

## «How Feudal Arab Landowners who exploited their peasantry became Nationalist Leaders»

by Joan Peters, 1984

[...] One condition was unique to Palestine, however: it was solely in Judah-cum-Palestine that the traditional Jewish *dhimmi* not only would be equal, but he or she would

- 1) help wrench the *effendis'* historical hold over the peasant-migrants and
- 2) create independence for the Jews.

5 As a counter, the *effendis* would set about inflaming the entrenched Jew-hatred of the Muslim masses by instilling fear in the only way the masses understood: by ominous warnings that Jews might begin to oppress Muslims as the Muslims had for so long oppressed the Palestinian Jews. [...]

10 It was in 1909, at the time when leading *effendis* felt their grip over the lives and fortunes of their erstwhile prey was getting too loose, that *effendi* Ruhi Bey al-Khalidi warned that the Jews would "displace the Arab farmers from their land and their fathers' heritage.... The Jews were not here when we conquered the country." It mattered little that the *effendi's* argument was false. It served his group's long-range economic interests, and at least some of his misstatements would be swallowed whole by a surprisingly large part of the world for the better part of a century.

15 In 1911, an Arab land official from a notable family based in Damascus charged that the Jewish settlers in Palestine wanted "solely to expel the poor Arab peasants from their land," while "treacherous Arab landowners" sold lands to the Jews. [...]

20 The *effendis'* somewhat disingenuous tactic in 1909 may have been the first specious charge of Jews specifically "displacing" Arabs. But the same *effendi* tactic had succeeded in pressuring the Turks to halt Jewish immigration to the Holy Land nearly thirty years before that. And the same tool would be cynically employed later by the Arabs with British support: later, "Arabs" in "Palestine" would be seen by the world as having been "displaced" and "excluded" from "their homeland" in 1948.

25 Despite the anti-Jewish solicitation inherent in his positions, as early as 1911 Ruhi Bey al-Khalidi proclaimed he was not an "anti-Semite, but an anti-Zionist." It was perhaps the premiere performance of that protest of qualification that is prevalent today. One benefit accruing from prominent *effendi* al-Khalidi's pronouncement could have been that Jews might be more likely to continue to buy land surreptitiously from one who disclaimed any support of "anti-Semitism." [...]

30 Anti-Jewish attitudes were the "daily bread in Palestine. Sheikh Sulayman al-Taji, an "Ottomanist" patriot and landlord who, paradoxically, himself sold land to Jews, wrote a poem called "The Zionist Danger" about "Jews, the weakest of all peoples and the least of them ... sons of clinking gold, stop your deceit . . ." The "poem" was published in November 1913, and that same month, murders were committed in Jewish kibbutzes (kibbutzim) of the Jewish-settled area of the country.

By the time of World War I, the active Arab anti-Semitism, whether called "Ottomanism," "anti-Zionism," or "Arab nationalism," had evolved into a kind of Muftism after Haj Amin al-Husseini, Grand Mufti and scion of the al-Husseini notables.