

establish branches in Bethlehem, Nablus, Ramallah, Tulkarem, and Jenin villages.

The ostensible aim of the Village League Movement was to finance rural development projects in member villages, dwelling at length--in the speeches of its leaders and articles appearing in its newspaper, al-Mir'aa--on the years of neglect suffered by rural Palestine at the hands of the urban-based national leadership. In practice, however, it set itself to compete with the Amman-based Palestinian-Jordanian Joint Committee which has been financing similar development projects since 1977, when the PLO succeeded in gaining full ascendancy in West Bank national politics (Sus, 1981:5-6).

The ideology of the Leagues was based on the notion of storming the urban political base of the PLO by mobilizing the allegedly conservative peasantry around issues of village-centered development (Tamari, 1983:4-6). Its mode of operation, however, was based on cultivating village potentates whose services and patronage rested directly on power delegated by the Israeli Civil Administration. Simultaneously the Civil Administration began to disband and punish local councils and mukhtarships that were seen as pro-PLO or un-cooperative (ibid.:12).

By 1982 the Village Leagues were transformed, under the direction of former Defense Minister and his protégé, Civil Administrator Menahem Milson, into an armed militia with a substantial budget running into several million dollars. Its dual function was to help eliminate or neutralize PLO power in the villages, and to create a local pliable leadership which can represent the Palestinians in the anticipated autonomy negotiations along the guidelines of the Camp David accords.

Internal bickering among League chieftens, as well as excesses committed by League militias against their village opponents (including personal opponents) sabotaged their own attempts at expansion. Basically, however,