

of the big absentee landlords, such as the Sursuk family. In this case, the whole socio-economic status of the direct cultivators was changed.

The presence of new owners/controllers over the land had paved the way for the expropriation and landlessness of the peasants. Forced to carry the brunt of the Ottoman fiscal crisis, the direct producers were increasingly unable to (reproduce) provide for themselves and their families without resorting to the usurers for loans. Furthermore, failure to pay back their loans in cash or in kind placed the direct producers in a yet more difficult situation. It left them no alternative but to mortgage, and inevitably eventually lose, their only means of production, their land (1).

The economic conditions of the Palestinian direct producers worsened further during the war years of 1914-18 due to a number of factors including conscription, cattle confiscation and deforestation (Stein, 1984:9). Nevertheless, the actual transformation process in which mass-scale expropriation took place occurred during British rule and in particular in the first decade, from 1920-30.

British Rule Over Palestine

Immediately after the first world war, Britain affirmed its military rule over Palestine. The division of the former Turkish colonies between France and Britain, the most powerful imperialist countries, was signed in the Anglo-French Declaration of 7 November 1918. In this treaty both governments pledged the "complete and definite emancipation of the peoples so long oppressed by the Turks" and vowed to help the indigenous peoples to establish governments based upon self-determination and independence (Stein, 1984: 35). In