

which prohibited the eviction of the cultivators from the land. The terms of land sale by the Ottoman government stipulated that the cultivators living on the land be kept on it after the sale. Therefore, except for the case of the land sold to the Rothschilds', land transfer under the Ottoman rule did not immediately result in the expropriation of the direct cultivators. (17) It must be noted here that this law had also restricted the new landowners as well. Thus, for example in the case of the Sursuks, despite the fact that the total size of land under their control was large, this land continued to be divided into many smaller pieces stretching over many villages. In order for the Sursuks to turn their property into one continuous unit and use it for capitalistic purposes, the landowner-merchant family would have to expropriate the cultivators and turn them into wage labour, a transformation which would have been unlawful and politically dangerous. The Sursuks resorted instead to increased tithes and over-taxation of the cultivators (Owen,1981:286; Baer,1982). According to Owen,the Sursuks "attempted to exploit in the triple role of landowners, money-lenders and tax farmers and were soon making many thousands of pounds a year...By 1890 the rewards from the Marj were great." (Owen,1981: 175)

The legal immunity provided by the Ottoman Land Law to the direct producers was abolished with the British colonial rule. In 1920, the British introduced the Land Transfer Ordinance which in turn legalized land transfers and made expropriation a norm rather than the exception. Legalizing expropriation, nevertheless, did not work to the advantage of the Sursuks

The signing of the "Balfour Declaration" in 1917 and its