

Sir Herbert Samuel and the Government of Palestine

When, in April 1920, Lloyd George asked Herbert Samuel to undertake the government of Palestine the mandate for which had just been assigned to Great Britain, he was quite deliberately offering the appointment to someone who sympathised with Zionism and would try to make a success of the Zionist programme. Samuel's interest in and involvement with Zionism dated at least from the outbreak of the war in 1914. When in November of that year the Ottoman empire joined the Central Powers, he was quick to suggest to Grey, the foreign secretary, the possibility of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine; the following January, he sent Asquith a memorandum on this subject, its romantic rhetoric startling and somewhat amusing the prime minister. 'The Jewish brain', declared the chairman of the local government board,

is a physiological product not to be despised. For fifteen centuries the race produced in Palestine a constant succession of great men – statesmen and prophets, judges and soldiers. If a body be again given in which its soul can lodge, it may enrich the world. Till full scope is granted, as Macaulay said in the House of Commons 'let us not presume to say that there is no genius among the countrymen of Isaiah, no heroism among the descendants of the Maccabees'.¹

The following March a revised version of this memorandum was circulated to the cabinet, of which Samuel was a member. In it, he argued that British imperial interests required a British protectorate over Palestine, and that this might provide an opportunity for Jews to immigrate, found colonies and develop the country so that in due course a majority would become settled in and rooted to the land.

Let a Jewish centre be established in Palestine [he urged], let it achieve, as it may well achieve, some measure of spiritual and intellectual

greatness, and insensibly the character of the individual Jew, wherever he might be, would be raised. The sordid associations which have attached to the Jewish name would be, to some degree at least, sloughed off, and the value of the Jews as an element in the civilisation of the European peoples would be enhanced.²

These, clearly, are the words of a convinced Zionist, who accepts and takes for granted the Zionist analysis of the Jewish predicament and how to surmount it. And for the rest of the war, indeed until his appointment as high commissioner at the end of April 1920, whether in or out of office, though he was not a member of the Zionist Organisation, he remained helpful and sympathetic to the movement. In 1918 and 1919, in particular, as he says in his *Memoirs*, he was 'co-operating closely' with the Zionist leaders,³ and even ready, at times, to use his influence and connections to further their cause. Thus we find him, for instance, writing to Balfour in March 1919 to express his disquiet at the news of an inter-Allied commission being sent to investigate conditions in the near east. This news, he writes, 'has caused much anxiety to those who are interested in Palestine' and who were afraid that delay and indecision would be harmful to the Zionist cause.⁴

He became the chairman of the Advisory Committee on the Economic Development of Palestine, and as such was consulted by the government on ways of furthering the Zionist programme. In February and March 1920 he was in Palestine on behalf of the Foreign Office, to investigate the 'financial and administrative conditions there, and to advise concerning the line of policy to be followed in future in these respects, should the mandate fall to Great Britain'. If it be asked how Samuel reconciled his Zionist sympathies with an active career in British politics, the answer is that he saw here no contradiction which needed to be reconciled or resolved. In his final report as high commissioner in Palestine there is a paragraph which deals with this subject and which seems an echo of those war-time controversies in which the notables of Anglo-Jewry adopted sharply divergent attitudes. In this passage Samuel refers to the fear of many Jews that the Balfour Declaration would undermine their position as established and fully-fledged citizens. This fear, he declared, led these Jews to regard Zionism and the Balfour Declaration 'with embarrassment, and sometimes with hostility'. Others, however, equally patriotic – and it is among these others that he undoubtedly counted himself – had a contrary view:

They refused to engage in fine-drawn discussions as to the meaning of 'national' and 'people'. They were deeply interested in the return of a body of their co-religionists to Palestine; they wished to see the movement succeed, and were ready to help in promoting it; and at the same time [he went on] they saw no reason why they should not remain, in spirit and in action, as loyal citizens of the states to which they belonged as if Palestine had not entered the field of political discussion and as if the Balfour Declaration had never been made.⁵

It was, then, as an avowed and indeed ardent sympathiser with Zionism that Samuel was chosen by Lloyd George to inaugurate the administration of Palestine under British mandate. Samuel's record as high commissioner may be held to have amply justified Lloyd George's choice. When Samuel left Palestine in 1925 the country was at peace and had been so for four years, Palestine was endowed with a modern and generally efficient administration, and the land was beginning to know some prosperity. Justifiable as it proved to be, Lloyd George's choice was also natural. From the start the prime minister had sympathised with Zionism. His motives were no doubt mixed, some of them even devious, but it is certain that he believed the enterprise of a Jewish National Home in Palestine both feasible and beneficent – beneficent alike to the British empire and to the Jews. Furthermore, it was as a patron of Zionism, as the author of the Balfour Declaration, that the British government publicly justified its case to be the mandatory of the League of Nations in Palestine, and who better than a sympathiser with Zionism to carry out a pro-Zionist policy and thus show the British government to be in earnest over its professions?

On hearing Lloyd George's offer, Samuel's first impulse was, as he tells us in his *Memoirs*,⁶ to ask the prime minister whether 'such an appointment was open to the danger that measures, which the non-Jewish population would accept from a British Christian governor, might be objected to if adopted by a Jew'. He therefore did not accept the offer on the spot. It was only after giving the matter further thought, and consulting Weizmann and Sokolow, that he wrote to Lloyd George accepting the post. The objections which he himself had raised, he now came to think, could be overcome. In the long run, he came to believe, the attitude of the non-Jewish population depended upon the reasonableness of his measures and upon the manner in which they were presented. Very soon after taking up his post another consideration began to have weight with him, to become

with the years gradually uppermost in his mind. In his *Memoirs*⁷ he puts it as follows: 'I had been appointed with full knowledge on the part of His Majesty's Government of my Zionist sympathies, and no doubt largely because of them. But,' he adds, 'I was there to administer the country, not for the benefit of one section of the population only, but for all; not commissioned by the Zionists but in the name of the King.' Samuel, as anyone who looks at his record must agree, was essentially a fair-minded and a punctiliously honourable man. It is therefore not surprising that the duties of his public office should have, very quickly, begun to weigh more with him than the advancement of a scheme which, however near it was to his heart, was yet the private dream and ambition of one section only of the population for which he was responsible.

In a debate in the House of Lords in May 1939 he declared that immediately after the war he, like other figures such as Neville Chamberlain, Winston Churchill and General Smuts, had contemplated that some day or other a Jewish state might be established, but that fuller experience convinced everyone that a Jewish state covering the whole of Palestine was not possible.⁸ How quickly he himself became so convinced may be seen from a gloss on the Balfour Declaration which he wrote after the Jaffa riots of May 1921, in consultation with the Colonial Office, and which he made public in a speech delivered at Jerusalem on 3 June. What the Balfour Declaration meant, said Samuel, was 'that the Jews, a people who are scattered throughout the world, but whose hearts are always turned to Palestine, should be enabled to found here their home; and that some among them, within the limits which are fixed by the numbers and interests of the present population, should come to Palestine in order to help by their resources and efforts to develop the country to the advantage of all its inhabitants'.⁹ It is, again, instructive to note what he had to say about Zionist aims and ambitions in the Report published in August 1921, in which he reviewed his first year as high commissioner. In it, he referred to those Zionists 'who sometimes forget or ignore the present inhabitants of Palestine', who, intent as they are on realising the Zionist dream, suddenly 'learn with surprise and often with incredulity, that there are half-a-million people in Palestine, many of whom hold, and hold strongly, very different views'. Some of these Zionists, he went on, would 'ride rough-shod' over this opposition and condemn anything else as a weak surrender to violence. He himself did not share such views: 'The policy of His Majesty's

Government', he declared, 'contemplates the satisfaction of the legitimate aspirations of the Jewish race throughout the world in relation to Palestine, combined with a full protection of the existing population. For my own part,' he went on, 'I am convinced that the means can be found to effect this combination. The Zionism that is practicable is the Zionism that fulfils this essential condition'.¹⁰ How far removed from mere Zionist advocacy his attitude became may be instanced by an exchange in which he was involved during the House of Lords debate on the Peel Report. Lord Strabolgi had remarked in passing how 'the case for the Jewish people throughout the world' had been put with force and clarity by Lord Reading, Lord Melchett and Lord Samuel. Samuel at once interjected: 'I hope the noble Lord will allow me to disclaim having stated the Jewish case'.¹¹

The Zionism, then, which fulfilled the essential condition laid down in his Report of 1921, was the only Zionism which it was both safe, politic and just to encourage and support. For though his duty embraced much more than the mere sponsorship of Zionism, yet after all, it was part of his duty – as well as his inclination – to promote Zionism.

The duty, thus, to govern Palestine in the interest of all its inhabitants as well as solicitude for Zionism – for that practicable Zionism which to him was now the only acceptable one – required that the existing inhabitants of Palestine should be conciliated and reassured. Other, more immediate and pressing reasons reinforced this attitude. When Lloyd George offered him Palestine Samuel, as we have seen, considered whether his being a Jew ought not to preclude him from accepting. Others also thought similarly. When Allenby, the supreme head of the military administration which had governed Palestine since the end of 1917, heard that Samuel was to become the first civil governor of the country, he hastened to telegraph to Curzon, the foreign secretary: 'I think the appointment of a Jew as first governor will be highly dangerous'. The Muslims, he went on, were in a state of great excitement, having heard that the Balfour Declaration was to be included in the peace treaty. 'The only restraining factor being assurance which has been given by chief administrator that government of country would be a British government. They will regard appointment of a Jew as first governor, even if he is a British Jew, as handing country over at once to a permanent Zionist administration'. Allenby went on to prophesy doom and destruction on Samuel's arrival in Palestine with 'outrages against Jews, murders,

raids on Jewish villages, and raids into our territory from east if no wider movement'. The Christians, whether Protestant, Catholic, or Greek Orthodox, would also 'deeply resent transfer of government to Jewish authority', and being quite influential, by throwing their weight against the administration would make 'government of any kind very difficult'.¹² These highly alarmist prognostications, characteristic as they are of Allenby's defective political judgment, surely also reflect the advice and information which the commander-in-chief was receiving from his subordinates in Palestine. Zionists have always vehemently complained of the lack of sympathy shown to their cause by the military administration in Palestine from the fall of Jerusalem until Samuel's appointment, and it must be said that the evidence of the official records in the archives does bear out their complaints. This lack of sympathy, and sometimes downright hostility of course could not remain concealed from the Palestinians. The chief administrators who succeeded one another, Generals Money, Watson and Bols, refused – no doubt for reasons which to them seemed convincing – to publish officially the Balfour Declaration in Palestine. Some two years after the publication of the Balfour Declaration in London, for instance, we find the Chief Political Officer writing from Cairo to the Chief Administrator in Jerusalem that the Declaration 'is to be treated as extremely confidential, and is on no account for any kind of publication'.¹³ This, of course, did not mean that the Palestinians were unaware of Zionist ambitions or of the support which the occupying Power was likely to give them. In the circumstances, therefore, the refusal to publish the Balfour Declaration was, as the Court of Enquiry into the Easter riots of 1920 at Jerusalem concluded, a mistake. The people, as the court argued, were never squarely faced with a *chose jugée*, a thing which in the east, they observed, often works miracles in persuading people to accept the inevitable.¹⁴ The dangers of this equivocal situation were no doubt increased by Sharifian propaganda in favour of proclaiming Faisal king of Palestine – a project which Bols, the chief administrator, Waters-Taylor, his chief of staff, and Allenby himself, actually took up and pressed strongly on the government.¹⁵ Their attitude cannot have remained unknown to the Sharifians or their sympathisers in Palestine. All these, then, were reasons why the Palestinians should feel encouraged to hope that their natural and long-standing opposition to Zionism could perhaps deflect the British government from a policy the very vagueness of which magnified, for them, its dangers

and terrors. The Easter riots which broke out in Jerusalem less than three months before Samuel took up his post showed what fear and hatred Zionism inspired and what methods could be used to persuade the British government to cease promoting it.

This situation, which was not of his making, provided an urgent and compelling reason for Samuel to embark on a policy of conciliation which would show the Palestinians that while Zionism was being encouraged, they had nothing to fear for their rights and their position.

How then were the Palestinians to be conciliated? To ask the question is immediately to realise how difficult – indeed perhaps impossible – such a policy would be. For who were the Palestinians, and how did one set about conciliating them? The Palestinians were in their overwhelming majority Muslims. Conciliating the Palestinians meant, to all intents and purposes, conciliating the Muslim Palestinians. These Muslims had hitherto formed part of the dominant religion in the Ottoman empire. For long centuries they had been accustomed to look upon the state as being peculiarly their own; and while there were among them, naturally, notables and powerful families, the Muslims of Palestine neither had a political organisation exclusively their own nor were they accustomed to negotiate with the government through representatives duly elected and formally appointed. The British military administration must have found it inconvenient in many ways to deal with this, so to speak, acephalous society and hit on the idea of considering the mufti of Jerusalem as the head of the Muslim community in Palestine and of giving him the title of Grand Mufti. This was in many ways a curious proceeding. In Islam a mufti, originally, was a man learned in the law, the analogue of the *prudens* of Roman law. He was, to start with, in no sense a public official; his standing rather depended on his learning and integrity and it was these qualities which gave weight to his opinions or *fatwas*. In some Muslim states the mufti did become in due course a public official appointed by the ruler to deliver legal opinions. In the Ottoman empire, notably, the right to issue *fatwas* came, from the fifteenth century (of the Christian era) onwards, to be vested in Shaikh-al-Islam in Istanbul who was appointed by the sultan. Muftis were also to be found in the Ottoman provinces. In contrast to the *qadi*, or religious judge, who was a transient and a stranger to the district to which he was appointed, the provincial mufti came from a local family. He was usually an elderly person

locally respected who sanctioned the judgments of the *qadi* not so much by his legal learning – which may have been minimal – as by his unimpeachable character. A provincial mufti was thus clearly a notable in the Muslim society of his province; but far from representing his community, he was by no means the most important notable. So much is this the case that it would entail considerable labour to ascertain the names of the muftis of Damascus or Jerusalem or Baghdad or a comparable provincial Ottoman city in the last hundred years. Indeed the only mufti of some renown in recent times who comes to mind is Muhammad Abduh, the mufti of Egypt from 1899 to 1905; and his reputation owed nothing to his office, being the outcome of previous political and literary activities quite removed from religion and jurisprudence. Had the question ever arisen, it would surely never have occurred to anybody to consider Abduh as the head of the Muslim community in Egypt. The circumstances in which Abduh assumed office are also useful in showing how cavalierly Muslim rulers could treat muftis and other religious dignitaries; for Abduh's appointment followed his predecessor's abrupt and instant dismissal by the khedive for having presumed to oppose on religious grounds some legislation sponsored by the Egyptian government.¹⁶ The decision therefore of the military administration to treat the mufti of Jerusalem as head of the Muslim community in Palestine and to give him the title of Grand Mufti – a title hitherto unknown in Islam¹⁷ – was a new departure from which were to issue the most momentous consequences. It is most probable that it was Storrs, the governor of Jerusalem, with his weakness for sonorous ecclesiastical titles, who invented the title; and that it was an English adaptation of the French title, *Grand Rabbin* (though the English 'grand' implies much more than the French '*grand*'), a translation of the Ottoman title *Hakham-bashi* which was well-known and familiar all over the middle east. By 1920, the title Grand Mufti was firmly established in the usage of the military administration. It has to be said, however, in the first place that in so magnifying the position of the mufti, the military administration may have been influenced by the fact that the incumbent mufti at the occupation of Jerusalem was Kamil al-Husaini, member of a large, influential – indeed powerful – family, and in the second place that this aggrandisement of the mufti remained something informal, at best semi-official, and was never given the sanction of law.

The mufti Kamil al-Husaini died on 21 March 1921, some nine

months after Samuel had become high commissioner, and the events connected with the choice of his successor may throw some light on Samuel's policy of conciliation, which was perhaps the most important and difficult issue facing him in the government of Palestine. Shortly after the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 the Ottoman government had promulgated a law regulating the election of provincial muftis.¹⁸ According to this law, the mufti of a province such as that of Jerusalem was to be appointed by the government from a list of three candidates selected by a college of electors comprising: 1. Imams, preachers and teachers of the great mosques; 2. The elected Muslim members of the municipal councils in the province, and 3. The elected Muslim members of the administrative council of the province.

In 1921, by reason of the war and its aftermath, no administrative council existed in the Jerusalem province and the members of the municipal councils were not elected but had been nominated by the military administration. The electoral college prescribed by the Ottoman law could therefore not be convened, but arrangements were put in hand to call a meeting of imams and other religious persons together with the Muslim nominated members of the municipalities in the Jerusalem province, in the belief obviously that such a meeting was the nearest approximation to the electoral college required by the law.

Kamil al-Husaini's death immediately precipitated a struggle for his succession. Writing to Storrs, the district governor, to notify him of the mufti's death, the *qadi* of Jerusalem added: 'His brother Hajj Amin efendi is his successor'. This was obviously not a statement of fact but the expression of a wish, and in the days following many petitions were sent to the district governor from shaikhs of tribes, notables and private persons urging that Hajj Amin was the people's choice.¹⁹ This was obviously a concerted move organised by the Husaini interest and designed to pressure the high commissioner into choosing Hajj Amin as mufti out of the list of three candidates to be elected by the electoral college, where it was clearly hoped that his name would figure. Hajj Amin was the late mufti's younger brother, and he was very young indeed for the position to which he aspired. Born in 1895 or 1896,²⁰ he was therefore in 1921 either twenty-five or twenty-six years of age. He is said to have attended al-Azhar in Cairo, but his religious studies cannot have been either long or arduous, for he is also said to have served as an Ottoman officer during the war. After the British occupation of Jerusalem we find him

employed – in what must have been a subordinate capacity – in the district governor's office. We then hear of him in 1918 helping to recruit Palestinians for the Sharifian army under the direction of Captain C. D. Brunton. He was then described as 'very pro-English'. But his attitude changed when he came to learn of British support for Zionism, to which he reacted with 'surprise and anger'.²¹ He became one of the leaders of the Easter riots in Jerusalem in 1920, and for his part in the disturbance a court martial sentenced him to ten years' rigorous imprisonment. The sentence was pronounced *in absentia*, since Hajj Amin had fled from Jerusalem and taken refuge among the Trans-Jordanian tribes. The high commissioner visited the area in August 1920 and at a meeting at as-Salt a number of shaikhs requested him publicly to pardon Hajj Amin and Arif el-Arif, another Jerusalemite also implicated in the Easter riots. As he wrote in a letter of 26 August to general headquarters, Cairo, 'For political reasons I considered it desirable to announce at the meeting that both the offenders might be pardoned'.²² By the following October Hajj Amin was back at Jerusalem where we see him included in a police black list of people to be actively watched, and described as 'agitator'.²³

This then was the record of one of the contenders for the post of mufti of Jerusalem. His main rival was Shaikh Hisam al-Din Jarallah, the inspector of the religious courts, who in fact also began to collect suffrages for himself as soon as the mufti Kamil had died. He must have been a force to contend with, for two days after the mufti's death the deputy director of public security was reporting that 'the efforts of Sheikh Husam al-Din Jarallah on his own behalf may lead to faction strife'.²⁴

On the face of it, Shaikh Hisam al-Din was much more than his turbulent and colourful rival the kind of person who had traditionally been chosen as mufti: a man of respectable reputation and with some knowledge of the law. And yet there are indications that Samuel was prepared, before the meeting of the electoral college, to use his prerogative in favour of Hajj Amin. In a note dated 11 April, the day before the meeting of the electoral college, he recorded a discussion with Hajj Amin 'at considerable length' 'on the political situation and the question of his appointment to the office of Grand Mufti' – and we notice that Samuel seems to have accepted 'Grand Mufti' as a proper title for the mufti of Jerusalem. At this interview, at which Storrs was present, Hajj Amin 'declared his earnest desire

to cooperate with the government, and his belief in the good intentions of the British government towards the Arabs. He gave assurance that the influence of his family and himself would be devoted to maintaining tranquility in Jerusalem . . .'.²⁵ It is quite clear that this interview was meant to prepare the way for the high commissioner to select Hajj Amin's name from the list of three candidates among whom he probably felt sure to be included, at the election which was to be held on the morrow.

Why, we may ask, was Samuel prepared to appoint as mufti a man of this kind and with such a record? And the answer probably lies in the situation with which he was confronted – a situation which was not of his making. At the Easter riots of 1920 the mayor of Jerusalem happened to be the head of the Husaini family, Musa Kazim Pasha al-Husaini. During the riots, Storrs tells us, 'he became first intractable and then defiant' and the district governor decided to dismiss him. In his place he appointed someone from a rival family, the ex-Ottoman deputy Raghib al-Nashashibi.²⁶ This happened before Samuel took up his post, and it may well have been represented to him – perhaps by Storrs – that it would be impolitic for both the mayor and the mufti of Jerusalem to be drawn from outside the Husaini clan, and therefore Hajj Amin – such as he was – should be chosen.

The meeting of the electors took place at the governorate on 12 April; to the surprise of the government, Shaikh Hisam al-Din Jarallah was given the largest number of votes, whilst Hajj Amin came at the bottom of the poll – he received only eight votes – and thus could not be included in the list of three candidates from which the high commissioner was to choose the mufti.²⁷ The result, as a report from the deputy director of Public Security (dated 14 April) informs us, incensed the members of the Husaini family and a meeting was immediately held at the house of Jamil al-Husaini to organise protests and deputations.²⁸ A powerful attack on the election and its results was in fact soon mounted. Numerous petitions and telegrams were sent to the government; rumours were put about that the *ulamas* who voted in the election had received bribes from the government, that the Jews, or else Raghib al-Nashashibi, had exerted their sinister influence against the Husaini candidate. A graphic example of the lengths to which this campaign was taken is provided by a notice posted on 19 April in the Old City. Entitled 'Wake up Moslems, The Jews are interfering in the election of the mufti', it began:

'Awake and prevent danger before it occurs. The accursed traitors

whom you all know, have combined with the Jews, to have one of their party appointed mufti . . .'

Such a mufti, the notice went on to say, would assist the Jews by selling to them *waqf* property and particularly the *waqf* of Abu Midian which included the Western Wall; he would agree to all Zionist claims and kill the national spirit in the country; he would hand over to the Jews the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa mosque so that they might pull them down and rebuild the Temple, 'as stated by Alfred Mond and the president of the Zionist Commission, Dr Eder.' 'The pride of Islam is dead', concluded the notice, 'but God wants to punish you for having opposed the Moslem government of the caliphate which protected the religion. Will you accept the shame to have a Jewish Zionist mufti and that your religious affairs should become a plaything in their hands?'²⁹ Finally the election was attacked as invalid on the ground that the membership of the electoral college was not as stipulated in the law. This powerful onslaught soon produced its effect on the government. A dispatch of 9 May informed the Colonial office that 'learned opinion, represented by the law courts, has not favoured the popular candidate Al Haj Amin al-Husseini' but that technical flaws in the constitution of the electorate had delayed the appointment of the mufti,³⁰ and by the end of the month it was quite clear that the election was to be disregarded, and Hajj Amin allowed to become mufti.

This outcome was determined largely, perhaps decisively, by the advice of one member of Samuel's secretariat, Ernest T. Richmond. Ernest Richmond was by profession an architect and had been employed before the war in the Egyptian Public Works Department. He was Storrs' intimate friend, and it was Storrs who, in 1918, rescued him from the Imperial War Graves Commission where he was then 'eating out his heart',³¹ and brought him to Jerusalem in order to survey the damaged fabric of the Dome of the Rock and advise on restoration. He seems in due course, to have become some kind of assistant to Storrs,³² with whom he shared a house in Jerusalem - as he had shared a flat with him earlier in Cairo. When Samuel was appointed high commissioner he chose Brigadier Wyndham Deedes as his civil secretary, and on the latter's suggestion the Foreign Office were asked at the beginning of August 1920 to release E. M. B. Ingram, then acting as private secretary to Lord Milner - who was then engaged in negotiations with Zaghlul - so that he might serve as political secretary in the newly-organised secretariat at Jerusalem.

The Foreign Office were not willing to release Ingram, and suggested instead James Morgan of the Levant Consular Service. At this point Storrs seems to have suggested Richmond for the post, and with the high commissioner's approval on 3 September he sent this telegram to Richmond who was then in London:

Post vacant in civil secretary's office salary 1000 plus 100 allowances. Duties general administration and of nature agreeable and suitable to yourself. I recommend.

The telegram did not reach London at the time, and failing to receive an answer, Storrs wrote again to Richmond who now made enquiries at the Foreign Office. Eventually the telegram was repeated on 24 September and at last communicated to Richmond. A telegram from the Foreign Office on 27 September informed Samuel that his offer was accepted.³³

Richmond was appointed assistant secretary (political). His duties in this office were of the highest importance. He was to maintain liaison between the government and the Muslim community and, in effect, to be the high commissioner's chief adviser on Muslim affairs. Towards the end of 1922 the Colonial Office proposed to change his title from assistant secretary (political) to second assistant secretary. Richmond took this to be a downgrading of his office and contemplated resigning unless his original title was maintained. Samuel wrote a dispatch on 27 December, urging his case and accompanied it by a private letter to Shuckburgh of the Middle East Department in which he stated that Richmond's resignation 'would have considerable political consequences. In the absence of any Arab in the higher ranks of the administration, Richmond who is in close and sympathetic touch with the Arabs, acts as a most useful intermediary. If he were to go', the high commissioner concluded, 'there is no one to take his place'.³⁴ By the following July the question of Richmond's official title had still not been settled and Sir Gilbert Clayton, the chief secretary, who on Samuel's absence on leave was then officer administering the government, took the matter up in another dispatch. His description of Richmond's function in the administration was somewhat different from Samuel's, and it is interesting to see how the duties of the assistant secretary (political) had by then developed. 'With regard to Palestine itself', wrote Sir Gilbert Clayton, 'rightly or wrongly, the Political Section, and more especially the present head thereof, has become the principal medium of

personal approach to the government available to the Arab elements and is regarded in that respect as to some extent the counterpart of the Zionist Organisation'.³⁵

The anomaly of a high British official in the secretariat being regarded as the Arab counterpart of the Zionist Organisation was noted by someone at the Colonial Office who pencilled this comment on the margin of Clayton's dispatch: 'but the Arabs don't pay for it'. As the minutes on Samuel's earlier dispatch and letter show, the Department in London was well aware of Richmond's sympathies and how their overt expression was little consonant with British policy. A minute by Mr Clauson is particularly noteworthy:

I must admit [he wrote] that I should not personally have one minute's regret if Mr Richmond resigned, he is by trade an architect, not a Secretariat officer at all, and he has entered the latter profession too late in life to make it possible for him to adapt himself to it. Moreover [Clauson added] he has not taken any particular pains to adapt himself to it; he is a declared enemy of the Zionist policy and almost as frankly declared an enemy of the Jewish policy of H.M.G. . . . Indeed [he concluded] I think that the government, so far from losing would gain very greatly by excluding from its Secretariat so very partisan a figure as Mr Richmond and starting again on a strictly non-partisan basis.³⁶

In the event Richmond did not resign until March 1924 and when he did, addressed to the high commissioner a remarkable letter. The letter, dated 13 March 1924, appears to be an answer to an invitation to a dinner. In it Richmond says that he had been led 'gradually and most reluctantly, but definitely' to believe that the Zionist commission, the Middle East Department of the Colonial Office and Samuel's own administration 'are dominated and inspired by a spirit which I can only regard as evil'. He finds himself completely opposed to these policies, but his opposition is not merely political, but moral or even religious. He had tried to alter the machine, but had completely failed and now had to go. He found repugnant any act which implied fellowship with this evil. Such an act would be dishonest 'because there is no fellowship of spirit; on the contrary there is enmity; not, I hope, personal, but still enmity'. If, knowing all this, Samuel still wanted him to come to the dinner, he would do so, but he would do so in the knowledge that he was committing a dishonest act, 'that, in coming, I am sacrificing something of right conduct to the duty I still owe you as my chief for the time being'.³⁷

During his three-and-a-half years in the Secretariat, then, Richmond

was as he said, trying to alter the machine. This may explain and justify his activities on behalf of Hajj Amin in the year 1921. As has been seen, by the end of April the high commissioner was disposed to delay the appointment of the mufti on the ground that the election of 12 April was technically imperfect. An unsigned note of 3 May which is most probably by Richmond suggested that the post of 'Grand Mufti' should not be left open any longer, that a quick settlement would have a good effect, and proposed the issue of a notice to the effect that

the recent election having been shown to be irregular is null and void, that in the view of the reception by the government of Mazbattas from the Mudarisin, Imams, Ulemas and numerous individuals throughout Palestine in favour of the appointment of Al Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the government considers it to be clearly proved that the people of Palestine desire the nomination of Al Hajj Amin and consequently nominate him.

At the bottom of this note the civil secretary Wyndham Deedes wrote: 'I don't agree'.³⁸ The suggested notice was never issued, but by means which are as yet unclear, by 10 May Shaikh Hisam al-Din Jarallah was prevailed upon to withdraw his candidature.³⁹ Furthermore, Hajj Amin organised on 31 May a meeting of nine religious dignitaries and notables before whom the mufti of Nablus delivered an opinion that the election of 12 April was invalid. We may add that the same mufti of Nablus delivered on the following day an opinion – which is also on the file – that this election was quite valid. The minutes of the meeting of 31 May were written and signed by Hajj Amin and translated by Richmond. The high commissioner was still not prevailed upon to announce officially the election of Hajj Amin, but from a memorandum by Richmond dated 7 June we learn that on a date not specified – probably after 10 May – Samuel and Deedes privately assured Hajj Amin that he was appointed mufti. This memorandum, a long and remarkable document, was therefore devoted to obtaining for Hajj Amin a formal and public letter of appointment. The memorandum, in the first place, emphasises the overwhelming desire of the people to see Hajj Amin appointed mufti. Richmond produces an imposing list of Muslim divines, notables and beduin shaikhs who, according to him, were all for Hajj Amin, and adds to them the Orthodox patriarch, the Syrian bishop, the *locum tenens* of the Armenian patriarch, the head of the Armenian part of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the bishop of the Coptic convent

and monks of the Orthodox church. In contrast to this overwhelming support, opposition to Hajj Amin, Richmond tried to show, was most suspect. It consisted of the Jews who were believed by 'a very large number of people' to be against Hajj Amin and to have arranged the election so that he might be set aside; their efforts were seconded by what he called the 'intrigues of the Nashashibi faction' which were favoured by the legal secretary. In the circumstances, this was clearly meant to be a telling, indeed a clinching argument. The legal secretary was Mr Bentwich, not only a fellow-Jew but also a relative of the high commissioner's. About him Richmond was outspoken. As has been seen, the mufti of Nablus having declared on 31 May that the election of 12 April was invalid, proceeded the very next day to change his mind and produced an opinion that the election was valid. This opinion the legal secretary seems to have sent to Deedes. Richmond now pronounced it obscure – which it was – and he questioned the legal status of the mufti of Nablus to pronounce on such a matter; 'but the chief point to bear in mind', he added, 'is that no opinion emanating from the legal secretary or his entourage or from any one dependent in any degree on the favour of his Department will at the present time be regarded as other than suspect by a very large majority of the people in this country'.⁴⁰ What effect such an argument had on a high commissioner jealous of his honour and determined to avoid the slightest aspersion on his uprightness and equity we can only conjecture. Moreover, as a minister Samuel had hitherto dealt with civil servants who avoided political commitment and whose primary purpose in tendering advice was to ensure the carrying on of the king's government. Most probably, he had so far never had to deal with a senior civil servant who believed passionately that it was his duty to alter the machine which his superiors expected him to maintain, and he may therefore have taken for granted that advice received in Jerusalem would rest on the same tacit assumptions which obtained in London.

The upshot of the Husaini campaign supported by Richmond from inside the Secretariat was that Hajj Amin was allowed tacitly to assume the office of mufti. He received, however, no official letter of nomination and his appointment was never gazetted,⁴¹ which may indicate that Samuel had misgivings over the whole affair. But Hajj Amin did occupy the office of mufti of Jerusalem, did style himself 'Grand Mufti', and did claim that he was the head of the Muslim community in Palestine. Richmond himself, in one memorandum

after another from August to October 1921 did his best to enhance Hajj Amin's position by arguing that his salary should be higher than that of other muftis – he quoted an argument of Storrs' to the effect that after all the bishop of London was paid more than the bishop of Chichester – and by insisting time and again – and it was sheer insistence buttressed by no evidence – that the mufti of Jerusalem was the head of the Muslim community, that to treat him on an equality with other muftis would not be received 'with quiet acquiescence' by the Muslims of Palestine, and that such a step would be likely to be regarded as 'a deliberate attempt to slight the Moslem community'.⁴² What in retrospect Richmond thought about it all, or at any rate what he would have wanted the world at large to think is indicated by a letter which he drafted in August 1923, in answer to one which Colonel Kisch, chairman of the Palestine Zionist Executive had sent to the chief secretary the previous January. In this letter Kisch had said that 'if, by arranging the appointment of the present mufti, through means involving a direct departure from the established procedure, the government hoped to earn the collaboration of this party in matters not connected with the Jewish National Home, it must by now have been gravely disillusioned'. Richmond's draft answer constituted an utter rebuttal of Kisch's argument: 'While I do not recognise the existence of any obligation on the part of the government to reply to criticisms in respect of its appointments, nevertheless I think it worthwhile in this instance to put you in possession of the facts'. 'The facts', according to this draft were that 'His appointment was desired by a great majority of the Arabs of Palestine and took place in accordance with existing regulations. To have thwarted that desire would not have reacted favourably on the welfare of Palestine or on that of any section of the inhabitants, not excluding the Jews'. Clayton, at the time officer administering the government, ordered that the draft should not be sent, and the question allowed to drop.⁴³

In protesting against the appointment of the mufti, Kisch of course was concerned with the effects of this appointment on Zionist work in Palestine. These effects are widely known and need not be laboured. But it is worth while considering briefly its effect on the Arabs of Palestine. If Hajj Amin had received enough votes on 12 April 1921 to be included in the list of candidates from which the high commissioner was to choose the mufti, and if Samuel had chosen him, the appointment, while admittedly bizarre, would have indi-

cated respect for the due process of law and would thus have perhaps served to conciliate the Palestinians by showing them that here was a government which respected elections and the wishes of the Muslims in the management of their communal affairs. Again, if the high commissioner had chosen to disregard the election and by an exercise of free arbitrary power appointed Hajj Amin – or anybody else – as mufti, he would have been behaving like the generality of Muslim rulers whose cavalier treatment of the religious institution is an abiding theme of Islamic history. From such an exercise of prerogative, the Palestinians would have concluded that a high commissioner was only a sultan writ in Frankish letters, and would have adjusted their behaviour accordingly. But to have tacitly allowed Hajj Amin, in response to agitation engineered by the Husaini clan to become mufti, and that without a letter of appointment defining the length and conditions of his tenure, was to invite the Palestinians to conclude that in Palestine rent-a-crowd was king; and to allow the Husainis, already powerful enough in Palestine, to become the self-appointed exclusive and irresponsible spokesmen of the Palestinians, whose power their fellow-countrymen could, as the sequel showed, challenge only at their peril. It was the Husainis who directed the political strategy of the Palestinians until 1947, and they led them to utter ruin.

The establishment of Husaini dominance over Arab Palestine was made easier by another development which followed shortly after Hajj Amin's elevation. This was the creation of the Supreme Muslim Council. Speaking in a debate on Palestine in the House of Lords in December 1938 Samuel pointed out that the system of *millet* or communal organisation as developed in the Ottoman empire was something suited to middle eastern conditions and that on taking over from the military in Palestine he had come to the conclusion 'that this system of communities was in the main the right one'.⁴⁴ This was a shrewd and judicious appreciation. From it the conclusion naturally followed that just as the Jews and the Christians had their long-established communal organisations so the Muslims, who had not needed such an organisation under the Ottoman regime, should now also have theirs. Such a communal organisation was necessary to manage the extensive Muslim religious endowments or *waqfs*, hitherto administered by the Ottoman government, to choose and appoint imams and preachers for the mosques, and *qadis* for the religious courts – these functions also having been previously discharged by

the Ottoman administration. 'For the British administration to assume control of the endowments and make appointments to the offices', remarked Samuel in his *Memoirs*, 'we did not consider advisable'. And he added: 'particularly an administration pledged to promote in Palestine the establishment of a Jewish National Home'.⁴⁵ Here then was another consideration adding weight to Samuel's general preference for communal organisation. It is worth examining what it is which specifically gave point to Samuel's belief that it was undesirable for an administration pledged to promote the establishment of a Jewish National Home to supervise and regulate Muslim religious affairs. At the beginning of 1918 the British government decided that a Zionist commission headed by Weizmann should go to Palestine. It was not quite clear what exactly it was to do there, or what powers it had, but its presence in the country, its access to the commander-in-chief and to other senior officers, rightly or wrongly gave the impression that it was a privileged body with extraordinary powers which no authority in Palestine was able to restrain. The Palestinians could not help but contrast the humble and difficult position of the Zionist settlers in Ottoman times, with their seemingly exalted position under the British occupation, with this Zionist commission to protect them and advance their interests. It was not simply the mere existence of the Zionist commission which gave rise to fear and antagonism; the activities of some of its members helped to intensify dislike for it. There was, for instance, the aggressive and persistent Jabotinsky, Ussishkin, whose attitude Meinertzhagen – not an enemy of Zionism – described in a dispatch of November 1919 as 'one of overbearing intolerance with a contempt for compromise',⁴⁶ and Weizmann himself. Though more subtle and politic than his colleagues, Weizmann was yet not averse from trying to make British authorities act as though the Balfour Declaration meant much more than they were prepared to concede, and he also must have found it difficult to restrain a legitimate feeling of triumph. His behaviour at the period may be illustrated by two significant episodes. 'As to Weizmann and Palestine', wrote Curzon in a letter to Balfour on 26 January 1919, 'I entertain no doubt that he is out for a Jewish government, if not at the moment then in the near future', and he went on to describe how, in the draft mandate for Palestine, to the words 'all necessary arrangements for the establishment in Palestine of a Jewish National Home', Weizmann had added the words: 'or Commonwealth'. 'You meant the first', Curzon observed, 'but he

interpreted it as meaning the second'.⁴⁷ It is reasonable to suppose that the tactics he tried in his dealings with Balfour, Weizmann would also employ in Palestine. The second episode dates from November 1921, and may give us an idea of the impression which the Zionist leader made in the years immediately following the Balfour Declaration. The Colonial Office had succeeded in arranging a private meeting between the Arab Delegation then visiting London and the Zionist Organisation and we have a report on the proceedings in a minute by Mr E. Mills, who was later to serve in Palestine and who is not known for anti-Zionist prejudice. 'Doctor Weizmann', recorded Mills, 'while his speech was conciliatory, adopted an unfortunate manner in delivering it. His attitude was of the nature of a conqueror handing to beaten foes the terms of peace. Also I think he despises the members of the delegation as not worthy protagonists - that it is a little derogatory to him to expect him to meet them on the same ground'.⁴⁸ It is fair to assume that if such was the impression gathered by a not unfriendly observer in 1921, then the same impression could have been derived by others, two or three years before.

The Zionist commission and the reactions to which it gave rise were not anything for which Samuel was responsible. Rather, he had to take account of them when he came to administer the country. And we do know that the widespread notion that the Zionist commission and the Palestine government were one and the same body gave him considerable worry. In November 1921 his civil secretary Wyndham Deedes wrote to Shuckburgh at the Colonial Office a private letter. He stated that he was writing at the high commissioner's suggestion, and went on to express alarm at the growing mistrust manifested by the Arab population for the administration; he attributed it to the fact that every administrative measure was believed to be inspired by the Zionists 'and impotently to have been accepted by the administration'. In the eyes of the Arabs, he declared 'the administration and the Zionists are one'. To remedy this situation, Deedes suggested, the anomalous position of the Zionist Organisation in the mandate 'should be abolished' and the administration should be 'left to govern this country with the help of a body in which all sections of the community should be adequately represented'.⁴⁹ Deedes' suggestion was not feasible; hence it was all the more important that an administration which laboured under such suspicion should allow Muslims freedom in the management of their religious affairs. At a conference of notables, muftis and principal *ulamas* in

November 1920 it was agreed to set up a Muslim communal organisation, but it was also agreed that the government should retain financial control over the administration of Muslim religious endowments (which had hitherto been exclusively the affair of the Ottoman government).⁵⁰ But we find that in subsequent negotiations, after Hajj Amin became mufti, this stipulation totally disappeared. Regulations promulgated at the end of 1921 provided for the setting up of a Supreme Moslem Council to be composed of a Rais al-Ulema who was to hold office permanently and of four members elected for a period of four years each. This council was to have unfettered control over the management of religious endowments and the expenditure of income therefrom, over the appointment and dismissal of all *shari'a* and *waqf* officials and over the nomination – and virtually the appointment – of *qadis*. And all these enormous powers which touched innumerable Palestinians in their livelihood and welfare were almost totally exempt from official inspection and control. Samuel's object in agreeing to these regulations may be gathered from a passage in his dispatch transmitting the regulations to London: 'I believe', he wrote, 'that the final settlement of the Moslem religious question will be acceptable to the Moslem population of the country and will bring them assurance that the government desires in every way that they should have complete control of their own religious affairs and religious endowments'.⁵¹

Those who were to elect this powerful body, as the regulations stipulated, were the secondary electors who had been elected at the last Ottoman elections which had taken place in May 1914. This committee met on 9 January 1922. Out of fifty-six electors, fifty-three were present. A motion supported by Raghib al-Nashashibi proposed postponement of the elections; it was lost by forty-three votes to ten, whereupon Nashashibi and five others withdrew from the meeting in protest. The remaining forty-seven electors proceeded to elect the council and Hajj Amin was by forty votes chosen Rais al-Ulema, or president of the council. It was a life appointment and it gave him an income of over £100,000 a year to dispose of and extensive patronage which enabled him to set up and head what the Peel Commission in their *Report* called a third parallel government in Palestine⁵² – the other two of course being the government of Palestine and the Jewish Agency. Of these three governments, the Supreme Moslem Council was the most irresponsible, the least fettered by the rule of law, and the least amenable to public agitation or pressure. In spite of the

regulations which provided for periodical election of members – but not of the president – the members elected in 1922 remained in office until late in 1937 when the Palestine government at last brought itself to disband the council and thus publicly to recognise – though never explicitly – to what despotism its own policies had abandoned the Arabs of Palestine.⁵³

By the mid-1920s, then, both the Jews and the Arabs had, as H. J. Simson put it in *British Rule and Rebellion* (one of the most perceptive books written on Palestine under the mandate), succeeded 'in growing crocodile skins round their respective communities, through which the rule of the government of Palestine hardly penetrated at all'. And the same author went on:

Though there were plenty of representatives of the civil power throughout the country, they dealt in all cases with one, or possibly with two communities, each having an organisation of its own, and each with a voice speaking in Jerusalem. The voices were seldom silent, and were usually complaining of or objecting to something. As a result, rule in Palestine was over-centralised, the voices in Jerusalem were heard too often, and conciliation took the place of rule. So there was order, followed by counter-order, and, in consequence, disorder.⁵⁴

Samuel also devised another strategy to conciliate the Palestinians and wean them of their fears. This was to allow them a say in government through representation in a legislative council. The Palestine Order-in-Council, issued in August 1922, provided for a legislative council to consist of ten official and twelve elected members. Of these eight were to be Muslim, two Jewish and two Christian. Elections were to be conducted according to the Ottoman law. The Palestinian leaders at once declared that unless they were given a clear majority over the officials and the Jews, they would refuse to cooperate in the elections. These leaders no doubt calculated that by being intransigent they would obtain more from the British government than by cooperating, and thus tacitly acquiescing in the mandate and the Zionist programme which it incorporated. Their attitude may also have been more than mere tactical calculation. For neither then nor later did the Palestinian leaders (who were of course largely Muslim) accept the fact that they were no longer the masters in the country and members of a ruling group which dominated not only Palestine, but also an extensive empire. They formed part of the Muslim world and their attitude was governed to some extent by their relation to

this world. This preoccupation comes out clearly in a letter from the mufti of Haifa reporting to Hajj Amin on the results of a journey to India which he undertook after the boycott of the legislative council elections in 1923.

We reached the country [wrote Muhammad Murad, the mufti of Haifa, on 17 December 1923] and found repugnance by every Muslim towards anyone who was Arab; if told, Here is an Arab, they took him to be like the Sharif Husain of whom they say that he betrayed Islam and caused the ruin of the caliphate. We were conscious of this situation immediately we arrived in the country, even though the leaders tried to disguise it out of politeness and kindness. We began to rebut this notion and to show all that Palestine had done in giving total aid to the Turkish army and how she fought to the end, etc. We explained to some of them the situation in Palestine, and the success in the boycott of the elections and of the advisory council was of the greatest help in rebutting these allegations. The truth is that this boycott, and our success in it, compelled everybody to respect us at the start, especially the leaders who greatly admired this success.⁵⁵

We must also remember that this consciousness of belonging to a ruling, an imperial group, played its part in making the Palestinian leaders adopt the rigid and cutting attitude towards Zionism, which was characteristic of them from first to last.

At the beginning of 1923, then, the government announced that elections for the legislative council would be held shortly. The Palestine Arab Congress immediately mounted a vigorous campaign against it, which succeeded in frightening off both candidates and electors. Those participating in the elections were branded as traitors, to be cursed publicly and boycotted by their community.⁵⁶ The campaign was all the more successful in that the government remained utterly passive in face of it. In his Final Report on the Administration of Palestine, Samuel remarked that 'the government did not regard it as its duty to exercise any pressure on the people to participate';⁵⁷ but the government not only did not regard it its duty to put pressure on the electors to vote, it also did not consider it its duty to take action against those who were using pressure to prevent voting. The secretary of the executive committee of the Palestine Arab Congress, Jamal al-Husaini, could insolently taunt the government with its inaction. The government, he wrote, had promulgated laws with special penalties against intimidation: 'But so far', he went on, 'the government brought up only one single case where

three of the accused were acquitted and the fourth condemned to pay a fine of £E25. What made the government shrink from applying its own laws when they cherish such beliefs we cannot tell'.⁵⁸

The results of the election were such that the high commissioner was compelled to announce that the scheme to set up a legislative council was being suspended because the people 'have not fully availed themselves of the opportunity offered to participate in the government of the country through elected representatives'.⁵⁹ This, of course, was for the Palestine Arab Congress a considerable – though an easy – victory. A minute of 23 February 1923 by Mr Moody – who had served as an administrator in Palestine and who was then seconded to the Colonial Office – was acute and sagacious in describing the situation: 'In order to effect a boycott of the elections', Mr Moody wrote in comment on the Political Report for January, which gave an account of the boycott, 'resolution is not required on the part of the Arab populace; only apathy and inertia. The executive committee of the Arab Congress is flogging a dead horse. If the elections fail they will claim the result as a victory for themselves, and a defeat for the government. It is a pity to have given them such an easy mark'.⁶⁰ But one could go further and say that even if there had been no boycott and a legislative council had been elected, yet this would not have ensured the representation of the Palestinians and their involvement in the process of government which Samuel desired. As elections in Ottoman times showed, the result of electoral exercises followed the wishes not of the population but of the government. If, as in this case, the government did not interfere and even allowed or condoned a boycott, to the people this only meant either that the government was secretly opposed to elections or was so weak that its wishes had better be disregarded and its opponents supported. In such circumstances, as Moody observed in a later minute, nomination was more suitable than election. 'I have tried', he remarked, 'to conduct elections in villages for the mukhtarship and uniformly failed'.⁶¹ But elections had been ordained; a boycott had then been proclaimed which the government had done nothing to counteract. Those leaders therefore who had advocated an extreme line were now triumphant. It was a situation which was to be repeated again and again during the mandate. To confine ourselves to Samuel's time, the failure of the elections led him to propose the setting up once again of the nominated advisory council which he had formed shortly after his arrival in Palestine.

Invitations to serve on the council were sent to ten Muslims and Christians (who included Raghib al-Nashashibi, Arif al-Dajani, Sulaiman Tuqan, Amin al-Hadi and Isma'il al-Husaini). They started by accepting, but withdrew when agitation against them was organised by the Palestine Arab Congress.⁶² A few months later, still in an attempt to provide the Palestinians with representative institutions, the government offered to set up an Arab Agency, to be the counterpart of the Jewish Agency. On this occasion the 'moderates', knowing that the 'extremists' would reject the proposal, 'decided to forestall them by publishing their own non-acceptance'.⁶³ In his minute of 23 February, when all these developments were still in the future, Moody had written with prescient common sense: 'In Palestine a politician cannot hope to be successful unless he is an extremist. The personal influence of the Arab extremists on the *effendis* in the towns is great. The personal influence of the *effendis* over the *fellaheen* in the villages is even greater . . .'. The government's quest for representative Palestinians had put it – and the Palestinians – at the mercy of the 'extremists'.

If this was so – and beyond any doubt, it was so – the attempt to introduce European representative devices among the Palestinians was hopeless. It is of course perfectly true that the people of Palestine were at one with those who claimed to speak for them in their utter opposition to Zionism. But this was not enough to make these leaders representative, for they were neither properly or periodically elected, nor were they amenable to the checks and controls which representation normally entails. One of Samuel's successors, Sir Arthur Wauchope, once asked a delegation of the Palestine Arab Congress how they had come to be appointed representative of the Arab population. He was answered by Jamal al-Husaini who said that

from the government point of view they were not elected officially, but the Arabs accepted them as their representatives and since 1920, government had also recognised the Arab executive as representative. They represented both the townspeople and the village population. The actual executive was composed of forty persons, who represented the three hundred members of the [Palestine Arab] Congress.⁶⁴

Jamal al-Husaini's claim was, of course, untenable; but the Palestine government, anxious to balance Arab against Jewish representatives, and trapped by its own long and futile quest for representative institutions, was in no position to contest it.

There remains one device to be considered, by which Samuel hoped to conciliate the Palestinians and make Zionism more acceptable to them. His partiality for it appears very early in his connection with Palestine, and he continued to favour it long after his period as high commissioner. The device was to involve in one way or another Palestine's Arabic-speaking neighbours with Palestine and its problems, in the belief that this would lessen friction in the country and reassure the Palestinians. Samuel, in other words, was an early believer in pan-Arabism. It was immediately following his first visit to Palestine that Samuel broached to Curzon the scheme of an Arab union in which Palestine would be included. While in the country he had heard that the military administration, alarmed at the doings of Faisal's followers in Damascus and at the anti-Zionist sentiments of the Palestinians, was advocating that Faisal should be recognised as the king of a united Syria, including Palestine.⁶⁵ Samuel rightly considered this scheme a threat to Zionist interests, and proposed an alternative scheme: 'I think', he wrote to Curzon, 'the solution lies in the formation of a loose confederation of the Arab-speaking states, each of which should be under its own appropriate government, but all of which should be combined together for common and economic purposes. The seat of such a confederation should be Damascus, and Faisal might be recognised, not only as sovereign in his own state, but also as the honorary head of the confederation'. As Samuel envisaged it, the union would be 'principally economic and not political'; and Palestine, ruled by Great Britain under a mandate embodying the provisions relating to the Jewish National Home, would form part of it. Curzon's immediate reaction to the proposal was to dismiss it briefly. He minuted Samuel's letter: 'A federal council at Damascus with the League of Nations behind it fills me with no sort of enthusiasm'.⁶⁶

Samuel's scheme of confederation was not a mere passing response to a momentary threat. On the contrary. The idea that Palestine's difficulties would be less intractable if her neighbours took an interest in her affairs seems a recurrent one in his thoughts. In his letter to Curzon where he commented on Allenby's fears regarding his appointment to Palestine he insisted on the importance of an understanding with Faisal. 'If that could be effected', he wrote, 'the Arab extremists in Palestine would have no ground on which to stand'.⁶⁷ This, of course, was an illusion since the Sharifians had neither power nor following to control or influence events in Palestine. The illusion was

widespread among both British and Zionists and took a very long time a-dying.

Some two years after suggesting the Arab economic union, Samuel once more put forward a scheme of Arab unity by which, he hoped, the situation in Palestine would be eased. In a letter to the secretary of state of 12 December 1922, Samuel suggested that the government should promote a confederation of Arab states to include the Hijaz, Syria, Palestine, Trans-Jordan, Iraq and possibly Najd. The president of the confederation would be the king of the Hijaz, and there would be a council to look after the common interests of the confederation, such as communications, customs, extradition, culture, and religion. 'More important, however, than any specific functions of the council', he went on, 'would be the fact of its existence. This in itself would give satisfaction to Arab national aspirations. The confederation would be a visible embodiment of Arab unity, and a centre round which the movement for an Arab revival – which is a very real thing – could rally; it would give leadership and direction to that movement, especially on its cultural side'. The Zionists, he declared, would welcome such a scheme, as they 'would regard the advantage of satisfying the reasonable national aspirations of the Arabs and of securing cessation of open and persistent Arab opposition to Jewish expansion in Palestine, as far outweighing the possible future risks that would be involved in Palestine becoming a member of a distinctively Arab polity'. With Samuel's letter was included a memorandum by his chief secretary, Wyndham Deedes, in which he argued that because the Jewish question was restricted to Palestine, this tended to make the feeling on both sides intenser and more bitter: 'If the question of a Jewish National Home were envisaged as part of the revival of eastern civilisation in which both Arab and Jewish national life were to be fostered by England and France, there would be more hope of cooperation and good understanding . . .'. These proposals were received with much scepticism in the Colonial Office. In forwarding them to Curzon for his comment, the duke of Devonshire wrote, in a letter of 10 January 1923, that Samuel's scheme would irritate the French; would arouse Ibn Sa'ud's suspicion; and would not give the Palestinians what they wanted, namely abandonment of Zionism, but merely 'furnish them with a convenient machinery for further protest and agitation'. He concluded: 'As an attempt to promote cooperation between a number of people who have little in common with one another and are torn by mutual jealousies, it would be very

unlikely to succeed'. Curzon's criticism proved even more scathing. The objections to the scheme, he wrote in a letter of 18 January, were 'overwhelming'. As things stood in Palestine, the British government had only two stark alternatives: 'either to rely on Arab support which involves the renunciation of the Zionist policy, or to rely on Jewish support which entails facing the persistent hostility of the Arab element of the population'. Samuel's method of squaring the circle would simply not work. Curzon had a few observations to add concerning the feasibility of relying on the Arabs which exemplify the shrewd, informed judgment which he usually brought to bear on issues of eastern policy – but which, it is true, was not always matched by resolute execution. 'Reliance on the Arabs', he wrote, 'seems to me a policy fraught with considerable danger. It is true that their present hostility is ascribed to our Zionist policy but I feel by no means confident that were that policy to be abandoned we could permanently count on Arab friendship. Our difficulties in Iraq, which no one can attribute to Zionism, should warn us against staking everything on friendly Arab collaboration'.⁶⁸ Here, surely, stated in a nutshell, we find expressed the essential objection to the pan-Arab adventure on which successive British governments embarked in the decade which began with the Palestine Round Table Conference of 1939.

This conference came about as a consequence of the Palestine Arab rebellion which began in 1936. Almost from the start of the rebellion offers of mediation were made to the British government. But both the Palestine administration and the Colonial Office firmly rejected these attempts to interfere in a territory under British mandate. Mediation by Iraq, declared the chief secretary of the Palestine government, would implicate her too closely in the affairs of Palestine 'and thus strengthen claim of king of Iraq and associates of Arab rulers to intervene directly in the mandated territory'.⁶⁹ 'His Majesty's government', the Foreign Office categorically informed the British ambassador at Baghdad, 'clearly cannot agree to any foreign statesman negotiating or mediating between them and the Palestine Arabs'.⁷⁰ In response again, to an offer by the prime minister of Egypt to use his good offices in Palestine, the foreign secretary informed Sir Miles Lampson at Cairo that 'while I have no desire to appear as if administering a rebuff to Nahas Pasha I do not wish to let His Excellency think that by influencing Palestine Arabs to co-operate with the Royal Commission he would be placing His Majesty's Government under an obligation to him. Nor generally do

I wish in any way to encourage his intervention in this matter'.⁷¹

It was at this juncture, after the announcement of the Royal Commission, but before its departure for Palestine, that Samuel proposed to get in touch with Nuri al-Sa'id and endeavour to find some way out of the difficulty. He informed the colonial secretary, Ormsby-Gore, of his plan. Ormsby-Gore was not enthusiastic and advised Samuel not to commit himself too far to Nuri, as negotiations of this kind might 'reopen the bargaining attitude of the Mufti & Co'.⁷² In company with Lord Winterton, Samuel met Nuri at Paris on 19 and 20 September. A note of the discussions which he drew up shows that Nuri's interest in these negotiations was only to advance a pan-Arab scheme in which Iraq would have the primacy. A union between Iraq, Palestine and Trans-Jordan, he told Samuel, would make the Palestinians look with equanimity upon a large Jewish immigration; and he pressed upon Samuel and Winterton his proposal that he, acting officially on behalf of Iraq, should mediate between the Palestinians and the British government. Commenting on these talks, Winterton shrewdly observed that Nuri 'seemed to have the *arrière pensée* that he will some day become the *deus ex machina* for a federation of all Arabia' and that he made any compromise solution impossible.⁷³

The Royal Commission on Palestine, reporting in the summer of 1937, proposed the partition of the country into a Jewish and an Arab state. The proposal was open to all kinds of objections, and in a speech in the House of Lords Samuel set them out in a masterly fashion. To partition he himself preferred a 'great Arab confederation – not to be built up in a day or a year, but gradually perhaps, built up, including Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine as well'. In this confederation Jews and Arabs would co-operate 'as they did in the great days of Arab civilisation, when Jewish statesmen, philosophers and scientists helped the Arabs to keep alight the torch of knowledge'. To this Lord Swinton replied sharply: 'As he knows from his experience, and I know from my four years at the Colonial Office, the difficulty was to get them to cooperate on a Board of Works: are they likely to cooperate in an Arab federation?'⁷⁴

Samuel, however, remained convinced that the solution to the Palestine problem lay through pan-Arabism. While on a visit to Palestine and Egypt in the spring of 1938, he met, among others, the Palestinian leader 'Awni Abd al-Hadi and the Egyptian heir to the

throne, Prince Muhammad Ali. The latter told him that a form of union between Palestine, Trans-Jordan, Syria and the Lebanon would assuage the fear of the Palestinians of being swamped by Jewish immigrants. Samuel went away convinced that since there was nobody among the Arabs to speak on their behalf, action to break the deadlock could be initiated only by the Arab rulers. He realised the objection to foreign intervention in the affairs of a territory under British mandate; but the advantages of such intervention clearly outweighed the disadvantages, and indeed he saw no 'better line of approach towards a possible agreement than through the princes'.⁷⁵

By the autumn of 1938, things were no better, indeed worse, in Palestine. Samuel saw Malcolm MacDonald, the colonial secretary, and again proposed a course of action which would invite intervention by neighbours of Palestine in the country's affairs. He suggested the dispatch of a British mission to Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Trans-Jordan 'with a view to securing their cooperation on lines that would be acceptable to the Jews'.⁷⁶ In the end, things worked out as Samuel desired. The British government itself decided – but not, of course, in order to facilitate a solution acceptable to the Zionists – that it would be advantageous to recognise outside Arab interest in Palestinian politics. They convened the Round Table Conference, which Samuel welcomed in a speech in the House of Lords as 'a visible proof that His Majesty's Government recognise that Palestine is not merely a local question and that just as it interests Zionists all over the world outside Palestine, so also it interests Arabs outside Palestine wherever they may be, and particularly in the contiguous countries'. And he went on to say that 'There should be extended encouragement to the creation of a confederation of Arab states, in which Palestine and Trans-Jordan should form part'.⁷⁷ The Round Table Conference was of course only the beginning of a policy which culminated in the sponsorship of Arab unity and the Arab League. This encouraged and made possible the continuous and systematic interference in Palestine affairs by Iraq, Egypt, Trans-Jordan and the others – each of course, in exclusive pursuit of its own interests. It was an illusion to believe – as its various advocates did – that this policy would either promote peace in Palestine, or advance British interests. As the sequel showed, it also led the Palestinians, within a short space of time, to stark and utter ruin.