

failed to wrest the political leadership from the notables, they played a prominent role in the process of revolutionary fermentation between 1930 and 1935. During this period immigration and land acquisition assumed threatening proportions, which rendered one-fourth of the Palestinian rural population landless. Moreover, these landless peasants were not able to obtain work in the cities or in Jewish factories, owing to the Histadrut's boycott of Arab labour on Jewish enterprise. In view of these facts it was not surprising that Qassam's call for armed resistance against the British and the Jews found its greatest echo in the tin shacks of Haifa.

Although Qassam's insurgency was nipped in the bud in November 1935, it heralded a new active revolutionary stage which started out as a general strike (which is probably the longest political strike in history) in the spring of 1936 and quickly led to the great Palestine rebellion of 1936-39 which was a peasant uprising backed by urban population.

The Rebellion succeeded in attracting the attention of Arabs and Muslims in the neighbouring countries to the Palestine problem. In 1938, the rebels ruled considerable areas of rural Palestine and even succeeded in occupying some of the major cities for short intervals. To face the challenge of the Palestinian rebels, Britain had to employ two divisions and squadrons of aeroplanes.<sup>1</sup> During the 1938 European political crisis the Palestinian resistance represented a military embarrassment. The Rebellion culminated in the London Round Table Conference and the 1939 White Paper, which offered the Arabs some concessions over Jewish immigration and future independence. The concessions were neither immediate nor substantial and the prospect of independence was tied to Zionist co-operation which failed to satisfy the Arabs. These minor concessions were achieved after great sacrifices and at the expense of weakening Arab power to face the Zionist challenge in the ensuing period.

The major causes for the failure of the Palestinian Arab nationalists to prevent the establishment of the Jewish National Home centred around the lack of balance of power between themselves and their adversaries: the British-backed Zionists. The Palestinian Arabs formed an under-developed rural society with meagre resources and minimal effective organisation, while the Zionists constituted a highly organised, well-financed movement led by a highly intelligent and determined leadership.

Inability to change the balance of power owed much to the international situation and to the fact that the neighbouring Arab countries were under foreign rule or influence, in addition to the Palestinians own indigenous clashing interests and rivalries.

No less important was the failure of the Palestinian Arab national movement to produce the required leadership. By choosing, as their first political priority, the protection of their interests, the majority of notables maintained a counter-revolutionary attitude. Then, the economic and educational superiority of the Zionists prevented the emergence of a strong Arab bourgeoisie capable of assuming effective leadership in Palestine. The 'lower strata', too, failed to evolve a new radical leadership of its own for a number of reasons, not least of which was the hold of tradition on the peasants which, no doubt, enhanced Hajj Amin's position of leadership.

During the 1936-1939 rebellion, which represented the highest stage of the Palestinian Arab struggle against the Anglo-Zionist convergence, the weaknesses of the Palestinian nationalist movement were exposed. The political leadership displayed its compromising attitudes when it called off the general strike and the rebellion of 1936, without insisting on prior concessions from the Government. Throughout the rebellion the political leadership was willing to entrust a great part of their cause to the rulers of the Arab states, who, however, were eager to stand well with the British. The absence of a modern revolutionary organisation denied the rebels the valuable role of political revolutionary cadres, and the lack of a loyal commitment to a common purpose prevented the necessary co-ordination between the military and the political efforts.

In view of the absence of a capable revolutionary leadership, it was not surprising that the Palestinians failed to adopt an adequate strategy to prevent the establishment of the Jewish National Home in their country and against their will.

#### Note

1. Professor W. Khalidi put the number of Palestinian Arab casualties during the 1936-1939 Rebellion at 5,032 killed and 14,760 wounded and the number of detainees at 5,600 in 1939. See W. Khalidi (ed.), *From Haven to Conquest*, Beirut, 1971, Appendix IV, pp.848-9.