

Forum: Historical Security Council

Issue: The Question of Palestine

Student Officer: Rana Ürek

Position: President Chair

Introduction

The lack of cooperation between Arab nationalist movements and Jewish workers' movements against imperialism during the British Mandate has been one of the most unfortunate historical developments in Palestine. The British policies after World War I until the UN decision to partition Palestine in 1947 should be heavily dissected and criticized, as they contributed significantly to the rise of ethnic tensions in the region. Another external influence which is that of the Comintern regarding its communication with the Palestinian Communist Party (PKP) should also be dwelled upon in order to contextualize the turn of historical events in the region. We must also bear in mind the internal factors, as much as external ones, that affected the lack of a uniform people's movement in Palestine. The demographic gap between the two communities where Palestinian Arabs were mostly peasants under feudal-cleric leaders and Jewish workers constituted their own proletariat, will be a key point to understand the unlikely possibility of multinational communist victory in Palestine (Beinen).

Definition of Key Terms

Mandatory Palestine: The British mandate established in 1920 in Palestine following the end of World War I.

Zionism: The political ideology of Zionism extends back to 1870's. Mount Zion in Jerusalem is the name origin of the movement, which is founded on the belief that there is a need to create an immigrant Jewish community, which then evolved into a goal of establishing a new state, in the territories defined as the historic Land of Israel. The movement was denounced as "bourgeois nationalism" by the Palestinian socialist movements, which used to see hope in "proletarian-Zionist" political parties until the early 1920's, in order to fight against British

imperialism.

Balfour Declaration: A public statement issued by the British government in support of the establishment of a Jewish nation in Palestine. Even though the equal rights for Arabs and Jews clauses exist within the declaration, the declaration also beared betrayal for Arabs, as they were promised the independence

Sykes-Picot Agreement: Sykes Picot Agreement between the diplomats, Francois Georges-Picot for France and Sir Mark Sykes for Britain, drafted out how to partition the Middle Eastern land following the first World War. With the Soviet revolution in 1917 and the following withdrawal of Russia from WWI, the secret agreement was publicized, causing significant reaction in the Arab community.

Anti-Semitism: Hostility, prejudice or discrimination towards people of Jewish origin. Not to be confused with anti-Zionism.

General Overview

The lack of binational cooperation between the Palestinian Arabs and Jews during the period between the first World War and the partition of Palestine with regards to socialist movements should be analyzed with detail. Therefore the formation of political parties, external influences and demographic differences between 1919 - 1948 will mainly be discussed in this section.

Socio-economic situation in Palestine

Until the end of World War I, Palestine was under the rule of Ottoman Empire, yet many uprisings for independence and British backed rebellions were occuring during the early 1900's. The Hussein-McMahon letters, exchanged between Sharif Hussein of Mecca, governor of the Hijaz province of Arabia, and Henry McMahon, the British high commissioner to Egypt, where Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, and Saudi Arabia regions were promised for Arab independence by the British in return of Arab rebellions against the Ottoman Empire and cooperation with the Allies in WWI.

Yet this promise was betrayed when the newly found Soviet Union left WWI in 1917 and publicized all secret agreements including the Sykes-Picot agreement on how to partition the

Middle Eastern land following the first World War between the Allies. The Arabs viewed this document as the evidence that the British didn't care for the independence of Arab nations. The Balfour Declaration issuing a formal support for a Jewish independent state by the British government was also another provocation. Yet, the Arab movements against British imperialism were late to develop, at least that was the case for uprisings less oriented on religious and more focused on political ideology.

The demographics characteristics of Arabs in Palestine played a big role in defining the character of their movements. Jews were more ready to organize themselves in socialist parties (more specifically "proletarian-Zionist" political organizations which will be expanded upon with more detail in the following subsection) and resist British imperialism through worker politics since most of the Jewish immigrants coming to Palestine during the first and second immigration waves were European workers aiming to build a society in Palestine. However the Arabs were mostly peasants. They were under the influence of religious-clerics and feudal land ownership systems. The unsuccessful efforts of the Ottoman Empire for centralization in the 19th century, a selection of elite notable families with power dominated the region. The first political representation of the Arabs under the British Mandate was through the selection of the notable family members into The Supreme Muslim Council in 1922 (Beinin).

Another explanation for the initial lack of authentic and organized Arab movements against British imperialism is the fear towards cooperation. Since the Arab Palestinian leadership was fiercely opposed to the British Mandate and the Balfour Declaration, they refused to cooperate with the British Mandate in establishing autonomous Arab political institutions. More importantly, the adaptation of the "millet system" by the British resulted in the condensation of Arabs under religious leaders, which again prevented the formation of a revolutionary movement with distinct political goals (Beinin).

Emergence of Jewish Socialism

Interestingly, the first traces of socialism in Palestine emerged within the Zionist movement which was culturally rooted in the socialist Zionist tradition present in the Tsarist Russia. During the revolutionary transition, anti-Tsarist political formations included many Jewish members, possibly due to the oppression of the already existing high proportion of Jewish workers and

intellectuals in Russia. Nathan Syrkin was one of the leading figures which tried to bridge together Zionism and socialism. This was a precursor to Ber Brochov's "proletarian Zionism" doctrine aiming to protect the rights of the Jewish working class (Budeiri).

Even though the first wave of Jewish immigrants to Palestine from Europe (1882-1904) were mainly motivated by romantic and nationalistic ideals, the second wave of immigrants (1904-1914) were definitely inspired by the ideological premise of "proletarian Zionism." Poale Zion, founded in 1905, was one of the prominent political parties of proletarian Zionism in Palestine (Beinen). As Poale Zion encompassed other independent and more moderate views such as that of Ahdut ha-Avodah (Unity of Labour), fractions within the party started to emerge. A small group within Poale Zion members opposing Ahdut ha-Avodah and feeling a contradiction with the aims of socialist revolution and Zionism in Palestine, parted their ways and founded Mifleget Poalim Sozialistit (MPS), which is the precursor political formation to the Palestinian Communist Party (PKP).

It is noteworthy to mention the collapse of MPS on 1921, following the aftermath of the May Day demonstrations in Jaffa. MPS had the intention to parade from Jaffa to Tel Aviv while calling for the disintegration of the British Mandate and the establishment of a "Soviet Palestine." Another May Day demonstration was also taking place in Jaffa, where the rival socialist party Ahdut ha-Avodah had official authorization to gather. When these two groups, MPS and Ahdut ha-Avodah, came across a fight occurred between them. The violence between these two Jewish political groups resulted in an Arab attack on both sides, as they heard of the attacks and misthought that Arabs were being attacked by them. The consequence was further Arab violence on Zionist settlements, where 48 Jews and 47 Arabs (most of which had been killed by the British forces) died alongside 146 Jews and 73 Arabs being wounded ("Palestine").

This early sign of reactionary violence among Palestinian Arabs bears importance especially regarding the possibility of external provocation. The aftermath of the May Day demonstrations in Jaffa resulted in the deportation of fifteen leading members of MPS by the British rule. alongside several other party members leaving Palestine on their own accord. Since then, all communist activities in Palestine had to be organized discreetly (Kessler). This was the end of MPS, until a pro-Comintern group within their party ranks got together to form the Palestinian

Communist Party (PKP) in 1922.

“Arabization” of PKP (Palestine Communist Party)

As we are set out to discuss the external factors which have affected the fate of the Jewish and Arab movements in the early 1920's, it is also important to discuss the role of the Comintern alongside the British. By February 1924, the Palestine Communist Party (PKP) had become a formally recognised member of the Communist International. By then, all belief in uniting socialism and Zionism under one roof was abandoned in the party ranks, which was not the case for MPS which had varying differences of opinion regarding “proletarian Zionism.” The PKP party program accepted in 1923 contained the following observations:

“Zionism is the movement of the Jewish bourgeoisie which seeks to create markets for itself and exploits romantic nationalist notions for this purpose. Zionism had tied its faith to British imperialism [...] All parties which speak of socialist colonisation (Ahdut ha-Avoda and Hapoel HaTzair) make it easier for the bourgeois Zionists to achieve their aims” (Beinen).

Yet even in 1923, with the disavowal of Zionism, there were still no Arab members of the party. In fact, both PKP and its opposition such as Ahdut ha-Avoda, together received 7% of the vote in the 1923 elections, showing their lack of influence on Arabs in Palestine. Most of their party members were dominantly Jewish and no party member could write a leaflet in Arabic (Beinen). This was going to change in the following years.

PKP was trying to reform itself to become something relatable to Arabs as a possible political option. The arabisation of PKP was something the Comintern desired as well. After PKP became an official branch of the International, Karl Radek, a leader from the Comintern, sent out the following message of directions to PKP about its future:

“Until now the Party was composed of immigrant Jews. In the future it must become a party of Arab workers to which Jews can belong who have acclimated and rooted themselves in the Palestinian conditions people who know Arabic” (Beinen).

One of the earliest events that led to PKP's appeal in Arab communities occurred in 1924, after

the purchase of Jezreel Valley, Afula by the Jewish National Fund. PKP defended the rights of Palestinian peasants to remain in their home against the Zionist settlements, and urged Jewish workers not to collaborate by agreeing to move in to the region. Following this event, Arab newspapers supported the jailed PKP members for campaigning against the settlements by distributing pamphlets.

Furthermore, PKP began to establish communication with factions of the Arab national leadership who were consistently anti-imperialist and against British control. Husaini family, one of the influential traditional families in the region, were one of their early partnerships of PKP, which later ended due to PKP's disavowal of Husainis as fascist collaborators. Additionally, even though the need to establish an anti-imperialist front together with the Arabs was a consensus among the party members, the militantly anti-Zionist faction remained a minority.

Overall, the aimed "arabisation" of the party and the bridge between Arab nationalists and Jewish socialists was not fully achieved in this period. The anti-imperialist movement in Arabs which contained a big potential was not effectively used. In fact, the anti-imperialist character of Arab movements were diverted into an anti-Jewish course by Arab national leaders such as al-Hajj Amin al-Husaini. One of the most explicit examples occurred in 1929 about the disputes over the Wailing Wall, the holy site where the Arab demonstrations against right-wing Zionists resulted in a series of attacks on the Jewish population. PKP claimed that British instigation was responsible of the attacks after some Arab demonstrators were observed to shout "The government is with us!" as they attacked the Jewish population (Beinen).

The Revolt of 1936 - 1939

Starting from the early 1930's PKP maintained close ties with the left wing of Istiqlal (Independence) Party, increasing its influence among the Arab workers. At the same time, the Arab Higher Committee was also preparing to launch a countrywide campaign against Zionism and British Mandate, which was supported by a part of the PKP. When the strikes against the British government, with the leadership of the Arab Higher Committee, began, the demands included: the establishment of a National Government responsible to a representative council, abandonment of the policy regarding Zionist settlements and the prohibition of further Jewish

immigration to the region.

The support in PKP diminished as the armed struggle contained elements of terror in it. The Arab members of PKP still continued an active role in the revolt until late 1938, even after the Comintern denounced the leader of the revolt and Arab Higher committee member Amin al-Husaini as a fascist, a foreshadowing al-Husaini's ties with the Nazi and Fascist Italy regimes and the meeting he had with Hitler in 1941 in Ribbentrop to seek support for Arab independence in Palestine.(Beinen). The divide in PKP regarding the support for the Arab revolts, resulted in the party's 1943 divide where an Arab faction separated itself and formed the National Liberation League in 1944.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Poale Zion: The party was founded in Palestine in 1905. The official party ideology was marxism and socialism alongside "labour Zionism," as most of the party members were constituted of Jewish diaspora who migrated to Palestine with romantic nationalistic views of Zionism. They were criticised by the Comintern as an anti-communist political party disguised under a socialist and communist movement (Kessler). The party viewed this as a contemporary mistake and wanted to join the International, but only certain members who disavowed Zionism in any form were allowed. These members would later form the Mifleget Poalim Sozialistit (MPS), the precursor to Palestine Communist Party (PKP).

Ahdut ha-Avodah: After the split in Poale Zion, where some party members began to form Mifleget Poalim Sozialistit (MPS), the remaining portion gathered itself under Ahdut ha-Avodah. The root of the division was due to conflicting views on Zionism, where MPS mostly viewed it as a bourgeois nationalism, and only supported the Jewish immigrants and workers building the nation without abiding by the ideological position of Zionism which they thought was hijacked by imperialist aims. Ahdut ha-Avodah and MPS would clash in the May Day demonstrations of 1921 in Jaffa, which escalated an Arab attack on Jewish communities. While Ahdut ha-Avodah had official permission to demonstrate for the May Day, MPS was not favoured by the British rule. And after their encounter resulted in a bloodshed, many MPS members were arrested and deported outside of Palestine.

Mifleget Poalim Sozialistit (MPS): Most MPS members previously belonged to Poale Zion, however parted their ways as they didn't see potential in endorsing Zionism, even in the proletarian form. For that ideological difference, they became the rival party of Ahdut ha-Avodah. Following the Jaffa demonstrations, the leaders of the party were arrested and the party needed to go undercover to start its organization again. This was how the Palestinian Communist Party (PKP) was founded.

Palestinian Communist Party (PKP): PKP became an official part of the International in February 1924. The reason for not accepting Poale Zion as a branch of the International was not present for PKP, as most of the members did not endorse Zionism, of course some more militantly than the others. However, still the party had problems reaching out to the Arab population in order to combine their struggles under the British rule with the aims of their party. They are criticized by the Comintern in their lack of hope to see revolutionary potential in the Arab national leadership. Party's relationship with one of those leaders al-Husaini, which they cut off ties with due to their mistrust in his anti-imperialism must have affected their position.

Arab Higher Committee: Initiated in 1936 by Haj Amin al-Husayni, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, this political body became central for Palestinian Arabs. The formation of the committee followed the general strikes of Arab workers in 1936 against the British government. The committee wanted to end Jewish immigration and Zionist settlements. After the assassination of a British District Commissioner in 1917, the committee was ruled illegal by the British government.

Comintern: Comintern was a supporter of the anti-Zionist Jewish socialist movements in Palestine. After PKP addition to the International they gave directives for party members of PKP in order for them to incorporate Arab peasants and their anti-imperialist sentiments, mostly practices under the flag of nationalism, into their own movement. However despite a few successful attempts the "arabization" of PKP was not achieved. Furthermore the Comintern policies regarding Palestine also changed with the emerging leadership of Stalin.

United Kingdom: The policies of the British Mandate have been heavily criticized by both the communist parties and Arab nationalist movements. The publicization of the Sykes-Picot agreement by the Soviet Union following its withdrawal from the war due to 1917 revolution,

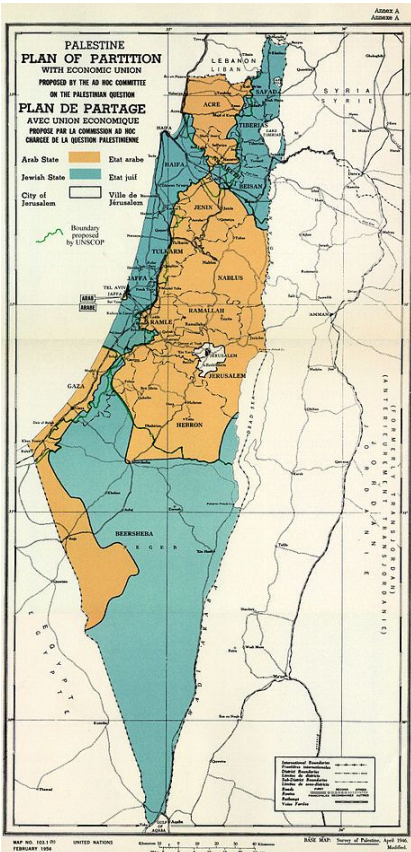
which concerned how to partition the Middle Eastern land following the first World War between the Allies was not well received by the Arab community. Therefore a hostility existed between the governors and the population even from the beginning. The repression of the communist activities from the early 1920's until WWII where the restrictions were loosened due to partnership with the Soviet Union was also a contributor for the tensions between the British and the socialist movements. During the pre-partition period, the British also supported the establishment of Zionist settlements. The killing following the manhunt instigated by the British government for al-Qassam who founded the anti-Zionist and anti-British militant organization Black Hand, resulted in a great backlash from the Arab community which fueled the revolts of 1936-1939. When the British realized the growing and uncontrollable tensions in the region, the partition of the land was proposed as a way to end the British Mandate. The partition plan of 1947 was passed after its proposal to UN even though many political groups within Palestine opposed the plan.

Timeline of Events

1882 - 1904	First wave of immigrations of European Jews motivated with romantic and nationalistic ideals.
1904 - 1919	Second wave of Jewish immigration, this time motivated with the with the ideological premise of "proletarian Zionism."
1915 - 1916	Hussein Hussein-McMahon Letters: the eight letter exchange between Sharif Hussein of Mecca, governor of the Hijaz province of Arabia, and Sir Henry McMahon, the British high commissioner to Egypt, showcases that in return of the Arab rebellions against the Ottoman Empire, the recognition of the independent Arab states in Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, and Saudi Arabia regions were promised.
May 16, 1916	Sykes Picot Agreement between the diplomats, Francois Georges-Picot for France and Sir Mark Sykes for Britain, drafted out how to partition the Middle Eastern land following the first World War. With the Soviet revolution in 1917 and the withdrawal of Russia from WWI, the secret agreement was publicized, causing significant reaction in the Arab community.

1916	Arab revolts against Ottoman Empire.
1917	Balfour Declaration issued by the British, expressing support for the establishment of a Jewish nation in Palestine
1918	End of WWI with the lost Ottoman Empire.
1920 - 1923	British Mandate on Palestine
1933 - 1936	A third wave of Jewish immigration resulting from the threat of Nazi Germany
1936 - 1939	Arab revolts against the British Mandate
1939 - 1945	Jewish resistance against the British Mandate
1947	On February, the British government refers the “Question of Future of Palestine” to the United Nations. On 29th of November, UN passes the draft to partition the land into Jewish and Arab Palestinian states.

UN Involvement



Following the uprisings and conflicts in the region during 1929-1936, the proposal to partition the Palestinian land (UNSCOP Partition Plan) was brought up on United Nations on 29th of November, 1947. With a vote of 31 countries in favour, 13 against and 10 abstentions the draft was passed. Among the absentee votes, United Kingdom was included. More surprisingly, one of the 31 votes in favour of the partition belonged to the Soviet Union. The revolutionary potential seen in the Arabs, under Lenin’s leadership, including acts of giving directives to PKP to incorporate Arab peasants into their party, was slowly abandoned under Stalin. The benefits of not opposing an international

consensus towards the establishment of a Jewish state seemed to outweigh anything the Arabs could offer (Krammer). Even though the PKP and its splitted Arab branch National Liberation League (NLL) both initially opposed the partition plan, they accepted it after the Soviet endorsement of the partition. Therefore the Soviet decision regarding the partition should also be questioned.

Relevant UN Documents

[Resolution 181](#): Adopted on 29th of November 1947, advocates for the partition of the Mandatory Palestine into Arab and Jewish states with international status for Jerusalem.

[Resolution 212](#): Adopted on 11th of November 1947, concerned with the assistance to Palestinian refugees

[Resolution 194](#): Adopted on 11th of December 1947, guarantees movement of freedom to Jerusalem and other Holy Places, advocates for compensation money to be paid to refugees.

Possible Solutions

Even though the end of British Mandate seems to be an improvement for the condition of the Palestinian land, the rising tensions between the Palestinian Arabs and Jews during the past decades such as the events of Jaffa demonstrations in 1921 and the Wailing Wall Incident in 1929, allows the further continuation of racial violence. The anti-imperialist character of the Arab movement has been observed to turn anti-Jewish, as a result of British provocations. This will play a huge role during the civil war between Arab-Israeli War in 1948. Therefore the partition, or the creation of a Jewish state from the viewpoint of the Arabs living in that region, should not be expected to be welcomed without violence. PKP and its 1943 splitted Arab branch National Liberation League (NLL) both initially opposed the partition plan, only to have to support it after the Soviet endorsement for the partition. Therefore, the overall legitimacy of the UN imposed partition should be questioned.

Bibliography

Beinen, Joel. "The Palestine Communist Party 1919 - 1948." *MERIP Reports*, no. 55, 1977, pp. 3–17. *JSTOR*,

www.jstor.org/stable/3010830.

Budeiri, Musa. *The Palestine Communist Party, 1919-1948*.

books.google.com.tr/books?id=R2F2DwAAQBAJ&pg=PA35&lpg=PA35&dq=mifleget+poalim+sozialistit&source=bl&ots=EaWqivfJ_c&sig=ACfU3U3If0NtDq0O0xZV00csLBn51YgjKQ&hl=tr&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiy9tKn2OrgAhXDKIAKHbs_AxsQ6AEwAHoECAEQAAQ#v=onepage&q=mifleget%20poalim%20sozialistit&f=false.

"History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict." *ProCon*,

israelipalestinian.procon.org/view.timeline.php?timelineID=000031.

Kessler, Mario. "Joseph Berger: Communist Activist in Palestine and Victim of Stalinism

(1904–1978)." *Marxist Internet Archive*, www.marxists.org/subject/jewish/berger.pdf.

Krammer, Arnold. "Soviet Motives in the Partition of Palestine, 1947-48." *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1973, pp. 102–119. *JSTOR*,

www.jstor.org/stable/2535483.

"Palestine. Disturbances in May, 1921." *Archive.org*,

archive.org/details/palestinedisturb00gearich/page/10.