1939 White Paper

The failure to arrive at an agreed solution paved the way for the British to announce their own solution. In their Palestine Statement of Policy of 1939 the British Government declared 'unequivocally' that it was not part of their policy that Palestine should become a Jewish State. Similarly, HM Government 'cannot agree' that the MacMahon correspondence forms a just basis for the claim that Palestine should be converted into an Arab State. What HMG desired to see established 'ultimately' was an independent Palestine state 'in which the two peoples in Palestine, Arabs and Jews, share authority in government in such a way that the essential interests of each are secured. . . The object of HMG is the establishment within ten years of an independent Palestine State in such treaty relations with U.K. as will provide satisfaction for all commercial and strategic interests of both countries'. The British Government further declared that the transitional period of mandatory rule 'would promote gradual self-government. Jewish immigration during the next five years was fixed at 75,000 after which