

The search for a "plot viable" during the British Mandate in which a hypothetical average peasant household could find self-sufficiency in agriculture proved to be illusory in the years preceding the war of 1948 (Hope Simpson, 1930:60-67; Carmi and Rosenfeld, 1974:473). It is even more illusory today when only a minority of rural households, and only 24.1% of the total population in 1979, live on income derived from agriculture (State of Israel, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 1980: 21). This is not to say, however, as we shall argue below, that the family farm has become insignificant; merely that it has acquired a new and subsidiary dimension in the peasant's life.

In this context it seems that the overriding variable in the marginalization of land, aside from plot fragmentation, is the pull of wage labour. In the West Bank today only peasants in irrigated farming (which constitutes about 4% of the total cultivable land) seem to have resisted the pull of opportunities of employment outside the villages (Tamari, 1980: 31-34).

Official statistics show (Table 7:1) that about a third of the total rural population (36.5%) as having no "external" basis of support (i.e. remittances from abroad, welfare payment, etc...) aside from their farm income and family wage labour. Out of 66 thousand families in the rural sector (about 64% of the total population) 12.9 thousand families (12% of the population) have no members of the households as income earners - that is, belonging to the labour force. From the data we also note that slightly over half the total rural families as not having any agricultural land or access to land, whatsoever.