

last 15 years of occupation? Traditionally, Arab construction, which constituted a job with an elaborate hierarchy of skills and stages of initiation, has been transformed by Israeli building firms into a relatively mechanized industry with a tremendous thirst for unskilled labour. This development took place at an especially rapid pace after the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza when an economic boom coincided with high demand for immigrant housing (for Jews) and the influx of tens of thousands of unskilled, cheap and politically powerless labourers. This demand for building workers withstood the economic recession during the years 1974-1978 (including the recession in the building sector), and, it seems, the more recent slowdown of economic activities beginning in 1980. (Jerusalem Post, January 31, 1979; Al-Quds March 26, 1980).

The Significance of "Marginal Farming"

But the Israeli demand for building workers is not sufficient to explain the uneven distribution of rural workers in construction. As will be seen in the case of Ras el-Tin village, there is a definite relationship between the nature of construction work in Israel and the demands for marginal farming in the Palestinian village. If we collapse those households whose earners depend on their farm only with those dependent on "farm and support" (Table 7:1, above) we obtain a total of 41.5% of total households whose income is supplemented by farming (albeit in declining proportions) - a sizeable proportion of the West Bank rural population by any standard. For those households it is important to have their breadwinners employed in jobs from which they can be released periodically when agricultural work in the family farm demands it. The building trades in their modes of recruitment (reliance on family connections, short-term employment, lack of basic skills, etc...), and the preponderance