

In tracing the fortunes of the Abdul Hadi clan, he further notes how the joint-farm, under sharetenancy arrangements, provided a "perfect opportunity for a patron-client relationship, (and) assumed pivotal importance as a lever of influence in such circumstances (i.e. the rebellion of 1936). Its establishment was, indeed, a crucial stage in the evolution of a sheikly family into an absentee class exercising its economic and political control of the home village in new ways." (Firestone, 1975a:182).

Firestone overvalues the exchange of political gains made by landlords in return for material losses precisely because he was dealing with a period of political uncertainty. This situation need not, and could not, have existed over an extended period. But we can still conclude that patronage (or feudal relations, if we use the term generously) under conditions similar to those prevalent in Mandatory Palestine, was an essential pre-requisite for the mediation of sharetenancy in the consolidation of the landless and smallholding peasantry to a situation of ascendancy and relative security in their land tenure. Despite the paradoxical marginalization of peasant holdings and increased proletarianization, all the evidence we have seems to support this assumption. For, in those regions with weak patronage relations -- such as the coastal areas -- the advance of market relations gave rise to rural capitalism or alternatively to widespread speculation in land and the emergence of a pure rentier class of absentee landlords. (The process towards agrarian capitalism was facilitated no doubt by the abundance of migrant labour supply -- but that in our view is not the critical factor).

Under those conditions, no political base existed for rentiers among the peasantry. Where, by contrast, patrimonial bonds were strong and fulfilled functional needs -- as was the case in the central mountains and the northern plains of the West Bank -- a regime of smallholding