

THE SHORT-LIVED LIBERAL EXPERIMENT IN POSTWAR IRAQ (1945-1948)

Karol SORBY

Institute of Oriental and African Studies, Slovak Academy of Sciences,
Klemensova 19, 813 64 Bratislava, Slovakia

The events of the immediately post-war years in Iraq were of paramount importance in consolidating opposition to Britain and the Iraqi monarchy. The growth in size of the working class, combined with the new political circumstances, created conditions that favoured the development of a labour movement. Furthermore, a number of political parties were licensed in 1946, inaugurating a certain degree of cautious democratization in Iraq. But from 1941 until the 1958 revolution, Nūrī as-Sa'īd either headed or controlled most government coalitions. After World War II he tried to make a long term agreement with Great Britain by means of a new Anglo-Iraqi Treaty signed at Portsmouth, in January 1948. So vehement were public demonstrations against it that the treaty was never ratified. The Arab defeat in Palestine war had serious political and economic repercussions in Iraq as it gave the regime the opportunity to impose martial law on the country. The traditional pro-British policy continued and failures in domestic affairs were matched by foreign policy failures. This policy implemented through relentless domestic suppression – only served to intensify the desire for full independence.

In postwar Iraq the political life on the surface appeared stable. The establishment politicians, supported by the landlord-shaykhs, the new urban wealthy, and the upper reaches of the army, seemed firmly entrenched in power. Beneath the surface, however, new social groups, motivated by different ideas and aspirations, emerged to challenge establishment values and policy. In country and city alike, poverty was widespread, yet new oil wealth was creating visible pockets of modernity and presenting Iraqis with prospects for a better future. Although the bulk of the population remained traditional in outlook and social practice, a new generation, reared on Western ideas of nationalism, secularism, and modernity, pursued the search for a new national identity on a new ideological basis.¹

¹ Marr, Phebe: *The Modern History of Iraq*. Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press 1985, p. 95.

As well as inaugurating a certain degree of cautious democratization, the circumstances of the Second World War had important effects upon the Iraqi economy, which gradually came to make themselves felt in political terms. The presence of the allied armies of occupation meant a sudden influx of a large body of newcomers with substantial purchasing power, while the absence of normal supplies of manufactured goods from abroad gave local firms and industrialists an obvious incentive to expand or initiate production, and thus facilitated capital accumulation on a larger scale than had previously been possible.²

The contradictions appeared sharply in the area of internal policy, but still more clearly in the area of foreign policy. Anti-British feelings over persecutions, arrests and executions rose steadily and there was a general dissatisfaction in Iraqi society. These feelings were stirred by the Palestine question. Antipathy to the British could be found at every level of Iraqi society, but there was also strong pro-British sentiment, especially among the older generation of political leaders. The British were allied with the "old gang" of Iraqi politicians, who personified reaction and corruption. The eruption of revolutionary movements in other Middle Eastern states caused strong repercussions inside Iraq disclosing the fragility of the existing regime and its vulnerability to outside pressures. As these pressures intensified, Iraq was plunged into a series of foreign policy crises, some due to its alliance with Britain, others of the leaders' own making. All weakened and further isolated the regime from large numbers of its own people.³

The year 1945 raised hopes both among working people and national bourgeoisie that after the end of the war a fundamental change of situation will occur. But the ruling circles refused to allow any changes. Martial law remained valid and the situation of workers especially those working during the war for allied armies, worsened drastically. On the other hand the war had shattered traditional relations in the villages, where the majority of peasants depended on the landlords. Before the war the landlords could force the peasants to work on their land and fugitive peasants be brought back by force. During the war the British command depended on a free work force, so the peasants could not be afterwards forced to return.⁴ Nevertheless, the landlords retained remarkable influence in the society as they dominated the countryside and the peasants constituted more than 55 per cent of the population. In such unfavourable conditions more and more people sympathized with the underground *Communist Party of Iraq*. The party, whose general secretary was Jūsuf Salmān Jūsuf, called *al-fahd* (the leopard), had a solid organizational structure and ideologically

² Sluglett, Marion Farouk and Peter Sluglett: *Iraq since 1958. From revolution to dictatorship*. London, New York, I.B. Tauris and Co Ltd Publishers 1990, p. 38.

³ Al-Ja'fari, Muḥammad Ḥamdī: *Inqilāb al-waṣīy fi al-ʿIrāq*. (The Regent's Coup in Iraq). Cairo, Maktabat Madbūlī 2000, pp. 44-45.

⁴ Paloncy, Evžen: *Irák*. Praha, Nakladatelství politické literatury 1964, p. 20.

worked through illegally published and distributed magazines "ash-Sharāra" (the Sparkle) and "al-Qā'ida" (the Base).⁵

When the war came to an end, political consciousness was aroused and there was an almost universal demand for democratic freedoms promised during the war. The British in general sympathized with the reformers who demanded, among other things, social justice, educational programmes, and agricultural development. Unless such requests were met, the intelligentsia might swing to the left and the communist faction would be buttressed. If the situation deteriorated the British would find themselves aligned with the corrupt ruling class. They thus faced a dilemma: on the one hand the British favoured reforms; on the other they wished to retain the friendship of those ruling Iraq.

The events of the immediate post-war years were to be of paramount importance in consolidating opposition to Britain and the monarchy. Under the cabinets of Ḥamdī al-Pāchachī and Tawfiq as-Suwaydī between 1944-1946, when Nūrī as-Sa'īd had fallen temporarily out of favour as the regent had become tired of being dictated to and was attempting to assert his independence,⁶ a total of sixteen labour unions, twelve of which were controlled by the communists, were licensed. The largest unions were formed in the country's most important industrial undertakings, Basra port, and the Iraqi railways, which were both under British management. Major strikes for higher wages took place on the railways and the port.⁷

The government of Ḥamdī al-Pāchachī, which had become entirely unfitted for the changed conditions of the time, made no move which showed any inclination towards progress or granting the democratic freedoms. The victory of the British *Labour Party* in the general elections of 1945 was particularly discussed in political circles in Baghdad and the press as favouring the liberal and democratic forces in Iraq. But the government of Ḥamdī al-Pāchachī paid no attention to the new spirit, and the security regulations, censorship, and martial law, which were tolerated during the war, were continued. The press began to agitate for a cabinet change, but Ḥamdī al-Pāchachī would not resign.

Owing to continued protests made by representatives of various shades of opinion, the regent, prince ʿAbdalilāh ibn ʿAlī, showed increasing interest in domestic politics.⁸ He both recognized the need for change and wished to profit from it personally. Realizing how unpopular he had become for his cooperation with the British during the war and for his suppression of the Rashīd ʿĀlī al-

⁵ Laqueur, Walter: *Communism and Nationalism in the Middle East*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul 1957, pp. 183-189.

⁶ Batau, Hanna: *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*. Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press 1982, pp. 348-350.

⁷ Sluglett and Sluglett, op. cit., p. 39.

⁸ Nāsirī, Tāriq: ʿAbdalilāh al-waṣīy ʿalā ʿarṣ al-ʿIrāq (1939-1958). Ḥayātuhu wa dawruhu as-siyāsī. (ʿAbdalilāh the Iraqi Regent. His Life and Political Role). Vol II, Baghdad 1990, p. 350.

Kaylānī movement, the regent ʿAbdalilāh now strived to gain some public support by introducing a new political direction. In a meeting of deputies and senators on 27 December 1945 without consulting the prime minister, he made a speech in which he called for a new modified treaty with Britain, for the formation of political parties, promised full freedom for their activities and the inauguration of economic and social reforms. He also pleaded for a new electoral law, for measures to improve social security and unemployment, some redistribution of wealth and a political “open door” for the younger, educated generation.⁹

Although Iraq, like the rest of the Middle East, experienced a postwar wave of resurgent nationalism, she did not have such violent anti-British manifestations as those in Egypt. This calm could be attributed partly to the less sophisticated character of Iraqi politics, as contrasted to the Egyptian, and partly to the nearness of the Soviet Union, whose action in Azerbaijan in 1945-1946 made the more sedate Iraqi politicians think twice before they embarked upon adventurous policies. In contrast to Egyptian King Fārūq, long resentful at the personal humiliations inflicted by the British, Iraq’s regent owed much to Britain and as a Hashemite, favoured British-Arab understanding.¹⁰

The regent’s speech reflected a realization of this political consciousness and the rise of a “new force” in politics which, as subsequent events demonstrated, could be destructive if not permitted to play its role through constitutional channels. For many, the regent’s speech came as a distinct encouragement. The immediate reactions to the regent’s speech were favourable, but the problem for the regime was how to implement this policy. The elder politicians and the reactionaries viewed it with grave suspicion. The government of Ḥamdī al-Pāchachī, which represented the vested interests of the elder politicians, failed to honour the regent’s promises in spite of criticism in parliament.¹¹ Knowing that he no longer had the support of the regent and no longer able to control his cabinet, Pāchachī tendered his resignation on 29 January 1946. The regent’s new ideas were surprising as he more often than his predecessors used the right given to the ruler, to dissolve the chamber of deputies and he had ordered changes in the constitution to be made to increase the legal capacity of the monarch. He undertook that step in harmony with British policy, which supported liberal regimes in several countries of its sphere of influence.¹²

The regent called a meeting of the leading politicians at his palace and there was a difference of opinion on the new government to be formed. The problem

⁹ Al-Ḥasanī, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq: *Tārīḥ al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya* (A History of the Iraqi Governments), Vol VI, Baghdad 1988, pp. 313-316.

¹⁰ Lenczowski, George: *The Middle East in World Affairs*. New York, Ithaca, Cornell University Press 1956, p. 250.

¹¹ Al-Ḥasanī, *op. cit.*, Vol VI, p. 317.

¹² Al-ʿAqqād, Ṣalāḥ: *Al-Maṣriq al-ʿarabī al-muʿāsir*. (The Contemporary Arab East). Cairo 1983, p. 223.

was how to implement the new policy. It had to go far enough to propitiate the opposition and yet not so far as to alienate regime's conservative base of support. A cabinet crisis developed known as "the crisis of the ruling class" which lasted more than three weeks until the opposition of the extreme right was overruled. It was clear that for implementing a liberal policy "strong-hand" politicians were not suitable, so for this task, the regent on 23 February 1946 chose Tawfiq as-Suwaydī as prime minister. The new government was composed of men sympathetic to liberalism who were determined to carry out the policy of reforms promised in the regent's speech.

The cabinet started with fair hopes: although, surprisingly, no budget for 1946-1947 was submitted, the state finances were still treated as giving no cause for immediate alarm. The foreign policy was not fully in line with the ideas of the regent, who wanted closer cooperation with Turkey. Tawfiq as-Suwaydī proposed to revise the Anglo-Iraqi treaty of 1930, and to follow a strong pan-Arab policy with a view to strengthening the Arab league rather than to pursue an alliance with Turkey at the expense of Arab solidarity.¹³ Although the cabinet approved the treaty with Turkey at the regent's suggestion, it made a reservation that it should not contravene the Arab League Pact.¹⁴ The new electoral law long under preparation was passed, substantially improving and liberalizing the existing procedures. It did not, however, introduce direct one-stage election, as preferred by the opposition.

The "new force" was made up of two former groupings, although they were formally organized as two, or perhaps three, political parties. The first was the old *al-Ahālī* group, whose ideology of democracy and socialism had become popular. This group was split into two, owing in the main to personal differences, rationalized on ideological grounds: the party of Kāmil al-Chādirchī emphasizing democracy, the other led by ʿAbdalfattāḥ Ibrāhīm, stressing socialism. The second group was made up of the pan-Arabs, former followers of Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī, and members of the *al-Muʿannā* club, who reorganized themselves into an almost socialist political party.¹⁵

The government, which was formed to grant certain democratic freedoms in order to win the confidence of the new generation and liberal elements, was opposed by the leading elder politicians, and eventually forced to resign. Saʿd Ṣāliḥ, minister of interior, without long hesitation on 20 April gave permission for licensing five new political parties. The only party that was not permitted,

¹³ As-Suwaydī, Tawfiq: Muḏakkirātī. Niṣf qarn min tārikh al-ʿIrāq wa al-qaḏīya al-ʿarabiya. (My recollections. Half Century of Iraqi History and the Arab Question). Beirut, Dār al-kātib al-ʿarabī 1969, p. 438.

¹⁴ The Pact of the Arab League, 22 March 1945. In: Hurewitz, J.C.: Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East. A Documentary Record. Vol II. Princeton, New Jersey, D. Van Nostrand Co, Inc. 1956, pp. 245-248.

¹⁵ Khadduri, Majid: Independent Iraq 1932-1958. A Study in Iraqi Politics. London, Oxford University Press 1960, pp. 259-260.

was the *National Liberation Party* (Ḥizb at-taḥarrur al-waṭanī) under the leadership of Muḥammad ash-Shabībī, as it was only a cover name for the *Communist Party*.

Of the permitted parties four can be labelled as ideological and the fifth, the *Liberal Party* (Ḥizb al-aḥrār), founded in 1939, which was inactive during the war, was now revived with a modest reform programme made attractive by an anti-British colouring.¹⁶ It was a not numerous centre party, founded and led by Tawfiq as-Suwaydī. After the fall of his government Tawfiq as-Suwaydī resigned and the leadership of the party was assumed by Saʿd Ṣāliḥ and after his death in 1948 by ʿAbdalwahhāb Maḥmūd. Another outstanding member of the party was Kāmil al-Chuḍayrī, president of the Baghdad chamber of commerce. The official daily paper of the party was Ṣawt al-Aḥrār (*The voice of the Liberals*).

The new parties were formed mainly on the basis of domestic issues. The right wing *Independence Party* (Ḥizb al-istiqlāl) advocated a strong Arab nationalist policy and moderate social reform. Many of its members were either former members of the pan-Arab *al-Muṭannā* club¹⁷ or sympathizers with the Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī coup d'état, brought up to date by accretions of students and malcontent intelligentsia. The leader of the party was Muḥammad Maḥdī Kubba from a well-known *sharī* family and secretary general was a *sunnī* muslim Fāʿiq as-Sāmarrāʾī. The party had a solid organizational structure; based its foreign policy on unfriendliness to Turkey and to Great Britain but "neutrality" towards the Soviet Union. In the Palestine question it supported the *muftī* Amīn al-Ḥusajnī against Hashemite aspirations.¹⁸ The analysis of the programme shows, that the party demanded an agrarian reform and though it did not fix the limit of the land holding, it wanted the land to be divided among peasants who cultivated it within farming cooperatives with equal acreage for every family. The programme recommended the great industrial projects to be state undertakings mainly in cases when private investment is insufficient.¹⁹ This indicates that the party did not consider the nationalization of the existing projects, only the participation of the state in new projects. The party's official press organ was Liwāʾ al-istiqlāl (*The banner of independence*).

The *National Democratic Party* (al-Ḥizb al-waṭanī ad-dīmuqrāṭī), left of centre, was a direct outgrowth of the older *al-Aḥālī* group with its progressive traditions of the thirties. It was the party of the national bourgeoisie as most of the leadership came from wealthy or well-established families, a background oddly in contrast with their semi-socialist views, which some had acquired at

¹⁶ Longrigg, Stephen Hemsley: *Iraq 1900 to 1950. A Political, Social and Economic History*. Beirut, Libraire du Liban 1968, p. 335.

¹⁷ A club associating Arab patriots (nationalists), named after the Arab military commander of the 7th century.

¹⁸ Al-ʿAkkām: ʿAbdalāmīr Hādī: *Tārīḥ Ḥizb al-istiqlāl al-ʿirāqī 1946-1958. (A History of the Independence Party of Iraq)*. Baghdad 1986, pp. 33-35.

¹⁹ Al-ʿAkkām, op. cit., p. 43.

Western universities. The party was headed by Kāmil al-Chādirchī and other prominent members were Ḥusajn Jamil and Muḥammad Ḥadīd. The *National Democratic Party* reminded in many aspects the *Independence Party*: kept to constitutional forms of political struggle though it was clear that within the existing regime it was impossible to form a parliament which would vote for reforms.²⁰ The *National Democratic Party* did not focus its attention on national and Arab questions, it stood for Western type parliamentary system where the cabinet is responsible to the parliament, for observation of democratic rights and freedoms and for introduction of direct elections. For that reason it had few followers in the countryside. It also demanded agrarian reform, but like the *Independence Party* it did not fix the maximum limit of the land holding. In the field of industry the party did not demand nationalization, the state had to observe the development of industry, especially of the oil industry.²¹ Despite the party's concern for land reform, it found little echo in the rural countryside, where the overwhelming majority of the peasants retained their tribal and sectarian ties. The official daily paper was *Ṣawt al-Ahālī* (*Voice of the kinsfolk*).

Both the *Independence Party* and the *National Democratic Party* appealed almost wholly to the urban, literate classes. Their activities centered on a newspaper and the creation of a favourable climate of opinion. Their impact on the lower classes, whether urban or rural, was minimal. Both parties were dedicated to working through parliament and elections to achieve their aims. However, as time passed and it became clear that they would not unseat the establishment or even gain many seats in the assembly, they became more negative in their policy toward the government, and more alienated from the system.²²

Farther to the left was the *National Union Party* (Ḥizb al-ittiḥād al-waṭanī) that represented the radical bourgeois left. Leader of the party, °Abdalfattāḥ Ibrāhīm was in the thirties a member of the *al-Ahālī* group. He was influenced by Marxist ideas and advocated radical social reform within the limits of parliamentary democracy, but hesitated to apply revolutionary methods of political struggle being convinced that the situation in the country was not yet ripe for a revolution.²³ By founding the party he wanted to unite leftist elements into one organization on a reform and not revolutionary programme. Because in his daily newspaper *as-Sijāsa* (*Politics*) he criticized the circumstances and vigorously fought for fulfilment of the party programme, the newspaper was suppressed in 1946 by the government of Arshad al-'Umarī and the *National Union Party* was disbanded in September 1947.²⁴

²⁰ Al-Chādirchī, Kāmil: *Mudakkirāt Kāmil al-Chādirchī wa tāriḫ al-Ḥizb al-waṭanī ad-dīmuqrāṭī*. (Memoirs of Kāmil al-Chādirchī and a History of the National Democratic Party). Beirut, Dār al-ṭalī'a 1970, pp. 54 and 86.

²¹ Al-Ḥasanī, op. cit., Vol VI, pp. 38-39; Al-Chādirchī, op. cit., p. 90.

²² Marr, op. cit., p. 99.

²³ Al-°Aqqād, op. cit., p. 229.

²⁴ Longrigg, op. cit., p. 336.

The *People's Party* (Ḥizb aš-ša^cb) has been the most leftist of all the permitted parties, supported and even infiltrated by the *Communist Party*. The party leader, ^cAzīz Sharīf, was a well-known Baghdad lawyer and prominent member of the Iraqi Partisans of Peace movement. The party programme did not differ substantially from the programme of the *National Union Party* and many contemporaries suspected ^cAzīz Sharīf to have written the communist proclamations in the magazine al-Qā^cida. Contrary to the unionists, it had contacts with the international communist and worker movement.²⁵ Its official daily paper al-Waṭan (*The Nation*), was also suppressed by the government of Arshad al-^cUmarī. Both parties were of the same opinion of the Arab union: they were afraid that it could be achieved for the sake of the Arab reaction, so they stressed cooperation between democratic peoples organizations in the Arab countries not between governments.

The reactionary ruling circles limited the political activities of the *National Union Party* and the *People's Party* by all means. Although the *Communist Party* was prohibited, it had a considerable influence among the working classes as the party used all possible methods for political work. It also used the platform of the permitted *Anti-Zionist League* (^cUṣbat mukāfaḥat aš-ṣahyūniya) for wide political agitation. The party gained important positions within the trade union movement and that caused fear in the government that the workers would not be satisfied purely with economic demands but would combine them with political demands.²⁶ The most important political feature of that period in Iraq was that despite different opinions of politicians and political parties (except the extreme right) there existed a common platform which was the liquidation of the influence of the British imperialists and their domestic helpers.

The year 1946 was a stormy one in Iraq. Despite the flowering of new political parties, the liberalization programme of the government of Tawfiq as-Suwaydī was short-lived. During its short span in office the government was able to introduce several important changes: martial law was ended, the restrictions imposed on the press and public meetings during the war were removed and the remaining interment camp was closed.²⁷ The spring of 1946 was marked with struggle to abolish the notorious Anglo-Iraqi treaty which represented the most serious obstacle to the democratization of society, where the foreign policy problems were mixed with domestic troubles. The political parties – permitted and initially even encouraged by the regime – aided by the spread of press and radio and by an expanded educational system, managed to activate the new socioeconomic groups, especially the educated middle class and the working class. But the presence of these groups in vulnerable sectors of the economy and

²⁵ Al-^cAqqād, op. cit., p. 229.

²⁶ Laqueur, op. cit., p. 186.

²⁷ At-^cāikrītī, Salmān: Al-waṣīy ^cAbdalilāh ibn ^cAlī yabḥaṭ ^can ^carš. 1939-1953. (The Regent ^cAbdalilāh ibn ^cAlī is seeking a throne). Beirut, ad-Dār al-^carabiya li-l-mawsū^cāt 1989, pp. 97-98.

society brought about a possible danger, because their influence was increasingly evident in demonstrations, strikes and disturbances which further weakened the regime.²⁸

The demand for the abolition of the unequal Anglo-Iraqi treaty was aimed not only at considerable weakening of the position of the British, but also at the Iraqi extreme right, which could proceed with its antipopular policy first of all thanks to the support of the British imperialists. The British armed forces, mainly the units of the RAF at the air bases of al-Ḥabbānīya and ash-Shuʿayba, were a permanent threat for patriotic forces and support for the reactionary forces. In the struggle for the abolition of the treaty the leftist forces, mainly the communists, were most active. They used their influence to press this demand through the licensed political parties and the trade unionist movement. But the Iraqi reaction was well aware that abolition of the treaty would jeopardize the position of the supporters of the monarchy.

The government of Tawfīq as-Suwaydī, which was formed to grant certain democratic freedoms in order to win the confidence of the new generation and liberal elements, was opposed by the leading elder politicians, who strictly refused the “liberalization manoeuvre”. The elder politicians reacted violently to the new popular force. Their combined pressure with the regent’s approval, resulted in the overthrow of the government of Tawfīq as-Suwaydī. It needed two new cabinets to undo what that government has done in giving formal recognition to the popular force. The regent himself had to recognize that he acted too hastily and he eventually forced the cabinet to resign. It was achieved by a political stratagem: the senate did not approve a temporary budget for two months.²⁹ It was thus that the government, though it was energetically trying to carry out its reform programme, was forced to resign on 30 May 1946.

On 1 June, to rescue the situation, the regent chose mayor of Baghdad Arshad al-ʿUmarī, professedly a neutral, to form a cabinet and conduct the general election that was constitutionally due within the next year. The new prime minister soon embarked on a repressive policy with such enthusiasm that he succeeded in alienating virtually all sectors of opinion. In doing so, he caused the regent and others to doubt his ability to contain the developing social unrest.³⁰ Meanwhile the political situation in Iraq was becoming more tense. On 28 June due to the latest developments in Palestine the *Anti-Zionist League* organized in Baghdad a peaceful demonstration. Although the demonstration was ostensibly directed against oppressive rule in Palestine, the communists, who were denied permission to organize a formal party, used this so-

²⁸ Marr, op. cit., pp. 95-96.

²⁹ Suwaydī, Tawfīq: Muḍakkirātī. Nisf qarn min tārikh al-ʿIrāq wa al-qaḍīya al-ʿarabīya. (My Memories. A Half Century from the History of Iraq and the Arab Question.) Beirut, Dār al-kātib al-ʿarabī 1969, pp. 440-443; Nāṣirī, op. cit., Vol II, p. 350.

³⁰ Tripp, Charles: A History of Iraq. Cambridge University Press 2000, p. 117.

ciety to promote their activities.³¹ More than three thousand workers and students marched through the city demanding the immediate withdrawal of British troops from Iraq and the demonstration ended in disturbances lasting five hours. The government being violently attacked in the opposition press, responded first by warning and then by suspending the offending newspapers. Far more important than these suspensions was a strike by oil workers in Kirkuk, which proved so serious that even the British, who had encouraged the liberalization movement, became worried.

In the other major British directed concern, the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC), based in Kirkuk, permission to form a union was refused, and the workers went on strike for higher wages. The Kirkuk strike of 3 July 1946, although fully exploited by the communists, was in the main the result of the bad post-war economic conditions. Wages of workers of the IPC, though considered fairly good, had not kept up with the rise in prices, and there was a critical housing shortage.³² The foreign-owned oil company was blamed for much of Iraq's internal troubles. When the oil workers' demands for an increase in wages and the formation of a trade union were not conceded, they struck and denounced their employees as "imperialist exploiters". There is no doubt that the communists had a hand in fomenting the strike. On 14 July several thousand striking workers gathered at the outskirts of Kirkuk but the IPC refused to comply with the basic demands of the workers. The governor of Kirkuk considered the gathering as an illegal act and ordered the police forces to part it. The police fired into the crowd killing 18 and wounding 50 workers.³³ This tragic incident was a foretaste of the terrible violence of 1948, the year of the great national uprising known as "al-waṭba" (the leap).

This act of brutality caused an uproar and aroused the criticism of opposition parties. All the political parties now sided with the strikers against the government which was perfectly prepared to kill Iraqi workers in defence of British interests, demanding the resignation of the cabinet and the punishment of the "murderers of Kirkuk".³⁴ The left called for a united attitude of all patriotic organizations against the government. In August 1946, when the British government threatened by another strike in Iran, in the Abadan oilfields, moved another brigade from India and stationed it in Basra, the united opposition accused the government of violation of the Anglo-Iraqi treaty of 1930, which permitted Britain to send reinforcements only in time of war or threat of war.³⁵

³¹ Khalīl, ʿĀdil Ghafarī: *Aḥzāb al-muʿārāḍa al-ʿalanīya fī al-ʿIrāq*, 1946-1954. (The Legal Opposition Parties in Iraq). Baghdad 1984, p. 110.

³² Longrigg, Stephen Hemsley: *Oil in the Middle East. Its Discovery and Development*. London, Oxford University Press 1961, pp. 177-178.

³³ Oganessian, Nikolai O.: *Nacionalno-osvoboditelnoe dvizhenie v Irake, 1917-1958*. (The National liberation movement in Iraq). Erevan 1976, p. 315.

³⁴ Khayrī, Suʿād: *Min tārikh al-ḥaraka aṭ-ṭawra al-muʿāšira fī al-ʿIrāq, 1920-1958*. (From the History of the Contemporary Revolutionary Movement in Iraq). Baghdad 1973, p. 152.

In order to ease the situation the IPC sent conciliators to the Iraqi government to further an agreement between the workers and the company. The workers were induced to return to work by the promise of improved living conditions and the concession of some of their demands: wages were raised, daily allowances for rent were added, medical facilities were extended, and housing plans were made. However, neither the the Iraqi government nor the IPC would allow the workers to organize a trade union, since it would be liable to fall under communist influence.³⁶ The government tried to silence the opposition by hard oppressive measures, but achieved only further integration of the opposition forces irrespective of differences in their views. The extreme right quickly became aware of the importance of creating an appearance of democratic reforms and to hinder the weakening of the ruling class. It drew the conclusion that hard measures must be taken only against the communists and with the rest it was necessary to come to an agreement.

The growth of the national liberation movement in the Arab countries caused grave concern both of the British government and the Arab reaction. It came into the open at the sessions of the leaders of the Arab League in Inshāṣ (Egypt – May 1946) and in Blūdān (Syria – July 1946), where the monarchs and presidents agreed *inter alia* the common procedure against the communists.³⁷ As a result of Arshad al-ʿUmarī's energetic reaction to the left-wing agitation, there could no longer be any claim to impartiality if the impending elections were held under his premiership. When the regent returned from another visit to Britain he was dissatisfied with the premier's handling of the situation and decided for change. So Arshad al-ʿUmarī tendered on 16 November his resignation and on British recommendation the regent called upon the most experienced Iraqi politician, Nūrī as-Saʿīd to form the new government with instructions to hold new elections.³⁸ The policies pursued by the regent in fact remained repressive. The British supported the Iraqi monarchy, the regent upheld the authoritarian policies of his ministers; ministers suppressed the newspapers and took no initiative in land reform or agricultural or educational matters; and the cumulative result came full circle to the British.

Nūrī as-Saʿīd was well aware of the importance of the Arab world for Iraq, but his understanding of Iraq's interests meant that its foreign policies should pay as much attention to the cultivation of its northern and eastern neighbours as to the Arab world. However, as he discovered in 1946 when he negotiated the treaties of friendship with both Transjordan and Turkey, this was a view which was shared neither by many in the Iraqi political elite nor by the regent. Contin-

³⁵ Treaty of Preferential Alliance: The United Kingdom and Iraq, 30 June 1930. In: Hurewitz, op. cit., Vol II, pp. 178-181.

³⁶ Khadduri, op. cit., p. 361.

³⁷ Noveishaya istoriya arabskikh stran, 1917-1966. (A Modern History of the Arab Countries). Moscow, Nauka Publishing House 1967, p. 174.

³⁸ Al-Ḥasanī, op. cit., Vol VII, p. 130.

ued suspicions of Turkey's territorial ambitions in northern Iraq and the question of Alexandretta coloured much of the Iraqi political elite's views. This was sharpened by the final withdrawal of French troops from Syria in 1946 which awakened in many politicians, including the regent, hopes of an eventual union between Iraq and Syria, whether driven by dynastic or nationalist aspirations.³⁹ But Nūrī as-Saʿīd had persuaded the regent that anything more than a treaty of friendship might have dangerous consequences.

As many times before, Nūrī as-Saʿīd once again proved his experience: he maintained the authoritarian type of rule, but proceeded with considerably more skill. By promises to hold free elections and restore democratic freedoms he managed to persuade the not sufficiently watchful leaders of the liberals and national democrats to accept ministerial posts in his cabinet, which was formed on 21 November. The effect of this step on the remaining three opposition parties was exactly as Nūrī as-Saʿīd has expected: they immediately forgot the discords with the regime and directed their anger to their former allies.⁴⁰ The premier immediately dissolved the parliament and in accordance with the new law he began to prepare the elections planned to be held in February 1947.

On 18 January 1947 the police had arrested Jūsuf Salmān Jūsuf (*al-fahd*) and other leading members of the underground *Communist Party of Iraq*, the dissident *Communist League* (Rābiṭat ash-shuyūʿiyyīn), and the *National Liberation Party*, and seized a mass of revealing documents, dealing a heavy blow to the most dangerous enemy of the regime. The two opposition parties sharing the government responsibilities soon disclosed the manoeuvre of Nūrī as-Saʿīd and their representatives ʿAlī Mumtāz for the liberals and Muḥammad Ḥadīd for the national democrats, resigned in protest,⁴¹ but the united course of the opposition was crushed and the initiative in the pre-election period remained in the hands of the extreme right.

The elections held in the beginning of March 1947 resulted in an overwhelming victory of the right-wing candidates. The chamber returned by the elections consisted largely, as usual, of non-party men (45 per cent on this occasion). Nūrī as-Saʿīd had achieved his two objectives, in spite of the boycott of elections by the *Liberal Party* and the withdrawal of members of the *National Democratic Party* from parliament when the election returns were announced. On 11 March Nūrī as-Saʿīd resigned and then declined the regent's invitation to form a cabinet, suggesting instead his associate, Ṣāliḥ Jabr, who became Iraq's first *sharʿī* prime minister. The government was formed on 29 March and Nūrī as-Saʿīd retired to preside over the senate.⁴² That allowed him greater freedom of manoeuvre: he could be influential behind the scenes without necessarily at-

³⁹ Tripp, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

⁴⁰ Paloncy, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁴¹ Laqueur, *op. cit.*, pp. 190-191; Khadduri, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

⁴² Birdwood, Lord: Nuri as-Said. London, Cassel and Co. 1959, p. 213.

tracting either the disgrace of the opposition parties or the antagonism of the regent in the year ahead.⁴³

In 1947, it was clear both that the regent's and others' ambitions in the Arab world would only increase. Nowhere was this likely to be more contentious than in the question of Palestine. British withdrawal raised the possibility of an outcome much less favourable than expected, and forcing governments to make choices which they would rather have avoided. Given these troubling issues in the Arab world, and given the disputes which they would cause within Iraq itself, it was scarcely surprising that Nūrī as-Sa'īd should have preferred to stay in the background during these months.⁴⁴

Although a number of British officials and some British ministers had come to realize that with the "old gang" in power, Iraq cannot hope to progress very far,⁴⁵ there were evidently limitations on the extent to which pressure on the "old gang" to mend its ways would ever be brought to bear, since vital imperial communications, in terms of bases and other military facilities, as well as access to Iraqi oil, were to be maintained in any recasting of Anglo-Iraqi relations. The anxieties expressed by some British officials in 1946 and 1947 were temporarily allayed when prime minister Ṣāliḥ Jabr took office. It was believed that he would be interested in implementing some of the social reforms that were judged necessary to prevent popular discontent reaching dangerous proportions, since Nūrī as-Sa'īd, while acknowledging that reforms were desirable, did not seem sufficiently convinced of the volatility of the situation.⁴⁶

Ṣāliḥ Jabr introduced a programme of such sweeping economic and social scope that its fulfilment was clearly unrealistic, but as a manifesto it appeared to the *Foreign Office* balanced, progressive and enterprising. The British hoped that Ṣāliḥ Jabr would "meet the growing demand from the left wing circles for more radical change".⁴⁷ He seemed to the British as a moderate and strong nationalist, who would cooperate with them in both domestic and foreign affairs. The British did not doubt that Nūrī as-Sa'īd possessed a social conscience; but they thought that he had become so absorbed in pan-Arab affairs that he could not be relied upon to force the pace of social change on his friends in the "old gang". They therefore welcomed his ascendancy to the presidency of the Iraqi senate, where he would continue as usual to manipulate behind the scenes. Ṣāliḥ Jabr, by contrast with Nūrī as-Sa'īd, had the reputation of being a straightforward, toughminded,

⁴³ Silverfarb, D.: *The Twilight of British Ascendancy in the Middle East: A Case Study of Iraq 1941-1950*. London, 1994, pp. 81-92.

⁴⁴ Tripp, op. cit., p. 120.

⁴⁵ FO 371/52315/E7045 Chancery to Eastern Department, 16 July 1946. Quoted in: Louis, William Roger: *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945-1951*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 309.

⁴⁶ Sluglett and Sluglett, op. cit., p. 39.

⁴⁷ FO 371/61589 Minute by Garran, 28 April 1947. Quoted in: Louis, op. cit., p. 321; Al-Ja'fari, op. cit., p. 55.

honest nationalist with whom the British could do business. If the basis of Anglo-Iraqi friendship – critics would say the formal instrument of British imperialism – the treaty of 1930, needed to be adjusted, then Şālih Jabr appeared to be the best man in sight to reaffirm it in only slightly modified form.⁴⁸

The regent turned to the revision of the 1930 treaty with Britain. In 1947 this treaty still had ten years to run, but the regent hoped to modify the treaty in Iraq's favour, believing that such a change would go far toward meeting the objections of the opposition and recouping some of his lost prestige. In this the regent was misguided. The treaty had always been a divisive issue in Iraqi politics and the opposition wanted it eliminated, not modified. To revive the whole treaty issue unnecessarily was an open invitation to the nationalists to attack the regime and to incite more disturbances. The timing also showed bad judgment: the regent proposed to resuscitate the treaty issue just as the Palestinian issue was reaching a crisis stage, focusing public attention on Britain's role in that affair.⁴⁹

Deterioration of the political situation in the country caused disputes in the ranks of the right-wing politicians about how to strengthen their position and weaken the national liberation movement. The leaders of the Iraqi national bourgeoisie obviously learned from the defeat they suffered from the reactionary ruling clique and tried to avoid mistakes they committed immediately after the war and exploit the growing discontent among the people. Their role in the national liberation movement was indisputable, but in pushing forward the demands of working people they remained inconsistent and hesitating.⁵⁰ The well-known tactical manoeuvre, aimed at splitting of the anti-imperialist forces ceased to work and the struggle against the parliament and against the Anglo-Iraqi treaty united anew the patriotic forces.

Worsening of the economic situation in the country during 1947 and the development in Palestine intensified the popular dissatisfaction and anti-British sentiments. The public in Iraq demanded the evacuation of British troops from the country and handing over the two air bases al-Ḥabbāniya and ash-Shu'ayba to Iraq, but the British side stubbornly refused. Negotiations to renew the treaty went on since May 1947 in secret for fear of anti-British demonstrations, as the masses were embittered by the British role in Palestine. However, no preoccupation of the Iraqi cabinet and public during 1947 equalled that of the absorbing and saddening Palestine question. The problem of Arab survival in Palestine against the threat of ubiquitous, and ably directed Zionism, backed by American money and supported by strong elements in Britain, overshadowed all other problems. It aroused sincere and bitter sentiment as showing the full picture of Western injustice and cynicism, and united all parties in a dangerous atmosphere of anti-European emotion.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Louis, *op. cit.*, p. 322.

⁴⁹ Marr, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

⁵⁰ Paloncy, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁵¹ Longrigg, *op. cit.*, p. 343.

The leaders of the extreme right supposed that under the banner of struggle against the communism they could unite the Iraqi national bourgeoisie. The communist leaders arrested in January 1947 had been sentenced in a stage managed trial as follows: Jūsuf Salmān Jūsuf (*al-fahd*) and two others to death penalty and thirteen other communists were sentenced to varying terms of forced labour.⁵² The death sentences aroused protests in the neighbouring Arab countries and in Europe so on 13 July 1947 they were commuted, that of *al-fahd* to penal servitude for life and his companions for fifteen years. It was regrettable that Šāliḥ Jabr's best-meaning government was compelled, like his predecessors, to take steps against the vigorously anti-regime press and party agitation. The left-wing parties were first affected by suppression of their newspapers then Kāmil al-Chādirchī and ʿAbdalfattāḥ Ibrāhīm were charged with sedition and arrested. ʿAzīz Sharīf only escaped imprisonment by fleeing Iraq. In these circumstances, which also coincided with enormous rises in the cost of living, and increasing public hostility towards British policy in the region and in Palestine in particular, any renegotiations of the treaty that fell short of a major revision in Iraq's favour was likely to prove unacceptable to most politically conscious Iraqis.⁵³

Although Šāliḥ Jabr was preoccupied with the Palestine problem and with the preliminary negotiations with the British authorities, he rather unwisely mishandled the internal situation and, not unlike Arshad al-ʿUmarī, resorted to drastic measures against the press and parties, which led them to frenzied agitation against the government. In office, he proved as illiberal and repressive as Nūrī as-Saʿīd. On 29 September it was officially announced that the *National Union Party* and the *People's Party* were formally suppressed on grounds of sedition. The other three parties protested against the arrest of party leaders. The parties had already shown dissatisfaction with the government's foreign policy.⁵⁴

In ignorance of these disadvantages, the regent and Šāliḥ Jabr opened negotiations with the British, but they encountered opposition because the British were sceptical about change. The international situation looked threatening. The Soviet Union's policy in neighbouring Iran and Britain's anticipated withdrawal from Palestine emphasized the need for a firm alliance with Iraq. From the British point of view, the Iraqi treaty already in force served that purpose well; renegotiations could open a Pandora's box. Nūrī as-Saʿīd unlike the regent was not keen about renegotiation. He shared Britain's preoccupation with the Soviet threat, and he worried about Soviet support for the Kurds in Iran and the effect this might have on Iraq's Kurds in the north. Nūrī as-Saʿīd also recognized that the occasion would be exploited by the regime's political enemies. Nevertheless, when it became apparent that both the regent and Šāliḥ Jabr were determined to raise the issue, he cooperated.⁵⁵

⁵² Batatu, *op. cit.*, p. 540.

⁵³ Sluglett and Sluglett, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁵⁴ Khadduri, *op. cit.*, pp. 261-262.

⁵⁵ Marr, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

The Iraqis saw their own difficulties and their own puny efforts compared with what some other countries were doing. They measured this shortcoming and blamed the British mandatory administration and later British influence for leaving Iraq so far behind Turkey, always an enviable example in Iraqi eyes. The British for their part recalled the extremely bad state of Iraq at the time of the British occupation. Great strides had been made. A nation had been born where there had been a backward, ignorant, diseased and oppressed Arab province. Compared with that past state, Iraq had advanced under British guidance and the existing shortcomings were but a stage on the road of progress. The Iraqis, however, did not see it in this way. Between the British and Iraqi pictures lay the fundamental difference of outlook between the colonizer and the colonized; the inescapable penalty of colonizing, under whatever name it is done and however progressive or socialist the agency or government which executes it. The colonizer sees only the progress made in years of hard work; the colonized sees only his own backwardness, dependence, frustration – and dreams of what might have been. It is natural that the two can never meet or agree. It is the curse that history has pronounced on all imperialism, however liberal, benevolent, disinterested, unselfish or necessary it may have seemed. It was the British Achilles heel in Iraq.⁵⁶

The Anglo-Iraqi treaty had always been the neuralgic point of Iraqi politics and the opposition demanded its abolition and not amendment. The Iraqis asked for the evacuation of the British troops from the country and handing over of the military air bases at al-Ḥabbāniya and ash-Shu‘ayba, to the Iraqi authorities. Preliminary negotiations on revision of the 1930 treaty began in Baghdad and were conducted secretly from 8 to 17 May 1947. From the very beginning Ṣāliḥ Jabr insisted that the Palestine question and the need of the Iraqi army for arms should be linked with the new treaty. However, the major issue was who would have control over the air bases. The views of the Iraqi and the British negotiators came together, but final agreement rested with the approval of the cabinets of the two countries. Since the regent was planning to visit England in August 1947, Ṣāliḥ Jabr informed the British government that he was ready to accompany him and resume the negotiations there.⁵⁷

The foreign secretary, Ernest Bevin replied that he would be ready to negotiate directly with the Iraqi premier in November, as he was preoccupied with a number of problems all the summer. During his visit to England the regent saw Bevin on 18 August and sent a letter to Ṣāliḥ Jabr in which he stated that Bevin told him “We are prepared to have an honourable long-term agreement”, and was anxious to know what the preliminary Iraqi proposals were.⁵⁸ The regent,

⁵⁶ Kimche, Jon: *Seven Fallen Pillars. The Middle East, 1945-1952*. London, Secker and Warburg, 1953, p. 102.

⁵⁷ Khadduri, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

⁵⁸ Al-Ḥasanī, *op. cit.*, Vol VII, pp. 215-216.

who was still in England, sent on 10 October two cables to Şālih Jabr stating that the British government had been considering the British proposals which were: the air bases would not be completely given up by Britain; the airfields at al-Ḥabbānīya and ash-Shuʿayba would continue under British control, but would be jointly used by British and Iraqi forces.⁵⁹ Dissatisfied with these proposals, Şālih Jabr informed the regent on 13 October that the negotiations in Baghdad the previous May were based on the assumption that Britain was willing to evacuate the two bases, but that Iraqi control would permit the British to participate in the operation of the bases for the purpose of joint defence against a common enemy. He added that he would refuse to resume the negotiations unless Bevin accepted the principle of Iraqi control of the bases and threatened to resign.⁶⁰

Şālih Jabr from the outset of his career as prime minister had staked his reputation on successful negotiations with the British. The British knew that, unless they relinquished real control as well as theoretical sovereignty of the bases the prime minister would resign and leave them to face demands of evacuation rather than of “sharing”. Here Bevin preferred to gamble with moderate Iraqi leaders rather than risk the initiative passing to the extremists. The British recognized the political courage of Şālih Jabr in being willing to consummate an alliance. What they did not fully perceive was his only tepid support by prominent political leaders in all parts of Iraqi society, and the general discontent caused by famine. During the time that their leaders talked high politics the Iraqi people suffered from inflation, locust plagues, bad harvests, and bread shortages.⁶¹ Though the British were not unaware of the fragile political and popular foundation of the government, they judged Şālih Jabr to be a statesman of sufficient stature to manage satisfactorily the outstanding problems.

The British had hopes that the negotiations with the Iraqis would prove to be so successful that the treaty could be used as a “model” for defensive alliances with all of the states of the Arab League.⁶² Douglas Busk, the acting head of the British mission in Baghdad had since summer 1947 urged the Foreign Office to accelerate plans for the eventual handing over of the two air bases. During the autumn he continued to warn that events were moving faster than anticipated, and that unless the British convinced Şālih Jabr of their genuine intent to relinquish the bases then they would feel the lash of nationalist sentiment. To the Iraqis Busk elaborated the meaning of “sharing bases” and to the Foreign Office he emphasized how British generosity in that direction would conciliate

⁵⁹ Shabīb, Maḥmūd: Waḡba fī al-ʿIrāq wa suqūṭ Şālih Jabr (The waḡba in Iraq and the fall of Şālih Jabr). Baghdad, Maḡbaʿat ad-dīwānī 1988, p. 15; Al-Ḥasanī, op. cit., Vol VII, pp. 217-218.

⁶⁰ Al-Ḥasanī, op. cit., Vol VII, pp. 218-219.

⁶¹ Louis, op. cit., p. 331.

⁶² FO 371/68441/E324 Minute by Walker, 14 January 1948. Quoted in: Louis, op. cit., p. 332.

the nationalists. By "sharing" the British would maintain a military presence, to which Busk and his colleagues in London attached the highest importance. In explaining the fundamental reason for the necessity of the British retaining at least partial control of the bases he drew upon the lessons of the Second world war. Here Busk put British policy into the larger perspective of the past and future survival of the British empire: "Without properly maintained bases it would be impossible to fly assistance in time to Iraq in the event of war or threat of war."⁶³

In October 1947 Ernest Bevin put the Iraqi problem before the cabinet. He argued that unless Britain acted now, the initiative would pass to the Iraqi extremists. He found it wiser to avoid fighting to defend a position which Britain is bound to give up in the end, and so arouse nationalist fervour and anti-British feeling in the process. In a discussion with the regent Bevin stated that Britain had made "immense strides" in air development and the British would be ready to make all these new facilities available to the Iraqis. He added that he hoped to make al-Ḥabbāniya and ash-Shu'ayba the best bases in the world, though he warned, that in doing so Iraq would have to help foot the bill. He emphasized that Iraq and Great Britain must sink or swim together.⁶⁴ In late 1947 he had good reason to think that the two countries would not only keep afloat but would pull together towards the common goal of defence of the Middle East against possible Soviet aggression.

The regent returned to Baghdad on 29 October 1947 and was faced with the prime minister's determination to resign. The British government submitted a memorandum in which Bevin's proposals were reformulated in a more flexible and acceptable manner, but Ṣālīḥ Jabr requested the reconsideration of the original principles of the agreement. Thereupon a delegation arrived in Baghdad and the negotiations were resumed from 22 November till 4 December 1947.⁶⁵ Various draft proposals and counter-proposals were exchanged in which the principle of Iraqi control of the two bases, but with adequate facilities for Britain, was accepted. When Douglas Busk obtained satisfactory assurances from the Iraqis on final points such as those of the Joint defence board, the path lay open to the final meeting. The details were left to be worked out in the forthcoming negotiations between Ernest Bevin and Ṣālīḥ Jabr. These preliminary steps were satisfactory to the Iraqi government, and the place for completing the negotiations was shifted to London to enable the British and Iraqi negotiators to exchange views directly.⁶⁶

By December 1947 agreement was finally reached and it was only in early January 1948 that most Iraqis learned, to their surprise, that negotiations had

⁶³ FO 371/61596/E10295 Busk to Bevin, 3 November 1947. Quoted in: Louis, *op. cit.*, p. 332.

⁶⁴ Louis, *op. cit.*, p. 328.

⁶⁵ Shabib, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.

⁶⁶ Khadduri, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

been taking place. Before Ṣāliḥ Jabr proceeded to London, Nūrī as-Saʿīd suggested holding a meeting of the leading politicians and prominent members of parliament to discuss the proposed treaty revision. It was agreed that three questions should be presented for discussion: 1. was Iraq in need of a treaty of alliance with a foreign power? 2. if an alliance with a foreign power were needed, who would be that power? 3. what should be the basic principles of the alliance?⁶⁷

On 28 December the regent called a meeting at the ar-Riḥāb palace, attended by the leading elder politicians. The parties were not invited to send representatives, which gave the impression that the meeting was another plot designed by the elder politicians to come to an understanding with British imperialism. At this meeting the elder politicians agreed that, in the present state of world conditions Iraq, was in need of a treaty with Britain, but that such a treaty should be on the basis of equality and mutual interests. Many of them stressed the necessity for the evacuation of British forces, but showed willingness to give Britain the right to use the air bases in the event of war. Nūrī as-Saʿīd disapproved of the regent's suggestion to postpone the signing of the treaty owing to the unfavourable domestic and Arab situation.⁶⁸ It was decided that the premier and the ministers of foreign affairs and of defence, Fāḍil al-Jamālī and Shākīr al-Wādī, would proceed to London for final talks and probable signature. Jamāl Bābān was left as acting prime minister. When the opposition parties learned of the meeting, they protested both about the meeting and the fact that the treaty was not being brought before the public for discussion.

On 3 January 1948 the regent called another meeting attended by Ṣāliḥ Jabr, Nūrī as-Saʿīd, Tawfīq as-Suwaydī and Aḥmad Mukhtār Bābān. After a careful review of the principal proposals the regent suggested that Nūrī as-Saʿīd and Tawfīq as-Suwaydī should accompany the Iraqi delegation, led by the prime minister, to negotiate with Ernest Bevin in London. Ṣāliḥ Jabr welcomed the regent's proposal, and it was approved by the cabinet on the following day.⁶⁹ On 5 January, demonstrations against the treaty began. Ignoring or misinterpreting these warning signals, an Iraqi delegation left for London to complete the negotiations. On 6 January the delegation arrived in London.

Negotiations in which the basic principles were reviewed began on 7 January. On the same day Ṣāliḥ Jabr called a meeting of his own delegation in which further proposals were formulated as follows: 1. the preamble of the Anglo-Iraqi treaty of 1930 should be replaced by that of the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1936; 2. consultation on foreign policy with the British government, as provided in article 1 of the treaty of 1930, should no longer be continued under the new treaty; 3. all the annexures of the treaty of 1930, concerning military ad-

⁶⁷ Khadduri, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

⁶⁸ Nāṣirī, *op. cit.*, Vol II, p. 364; Shabīb, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-43.

⁶⁹ Al-Ḥasanī, *op. cit.*, Vol VII, pp. 224-225; Shabīb, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-60.

vice, railways, etc. should not be included under article 4 of the new treaty; 4. the right of the two signatories to ask for revision of the treaty should be ten rather than fifteen years.⁷⁰ These additional proposals, except the last, were accepted by the British delegation, and the negotiations proceeded quickly and satisfactorily till 10 January when the final text was initialed. During the discussions Lord Tedder stressed the importance the British attached to maintaining a really strong and efficient air base in Iraq which would be ready at a moment's notice day and night. Only so was there hope of an effective defence of Iraq which would be ready in an emergency.⁷¹

The ground had been so thoroughly laid that the meetings in London were pensive and sometimes almost festive occasions rather than sessions of hard bargaining. The formal date of the signing of the treaty was fixed on 15 January in Portsmouth. On the occasion of the signing of the treaty Ernest Bevin said that everything which was objectionable in the old treaty had been removed. The treaty was the beginning of a new series of treaties, regularizing and expressing the friendship between Great Britain and the Arab world. In reply Ṣāliḥ Jabr said on behalf of his government that the treaty was an expression of the mutual desire to live as free and equal allies and friends and would help the two parties to work together for international peace and prosperity.⁷² Critics of these exchanges, then as later, charged that Bevin had merely found a collaborator willing to whitewash the treaty of 1930 and bring it up to date with "new-fashioned terminology". Such was not the intention of Ṣāliḥ Jabr, who wished to be recorded in history as the nationalist who delivered Iraq from the British on a basis of complete equality.⁷³

The Portsmouth treaty should have been an alliance between Britain and Iraq on the basis of equality and complete independence. It provided that "each of the high contracting parties undertakes not to adopt in foreign countries an attitude which is inconsistent with the alliance or might create difficulties for the other party". It also pledged that any dispute with a third party should be the subject of consultation between the two parties with a view to settling it by peaceful means, but that if one of the two parties become engaged in war, the other would "immediately come to its aid as a measure of collective defence".⁷⁴ As many had feared, the treaty was to last for twenty-five years, formally sanctioning British influence in Iraq until 1973, fifteen years beyond the expiry date of the 1930 treaty.

It is worth mentioning that the annexure of the treaty recognized the importance of the air bases as "an essential element in the defence of Iraq itself and of international security". Britain's use of the air bases in the event of war, or

⁷⁰ Khadduri, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

⁷¹ FO 371/68442 Minutes of meeting of 10 January 1948. Quoted in: Louis, *op. cit.*, p. 334.

⁷² Al-Ḥasanī, *op. cit.*, Vol VII, pp. 240-241.

⁷³ Al-Ja'fari, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

⁷⁴ Khadduri, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

threat of war, was made dependent on Iraq's invitation. Another important innovation was introduced: the British military mission was to disappear, a mixed Anglo-Iraqi joint defence board would be established for the purpose of discussing matters of defence for both countries. Its functions included: 1. the formulation of agreed plans in the strategic interests common to both countries; 2. immediate consultation in the event of a threat of war; 3. the co-ordination of measures to enable the forces of either party to fulfil their obligations under the treaty; 4. consultation regarding the training of the Iraqi forces and the provision of equipment for them; arrangements for joint air training operations.⁷⁵

In the event of war or a threat of war involving either party, Iraq would invite Britain to send the necessary forces of all arms into Iraq and would furnish all facilities and assistance, including communications through the country. Operational units of the RAF would continue to have free access to the two air bases at al-Ḥabbāniya and ash-Shu'ayba, until such time as peace treaties had entered into force with all ex-enemy countries and the allied forces had been withdrawn from their territories; subsequently Iraq might invite RAF units to use the bases on the advice of the Joint Defence Board in the light of circumstances then prevailing. Britain would provide the technical staff, installations, and equipment to maintain the two bases at the necessary state of operational efficiency at all times, whether of peace or war. The armament and essential equipment of the Iraqi forces would continue to be of British type. The clause in the 1930 treaty permitting British naval vessels to visit the Shaḥḥ al-ʿArab was maintained. In an exchange of letters annexed to the treaty the British government undertook to provide experts or technically qualified officials to assist Iraq in carrying out extensive plans of economic and social development.⁷⁶

Both parties agreed to grant each other facilities in military matters on the basis of mutual interest. Iraq promised to employ British subjects whenever foreign military instructors were needed, and also to send Iraqis to England whenever military training was sought abroad. The period of the treaty, unless revised within fifteen years, was fixed at twenty years. Although the treaty sought to establish the alliance on the basis of respect for Iraqi independence and mutuality of interests, it was not a treaty between two equals as Ṣāliḥ Jabr called it. The two air bases, which were often the subject of criticism, were handed back to Iraq, to be used in a manner to be decided freely by the Joint Defence Board. British forces were to be evacuated, and Iraq would be supplied with arms and military training. And yet the treaty was repudiated by the Iraqis as soon as the news of its signature reached Baghdad.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Kirk, George: *The Middle East 1945-1950*. London, Oxford University Press 1954, p. 154.

⁷⁶ Text in English, Foreign Office: *Treaty of Alliance between the UK and Iraq*, Portsmouth, 15th January 1948. Cmd. 7309. London, H.M.S.O. 1948; Text in Arabic, Al-Ḥasanī, op. cit., Vol VII, pp. 234-241.

⁷⁷ Khadduri, op. cit., p. 267.

Even before the delegation had arrived in Britain there were large student demonstrations in Baghdad, initiated by the *Independence Party*.⁷⁸ When the terms of the treaty were released to the Iraqi press on 16 January the students went on strike for three days and the tide of popular discontent became a flood, in which the communists emerged unmistakably as the fundamental force. The political parties issued manifestoes repudiating the treaty as inconsistent with Iraqi national interests.⁷⁹ While the British and Iraqi delegations were exchanging congratulatory speeches in Portsmouth, events in Iraq were reaching the crisis that has come to be known as “al-waṭba” (the leap). The parties completely agreed on the view that the new treaty was in many ways a step back in comparison with the treaty of 1930.⁸⁰ On 19 January, after three days of continuous rioting and demonstrations, the government broadcast a statement to the students giving warning of severe punishment if they did not resume their class-work. Since the political parties had been excluded from formal consultation and their activities subjected to rigid control and censorship, they saw their opportunity in this popular excitement, and joined forces with the students and public. On the 20th there was another mass demonstration, and the clashes between the police and demonstrators demanding the dismissal of the government and the repudiation of the treaty ended tragically. A mass march of workers was fired on by the police, and a number of people were killed and hundreds injured.⁸¹

To understand the violence of the demonstrations it is necessary to realize the strength of the pent-up frustrations created by the war situation. The nationalists were bitter over the continuance of British influence in Iraq and the failure of the national movement of Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī. This was their first opportunity since 1941 to express their feelings. Resentment toward the British for their role in the Palestine problem had reached a peak, with daily statements in the opposition press attacking Britain. The intelligentsia and the opposition politicians resented their continued exclusion from power and the failure of liberalization, while the poor were angry over rising prices and bread shortage that had become particularly acute in 1947.⁸²

The next day (21 January) in the evening the regent called a meeting at the royal diwan (al-balāṭ al-malakī) attended by leading personalities to discuss the situation. After a long discussion the regent, in order to put an end to disorder, was forced to issue a proclamation stating that: “It was unanimously decided that the Anglo-Iraqi treaty signed at Portsmouth does not realize the country’s aspirations, and is not a beneficial instrument to consolidate the bonds of friendship between the two countries. As the council of ministers has not ap-

⁷⁸ Batatu, *op. cit.*, p. 548.

⁷⁹ Al-Ḥasanī, *op. cit.*, Vol VII, p. 226-228.

⁸⁰ Al-ʿAqqād, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

⁸¹ Nāṣirī, *op. cit.*, Vol II, p. 376; Al-Ḥasanī, *op. cit.*, Vol VII, pp. 256-259.

⁸² Marr, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

proved the ratification of the treaty, the regent promises the Iraqi people that no treaty will be ratified that does not assure the rights of the country and the national aspirations.”⁸³

In Baghdad the initial response to the proclamation was favourable and it immediately stopped the demonstrations, although agitation against those who signed the treaty continued. In London, however, the news came as surprise to the government since the treaty was held to have been freely negotiated with the Iraqi delegation. On 22 January Şāliḥ Jabr, who was still in London, made a statement in which he denounced his political opponents as “destructive elements who had exploited some innocent students and succeeded in creating disorders”. He was confident that after explaining the intentions of the new treaty to the parliament and people, the overwhelming majority of the country will support it.⁸⁴

On 26 January Şāliḥ Jabr and his colleagues returned from London. A meeting was held in ar-Riḥāb palace, attended by the premier minister, Nūrī as-Saʿīd, and Jamāl Bābān the deputy premier. They had not yet given up the hope of salvaging the treaty. Şāliḥ Jabr requested an opportunity to defend his position before the public as he was firmly convinced that he could handle the situation. In the evening he broadcast a statement in which he appealed for calm, and affirmed that the nation would shortly have a detailed explanation of the clauses of the treaty and could then say its final word on it.⁸⁵ The statement acted as a signal, and as a reaction to the premier’s failure to resign and his insistence on defending the treaty active masses of people immediately took the streets. Not long after, at around midnight, came the sound of machine guns. In the morning Baghdad looked more like a battlefield than a city. However, decisive things were about to happen, and rulers and ruled had made their preparations.⁸⁶

On 27 January there were huge demonstrations, which soon developed into clashes between the police and demonstrators, who retaliated by throwing stones and erecting barricades of burning cars. On that day alone many people lost their lives through police and military action. How many fell cannot be determined. Numerous bodies were buried without being registered, others drifted down the Tigris. The total figure for dead and injured is commonly set at between three and four hundred.⁸⁷ Several ministers and members of parliament resigned in protest against the police brutality. The opposition political parties put out a united call for the “immediate abolition of the treaty, the dissolution of parliament, a new, free election, and a prompt supply of bread”.⁸⁸ On the evening of the same day Şāliḥ Jabr presented his resignation to the regent. The

⁸³ Al-Ḥasanī, *op. cit.*, Vol VII, p. 264; Shabīb, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

⁸⁴ Al-Ḥasanī, *op. cit.*, Vol VII, p. 265; Shabīb, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

⁸⁵ Batatu, *op. cit.*, p. 554.

⁸⁶ Batatu, *op. cit.*, p. 554.

⁸⁷ Al-Ḥasanī, *op. cit.*, Vol VII, pp. 262-274; Batatu, *op. cit.*, p. 557.

⁸⁸ Khalīl, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-168.

burial of the victims had been only another huge demonstration of popular discontent. By the end of January, practically every articulate element in the country had come out against the treaty. For a time, a real atmosphere of war prevailed in Baghdad.

By accepting premier's resignation and refusing the treaty the regent managed to calm the storm of the popular anger and save the situation without offering concessions by the extreme right. The uprising showed the weakness and incapability of the regime, but on the other hand it demonstrated the hesitation and irresolution of the national bourgeoisie frightened by the strength of mass actions which it had helped to instigate by slogans about the necessity of the liquidation of British imperialism.⁸⁹ The Iraqi national bourgeoisie believed that it would be able to reach a compromise solution which would strengthen its position. It wanted to have a proper share in both parliament and government to push through its own requirements. The national bourgeoisie had refused many demands raised by the working people because they exceeded its interests.

By January 1948 there was a *revolutionary situation* in Iraq that is Lenin's two objective requisites of a successful revolution were clearly present: the existence of mass discontent against the government and the ruling class and the disintegration of governmental authority. But there was no sign of the essential subjective requisite: there was no organized mass party with a revolutionary leadership, and no prospect of one emerging. The prohibited Communist party of Iraq had had on the one hand a very narrow base and on the other hand its leadership had been arrested in January 1947. So in spite of all the discontent and governmental disintegration there existed in Iraq no genuine united mass movement with a definite purpose and policy. The wave of revolutionary discontent was purely negative; against the British, against the government, against the police, and against hunger.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, the Iraqi workers gained valuable experience and their example had a positive response in the neighbouring countries. Although another ten years were to pass before the overthrow of the *ancien régime*, the hatred that was revealed in these terrible scenes in Baghdad was a portent of the wrath to come.

After consultations with the leading politicians the regent charged another *shī'cī*, the 66-years old senator Muḥammad aṣ-Ṣadr who had been active in the revolution of 1920. To the bitter disappointment of the opposition, on 29 January he presented a cabinet made of politicians loyal to the monarchy, that is he surrounded himself with tried statesmen of former cabinets. Three former premiers accepted office under him: Jamīl al-Midfa'ī for interior, Ḥamdī al-Pāchachī for foreign affairs, and Arshad al-'Umarī for defence. He also gave one seat in the cabinet to the leader of the *Independence Party*, Muḥammad Mahdī Kubba. The *Liberal Party* refused to participate when invited, and the *National Democratic Party* was not invited. The manner in which the parties

⁸⁹ Paloncy, op. cit., p. 45.

⁹⁰ Kimche, op. cit., p. 105.

were manoeuvred to acquiesce in this arrangement reflected the lack of agreement among party leaders, who seem to have cooperated only to force the previous cabinet to resign, but were wholly unprepared to follow up their victory and achieve power.⁹¹

After a cabinet meeting on 2 February it was announced that the treaty would not be ratified on the grounds that it was not a fit instrument for strengthening the friendly ties between Iraq and Britain. The main task of the premier of that caretaker cabinet was to organize and conduct new elections in summer. The opposition, which had been united in attacking the treaty, now found themselves without a constructive program. The fact that the *Independence Party*, had accepted office while others were left out, helped split the opposition as intended by Nūrī as-Saʿīd and the regent.⁹² Under popular pressure the parliament was dissolved on 22 February and new elections were ordered. The political parties, hoping to participate more actively in the forthcoming elections, had insisted on dissolution. They also demanded freedom of the press and the abolition of censorship. The communists were not interested in the elections, for they had no hope of entering parliament. The opposition parties had hoped that in parliamentary elections they would succeed in gaining an adequate number of seats to pursue their own policy. In February Sir Henry Mack succeeded Sir Hugh Stonehewer-Bird as British ambassador to Iraq.⁹³

However, the extreme right did not wait with folded arms: it used the growing tension owing also to the loss of Arab rights in Palestine. A cabinet reshuffle took place on 4 March 1948, when Jamil al-Midfaiʿi resigned. ʿUmar Naẓmī minister of justice, who protested against the dissolution of parliament, also resigned on the same day. Minister of foreign affairs, Ḥamdī al-Pāchachī, died on 27 March, and was replaced by Naṣrat al-Fārisī. Muṣṭafā al-ʿUmarī a staunch supporter of the regime took charge of interior. It was he who would now run the election, in a manner satisfactory to the regent and Nūrī as-Saʿīd. All through the Portsmouth crisis the Palestine problem had been a gathering storm. The earlier decision to encourage the infiltration of guerrilla fighters from each Arab country into Palestine, for the stiffening of local resistance, was carried out to a limited extent. Several hundred young men and a few veterans from Iraq entered Palestine and served with Fawzī al-Qāwuqjī. The ineffectiveness of this force, and the collapse of Arab resistance in the face of Jewish terrorism led the Arab League to decide upon the intervention of Arab regular armies. In April 1948 the regent visited Amman and Cairo with the ministers of defence, finance and foreign affairs. Shortly afterwards the cabinet declared martial law, a step made ostensibly because of the war in Palestine and to prevent disorder, which really caused the immediate cessation of demonstrations.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Khadduri, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

⁹² Marr, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

⁹³ Longrigg, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

⁹⁴ Longrigg, *op. cit.*, p. 349.

It was a step happy only in its immediate restoration of outward tranquillity, but indicative of no real solution of any of the nation's problems. The opposition protested and Muḥammad Maḥdī Kubba resigned from the cabinet, but otherwise they could do little.

By the outbreak of the war in Palestine in May 1948, Iraqi passions were thoroughly aroused. Tensions were temporarily relieved by the dispatch of Iraqi troops under general Ṣāliḥ Ṣā'ib – forces ill prepared, ill equipped, and with clearly inadequate supplies and reserves. They crossed into their allotted sector of Palestine immediately after the State of Israel had been proclaimed. They fought with Transjordan's Arab legion on the central front, north and west of Jerusalem. Initially the Arabs did well, advancing to the heights above Tel Aviv ten miles from the Mediterranean, and a swift victory was expected back home. However, a cease-fire, concluded under pressure from the UN at the end of May, stopped the advance, and worked to the advantage of the Jews. Despite an arms embargo, during the cease-fire the Jews unlike the Arabs, acquired huge amounts of war material, and when fighting resumed the Jews used the advantage until their final victory. Whether or not an initial Arab victory would have ensued without the cease-fire is questionable, but the belief was fostered among the civilian population, in Iraq as elsewhere in the Arab world, that victory had been snatched from them by the British, the Americans, and their UN supporters.⁹⁵

The emergency regime, which facilitated government control over the elections, was marked by strict censorship, the opening of a concentration camp in the southern desert for the many arrested trouble-makers, the subordination of civil to military officials in all areas, and the establishment of military courts. In the general elections which took place on 15 June under martial law, the three opposition parties won a mere 7 from 138 seats between them. Their defeat demonstrated their lack of organization no less than their weakness in a struggle against the more experienced elder politicians. As always the elections were dominated by men who already enjoyed a certain position and status, whether in the countryside or in the towns, because of their independent sources of wealth or because they were clients of the regent or of other powerful individuals in the established hierarchy. The fact that these individuals were able to ensure that a large number of their own clients and supporters won seats, despite the best endeavours of the cabinet, merely demonstrated their informal power and did not help the opposition parties.⁹⁶

The great majority of the new parliament – as had been the case with every previous parliament – was composed of so-called “independents”. This concentration of independents was the real force inside the country. The “independents” were the deputies nominated rather than elected by the thousand shaykhs who owned about two-thirds of all cultivable land in Iraq. In obedience to their

⁹⁵ Marr, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

⁹⁶ Tripp, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

masters these men who represented the shaykhs became the conservative party *par excellence*; they had everything that goes to the making of a good conservative party; and since for the greater part of their association with Iraq, the British also wanted to avoid any political upheavals, they understood the value of the thousand shaykhs and cultivated them from the first as Britain's special friends and allies in Iraq.⁹⁷ The cabinet of Muḥammad aṣ-Ṣadr had possessed little authority, had failed to restore order save by imposing martial law, had neglected current administration, had allowed an alarming financial deterioration, and left a disheartening legacy at home and abroad. On 16 June the prime minister tendered his resignation on the grounds that he had completed the task for which he formed the cabinet, and the regent, thanking him for the "valuable work" that he had accomplished, accepted his resignation.

When the new parliament met on 21 June the offered resignation of the government was accepted. The parliament was confronted, to its dismay, with a situation containing new and alarming features which events in Palestine had created. The regent's choice of a successor fell unexpectedly upon a statesman formerly prominent but, through long residence in Europe, now rather out of touch with current politics: Muzāḥim al-Pāchachī. Owing to his long absence from Iraq, mainly in diplomatic services, he was not expected to be involved in personal and partisan issues which had rendered the atmosphere very tense. He claimed to be of no party and selected a cabinet of familiar figures of the "old gang". These ministers, whose appointment showed once more the small part played by party affiliation in the making of ministries, were mostly to remain in office for half a year, and could achieve something but not much towards redressing Iraq's present misfortunes of penury, insecurity, and foreign entanglement.⁹⁸

The prime minister announced no programme in parliament, he merely stated that he would devote himself to internal reforms as the state finances went from bad to worse. The financial situation had deteriorated owing to a fall in trade and reduction in oil royalties, the latter resulting from the stoppage of the Haifa pipeline. The Palestine conflict too had consumed huge amounts, but on the other hand the war was a suitable opportunity to persecute the popular forces. It was a period of settling accounts with patriots who had criticized the anti-popular and pro-imperialist policies of the regime – they could now be tried as "enemies of the Arabs" or "violators of national unity". Only martial law helped to maintain internal order, but conflict developed between the civil and military authorities.

The ensuing disagreements within the cabinet led in autumn 1948 to a reshuffle, which aroused opposition in parliament and signalled that the prime minister had become completely subservient to the elder politicians. The signatories of the Portsmouth treaty began returning to Iraq and they restarted a pro-

⁹⁷ Kimche, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

⁹⁸ Longrigg, *op. cit.*, p. 351.

paganda campaign about the benefits of the treaty. Faced with this situation Muzāḥim al-Pāchachī tendered his resignation on 6 January 1949. To save the situation, the regent once again asked Nūrī as-Saʿīd to form a new government.

The Iraqī uprising of 1948 – al-waṭba – was the most important revolutionary uprising in the Middle East in the post-war years 1945-1948. It reflected the depth and breadth of resentment against the regime and its foreign connection and was clear evidence of anti-British attitude of the populace. All the opposition forces took part in it, but the most active were the workers and students. The national bourgeoisie in the role of the hegemonist of the uprising was unfitted to coordinate the actions of protest, did not create a steering organ, and was satisfied with formal concessions from the ruling reactionary forces. Although the British were silently outraged, the cancellation of the Portsmouth treaty made little real difference to them: they merely fell back on the old 1930 treaty. They no longer fully trusted the regent, and began to regard Nūrī as-Saʿīd as the only really strong pillar of the regime.