

## CHAPTER II

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MAJLESIYOUN'S LEADERSHIP OF ARAB PALESTINE

After World War I, political fragmentation became a very serious problem in the Arab World. In addition to the traditional socio-political divisions, which had characterized Arab society (i.e., the varieties of localism, parochialism and clannism), there was now new political entities created by the European powers. In time, these entities began to demand from the populace absolute loyalty as well as total obedience to their institutions and symbols of authority. The new colonial creations prompted the development of national liberation movements whose object was the assertion of independence through the expulsion of the colonial powers and the establishment of Arab sovereignty over Arab land.

In Palestine, the quest for independence and political freedom took a slightly different form than in the neighboring Arab states. Palestinian Arabs had to deal with a second threat to their future independence and territorial sovereignty and this threat was embodied in the goals and aspirations of Jewish Zionism. Of course, the Zionist movement had obtained, in 1917, the Balfour Declaration from the British Government promising them the creation of "a Jewish national home in Palestine." It is impossible to understand the Palestinian national movement without the constant reminder that the movement was profoundly influenced, and, to a certain degree, shaped by its long and difficult struggle with the Zionists.

One would expect that the ferocity of the struggle between the Palestinian Arabs on the one hand and the Zionists and their British ally on the other would unite the Palestinian Arab movement and would consolidate its forces to make it a more formidable force. Yet, unfortunately, the Palestinian Arabs could not escape their traditional rivalries. The Palestinian national movement fell victim to internal divisions and political fragmentations. At times, Arabs fought Arabs while their Zionist enemy confronted them with unusual stubbornness and determination to succeed in their ultimate goal of creating a Jewish state in Palestine.

## The Palestine Movement in its Early Stages of Development

Initially, the British governed Palestine through a military administration known as Occupied Enemy Territory Administration. In 1917, this administration was headed by Field Marshal Lord Allenby assisted by his personal appointee General Clayton (Later Sir Gilbert) as Chief political officer and Sir Ronald Storrs as Governor of Jerusalem.(1) Of course, during its military occupation, Palestine continued to be governed by the laws of the Ottoman Empire, the predecessor State in Palestine, in accordance with the requirements of International law.

During this period of military rule, 1917-1920, a number of political groups and associations appeared at the scene. They were the rudiments of the nascent movement which later became the official leadership of Arab Palestine. These clubs were offshoots of their Syrian prototype Nadi Filastine (The Palestine Club) which was organized in 1919 in Damascus to press upon the government of King Faisal the Palestine cause.(2) The Club was led by Shaykh Abd el-Qader Muzaffar and it included a number of young Palestinian activists like Haj Amin Al-Husseini, Izzat Darwazah, Rushdial-Shawwa and Salim Abdul Rahman al Haj Ibrahim, whose names later became well known among the leaders of Palestine.(3)

Similar political groups were organized in the towns of Palestine but only three of them had any appreciable impact upon political events in Palestine: The Muslim-Christian Association, the Arab Club (Al-Nadi al-Arabi), and the Literary Society (Al-Muntada al-Arabi).

The Muslim-Christian Association promoted the principle of political cooperation between the Muslims and Christians of Palestine for the purpose of forging unity and organizing a political front to deal with the Zionist enemy. Its membership came mainly from the ranks of the political elites of Urban Palestine, who aspired to retain the political influence they had secured under the Ottoman Empire which preceded the new British military administration. They also hoped the Arabs would obtain an appreciable measure of justice under British rule and that the new administration would honor British commitments made to the Arabs in the well-known Hussein-McMahon correspondence of 1915.(4)

The two other political groups, the Arab club and the Literary Society were similar to the first in that their recruits were mainly from the ranks of urban elites. But they were different in many other respects. For one thing, they rejected the creation of a British mandate in Palestine and desired instead to become part of Faisal's Syrian Kingdom.

However, the more interesting aspect of the two organizations was their being the first political manifestation of the Husseini-Nashahsibi rivalry which, later, would divide the Palestinian national movement. Until this time, the two great Jerusalem families competed by means of the traditional methods which knew very little about modern political organization. The Husseinis led the Arab club and the Nasashibis led the Literary Society. According to Zionist sources, the two groups were in contact with the more radical secret organizations known as al-Fidai (Self-Sacrificer) and al-Ikha' Wal 'Afaf (Brotherhood and Purity). These latter groups indulged in political agitation mainly in the cities of Jaffa and Nablus and they condoned the use of terrorism as a political weapon in the last resort.(5) (No evidence was provided to prove that they did resort to terrorism).

### **The Palestinian Congresses**

The initial period in the development of the Palestine Arab movement, from about 1919 until 1934, was marked by the convening of a number of congresses.(6) These Congresses, like the political clubs of Palestine, drew their inspiration from the General Syrian Congress of which they were initially a part. The Syrian Congress was organized in 1919 and became widely recognized as the nationalist leadership of geographic Syria, including what later became Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, and the present day Syrian Republic.(7) This was the congress that elected Amir Faisal, the actual leader of the 1916 Arab Revolt, as king of a United Syrian state.

An all-Palestine Congress was held in Jerusalem between January 27 and February 10, 1919, to formulate a common policy, called "program", on Palestine to advise Faisal while attending the Paris Peace Conference on behalf of the Arabs. The Jerusalem Congress was presided over by 'Aref Pasha al-Dajani who was, at the time, the president of the Jerusalem branch of the Muslim-Christian Association mentioned earlier. (Representatives of the Association also attended the General Syrian Congress in Damascus.)(8)

The Jerusalem Congress, resolved to reject political Zionism and to accept British assistance on condition such assistance would not impinge upon Sovereignty in Palestine.(9) Basically, the Congress wanted Palestine to be part of an independent Syrian State to be governed by Faisal of the Hashemite family. It also preferred U.S. political tutelage, should this be necessary, or British tutelage, as a second choice, but under no circumstances would the Congress accept French political guardianship.

Late in 1919, the Higher Committee, al-Lajneh al-'Ulya, was formed at a special congress in Haifa. Soon, branches of this committee were organized in Jerusalem, Nablus and Haifa, and they were granted jurisdiction over other political groups such as the Arab club, the Literary Society, the Muslim-Christian Association, the Self-Sacrificers and the Greek Orthodox Club.(10) The president of the Higher Committee was Rashid al-Haj Ibrahim of the Haifa Muslim-Christian Association.

Another Congress was held in Haifa on December 14, 1920, and it consisted mainly of the then existing political clubs and associations as well as the Palestinian members of the General Syrian Congress. This Congress was the third of its kind in the sense that it was an offshoot of the first, which met in Damascus in 1919, and the second, which met in Haifa in 1919.(11)

It was at this Third Congress that the Arab Executive Committee was elected with Mousa Kazim al-Husseini as its head and 'Aref Pasha al-Dajani as his deputy.(12) The membership of the Third Congress was exclusively Palestinian, an indication that Palestine had become a separate political entity with its specific political needs and requirements.

Collectively, the Executive Committee was to become the official leadership of Arab Palestine. It consisted of nine members, who were to carry the work between the plenary meetings of the Congress, while a permanent Secretariat was organized in Jerusalem to take charge of the day-to-day aspects of Palestinian politics. Basically, members of the Executive came from the landowning families of Palestine. In addition to Musa Kazim Pasha and 'Aref Pasha, mentioned above, there were Shaykh 'Abd al-Latif al-Haj Ibrahim of Tulkarem, Shaykh Taji al-Farouqi of Ramleh, al-Haj Tawfiq Hammad of Nablus, 'Abd al-Fattah al-Sa'adi of Acre, Ibrahim Shammass, and Ya'qub Bardakash. The last two were Arab Christians, one from Jerusalem and one from Jaffa.(13)

The Third Congress passed resolutions demanding self-determination for the Arabs of Palestine and the establishment of an Arab government. Obviously, the Third Congress was preoccupied solely with the problem of Palestine, Its connection with Syria was becoming more symbolic than real.

The same was true with the Fourth Arab Congress which was held in May 1921 in Jerusalem. This Congress resolved to send a Palestinian delegation to London to make a plea for the Arab Palestinian cause, The delegation did go to London where it did no more than correspond with the Colonial Secretary, Winston Churchill.(14) The gist of the delegation's position was not to cooperate with the British Government in drafting a constitutional document for Palestine unless the

policy of creating a Jewish national home in Palestine was altered.(15) This was probably why a meeting with Churchill never took place and the Palestinian nationalist movement was becoming more radicalized.

### **The Emergence of the Husseinis As the Leading Family of Palestine**

To understand Palestinian Arab politics one must be familiar with the social structure of Palestinian society, and the position of influence the great families of Palestine had during the British mandate, specifically from shortly after World War I until the establishment of the Jewish State in 1948. At the outset, one must keep in mind that the politics of Palestine was largely the politics of the big families who derived their influence mostly from their ownership of vast tracks of agricultural land.

### **The Social Division**

The Arab Muslims of Palestine, who constituted the vast majority of the country's population, were divided into three distinct social groups: the beduins, the rural people, (usually referred to as the fallahin, and the urban population.

The beduin population concentrated mostly in the southern part of the country but were found in appreciable numbers in the Jordan Valley. In 1922, according to the official census, there were about 60,000 beduins in Palestine, or about 10 percent of the total population.(16) In general, the beduins stood outside the society as a whole, not fully integrated into the mainstream of political life.(17) They usually resisted interference in their internal affairs, disliked centralized political authority, and strongly opposed any restrictions upon their freedom of movement.(18) According to one source, the traditional leadership of Arab Palestine used the beduins to obstruct Jewish efforts to colonize the southern part of the country.(19)

The fallahin were mostly poverty stricken people, illiterate, and village oriented even when they lived in urban centers.(20) At the end of 1946, less than two years before the establishment of the state of Israel, they numbered 747,970 individuals or 65.44 percent of the total Arab population. They lived in about 865 villages scattered throughout the country.(21) According to the 1922 official census of Palestine, they numbered 430,000. Probably, one percent of them were wealthy landlords, half of them were middle and small land owners and the rest, about 200,000 people, were wage earners.(22) In the rural areas, the traditional

rivalries involved the extended families, known as the hamulas, and the clans.(23) One aspect of the rivalry was historical, involving the Qaysis and the Yamanis.(24) According to R. Patai, the rivalry originated in the tribal feuds of North and South Arabia which spread into the whole of Arabia as well as the fertile Crescent.(25) In the 1920's and 1930's, the rivalry affected the Palestinians but Western sources exaggerated its strength and political implications.

The Urban population numbered much less than the rural, but it was politically the more active, playing a significant role in the national movement of Palestine.

At the bottom of the social ladder of the urban society of Palestine, there was the proletariat class, which usually contained two substrata. The first included the multitude of the unemployed and servants doing menial work at the homes of the well-to-do and in the streets as venders, porters, and helpers. The second included the impoverished unskilled workers, boatmen and artisans.(26) They usually lived in the old part of the cities and were mostly illiterate. Politically, they provided the human element needed for agitation, demonstrations, protesting crowds, mobs and even in spontaneous riots and violent action.

Up the social ladder there was the middle class which consisted of minor government officials, teachers, shopkeepers, wholesale merchants and the more affluent artisans.(27) Most of this small middle class came to being during the mandate period of Palestinian history, when the British began to introduce European economic activities and new modes of production.(28) A large proportion of this class was the Christian Arabs and other minorities many of whom were educated in missionary schools.

The urban upper class was the center of political power and both the national and local leadership came from its ranks. Although members of this class lived in the city many of them owned a lot of land in the villages. They were absentee landlords who came from Palestine's big families. Some members of this class were high officials in the religious hierarchy who derived a great deal of influence from their role as patrons of the major religious festivals of which the Nabi Musa (the prophet Moses) was the most important.

Members of the urban upper class, usually known to Westerners as the effendi class, were usually literate and well-educated in the "outward forms of European culture."(29) The social cohesion, which characterized this class for a long time, was somewhat impaired by the political rivalries which involved the big families of Palestine whose power and influence during the twenties and the thirties of this century could not be underestimated. In Jerusalem, the capital of Palestine, the rivalry between the Husseinis and the Nashashibis was typical. The power and

influence of these two families predated the British mandate when the Ottoman state helped them extend their influence over the peasant class and the rural areas.(30)

It should be remembered that the divisions and rivalries which characterized relations among big families of Palestine were in part a by-product of a rigid social structure. According to J.C. Hurewitz, "the Muslim community was atomized by clannish separatism."(31) The clan was the social class' basic unit. Headed by a shaykh, the clan in the small village aligned itself with a particular clan in the larger village and also with a clan in the town or city where the powerful landowning families always resided as absentee landlords.

As mentioned earlier, rivalries among the big families were old going back to the Qaysi and Yamani rivalries of pre-Islamic time.(32) The latter divisions had a geographic dimension involving north Arabia, where Qaysi's power rested, and south Arabia where Yamani's influence extended. Yet Palestinian factionalism carried with it no ideological connotations, for the simple reason that big families competed for the control of existing resources and did not aim at changing the social structure.(33) In Jerusalem, as elsewhere in Palestine, ideology and politics rarely went together. In fact, the Palestinian national movement never manifested genuine ideolo-gical inclination. At any rate, prior to 1948, family feuds and factional politics were responsible for the failure of Palestinians to successfully challenge the Zionist movement in its attempt to create a Jewish state.(34)

### **The Hussein Family**

In a sense, the history of Palestine's Arab nationalism in the 1920's and 1930's is the history of the Husseinis and Nahashibis, the two main families of Jerusalem. Although their differences were partly personal and partly related to policy,(35) there were institutional forms and terminologies involved in the competition for power and influence. The Husseinis became identified with the Supreme Moslem (SMC) and their political supporters became known as the Majlesiyoun, meaning those who supported the SMC as the focal point of Palestinian leadership. Since the 1920's, but especially during the 1930's, those who supported the SMC also supported the Husseinis, and there was a clear understanding that the Majlesiyoun were in fact pro-Husseinis. The close identification of the two meant that the family must always be in control of the SMC.

There seems to be a great deal of controversy and uncertainty regarding the origin of the Husseinis. The family itself traces its origin to the prophet

Mohammed, specifically to Hussein ibin Ali Abi Talib the grandson of the prophet through his daughter Fatima. Originally from the Arabian Peninsula, the Husseinis believe they came to Jerusalem about 800 years ago.(36) Their claim is widely accepted by the Arabs of Palestine. However, one source refutes their claim and argues that the "main branch of the family was not of Palestinian origin, they were the Al Aswads (the Blacks) from the Yemen."(37) They acquired social status as a result of a marriage between one member of the family (the Aswads) and another wealthy (landowning) family from Abu Ghosh.(38) Later, one male member of the Aswad family married a female from another family called al-Husseini who claimed descent from Hussein, the son of Ali, the fourth Caliph, and Fatima, the daughter of the prophet. Contrary to Moslem custom the Aswad assumed his wife's family name so as to gain social prestige and wealth. It was Mustafa, the grand father of Haj Amin, the future leader of Palestine, who dropped the Aswad and kept the Hussein in his family name.(39) Mustafa developed good relations with the Ottoman Turks and in the 1890's he obtained the highly prestigious post of "Mufti of Jerusalem."

The Hussein family held the position of mufti of Jerusalem since the middle of the nineteenth century. When Jerusalem became a municipality in 1877, the family had to compete with the Khalidis and Alamis for the control of the position of mayor.(40) Members of the family also held high positions in the Ottoman administration at the subdistrict, district and central (in Istanbul) levels.(41) These positions enhanced their social prestige and political influence. Of course, the post of mufti was the most prestigious because it was a religious position in a religiously significant place. Furthermore, its holder automatically became the central figure at the important Nabi Mousa celebrations.(42)

The Husseinis acquired something of a hereditary title to the office of mufti of Jerusalem. Under the Ottomans, the occupant of the office was the governor's advisor on matters involving the religious laws known as the Shari'a.(43)

Ultimately, however, the basis of Hussein social and political prestige and influence was their wealth, especially the large tracts of land they owned in southern Palestine.(44) One source estimated that the family owned 50,000 dunums (1 dunum = 1/4 of an acre) in Jericho, Ramallah, Liddah (Iod) and Ramlah.(45)

## Haj Amin Al-Husseini

In the 1920's, the Husseinis were fast becoming the most powerful family in Palestine. A member of the family by the name of Haj Amin was appointed by the British as the mufti of Jerusalem. Consequently, he became the leader of the family and ultimately the leader of the Palestine national movement. By the mid 1930's Haj Amin became the undisputed leader of Arab Palestine, and until the establishment of Israel in 1948, he was its most popular leader.

Amin was born in Jerusalem in 1896. His father was Shaykh Mohammed Tahir al-Husseini, who was also the mufti of Jerusalem during the last decade of the nineteenth century.(46) In 1912, the son, Amin, finished his high school education and went to Cairo to study religious law at the Azhar University, the best known institution of higher education for religious studies in the Moslem World. While at Azhar, he fell under the influence of the well-known Islamic reformer Rashid Rida, who at the time propagated the ideas of Afghani, another Islamic reformer of Persian origin.(47)

In 1913, Amin went to Mecca on a Pilgrimage. As in the case of all pilgrims, he acquired the honorific title of Haj which became part of his name ever since. When World War I came in 1914, he joined the Ottoman Turkish army as a lieutenant and was stationed in the Izmir province. In 1917, he returned to his native town Jerusalem and became politically active opposing and protesting the imposition of a British mandate on Palestine, particularly, because the mandate carried with it a Zionist policy which Arabs deemed detrimental to their national interest. When the Arab Revolt of 1916 became a full scale war against the Turks he joined it and he became closely associated with its leader, prince Faisal. In 1919, he became active in the General Syrian Congress, mentioned earlier, and he was the person to coordinate Congress' relation with the nationalist movement in Palestine.(48)

After he returned to Jerusalem, he taught at al-Rashidiyyah and Rawdat al-Ma'aref schools while seeking "the limelight of public life" by writing in the local newspaper Suriyah al-Janubiyah (Southern Syria) and addressing public crowds.(49) He was active in the Arab club, mentioned earlier, which had become a Hussein political strong hold. The club advocated union with Syria and agitated against British domination of Palestine. Haj Amin, as early as 1919, showed tremendous dislike for Zionist ambition and British policy. In his opposition to both, he showed considerable organizational and leadership abilities.

His political activity got him in trouble with the British authorities. On April 4, 1920, at the festival of Nabi Mousa, riots broke out and there were many Arab and

Jewish casualties for which a British military trial was held and Haj Amin, along with others, was charged for inciting the riots which caused the injuries. Amin's articles in the newspaper Southern Syria were, according to a Zionist source, inflammatory creating an atmosphere of uncontrolled excitement. He and Aref el-Aref, the editor of the same paper, were sentenced in absentia to ten years of imprisonment. Haj Amin had managed to leave the country for Damascus where he continued his political activity in the service of Prince Faisal. However, when in June 1920 the French forced Faisal out of Damascus, Haj Amin went to Transjordan where, two months later, he received a pardon from Sir Herbert Samuel, the High Commissioner of Palestine, as a result of Arab pleas on his behalf. Soon after he returned to Jerusalem, in 1921, the High Commissioner appointed him mufti of Jerusalem. At the time, he was twenty six years old.

As Mufti Of Jerusalem

The position of mufti of Jerusalem carries with it a great deal of power and prestige. There were mufties in almost every city and town, but because of the religious and political significance of Jerusalem, its mufti outranked all other muftis. This is why he was called the grand mufti, something like a head mufti.

The mufti's job is to issue a fatwa which is a ruling that a certain practice, or a certain situation, is not contrary to religious teachings or religious law. He also issues dispensations tolerating certain practices or situations, whose religious consistency or conformity is questionable. It is obvious that the position of mufti is a purely religious position. In a religious or sectarian society, like the Muslim society, the holder of the position can wield tremendous power. Under certain circumstances, a mufti can misuse his power and become the source of religious authority by validating practices which are clearly inconsistent with the religious law and by interfering in religious matters outside his traditional jurisdiction. (50)

In the 1920's and 1930's, the muftis not only possessed high prestige in the community but many of them acquired immense political influence and power. The grand mufti of Jerusalem was considered a sort of super mufti, a head mufti, who, although has no authority over muftis in other towns, exercised informal and extra-legal powers greater than his position would require.

At any rate, the way Haj Amin came to hold this position was very controversial because it involved realpolitik. At the time of British occupation of "Southern Syria" (Palestine), the Husseini family was already the most influential in the holy city. The mayor lame from its ranks. He was Mousa Kazem Pasha al-Husseini, a leading figure of his time. The mufti of Jerusalem was also a Husseini. He was Kamal al-Husseini, Haj Amin's half brother. The British got along with the

mufti much better than they did with the mayor. The latter was removed from office in 1920 on account of an anti-British political speech he had made earlier and in his place Raghīb Nashashibi was appointed.(51) Of course, the Nashashibis were the Husseinis main rival clan during the British mandate. Kamal, the mufti, died in March 1920 and the British had to appoint a replacement for him. As mentioned earlier, the British liked Kamal. In fact, they expanded his official duties beyond the traditional duties assigned to his office.

Under the traditional rules of international law, the British as the occupation authority, were obligated to enforce Ottoman Law in areas unrelated to military security. Consequently, they had to follow Ottoman Laws which governed the appointment of the mufti. These laws stipulated that the mufti be elected by a sort of electoral college(52) consisting of the 'Ulema (scholars in religious affairs), the imams (leaders of the Friday prayers), the Khatibs (those who deliver the Friday "Sermons"), members of the Jerusalem municipal Council, and members of the local administration council.(53)

In the election which was held on April 12, 1921, the Nashashibis threw their weight behind the candidacy of Shaykh Husam al-Din Jarallah. To the surprise of every one, especially the British themselves, Jarallah came on top of the list and Haj Amin came fourth. Since the law required the appointment of the mufti from among the top three on the list of winners, Haj Amin was out of the running.(54) (A Khalidi came second and a Budeiri came third).

Matters were further complicated by the fact Haj Amin was neither a member of the religious 'ulamas nor a true shaykh because he never completed his study at the Azhar University.(55) Yet the British preferred Haj Amin, partly because they desired to balance clan interests, a policy they believed was necessary to maintain political control. Since the mayoralty was in the hands of the Nashashibis, they wanted a Husseinis to occupy the second most prestigious job, that of mufti. Perhaps, they were encouraged by the fact that the late mufti was quite accommodating and hoped his brother Amin would be cooperative even though the latter had earlier been sentenced by a British military court. However, it seems the British did not have much difficulty persuading Jarallah to withdraw from the race leaving Haj Amin in third place, and, consequently, eligible to be selected mufti. Of course, the job went for Haj Amin.

There were other mitigating circumstances favoring Haj Amin in addition to British support. It seems he was the more popular candidate, at least many high ranking British officials thought so. The Husseinis made sure the British understood this by urging people to petition the administration, sign letters, and send

telegrams. Even non-Palestinian Arabs, including Hashemites in Jordan who were not pro-Husseinis, expressed their unqualified support of Haj-Amin. Also, Haj Amin might have gone out of his way to allay the fear of those in the British administration who were concerned about Amin's political record particularly, activities associated with the Nabi Mousa incident of April, 1920. Instrumental in his selection as mufti were Ernest Richmond, First Secretary for Arab Affairs, and Sir Ronald Storrs, the governor of Jerusalem, who, together, were able to persuade Sir Herbert Samuel that Amin was the more popular choice.(56) Nevertheless, although Amin did take the job, an official letter of appointment was never sent to him and his appointment was never published in the official Gazette, as the law required.(57)

Once appointed, Haj Amin lost no time transforming the mufti position into a power house of political influence and social prestige. His real aim was to capture the more important job of President of the Supreme Moslem Council, or the SMC as it was popularly referred to in British official circles.

### **As President of the Supreme Moslem Council**

During the Ottoman Empire, the Islamic endowment known as Waqf and the Shari'a (religious) court fell under the jurisdiction of a Turkish official holding the title of Shaykh al-Islam. The defeat of the Ottoman state in World War I left the Waqf and Shari'a courts in Palestine without their central administration and the British had to provide the substitute for it. During the military administration, 1917-1920, the courts were put under a Director General who reported to the Senior Judicial Officer,(58) and the Waqf was controlled by the officer in charge of finances. When the civil administration replaced the military administration in 1920, these arrangements were deemed insufficient in view of the fact the new administration was to be, more or less, permanent. Since the British were non-Muslims and the Muslims were the majority in Palestine, quite accustomed to an Islamic state, the arrangements were also considered as unfair. Consequently, the concept of purely Islamic Central institution to take charge of all Islamic affairs became very appealing to the British local administration. In fact, it became almost a necessity in order to avoid the appearance of being unfair to the Muslims who resented putting their religious courts under the authority of a Zionist Jew, Norman Bentwich, who headed the legal department in the British administration of Palestine.

Of course, the Muslims, themselves pushed for the idea in a series of conferences. The proposal for the creation of a Moslem Council originated in the work of a committee composed mainly of 'ulama (Islamic scholars) and set up by a country-wide conference held on November 19, 1920. The British High Commissioner, who was also a Zionist Jew, enthusiastically supported the committee's general proposal but he insisted on one amendment, that the qadis (judges) could not be removed without the government's consent.

There was some opposition, of course, but it was limited mainly to the Nashashibis whose leader Ragheb had become Haj Amin's main rival in the conduct of Palestinian politics. The High Commissioner had suggested that the proposed Islamic Council "be elected by representatives chosen by the Muslim secondary electors to the last Ottoman Parliament.(59) On January 9, 1922, the electors met to elect Rais al-'Ulama who was to become president of the Supreme Moslem Council (to be known, henceforth, as the SMC), and four other council members, two representing the Sanjak (district) of Jerusalem and one representing each of the other two Sanjaks, that of Acre and that of Nablus.(60) As was expected, Haj Amin easily won the presidency of the SMC while the opposition led by Ragheb was waging a desperate and unsuccessful campaign against him.

In order to understand the bases of Haj Amin's influence and power, one should look at the SMC's religious duties and functions. These functions were quite broad and encompassed wide range of activities. It controlled Waqf property and finances, appointed its director and staff, dismissed them as well, and supervised, in addition, all local Waqf committees. It also had general supervisory powers over the Shari'a courts, including, albeit with the approval of the government, the appointment and removal of judges. There were at the time eighteen Shari'a courts in Palestine and they employed a total of 250 individuals. (In the case of the religious endowments the SMC employed 592 people in six departments). Also, the SMC administered ten schools and institutions including the Muslim Orphanage House.(61) Finally, it had the important power of appointing Mufties outside Jerusalem, in all cities and towns except Beersheba where the mufti was elected by the local Chiefs. It was not necessary to obtain government approval for these appointments.(62)

It is obvious from the foregoing discussion that the combination of mufti and President of the SMC gave Haj Amin the instruments he needed to eventually become the undisputed political leader of Arab Palestine. The SMC became the focal center of political activities around which the Husseini supporters rallied.

However, Haj Amin made sure he had complete control of this important body while building it up to be the leadership council of the people. Consequently, he secured the key positions on the council, the Awqaf bodies and the schools for members of his own family, while making sure the mu'arada (opposition) got only the minor positions.(63)

His nephew, Jamal, became the SMC's general secretary. Two other Husseinis, Tawfiq Ragheb and Ishaq Darwish, became directors of the Orphanage schools which were financed by the SMC.(64) His brother-in-law Ahmad Ragheb al-Husseini was appointed to the important position of Inspector of the Shari'a courts.(65) Ahmad also audited the SMC's accounts while his son served as a legal counsel to the SMC.(66) Fakhri, another prominent Husseinis, served until 1935, as the SMC's lawyer. Amin's cousin, Munif, became the editor of Al-Jami'a Al-Arabiyyah (the Arab league) which was the mouthpiece of the Husseinis and their political supporters (i.e. the majlesiyoun). Rawdat al-Ma'arif, an SMC school, was headed by Abdul Latif al-Husseini. This school became a Husseinis stronghold where the family agitated to drum up support for its nationalistic activities and policies.(67)

Initially, the British administration was responsible for allowing the SMC to become a powerful body. The law creating the SMC was vague on the question of the president's tenure in office, allowing Haj Amin the advantage of interpreting the law to mean that he was to be President for life. In 1926, when the four positions on the council became vacant, the British did not insist on replacing the president. In addition, the British, particularly the High Commissioner, wanted the SMC to have broad powers, perhaps not realizing the political implications of such a policy. They sincerely believed it was only fair to allow the Muslims complete control of their religious affairs and since the central Islamic institutions had disappeared with the Turkish Empire, the SMC should be allowed to replace them. Furthermore, being a Zionist Jew, Sir Herbert Samuel was very conscious of Muslim and Arab sensitivities with regard to the Balfour Declaration and the new status acquired by the Jews. Soon the Mandate agreement would recognize the Jewish Agency as a public body with important responsibilities and would leave the Arabs without a comparable agency equally recognized. Samuel became more supportive of British effort to broaden the powers of the SMC as the unofficial counterpart of the Jewish Agency.

Since Haj Amin and his family were in full control of the religious institutions of Palestine they were in a position to use these institutions to become politically the most powerful clan in the country. In a traditionally sectarian society as that of

Palestine, politics could very easily become a function of religion. In fact, since in Palestine the foreign ruler was Christian and most people living in the country were Muslims, the relationship of religion to politics was unsurprisingly intimate. Consequently, it was not too difficult for Haj Amin to become, within a short period of time, the undisputed political leader of the Palestinian Arabs.

### **Early Opposition to Haj Amin's Leadership**

Haj Amin's ascendancy to the position of mufti and president of the SMC did not go unchallenged. The Nashashibis, under Ragheb, fought him every step of the way. Although they lost both battles, one should recall that they did win the mayoralty which was not a minor victory. The mayoralty was a very prestigious office which the Nashashibis used to gather around them the anti-Husseinis of Jerusalem and those in the country as whole. They also used it to set themselves up as the rival claimants to the country's political leadership.

Their opposition was not purely personal, or if it were, it did not hesitate to bring out to the open issues of policy and exploit the apparent weaknesses of the Husseinis, whether these weaknesses related to the public behavior of certain members or to the questionable practices of Haj Amin himself.

One such issue involved the Waqf fund which was managed by Haj Amin himself, as president of the Waqf's central committee. The fund showed revenues ranging from a low figure of 53,404,286 Palestinian pounds for the year 1926 to a high figure of 62,578,791 for 1930.(68) The opposition often charged that Haj Amin used the money to enhance his personal prestige and entrench himself in power as the country's political leader. It also complained that he used the money to reward his friends and political supporters and to keep others, particularly his opponents, away from the center of Palestinian politics.

Similar charges were made with regard to the finances of the SMC. As revenues, they were derived from three main sources: rent from its own real estate property, a tax known as "tithe", which was the tenth of the yearly proceeds arising from Waqf lands, and contributions. Income from the first source averaged around 15,000 Palestinian pounds between 1926 and 1931. On the whole, income from the second source was the largest.(69) It ranged from a high of 36,000 Palestinian pounds in 1929 to a low of 5,000 in 1931.(70) As to contributions, those usually come from Muslim or Arab governments, and never were a steady and reliable source. But in some years, they were substantial. In the year 1923-1924, the total sum of 94,952 Palestinian pounds was collected

from Hijaz, Egypt, Iraq and India to renovate the Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem.(71) Most contributions were sent to maintain the holy places and to attend to the welfare of the needy Muslims. Since Haj Amin was in direct control of SMC finances, he was personally held responsible for them. Whether opposition charges against Amin were true or not, we do not know. No court of law had ever passed judgement on their validity.

It must be kept in mind that the rise of Haj Amin to position of leader did not happen without causing divisions within the Hussein family itself. The impression people had of the Husseinis was that the family had a good measure of internal unity and social cohesiveness. Yet the experience was not all together positive, and some negative consequences did result from it, particularly with regard to the traditional leadership and the older generation of Husseinis who felt the young Haj Amin was too obtrusive and cunning. This group was headed by Musa Kazem Pasha who had been the political and moral leader of the family for a long time. Nevertheless, one must not exaggerate the internal schism especially when viewed in the context of Arab culture. Clannish unity becomes stringer in the face of external threats or interests. In case of the Husseinis, the political wounds resulting from Haj Amin's rise to eminence and power, were healed in the internal unity that followed his political victories.

One of the basic weaknesses of the Husseinis was that their geographic location limited initially their influence. Very few of them lived outside the Jerusalem area. Consequently, they had to struggle in order to extend their influence over the whole country. As a strictly urban family their biggest problem was to penetrate, politically, the rural areas which were politically conservative, having traditional loyalties already well established. However, their control of the religious institutions, particularly, the SMC, helped a great deal in establishing contacts and strengthening ties with the villages and the towns. Of course, the rural population, particularly the fallahin (peasants), was strongly inclined towards religion and a religious leadership, like that of Haj Amin, had obvious advantages in politics. Although difficult, the political transformation of religious positions and symbols was not impossible at all. In fact, it became easier as the nationalists began to take issue with, and even battle with, the British occupier of their country and their allies the Zionists who soon would reveal their intention and determination to create a Jewish state in Arab Palestine. The more secularist Nashashibis were never able to penetrate deep into rural Palestine. Their political influence remained urban, among people alienated by the Husseinis. The Hussein's use of patronage and money to install their political allies in position of

influence alienated families who were the local rivals of these allies. Few individuals were alienated because they found their political ambitions unfulfilled on account of Haj Amin's desire to monopolize political activities at the national level. Although very few, a number of political groups were organized around these alienated political figures. These were, for instance, the Arab National Party organized in 1924 around Shakh Suleiman Taji al-Farouqi of Ramleh,(72) the Farmer's Party or Hizb al-Zurr'a organized by Mousa Hdeib, and the Moslem National Council.(73)

Apparently, there were times when opposition to the Majlesiyoun (supporters of SMC or the Pro-Husseinis) became very desperate. Opponents of the mufti (Haj Amin) charged that the Husseinis were collaborators hiding behind nationalist slogans and nationalistic political rhetoric. The charge was based on the fact that there were many Husseinis working in the mandate (British) government of Palestine. The assumption was made that Haj Amin used his religious position to get his relatives into the government and that he was not a true nationalist. Some made an issue of the fact that Haj Amin's salary as mufti and president of the SMC was paid by the government and that when Haj Amin was appointed mufti he tried to bargain for a high salary. Before he was appointed mufti, the argument goes, Haj Amin was very friendly with the British. Few claimed that he had promised to cooperate if appointed mufti and head of the SMC.

Haj Amin might have done some of these things he was accused of, but there was no evidence that he had betrayed the nationalist movement by making improper promises to the British. Indeed his salaries were, by the standard of the time, very high,(74) but this did not mean he was bought by the British. One might have found evidence that the mufti was not yet radicalized by the events of the early 1920's, but there was ample evidence that he had become uncompromising during the riots of 1929. By the 1930's, there was no question that Haj Amin had become the most stubborn enemy the British had in Palestine. Of course, by then, Haj Amin and the Palestinian national movement were one and the same. Politically, both had crossed the point of no return.

**FOOTNOTES**

(1) H. Luke and E. Roach, The Handbook of Palestine and Transjordan, London, 1934, p. 31.

(2) Ann Lesch, The Frustration of a Nationalist Movement, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1973, p. 182.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Ibid., p. 184.

(5) Zionist Intelligence Report, (henceforth ZIR), 20 March, Central Zionist Archives (henceforth CZA): Z4/16004, Zionist Intelligence Report, Fall 1919, CZA: Z4/3886/I.

(6) Palestine Government, A Survey of Palestine for the Information of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, vol. II, Jerusalem, 1946, p. 946.

(7) For a full text of the Syrian Congress resolutions, see for example George Antonius, The Arab Awakening, pp. 440-42.

(8) A Survey of Palestine, vol. II, p. 946.

(9) Lesch, Frustration, p. 188.

(10) ZIR, January 1920, CZA: Z4/3886/I.

(11) John Marlowe, The Seat of Pilate, London, 1959, p. 89, see also Survey of Palestine, vol. II, p. 946.

(12) Maurice Pearlman, "The Political Organization of the Arabs of Palestine", Palestine Affairs, vol. II, No. 5, May 1947, p. 53, see also, Mohammed I. Darwazah, Al-Qadiyyah al-Filastiniyah fi 68 Mukhtalaf Marahiluha (The Palestinian Problem in its different periods). vol. I, Beirut, 1959, pp. 37-38.

(13) Israel State Archives (henceforth ISA): Chief Secretary's Papers political 2221, 2/244.

(14) Survey of Palestine, vol. II, p. 946, see also cmd. 1700.

(15) For a full text of the letters, see Great Britain, Correspondence with the Palestine Arab Delegation and the Zionist Organization, cmd. 1700, June 1922, p. 2. However, for a full report of the conference which was held at the Colonial office on August 12, 1921, see Akram Zu'aitir, Watha'iq al-Haraka al-Wataniyyeh al-Filastiniyah: 1917-1939 (Documents on the Palestine National Movement: 1917-1939), Beirut, 1979, pp. 118-126.

(16) As quoted in M. Hafez Ya'coub, Nathra Jadidah Ila Tarikh al-Qadiyyah al-Filastiniyyah: 1919-1948, (A New Look at the Palestinian Problem: 1919-1948),

Beirut 1973, p. 46. See also, Naji 'Alush, Al-Muqawamah al-'Arabiyya fi Filastine: 1917-1948, (Arab National Movement in Palestine 1917-1948), Acre, 1979, pp. 9-10.

(17) J.C. Hurewitz, The Struggle for Palestine, p. 35.

(18) Rony E. Gabbay, A Political Study of the Arab-Jewish Conflict, Geneva, 1959, p. 9.

(19) A. Granott, The Land System in Palestine: History and Structure, London, 1952, p. 164.

(20) Lesch, Frustrations, p. 151.

(21) Gabbay, Political Study, p. 9.

(22) Ya'coub, Nathra Hadidah, pp. 43-46.

(23) Lutf Ghantous, "Athar al-Tarkib Al-Tabakki fi Qadiyyat Filastine", (The impact of class structure on the Palestinian problem), Dirasat Arabiyyah (Arab Studies), No. 1, Beirut, 1965, p. 5.

(24) H. Finn, Palestine Peasantry, London, 1923, pp. 244-46, and for an elaborate study on the Qaysi-Yamani rivalry, see Mordechai 'Abir, "Local Leadership and Early Reforms in Palestine: 1800-1834", as quoted in Moshe Ma'oz, Studies on Palestine During the Ottoman Period. Jerusalem, 1975, pp. 288-289.

(25) Raphael Patai, Golden River to Golden Road: Society, Culture and Change in the Middle East, 2nd ed. pp. 182-184, see also Philip K. Hitti, History of the Arabs, London, 1937, pp. 280-281.

(26) Taysir Nashif, "Palestinian Arab and Jewish Leadership in the Mandate Period", Journal of Palestine Studies, vol. IV. No. 4, Summer 1977, p. 114.

(27) Ibid.

(28) S.B. Himadeh, The Economic Organization of Palestine. Beirut, 1938, p. 38.

(29) Cmd. 5479, 1937, p. 44.

(30) R.W. Thompson, Progress and the Pathos, London, 1952, p. 13.

(31) Hurewitz, Struggle for Palestine, p. 35.

(32) N. Johnson, Islam and the Politics of Meaning in Palestinian Nationalism, London, 1982, pp. 12-13, for a more detailed study on the Qaysi-Yamani rivalries, see E. Haddad, "Political 70 Parties in Syria and Palestine", Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society I, 1, 1920, p. 212.

(33) H. Alavi, "Peasant Classes and Primordial Loyalties", Journal of Peasant Studies, vol. I, 1973, p. 44.

(34) Salim Tamari, "Factionalism and Class Formation in Recent Palestinian History", as quoted in Roger Owen's Studies in Economic and Social History of Palestine in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, St. Anthony's, London, 1981.

(35) John Marlowe, Rebellion in Palestine, London, 1946, p. 118.

(36) This information has been gathered from several Arabic books that trace the origins of the Husseini family. A good source will be Aref el-Aref's, Al-Mufassal fi Tarikh al-Quds (A Detailed History of Jerusalem), Jerusalem, 1961.

(37) Maurice Pearlman, Mufti of Jerusalem, London, 1937, p. 10.

(38) Joseph B. Schechtman, The Mufti and the Fuehrer, London, 1965, p. 16.

(39) Ibid.

(40) Yeshoa Porath, The Emergence of the Palestinian Arab National Movement, 1918-1929, London, 1974, p. 13.

(41) Ibid.

(42) Ihsan al-Nimer, Tarikh Jabal Nablus wa al-Balqa, vol. II, (The History of Nablus mountain and Balqa), Nablus, 1961, p. 405.

(43) Norman and Helen Bentwich, Mandate Memories: 1918-1948, p. 189.

(44) Hurewitz, The Struggle for Palestine, p. 58.

(45) Yuval A. Ohanna, The Internal Struggle within the Palestinian Movement 1929-1939, Tel-Aviv, 1981, pp. 35-37.

(46) Bayan Al-Hout, Al-Qaiyadat wa al-Mou'assassat al-Siyasiyyeh fi Filastin 1917-1948, (The Leadership and Political Organization in Palestine, 1917-1948), Beirut, 1981, pp. 201-202.

(47) Al-Badawi al-Mulatham, Al-Adib, vol. 23, No. 27, Beirut, 1964, p. 109.

(48) Ohanna, Internal Struggle, p. 38.

(49) Schechtman, Mufti and Fuehrer, pp. 18-19.

(50) Bayan Al-Hout, Qiyadat wa al-Mou'assassat, p-. 201-204.

(51) 'Alush, Al-Maqawamah al-Arabiyyah, p. 52.

(52) Elie Kedourie, "Sir Herbert Samuel and the Government of Palestine", Middle Eastern Studies, vol. 5, No. 1, January 1969, pp. 49-51.

(53) Schechtman, Mufti and Fuehrer, p. 21.

(54) ISA, CS, File 245, see also al-Hout, Qiyadat wa Mou'assassat p. 204.

(55) Porath, Emergence, p. 155.

(56) Helen and Norman Bentwich, Mandate Memories, p. 191.

(57) Majid Khaddourie, 'Arab Mu'asrin: Adwar al-Qadah fi al-Siyassah, (Contemporary Arabs: The Role of Leaders in Politics), Beirut, 1973, p. 55.

(58) Ohanna, Internal Struggle, pp. 40-42.

(59) Porath, Emergence, p. 196.

- (60) Ibid.
- (61) Bayan al-Hout, Qiyadat wa Mou'assassat, p. 208.
- (62) Porath, Emergence, pp. 197-198.
- (63) Ohanna, Internal Struggle, p. 48.
- (64) Eliyahu Eilat, Haj Muhammad Amin al-Husseini, Tel-Aviv, 1969, p. 48.
- (65) Ibid.
- (66) Ohanna, Internal Struggle, pp. 49-55.
- (67) Aref el-Aref, Al-Mufassal fi Tarikh al-Quds, p. 444.
- (68) Supreme Moslem Shari' Council Statement, showing the actual annual revenue income in thousands of pounds from April 1926-December 1931. Arab Studies Society (ASS), Files 401, 402, 403, 404.
- (69) Ohanna, Internal Struggle, p. 45.
- (70) Ibid., p. 46.
- (71) Ibid.
- (72) Matiel E. Mogannam, The Arab Woman in Palestine, London, 1937, p. 234.
- (73) Kamil Khillah, Filastin wa al-Intidab al-Baritani, 1929-39, (Palestine and the British Mandate, 1922-39), Beirut, 1974, pp. 238-242.
- (74) Ohanna, Internal Struggle, p. 52.