

(pg. 179)

### The Great Arab Revolt (1936-1939)

- \* In April 1939, the Arabs of Palestine initiated even newer and deadlier riots than in past years. This new wave lasted for three years, until the outbreak of World War II in September 1939.
- \* What came to be known as "The Great Revolt" was directed against the Yishuv and the coming state, and their British enablers. It was the expression of the growing Palestinian Arab nationalist movement.

### Background Causes

- \* **The Fifth Aliyah:** What was until then the largest pre-state wave of Jewish immigration to Palestine. The Jewish population doubled, settlement expanded, and the economy became stronger. Arabs feared that the Jews would become the majority and eventually dominate all of Palestine. To that end, the revolt's main purpose was to halt the development of the Yishuv.
- \* **Palestinian Legislature Proposal:** In 1935, Wauchope proposed setting up a Palestinian legislature that was to include eleven Muslim representatives, seven Jews, three Christians, and five British representatives. The proposal was rejected by parliament, with the majority claiming that a governing body with a Muslim/Arab majority would close the gates of the only refuge willing to take in Germany's Jews.
- \* In 1936, when Wauchope's proposal was rejected, the extremist element in Palestine called for protests, strikes, and riots throughout Palestine.
- \* **Growing Extremism:** The 1929 riots strengthened the position of Haj Amin al Husayni. Husayni convinced the Palestinian Arabs that Zionism was a mortal danger to Arab and muslim interests.

(pg. 180)

- \* New organizations and institutions were also founded to provide infrastructure to the new Arab nationalist movement: the Arab Bank and the Arab National Fund, which was created to prevent land sales to Jews and to acquire land for Arab farmers.
- \* Another important development in Palestinian society was the creation in 1930 of the Independence Party (Arb. *Hizb al-Istiqlal*). It was not a party of the masses; rather it represented the urban youths and the educated. Its principles were the annulment of the Balfour Declaration, the end of the British Mandate, cessation of Jewish immigration, prevention of land sales to Jews, and the establishment of an Arab state in Palestine.
- \* The heads of the party likened the mandate to a tree, Zionism being only one of its many branches, and chopping down the tree would eliminate all of its branches. To that end, they focused their energies on fighting the British authorities and the Yishuv.
- \* Arab extremism was also influenced by the Arab press, especially the newspaper "Falistin", which was thoroughly antisemitic. Hate articles and incitement to violence were regular features.
- \* Arab newspapers ran stories about Arab laborers laid off from their jobs for the sake of "Hebrew Labor" and Jewish laborers who were stealing food from the mouths of poor

Arabs. Similar articles described Jews stealing land from Arab fellahin for the sake of "redeeming lands."

- \* In October 1935, a crate containing smuggled Haganah arms hidden in cement mix broke open in broad daylight at Haifa's port. The incident frightened Arabs, as it confirmed their suspicions that the Jews were arming themselves for an impending struggle.
- \* In November 1935, fearing arrest after a British constable had been killed in a skirmish with some of his followers, Sheikh Muhammad Izz ad-Din al-Qassam and twelve of his men engaged in a firefight with a Palestine police patrol. British police launched a manhunt and surrounded al-Qassam in a cave near Ya'bad, where he was killed.

(pg. 181)

- \* The manner of his last stand made him a popular hero and an inspiration to fighters, who in the 1936-1939 Arab Revolt, called themselves "Qassamiyun", followers of al-Qassam. A modern-day terror organization is also named after him.
- \* **Establishment of Other Arab States in the Middle East:** In the 1930's, in an attempt to appease Arab nationalist feelings, France and Britain granted independence to the Egyptian, Lebanese, Syrian, and Jordanian Mandates. This development awakened further nationalist feelings among Palestine's Arabs, but also gave them cause to worry that they alone, among the Arabs of the Middle East, would not receive independence.
- \* **The Rise of Totalitarian Regimes in Europe:** Soviet Russia, Fascist Italy, and Nazi Germany proved that their strong-arm tactics and policies of abrogation of international agreements proved themselves more effective than the weak and inactive Great Britain. This showed the Arabs that they could use violence and terror to attain their demands from Britain, which was desperate for continuing Arab oil support in the tense period leading to World War II.
- \* Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy maintained anti-British stances and used them to forge alliances with disenchanted Arab subjects of Britain. In return, the Arabs hoped that the antisemitic Germans and Italians would fight against the Yishuv.

(pg. 182)

### The Great Revolt

- \* **The General Strike:** In April 1936, Amin al Husayni founded the Arab Higher Committee, which included representatives from various Arab political parties and organizations. Its first act was to call a general strike for May of that year. Arabs were not to pay taxes, and Arab workers and businesses were to be inactive, with the hopes of crippling the Yishuv agricultural economy.
- \* The Arab Higher Committee also made three explicit demands of the British: an end to Jewish immigration, cessation of all Jewish land acquisitions, and establishment of a governing council that truly represented Palestine's population, i.e. the Arabs.
- \* Al Husayni organized vigilante gangs to enforce complete socio-economic separation of Arabs from Jews, mostly in the form of preventing Arab laborers from working on

Jewish farms or Arab traders from selling Jewish produce. He also allegedly offered financial support to striking Arabs who stood to lose their livelihoods.

- \* The strike, which lasted for 175 days, effectively closed down Jaffa's port, which at the time was the main point of entry for Jewish immigrants and the center of import and export, and effectively separated the Jewish and Arab economies from each other until today.

(pg. 183)

- \* The strike was a failure, as it did not achieve any of its stated goals.
- \* Many Arabs did not want to participate in the strike, as they realized it would harm them, but were coerced by the Mufti's goons. In the end, the strike hurt economic interests throughout the Arab sector as well as traders, storekeepers, craftsmen, laborers, and farmers.
- \* The British warned that they would impose martial law in order to bust the strike, and also threatened to use the full strength of the law against Arab criminals.
- \* The strike forced the Jews to develop new segments of their economy. Many Jews found new employment as replacements for striking Arabs.
- \* After intervention of the kings of Saudi Arabia and Jordan on behalf of the British, the Arab Higher Committee called for an end to the strike.
- \* Simultaneous with the strike, the Mufti's goons initiated a campaign of terror against Jews: shootings in mixed cities and firebombing Jewish vehicles on roads. Other tactics included blocking and mining roads and destroying bridges. Arab vandalism also caused significant damage to Jewish property.
- \* Neighboring Arab states provided additional fighters and arms. Fawzi al-Qawuqji led a force of Iraqi and Syrian volunteers stationed near Jenin, and became the commander and organizer of the Arab armed struggle against the British and the Jews.

(pg. 184)

- \* The Arabs also turned their arms against the British. They blew up the Haifa-Iraq oil pipeline, killed the Galilee regional governor Lewis Andrews, and attacked British police stations and army bases, which prevented the British from reinstating order at the beginning of the revolt, turning Palestine into a powder keg.
- \* **The End of the Revolt:** Internal Arab strife was a main cause of the failure of the revolt. Close to 600 Arab dissenters were murdered by other Arabs, many from the Nashashibi Hamula, a rival family of the al Husaynis'. (Raghib al Nashashibi was the long-time mayor of Jerusalem before he was dismissed by the British.)
- \* Whole villages openly fought against the forces of the revolt, leading to dissension that brought many more Arabs to want to end the rebellion.
- \* The agricultural strike hurt the labor sector so much that many Arab villages were brought to the brink of starvation.

(pg. 185)

- \* The Jewish defense organizations, the Haganah and the Irgun, fought against the Arab uprising with renewed strength and determination. The Irgun even resorted to terror-like tactics against Arab civilians in order to show the Arabs that violence was a two-way street.
- \* The Haganah organized new units in order to more effectively protect Jewish settlements from Arab attacks. British security forces cooperated with the Haganah by forming the Jewish Settlement Police, Jewish Supernumerary Police, and Special Night Squads. Other security forces and infrastructure created during the Arab revolt included the Mobile Units, the Fosh, Hish, and Special Operations Squads.

(pg. 186)

- \* The original British inactivity could be attributed to initial underestimation of the severity of the situation, but later, the British realized that their tolerant and lenient reactions were ineffective. Afterwards, the British disbanded the Arab Higher Committee, declaring it an illegal organization, and exiled its members to Damascus.
- \* After the British came to the realization that the rebellion threatened British control over the region, the rebellion was brutally suppressed by the British Army and the Palestine Police Force using repressive measures that were intended to intimidate the Arab population and undermine popular support for the revolt.
- \* The British reaction was exceptionally harsh after the British, who first thought that an Arab revolt would be insignificant, lost more than 60 troops and many more were injured. Reinforcements were called in from throughout the empire, including support from the Royal Air Force.
- \* The British instituted Marshall law throughout the country, and took punitive action against Arab villages that took part in the revolt, including destroying houses, uprooting orchards, and arresting thousands. Many Arabs were taken to court and charged with crimes that carried the death penalty, like murder. 360 were convicted and dozens were executed.
- \* The British deposed al Husayni from his position as mufti and head of the Supreme Muslim Council, turning it into a direct subsidiary of the mandatory authority. The mufti escaped from Palestine and took refuge in other Arab countries until making his way to Europe, where he befriended Hitler and plotted to bring the Final Solution to Palestine.
- \* The British arrested and expelled many local Arab leaders. Many other prominent members of the Arab community fled from Palestine for good, leaving the community bereft of the leadership necessary to carry on the struggle.
- \* The British also hunted down Arab instigators and combatants, but al Qawuqji and his gang were allowed to escape to Jordan.