

Chapter Six

Wage Labour, Landlessness, and Migration as Factors in Rural Transformation

While sharetenancy can be seen as constituting the main internal (i.e. agrarian) mechanism for the productive disposition of the rural surplus population, wage labour opportunities and migration present the external outlets for the release of demographic pressures on the land. The supplementation of cash income from non-agricultural sources (such as village crafts, seasonal cropping arrangements, transport, etc.), is of course, a common feature of traditional village employment. But the foundation of a peasant economy is not challenged until employment chances outside the village, especially those related to the penetration of capitalist manufacturing and market, are introduced to village life (Franklin, 1969:55-56). An alternative threat to the rationale of a peasant economy is the substantial supplementation of farm income with remittances sent by migrant members abroad, to the extent that marginal agriculture, as defined above, becomes redundant. We shall deal here with both of these problems, migration and wage labour, as they relate to each other, and to the peasant farm as a unit of production.

In Ottoman Palestine the monetization of the rural economy and pressures to pay taxes and debts in cash compelled many peasants to seek employment in commercial agriculture in the estates of absentee landlords, as well as in the farms of middle peasants, in the central and Maritime plains. The growth of citrus plantations in the coastal plains and Gaza by WWI created new demands, also within agriculture, for wage