

---

**THE 1936-39  
REVOLT IN  
PALESTINE**

**GHASSAN  
KANAFANI**

---



## **GHASSAN KANAFANI**

**(1936-1972)**

Ghassan was a Palestinian journalist, novelist, and short story writer, whose writings were deeply rooted in Arab Palestinian culture, inspired a whole generation during and after his lifetime, both in word and deed. He was born in Acre, Palestine on 9 April 1936 and lived in Jaffa until May 1948, when he was forced to leave with family first to Lebanon and later to Syria. He lived and worked in Damascus, then Kuwait and later in Beirut. In July 1972, he and his young niece Lamis were killed by Israeli agents in a car bomb in Beirut. By the time of his untimely death, Ghassan had published 18 books and written hundreds of articles on culture, politics, and the Palestinian people's struggle. Following his assassination, all his books were re-published in several editions in Arabic and his novels, short stories, plays and essays were collected and published in four volumes. Many of Ghassan's literary works have been translated into various languages and published worldwide. Although Ghassan's novels, short stories and most of his other literary work were an expression of the Palestinian people and their cause, yet his great literary talents gave his works a universal appeal.

# **CONTENTS**

<b>3</b>	<b>COLOPHON</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION TO GHASSAN KANAFANI</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>POLITICAL WRITINGS OF GHASSAN KANAFANI</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>POEM FOR GHASSAN KANAFANI</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>THE 1936-39 REVOLT IN PALESTINE</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>BACKGROUND: THE WORKERS</b>
<b>20</b>	<b>BACKGROUND: THE PEASANTS</b>
<b>26</b>	<b>BACKGROUND: THE INTELLECTUALS</b>
<b>35</b>	<b>THE REVOLT</b>
<b>61</b>	<b>LETTER FROM GAZA BY GHASSAN KANAFANI</b>
<b>66</b>	<b>TRIBUTE TO GHASSAN KANAFANI</b>



and logical confrontation stand, which was revealed in his works and through the western news media. This drove imperialism and its reactionary allies to stop the pen which refused to surrender to their temptations or warnings. Ghassan Kanafani transformed the Palestinian and Arab cause to a cause through which we adopt the struggle of all the exploited and oppressed in the world.

Ghassan's commitment will remain a monument for the struggling masses. He said in a meeting with the staff of *Al Hadaf*: "Everything in this world can be robbed and stolen, except one thing; this one thing is the love that emanates from a human being towards a solid commitment to a conviction or cause".

## **COLOPHON**

**PUBLISHER** • Tricontinental Society, London (1980), Committee for a Democratic Palestine, New York (1972)

**DESIGN & EDITING** • Danah Abdulla ([dabdulla.com](http://dabdulla.com))

**TYPESET** • Palatino, Work Sans

**SOURCE** • [newjerseysolidarity.org/resources/kanafani/](http://newjerseysolidarity.org/resources/kanafani/)

## **INTRODUCTION TO** **GHASSAN KANAFANI**

He was himself part of them; he lived and experienced the poverty caused by capitalism and imperialism and he remained within the ranks of the oppressed masses, in spite of the capitalists' temptations and their attempts to encircle his journalistic life. He remained a humble man who worked day and night to raise and develop the quality of human life out of the adversity imposed by history.

Addressing himself to a group of students, Ghassan said: "The goal of education is to correct the march of history. For this reason we need to study history and to apprehend its dialectics in order to build a new historical era, in which the oppressed will live, after their liberation by revolutionary violence, from the contradiction that captivated them". Ghassan Kanafani had not only achieved the knowledge of historical materialism, but he applied it in his work. The concept that he believed in and lived for was shown clearly in what he said and wrote. The primary contradiction, is the one with imperialism. Zionism and racism. It is an international contradiction, and the only solution is to destroy these threats by a united and steadfast armed struggle, he encouraged and raised the spirit of internationalism among all the people he addressed or knew.

This belief made him reject all compromises, all bourgeois or divisive solutions, which do not encompass or apply the thesis and development of the revolution and its long path towards liberation, striking the interests of imperialism and consolidating with the masses. He said in a comment about the martyred Patrick Arguello: "The martyr Patrick Arguello is a symbol for a just cause and the struggle to achieve it, a struggle without limits. He is a symbol for the oppressed and deprived masses, represented by Oum Saad and many others coming from the camps and from all parts of Lebanon, who marched in his funeral procession".

In discussions about the imperialist reactionary schemes against the revolutionary forces, he stated:

"The results of the imperialist assault will be directed against the oppressed masses to prevent them from mobilising and fighting". This position was based on the analysis of the stand of the Arab regimes and the regimes of the underdeveloped countries in general, which retreat under the strokes of imperialism.

In the context of international revolution, he said: "Vietnamese revolutionaries have been struggling against imperialism for tens of years. They will transfer their revolution to other places; first, because their revolution is continuous, second, because they are internationalists..." "The Palestinian cause is not a cause for Palestinians only, but a cause for every revolutionary, wherever he is, as a cause of the exploited and oppressed masses in our era".

As the struggle of the international proletariat against imperialism was the main issue for Ghassan Kanafani, the conspirators behind his assassination feared his clear

GHASSAN KANAFANI WAS born in Acre in 1936, and his family was expelled from Palestine in 1948 by Zionist terror, after which they finally settled in Damascus. After completing his studies, he worked as a teacher and journalist, first in Damascus, and then in Kuwait. Later, he moved to Beirut and wrote for several papers before starting *Al Hadaf* (The Target), the weekly paper of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), in 1969.

To begin with, Kanafani was an active member of the Arab Nationalist Movement, the forerunner of the PFLP, but later, along with his comrade George Habash, he became a Marxist, believing that the solution to the problems which faced the Palestinians could not be achieved without a social revolution throughout the Arab world.

Kanafani was killed when his car exploded in July 1972, murdered by Zionist agents. His sister wrote:

"On the morning of Saturday, July 8, 1972, at about 10:30am, Lamees (Kanafani's niece) and her uncle were going out together to Beirut. A minute after their departure, we heard the sound of a very loud explosion which shook the whole building. We were immediately afraid, but our fear was for Ghassan and not for Lamees because we had forgotten that Lamees was with him and we knew that Ghassan was the target of the explosion. We ran outside, all of us were calling for Ghassan and not one of us called for Lamees. Lamees was still a child of seventeen years. Her whole being was longing for life and was full of life. But we knew that Ghassan was the one who had chosen this road and who had walked along it. Just the previous day, Lamees had asked her uncle to reduce his revolutionary activities and to concentrate more upon writing his stories. She had said to him, "Your stories are beautiful," and he had answered, "Go back to writing stories? I write well because I believe in a cause, in principles. The day I leave these principles, my stories will become empty. If I were to leave behind my principles, you yourself would not respect me." He was able to convince the girl that the struggle and the defence of principles is what finally leads to success in everything.

In the memoir which Ghassan Kanafani's wife published after his death, she wrote:

"His inspiration for writing and working unceasingly was the Palestinian-Arab struggle...He was one of those who fought sincerely for the development of the resistance movement from being a nationalist Palestinian liberation movement into being a pan-Arab revolutionary socialist movement of which the liberation of Palestine would be a vital component. He always stressed that the Palestine problem could not be solved in isolation from the Arab World's whole social and political situation."

This attitude developed naturally out of Kanafani's own experiences. At the age of twelve he went through the trauma of becoming a refugee, and thereafter he lived as an exile in various Arab countries, not always with official approval. His people were scattered, many of them making a living in the camps or struggling to make a living by doing the most menial work; their only hope lay in the future and in their children. Kanafani himself, writing to his son, summed up what it means to be a Palestinian:

"I heard you in the other room asking your mother, 'Mama, am I a Palestinian?' When she answered 'Yes' a heavy silence fell on the whole house. It was as if something hanging over our heads had fallen, its noise exploding, then – silence. Afterwards...I heard you crying. I could not move. There was something bigger than my awareness being born in the other room through your bewildered sobbing. It was as if a blessed scalpel was cutting up your chest and putting there the heart that belongs to you...I was unable to move to see what was happening in the other room. I knew, however, that a distant homeland was being born again: hills, olive groves, dead people, torn banners and folded ones, all cutting their way into a future of flesh and blood and being born in the heart of another child...Do you believe that man grows? No, he is born suddenly – a word, a moment, penetrates his heart to a new throb. One scene can hurl him down from the ceiling of childhood onto the ruggedness of the road."

"To our departed and yet remaining Comrade; you knew of two ways in life, and life knew from you only one. You knew the path of submission and you refused it. And you knew of the path of resistance and you walked with it. This path was chosen for you and you walked with it. And your comrades are walking with you."

## **TRIBUTE TO GHASSAN KANAFANI**

GHASSAN KANAFANI, PALESTINIAN journalist, author and artist, member of PFLP's Politbureau and spokesman for PFLP, was assassinated in Beirut on July 8, 1972, by Israeli agents. His ability to illustrate, beyond any shadow of doubt, the deprivation and sufferings of his people, as well as to transform an ideology and political line into popular literature made him a grave threat to the Zionist entity.

The following are excerpts from a tribute to Ghassan by one of his colleagues, a Palestinian author, S. Marwan, published in *Al Hadaf* on July 22, 1972. *Al Hadaf* (the Target) is the weekly PFLP organ, of which Ghassan Kanafani was the founding editor.

### **THE STRUGGLE OF THE OPPRESSED OF THE WORLD**

**"Imperialism has laid its body over the world, the head in Eastern Asia, the heart in the Middle East, its arteries reaching Africa and Latin America. Wherever you strike it, you damage it, and you serve the World Revolution".**

Imperialism is not a myth or a word repeated by the news media, a motionless picture that doesn't affect the human reality. In Ghassan Kanafani's conception, it is a mobile body, an octopus which colonises and exploits, spreading itself over the world through western monopolistic enterprises. Imperialism is directing various forms of aggression against the toiling masses of the world, and particularly in the underdeveloped countries.

Based on the slogan: "All the Facts to the Masses" raised in *Al Hadaf*, Ghassan Kanafani put his clear intellect in the service of the masses and their objective class interests, leading him to state: "The desire for change which is sweeping through the Arab masses, must be motivated by ideological and political clarity, which is absolute. Thus, *Al Hadaf* devotes itself to the service of that revolutionary alternative, as the interests of the oppressed classes are the same as the goals of the revolution. It presents itself as the ally of all those carrying on armed and political-ideological struggle to achieve a liberated progressive nation".

The natural base for Ghassan's intellectual and artistic work was adopting and defending the interests of the toiling masses, not only of the Palestinians, but also the Arabs and the international oppressed classes. Because of this fundamental base for all of his work, Ghassan Kanafani, as a Marxist, adopted the path of armed struggle as the only way to defend the oppressed.

I went out into the streets of Gaza, streets filled with blinding sunlight. They told me that Nadia had lost her leg when she threw herself on top of her little brothers and sisters to protect them from the bombs and flames that had fastened their claws into the house. Nadia could have saved herself, she could have run away, rescued her leg. But she didn't.

Why?

No, my friend, I won't come to Sacramento, and I've no regrets. No, and nor will I finish what we began together in childhood. This obscure feeling that you had as you left Gaza, this small feeling must grow into a giant deep within you. It must expand, you must seek it in order to find yourself, here among the ugly debris of defeat.

I won't come to you. But you, return to us! Come back, to learn from Nadia's leg, amputated from the top of the thigh, what life is and what existence is worth.

Come back, my friend! We are all waiting for you.

## **POLITICAL WRITINGS OF** **GHASSAN KANAFANI**

IN THE LAST week of October 1977, the Israeli occupation authorities banned the performance of a theatrical adaptation of Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun*. The play was to be presented in Nazareth by a local theatrical group. In preventing the performance, the Zionist authorities in effect expressed a profound fear of any literature and art that expresses a sense of deep attachment to Palestinian identity.

It was noteworthy that the banned play is written by a Palestinian writer who was assassinated at the hands of Zionist terrorists. Why was Kanafani a target of Zionist terror? Kanafani's writings were influential and instrumental in evoking and crystallising the conviction that Palestinians, particularly of his generation, had a total and overriding duty to remain Palestinian. His words, in a simple yet profound manner, expressed and articulated the Palestinian cause. His writings were a source for the rejection of the status quo, for he believed in a future that would deliver a free Palestine.

In one of his novels, *Return to Haifa* (1969) Kanafani emphasised that

"The greatest crime anybody can commit is to think that the weakness and the mistakes of others give him the right to exist at their expense."

Moreover, in addition to being a prolific writer, Kanafani was an astute political commentator. "The Resistance and its Problems", a pamphlet by comrade Kanafani, published by the PFLP in 1970, was, at the time of its publication, the most daring and responsible critique of the dynamics of Palestinian resistance. He identified the major drawbacks that prevent the forging of the Palestinian people's victory. As a revolutionary, Comrade Kanafani in subjecting the resistance movement to critical evaluation, sought through praxis to enrich and clarify the theoretical basis of the struggle so as to lay the basis for inducing changes in the objective conditions. In his critical pursuit, he identified the basic factors of analysis as an evaluation of three interconnecting criteria:

- The political-theoretical line of the resistance;
- The question of praxis – particularly the armed dimension;
- The question of organisation and leadership which provides the first two factors with the necessary dialectical connection.

Seven years after its publication, the method and framework of analysis he presented remain the most useful of approaches in conducting a critical evaluation of our predicament.

Ghassan believed that a people who struggle for liberation must know their history. However, existing written history reflects the views of its writers – colonial history. To fill in the gap, he set out to write the modern history of the Palestinian people's struggle. The initial piece was a study of the famous 1936-39 revolt in Palestine. Due to his assassination, he never completed the rest of the project.

Comrade Kanafani's multi-dimensionality extends beyond his literary and political abilities. In addition, he was a painter and a skilful literary critic. Through his efforts, the Arab reader outside Palestine was introduced to what he called the "Poets of resistance." Mahmud Darwish and Samih al-Qasim, two currently well-known Palestinian Arab poets were first discovered by Kanafani. Comrade Kanafani was not satisfied with studying Palestinian literature, for he believed that to know one's enemy one must study his literature. He thus became the first Arab writer to interpret Israeli-Zionist literature. Comrade Kanafani was perhaps the first Arab writer to be martyred in the course of the process of liberation.

He consciously chose to abandon and forego many bourgeois opportunities and offers as he delved more and more into political and organisational tasks within the framework of the PFLP. Such an option was basically consistent with one of the dominant themes pervading most of his literary writings. He expressed the idea that the Palestinian who prefers his own private happiness to the destiny of the Palestinians is doomed to failure.

Not surprisingly, Kanafani's funeral was perhaps the biggest political demonstration in Lebanon since Nasser's death. As a martyr however, his impact on the Palestinian predicament and consciousness is an ever present fact. The Israelis tried to silence him, but his spilt blood has served well in nurturing the militancy of the present and future generations of Palestinians.

The Israeli occupation forces tried to silence and prevent our people from seeking to assert their new identity – liberation. The theatre in Nazareth might have been forced into closure, but the people of the surrounding towns organised demonstrations and rallies expressing their anger. Tewfik Zayyad, the Palestinian poet and mayor of Nazareth, addressed the crowd telling that their action proves Israel's impotence in confronting Palestinian self-assertion.

Together with her slight smile I heard her voice. "Uncle! Have you just come from Kuwait?"

Her voice broke in her throat, and she raised herself with the help of her hands and stretched out her neck towards me. I patted her back and sat down near her.

"Nadia! I've brought you presents from Kuwait, lots of presents. I'll wait till you can leave your bed, completely well and healed, and you'll come to my house and I'll give them to you. I've bought you the red trousers you wrote and asked me for. Yes, I've bought them."

It was a lie, born of the tense situation, but as I uttered it I felt that I was speaking the truth for the first time. Nadia trembled as though she had an electric shock and lowered her head in a terrible silence. I felt her tears wetting the back of my hand.

"Say something, Nadia! Don't you want the red trousers?" She lifted her gaze to me and made as if to speak, but then she stopped, gritted her teeth and I heard her voice again, coming from faraway.

"Uncle!"

She stretched out her hand, lifted the white coverlet with her fingers and pointed to her leg, amputated from the top of the thigh.

My friend...Never shall I forget Nadia's leg, amputated from the top of the thigh. No! Nor shall I forget the grief which had moulded her face and merged into its traits forever. I went out of the hospital in Gaza that day, my hand clutched in silent derision on the two pounds I had brought with me to give Nadia. The blazing sun filled the streets with the colour of blood. And Gaza was brand new, Mustafa! You and I never saw it like this. The stone piled up at the beginning of the Shajiya quarter where we lived had a meaning, and they seemed to have been put there for no other reason but to explain it. This Gaza in which we had lived and with whose good people we had spent seven years of defeat was something new. It seemed to me just a beginning. I don't know why I thought it was just a beginning. I imagined that the main street that I walked along on the way back home was only the beginning of a long, long road leading to Safad. Everything in this Gaza throbbled with sadness which was not confined to weeping. It was a challenge: more than that it was something like reclamation of the amputated leg!



meaning? Why didn't we leave this defeat with its wounds behind us and move on to a brighter future which would give us deeper consolation? Why? We didn't exactly know.

When I went on holiday in June and assembled all my possessions, longing for the sweet departure, the start towards those little things which give life a nice, bright meaning, I found Gaza just as I had known it, closed like the introverted lining of a rusted snail-shell thrown up by the waves on the sticky, sandy shore by the slaughter-house. This Gaza was more cramped than the mind of a sleeper in the throes of a fearful nightmare, with its narrow streets which had their bulging balconies...this Gaza! But what are the obscure causes that draw a man to his family, his house, his memories, as a spring draws a small flock of mountain goats? I don't know. All I know is that I went to my mother in our house that morning. When I arrived, my late brother's wife met me there and asked me, weeping, if I would do as her wounded daughter, Nadia, in Gaza hospital wished and visit her that evening. Do you know Nadia, my brother's beautiful thirteen-year-old daughter?

That evening I bought a pound of apples and set out for the hospital to visit Nadia. I knew that there was something about it that my mother and my sister-in-law were hiding from me, something which their tongues could not utter, something strange which I could not put my finger on. I loved Nadia from habit, the same habit that made me love all that generation which had been so brought up on defeat and displacement that it had come to think that a happy life was a kind of social deviation.

What happened at that moment? I don't know. I entered the white room very calm. Ill children have something of saintliness, and how much more so if the child is ill as result of cruel, painful wounds. Nadia was lying on her bed, her back propped up on a big pillow over which her hair was spread like a thick pelt. There was profound silence in her wide eyes and a tear always shining in the depths of her black pupils. Her face was calm and still but eloquent as the face of a tortured prophet might be. Nadia was still a child, but she seemed more than a child, much more, and older than a child, much older.

"Nadia!"

I've no idea whether I was the one who said it, or whether it was someone else behind me. But she raised her eyes to me and I felt them dissolve me like a piece of sugar that had fallen into a hot cup of tea.

## **POEM FOR GHASSAN** **KANAFANI**

### **GHASSAN KANAFANI • "MEN IN THE SUN"**

Ghassan, when the hatred of the enemy exploded, your life ended.  
They thought that in killing you, they had disrupted our path.  
Instead, our determination to continue along that path increased,  
The pen in one hand and the gun in the other  
Your presence among us increases every day.  
Ghassan, we remember well and never forget  
That the path is not easy and that few are worthy of it.  
Ghassan, we remember well that you are the one who said,  
"He is wrong who says that we are the generation of revolution.  
Rather we are the generation who will give it life."  
And the homeland which you were far from,  
You were the closest of people to it  
The homeland in which you should have been living,  
Was living in you.  
You were the homeland,  
You were the revolution,  
You were the pen and the gun.

---

# THE 1936 - 39 REVOLT IN PALESTINE



---

**GHASSAN KANAFANI**  
PUBLISHER: COMMITTEE FOR DEMOCRATIC PALESTINE

est thought was: why don't we abandon this Gaza and flee? Why don't we? Your situation had begun to improve, however. The Ministry of Education in Kuwait had given you a contract though it hadn't given me one. In the trough of misery where I existed you sent me small sums of money. You wanted me to consider them as loans because you feared that I would feel slighted. You knew my family circumstances in and out; you knew that my meagre salary in the UNRWA schools was inadequate to support my mother, my brother's widow and her four children.

"Listen carefully. Write to me every day...every hour...every minute! The plane's just leaving. Farewell! Or rather, till we meet again!"

Your cold lips brushed my cheek, you turned your face away from me towards the plane, and when you looked at me again I could see your tears.

Later, the Ministry of Education in Kuwait gave me a contract. There's no need to repeat to you how my life there went in detail. I always wrote to you about everything. My life there had a gluey, vacuous quality as though I were a small oyster, lost in oppressive loneliness, slowly struggling with a future as dark as the beginning of the night, caught in a rotten routine, a spewed-out combat with time. Everything was hot and sticky. There was a slipperiness to my whole life, it was all a hankering for the end of the month.

In the middle of the year, that year, the Jews bombarded the central district of Sabha and attacked Gaza, our Gaza, with bombs and flame-throwers. That event might have made some change in my routine, but there was nothing for me to take much notice of; I was going to leave this Gaza behind me and go to California where I would live for myself, my own self which had suffered so long. I hated Gaza and its inhabitants. Everything in the amputated town reminded me of failed pictures painted in grey by a sick man. Yes, I would send my mother and my brother's widow and her children a meagre sum to help them to live, but I would liberate myself from this last tie too, there in green California, far from the reek of defeat which for seven years had filled my nostrils. The sympathy which bound me to my brother's children, their mother and mine would never be enough to justify my tragedy in taking this perpendicular dive. It mustn't drag me any further down than it already had. I must flee!

You know these feelings, Mustafa, because you've really experienced them. What is this ill-defined tie we had with Gaza which blunted our enthusiasm for flight? Why didn't we analyse the matter in such away as to give it a clear

## LETTER FROM GAZA BY GHAFFAN KANAFANI

Dear Mustafa,

I have now received your letter, in which you tell me that you've done everything necessary to enable me to stay with you in Sacramento. I've also received news that I have been accepted in the department of Civil Engineering in the University of California. I must thank you for everything, my friend. But it'll strike you as rather odd when I proclaim this news to you – and make no doubt about it, I feel no hesitation at all, in fact I am pretty well positive that I have never seen things so clearly as I do now. No, my friend, I have changed my mind. I won't follow you to "the land where there is greenery, water and lovely faces" as you wrote. No, I'll stay here, and I won't ever leave.

I am really upset that our lives won't continue to follow the same course, Mustafa. For I can almost hear you reminding me of our vow to go on together, and of the way we used to shout: "We'll get rich!" But there's nothing I can do, my friend. Yes, I still remember the day when I stood in the hall of Cairo airport, pressing your hand and staring at the frenzied motor. At that moment everything was rotating in time with the ear-splitting motor, and you stood in front of me, your round face silent.

Your face hadn't changed from the way it used to be when you were growing up in the Shajiyah quarter of Gaza, apart from those slight wrinkles. We grew up together, understanding each other completely and we promised to go on together till the end. But...

"There's a quarter of an hour left before the plane takes off. Don't look into space like that. Listen! You'll go to Kuwait next year, and you'll save enough from your salary to uproot you from Gaza and transplant you to California. We started off together and we must carry on..."

At that moment I was watching your rapidly moving lips. That was always your manner of speaking, without commas or full stops. But in an obscure way I felt that you were not completely happy with your flight. You couldn't give three good reasons for it. I too suffered from this wrench, but the clear-

## INTRODUCTION

**B**etween 1936 and 1939, the Palestinian revolutionary movement suffered a severe setback at the hands of three separate enemies that were to constitute together the principal threat to the nationalist movement in Palestine in all subsequent stages of its struggle:

- the local reactionary leadership;
- the regimes in the Arab states surrounding Palestine;
- the imperialist-Zionist enemy.

The present study will concentrate on the respective structures of these separate forces and the dialectical relations that existed among them.

The intensity of the Palestinian nationalist experience, which emerged since 1918, and was accompanied in one way or another with armed struggle, could not reflect itself on the upper structure of the Palestinian national movement which remained virtually under the control of semi-feudal and semi-religious leadership. This was due primarily to two related factors:

1. The existence and effectiveness of the Zionist movement, which gave the national challenge relative predominance over the social contradictions. The impact of this challenge was being systematically felt by the masses of Palestinian Arabs, who were the primary victims of the Zionist invasion supported by British imperialism.
2. The existence of a significant conflict of interests between the local feudal-religious leadership and British imperialism: It was consistently in the interest of the ruling class to promote and support a certain degree of revolutionary struggle, instead of being more or less completely allied with the imperialist power as would otherwise be the case. The British imperialists had found in the Zionists "a more suitable ally."

The above factors gave the struggle of Palestinian people particular features that did not apply to the Arab nationalist struggle outside Palestine. The traditional leadership, as a result, participated in, or at least tolerated, a most advanced form of political action (armed struggle); it raised progressive slogans, and had ultimately, despite its reactionary nature, provided positive leadership during a critical phase of the Palestinian nationalist struggle. It is relevant to explain, however, how the feudal-religious

leadership succeeded in staying at the head of the nationalist movement for so long (until 1948). The transformation of the economic and social structure of Palestine, which occurred rather rapidly, had affected primarily the Jewish sector, and had taken place at the expense of the Palestinian middle and petty bourgeoisie, as well as the Arab working class. The change from a semi-feudal society to a capitalist society was accompanied by an increased concentration of economic power in the hands of the Zionist machine and consequently, within the Jewish society in Palestine. It is significant that Palestinian Arab advocates of conciliation, who became outspoken during the thirties, were not landlords or rich peasants, but rather elements of the urban upper bourgeoisie whose interests gradually coincided with the expanding interests of the Jewish bourgeoisie. The latter, by controlling the process of industrialisation, was creating its own agents.

In the meantime, the Arab countries surrounding Palestine were playing two conflicting roles. On the one hand, the Pan-Arab mass movement was serving as a catalyst for the revolutionary spirit of the Palestinian masses, since a dialectical relation between the Palestinian and overall Arab struggles existed, on the other hand, the established regimes in these Arab countries were doing everything in their power to help curb and undermine the Palestinian mass movement. The sharpening conflict in Palestine threatened to contribute to the development of the struggle in these countries in the direction of greater violence, creating a revolutionary potential that their respective ruling classes could not afford to overlook. The Arab ruling classes were forced to support British imperialism against their counterpart in Palestine, which was in effect leading the Palestinian nationalist movement.

Meanwhile, the Zionist-Imperialist alliance continued to grow; the period between 1936 and 1939 witnessed not only the crystallisation of the militaristic and aggressive character of the colonial society that Zionism had firmly implanted in Palestine, but also the relative containment and defeat of the Palestinian working class; this was subsequently to have a radical effect on the course of the struggle. During that period, Zionism, in collaboration with the mandatory power, successfully undermined the development of a progressive Jewish labour movement and of Jewish-Arab Proletarian brotherhood. The Palestine Communist Party was effectively isolated among both Arab and Jewish workers, and the reactionary Histadrut completely dominated the Jewish labour movement. The influence of Arab progressive forces within Arab labour federations in Haifa and Jaffa diminished, leaving the ground open for their control by reactionary leaderships that monopolised political action.

assassinated the trade unionist leader Sami Taha in Haifa on 12 September 1947 and before that, the assassination in Jaffa of the unionist Michel Mitri, who had played an important role in mobilising Arab workers before the outbreak of the troubles in 1936).

All this enabled the Zionist movement in the mid-1940s to step up its previously only partial conflict with British colonialism in Palestine, after long years of alliance. Thus, in 1947 circumstances were favourable for it to pluck the fruits of the defeat of the 1936 revolt which the outbreak of the war had prevented it from doing sooner. The period taken to complete the second chapter of the Palestinian defeat – from the end of 1947 to the middle of 1948 – was amazingly short, because it was only the conclusion of a long and bloody chapter which had lasted from April 1936 to September 1939.

There can be no doubt that, in addition to his qualifications as an experienced imperialist officer, Wingate was equipped with an unlimited racist hatred for the Arabs. It is clear from the biographies written by those who knew him that he enjoyed killing or torturing Arab peasants, or humiliating them in any way.<sup>54</sup>

Through imperialists like Wingate, and through reactionary leaders of the type of the Amir Abdullah, the British were making it possible for the Zionist movement to become at both military and economic levels, a beach-head to guard their interests. All this happened from the conviction of all concerned that the leadership of the Palestinian nationalist movement was not sufficiently revolutionary to enable it to stand up to these closely united enemies.

In the midst of all this, the Palestinian nationalist movement, which had been paralysed by the subjective factors we have mentioned and the violent attacks launched both by the British and the Zionists, was in a difficult situation on the eve of the Second World War. The claims of some historians that the Arabs “stopped” their revolt to allow the British to wage its world war against Nazism, are naive, and refuted not only by the facts, but also by the fact that Hajj Amin al-Hussaini took refuge in Nazi Germany throughout the war.

This picture as a whole represents the political and social map that prevailed through the years 1936-1939. It is this situation, with the dialectical relations involved in it that explains the stagnation of the Palestinian nationalist situation throughout the war. When the war ended, the British found that the Palestinian nationalist movement had been pretty well tamed: its head was broken and scattered, its base had been weakened and its social fabric worn out and disintegrated as a result of the violent change that was taking place in society and of the failure of its leaderships and parties to organise and mobilise it and also as a result of the weakness and confusion of the left and the instability of the nationalist movement in the neighbouring Arab countries.

Thus, the Zionist movement entered the 1940s to find the field practically clear for it, with the international climate extremely favourable following the psychological and political atmosphere caused by Hitler’s massacres of the Jews, while the Arab regimes in the neighbouring Arab countries were bourgeois regimes in the historical predicament without any real power. Nor was there in Jewish society in Palestine at that time any leftist movement to exert pressure in the opposite direction – practically the whole of this society was devoted to settlement through invasion. The Palestinian left had, with the Second World War, begun to lose the initiative with which it had started in the mid-1930s, as a result of the change in Comintern policy, accompanied by the failure to Arabise the Party. What is more, the communist left was becoming more and more subject to repression by the defeated Arab leadership (for example, the Mufti’s men

54 Khalidi. Op. cit., p. 375-378.

## **BACKGROUND:** **THE WORKERS**

**T**he issue of Jewish immigration to Palestine was not merely a moral or national issue; it had direct implication on the economic status of the Arab people of Palestine, affecting primarily the small and middle-income farmers, workers and certain sectors of the petty and middle bourgeoisies. The national and religious character of Jewish immigration further aggravated the economic repercussions.

Between 1933 and 1935, 150,000 Jews immigrated to Palestine, bringing the country’s Jewish population to 443,000 – or 29.6% of the total – from 1926 to 1932 the average number of immigrants per year was 7,201.<sup>1</sup> It rose to 42,985 between 1933 and 1936, as direct result of Nazi persecution in Germany. In 1932, 9,000 German Jews entered Palestine, 30,000 in 1933, 40,000 in 1934 and 61,000 in 1935, nearly three quarters of the new immigrants settling in cities.<sup>2</sup> If Nazism was responsible for terrorising the Jews and forcing them out of Germany, it was “democratic” capitalism – in collaboration with the Zionist movement – that was responsible for directing comparatively large numbers of Jewish migrants to Palestine, as illustrated by the following: of 2,562,000 Jews that fled Nazi persecution, the U.S.A. accepted only 170,000 (6.6%), Britain 50,000 (1.9%), while Palestine received 8.5% and 1,930,000 (75.2%) found refuge in the U.S.S.R.<sup>3</sup> The severe economic impact of the immigration into Palestine can be realised when it is considered that a comparatively large percentage of Jewish settlers were basically capitalists: in 1933, 3,250 of the latter (11%) were considered as capitalists, in 1934, 5,124 or 12%, and in 1935, 6,309 or 10%.<sup>4</sup>

According to official statistics, of the Jewish immigrants who entered Palestine between 1932 and 1936, 1,370 (with 17,119 dependents) possessed PL<sup>5</sup> 1,000 or more and 130,000 were officially registered as seeking employment, or dependents

1 Himadeh, Said (ed.) *Economic Organization of Palestine*. American University of Beirut. Beirut 1939, p. 32.

2 Menuhin, Moshe. *The Decadence of Judaism in our Time*. Institute of Palestine Studies, Beirut, 1969

3 Weinstock. Nathan. *Le Sionisme - Contra Israel*. Maspero. Paris, 1969.

4 Ibid.

5 Palestinian Liras

of previous immigrants.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the immigration was not only designed to ensure a concentration of European Jewish capital in Palestine that was to dominate the process of industrialisation, but also to provide this effort with a Jewish proletariat. The policy that raised the slogan of “Jewish labour only” was to have grave consequences, as it led to the rapid emergence of fascist patterns in the society of Jewish settlers.

Another result was the development of a competitive struggle between the Palestinian Arab and Jewish proletariats and between Palestinian Arab peasants, farmers and agricultural labourers and their Jewish counterparts. This conflict also extended to higher classes, in as much as the Palestinian Arab small landowners and urban middle bourgeoisie realised that their interests were being threatened by growing Jewish capital.

In 1935, for example, Jews controlled 872 of a total of 1,212 industrial firms in Palestine, employing 13,678 workers, while the rest were Palestinian Arab-controlled and employed about 4,000 workers. Jewish investment totalled PL 4,391,000 compared to PL 704,000 in the Palestinian Arab industrial investment; Jewish production reached PL 6,000,000 compared to PL 1,545,000 by Palestinian Arab firms. In addition, Jewish capital controlled 90% of the concessions granted by the British mandatory government, which accounted for a total investment of PL 5,789,000 and provided labour for 2,619 workers.<sup>7</sup> An official census in 1937 indicated that an average Jewish worker received 145% more in wages than his Palestinian Arab counterpart (as high as 433% more in textile factories employing Jewish and Arab women, and 233% in tobacco factories).<sup>8</sup> “By July 1937, the real wages of the average Palestinian Arab worker decreased 10% while those of a Jewish worker rose 10%.”<sup>9</sup>

The situation resulted in an almost total collapse of the Arab economy in Palestine, primarily affecting Palestinian Arab workers. In his report to the Peel Royal Commission, George Mansour, the Secretary of the Federation of Palestinian Arab Workers in Jaffa, indicated that 98% of Palestinian Arab workers had a “well below average” standard of living. Based on a census covering 1,000 workers in Jaffa in 1936, the Federation had found that the income of 57% of Arab workers was less than PL 2.750 (the average minimum income required to support a family being PL 11); 12% less than PL 4.250, 12% less than PL 6, 4% less than PL 10, 1.5% less

Jewish proletariat was directed to work in repressive organisations, not only in British security projects directed against the revolt, but also in the Zionist military force.

The foundations of the Zionist military apparatus were laid under British supervision. The Zionist force, which had been entrusted with the defence of the Haifa-Lydda railway, was later given the defence of the oil pipeline in the Bashan plain. This pipeline, which had been recently constructed (1934) to bring oil from Kirkuk to Haifa, had been blown up several times by the Palestinian rebels. This was of great symbolic value: the Arab rebels, who were aware of the value of the oil to the British exploiters, blew up the pipeline for the first time near Irbid on 15 July 1936. It was later blown up several times near the villages of Kaukab, Hawa. Mihna Israil, Iksal, and between at-Ufula and Bashan, and at Tell Adas, Bira, Ard al-Marj, Tamra, Kafr Misr, Jisr al-Majami, Jinjar, Bashan and Ain Daur. The British were unable to defend this vital pipeline, and admitted as much, that the “pipe” as the Palestinian Arab peasants called it, was enshrined in the folklore which glorified acts of popular heroism. At any rate, the British secured minimum protection for the pipeline in two ways: inside Palestine it was defended by Zionist groups, while in Jordanian territory the task of guarding it was given to “Shaikh Turki ibn Zain, chief of the Zain subdivision of the Bani Sakhr tribe, whom the company authorised to patrol the desert by any means necessary”.<sup>53</sup>

Ben Gurion almost reveals this fact directly when talking about British efforts to establish a Zionist Air Force, whose task was to be to safeguard these interests. The British, in an early stage, were able to see the strategy called by the Americans 30 years later “Vietnamisation”. This was extremely important, because it was this incident that strengthened Britain’s conviction that the formation of a Zionist striking force would solve many problems connected with the defence of Imperialist interests accompanied by efforts to form a Zionist armed force to protect these interests.

In this field, the British officer Charles Orde Wingate played a prominent role in translating the British-Zionist alliance into practical action. Zionist historians try to give the impression that Wingate’s efforts were the consequence of personal temperament and “idealistic” devotion. But it is clear that this intelligent officer, who was sent to Haifa by his chiefs in the autumn of 1937, had been entrusted with a specific task –

the formation of the nuclei of striking forces for the Zionist armed force which had been in existence for at least six months, but which needed crystallisation and preparation. This British officer, whom “Israeli” soldiers regard as the real founder of the “Israeli” army, made the pipe-line problems his special task, however, this task led on to a series of operations involving terrorism and killing, and it was Wingate who took upon himself the task of teaching his pupils at Ain Daur – among whom was Moshe Dayan – to become an expert in such operations.

53 Sifri, op.cit. pp. 131-132.

6 Himadeh, op. cit., p. 26-27.

7 Weinstock, Op. cit.

8 Himadeh, Op.cit., p. 373.

9 Ibid. p. 376.

National Military Organisation.<sup>50</sup> The alliance of these, as the real representatives of the Zionist movement, with British colonialism, led to the idea of a “Quasi-Police Force” in the spring of 1936. The idea served as a cover for the armed Zionist presence which enjoyed the blessing and encouragement of the British.

This force served as a transition period for some months, during which the Haganah prepared to move, at the beginning of 1937, to a new stage. Not only were the British aware of this, they actually helped it to take shape. This stage consisted of forays by patrols and limited operations against the Palestinian Arabs, the main object of which was to distract and confuse them. It would have been quite impossible to advance to this stage and at the same time to maintain the “truce” (the alliance) with the Mandatory authorities had this not been the result of a joint plan. Ben Gurion affirms that the additional Zionist police force made an ideal “framework” for the training of the Haganah.<sup>51</sup>

In the summer of 1937 this force was given the name “Defence of the Jewish Colonies”, which was later changed to “Colony Police”. It was organised under the supervision of the British Mandate throughout the length and breadth of the country, and the British undertook to train its members. In 1937, it was strengthened with 3,000 new members, all of whom played a direct role in repressive operations against the Palestinian rebels, especially in the North. In June 1938, the British decided that offensive operations must be undertaken against the rebels. Therefore, they held instruction courses on this subject which provided training to large numbers of Haganah cadres, who later became cadres of the Israeli army.<sup>52</sup> At the beginning of 1939, the British army organised ten groups of Colony Police into well armed groups, which were given Hebrew names. Members of this force were allowed to abandon the Qalbaq, the official headgear, for the Australian bush hat, to make them even more distinctive. These groups totalled 14,411 men, each being commanded by a British officer, who was assisted by a second in command appointed by the Jewish Agency. By the spring of 1939, the Zionists also had 62 mechanised units of eight to ten men each.

In the spring of 1938, the British command decided to entrust to these Zionist elements the defence of railways between Haifa and Ludd that were blown up frequently by Palestinian commandos, and sent 434 members to execute this mission. However, only six months later, the Jewish Agency had succeeded in raising their numbers to 800. This development was not only of service in the building up of Zionist military strength, but also helped to absorb and employ large numbers of unemployed Jewish workers, who were constantly increasing in numbers in the towns. In this way, the

50 Bouyissir, Op. cit., p. 323.

51 Ben Gurion. Op. cit., p. 372.

52 Ibid., p. 373.

than PL 12 and 0.5% less than PL 15.<sup>10</sup> When the Mandatory Government refused to allow nearly 1,000 unemployed Jaffa workers to hold a demonstration on 6 June 1935, the Federation of Workers issued a statement warning the Government that unless their problems were solved, “the government would soon have to give the workers either bread or bullets.”<sup>11</sup> With the conditions of workers continuing to deteriorate, an uprising seemed imminent.

George Mansour (who had been previously a Communist Party member) came out with striking illustrations in his report to the Peel Commission: by the end of 1935, 2,270 men and women workers were unemployed in the city of Jaffa alone, with a population of 71,000.<sup>12</sup> Mansour pointed out five reasons for the high unemployment rate, four of which were directly connected with Jewish immigration: 1) the settling of new immigrants; 2) urban migration 3) dismissal of Arab workers from their jobs; 4) the deteriorating economic situation; 5) the discriminatory policy of the Mandatory Government in favour of Jewish workers.<sup>13</sup>

In a period of nine months, the number of Histadrut workers increased by 41,000. According to an Article published in issue No. 3460 of the newspaper *Davar*, Histadrut workers numbered 115,000 at the end of July 1936. The official 1936 government report (p. 117) had showed their number at the end of 1935 to be 74,000.<sup>14</sup>

The policy of dismissal of Palestinian Arab workers from firms and projects controlled by Jewish capital initiated violent clashes. In the four Jewish settlements of Malbis, Dairan, Wadi Hunain and Khadira, there were 6,214 Palestinian Arab workers in February 1935. After six months, this figure decreased to 2,276, and in a year’s time, went down to 617 Palestinian Arab workers.<sup>15</sup> Attacks against Palestinian Arab workers also took place. On one occasion, for instance, the Jewish community forced a Palestinian Arab contractor and his workers to leave their work in the Brodski building in Haifa. Among those who were systematically losing their jobs were workers in orchards, cigarette factories, mason’s yards, construction, etc...<sup>16</sup>

Between 1930 and 1935, Palestinian Arab pearl industry exports fell from PL 11,532 to PL 3,777 a year. The number of Palestinian Arab soap factories in Haifa alone fell from 12 in 1929 to four in 1935. Their export value fell from PL 206,659 in 1930 to PL

10 *Collection of Arab testimonies in Palestine before the British Royal Commission*. al-Itidal Press Damascus, 1938, p. 54.

11 Ibid. p. 55.

12 Himadeh. Op. cit. (the number of the unemployed increased to 4000 in Jaffa alone after 1936. see footnote 5, p. 55).

13 Collection. Op. cit, p. 55.

14 Ibid. p.55.

15 *Davar* No. 3462 (see footnote 13. p. 661.)

16 Collection. Op. Cit., p. 15.

79,311 in 1935.<sup>17</sup> It was clear that the Arab proletariat had fallen “victim to British colonialism and Jewish capital, the former bearing the primary responsibility.”<sup>18</sup>

Yehuda Bauer wrote: “On the eve of the 1936 disturbances, Palestine was possibly the only country in the world, apart from the U.S.S.R., that had not been affected by the world economic crisis; in fact, it enjoyed real prosperity as a result of a massive import of capital (over 30,000,000 in capital had entered Palestine). The imported capital had even fallen short of the necessary funds needed for all the investment programmes.”<sup>19</sup> This prosperity, however, was based on rather shaky foundations, which collapsed once the influx of private capital came to an end because of fears of the outbreak of war in the Mediterranean.

“The loan system collapsed and there were indications of serious unemployment and construction activity greatly diminished. Palestinian Arab workers were being dismissed by both Arab and Jewish employers, a number of them returning to their original villages. National consciousness was rising due to the aggravating economic crisis.”<sup>20</sup>

Bauer, however, omits the primary factor: continued Jewish immigration. Sir John Hope Simpson stated in his report that, “It was a bad, and perhaps a dangerous policy, to allow large sums of money to be invested in unprofitable industries in Palestine to justify increased immigration.” In effect, Bauer’s statement was basically unfounded. Since the influx of Jewish capital continued during the years he referred to and, in fact, reached its climax in 1935; the number of immigrants also increased during these years.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the dismissal of Arab workers by Jewish employers had begun long before that time.<sup>22</sup> In the meantime, large masses of Palestinian Arab peasants were being evicted and uprooted from their lands as a result of Jewish colonisation of rural areas.<sup>23</sup> They immigrated to cities and towns only to face increasing unemployment. The Zionist machine took full advantage of the rivalry between Palestinian Arab workers and their fellow Jewish workers. “Israeli” leftists later observed that not once, in a period of fifty years, were Jewish workers mobilised and rallied around material issues or the struggle of Labour Federation, to challenge the “Israeli” regime itself. “The Jew-

17 Ibid., p. 66.

18 Ibid., p. 59.

19 Yehuda Bauer. “The Arab Revolt of 1936” *New Outlook*. Vol.9 No. 6 (81). Tel-Aviv, 1966. p. 50.

20 Ibid., p. 51.

21 Capital invested in Jewish industries and commerce firms increased from PL 5,371,000 in 1933 to PL 11,637,300 in 1936; op. cit. p. 323.

22 In 1930, the number of Arab construction workers in Jerusalem dropped from 1,500 to 500 while that of Jews went up from 550 to 1,600.

23 Up to 1931, the Zionists expelled 20,000 Palestinian Arab peasants after they bought the land on which the latter used to work.

During this period, cooperation and interaction between the two lines of policy – (1) alliance with the British mandate to the greatest possible extent, and (2) the mobilisation of the Jewish settler society – had extremely important consequences.

The Jewish bourgeoisie took advantage of the spread of the Arab revolt to implement many of the projects that they would not have been able to implement under different circumstances. Suddenly freed from the competition of cheap<sup>47</sup> Palestinian Arab agricultural produce, this bourgeoisie proceeded to take action to promote its economic existence. Naturally, it was not possible to do this without the blessing of the British.

During the revolt, the Zionists and the mandatory authorities succeeded in building a network of roads between the principal Zionist colonies and the towns which were later to constitute a basic part of the infrastructure of the Zionist economy. Then the main road from Haifa to Tel-Aviv was paved, and the Haifa harbour was expanded and deepened, and a harbour was constructed at Tel-Aviv which was later to kill the port of Jaffa. In addition, the Zionists monopolised contracts for supplying the British troops who had started to flood into Palestine.

50 Zionist colonies were established between 1936 and 1939, and in between 1936 and 1938, Jews invested PL 1,268,000 in building works in five Jewish towns, against only PL 120,000 invested by Arabs in 16 Arab villages in the same period. Jews also engaged extensively in the British security projects undertaken to absorb and employ large numbers of unemployed Jewish workers, who were constantly increasing in numbers on the frontiers of Palestine, for which “the British employed Jewish labour at a cost of PL 100,000 to build”<sup>48</sup> as well as dozens of other projects. Figures published later give us a more accurate idea: the value of exports of locally manufactured goods rose from PL 478,807 in 1935 to nearly double that figure (PL 896,875) in 1937, in spite of the revolt.<sup>49</sup> This can only be explained by the greatly increased activity of the Jewish economy. The scope of this mobilisation expanded from the economic field, in alliance with the Mandate, to the military field, in collusion with it.

The British realised that their Zionist ally was qualified to play a role that no one else could play so well. In fact, Ben-Gurion is only telling part of the truth when he admits that the number of Jewish recruits in the quasi-police force armed with rifles rose to 2,863 in September 1936, for this was only a part of the Jewish force – there were 12,000 men in the Haganah in 1937, in addition to a further 3,000 in Jabotinski’s

47 Let us take as an example, wages paid by the growers of citrus fruits – the most important agricultural produce in Palestine. In 1936, the General Agricultural Council fixed the wages of Jewish workers at PL12 per dunum per year, and of Arab workers at PL 8.

48 Barbour. Op. cit. p. 193.

49 Himadeh, Op. cit., p. 323.



makes the total of Arabs killed in the 1936-39 revolt 5,032, while 14,760 were wounded in the same period. Detainees numbered about 816 in 1937, 2,463 in 1938, and approximately 5,679 in 1939.

The real significance of these figures can be shown by comparisons. In relation to numbers of inhabitants, Palestinian losses in 1936-39 are equivalent to losses by Britain of 200,000 killed, 600,000 wounded and 1,224,000 arrested. In the case of America, the losses would be one million killed, three million wounded and 6,120,000 arrested!

But the real and most serious losses lay in the rapid growth of both the military and economic sectors which laid the foundations of the Zionist settler entity in Palestine. It is no exaggeration to say that this economic and military presence of the Zionists, whose links with Imperialism grew stronger, established its principal foundations in this period (between 1936 and 1939) and one Israeli historian goes so far as to say that "the conditions for the Zionist victory had in 1948 been created in the period of the Arab revolt."<sup>46</sup>

The general policy followed by the Zionists during this period can be seen in their profound determination to avoid any conflict between themselves and the mandatory authorities, even at a time when the latter, hard-pressed by the Arab rebels, were obliged to refuse some of the vigorous demands of the Zionist movement.

The Zionists clearly knew that if they gave the British – who at the time had the strongest and most aggressive colonial army in the world – the chance to crush the Arab revolt in Palestine, this army would be doing a greater service to their schemes than they ever could have dreamed of. Thus the main Zionist plans ran along two parallel lines: the closest possible alliance with Britain – to the extent that the 20<sup>th</sup> Zionist Congress held in the summer of 1937, expressed its readiness to accept partition in its determination to conciliate Britain and avoid any clash with it. Such a policy was pursued so as to allow the colonialist empire to crush the Arab revolt that had broken out again that summer. The other line of their policy consisted of the continuous internal mobilisation of Zionist settler society, under the slogan adopted by Ben Gurion at the time of "no alternative", which emphasised the necessity of laying the foundations of a military society and of its military and economic instruments.

The question of the greatest possible conciliation with the British, in spite of the fact that they had, for example, taken steps to reduce Jewish immigration, was a pivotal point in the history of Zionist policy during that period, and in spite of the fact that there were in the movement certain elements that rejected what was called "self-control", the voice of this minority had no effect. The law that led the policies of the Zionists during that period was that summarised by Weizman who said: "There is a complete similarity of interests between the Zionists and the British in Palestine".

46 Bouyissir, Op. cit., p. 21.

ish proletariat could not be mobilised around its own cause."<sup>24</sup>

The fact is that the situation was fully the result of efficient Zionist planning, to recall Herzl's words:

"Private land in areas allocated to us must be seized – from its owners. Poor inhabitants are to be quickly evacuated across the border after having secured for them jobs in the countries of their destination. They are to be denied employment in our country; as for large property-owners, they will ultimately join us."<sup>25</sup>

The Histadrut summed up its policy by declaring that "to allow Arabs to penetrate the Jewish labour market meant that the influx of Jewish capital would be employed to service Arab development, which is contrary to Zionist objectives. Furthermore, the employment of Arabs in Jewish industries would lead to a class division in Palestine along racial lines: capitalist Jews employing Arab workers; should this be permitted, we would have introduced into Palestine the conditions that had led to the emergence of anti-Semitism."<sup>26</sup> Thus the ideology and practices that underlined the process of colonisation, with the escalation of the conflict with the Arab society in Palestine, were developing fascist characteristics in Zionist organisations; fascist Zionism was using the same tools as the mounting fascism in Europe. The Arab worker was at the bottom of a complex social pyramid and his condition grew worse as a result of the confusion within the Arab labour movement. During the period between the early twenties and early thirties, the progressive labour movement – Arab as well as Jewish – suffered crushing blows, which, together with the impact of purely subjective weaknesses, resulted in its virtual paralysis. On the one hand, the Zionist movement which was rapidly becoming fascist in character and resorting to armed terrorism sought to isolate and destroy the Communist Party, most of whose leaders were Jews, and that resisted being contained by Zionist labour organisations. On the other hand, the Palestinian feudalreligious leadership could not tolerate the rise of an Arab labour movement that was independent of its control. The movement was thus terrorised by the Arab leadership. In the early thirties, the Mufti's group assassinated Michel Mitri, President of the Federation of Arab Workers in Jaffa. Years later, Sami Taha, a trade unionist and President of the Federation of Arab Workers in Haifa, was also assassinated. In the absence of an economically and politically strong national bourgeoisie, the workers were directly confronted and oppressed by the traditional feudal leadership. The conflict occasionally led to violent confrontations which were reduced whenever the traditional

24 Haim Hanagbi, Moshe Machover, Akiva Orr. "The Class Nature of Israel" *New Left Review* (65), Jan-Feb 1971, p. 6.

25 Theodor Herzl, *Selected Works*, Newman Ed.. Vol.7, Book 1. Tel Aviv, p. 86.

26 Exco Foundation for Palestine. Inc., *Palestine. A Study of Jewish, Arab and British Policies*. Vol. 1. Yale University Press. 1947. p. 561.

leadership managed to assume direct control over trade union activities. As a result, labour activity lost its essential role in the struggle. Moreover, with the sharpening of the national struggle, a relative identity of interests united the workers with the traditional Arab leadership. Meanwhile, the Communist Party occasionally succeeded in organising political action. On one occasion on 1 May 1920, a group of demonstrating communists clashed with a Zionist demonstration in Tel-Aviv and were forced to flee the city and take refuge in the Arab quarter of Manshiya in Jaffa. Later, a confrontation took place with a British security force that was sent to arrest the Bolsheviks.<sup>27</sup> In a statement distributed on the same day, the Executive Committee of the Party declared:

“The Jewish workers are here to live with you; they have not come to persecute you, but to live with you. They are ready to fight on your side against the capitalist enemy, be it Jew, Arab or British. If the capitalists incite you against the Jewish worker, it is in order to protect themselves from you. Do not fall into the trap; the Jewish worker, who is a soldier of the revolution, has come to offer you his hand as a comrade in resisting British, Jewish and Arab capitalists... We call on you to fight against the rich who are selling their land and their country to foreigners. Down with British and French bayonets; down with Arab and foreign capitalists.”<sup>28</sup>

The remarkable thing in this long statement was, not only the idealist portrait of the struggle, but also the fact that nowhere did it mention the word “Zionist”, yet Zionism represented to the Palestinian Arab peasants and workers a daily threat, as well as to the Jewish communists, 55 of whom were attacked by Zionists in Tel-Aviv and expelled to Jaffa. The Palestine Communist Party remained isolated from the political reality until the end of 1930, which was the year its Seventh Congress was held. In the resolutions passed by the Congress, the Party admitted that it had “essentially adopted an erroneous attitude towards the issue of Palestinian nationalism, and the status of the Jewish national minority in Palestine and its role vis-à-vis the Arab masses. The Party had failed to become active among the Palestinian Arab masses and remained isolated by working exclusively among Jewish workers. Its isolation was illustrated by the Party’s negative attitude during the Palestinian Arab uprising of 1929.”<sup>29</sup>

Although in practice the Party systematically attacked the Palestinian bourgeoisie – which at the time was in a difficult position – and although it never adopted the policy of popular fronts and alliances with the revolutionary classes, the records of the Seventh Congress held in 1930-1931 provide a most valuable political analysis.

<sup>27</sup> Kayyali., Abdulwahhab. *Modern History of Palestine*. Arab Institute of Studies and Publication. Beirut. 1970. p.174.

<sup>28</sup> Documents of the Palestine Arab Resistance (1918-1939). Beirut, pp. 22-25.

<sup>29</sup> *Action among the peasants and the struggle against Zionism, The Palestine Communist Party Theses for 1931. Communist Internationalism and the Arab Revolution*, Dar al-Haqiqa, Beirut, p. 54.

formation and to identify rebels”.<sup>43</sup> The attitudes of Iraq and Saudi Arabia at that time were not much better than that of the Jordanian regime. At the London Conference they had expressed their readiness “to use their influence with the Palestinian leaders to put an end to the revolt”.<sup>44</sup> But all this could not make the leaders of the counter-revolution (the agents of the British) a force that had any weight with the masses. On the contrary, it strengthened the Mufti and his leadership, whereas the encouragement of counter-revolutionary elements was intended, among other things, to curb the Mufti and confine him within a field that could eventually be controlled. Throughout, the British acted in accordance with their conviction that al-Nashashibi could never be a substitute for the Mufti. The small marginal degree of manoeuvrability of the Mufti’s command, which was the result of the minor disputes in progress between French colonialism in Syria and Lebanon and British colonialism, was not capable of leading to a radical change in the balance of power, and it soon contracted to the point where it hardly existed at all on the eve of the War.

These facts as a whole show that the Palestinian revolt was attacked and received blows in its three most vital points:

**The subjective point** – meaning the incapacity, vacillation, weakness, subjectivity and anarchy of its various leaders.

**The Arab point** – meaning the collusion of the Arab regimes to frustrate it at a time when the weak popular Arab nationalist movement was only interacting with the Palestinian revolt in a selective, subjective and marginal way.

**The international point** – meaning the immense disequilibrium in the objective balance of power which resulted from the alliance of all the members of the colonialist camp with each other and also with the Zionist movement, which was henceforward to have at its disposal a considerable striking force on the eve of the Second World War.

The best estimate of Arab human losses in the 1936-39 revolt is that which states that losses in the four years totalled 19,792 killed and wounded. This includes the casualties sustained by the Palestinian Arabs at the hands of the Zionist gangs in the same period. This estimate is based on the first conservative admissions contained in official British reports, checked against other documents.<sup>45</sup> These calculations establish that 1,200 Arabs were killed in 1936, 120 in 1937, 1,200 in 1938, and 1,200 in 1939. In addition, 112 Arabs were executed and 1,200 killed in various terrorist operations. This

<sup>43</sup> Kayyali, Op. cit., p. 348.

<sup>44</sup> A letter from Baghdad to the British Foreign Minister. 31 Oct. 1930. Quoted in Kayyali, Ibid. p. 349

<sup>45</sup> Walid Khalidi (ed.) *From Haven to Conquest*. IPS, Beirut, 1971. pp. 836-849.

linked not only with British colonialism but also with the Zionist movement which controlled the industrial transformation of the Palestinian economy. Because of this class situation it is possible to sum up their history by saying that they

“cooperated with the occupation authorities in the administrative field and with Zionism in the commercial field, sold land to the Jews, acted as brokers, disseminated misgivings, impeded nationalist activity, strengthened the link between Abdullah and Hussain and the Zionists in 1923-1924 supported immigration and the Mandate in the twenties and partition in the thirties, advocated the establishment of a Jewish national home in part of Palestine and the surrender of the other part to Transjordan...etc.”<sup>41</sup>

While the Amir Abdullah of Transjordan was suppressing the Transjordanian mass movement which, on its own initiative, had decided at the popular conference held with Mithqal al-Faiz in the chair in the village of Umm al-Amd, to support the Palestinian revolt with men and material, the British decided to consider Transjordan as part of the field of action against the activities of the Palestinian rebels. The role played by the subservient Transjordan regime was not restricted to this; it closed the roads to Iraq to prevent any support arriving, and restricted the movements of the Palestinian leaders who, after the construction of the barbed wire entanglement along the northern frontier of Palestine, had been obliged to increase their activities from Transjordan. The regime’s activities culminated in the arrest in 1939 of two Palestinian leaders. One of them, Yusuf Abu Durrar, was handed over to the British whereupon he was executed.

At the time, the forces of the Transjordan regime were engaged side by side with the British troops and the Zionist gangs in hunting down the rebels. There can be no doubt that this role played by the Transjordan regime encouraged elements of the internal counter-revolution to step up their activities. A number of the Defence Party leaders took part in the establishment of what they called “peace detachments”, small mercenary forces which were formed in cooperation with the English, and helped to hunt down the rebels, took part in engagements with them and evicted them from some of the positions they controlled. Fakhri al-Nashashibi was a leader of one of these divisions, in arming them and directing their activities...this led to his being killed a few months after the end of the revolt.<sup>42</sup> Before that, the savage British campaign to disarm the whole of Palestine had depended on “encouraging elements hostile to the Mufti to supply them (the British) with in-

As shown in these records; the Party considered solving the Palestinian Arab national question as one of the primary tasks of revolutionary struggle: it viewed its isolation from the Palestinian Arab mass movement as the result of a “Zionist-influenced deviation that prevented the Arabisation of the Party”. The documents mention “opportunist efforts to block the Arabisation of the Party”. The Congress adopted the view that it was the duty of the Party to expand the cadres of the revolutionary forces capable of directing the activity of the peasants (that is, cadres of revolutionary Palestinian Arab workers.) The “Arabisation” of the Party, its transformation into a real party of the toiling Palestinian Arab masses was the first condition of the success of its activity in the rural areas.<sup>30</sup>

The Party, however, proved incapable of carrying out the task of mobilising Palestinian Arabs, and the revolutionary slogans adopted by the Congress were never translated into action: “Not a single dunum to the Imperialist and Zionist usurpers”, “the revolutionary expropriation of land belonging to the government, to rich Jewish developers, Zionist factions and big Arab landowners and farmers”, “No recognition of agreements on the sale of land”, “the struggle against Zionist usurpers”.<sup>31</sup> The Congress had also decided that “it is possible to solve all the burning issues and end oppression only through armed revolution under the leadership of the working class”.<sup>32</sup> The Palestine Communist Party was thus never “Arabised”. The field was open for the domination of the Palestinian Arab mass movement by the feudal and religious leaderships. Perhaps one reason behind the line and practices of the Party at that time was the uncompromising revolutionary attitude for which the Comintern<sup>33</sup> was famous between 1928 and 1934. But despite their small number, their relative isolation and their failure to reach the Palestinian Arab masses, particularly in the rural areas, the communists threw all their weight into the 1936 revolt. They showed great courage, cooperated with some of the local leaders, and supported the Mufti; many of them were killed and arrested. But they did not succeed in becoming an influential force. Apparently the slogan of “Arabisation” got lost somewhere later on, and nearly ten years later, on 22 January 1946, *Izvestia* dared to compare the “struggle of the Jews” in Palestine with the Bolshevik struggle before 1917.

In any case, the resolutions of the Seventh Congress of the Palestine Communist Party have only been revealed recently; the process of Arabisation did not take place, and despite the educational role played by the Party and the contributions it made to the struggle in this field, it did not play the role projected for it by its Seventh Congress

30 *Ibid.*, pp. 121-122.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 124.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 162.

33 The Communist International abbreviation

41 Sayegh, Anis. *The Hashemite & the Palestine Question*. Beirut, 1966. p. 150.

42 *Ibid.* See also *al-Talia'a*, No.4 April 7, 1971. Cairo, p. 98.

in the Palestinian national movement at that time. During the 1936 revolt, the Party split. There was also another fundamental split in 1948, and another in 1965, for reasons connected with Arabisation; the dissidents advocated a “constructive” attitude towards Zionism.

This failure of the Communist Party, the weakness of the rising Arab bourgeoisie, and the disunity of the Arab labour movement meant that the feudal-religious leaderships were cast to play a fundamental role as the situation escalated to the point of explosion in 1936.

ist movement”, while it regarded his enemies as “feudalist” traitors.<sup>39</sup> And this in spite of the fact that the Mufti’s group had absolutely no hesitation in liquidating leftist elements who tried to penetrate labour circles.

The Communist left, in addition to being weak, was incapable of reaching the countryside; it was concentrated in certain towns. It had failed to Arabise the Party, as the Seventh Comintern Congress had recommended, and was still a victim of its restricted view of Arab unity, and of relations, as far as the struggle was concerned, with the rest of the Arab homeland, which had organisational repercussions. It is clear that the shortcoming that was mainly responsible for this defeat was the great gap caused by the rapid movement of society in Palestine which, as we have seen, was undergoing an extremely violent transformation from an Arab agricultural society into a Jewish industrial one. This was the real reason why the Arab nationalist bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie did not play their historical role in the Palestinian nationalist movement at the time, and allowed the feudal religious leaders to lead this movement for a long period without rivals.

Dr. Abd al-Wahhab al-Kayyali adds other important causes. “Weariness with fighting”, he says, “constant military pressure, and the hope that some aspects of the White Paper would be applied, in addition to the lack of arms and ammunition, all played their part in making it difficult to continue the revolt. Moreover, in view of the fact that the world was on the brink of the Second World War, France suppressed the rebels’ headquarters in Damascus”.<sup>40</sup>

To all this we can add two important interconnected factors which can be discussed together, as they played a prominent role in frustrating the revolt. They are the attitude of Transjordan as embodied in the attitude of the subservient regime led by the Amir Abdullah, and the activity carried on by agents of the counter-revolution in the interior who were on the periphery of the terrorist activities of the British and Zionist forces.

The Defence Party, led by Raghīb Nashashibi, played the role of legal representative of the subservient Transjordan regime in the Palestinian nationalist movement. This link was probably a kind of camouflage because of the Party’s inability to reveal the links of subservience which connected it with British colonialism in the midst of a battle in which the principal enemy was that same colonialism. Therefore, the link with the regime in Transjordan was a sort of camouflage accepted by both sides. The Defence Party consisted of a small group of urban effendis who chiefly represented the interests of the rising comprador bourgeoisie and had begun to discover that its existence and growth depended on its being

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.114.

<sup>40</sup> Kayyali, Op. cit., p. 359.

can be no doubt that the British concentrated presence and the persistence that accompanied it in the Palestinian theatre had exhausted the rebels, who, with their leadership, no longer really knew who they were fighting against or why. At one moment, the leadership would talk of traditional friendship and common interests with Britain, at another went so far as to agree to the granting of autonomy to the Jews in the areas where they were settled. There can be no doubt that the vacillation of the leadership, and its inability to determine a clear objective to fight for, played its part in weakening the revolt.

But this must not lead us to neglect the objective factor: the British used two divisions of troops, several squadrons of planes, the police, and the Transjordan Frontier Force, in addition to the 6,000 strong quasi-Zionist force; all this was thrown in to gain control of the situation. (The Peel Commission admitted that security expenditure in Palestine had risen from PL 826,000 in 1935 to PL 2,223,000 in 1936). This campaign of terrorism and the efforts that were made to cut the rebels' links with the villages, exhausted the revolt. The killing of Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj Muhammad in March 1939 came as a crushing blow to the revolt, depriving it of one of the bravest, wisest and most honest of the popular revolutionary leaders. After that the local commands started to collapse and leave the field. Moreover, the Franco-British rapprochement on the eve of the Second World War certainly made it easier to surround the rebels; Arif Abd al-Razzaq, worn out by hunger and pursuit, was handed over to the French, along with some of his followers; Jordanian forces arrested Yusuf Abu Daur and handed him over to the British, who executed him. Also, British and Zionist terrorism in the villages had made people afraid to support the rebels and supply them with ammunition and food, and doubtless the lack of even a minimum of organisation made it impossible to surmount these obstacles.

At the time the Palestinian Communist Party attributed the failure of the revolt to five principal causes:<sup>38</sup>

1. The absence of the revolutionary leadership;
2. The individualism and opportunism of the leaders of the revolt.
3. The lack of a central command for the forces of the revolt,
4. The weakness of the Palestinian Communist Party.
5. The inauspicious world situation.

On the whole, this is correct, but to these causes must be added the fact that the Communist Party was close to the leadership of Hajj Amin al-Hussaini, whom they viewed as "belonging to the most extremely anti-imperialist wing of the national-

<sup>38</sup> Yasin. Op. cit. p. 115.

## **BACKGROUND:** **THE PEASANTS**

**S**uch was the situation concerning the workers at the outbreak of the 1936 revolt. However, what we have considered so far dealt only with one domain in which the conflict raged between the Jewish and Arab societies in Palestine and later inside each of these societies.

The other domain is the rural areas, where the conflict assumed its primarily nationalist form because of Jewish capital pouring into Palestine. Despite the fact that a large share of Jewish capital was allocated to rural areas, and despite the presence of British imperialist military forces and the immense pressure exerted by the administrative machine in favour of the Zionists, the latter achieved only minimal result (a total of 6,752 new colonising settlers) in comparison to Zionist plans to establish a Jewish state. Nevertheless, they seriously damaged the status of the Palestinian Arab rural population. Ownership by Jewish groups of urban and rural land rose from 300,000 dunums in 1929 to 1,250,000 dunums in 1930. The purchased land was insignificant from the point of view of mass colonisation and of the solution of the "Jewish problem." But the expropriation of nearly one million dunums – almost one-third of the agricultural land – led to a severe impoverishment of Arab peasants and Bedouins. By 1931, 20,000 peasant families had been evicted by the Zionists. Furthermore, agricultural life in the underdeveloped world, and the Arab world in particular, is not merely a mode of production, but equally a way of social, religious and ritual life. Thus, in addition to the loss of land, the Palestinian Arab rural society was being destroyed by the process of colonisation.

Until 1931, only 151 per thousand Jews depended on agriculture for a living, compared to 637 per thousand Arabs. Of nearly 119,000 peasants, about 11,000 were Jews,<sup>1</sup> whereas in 1931, 19.1% of the Jewish population worked in agriculture and 59% of the Palestinian Arabs lived off the land. The economic basis for this clash is very dangerous of course but to comprehend it fully, we should see its national face.

In 1941, 30% of the Palestinian Arab peasants owned no land, while nearly 50% of the rest owned plots that were too small to meet their living requirements. While 250 feudal landlords owned four million dunums, 25,000 peasant families were landless, and 46,000 owned an average of 100 dunums. 15,000 hired agricultural labourers worked for landlords. According to a survey of 322 Palestinian Arab villages conduct-

<sup>1</sup> Himadeh; Ibid., p. 39.

ed in 1936, 47% of the peasants owned less than seven dunums and 65% less than 20 dunums (the minimum required to feed an average family was 130 dunums).<sup>2</sup>

Although they lived under the triple pressure of Zionist invasion, Arab feudal ownership of the land and the heavy taxes imposed by the British Mandatory Government, the Palestinian rural masses were primarily conscious of the national challenge. During the uprisings of 1929 and 1933, many small Palestinian Arab peasants sold their lands to big landlords in order to buy arms to resist the Zionist invasion and the British mandate. It was this invasion which, by threatening a way of life in which religion, tradition and honour played an important role, enabled the feudal-clerical leaderships to remain in a position of leadership despite the crimes they had committed. In many cases, it was feudal elements who bought the land to sell it to Jewish capital.

Between 1933 and 1936, 62.7% of all the land purchased by Zionists belonged to landowners residing in Palestine, 14.9% to absentee landlords, and 22.5% to small peasants, whereas between 1920 and 1922, the figures were 20.8% from resident landlords, 75.4% from absentee landlords and 3.8% from small peasants.<sup>3</sup> The laws passed by the Mandatory Government were designed to serve the objectives of Jewish settlement, although they were framed in such a way as to suggest that peasants were protected against being evicted or forced to sell. In reality, they provided no such protection. This was illustrated in the cases of Wadi al-Hawarith, an area of 40,000 dunums, the village of Shatta with its 16,000 dunums, and many other villages where the land was seized by Zionists after having evicted its inhabitants. As a result, the 50,000 Jews who lived in agricultural settlements owned 1,200,000 dunums – an average of 24 dunums per inhabitant – while 500,000 Arabs owned less than 6,000,000, an average of 12 dunums per inhabitant.<sup>4</sup> The case of the 8,730 peasants evicted from Marj Ibn Amer (240,000 dunums), where the land was sold to Zionists by the Beirut feudal family of Sursok, remained suspended until the end of the Mandate in 1948.<sup>5</sup>

“Every plot of land bought by Jews was made foreign to Arabs as if it had been amputated from the body of Palestine and removed to another country.”<sup>6</sup> These words were those of a big Palestinian feudal leader. He added: “According to the Jews, 10% of the land was purchased from peasants, and the rest from big landlords...But in fact 25%

2 Communist Internationalism, pp. 135-145.

3 Weinstock. Ibid.

4 Collection. p. 34.

5 The Sublime Porte had granted this land to the Sursuk family of Lebanon in return for services. See also: Hadawi, Palestine Under the Mandate. 1920-1940, Palestine Studies, Kuwaiti Alumni Association., pp.34, 36.

6 Collection. p.34.

ence held in London in February 1939 was a typical illustration of the dubious transaction that was going on silently all the time between the command of the Palestinian revolt and the British, who knew for certain that the command was prepared to bargain at any moment. Of course Jamal al-Hussaini did not go to the Round Table Conference in London alone; he was accompanied by representatives of the “independent” Arab countries. Thus the Arab regimes which were subject to colonialism were destined for the second time in less than two years to impose their will on the Arabs of Palestine through the identity (latent and potential) of interests of all those who sat around the Round Table in London.

The speeches made by Jamal al-Hussaini, Amir Faisal (Saudi Arabia), Amir Hussein (the Yemen), Al Mahir (Egypt) and Nuri al-Sa’id (Iraq), who declared that he was speaking as a close friend of Britain and who did not want to say a single word that might hurt the feelings of any Briton, because he was their friend from the bottom of his heart,<sup>36</sup> only confirmed the success of the policy which Britain had for so long been carefully pursuing vis-à-vis the leadership of the Palestinian nationalist movement; it did not abandon it, and kept it constantly at the end of an open bridge. And the British were confident that Iraq and Saudi Arabia “were prepared to use their influence with the Palestinian leaders to put an end to the revolt and ensure the success of the Conference”.

However, the revolt in Palestine had not subsided (according to official figures, in February 1939, 110 were killed and 112 wounded in 12 engagements with the British, 39 villages were searched, curfews were imposed in three towns three times, about 200 villagers were arrested, there were fires in five government departments, ten Arabs were executed on charges of carrying arms, there were attacks on ten Zionist settlements, the oil pipeline was blown up; a train between Haifa and Lydda was mined, and a search post was set up in the Aqsa Mosque). The British figures presented by the Colonial Secretary show that “between 20 December and 29 February, there were 348 incidents of assassination, 140 acts of sabotage, 19 kidnappings, 23 thefts, nine mine and 32 bomb explosions, while the Army lost 18 dead and 39 wounded, and the Palestinians lost 83 dead and 124 wounded; these figures do not include casualties to the rebels...”<sup>37</sup> Things continued in this way until September 1939, the month in which the Second World War broke out. In the meantime, the Palestinian Arabs suffered irreplaceable losses; the leadership quite apart from the spirit of compromise that was afoot, was outside the country; the newly constituted local commands were falling one after the other on the various fields of battle, British oppression had reached its climax, and Zionist violence had been constantly escalating since the middle of 1937. There

36 Ibid., p. 258.

37 *Al-Ahram*, 1 March 1939, Cairo.

puted representative of the Palestinian Arabs. Their reserves of the leadership on the right of the Mufti were practically exhausted so that if the Mufti were no longer regarded as the sole leader, this would “leave no-one who can represent the Arabs except the leaders of the revolt in the mountains”, as the British High Commissioner for Palestine said.<sup>32</sup> There can be no doubt that this, among other reasons, contributed to keeping the Mufti at the head of the leadership of the Palestinian nationalist movement in spite, of the fact that he had left his place of refuge in the Aqsa Mosque in a hasty manner, and had been in Damascus since the end of January 1937.

British oppression, which had escalated to an unexpected level, and the escalation of police raids, mass arrests and executions throughout 1937 and 1938, weakened the revolt but did not end it. The British had come to realise that both in essence and substance, and in regards to its local leadership, it was a peasant revolt. As a result of this, the revolutionary spirit that prevailed throughout the whole of Palestine led to everyone in the towns wearing the peasant headdress (*keffiyah* and *agal*) so that the countryman coming into the town should not be subjected to oppression by the authorities. Later, all were forbidden to carry their identity cards, so that the authorities should not be able to distinguish a townsman from a countryman.

This situation indicates very clearly the nature of the revolt and its influence at that time. The countryside in general was the cradle of the revolt, and the temporary occupation of towns in 1938 was achieved after attacks by peasants from outside.<sup>33</sup> This meant that it was the peasants and villagers in general who were paying the highest price.

In 1938, a number of peasants were executed merely for being in possession of arms. A rapid glance at the list of the names of those who were sent to prison or to the gallows shows us that the overwhelming majority were poor peasants. For example, “all the inhabitants of the village of Ain Karem, three thousand in number, were sentenced to go ten kilometres every day to report to the police station”.<sup>34</sup> During that period, Britain sentenced about 2,000 Palestinian Arabs to long terms of imprisonment, demolished more than 5,000 homes, and executed, by hanging, 148 persons in Acre prison. There were more than 5,000 in prison for varying terms.<sup>35</sup>

Britain, which in November 1938 had abandoned the partition proposal recommended by the Peel Report, now began trying to gain time. The Round Table Confer-

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 346.

<sup>33</sup> In May 1938, the rebels occupied Hebron after they had already occupied the old port of Jerusalem. On 9 September, they occupied Beersheba and released prisoners. On 5 October, they occupied Tiberias; in early August parts of Nablus, etc.

<sup>34</sup> Bouyissir. Op. cit., p. 247.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

of the land belonged to peasants.”<sup>7</sup> This apologetic attitude on the part of the feudalists does not change the fact that (as reported by Jewish sources) of the total land acquired by three large Jewish companies by 1936 (which accounted for half the land purchased by Jewish capital up to that date), 52.6% belonged to absentee landlords, 24.6% to residing landlords, 13.4% from the government, churches, and foreign companies, and 9.4% from individual peasants.<sup>8</sup>

This transfer of land ownership created an expanding class of dispossessed peasants who turned to seasonal salaried labour. The majority eventually made their way to the cities and sought unskilled labour. “For a peasant who was evicted from his land, it was impossible to secure other land, and the compensation was usually very small except in cases where the *Mukhtar* (Mayor) or other village notables were involved.”<sup>9</sup>

The majority of dispossessed peasants thus moved to cities and towns. “In Jaffa, most of the street cleaners were ex-villagers; the Arab Cigarette and Tobacco Company in Nazareth reported that most of its workers were also of village origin.” The following illustrates the fate of migrating peasants:

“We asked the Company how many workers it employed and the answer was 210. The total weekly wages paid to the workers were PL62, amounting to an average of 29.5 piasters per worker per week.”<sup>10</sup>

At that time, the average weekly wages of a Jewish woman worker in tobacco factories ranged from between 170 and 230 piasters a week.<sup>11</sup> Even in government employment, an average Jewish worker earned over 100% more than his Arab counterpart.<sup>12</sup> In 1930, the Johnson-Crosby commission estimated the average annual income of a peasant at PL 31.37, before tax deductions. The report further indicated that average tax deductions amounted to PL 3.87. If we further deducted the PL 8 that the average peasant paid as interest on his loans, the net income would amount to PL 19.5 annually. According to the same report, the average sum required to cover the expenses of a peasant family was PL 26.

“The peasants, in fact...were the most heavily taxed group in Palestine...the policy pursued by the government clearly aimed at placing the peasant in an economic situation that would ensure the establishment of a Jewish national home.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>8</sup> Hadawi., Op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>9</sup> Collection. p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>11</sup> Himadeh. Op. cit., p. 376.

<sup>12</sup> Collection, p. 60.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 62-63.

Clearly then, Jewish immigration and the transformation of the Palestinian economy from an essentially Arab agricultural economy to an industrial economy dominated by Jewish capital, affected primarily the small Palestinian Arab peasants. Tax exemptions were granted meanwhile to Jewish immigrants, as well as exemptions covering the imports related to Jewish industries, such as certain raw materials, unfinished products, coal...etc. Customs duty on imported consumer goods rose. The average import tax rose from 11% at the beginning of the Mandate to more than 26% by 1936; 110% on sugar, 149% on tobacco, 208% on petrol, 400% on matches, and 26% on coffee.<sup>14</sup>

An illustration of government policy is provided by the following story told by Archbishop Gregorius Hajjar to the Peel Commission: "I was once in the village of Roma in the Acre district, where the inhabitants live off the production of olive oil. For a long time, they had been complaining to the High Commissioner about the Oil Company. The Company received help from the government in the form of tax exemption on its imports of groundnuts from which it extracted oil and mixed it with olive oil and sold it at lower prices. The people in the village asked that their product be protected against the Company's product, and the government formed a committee to hear the villagers' complaints. When the committee went to Roma the villagers were furious to find out that its chairman was none other than the director of the Company."<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, the tax system was clearly discriminatory in favour of the rich. On a yearly income of PL 22.37 the tax rate was 25% while salaries and earnings that exceeded PL 1,000 per year were subject to 12% in taxes.<sup>16</sup>

The small and middle peasants were not only impoverished as a result of losing their land, but were also the victims of Zionist practices that were based on the slogans of "Jewish labour only" and "Jewish products only." Jewish industrialists employed only Jewish workers, paid them higher wages and sold their products at higher prices. "Jews were encouraged to give preference to Jewish products although at higher prices than those of Arab competitors."<sup>17</sup> Raw materials were exempted from custom duty, while high taxes were imposed on imported goods, particularly if similar goods were locally produced by Jewish factories.

On the other hand, the class that was known as the "effendi class" and lived in the town, derived their income from agricultural land rented to peasants and from interests on loans to peasants (the Effendis did not begin to invest in industry until the

fundamental".<sup>28</sup> This was accompanied by a rise in the number of Zionists serving in the police in Palestine; from 365 in 1935 to 682 in 1936, and at the end of that year the government announced the recruitment of 1,240 Zionists as additional policemen armed with army rifles. A month later, the figure rose to 2,863<sup>29</sup> and British officers played a prominent role in leading Zionist groups in attacks on Palestinian Arab villages.

The fact that the leadership of the revolt was outside Palestine (in Damascus) made the role of the local leadership, most of which were of poor peasant origin, more important than it had been in the previous period. These were closely linked with the peasants. This does much to explain to what extent the revolt was able to go. In this period, for example, Abd al-Rahim al-Hajj emerged as a local commander, and the Communists say that they were in contact with him and supplied him with information.<sup>30</sup> This development might have constituted a historic turning point in the revolt had it not been for the weakness of the "left" in both the relative and the true sense, and had not these local commands been obliged to maintain their organisational link, to a certain extent, with the "Central Committee for Struggle" (*Jihad*) in Damascus, not only because of their traditional loyalty to it, but also because they depended on it to some extent for financing. In the whole history of the Palestinian struggle the armed popular revolt was never closer to victory than in the months between the end of 1937 and the beginning of 1939. In this period, the British forces' control of Palestine weakened, the prestige of colonialism was at its lowest, and the reputation and influence of the revolt became the principal force in the country. However, at this time, Britain became more convinced that it would have to rely on Zionists who had provided them with a unique situation that they had never found in any of their colonies – they had at their disposal a local force which had common cause with British colonialism and was highly mobilised against the local population.

Britain began to be alarmed at the necessity of diverting part of its military forces to confront the ever more critical situation in Europe. Therefore Britain viewed with increasing favour "the rapid organisation of a Jewish volunteer defence force of 6,500 men already in existence".<sup>31</sup> It had already gone some way in pursuing a policy of relying on the local Zionist force and handing over to it many of the tasks of repression, which were increasing. However, it did not destroy the bridge which it had always maintained with the class led by the Mufti, and it was in this field, and at this time in particular, that the British played a major role in maintaining the Mufti as the undis-

14 Ibid., p. 62.

15 Ibid., p. 44.

16 Ibid., p. 63.

17 Rony E. Gubbay, *A Political Study of the Arab-Jewish Conflict*, Librairie de Droz. Geneve, 1959. p.29. 109. Sifri, Op. cit., pp. 131-132.

28 Kayyali, Op. cit., p. 338.

29 *Jewish Observer*, 20 September 1963. London, pp. 13-14.

30 Abdul Qadir Yasin. *al Katib*, No. 121. April 1971 p. 114

31 Kayyali. Op. cit., p. 346.



unambiguous stand against the report of the Peel Commission, which, published on 7 July 1937, recommended partition and the establishment of a Jewish state. At the same time, it became clear that the High Commissioner's fear that pressure from the Mufti's left-wing might lead him to abandon his moderate attitude was not groundless. This pressure, however, was not exerted by the quarter from which the High Commissioner had expected it, but by the middle cadre which was still represented on the national committees, and which was represented daily by groups of dispossessed peasants and unemployed workers in the cities and the countryside.

Thus, the only course left to the Mufti was to flee. He avoided arrest by taking refuge in the Haram al-Sharif, but events forced him into a position which he had not been able to take up a year earlier. In September 1937, Andrews, the District Commissioner of the Galilee district, was shot dead by four armed commandos outside the Anglican church in Nazareth. Andrews was "the only official who administered the Mandate as Zionists consider it right...he never succeeded in winning the confidence of the Fellahin [Palestinian peasants]". The Arabs regarded him as a friend of the Zionists and believed that his task was to facilitate the transfer of Galilee to the Zionist state that had been demarcated by the partition proposal. The Arab peasants disliked him and accused him of facilitating the sale of the Huleh lands, and the commandos who killed him are believed to have belonged to one of the secret cells of the Qassamites.<sup>27</sup>

Although the Arab Higher Committee condemned this incident on the same night, the situation, exactly as had happened when al-Qassam was killed, had got out of the control of the Mufti and his group, so that, if they wanted to remain at the head of the national movement, they had to hang onto it and mount the rising wave, as had happened in April 1936. This time, however, the revolutionary enthusiasm of the masses was more violent, not only because of the experience they had acquired during the past year, but also because the conflict that was taking place before their eyes had become increasingly clear. It is certain that this stage of the revolt was directed substantially, if not entirely, against the British rather than the Zionists. The growth of the conflict had led to the crystallisation of more clear-cut positions; the peasants were in almost complete control of the revolt, the role of the urban bourgeoisie had retreated somewhat, and the wealthy people in the country and the big middle peasants were hesitant to support the rebels, while the Zionist forces had effectively gone on the offensive.

There are two important questions to be considered as regards this stage of the revolt: "The Arabs contacted the Zionists, proposing that they reach some kind of an agreement on the basis of a complete severance of relations with Britain. But the Zionists immediately rejected this, because they regarded their relations with Britain as

1940s). This form of exploitation was by far more ruinous to the peasants than Zionist colonisation.

Another rural group was the "Bedouins", who counted 66,553 in 1931 (in 1922 there were 103,000 Bedouin in Palestine). They were to play a principal role in the 1936 revolt, as they did during the August 1929 uprising. It drew the attention of the Palestine Communist Party in the congress referred to previously. The Bedouins, who made up nearly 35% of the population, constituted a potential revolutionary force. "Turned desperate because of severe impoverishment and constant hunger, they were always on the verge of armed uprisings. Their participation in the August uprising showed that they could play a leading role in a mass revolt, and at the same time it appears clearly that the leaders of these tribes could be spoiled by money. They were constantly providing the army of landless peasants and semi-proletarians with new hands and mouths."<sup>18</sup>

In the meantime, the fragmented Arab urban petty-bourgeoisie was in a state of confusion, indecision and fragmentation: the speed at which society was being transformed into a Jewish industrial society gave neither the growing bourgeoisie nor the feudalists the chance to take part in or to profit from the process. Therefore, it was by no means surprising that most of the Palestinian leaders who testified before the Peel Commission in 1937, and before the previous commissions, had eulogised Ottoman imperialism and praised the way it had treated them in comparison with British imperialism. They had been the instrument of the Porte, the bulwark of the Sultan, and an integral part of the system of domination, oppression and exploitation, whereas British imperialism had dismissed them from the post of chief agent, because it had found a better qualified, more firmly established and more highly organised agent in the Zionist movement. In this way, the main outlines of the fundamental role that the feudal-clerical leadership was to play were established – it was to be a "struggle" for a better position in the colonialist regime. But they could not engage in this "struggle" without rallying around their support, the classes that were eager to free themselves from the yoke of colonisation. With this end in view, they drew up a programme that was clearly progressive, adopted mass slogans, which they were neither willing nor able to push to their logical conclusions, and followed a pattern of struggle which was quite out of character.

27 Neville Barbour, *Nisi Dominus*, London, pp. 183-193.

18 Communist Internationalism. pp. 143-144.

Of course these leaderships did not have absolute freedom of action, as many people like to suggest; on the contrary, they were exposed to all the pressures that were shaping the course of events, to the increasing intensity of the conflicts and to all the influences we have already discussed. This explains why there developed from time to time partial contradictions between their interests and those of the ruling classes of the Arab countries surrounding Palestine, although they upheld the same class interests. It also explains their wide scale alliances within the class structure of Palestine.

within two hours of the call being published".<sup>25</sup>

Although at that time Britain was challenging the Palestinian leaderships on precisely the point over which they had deceived the masses – the question of Jewish immigration to Palestine – and although these leaders decided to boycott the Royal Commission (the Peel Commission), the Arab kings and amirs obliged these leaderships to obey them for the second time in less than three months. King Abdul Aziz Al Sa'ud and King Ghazi wrote letters to Hajj Amin al-Hussaini saying: "In view of our confidence in the good intentions of the British government to do justice to the Arabs, it is our opinion that your interest requires that you should meet the Royal Commission". In fact this incident, which appears trivial, shattered the alliance in the leadership of the nationalist movement, as the forces to the right of Hajj Amin al-Hussaini, led by the Defence Party, immediately opposed the decision to boycott the Peel Commission, and gave numerous indications of their desire to accept the settlement that Britain was to propose. The leaders of this party, which represented mainly the urban effendis, relied on the discontent felt by the big merchants in the towns and on the dislocation of the interests of the urban bourgeoisie, which depended on close economic relations embodied in the agencies they held from British, and sometimes Jewish, industrial firms.

The Arab regimes, especially that of Transjordan, strongly supported the attitude of this right wing, and Hajj Amin al-Hussaini and what he represented had no inclination to turn to the leftist front which, in fact, he had started to liquidate. Thus his attitude began to be increasingly vacillating and hesitant, and it was clear that he had got into a position where he could not take a single step forward with the revolt, and where, equally, retreat could no longer do him any good. However, when the British thought that they could now achieve the political liquidation of the Mufti in the period of quiet that followed the end of the strike, they found that this was not true, and that the Mufti's right wing was still much too weak to control the situation. The British High Commissioner maliciously continued to realise how great a role the Mufti could play while he was restricted to that position between the Defence Party on his right and the Independence Party (its left wing) and the young intellectuals' movements on his left. This High Commissioner realised Britain's ability to take advantage of the wide margin between "the inflexibility (obstinacy) of the villagers who resisted for six months, receiving little pay but not indulging in plunder" and the weakness or non-existence of great qualities of leadership in the members of the (Arab Higher) Committee".<sup>26</sup>

The correctness of the High Commissioner's view of the limited role that the Mufti's right-wing could play was shown when the Defence Party failed to take an

<sup>25</sup> Collection. p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> Kayyali, Op. cit., p. 326.

“importance of the organic link between the safety of British interests and the success of Zionism in Palestine”.<sup>21</sup> Britain decided to strengthen its forces in Palestine and to increase repressive measures.

Frightened by this decision, the leadership of the Palestinian nationalist movement vacillated and lost its nerve. Hajj Amin al-Hussaini, Raghib Nashashibi and Auni Abd al-Hadi hastened to meet the British High Commissioner, and it is clear from reports he sent to his government at the time they confirmed that they were prepared to end the revolt if the Arab kings asked them to do so. They did not, however, dare to admit to the masses that they were the originators; of this tortuous scheme, and repeatedly denied it. After this, large numbers of British troops, estimated at 20,000, poured into Palestine, and on 30 September 1936, when they had all arrived, a decree was issued enforcing martial law. The mandatory authorities stepped up their policy of relentless repression, and September and October witnessed battles of the greatest violence – the last battles, in fact, to cover nearly the whole of Palestine.

On 11 October 1936, the Arab Higher Committee distributed a statement calling for an end to the strike, and thereby the revolt: “Inasmuch as submission to the will of their Majesties and Highnesses, the Arab kings, and to comply with their wishes is one of our hereditary Arab traditions, and inasmuch as the Arab Higher Committee firmly believes that their Majesties and Highnesses would only give orders that are in conformity with the interests of their sons and with the object of protecting their rights; the Arab Higher Committee, in obedience to tire wishes of their Majesties and Highnesses, the Kings and amirs, and from its belief ill the great benefit that will result from their mediation and cooperation, calls on the noble Arab people to end the strike and the disturbances, in obedience to these orders, whose only object is the interests of the Arabs.”<sup>22</sup>

Exactly a month later (on 11 November 1936) the “General Command of the Arab Revolt in Southern Syria-Palestine” announced that it “calls for all acts of violence to be stopped completely, and that there should be no provocation towards anything liable to disturb the atmosphere of the negotiations, which the Arab nation hopes will succeed and obtain the full rights of the country”.<sup>23</sup> Ten days later, the same command issued another statement in which it declared that it had “left the field, from its confidence in the guarantee of the Arab kings and amirs, and to protect the safety of the negotiations”.<sup>24</sup> As Jamil al-Shuqairi says: “So, in obedience to the orders of the kings and amirs, the strike was called off, and the activities of the revolt came to an end

21 Kayyali, Op. cit., p. 319.

22 Documents, p. 454.

23 Ibid., p. 457.

24 Ibid., p. 458.

## **BACKGROUND: THE INTELLECTUALS**

In 1930, after thirteen years of British occupation of Palestine, the Director of Education admitted in his report that: “Since the beginning of the occupation, the government has never undertaken to provide sufficient funds for the building of a single school in the country,” and in 1935, the government turned down 41% of the applications by Palestinian Arabs for places in schools. In the 800 villages in Palestine there were only fifteen schools for girls and 269 for boys and only fifteen village girls got as far as the seventh elementary grade.

There were 517 Palestinian Arab villages which had neither boys’ nor girls’ schools and there was not one secondary school in the villages. Moreover, the government “censored books and objected to all cultural links with the Arab world, and did nothing to raise the educational level of the peasants...”<sup>1</sup>

Thus in 1931 among Palestinian Muslims 251 per thousand males and 33 per thousand females had attended school, and among the Palestinian Christians 715 per thousand males and 441 per thousand females (for Jews the figures were 943 per thousand males and 787 per thousand females).<sup>2</sup>

These figures give an idea of the educational situation in the rural areas, but not of that in Palestine as a whole, which had played a pioneering role in education since the start of the Arab resurgence at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, a large number of printing presses had been established in Palestine before the British occupation, about fifty Arabic newspapers appeared between 1904 and 1922, while at least ten more with a wide circulation made their appearance before the 1936 revolt.

A number of factors, which it is not possible to deal with at length here, had made Palestine an important centre of Arab culture, and the persistent efforts of intellectuals migrating into and out of Palestine were a basic factor in establishing the cultural role of Palestine and in the establishment of literary associations and clubs which began to appear in the early twenties.

This cultural development, which was constantly fed by a flow of Arab graduates from Beirut and Cairo, was accompanied by an extensive activity in the field of translation from French and English. The foreign missions that were primarily

1 Collection, p. 52.

2 Himadeh, Op. cit., p. 45.

attracted to Palestine for historical and religious considerations, placed a prominent role in disseminating an atmosphere of education in the cities. However, it is not the general cultural climate in Palestine during that period that is of concern to us, but rather, in particular, the influence of the aggravating economic and political crisis on the literary movement. The development of a certain “popular culture” was very significant. It represented a certain awareness that existed in rural areas despite the widespread illiteracy, an awareness that was spurred by the rapidly developing economic and political reality. Popular poetry in particular reflected a growing concern on the part of the rural masses over the course of events. This spontaneous awareness led to a spirit of mobilisation in the villages.

The majority of urban intellectuals, for their part, were of a feudal or commercial petty-bourgeois class affiliation. Although they basically advocated a type of bourgeois revolution, the objective conditions were by no means favourable to the development of the class that would logically lead such a struggle. As political activists, they thus remained under the control of the traditional leadership. Their work nevertheless reflected a degree of awareness that, in general, was not shared by their counterparts in other Arab countries.

The struggle between advocates of revolution and reactionaries in the rural areas, and between revolutionary militants and defeatist elements in the cities was developing in favour of the revolution. We do not know of a single Palestinian writer or intellectual in that period who did not participate in the call for resistance against the colonial enemy. There is no doubt that the intellectuals, even though they were not, in general, mobilised by a revolutionary party, played an important role in the national struggle.

The position of Palestinian intellectuals was unique. Having completed their studies and returned to their towns, they became aware of the incapacity of the class they belonged to of leading the national struggle. But at the same time, they suffered from their own inability to participate and benefit from the process of industrial development that was essentially controlled by an alien and hostile community. On the other hand, in the rural areas of Palestine, the peasants, who for centuries had been subject to class and national oppression, lived in a most archaic society where local feudal and religious leaders exercised absolute authority. Popular poetry often reflected the submissiveness of peasants<sup>3</sup>, which the Palestinian intellectuals, and in particular the

3 Examples of such proverbs: He who eats from the Sultan’s bread, strikes by his sword; Let no grass grow after mine; Today’s egg is better than tomorrow’s hen (A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush); When we started selling coffins people started dying; The most severe of pains is the present one; He runs after the loaf of bread and the loaf of bread runs before him; Life goes well with the well to do. (“Arab Society” by Dr. Ali Ahmed Issa, quoted in Yusra Arnita, *Folkloric Arts in Palestine*. Beirut, Palestine Research Center, P.L.O. p. 187.)

scale – they blew up and destroyed part of the city of Jaffa (18 June 1936) where the number of houses blown up was estimated at 220 and the number of persons rendered homeless at 6,000. In addition, 100 huts were demolished in Jabalia, 300 in Abu Kabir, 350 in Sheikh Murad, and 75 in Arab al-Daudi. It is clear that the inhabitants of the quarters that were destroyed in Jaffa and of the huts that were destroyed in the outskirts were poor peasants who had left the country for the town. In the villages, according to al-Sifri’s estimate, 143 houses were blown up for reasons directly connected with the revolt.<sup>19</sup> These houses belonged to poor peasants, some medium peasants and a very small number of feudal families. Secondly, Amir Abdullah of Transjordan<sup>20</sup> and Nuri Said started to take action to mediate with the Arab Higher Committee. However, their mediation was unsuccessful, despite the readiness of the leadership to accept their good offices. But the movement of the masses was not yet ready to be domesticated in 1936 although these contacts did have a negative effect on the revolt, and left a feeling that the conflict then in progress was amenable to settlement. In fact, this initiative, which started with failure, was to be completely successful in October of the same year, only about seven weeks later.

Not that these contacts were the only form assumed by the dialectic of the relations between Palestine and the neighbouring Arab countries. This dialectic was more complicated and reflected the complexity of the conflicts, we have already seen what al-Qassam represented in this field; and in fact the Qassamist phenomenon in this sense continued to exist. Large numbers of Arab freedom fighters poured into Palestine; among them were Sa’id al-As, who was killed in October 1936, Sheikh Muhammad al-Ashmar and many others. This influx also comprised a number of adventurist nationalist officers, the most prominent of whom was Fauzi al-Qawuqji who shortly after entry into Palestine at the head of a small band in August 1936 declared himself commander in chief of the revolt. Although these men improved and expanded the tactics of the rebels, the greater part of the burden of revolutionary violence in the country and of commando action in the towns, continued to be borne by the dispossessed peasants. In fact, it was the “officers” who emerged from the ranks of the peasants themselves who continued to play the major role, but most of them were subject to the leadership of al-Mufti. They also represented legendary heroism for the masses of the revolution.

Although the British officials in Palestine did not completely agree with London’s policy of reckless support for the Zionist movement, they thought that there was room for an Arab class leadership whose interests were not linked with the revolt, to cooperate with colonialism. Britain finally accepted, so it seems, on 19 June 1936, the

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>20</sup> Transjordan is the East Bank of the River Jordan, while the West Bank is part of Palestine (Editor).

This goes a long way towards explaining why the only two people who were comparatively proficient at organisation – Auni Abed el-Hadi and Mohammad Azat Darwazeh – were arrested, while the rest were subjected either to arrest or to harassment to the extent that they were totally paralysed. This is shown by the fact that 61 Arabs responsible for organising the strike (the middle cadre) were arrested on 23 May. However, these arrests did not prevent Britain from giving permits to four of the leaders of the revolt, Jamal al-Hussaini, Shibli al-Jamal, Abd al-Latif Salah and Dr. Izzat Tannus to travel to London and meet the Minister for the Colonies, which took place on 12 June. There was nothing unusual about this incident, which was to be constantly repeated throughout the subsequent months and years. The British High Commissioner had observed with great satisfaction that “the Friday sermons were much more moderate than I had expected, at a time when feelings are so strong. This was mainly due to the Mufti”.<sup>17</sup>

From the outset, the situation had been that the leadership of the Palestinian nationalist movement regarded the revolt of the masses as merely intended to exert pressure on British colonialism with the object of improving the conditions of the masses as a class. The British were profoundly aware of this fact and acted accordingly. They did not, however, take the trouble to grant this class the concessions it desired. London persisted in meeting its commitments by handing over the colonialist heritage in Palestine to the Zionist movement and, moreover, it was during the years of the revolt – 1936-1939 – that British colonialism threw all its weight into performing the task of supporting the Zionist presence and setting it on its feet, as we shall see later.

The British succeeded in achieving this in two ways: by striking at the poor peasant revolutionaries with unprecedented violence, and by employing their extensive influence with the Arab regimes, which played a major role in liquidating the revolt.

Firstly, the British Emergency Regulations played an effective role. Al-Sifri cites a group of sentences passed at the time to show how unjust these regulations were:

“six years imprisonment for possessing a revolver, 12 years for possessing a bomb, five years with hard labour for possessing 12 bullets, eight months on a charge of misdirecting a detachment of soldiers, nine years on a charge of possessing explosives, five years for trying to buy ammunition from soldiers, two weeks imprisonment for possessing a stick...etc.”<sup>18</sup>

According to a British estimate submitted to the League of Nations, the number of Palestinian Arabs killed in the 1936 revolt was about 1,000, apart from wounded, missing and interned. The British employed the policy of blowing up houses on a wide

<sup>17</sup> Kayyali, Op. cit., p. 311.

<sup>18</sup> Sifri, Op. cit., p. 60.

poets, could not combat easily. Certain intellectuals attempted to overcome the submissive mood of the rural masses and played a prominent role in disseminating progressive awareness.

Wadi al-Bustani, a poet of Lebanese origin who graduated from the American University of Beirut and settled in Palestine, played an important role as a progressive intellectual. He was the first to warn against the Balfour Declaration and its challenges, the very month it was issued. His period, (as Palestine was on the verge of armed revolt) produced a powerful vanguard of revolutionary poets whose works became part of the cultural heritage of the masses.<sup>4</sup> On 29 January 1920, the British Mandatory Government sent a letter to the editor of the cultural magazine *Karmel*, which was then published in Haifa, requesting the publication of a poem by the celebrated Iraqi poet Ma’ruf Al-Risafi that was dedicated to the British High Commissioner and that praised and eulogised him along with a Jewish speaker called Jehuda. The editor agreed to publish it along with a reply to it. Al-Bustani wrote the reply in the form of a poem which said the following:

“Juda’s speech? Or acts of witchcraft? And Rasafi’s saying? Or lies of poetry  
Your poetry is of the choicest words, you are well-acquainted with the jewels of sea  
verse  
But this sea is one of politics, if justice spreads high its low tide begins  
Yes! He who has crossed the Jordan River is our cousin but he who comes from  
across the sea is suspicious”.<sup>5</sup>

This long poem, which, at the time, became very famous, was in fact a unique political document; it not only made Al-Risafi look like a fool, but also asserted, even at that early date, political facts of great importance. It not only mentioned Jewish immigration and the danger it constituted, but also the role played by Britain in fragmenting the Palestinian Arabs, the Balfour Declaration, and its implications, etc.

A short time before this, on 28 March 1920, Al-Bustani had himself led a demonstration, which chanted a song that he had composed himself. He was summoned to an inquiry, and the following appears in the records of the inquiry conducted by the Public Prosecutor:

<sup>4</sup> According to Taufiq Ziyad, a resistance poet in occupied Palestine (Nazareth): “Our revolutionary poetry (Mahmud Darwish, Samih al-Qasim and myself) is an extension of the revolutionary poetry of Ibrahim Tuqan, Abd al-Rahim Mahmud, Mutlaq Abd al-Khaliq and others...because our battle is an extension of theirs.” (*On Popular Poetry*, Dar al-Thawra, p. 15)  
<sup>5</sup> Yaghi, Dr. Abdul Rahman. *Modern Palestinian Literature*. Beirut, p. 232.

**Public Prosecutor:** Statements have been made that you were carried shoulder-high, and that you said to the people who were following behind you: "Oh Christians, Oh Muslims".

**The Accused:** Yes.

**Public Prosecutor:** And you also said: "To whom have you left the country?"

**The Accused:** Yes.

**Public Prosecutor:** Then you said: "Kill the Jews and unbelievers."

**The Accused:** No. That violates the metre and the rhyme. I could not have said that. What I said was both rhyming and metrical. It is called poetry.<sup>6</sup>

In the subsequent periods, poetry played an increasingly important role in expressing, on all sorts of occasions, feelings of the helpless masses. Thus, when Balfour came from London to attend the opening ceremony of the Hebrew University in 1927, the ceremony was also attended by Ahmad Lutfi al-Said, as the delegate of the Egyptian government, and the poet Iskandar al-Khuri wrote the following lines addressed to Balfour:

"Running, from London you came to stir the fire of this battle  
Oh Lord I cannot blame you for you are not the source of our misery.  
For Egypt is to be blamed as it only extends to us empty hands."<sup>7</sup>

Ibrahim Tuqan, Abu Salma (Abd al-Karim al-Karmi) and Abd al-Rahim Mahmud were, since the beginning of the 1930s, the culmination of the wave of nationalist poets who inflamed the whole of Palestine with revolutionary awareness and agitation. As'af al-Nashashibi, Khalil al-Sakakini, Ibrahim al-Dabbagh, Muhammed Hasan Ala al-Din, Burhan al-Abbushi, Muhammed Khurshid, Qayasar al-Khuri, the priest George Bitar, Bulos Shihada, Mutlaq Abd al-Khaliq and others.

The work of Tuqan, al-Karmi and Mahmud displays an extraordinary power of appreciation of what was going on, which can only be explained as a profound grasp of what was boiling in mass circles. What appears to be inexplicable prophecy and a power of prediction in their poems is, in fact, only their ability to express this dialectical relationship that linked their artistic work with the movement that was at work in society.

The fact that we have concentrated on the role played by poetry and popular poetry does not mean that other manifestations of cultural activity in Palestine did not

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>7</sup> Taufiq Ziyad described this poem in the following words: "I have not known a poetry work equivalent in the strength, sacrifice and bravery in this great poem." (from *Literature and Popular Literature*, Dar al-Awda, p. 30).

the Turks gave the right of local government due to the fact that it had grown in conjunction with the feudal aristocracy.

The labour movement was newly established and weak, and, as a result, was exposed to oppression by the authorities, crushing competition from the Jewish proletariat and bourgeoisie, and persecution by the leadership, of the Arab nationalist movement.

Before the Arab Higher Committee was formed, with Hajj Amin al-Hussaini at its head on 25 April 1936, Jamal al-Hussaini, the leader of the Arab Party, had been dissatisfied by people's growing belief that the English were the real enemy, and the National Defence Party which represented, first and foremost, the growing urban comprador class, was not really disposed for an open clash with the British.

Only two days earlier, on 23 April 1936, Weizmann, the leader of the Zionist movement, had made a speech in Tel-Aviv in which he described the Arab-Zionist struggle, which was beginning to break out, as a struggle between destructive and constructive elements, thereby putting the Zionist forces in their place as the instrument of colonialism on the eve of the armed clash. This was the position on both sides of the field on the eve of the revolt!

In the countryside the revolt assumed the form of civil disobedience and armed insurrection. Hundreds of armed men flocked to join the bands that had begun to fan out in the mountains. Non-payment of taxes was decided on at the conference held in the Raudat al-Ma'aref al-Wataniya college in Jerusalem on 7 May 1936 and was attended by about 150 delegates representing the Arabs of Palestine. A review of the names of the delegates made by Isa al-Safri<sup>16</sup> shows that it was at this conference that the leadership of the mass movement committed itself to an unsubstantial alliance between the feudal-religious leaderships, the urban commercial bourgeoisie and a limited number of the intellectuals. The resolution adopted by this conference was brief, but it was a clear illustration of the extent to which a leadership of this kind was capable of reaching.

"The conference decided unanimously to announce that no taxes will be paid as of 15 May 1936 if the British government does not make a radical change in its policy by stopping Jewish immigration."

The British response to civil disobedience and armed insurrection was to strike at two key points: the first was the organisational cadre which was, for the most part, more revolutionary than the leadership, and the second the impoverished masses who had taken part in the revolt and who in fact had nothing but their own arms to protect them.

---

<sup>16</sup> Sifri, Op. cit., pp, 39-40.

conception of organisation as applied to struggle. Organisational responsibilities were most often based on individual talents in the subcommittees and among the middle cadre. However, they were usually incapable of transforming their abilities into policy. On the eve of the revolt, the situation of the representatives of the nationalist movement in Palestine was as follows: with the dissolution of the Arab Executive Committee in August 1934 six groups emerged:

1. The Arab Palestine Party, in May 1935, headed by Jamal al-Hussaini; it more or less embodied the policy of the Mufti and represented the feudalists and big city merchants;
2. The National Defence Party, headed by Raghīb al-Nashashibi; founded in December 1934 it represented the new urban bourgeoisie and the senior officials;
3. The Independence Party, founded in 1932, with Auni Abd al-Hadl as its head. It included the intellectuals, the middle bourgeoisie and some sectors of the petty-bourgeoisie. This contributed to its left wing playing a special role;
4. The Reform Party which, founded by Dr Husain al-Khalidi in August 1935, represented a number of intellectuals;
5. The National Bloc Party, headed by Abd al-Latif Salah;
6. The Palestine Youth Party, headed by Ya'qub al-Ghusain

This multiplicity was purely superficial; it was not a clear and definite expression of the class configuration in the country. The overwhelming majority of the masses were not represented (according to Nevill Barbour 90% of the revolutionaries were peasants who regarded themselves as volunteers).

A glance at the class structure in Palestine in 1931 shows that 59% of the Palestinian Arabs were peasants (19.1% of the Jews), 12.9% of the Arabs worked in construction industry and mining (30.6% of the Jews), 6% of the Palestinian Arabs worked in communications, 8.4% in commerce, 1.3% in the administration, etc.<sup>15</sup> This means that the overwhelming majority of the population was not represented in these parties which, although they represented the feudal and religious leaders, the urban compradors and certain sectors of the intellectuals, they were always subject to the leadership of the Mufti and his class, which represented the feudal-clerical leaders, and was more nationalist than the leadership which represented the urban bourgeoisie. The latter was represented by the effendis at a time when they were starting to invest their money in industry (this trend became more pronounced after the defeat of the 1936-1939 revolt).

The petty-bourgeoisie in general (small traders, shopkeepers, teachers, civil servants and craftsmen) had no leadership. As a class they had had no influence and no importance under the Turkish regime, which depended on the effendi class, to which

play any role, or that their role was insignificant. Literary newspapers and articles, stories, and the translation movement all played a significant pioneering role. For example, in an editorial published by Yusuf al-Isa in *Al-Nafa'is* in 1920, we read: "Palestine is Arab – its Muslims are Arab – its Christians are Arab – and its Jewish citizens are Arab too. Palestine will never be quiet if it is separated from Syria and made a national home for Zionism..." It was expressions of this kind at the beginning of the 1920s that fashioned the revolutionary cultural tide in the 1930s, which was to play an important role in promoting awareness and sparking off the revolt – writers such as Arif al-Arif, Khalil al-Sakakini (a mocking writer of fiery prose, and son of a master carpenter), As'af al-Nashashibi (a member of the upper bourgeoisie who was influenced by al-Sakakini and adopted many of his views), Arif al-Azzuni, Mahmud Saif al-Din al-Irani and Najati Sidqi (one of the early leftist writers who, in 1936, extolled the materialism of Ibn Khaldun and deplored idealism). Sidqi was probably the first chronicler which the Arab nationalist movement had from the beginning of the renaissance who used a materialist analysis of events. He published his research in *Al-Tali'a* in 1937 and 1938. Abdullah Mukhlis (who in the mid 1930s started calling for the view that colonialism is a class phenomenon, and maintaining that artistic production must be militant), Raja al-Hurani, Abdullah al-Bandak, Khalil al-Badiri, Muhammad Izzat Darwaza and Isa al-Sifri (whose eulogy of the death of al-Qassam had a profoundly revolutionary significance). This effervescence in the Palestinian cultural atmosphere, which reached its climax in the 1930s, was expressed in a variety of forms, but for many reasons related to the history of Arabic literature, the greatest influence was always exercised by poetry and popular poetry.

This alone explains the role which poetry took upon itself in this period, which was almost direct political preaching. Ibrahim Tuqan, for example, commenting on the 1932 establishment of the "national fund" to save land in Palestine from being sold to the Zionists (this was the fund established by the feudal-clerical leadership on the pretext of preventing the land of poor peasants from falling into the hands of the Zionists) says: "Eight of those responsible for the fund project were land brokers for the Zionists".

As early as 1929, Ibrahim Tuqan disclosed the role that the big landowners were playing in connection with the land problem:

"They have sold the country to its enemies because of their greed for money; but it is their homes they have sold. They could have been forgiven if they had been forced to do so by hunger, but God knows that they have never felt hunger or thirst."

"If only one of our leaders would fast like Gandhi - perhaps his fast would do some good. There is no need to abstain from food – in Palestine a leader would die

<sup>15</sup> *Palestine's Economic Future*. Percy, Lund H. London, 1946. p. 61.

without food. Let him abstain from selling land and keep a plot in which to lay his bones.”<sup>8</sup>

In the same year, Tuqan had written his epic on the death sentences passed by the Mandatory Government on the three martyrs, Fuad Hijazi of Safad, and Muhammad Jumjum and Ata al-Zir of Acre. This poem became extremely famous, and came to be regarded as part of the revolutionary heritage, like the poem of Abd al-Rahim Mahmud written on 14 August 1935 in which he addressed the Amir Saud who was visiting Palestine: “Have you come to visit the Aqsa Mosque, or to say farewell to it before it is destroyed?”

This poet was to lay down his life in the battle of Al-Shajara in Palestine in 1948, but before that he was to play a prominent role, along with Abu Salma and Tuqan, in laying the foundations of Palestinian resistance poetry, which later, under Israeli occupation, was to become one of the most conspicuous manifestations of the endurance of the Palestinian masses.

Poetry and popular poetry accompanied the mass movement from the early 1930s, expressing the developments that preceded the outbreak of the revolt. The poem of Abu Salma, in which he chronicled the 1936 revolt, courageously describes the bitter disappointment caused by the way the Arab regimes abandoned it:

“You who cherish the homeland revolt against the outright oppression  
Liberate the homeland from the kings liberate it from the puppets...  
I thought we have kings that can lead the men behind them  
Shame to such kings if kings are so low  
By god, their crowns are not fit to be shoe soles  
We are the ones who will protect the homeland and heal its wounds.”

Mention must also be made of the popular poet “Awad” who, the night before his execution in 1937, wrote on the walls of his cell in Acre a splendid poem ending with the lines:

“The bridegroom belongs to us; woe to him whom we are fighting against – we’ll cut off his moustache with a sword. Shake the lance with the beautiful shaft; where are you from, you brave men. We are men of Palestine – welcome with honour.”  
“Father of the bridegroom, do not worry, we are drinkers of blood. In Bal’a and Wadi al-Tuffah there has been an attack and a clash of arms... Oh ye beautiful women sing and chant. On the day of the battle of Beit Amrin you hear the sound of gun-shooting, look upon us from the balcony.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Yaghi, Dr. Abdul Rahman. *Modern Palestinian Literature*. Beirut, p. 283

<sup>9</sup> *Our Popular Songs*. by Nimr Sirhan. Jordan, Ministry of Culture and Information, p. 157.

But it was impossible to put the clock back, for the Qassamist movement was, in fact, an expression of the natural pattern that was capable of coping with the escalation of the conflict and settling it. It was not long before this was reflected in a number of committees and groupings, so that the traditional leadership was obliged to choose between confronting this escalating will to fight among the masses or to quell their will and to put them under their control.

Although the British took rapid action, and proposed the idea of a legislative assembly and mooted the idea of stopping land sales, it was too late: the Zionist movement, whose will began to crystallise very firmly at that time, played its part in diminishing the effectiveness of the British offer. All the same, the leadership of the Palestinian nationalist movement had not yet decided its attitude, but was extraordinarily vacillating, and up to 2 April 1936, the representatives of the Palestinian parties were prepared to form a delegation to go to London to tell the British government their point of view. However, things blew up before the leadership of the nationalist movement intended, and when the first flames were ignited in Jaffa in February 1936, the leaders of the Palestinian nationalist movement believed that they could still obtain partial concessions from Britain through negotiations.

But they were surprised by the following events. All who were closely associated with the events of April 1936 admit that the outbreak of violence and civil disobedience was spontaneous and that, with the exception of the acts instigated by the surviving Qassamists, everything that happened was a spontaneous expression of the critical level that the conflict had reached.

Even when the general strike was declared on 19 April 1936 the leadership of the nationalist movement lagged behind. However, they soon got on the bandwagon before it left them behind, and succeeded, for the reasons already mentioned in our analysis of the social-political situation in Palestine, in dominating the nationalist movement.

From the organisational point of view, the Palestinian nationalist movement was represented by a number of parties, most of which were the vestiges of the anti-Ottoman movements that had arisen at the beginning of the century. This meant both that they had not engaged in a struggle for independence (as was the case in Egypt, for example) and that they were no more than general frameworks, without definite principles, controlled by groups of notables and dependent on loyalties rooted in and derived from the influence they enjoyed as religious or feudal leaders or prominent members of society; they were not parties with organised bases.

Apart from al-Qassam himself (and the Communists, naturally) not one of the leaders of the Palestinian nationalist movement at this time possessed any organising ability; even Hajj Amin al-Hussaini, who had unusual administrative abilities, had no



immediately after it happened, and the attitude they adopted at the ceremony held on the fortieth day after his death. During these forty days, they discovered that if they did not try to mount the great wave that had been set in motion by al-Qassam, it would engulf them. They therefore cast off the indifference they had displayed at his funeral and took part in the rallies and speeches at the fortieth day ceremony.

Clearly Hajj Amin al-Hussaini was to remain aware of this loophole in later times. Even more than 20 years later the magazine *Filastine*, the mouthpiece of the Arab Higher Committee, tried to give the impression that the Qassamist movement was nothing but a part of the movement led by the Mufti, and that the latter and al-Qassam had been “personal friends”.<sup>12</sup> As for the British, they told the story of al-Qassam in the report on the incidents of 1935 that they submitted to Geneva as follows:

“There were widespread rumours that a terrorist gang had been formed at the inspiration of political and religious factors, and on November 7, 1935, a police sergeant and a constable were following up a theft in the hills of the Nazareth District, when two unknown persons fired on them, killing the sergeant... This incident soon led to the discovery of a gang operating in the neighbourhood under the leadership of Izz al-Din al-Qassam, a political refugee from Syria who enjoyed considerable prestige as a religious leader. He had been the object of strong suspicion some years before, and he was said to have had a hand in terrorist activities.”

“Sheikh al-Qassam’s funeral in Haifa was attended by very large crowds, and in spite of the efforts made by influential Muslims to keep order, there were demonstrations and stones were thrown. The death of al-Qassam aroused a wave of powerful feelings in political and other circles in the country and the Arabic newspapers agreed in calling him a martyr in the articles they wrote about him”.<sup>13</sup>

The British, too, were aware of the challenge represented by the killing of al-Qassam, and they too tried to put the clock back, as is shown by the view expressed by the High Commissioner in a letter he wrote to the Minister for the Colonies. In this letter he said that if the demands of the Arab leaders were not granted, “they would lose all their influence and all possibility of pacification, by the moderate means he proposed, would vanish”.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Palestine*. No.94. 1 January, 1969. Arab Higher Committee. Beirut.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 94. p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> Kayyali, *Op. cit.*, p. 296.

The anger felt against all three members of the enemy trinity – the Zionist invasion, the British mandate and Arab reaction, both local and otherwise, grew constantly as the situation grew more critical.

At that time the countryside, with the escalation of the conflicts and the outbreaks of armed uprisings, was developing its new awareness through the contacts of its “cultural” elements, with the towns and the multiplication of factors inducing such awareness:

“Good people, what is this hatred? A Zionist with a Westerner?”<sup>10</sup> and “the gun appeared, the lion did not; the muzzle of the gun is wet with dew,” or: “His rifle, with the salesman I say my heart will never rest till I buy it His rifle got rusty from lack of use but still longing for its fighter.”

Indeed, the inflammatory call to revolt went to such extraordinary lengths that, after all the inherited proverbs which counselled submissiveness, and constituted a lead with the infallible authority of traditions, popular poetry suddenly became capable of saying: “Arab, son of weak and poor woman, sell your mother and buy a gun; a gun will be better than your mother when the revolt relieves your cares.”<sup>11</sup>

As the conflict became more and more acute, the “gun” was to become the instrument which destroyed the age-old walls of the call to submissiveness and suddenly became able to pierce the heart of the matter, and the revolt became the promise for the future – better than the warmest things in the past, the mother and the family. But over all this effervescence the patriarchal feudalism was ossified with its impotent leadership, its authority and its reliance on the past.

In the midst of these complicated and heated conflicts, which were both expanding and growing more profound, and which mainly affected the Arab peasants and workers, although they also pressed heavily on the petty and middle bourgeoisie and the middle peasants in the country, the situation was becoming ever more critical, expressing itself in armed outbreaks from time to time (1929-1933). On the other hand, the Palestinian feudal-clerical leaders felt that their own interests were also threatened by the growing economic force – Jewish capitalism allied with the British Mandate. But their interests were also threatened from the opposite quarter – by the poor Arab masses who no longer knew where to turn. For the Arab urban bourgeoisie was weak and incapable of leadership in this stage of economic transformation which was taking place with unparalleled rapidity

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 299-300.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 301.

and a small section of this bourgeoisie became parasitic and remained on the fringe of Jewish industrial development. In addition, both their subjective and objective conditions were undergoing changes contradictory to the general direction Arab society was pursuing.

The young intellectuals, sons of the rich rural families, played a prominent role in inciting people to revolt. They had returned from their universities to a society in which they rejected the formula of the old relationships, which had become outdated, and in which they were rejected by the new formulas which had started to take shape within the framework of the Zionist-colonialist alliance. Thus the class struggle became mixed, with extraordinary thoroughness, with the national interest and religious feelings, and this mixture broke out within the framework of the objective and subjective crisis which Arab society in Palestine was experiencing. Due to the above, Palestinian Arab society remained a prisoner of the feudal-clerical leaderships. In view of the social and economic oppression which was the lot of the poor Palestinian Arabs in the towns and villages, it was inevitable that the nationalist movement should assume advanced forms of struggle, adopt class slogans and follow a course of action based on class concepts. Similarly, faced with the firm and daily expressed alliance between the invading society built by the Jewish settlers in Palestine and British colonialism, it was impossible to forget the primarily nationalist character of that struggle. And in view of the terrible religious fervour on which the Zionist invasion of Palestine was based, and which was inseparable from all of its manifestations, it was impossible that the underdeveloped Palestinian countryside should not practice religious fundamentalism as a manifestation of hostility to the Zionist colonialist incursion.

Commenting on the emergence of the Black Panther movement in "Israel," the leftist Hebrew-language magazine *Matzpen* (No. 5, April 1971) wrote:

"Class conflicts in Israel sometimes tend to take the form of confessional conflicts. Class conflicts, even when translated into the language of confessionalism, have from the start lain at the heart of Zionism."

Of course this statement applies to an even greater extent to the role played by religion against the Zionist incursion, as being a form of both national and class persecution. For example:

"One of the results of Zionism was that celebrations of the Prophet's Birthday were turned into nationalist rallies under the direction of the Mufti of Haifa and the poet Wadi' al-Bustani and were attended by all the Christian leaders and notables, not a single Jew being invited. In this way, saints' days, both Muslim and Christian, became popular festivals with a nationalist tinge in the towns of Palestine."

others to purchase arms, committees for training, for security, espionage, propaganda and information and for political contacts, and then armed revolt. Most of those who knew al-Qassam say that when he went out to the Ya'bad hills with 25 of his men on the night of 12 November 1935, his object was not to declare the armed revolt but to spread the call for the revolt, but that an accidental encounter led to his presence there being disclosed, and in spite of the heroic resistance of al-Qassem and his men, a British force easily destroyed them. It appears that when he realised that he could no longer expand the revolt with his comrades, Sheikh al-Qassam adopted his famous slogan: "Die as Martyrs." It is due to al-Qassam that we should understand this slogan in a "Guevaris" sense, if we may use the expression, but at the ordinary nationalist level, the little evidence we possess of al-Qassam's conduct shows that he was aware of the importance of his role as the initiator of an advanced revolutionary focus.

This slogan was to bear fruit immediately. The masses followed their martyr's body 10 kilometres on foot to the village of Yajur. But the most important thing that happened was the exposing of the traditional leaders in the face of the challenge constituted by Sheikh al-Qassam. These leaders were as conscious of the challenge as was the British Mandate. According to one Qassamist, a few months before al-Qassam went into the hills, he sent to Hajj al-Amin al-Hussaini, through Sheikh Musa al-Azrawi, to ask him to coordinate declarations of revolt throughout the country. Hussaini refused, however, on the ground that conditions were not yet ripe.<sup>10</sup> When Al-Qassam was killed, his funeral was attended only by poor people.

The leaders adopted an indifferent attitude, which they soon realised was a mistake, for the killing of al-Qassam was an occurrence of outstanding significance which they could not afford to ignore. Proof of this is to be found in the fact that representatives of the five Palestinian parties visited the British High Commissioner only six days after the killing of al-Qassam, and submitted to him an extraordinarily impudent memorandum in which they admitted that

"if they did not receive an answer to this memorandum which could be regarded as generally satisfactory, they would lose all their influence over their followers, extremist and irresponsible views would prevail and the situation would deteriorate".<sup>11</sup>

They obviously wanted to exploit the phenomenon of al-Qassam to enable them to take a step backwards. However, by his choice of the form of struggle, al-Qassam had made it impossible for them to retreat, and this in fact is what explains the difference between the attitude of the Palestinian leaders to the killing of Sheikh al-Qassam

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 22

<sup>11</sup> Kayyali, Op. cit. p. 296.

absorbing resentment (the British took a long time to see the value of this manoeuvre; however, their interests were safeguarded through the existence of competent Zionist agents); thirdly: Zionist violence (the armed bands, the slogan of "Jewish labour only", etc.) in addition to colonialist violence (the manner in which the 1929 rising had been suppressed).

In any discussion of the 1936-1939 revolt, a special place must be reserved for Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam. In spite of all that has been written about him, it is not too much to say that this unique personality is still really unknown, and will probably remain so. Most of what has been written about him has dealt with him only from the outside and because of this superficiality in the study of personality, several Jewish historians have not hesitated to regard him as a "fanatical dervish", while many Western historians have ignored him altogether. In fact, it is clear that it is the failure to grasp the dialectical connection between religion and nationalist tendencies that is responsible for the belittling of the importance of the Qassamist movement.

However, whatever view is held of al-Qassam, there is no doubt that his movement (12-19 November 1935) represented a turning point in the nationalist struggle and played an important role in the adoption of a more advanced form of struggle in confrontation with the traditional leadership which had become divided and splintered in the face of the mounting struggle.

Probably the personality of al-Qassam in itself constituted the symbolic point of encounter of that great mass of interconnected factors which, for the purposes of simplification, has come to be known as the "Palestine problem." The fact that he was "Syrian" (born in Jabala on the periphery of Latakia) exemplified the Arab nationalist factor in the struggle. The fact that he was an Azharist (he studied at Al-Azhar) exemplifies the religious-nationalist factor represented by Al-Azhar at the beginning of the century. The fact that he had a record of engaging in nationalist struggle (took part in the Syrian revolt against the French at Jabal Horan in 1919-1920 and was condemned to death) exemplified the unity of Arab struggle. Al-Qassam came to Haifa in 1921 with the Egyptian Sheikh Muammad al-Hanafi and Sheikh Ali al-Hajj Abid and immediately started to form secret groups. What is remarkable in al-Qassam's activities is his advanced organisational intelligence and his steel-strong patience. In 1929, he refused to be rushed into announcing that he was under arms and, in spite of the fact that this refusal led to a split in the organisation, it did succeed in holding together and remaining secret.

According to a well-known Qassamist<sup>9</sup>, al-Qassam programmed his revolt in three stages, psychological preparation and the dissemination of a revolutionary spirit, the formation of secret groups, the formation of committees to collect contributions and

<sup>9</sup> Yasin, Subhi. Op. cit., pp. 22-23.

The feudal-clerical leaderships proceeded to impose themselves at the head of the movement of the masses. To do this they took advantage of the meagreness of the Arab urban bourgeoisie, and of the conflict which was, to a certain extent, boiling up between them and British colonialism, which had established its influence through its alliance with the Zionist movement; of their religious attributes, of the small size of the Arab proletariat and the meagreness of its Communist Party, which was not only under the control of Jewish leaders, but its Arab elements had been subjected to oppression and intimidation by the feudal leadership ever since the early twenties. It was against this complicated background, in which the interlocked and extremely complicated conflicts were flaring up, that the 1936 revolt came to the forefront in the history of Palestine.

## THE REVOLT

Historians are at odds with each other with regard to the different incidents that took place in various places as the reason for the outbreak of the 1936 revolt. According to Yehuda Bauer, “the incident that is commonly regarded as the start of the 1936 disturbances” occurred on 19 April 1936, when Palestinian Arab crowds in Jaffa attacked Jewish passers-by.<sup>1</sup>

In the view of Isa al-Sifri<sup>2</sup>, Salih Mas’ud Buwaysir<sup>3</sup> and Subhi Yasin<sup>4</sup>, the first spark was lit when an unknown group of Palestinian Arabs (Subhi Yasin describes it as a Qassamist group including Farhan al-Sa’udi and Mahmud Dairawi) ambushed 15 cars on the road from Anabta and the Nur Shams prison, robbed their Jewish and Arab passengers alike of their money, while one of the three members of the group made a short speech to the Palestinian Arabs, who formed the majority of the passengers, in which, according to al-Sifri, he said, “We are taking your money so that we can fight the enemy and defend you.”<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Abd al-Wahhab al-Kayyali thinks that the first spark was lit before that in February 1936 when an armed band of Palestinian Arabs surrounded a school which Jewish contractors were building in Haifa, employing Jewish-only labour.<sup>6</sup> But all sources rightly believe that the Qassamist rising, sparked off by Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam was the real start of the 1936 revolt.

However, the report of the Royal Commission (Lord Peel) which Yehuda Bauer regards as one of the more authoritative sources written about the Palestine problem, sidesteps (ignores) these immediate causes for the outbreak of the revolt, and attributes the outbreak to two main causes: the Arabs’ desire to win national independence and their aversion to, and fear of, the establishment of the “Jewish national home” in Palestine. It is not difficult to see that these two causes are really only one, and the words in which they are couched are inflated and convey no precise meaning. However, Lord

---

1 Yehuda Bauer, Op. cit. p. 49

2 Sifri, Issa. *Arab Palestine Under the Mandate & Zionism*. The New Palestine Bookshop. Jaffa, 1937. Vol. II p. 10

3 *Palestinian Struggle over half a century*, by Saleh Bouyissir. al-Fatah House, Beirut, p. 180.

4 *The Great Arab Revolution in Palestine*. al-Hana House, Damascus. Subhir Yasmine, p. 30

5 Bouyissir, Op. cit., p. 181.

6 Kayyali, Op. cit., p. 302.

Peel mentions what he calls “secondary factors” which contributed to the outbreak of the “disturbances” These are:<sup>7</sup>

- The spread of the Arab nationalist spirit outside Palestine
- Increasing Jewish immigration since 1933
- The fact that the Jews were able to influence public opinion in Britain
- The lack of Palestinian Arab confidence in the good intentions of the British government
- The Palestinian Arabs’ fear of continued land purchases by Jews
- The fact that the ultimate objectives of the Mandatory government were not clear

The way the then-leadership of the Palestinian national movement understood the causes can be deduced from the three slogans with which it adorned all its demands. These were:<sup>8</sup>

1. An immediate stop to Jewish immigration
2. Prohibition of the transfer of the ownership of Palestinian Arab lands to Jewish settlers
3. The establishment of a democratic government in which Palestinian Arabs would have the largest share in conformity with their numerical superiority

But these slogans, in the bombastic versions in which they were repeated, were quite incapable of expressing the real situation, and in fact to a great extent, all they did was to perpetuate the control of the feudal leadership over the nationalist movement. The real cause of the revolt was the fact that the acute conflicts involved in the transformation of Palestinian society from an Arab agricultural-feudal-clerical one into a Zionist (Western) industrial bourgeois one, had reached their climax, as we have already seen.

The process of establishing the roots of colonialism and transforming it from a British mandate into Zionist settler colonialism as we have seen, reached its climax in the mid-1930s, and in fact, the leadership of the Palestinian nationalist movement was obliged to adopt a certain form of armed struggle because it was no longer capable of exercising its leadership at a time when the conflict had reached decisive proportions. A variety of conflicting factors played a role in inducing the Palestinian then-leadership to adopt the form of armed struggle – firstly: the Izz al-Din al-Qassam movement; secondly: the series of failures sustained by this leadership at a time when they were at the helm of the mass movement, even with regard to the minor and partial demands that the colonialists did not usually hesitate to yield to, in the hope of

---

7 Collection. p. 96.

8 Hadawi. Op. cit., p. 38.