

Studies in Zionism

Vol. 8, no. 1 (1987); pp. 25 - 49

"Palestine's Rural Economy, 1917 - 1939"

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During the early decades of the twentieth century in Palestine, the majority Arab population sustained itself primarily through agricultural and pastoral pursuits. The land and its management dominated the peasant's life. Palestinian fellaheen precariously but diligently existed in degrees of subsistence and poverty. The annual struggle to survive required rugged persistence. It necessitated an almost fatalistic acceptance of repeated destitution and regular financial insolvency. The rural economy's nature prevented the peasant from enjoying economic or political independence.

Land was the nexus of economic and, ultimately, political power in Palestine. Those who controlled or benefited from cultivating, renting, and selling land were, as elsewhere in the Middle East, the dominant if not domineering social, economic, and political elite. The Palestinian peasant was bound to the land because alternative occupations in commerce, industry, manufacturing or manual labor were scarce; over a period of centuries he relied upon cultivation and grazing for his primary income in the absence of investment capital or exploitable natural resources.

What was critical to all who depended on agriculture was the quantity of produce. The state claimed its taxes, the landowner sought a part of the yield as rent, and the peasant wanted his share to support himself and his family, and to pay portions of what seemed endless debts. Any factor that interrupted the growing or harvesting process was in some measure economically harmful. There seemed to be an unending stream of causes which hindered agricultural production and prevented rural solvency in Palestine. These conspired together to hamper development.

The purpose of this essay is to identify and explain those factors which influenced the rural economy's evolution, and to indicate how Palestine's rural population fared during the: emerging Arab-Zionist struggle to control the country's political future.

Two broadly defined areas combined to influence, create, and maintain the fellaheen's precarious financial state: administration of the land sphere and a series of enfeebling events. First, there were Ottoman and British policies which introduced unfamiliar changes in the style,

form, and rules of governance under which the peasant had traditionally operated. For a century prior to the 1940s, these included selective alterations in the bureaucratic, fiscal, and administrative structure of Palestine. These innovations, combined with repeated governmental reluctance to assist financially the rural population, gave the peasantry little opportunity to escape insolvency.

Traditional behavior on the part of fellaheen, such as the retention of customary practices in cultivation habits and land use, limited economic development. It also included severe indebtedness imposed in usurious fashion by landowners, grain merchants, tax collectors, rural sheikhs, and notables.

And second, there were natural and man-made setbacks that consisted of periodic military and civilian disturbances, regional trade difficulties, and vexing international problems. Any one of these obstacles might have been surmountable, but not all three simultaneously and for prolonged periods of time. For economic reasons alone an overwhelming majority of the Palestinian peasantry remained on the sidelines of the political struggle, at least until the mid-1930s, coping instead with matters of survival and existence. The status and decline of Palestine's rural economy helped to neutralize the Jewish demographic disadvantage during the early years of the Mandate.

Over several centuries, Palestinian Arab class structure became stratified as it did elsewhere in the Middle East. There were two major classes - the landed elite and the peasantry - and a very small middle class. Either one owned land and worked it or had it worked by permanent tenants or less permanent agricultural laborers. Some owners lived on the land they worked; others dwelt in the area or in a distant capital like Beirut, Damascus, or Cairo. When living away from the land, an owner employed managers resident in the vicinity to collect rents and taxes. Sometimes a peasant was both the owner of his own parcels and a tenant or agricultural laborer on another's land. In Palestine, rent payment in cash was rare. Instead in a great majority of cases rent varied from 20% to 75% of the gross yield, depending upon the extent to which the landlord provided the tenant with his seeds, animals, and other subsistence. In addition, the cultivator paid 10% of his gross produce for the tithe which amounted to at least 35% of the net produce. ¹

¹ Report of the Committee Appointed by His Excellency to Give Further Consideration to the Draft Rural Property Tax, June 23, 1933, Public Record Office (hereafter P.R.O.), CO 733/267/37560, P. 3; and Albert Abramson, Palestine Commissioner of Lands, to Chief

During the Ottoman regime, the fellaheen's economic situation was

continuously precarious. The prosecution of World War I in Palestine added to the economic problems of all segments of the population. In the 1920s, during the first decade of the British Mandate, Palestine's agricultural sector did not fair well except for plantation and cash crops such as citrus and bananas. In the early 1930s before the peasant suffered five consecutive years of poor crop yields, many villagers were disillusioned by their financial difficulties; they were no longer making efforts to extricate themselves from their indebtedness to the government and moneylenders.² In the mid-1930s, the civil unrest in Palestine further impaired the Arab rural economy. Eventually the peasant became exhausted and was beaten by forces beyond his ken or control.

Beginning in the nineteenth century or earlier, the peasant steadily became economically reliant and politically dependent upon others who gradually gained irretrievable control over his future. Classic patron-client relationships were formed. These ties were solidified and reinforced over time, with the notable elite acting as intermediaries between "government" and the peasantry. In matters pertaining to land the peasant's illiteracy made him depend upon spokesmen in coping with administrative matters like tax payment. During the early years of British rule in Palestine, the peasantry had little interest in politics yet desired changes in the rural economy which would lead to its improvement, without greatly altering customary agricultural procedures and practices.³ Thus the Arab political arena during the British Mandate was ultimately left to those who had landowning interests, including urban merchants, professionals, religious leaders, village sheikhs, mukhtars, and local government officials. Together this elite numbered perhaps no more than several thousand out of a total Muslim and Christian population of 769,813; the rural Arabs constituted approximately two-thirds of the total Arab population of Palestine in 1931.⁴

Secretary, February 21, 1930, Israel State Archives (hereafter I.S.A.), Land Registry Group, M3380/2.

² Albert Abramson to Acting Chief Secretary of the Palestine Government, May 12, 1931, P.R.O., CO 733/207/87275.

³ Great Britain, P.R.O., CAB 24/165 1887, Herbert Samuel, "Palestine," February 25, 1924, P. 4; Lord Plumer, High Commissioner for Palestine, to Sir Leopold Amery, Secretary of State for the Colonies, April 22, 1926, I.S.A., M15/27A.

⁴ Palestine Government, Census for Palestine, 1931, vol. 1, pp. 96, 291-292. In 1931 there were 108,765 rural earners and 331,319 dependents. Of the earner category, 70,526 (65%) were cultivators, 32,539 (35%) were agricultural laborers, and 5,311 (5%) gained their livelihood from

rents.

From the outset of British military control of Palestine in 1917, the peasant required financial relief from accumulated liabilities. His indebtedness was due in a small way to improvidence and extravagance, but was mostly caused by the needs of production, cost of living, taxes, and payment of previous debts. Production essentials included seeds, agricultural equipment, plows, and farm animals. Usually a peasant could not defray more than a fraction of his outstanding debt to a moneylender. He steadily increased both the size and sources of his borrowing while loan rates also rose. It was not uncommon in Palestine for the fellah to pay interest rates of 30% to 60% on money borrowed over periods of three months to a year. Loans were rarely used to upgrade an agricultural holding for future benefit; instead they were employed to meet immediate and pressing needs. By the early 1930s money for current or debt payments became scarce, contributing to the evolving barter economy in the rural sector. Villagers in the hill regions of Nablus and the Galilee were wont to sell their animal manure to orange growers for specie rather than use it to fertilize their own land. 5 Gradually many peasants became unable to repay borrowed sums, defaulting on their sources of credit such as their crops, farm animals, homes, tenants' privileges or land. Creditors accepted payment of debts for a crop not yet harvested at a price below its market value; the moneylender held the crop for future sale when supplies were short and demand greater. In Palestine, most of the money-lenders were also grain merchants, wheat being the most common medium of exchange. Loans were usually expressed in terms of kilograms of wheat, with a proviso for a proportionate increase in the quantity to be repaid by the peasant, should prices fall below a certain figure. Money-lenders regularly resorted to various subterfuges by which they circumvented the Ottoman law which set the legal rate of interest at 9%.⁶

Under the Ottoman regime there was little monetary relief from regular government or bank sources for the peasants' indebtedness. Absence of

5 Alfred Bonne, *Palastina Land und Wirtschaft*, Berlin, 1935, P. 124; London Times, August 14, 1936. Abraham Granott in *The Land System in Palestine: History and Structure*, London, 1952, depicts a devastating picture of the Palestine peasantry's enormous indebtedness. See especially pp. 54-70.

6 Great Britain, Palestine Royal Commission Memoranda Prepared by the Government of Palestine, Memorandum No. 13, "Rural Indebtedness," P.R.O., Colonial No. 133, London, 1937, P. 42; Sir John Chancellor, High Commissioner for Palestine, to Lord Passfield, Secretary of State for the Colonies, June 21, 1930, Sir John Chancellor

Papers, Rhodes House, Oxford University; Claude F. Strickland, 'The Struggle for Land in Palestine,' *Current History* (published by the New York Times) 34 (April 1931), P. 47. For examples of how grain merchants and moneylenders repeatedly put the cultivator into perennial debt, see F. G. Howill (of the Westminster Bank Ltd.), *The Banking Situation in Palestine*, Palestine, 1936, pp. 80, 91.

acceptable collateral such as title deeds, required by the Ottoman Agricultural Bank for the tendering of loans, gave the moneylender, who was offered inadequate security for his loans, reason to charge very high rates of interest. The Director of the Palestine Department of Lands noted that "the fellah rarely had clear title [to his land] ... and rarely ha[d] recourse to the formality of a regular mortgage with perhaps not 5% of the fellah's land mortgaged formally."⁷ In 1931, it was estimated that the volume of the Palestinian peasant's liabilities represented the full value of his annual income from crops and agricultural stock, or in other words, all his temporary wealth. In December 1939, the Managing Director of the Jewish National Fund noted that the Arabs were in monetary distress due to indebtedness. ⁸

The British for their part were parsimonious and lacked personnel who knew the culture, languages and recent local political history of the region. They were aware of the problems in the rural economy but decided not to ameliorate them. Meager and sporadic British assistance was provided the peasant by His Majesty's Government's (HMG) presence in Palestine. Only rarely during the Mandate did the British even try to undo fellaheen indebtedness. They had good intentions but lacked real commitment. Instead the British administration relied upon legislative solutions from the late 1920s onward for rural problems that required massive financial injections. Continuous financial commitments by HMG to rid the peasant of his indebtedness were suggested numerous times by those who investigated his plight.

Reports, assessments, reviews and analyses were repeatedly and accurately made by British experts, commissions of inquiry, and administrators in the Palestine Government about the poor state of the land regime, the need to reform the agricultural sector, and provisions for rural financial relief. All stressed the need to ameliorate the situation and assist Palestine's rural population. Yet little substance came of the suggestions made. The Land Settlement Commission Report of 1921, the numerous reports written on Palestine's land regime by Sir Ernest Dowson in the 1920s and 1930s, the Shaw Commission Report, the Hope Simpson investigation, the Johnson-Crosbie Report, and the Strickland Report, all in 1930, and both of Lewis French's reports in 1931 and 1932 supported

7 Mr. J. N. Stubbs, Director of Lands, to the Director of the Development Department, February 10, 1932, I.S.A., M3390/3.

8 Great Britain, Palestine Royal Commission Memoranda Prepared by the Government of Palestine, Memorandum No. 13, "Rural Indebtedness," Palestine, 1937, P. 42; minutes of the Jewish National Fund Directorate meeting, December 19, 1939, remarks by Abraham Granovsky, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem (hereafter C.Z.A.), KKL 10.

HMG's annual reports on Palestine and Transjordan made to the League of Nations, which called for substantive changes in the land regime and a wide assortment of assistance to Palestinian agriculture and to the fellah himself. 9

Cash loans were sponsored by the British and had a salutary effect until 1923 when they were suspended owing to HMG's financial stringency. That stringency repeated itself when, in the 1930s, a development loan for Palestine, first planned for £7.2 million, was reduced to £50,000.¹⁰ Some seed and fodder loans were made in 1928 and 1934 respectively, and agricultural loans amounting to £169,214 were provided from 1930 to March 1936. But the total rural earner population in 1930 exceeded 100,000 and total indebtedness was estimated at £2 million."

The sums allocated by the British for financial relief barely scratched the surface of the fellaheen's needs, particularly since the earnings of one-quarter of the Muslim rural population in 1931 were below the subsistence level,¹² that is, a sufficient income to provide food and shelter for a peasant and his family. In the 1930s, tithe payments were remitted and some instruction was introduced to improve the quality of seeds, livestock and farming procedures. Though it was reported that many fellaheen were appreciative of these British efforts, the great majority of them were in a state of depression. ¹³ A large number of peasants had lost

9 See "Land Settlement Commission Report," May 1921, P.R.O., CO 733/18/9614; Ernest Dowson, "Preliminary Study of Land Tenure in Palestine," 1924, I.S.A., 3571/1; idem, "Notes on Land Tax, Cadastral Survey and Settlement," n.d., I.S.A., 065/02059; idem, "Memorandum on an Agricultural Bank," 1933, P.R.O., CO 733/233/97248; idem, "Note on the Palestine Land Problem," 1935, CO 733/272/75072; Great Britain, P.R.O., Cmd. 3530. Report of the Commission on the Palestine Disturbances of August 1929 (Shaw Report), London, 1930, P.R.O., Cmd. 3683; Palestine: Report on Immigration, Land Settlement and Development (Hope Simpson Report), London, 1930; Report of a

Committee on the Economic Conditions of Agriculturists in Palestine and Fiscal Measures of Government in Relation Thereto (Johnson-Crosbic Report), Palestine, 1930 Report by Mr. C. F. Strickland of the Indian Civil Service on the Possibility of Introducing a System of Agricultural Cooperation in Palestine (hereafter Strickland Report), Palestine, 1930; Lewis French, First Report on Agricultural Development and Land Settlement in Palestine (hereafter French, First Report), Palestine, 1931; idem, Supplementary Report on Agricultural Development and Land Settlement in Palestine (French Supplementary Report), Palestine, 1932.

10 Kenneth W. Stein, *The Land Question in Palestine, 1917-1939*, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1984, P. 146.

11 Great Britain, Palestine Royal Commission Memoranda Prepared by the Government of Palestine, Memorandum No. 14, "Measures Taken to Provide Agricultural Credit," Palestine, 1937, pp.45-48.

12 Census for Palestine, 1931, vol. 1, P. 291.

13 League of Nations, Permanent Mandates Commission-Minutes, Twenty-seventh Session, remarks by Mr. Sydney Moody of the Palestine administration, June 5, 1935, P. 38.

control of their economic destiny and vented their frustration on their own brethren, the British, and the Zionists through various degrees of disturbance in the 1930s, which included disputes over cultivation and grazing rights, the uprooting of trees, squatting and trespassing on other people's property, civil protests, strikes, and communal violence.

Mr. Moody of the Palestine Chief Secretariat summed it up well in 1923 when he said:

... the Palestine government would do well to devote more money and attention to agriculture. If the farmers could see some sort of improvement in their circumstances the danger of political troubles would be lessened: A strong agrarian policy seems to me the one positive thing that the Palestine government could do to relieve the economic and therefore the political situations. 14

But HMG came to Palestine to protect and enhance Great Britain's national interests, not to act as a social and economic welfare net for either the poor Palestinian peasant or the Jewish population. To be sure, HMG protected the rights and aspirations of the Jewish community in its efforts to establish a Jewish National Home, but even this priority in the dual obligation was secondary to its larger interest of preserving its strategic presence at the eastern end of the Mediterranean. Throughout

the Mandate, HMG concentrated upon building a military infrastructure in Palestine that would maintain peace at a minimal cost while protecting Britain's various economic and political interests in Egypt (Suez), links to Iraq (oil) and India, and positions vis-à-vis other great powers in the region.

It was not just intentional and benign neglect on the part of the British Mandatory Government which gave little hope to the Palestinian peasant. The introduction of administrative reform under the Ottomans, later carried forward by the British, distanced him from the central government and heightened his dependence upon local notables and moneylenders. By the late 1930s and early 1940s much of the traditional Palestinian Arab political leadership had been exiled or killed, leaving the peasant to look to the British as paternalistic alternatives for the defense of Arab rights. But HMG would not and could not meet the unrealistic expectations of the Arab population that it would throttle the Jewish National Home's development, provide financial relief to the agricultural population, and create conditions necessary for self-determination.

14 Political Report for January 1923, remarks by Mr. Moody of the Palestine Chief Secretariat, P.R.O., CO 733/42/8933.

Administration and Use of Land

The introduction by the Ottoman central government of new forms of record-keeping toward the end of the nineteenth century seemed like an innocuous enough innovation, but the initiation of a land registration system in Palestine in 1871 had a particularly adverse effect ultimately upon the peasants' economic and political future. With an avowed goal of increased tax revenues, the reforms of the tanzimat neither reduced the power of local notables nor did they appreciably augment revenue. The peasantry had traditionally feared the central government and its representatives because of its oppression through rapacious tax demands and conscription. Land registration meant paying the cost for a title deed, an additional tax valuation, and providing the government with knowledge of a peasant's whereabouts and that of his family. Fellaheen avoided registering their land for they sincerely believed that doing so would obligate them for military service." Instead, land, when infrequently registered, was regularly entered in the name of notables who were predisposed to associate with the authorities and who were already familiar with municipal government, the commissions, boards, and offices of regional sub-district administration.

Land registered in whatever manner was usually recorded as less than the actual size to avoid larger tax assessments. As for the owner-occupier, he usually retained the right to work his land, but sometimes as

another's tenant to maintain anonymity. Taxes were paid by notables or estate managers so that records of payment were virtually nonexistent among a population that was preponderantly illiterate. During the 1920s and 1930s when written proof of tithe payment was required by the British for consideration of statutory tenancy under the various ordinances for agricultural tenants' protection, the peasants rarely had such records and therefore were frequently denied compensation in land or money for their displacement because of land sales. 16 The British tried through a process of Land Settlement to fix proprietary rights on land after 1928, but the peasantry lost faith in HMG for not moving quickly enough to change the land regime and make sufficient funds available to them. 17

15 A. Rizk (Palestine Department of Lands), Remarks on a Note of the Governor of Samaria on Werko and the Land Registry, February 2, 1923, P. 1, I.S.A., AG 755/L3/79/23.

16 See Kenneth W. Stein, "Legal Protection and Circumvention for Rights of Cultivators in Mandatory Palestine," in *Palestinian Society and Politics*, ed., Joel S. Migdal, Princeton, 1980, pp. 233-261.

17 The British made a serious blunder in 1929 and lost considerable credibility with a peasantry reluctant to associate actively with the government. HMG employed Land Settlement officials who were carrying out land surveys and had gained the confidence

Land registration provided some with tangible proof of ownership while it denied others, of their own volition, that same proof. A title deed was physical evidence of ownership, a negotiable item which was used as collateral for loans or exchanged to clear past indebtedness. Local notables were able to accumulate vast amounts of land for themselves. Peasants who did obtain title deeds or proof of registration under British rule through the 1921 Beisan Agreement, for example, which confirmed Arab cultivation rights on 75,000 acres in northern Palestine, readily sold their newly allotted parcels to Jewish purchasers. Many other landowners who had acquired title deeds legally during the Ottoman period sold these lands to Jewish immigrants during the Mandate. 19

The manner in which land was used caused deterioration of Palestine's rural economy. Most harmful was the retention of cultivation habits that limited output. These included traditional methods of agriculture, lack of manuring and intensive farming, continuous cropping without rotation, and an absence of regular irrigation. The cost and scarcity of farm animals compelled the peasant to work hard but inefficiently. He often tied himself to his plow, a practice which tired him faster and made him less productive. Therefore his employment in a

subsidiary occupation as an agricultural laborer on another's land became important. Field crops with few exceptions were "broadcast," weeded by hand, then cut with a sickle, and trodden down by cattle on the village threshing floor. The presence of weeds, dirt and other foreign matter in the wheat and barley remaining made it unfit or at least less competitive for export sale. In 1920, a hectare of wheat in Palestine produced an average of 593 kg while the same area in Egypt yielded 1,793 kg. 20 Of course the Egyptian peasant did not suffer the same economic and physical hardships endured by his Palestinian counterpart during World War I. Likewise, Palestinian agriculture did not benefit from the fertile soil built up over centuries by silting of the

of the local population to administer the punishment meted out to those guilty of participation in the 1929 disturbances. See Sir Ernest Dowson to J. M. Martin, Secretary to the Palestine Royal Commission, August 16, 1938, P.R.O., CO 733/ 361/75072/folio 33.

18 For a comparison of land accumulation by urban notables in Syria and Iraq during the Ottoman period, see, respectively, A. L. Tibawi, *A History of Syria*, London, 1969, P. 176, and Sir Ernest Dowson, *An Inquiry into Land Tenure and Related Questions - Proposals for the Initiation of Reform [in Iraq]*, London, 1932, pp. 20-24.

19 See Stein, *The Land Question*, pp. 62-64, 228-239.

20 E. R. Sawrer (Director of the Palestine Department of Agriculture), *A Review of the Agricultural Situation in Palestine in 1921*, Jerusalem, 1921; idem, *A Review of the Agricultural Situation in Palestine in 1922*, Jerusalem, 1923; idem, *A Review of the Agricultural Situation in Palestine in 1923*, P.R.O., CO 733/46/31959.

Nile. As the Mandate progressed the Palestinian fellah tended to resist the minimal efforts undertaken by the British to instigate changes in agricultural procedures that would have incorporated new farming methods, or included mechanization for purposes of increasing crop yields.

The Musha' Land System

Probably more than any other single factor, the musha' land system held back the economic advancement of the Palestinian peasant. According to virtually every land expert, its use was a severe impediment to agricultural productivity and development; its practice contributed to indebtedness, rural insolvency, a state of hopelessness, and eventually, alienation of the peasants' land. 21 In 1933, between 46% and 63% of the country's 8,252,900 cultivable dunams (a dunam equals a quarter of

an acre) were under some form of musha' use. 22

The central concept in the musha' system was collective ownership or cultivation of common land which was periodically redistributed by lot among various clans. The repartition of the same land area was designed to insure a measure of equality in the distribution of land of all qualities. Its goal was to maintain the integrity of a land area by ensuring its ownership or use by a group as a whole rather than by an individual. The variations of musha' use in Palestine were numerous, but certain common points were general to its effect throughout Palestine.

Periodic parcellation precluded one's willingness to spend time, effort, or money on improving a plot which would be someone else's within one, two, or five years. Long-term improvements on a parcel of land were rare, since few wanted others to benefit from their work. One peasant was quoted as saying:

I cannot plant a tree on my lands; next year they will have passed to another's cultivation. I cannot fertilize my fields; another shareholder will get the benefit next year, and why should I spend a pound per bag on

21 Dowson, "Land Tenure in Palestine", P. 35; Strickland Report, P. 11; Granott, The Land System, P. 218; Arthur Ruppin, Syrien als Wirtschaftsgebiet, Berlin, 1917, P. 31; Leon Schulman, Zur türkischen Agrarfrage Palästina und die Fellachenwirtschaft, Weimar, 1916, P. 65.

22 High Commissioner Sir Arthur Wauchope to Phillip Cunliffe-Lister, Secretary of State for the Colonies, April 15, 1933, P.R.O., CO 733/230/17249 (Part 1); see Stein, The Land Question, pp. 4, 14-15.

manure for another person's advantage? I cannot build a stable for my horse or my cattle; it will belong to another next year. 23

Redistribution meant that a peasant rarely left an area fallow, a practice which would have prevented the depletion of soil nutrients. Crop rotation on musha'-held land was rare even between the summer and winter growing seasons. Parcels allotted to a peasant were not contiguous, causing inefficient use of his time. One was forced to move from plot to plot to undertake all of the farming processes from preparing

the soil to harvesting the crop.

Since the Ottoman Agricultural Bank offered loans only on tracts that were truly individually owned and registered, musha'-held land was rarely given as collateral. There was no reference to a particular plot that a musha' participant possessed; the land was held collectively and so registered. 24 Obviously, the musha' system contributed to the lucrative business and profits enjoyed by moneylenders who did not insist on title deeds as collateral. Village and clan harmony was often strained during parcellation. Tension, quarreling and sometimes violence developed over the areas or parcels to be allotted. The redistribution procedure tended to favor the stronger, more numerous, or socially more prominent in a village at the expense of the poorer and weaker among the musha' community. 25 It was reported by a Palestine judge that there was an absence of village harmony during and after the allocation process. Feelings of apathy and despair were rife among the fellaheen, because many had little reason to look forward to a future on land that would pass to another. 26

Though the size of a land area associated with the musha' system did not change, the population increased. Over a period of time the same amount of land was distributed among a larger number of qualified villagers. The size of parcels or shares usually diminished according to the male demographic increase. This had the effect of making the plots so small or narrow that they were not worth farming. In turn population increase in a musha' community heightened the possibility that the musha' share-

23 French, First Report, P. 11; see also Albert Abramson, Southern District Governor, to Chief Secretary, February 7, 1924, I.S.A., M15/27A.

24 Jacob Thon, of the Palestine Land Development Company, to the General Secretary of the Zionist Executive, January 15, 1930, C.Z.A., S25/10396; Shulman, Zur türkischen Agrarfrage, P. 65.

25 Ernest Dowson, "Progress in Land Reforms, 1923-1930," 1931, pp. 27-28, P.R.O., CO 733/221/97169-, idem, "Report on the Work of the Ghor Mudawarra Demarcation Commission," March 19, 1932, I.S.A., 3548/file 1.

26 Gad Frumkin, The Path of a Judge in Jerusalem (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1954, P. 305.

holder would sell his shares or right to participate in the parcellation process. 27

Finally, if the musha' system had a positive quality it was that its nature delayed or postponed the sale of land to outsiders, but it did not prevent such sales ultimately. The small number of parcels or shares offered made it difficult initially for landbrokers, moneylenders, or intermediary agents to aggregate them into large tracts enticing enough for purchase. Over time, the poor economic condition of fellaheen forced many of them to cede their participatory rights in the distribution process to moneylenders who had liens on them. It was estimated in 1923 that 75% of musha' lands were not owned by fellaheen but by individuals who lived in towns. 28

In the 1920s, Jewish land purchase focused on tracts partially occupied and registered in the names of single owners. From January 1921 through December 1929, only a quarter of the total area purchased by Jews, 116,000 dunams, was previously musha'-held land. 29 But in the 1930s more musha' shares were accumulated and eventually sold to Jewish buyers. The practice of using broker intermediaries rather than acquiring parcels or shares directly from musha' participants increased in the 1930s for two major reasons: individual owners of larger areas were not readily available, and Zionists preferred to avoid direct responsibility for displacement of fellaheen in the land purchase process. All evidence suggests that Zionist officials, Jewish National Fund operatives, and private Jewish purchasers sought the assembly of musha' shares but refrained from buying them until they were combined into large parcels by intermediaries. 30

Naturally caused and man-made setbacks severely complicated Palestine's rural economy. Epidemic, plague, episodic rainfall, and drought were part of Palestine's agricultural landscape for centuries; their frequency and intensity, in combination with human impositions, greatly influenced the peasant's degree of subsistence and poverty. In the early twentieth century, Palestine suffered two separate cycles of devastation,

27 Palestine Director of Lands to Palestine Commissioner of Lands, April 13, 1932, I.S.A., 3573/ 1/folio 86; Dowson, "Land Tenure in Palestine," P. 54.

28 Hilmi Hussein, Inspector of Lands, Northern District, to Director of Lands, July 14, 1923, I.S.A., 3317/6.

29 Sir John Chancellor to Lord Passfield, January 17, 1930, P. 52, P.R.O., CO 733/182/77050 (Part 1); "Statistics Prepared by the Palestine Land Department for the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry 1945," I.S.A., 3874/1.

30 Colonel Frank Kisch, head of the Palestine Zionist Executive, to the

Zionist Executive, December 16, 1928, C.Z.A., S25/1336; Jacob Thon, "A Few Remarks on Land Laws," 1936, C.Z.A., S25/9851; minutes of the Jewish National Fund Directorate meetings, June 15, 1939 and March 3, 1940, C.Z.A., KKL10.

one from 1913 to 1920 and the other from 1926 to 1939. Both periods witnessed hardship in the rural sector. The ravages of nature and physical destruction worsened the economic condition of the majority Arab rural population in Palestine west of the Jordan.

Adequate numbers of sheep, cattle, and mules were critical to the livelihood of the Palestinian peasant. But from 1913 through 1920 a combination of epidemics and confiscation by the Turks created enormous livestock shortages (see Table).

Palestine Animal Census for Years Ending 1909, 1920, 1926, 1934, 1937 31

	1909	1920	1926	1934	1937
Sheep	174,000	262,588	290,584	188,267	207,000
Goats	238,500	271,733	341,289	380,511	361,000
Camels	43,290	8,800	27,319	32,033	28,000
Oxen and Goats	125,000	108,500	180,015	130,804	175,000

In 1913, there was a serious epidemic which reduced sheep flocks, cattle stock, and the number of transport oxen. The Turks commandeered huge camel stocks in 1915 and 1916. In 1916 they requisitioned large flocks of sheep near Beersheba and in 1917 the hill regions from Nablus to Hebron suffered a scarcity of sheep. During World War I, army mules were made available to cultivators to replace those seized by the Turkish army. However, many of them never became acclimatized to their new agricultural work conditions and died shortly after their purchase. Mules needed thereafter were brought from Syria, since few were bred in Palestine. 32 Further depleting the supply of field and grazing animals was the decrease in forage available. For food supply needs peasants chose to grow wheat rather than provide forage for their animals. Later in the 1930s herds were further reduced because of heavy slaughtering to satisfy the meat demands of a rapidly increasing population. In 1925, for example, large numbers of sheep, bullocks, cows, and calves were slaughtered for

31 Statistics culled for this table were taken from the "Land Settlement Commission Report," May 1921, P.R.O., CO 733/18/9614; Great Britain,

Report by HMG on the Administration under Mandate of Palestine and Trans-Jordan for the Year 1924, P.R.O., Colonial No. 12, 1925, P. 49; and Animal Census returns provided in the Annual Reports of the Palestine Department of Agriculture.

32 E.R. Sawrer, A Review of the Agricultural Situation in Palestine in 1923, P.R.O., CO 733/46/31959.

urban consumption; the absence of plow and grazing animals put a premium price on those available, imposing an additional burden on the peasants' meager resources. 33

Just as there was a depletion of livestock, so also was there a severe shortage of manpower during and immediately after the war. Younger village members left lands they habitually worked in order to escape military service. In many areas of Palestine only old people, children, and women remained. As a consequence, fields were either partially plowed and sown, or left untended. In the Gaza area, all the inhabitants were evacuated by the Turkish military authorities for a period of time, thereby interrupting cultivations. 34

A locust invasion in 1915-1916 greatly reduced the barley and wheat crops. Centuries of neglect and deforestation in favor of growing meager cereal crops had decreased the size of Palestine's forests. The Forest Law introduced by the Ottoman Government in 1860 to augment afforestation only served as a device for the extortion of additional revenues and was reported to have hastened the process of forest destruction. 35 But the Turkish army laid waste the vast olive groves of Palestine. The onset of World War I halted the shipment of coal into Palestine, thus necessitating the use of an alternative fuel for the locomotives that moved the Turkish army and its matériel northward. More than 60% of olive and other trees were felled by the Turks with two immediate consequences: loss of olive oil necessary for the Nablus soap industry, and shortages of an essential part of the peasants' diet. 36 There were residual effects as well. Deforestation meant that in the early 1920s local feelings were prohibited except by license. In a rare case of agreement, British officials, the Palestine Zionist Executive and the Supreme Muslim Council supported nursery development and reforestation. 37

33 Palestine Government, Department of Agriculture, Forests, and Fisheries, Annual Report for 1925, P. 2.

34 E.R. Sawrer, A Review of the Agricultural Situation in Palestine in 1921, P. 7; Palestine Zionist Executive, "Report on Trade and Industry," May 29, 1922, C.Z.A., Z4/1126; H. M. Kalvarisky, a Jewish land-

purchasing agent, in She'ifotaynu, 1918, pp. 10-20.

35 Great Britain, Report on the Palestine Administration, July 1920-July 1921, Palestine, 1922, pp.107-109.

36 Major General Sir Walter Lawrence to Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, May 13, 1919, [S.A., M101; Franz Carl Endres, Die wirtschaftliche Bedeutung Palästinas als Teiles der Türkei, Berlin, 1918, P. 14; Alfred Bonne, 'Die sozial ökonomischen Strukturwandlungen in Palästina,' Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik 63 (1930), P. 326; Edwin Samuel, A Lifetime in Jerusalem, London, 1970, P. 65.

37 Great Britain, Report on the Palestine Administration for 1922, Palestine, 1922, pp. 44-45; Report on the Palestine Administration for 1923 (P.R.O., Colonial No. 5), Palestine, 1924.

Devastation caused by the fighting in Palestine during World War I adversely affected the rural economy and the peasants' financial situation. The economy in general suffered from a severe decline in currency value and available capital. The inhabitants of Gaza bartered pottery for cereal from northern Palestine. The more densely populated area from Nablus to Jerusalem barely provided enough agricultural produce for local consumption. 38 Administratively, the headlong Turkish retreat brought about the destruction of sub-district land registers and agricultural bank records, leaving virtually no complete and accurate picture of land rights.

From 1920 to 1922 there was insufficient rainfall for agricultural needs. The dumping of Syrian wheat on the Palestine market caused a fall in local wheat prices which in turn exacerbated the peasants' economic condition. In the Northern District of Palestine, villagers everywhere were preoccupied with the difficulty of obtaining money to pay their debts. The Director of Agriculture, writing from Haifa, quoted the Governor of the Galilee as saying that cultivators were "being compelled to sell their wives to pay their tithes," while others in the Acre sub-district were using their agricultural loans to pay the tithe on the last crop that had failed. 39 Traditional cultivation was severely interrupted by the war, compelling many fellaheen, even before the onset of large-scale Jewish immigration and land purchase, to turn toward alternative livelihoods. Many peasants from the countryside were drawn to the towns and urban areas by projects undertaken by the British to bolster their strategic control over Palestine, and to the building trades stimulated by Jewish industrial and residential construction. 40

Less apparent but nonetheless important in the rural economy's

evolution after the war was the modification of internal trade routes. Predominantly east-west marketing patterns were changed. Customary marketing outlets and credit relationships were altered. Previously, two relatively independent economic districts had existed: one in the north with Haifa as the outlet port, and one in the south with Jaffa serving as the point of embarkation for goods. Acre, Nazareth, Safed, and Tiberias acted as the

pp. 38-39; Report by HMG on the Administration under Mandate of Palestine and Trans-Jordan for the Year 1924 (P.R.O., Colonial No. 12), Palestine, 1925, pp. 45-46.

38 Reginald Wingate, "Agriculture and Supplies in Palestine," February 7, 1917, P.R.O., FO 371/3049/41442.

39 Director of Agriculture to Chief Secretary, August 7, 1922, I.S.A., 3852/492; "Political Report for November 1922," P.R.O., CO 733/28/63733; Herbert Samuel, "The Situation in Palestine," P.R.O., CAB 24/140-1877.

40 See Palestine Government, Report of the Department of Agriculture and Forests for the Years 1931 and 1932, Palestine, 1933; Bonne, "Die sozial ökonomischen Strukturwandlungen in Palästina," P. 322.

market centers for the northern hinterlands, while Jerusalem, Ramle, Gaza, and Hebron served the same purposes in the south. However, the British presence, through intensive road-building, not only integrated these two distinct centers' but blended others into them as well. The impact of these changes brought world markets closer to Palestine's hinterlands, made it extremely difficult for nascent Palestinian industry to compete with items produced abroad, and initiated new trading patterns and partners. Prohibitive tariffs placed on agricultural produce intended for Egypt forced growers in Palestine to concentrate on smaller and less lucrative markets or on Syria. 41 Changing trade patterns, new tariffs, a suffering rural economy, indebtedness, and financial attraction to urban areas made some fellaheen transients and others per diem laborers in Palestine after World War I.

The second major period of decline in the rural economy commenced in the late 1920s and lasted until 1939. From 1926 on Palestine's agrarian sector suffered a series of crises that tested many peasants' patience and broke their resolve: a cattle pestilence in 1926; some degree of drought in 1927, 1928 and 1931-1933; infection of 80% of the local dairy herds in 1930; four consecutive years of locust plague from 1928 through 1931; field mice depredations in 1928, 1930 and 1931-1933; the starvation of flocks in Gaza and Beersheba in 1932; partial

failure of the olive crop from 1932 through 1935; massive migrations of starlings in 1932-1933, causing devastation of the germinating crops; insufficient seed grain and pasturage in 1933 through 1935; and physical disturbance and rural insecurity from 1936 through early 1939. 42

In terms of output, these successively poor years had the following effects: in 1930, damage to almost a million dunams in 350 villages, which meant a loss of 65% of the wheat crop; in 1931 diminished production of summer and winter crops; severe crop failures in 1932 including loss of 60% of the durra crop, 80% of the olive crop, and 85% of the sesame crop.

41 Ibid.; "Administrative Report for October 1920," P.R.O., CO 733/7/57950; Mr. Pevsnet, aid to a Jewish land-purchasing agent, to Dr. Arthur Ruppin, an agricultural expert in the Jewish Agency, June 1, 1930, C.Z.A., S25/7448.

42 Palestine Government, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture and Forests from 1927 to 1930, Palestine, 1931, pp. 7, 130; League of Nations, Permanent Mandates Commission-Minutes, Fifteenth Session, remarks by High Commissioner Sir John Chancellor, July 5, 1929, P. 91; Great Britain, Report by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Council of the League of Nations on the Administration of Palestine and Trans-Jordan (hereafter Report by HMG) for the Year 1928, P.R.O., Colonial No. 40, P. 65; Great Britain, Report by HMG for the Year 1930, P.R.O., Colonial No. 59, pp. 182-183; and B. Dinier et al. (eds.), History of the Maganah (Hebrew), vol. 2, part 1, Tel Aviv, 1964, P. 303.

From 1931 through 1933 there was a 37% drop in domestic wheat output in Palestine. This forced the administration to issue loans for seed, plow oxen, and forage, and to remit the tithe from 1931 through 1934. In Jenin in early 1934, Arab journalists reported that 60% of the stock and 90% of the offspring perished due to scanty grazing, inclement weather, and drought; in Nablus the cold weather and lack of pasturage took their toll of 60% of the remaining stock. This resulted in the government's remission of the animal tax. In the early 1930s there was a steady decline in the price of domestic wheat and cereals, primarily because of the dumping of Syrian wheat on the Palestine market and worldwide overproduction.⁴³

The social and political consequences of these setbacks from 1926 through 1935 were varied, profound and, above all, perforce long-lasting. They all pointed to dual conclusions: further impoverishment of the fellaheen and Bedouin population; and the continued inability of the peasant to gain control over his own destiny. These repeated agricultural

setbacks compelled some to sell their cattle unprofitably. This meant that less land was plowed in following seasons. Similarly, the shortage of seed grain in subsequent years made many fellaheen even more dependent upon moneylenders; the absence of grain meant defaulting on lands one owned in order to pay debts. For some fellaheen, the most immediate relief was the sale of all or a part of their remaining small plots of land to brokers, intermediaries, or directly to Jewish purchasers. 44

Land sales statistics from the Palestine Lands Department for the period from June 1, 1934 to August 31, 1936 confirm in fact an upsurge in small transactions precisely at the time when financial pressures on the rural population were most severe. The statistics show that the average land sale by Arabs to Jews was 51.8 dunams; that 75% of the sales transactions in this period involved 100 dunams or less, and averaged 15.5 dunams. These figures do not reveal the extent of land brokerage or intermediary activity by those who accumulated smaller parcels of land and sold them as units larger than 100 dunams. But the Palestine Arab press is filled with

43 Great Britain, Report by HMG for the Years 1931, 1932, 1933, 1934, 1935, 1936, 1937, and 1938, P.R.O., Colonial Nos. 75, 82, 94, 104, 112, 129, 146 and 166; telegram from High Commissioner Sir Arthur Wauchope to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, August 10, 1932, P.R.O., CO 733/224/97270; Filastin, February 24, 1934; Al-jami'ah al-'Arabiyyah, March 4, 1934; Palestine Government, Official Communiqué No. 11/340, March 25, 1934; and Stein, The Land Question, pp. 142-146.

44 High Commissioner Wauchope to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, May 28, 1932, P.R.O., CO 733/224/97270, and August 14, 1933, P.R.O., CO 733/245/17493; and Stein, The Land Question, pp. 173-192.

mention of such activity and the detrimental impact: these land sales were destined to have upon the Arab community in Palestine. 45

The social bonds that had made Palestinian Arab rural society so hierarchical and firmly connected to the notable urban elite, changed noticeably because of the rural economy's decline. Landowners with tenants and agricultural workers lost a portion of their labor supply since more attractive urban alternatives in Jewish and British development enterprises were available. As musha' and small parcels were consolidated in anticipation of their sale, the economic weight of some landowners with predominant influence in a village area declined as land was ultimately transferred to Jewish ownership. Several owner-occupiers sold all or part of their holdings, forcing the Palestine administration to prepare legislation in 1935 to protect the owner against disposing of

areas necessary for his own self-sufficiency. Many who sold directly to Jewish buyers or had land sold out from under them by landowners or through intermediaries often moved to towns and urban areas. Rural-urban migration particularly increased in the 1931-1936 period because of the waning viability of the agricultural economy.⁴⁶

From the early 1930s on, the Palestine Arab press repeatedly condemned a troika of culprits: the British, the Zionists, and the Arab political leadership. When the value of the pound sterling fell in 1931 because England left the gold standard, local merchants raised their prices. *Filastin* of January 1, 1932 criticized "our merchants [who] take advantage of it [the price rises] at a time when the fellah, the laborer, and the artisan are on the verge of starvation"; on February 7, 1932 this paper stressed that the peasants' poverty was not due to heavy taxation but to the nightmare of exorbitant interest which the merchants and moneylenders charge the simple fellah; *Al-jami'iah al-'Arabiyyah* of August 5, 1932 noted that

the fellah is the milking cow of the Government, 'Whom it does not pity, and he is the servant of the leaders who do not care for him. The fellah

⁴⁵ Schedule of Jewish Land Purchase, I.S.A., 3874/7 For example, *Al-jami'ah al-'Arabiyyah*, September 7, 1934, condemned land brokers and landowners who sold their land to Jews. It stated: "By selling land, they sell the blood and remains of their fathers"; and the same paper on January 16, 1935 attacked illegal brokerage of land by those doctors and lawyers who sought profit and disregarded every national cause.

⁴⁶ Census for Palestine, 1931, vol. 1, P. 51; Great Britain, Palestine Royal Commission Memoranda Prepared by the Government of Palestine, Memorandum No. 2, "Regional Distribution of Population," P.R.O., Colonial No. 133, London, 1937, P. 4. The point of increased urbanization is particularly well made by Rachele Taqqu, "Peasants into Workmen: Internal Labor Migration and the Arab Village Community under the Mandate," in *Palestinian Society and Politics*, pp. 261-281.

then is compelled to leave his village when he finds nothing to eat; either he goes to the town to work or to obtain a living somehow even through crime. The following factors lead to this: 1) lack of funds, 2) lack of means of irrigation, 3) poor means of agriculture, 4) heavy taxes, 5) absence of

an agricultural bank, 6) [and being] badly nourished....

Al-jami'ah al-Islamiyyah of February 16, 1934 described the following scenario for the Arab laborer:

[he] seeks employment but can not find it; he has no work because the Jews took over all the work; the fellaheen are driven from the land because the Zionists bought it from the rich landlords. The fellaheen are drawn to the towns to seek jobs which they do not get. They- have nothing to do eventually but become gangsters.

Finally, Al-Difa' of January 7, 1936 noted that "among the leaders of the Arabs in Palestine, private interests are paramount."

The immediate economic consequences of these successively poor years meant a reduction in dairy and meat products, higher fodder prices because of insufficient domestic forage and pasturage, importation of livestock mostly from Syria, and the almost total devotion of time by available Palestine administration officials to alleviation of these severe and immediate problems. Curiously, those engaged in citriculture were not affected by the successively poor agricultural yields in the dry farming sector; in fact, during the mid-1930s only 1935-36 was a particularly poor year in terms of citrus output. In 1937 the local citrus growers suffered setback for three unrelated reasons: an unusually high percentage of rot in the harvest due to excessive rains; irregular shipments due to the disturbances in Palestine; and competition with Spanish fruit which inundated the English market causing a drop in the price of citrus imported from Palestine. The onset of World War II created major problems for the Palestine citrus industry, particularly in terms of shipping produce to European markets; it was thereafter transported via railroad and through Egypt, or sold directly to the British army.⁴⁷

Continuing vicissitudes of nature adversely affected the rural economy from 1936 to 1939. Insufficient and untimely rain!; limited wheat and cereal production in various regions of Palestine. In 1936, a hot dry

⁴⁷ Moshe Shertok (Sharett) of the Jewish Agency to J. M. Martin, Secretary to the Royal (Peel) Commission, May 28, 1937, C.Z.A., S25/4653; Palestine Government, Annual Reports of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for the Years Ending March 1941 and March 1942, Palestine, 1941 and 1942 respectively.

khamsin damaged the summer yields, particularly the olive crop,

livestock and plow animals were in short supply, and a deficiency of seed restricted planting in October after a temporary cessation of the disturbances which had begun in April. The shortage was so great that local merchants sought seed grain as far north as Aleppo and Homs.⁴⁸

By comparison, 1937 was an excellent year since production and prices of wheat were higher, and rainfall was adequate. However, drought in December 1937 and early 1938 caused losses in Hebron and Beersheba.⁴⁹ Wheat production dropped to 44,000 tons, only one-third of the previous year's yield.⁵⁰ The end of the riots, the demand for foodstuffs in Palestine, and minimal natural interruptions helped to increase agricultural production. The wheat output in 1939 reached an all-time high. In comparison to the earlier years of the 1930s, prices were better for agricultural produce in general, but wheat and barley harvests increased only marginally for a burgeoning population. The closure of the Mediterranean to merchant shipping, the reduction of competitive imports, and the granting of seed loans to cultivators helped to revitalize the rural economy."

To be sure, the wrenching level of economic destitution of the early 1930s was not matched in the last years of the decade. Nonetheless, the rural economy was bruised, damaged, and in part paralyzed during the intermittent unrest from 1936 to 1939. Indeed, those disturbances were primarily directed at political targets; they focused on the destruction of Jewish enterprises, crops, and civilian settlements, British outposts and personnel, and generally HMG's policy of continuing to foster support for the Jewish National Home. Yet, those peasants who participated in the numerous bands that emerged during the Arab Revolt were also motivated by personal anger, fear, frustration, and distress.⁵²

The 1936-1939 disturbances were as much a rebellion against an imposed political policy as they were a civil war aimed at Arab brokers,

48 Palestine Government, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for the Year Ending March 1937, Palestine, 1937.

49 Palestine Government, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for the Year Ending March 1938, Palestine, 1938, and League of Nations, Permanent Mandates Commission-Minutes, Thirty-fourth Session, June 10, 1938, P. 58.

50 Great Britain, Report by HMG for the Year 1938, P.R.O., Colonial No. 166, pp. 276-278; League of Nations, Permanent Mandates Commission-Minutes, Thirty-sixth session, June 13, 1939, pp. 77-78.

51 Palestine Government, Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for the Year Ending March 1940, Palestine, 1940, pp. 1-3, and Leo Herrmann, *The Palestine Agricultural Economy under War Conditions*, Tel Aviv, 1944, pp. 1-7.

52 See Shai Lachman, "Arab Rebellion and Terrorism in Palestine, 1929-1939: The Case of Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam and His Movement," in Elie Kedourie and Sylvia Haim, *Zionism and Arabism in Palestine and Israel*, London, 1982, pp. 74, 77-86.

intermediaries, land agents, merchants, urban professionals, and self-anointed politicians. Many of these notables had previous and current dealings with Jewish land purchasers. Violence was vented on this segment of Arab society because of obvious inconsistencies between displays of antagonism against Zionism and private collaboration with Jewish nation-builders. Many Palestinian Arab political leaders sold land to Jews before, during and after the disturbances to gain a measure of economic relief when other sources of capital were unavailable.⁵³ The political implications of this slow but steady disconnection from land were not immediately gauged; the most urgent priority was providing for oneself and one's family.

Arab merchants, particularly manufacturers, were hurt as the result of a loss of labor and an inability to move goods to the borders for export during the protracted Arab strike. The devaluation of the Syrian currency in late 1936 came as an additional blow. Shopkeepers who were forced to keep their businesses closed for prolonged periods of time depleted or exhausted their savings. Foreign manufacturers lost confidence in their customers in Palestine, a development which impaired trade and lessened the availability of imported goods.⁵⁴

The fellaheen were not immediately and uniformly harmed by the revolt. In spite of marketing difficulties due to a transport strike, and an Arab boycott of the Jewish buyers, the peasant was basically self-sufficient and left with excess produce on his hands from 1936 through the middle of 1938. But the disturbances in the rural sector adversely affected its economy and indirectly the peasant in six ways. First, retention of produce meant disposing of crops locally at very low prices or losing more perishable ones. Second, the urban population's reduced purchasing power pushed the peasant deeper into debt. Third, during later periods of the strike, villagers were intimidated and forced to feed the members of the armed bands. Work animals, seed, vegetables, oil, wheat, and other provisions were requisitioned by those engaged in the unrest. Many fellaheen sat idle either for lack of seed and plow animals or because they had no desire to produce a crop if it were going to be

taken from them.

53 Minutes of the Jewish National Fund Directorate meetings, July 6, 1938 and August 8, 1938, C.Z.A., KKLIO; Abraham Granovksy, *The Struggle for Land in the Years of the Disturbances* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1939, pp. 3-5. Stein, *The Land Question*, Appendix 3, "Partial List of Palestinian Arab Politicians and Notables Involved in Land Transfers to Jews, 1918-1945," pp. 228-238.

54 Dr. R. Rutenstreich (Jewish Agency), "Economic Condition of Palestine, 1936," December 30, 1936, C.Z.A., S25/9783-, Mr. G. Agronsky (Jewish Agency), "Palestine Arab Economy Undermined by Disturbances," January 20, 1939, C.Z.A., S25/10091; see also C.Z.A., S25/9902.

Fourth, crops and land were damaged by rioters. Fifth, some government agricultural and horticultural stations were attacked by armed bands who periodically wasted and burnt crops, shot mules, and destroyed property. And sixth, insecurity in the rural sector reduced government revenue, in turn leading to a decrease in the already meager administration efforts to provide agricultural credit. 55

The disturbances also affected the rural Jewish economic sector. A depression had preceded them from the late fall of 1935. The revolt brought about an immediate decrease in Jewish immigration and therefore a decline in the inflow of capital from abroad; the total output of factories was reduced because of the general insecurity and the decline in demand for goods; Jewish workers in the building trades were laid off, and some of them were forced to return to agriculture, thus replacing Arab laborers in rural employment. The instant inability to obtain agricultural produce necessitated a reallocation of land use in Jewish rural communities. A sense of self-reliance was demanded of the Jewish community because of the Arab boycott and transport problems. A measure of Jewish self-sufficiency continued after the outbreak of World War II as Jewish urban areas slowly became direct outlets for agricultural produce from kibbutzim and moshavim. 56 A demand developed for locally manufactured goods because of a decline in imports. This was a stimulus to Jewish industrial development. The disturbances around Jaffa port forced Tel Aviv's port to grow as an alternative; half of Palestine's citrus exports passed through the latter by early 1939. The riots resulted in a drop in Jewish capital investment. Arabs from the depressed rural sector were able to find fewer jobs in the urban building trades. Similarly, British expenditures in seeking an end to the revolt meant a consequent reduction in the number of public works projects and less staff in government departments. Hundreds of government posts were not filled and other workers were dismissed because they could not operate

normally on account of insecurity.⁵⁷

55 Great Britain, Report by HMG for the Years 1937, 1938, and 1939, pp. 275-278, 263-265, and 276-278 respectively; Agronsky, "Palestine Arab Economy Undermined by Disturbances," C.Z.A., S25/10091.

56 Moshe Smilansky, Chapters in the History of the Yishuv (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, 1947, vol. 6, pp. 68, 69, 80, 99, 109, 118.

57 Great Britain, Report by HMG for the Years 1937, 1938, and 1939, pp. 275-278, 263-265, and 276-278 respectively; Agronsky, "Palestine Arab Economy Undermined by Disturbances," C.Z.A., S25/10091; and D. Gurevich, A. Gertz and R. Bachi, The Jewish Population of Palestine, Jerusalem, 1944, P.11.

Conclusions

The rural economy of Palestine was in a depressed state when the British military entered the country in 1917, and it had worsened by 1939 when World War II commenced. In the course of time, numerous factors combined steadily to dislodge the peasant from land his ancestors may have worked. Adherence to traditional agricultural practices, the usury of self-seeking Arab grain merchants and moneylenders, the musha' land system, and unproductive cultivation habits stymied the advancement of the fellaheen. Local natural phenomena such as unpredictable drought or floods, and the destruction of crops by vermin added to their plight. The imposition of administrative and political policies and the consequences of external events upon Palestine indirectly influenced the rural economy in an adverse manner. The effect on the peasants of no consistent financial commitment by the British during the Mandate to assist the rural population is all too evident. Only in times of crises and immediate threat to internal security, either through economic decline or physical disturbance, was temporary attention paid to the majority rural population.

In the early 1930s, the British did assist the rural population and the peasant cultivators in particular through financial support. They provided funds for mixed-crop farming, drought-resistant seeds, better stock, and fodder. Relief was provided through government loans and tax remissions. But the insufficient quantity and quality of this aid only increased the embitterment of a destitute rural population toward Britain and her support of the Jewish National Home.

A second British policy option to assist the peasantry was pursued from the late 1920s onward: the devising and application of a series of legislative curatives for the rural indebted sector of the population. The

British believed naively that they could change social behavior and customary practices steeped in tradition. The Palestinian peasant had little knowledge of due process, but when given the opportunity took advantage of newly introduced laws and ordinances which furthered his interest. In 1928, the process of Land Settlement was aimed at determining boundaries, but fellaheen were continuously reluctant to participate in identifying land rights, especially when their registration of land increased the fees they were required to pay; boundary delimitation was important to the British but not to the peasants.

The Protection of Cultivators Ordinances of 1929 and 1933, when not circumvented routinely, protected only the smaller agricultural class of tenants, not the larger group of small owner-occupiers. The Imprisonment for Debt Ordinance in 1931 limited the number of times one could be imprisoned for inability to pay a debt, and reduced the number of debtors in prison, but did little to relieve the long-term indebtedness of the fellaheen. The Mortgage Debt Ordinance of 1931 kept a tenant on his land in case of foreclosure, and angered the landlord who sought to upgrade or sell his holding. The 1932 Land Disputes Possession Ordinance gave a squatter or tenant without a title deed rights to remain on land he did not own. He in turn developed a perception that possession of land was more important than an owner's title. The Landless Arab inquiry from 1931 to 1936 was aimed at resettling Arabs displaced because of Jewish land purchase. However, it enumerated only 899 persons in this category, resettled less than 100 of them, and raised fellaheen expectations that land once sold to Jews would be returned to the original owners by the Palestine administration. The Usurious Loan Ordinance of 1934 outlawed moneylending at an interest rate exceeding 9% per annum, but there was little enforcement of this law. And the proposed ordinances to partition musha' land in 1933 and protect small landowners in 1936 were never enacted.

Several impressions were left upon the fellaheen population by the combined British policy of too little financial aid and these legislative initiatives. Hopes about British willingness to assist the peasantry were raised and eventually shattered. Extra-legal rights were encouraged. There was an increasing atmosphere of officially sanctioned permissiveness and disregard for law. By late 1935, resentment developed against the British in many Arab villages, but British policy only contributed to a longer process of rural disenchantment and discontentment.⁵⁸

The rural economy never recovered from either the destruction left by the Turkish army during World War I or the numerous natural setbacks which had plunged the fellah into inextricable debt by the early 1930s.⁵⁹ Other causes and events had a negative and corrosive impact upon the

rural economy and the peasants' precarious viability: insecurity of Mediterranean shipping caused by World War I, the imposition of tariff restrictions by Syria and Egypt, the dumping of foreign wheat on the Palestine market, the worldwide depression in the 1930s, the war in Abyssinia in 1935, the 1936-1939 Arab Revolt, and the slowing of Mediterranean trade because of World War II. All these factors conspired to limit the peasant's economic development. In 1925 Sir Herbert Samuel said that "large numbers of the Arab peasantry are exceedingly poor"; in

58 League of Nations, Permanent Mandates Commission-Minutes, Twenty-fifth Session, May 31, 1934, P. 14; High Commissioner Wauchope to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, P.R.O., CO 733/297/75156 (Part 1).

59 E. Keith-Roach, Acting District Commissioner, to Chief Secretary, February 5, 1932, I.S.A., M3880/2.

1931, Chaim Arlosoroff, the head of the Jewish Agency, noted that "the Bedouin of the south are on the threshold of starvation"; and in 1932 Moshe Smilansky, working for the Jewish Agency, remarked that "in the Arab village nauseating poverty prevails.⁶⁰

The quality and quantity of the peasant's crop yields determined his well-being. They affected the peasant's level of financial insolvency, the landlord's rent, the land manager's fees, the moneylender's loan schedules, and the government's taxes. But during the first four decades of the twentieth century, virtually everyone connected with Palestine's Arab rural sector suffered. The rural economy penultimately alienated the peasant from his land. The ultimate cause of his displacement was the magnetic attraction of British and Jewish capital through public works projects and land sales respectively. There were alternatives to a protracted and untenable financial state. An unwelcome option to an increasingly unmanageable rural environment was present. For those with a traditional long-term attachment to their land it was difficult but necessary to sell portions of their holdings. There was an unavoidable drift away from rural occupations. An ineluctable pull toward urban areas, particularly in the 1930s, developed. The Palestinian peasantry became displaced in part by forces beyond their control. This process started in the late Ottoman period, gained momentum from economic causes and political factors during the British Mandate, and was catalyzed by Jewish nation-building.

60 Great Britain, Report by the High Commission on the Administration of Palestine, 1920-1925, P.R.O., Colonial No. 15, Palestine, 1935, P. 18; Chaim Arolosoroff, Jerusalem Diary (Hebrew), n.d., P. 29; minutes of the Jewish Agency meeting on the French Report, June 22, 1932, remarks

by Moshe Smilansky, C.Z.A., S25/7599.