

## "The Non-viability of Peasant Existence"

The process of peasant proletarianization in Palestine has been treated in a theoretical contribution by the anthropologists Carmi and Rosenfeld (1974). According to the authors the nature of the agrarian regime in Mandatory Palestine was such that all peasants, including a substantial section of the upper peasantry were "imminent proletarians" (475). The dynamic of this process was rooted in the nature of the dry farming system, in the chronic indebtedness of the peasantry to absentee landlords and urban merchants, and, according to the authors, in the absence of meaningful differentiation among the peasantry which could have given rise to rural capitalism (Carmi and Rosenfeld, 1974:472-473; 483). Furthermore, demographic pressures on the land tended to increase the non-viability of the peasant's farm given the prevailing system of partible inheritance which divided the father's estate equally to all his male heirs.

The landless peasantry, already 22% of all agricultural households in 1931 (Warriner, 1948:63), were neither pushed out of the village in favour of intensive farming, nor became wage workers since the Arab aristocracy was basically a rentier-merchant class which did not invest in manufacturing. Moreover, Zionist enterprises were keen to exclude Arab labour from competing with the Jewish proletariat. The only exception to this condition, intensive agriculture in citrus, was developed in so-far marginal land which did not involve peasant displacement (Carmi and Rosenfeld, 1974:474). Surplus rural labour augmented an already stagnant agrarian regime increasing its rate of self-exploitation; or to use Carmi's expression, landless and marginal peasants were re-cycled and "reabsorbed into the backward system" (475).