

Research Project on Urban Land Ownership
in Peninsular Malaysia

by

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A. Objectives and Scope of the Study

There has been a common tendency, among academicians and administrators alike, to assume that problems of land tenure are of special significance only in rural areas and therefore worthy of inquiry only in that context. Academic publications, Government reports and land reform programmes all bear testimony to this. But in some regards it is the ownership and use of urban land which is of greatest concern - for economic, political and social reasons - and this is particularly so in Malaysia. Of course a great deal of attention has been given to the study of urban agglomerations by sociologists, geographers, economists, planners and others and their findings have been enormously helpful in facilitating our understanding of urban problems and in helping us to plan and manage economic growth and social change. But the question: "Who owns Kuala Lumpur? (or Georgetown, or Ipoh, or Chicago, or Frankfurt, etc.) has never, it would appear, been asked and systematically answered either out of academic or out of policy interest - and this despite our awareness of the ways in which economic power and political influence are related to urban land ownership. In the specific case of Malaysia this question is of direct relevance to the whole problem of the restructuring of society as envisaged in the Second Malaysia Plan. Two issues would appear to be of special significance. First, alongside our efforts to create a better ethnically-balanced urban population and to promote an occupational structure that does not closely follow ethnic lines, we should also show appropriate concern for the conditions under which this greater mix is achieved. In other words, as more Malays enter urban areas, are they settling merely as tenants and squatters or are they also increasing their share of a crucial resource, namely urban land? Until we obtain