

Carmi and Rosenfeld (1974:473) and the preservation of the peasant household as a unit of production in an idealized form (Graham-Brown, 1977:47). That ideal form was expressed in the notion of the "lot viable"; the acreage necessary of an average peasant family subsistence, the calculation of which consumed a substantial proportion of official village studies (for a summary cf. Government of Palestine, 1946:272-289).

An alternative to this search for peasant viability (or perhaps, from the point of view of its proponents, the method to sustain it) was government interference in the regulation of land tenure system, of rural credit arrangements and basic investment in an agrarian infrastructure that would, it was hoped, improve the standards of living of the peasantry. Aside from altering the rural tax system (basically abolition of the Ottoman tithe and institution of the rural property tax) the successive Mandate administration did very little on this front (Migdal, 1980:22-23). Their conservative attitude towards the peasantry was rooted in their firm political alliance with absentee urban landlords and village notables, whose power they needed to maintain security in the countryside, and an undefined - but solid - commitment towards the establishment of a Jewish National Home (Graham-Brown, 1977:48-51; Migdal, 1980:20-22). Thus any attempt to tamper with the land tenure system, with the principle of collective land sales to Jewish and the status of tenant farmers, and with the conditions of rural credit arrangements, would have threatened the precarious agrarian power base held by the colonial regime.

Hence, while the search for the lot viable and the preservation of the small holders domain was the guiding principle of the Mandate, in practice they gave in to the obvious and acceded to the massive thirst of rural workers for wage labour employment.