

CHAPTER XIV

THE DEVELOPMENT OF WEST BANK AGRICULTURE - DISCUSSION ANDCONCLUSIONS

The development of West Bank agriculture inevitably occupies a significant position on the agenda of Palestinian strategists.

A more developed agriculture would not only involve conventional economic gains, but it would also bear heavily on basic features of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This research has attempted to evaluate present constraints and problems limiting agricultural development, and then provide politicians as well as concerned agencies with specific developmental proposals. In this context Chapter 1 defined the objectives of this study, discussed its methodology, and reviewed pertinent literature.

Geographical background

The West Bank is handicapped by a unique geography which results in severe constraints on its agricultural potential. This is manifested by such attributes as an exceedingly rough topography, excessive rockiness, irregular and strictly seasonal rainfall, and frequent occurrence of very hot weather. Geographical attributes have severely limited the area of land fit for irrigated farming and resulted in excessive dependence on rainfed patterns of agriculture.

Important aspects of human geography have also been discussed and evaluated in respect to their impact on the process of agricultural development.

Resource conflict

The history of Palestine has led to sharply conflicting claims between Palestinian Arabs and Jews. Soon after Israel occupied

the West Bank and Gaza Strip in June 1967, it began implementing a policy involving evacuationary and colonial elements. Notwithstanding some differences in timing and methods to be used, all Israel's major political parties now look forward to annexing the West Bank and Gaza Strip to the state of Israel.

The acquisition of West Bank land now lies at the heart of Israel's policies, and legal loopholes in current forms of ownership are effectively exploited. When no such legal methods of acquisition exist the Military Administration resorts to the needs of security as justification for land acquisition. In contrast, long term forms of land use by local residents, such as urban uses and fruit tree orchards, are openly hindered.

Water resources have also been subjected to large-scale exploitation by Israel, leaving only a minority of ground water resources for use by local citizens. Consequently, horizontal expansion in irrigated farming is limited merely to the prospects of saving on water use by using more efficient irrigation techniques.

Transformations in the labour market represent an unusual but important example of resource conflict. While giving priority to evacuating the maximum number of certain sectors of the local population, Israel has initiated many transformations in the labour market which result in more than 40 percent of the West Bank's labour force becoming subservient to the Israeli economy. The major source for the supply of labourers drawn into Israel is rural communities engaged in dryland agriculture.

Israel has utilised the authority it enjoys as an occupying force to expedite a tighter control and exploitation of various West