Urban Squatters in Peninsular Malaysia: A Marginal Workforce or a Third World Proletariat?

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ABSTRACT

Urban squatters are amongst the most exposed social groups in the peripheral economies of Southeast Asia. The main concern of the paper is with the extent to which squatters, as a marginalised and exposed group, represent part of an emerging Third World proletariat. What has been the effect on the social order of Southeast Asian cities of the processes that exclude groups of the urban poor from the benefits of development yet integrate them into the same system? Using data from extensive fieldwork in nine Peninsular Malaysian squatter settlements the occupational structure and income earning patterns of squatters is analysed, focusing on the relationships between these variables, the system of social stratification and social relations of production. The data illustrate that squatters not only provide labour directly to capitalist activity but also help support and sustain such enterprise in a number of ways. The conceptual and heuristic usefulness of the notion of 'proletarian' is also examined in the Third World context, thus promoting discussion on the part played by different sections of the labour force and on inter and intra-class conflicts under conditions of contemporary Southeast Asian urbanisation.

INTRODUCTION

Among the social groups who occupy exposed positions in the peripheral economies of Southeast Asia urban squatters are amongst the most readily identified. They occupy a variety of unconventional housing, generally, on land that does not belong to them and are often seen as a barrier or threat to orderly urban growth. It is the very nature and location of their physical environment in cities that has made them so visible and has lead to their being labelled as a marginal group (Juppenlatz, 1970; Fryer, 1970). The concept of marginality has also been extended to analyse the socio-economic conditions of the

inhabitants of squatter areas and their workforce participation. Thus squatters were thought to be an economic burden, marginally productive in terms of the national economy and marginally profitable in terms of their own livelihood. Furthermore they were assumed to live in communities which were not integrated socially or politically into the city. In these terms, squatters were seen as being marginal because they exhibited a variant culture and behaviour.

The concept of marginality as applied to squatters has been empirically refuted by several researchers (Perlam, 1974, 1976; Peattie, 1974) who have shown that this group is often similar in behaviour and aspirations to non-squatters. These studies have emphasised, however, that while the poverty of squatters is real, it is not a consequence of their immanent characteristics but is rather a condition of Third World societies.

These initial criticisms of marginality have been extended into the more dynamic concept of marginalisation which is related to the uneven penetration and impact of capitalism in the Third World. This concept is used to examine:

> the relations existing between the dominant integrated . . . patterns of production, distribution and exchange, and those characterising the apparently "marginal" sections of society (Gerry, 1977a,1).

Marginalisation theory is thus concerned with the processes and mechanisms which give rise to the existence of an internal polarisation of social groups within Third World cities. It considers the manner in which groups of the urban poor are exploited and impoverished and, yet, are an integral part of the occurrent development process. Indeed both Weeks (1975) and Leeds (1977) suggest that while the position of the urban poor is symptomatic of the inherent contraditions in the dynamics of peripheral capitalism, this group has an important economic function in the perpetuation of the dominant capitalist mode of production (see Quijano, 1974; Long, 1975; Mkandawire, 1977). Leeds (1977) develops this proposition further by suggesting that the capitalist sector depends on the 'penny-capitalist' sub-system, associated with the urban poor, to stimulate and create markets. In this manner, the concept of marginalisation stresses the inter-sectoral dynamics of urban activity and the linkages between the 'marginalised' and dominant groups. It describes the process of exclusion of the urban poor by the emergent capitalist sector rather than simply the condition of exclusion.

In this paper I am concerned with examining the extent to which squatters, as a marginalised group, represent part of an emerging Third World proletariat. What has been the effect on the social order of Southeast Asian cities of the processes that exclude groups of the

urban poor from the benefits of development yet integrate them into the same system? Is marginalisation to be seen as contributing to the stratification of Third World populace into class groupings and the subordination of workers to dominant social and economic structures? As Petras (1975, 302-304) suggests, the extension of capitalism into peripheral nations has transformed the class structure and stratified society in which the creation of a proletariat, part of a marginalised mass, is tied to the dynamic of externally induced expansion.

This essay is not an exposition of the external forces influencing Third World cities, but an examination of some of its consequences. In so doing, the paper also poses questions of an epistemological nature. How do we understand the notion of a proletariat in the Third World? Are traditional definitions of this fundamental social category adequate for analysis of the groups of workers observable in Third World cities? Lloyd (1982, 50-51) argues that Third World urban workers can be divided into three groups: wage earners in large industrial and commercial enterprises; those in the public sector; and those in the informal sector. This functional classification contrasts with that of Quijano (1974) who emphasises the existence of a marginal proletariat and a marginal petty bourgeoise located below, but structurally similar to, the proletariat and petty bourgeoise proper. The former division categories the workforce, but it does not provide any indication of the relationship of the worker to the over-riding economic structure, explain how they are inserted into the productive system, or note the relationships between economic categories among the urban poor. John Taylor (1979) provides such an explanation, for he characterises a Third World proletariat as differentiated into a 'series of clearly demarcated fractions . . . that can be analysed as an effect of a restricted and uneven development (Taylor, 1979, 242). In isolating four proletarian 'fractions' i.e. trained permanent, unskilled migrant, artisan-capitalist and semi-proletarian, he is attempting to explain the changing nature of the labour process in Third World cities, one that is part of changing conceptions of work generated by 'specifically capitalist units of production, to which sections of the proletariat are increasingly tied on a more permanent basis (Taylor, 1979, 241). Thus workers in larger capitalist enterprise may be labelled a 'true proletariat' because their labour is directly engaged in the production of goods and the creation of surplus value. However workers who are employed in small enterprises, who are self employed but subcontract, or work to commission, can also be seen as part of a proletariat. What of workers who mix different occupational categories as part of their coping strategy against povery? The overlap and contraditions are evident in whatever criteria are used (also see

MacEwan Scott, 1979) because such occupational groupings do not point to the social relations inherent in each form of income earning activity. Moreover a social homogeneity i.e. shared residential environment among squatters, ethnic or migrant background, can mask a diversity of economic categories and interests.

The view held here is that it is not necessary (or even helpful) to adopt a restrictive definition of 'proletariat' in order to comprehend social relations in the Third World city or how surplus is expropriated from and in different modes of production. The question of squatters as part of a Third World proletariat is thus raised. As de Wind (1979, 167) states in relation to another 'marginalised; group: they are

> proletarian in that they sell their labour power for wages in order to gain a livelihood, but the term cannot be applied to all [miners] without some qualification. The proletarian socio-economic status of many . . . is modified by their access to land, technical skills and money.

This applies equally to squatters who not only have differential access to land and housing, but also a wide range of education, financial and cultural resources and marketable skills. In this way we need to examine the whole spectrum of the so called 'marginal' workforce who are drawn into the orbit of capitalist economic relations (production, distribution or exchange) even though they may not be involved directly in capitalist production. It will be shown that contrary to popular belief and myth, squatters for the most part are employed in a variety of occupations which either directly provide labour for industrial production, the distribution and exchange of its products, or indirectly support such activity. Squatters are engaged in both domestic and pretty commodity production, thereby lowering the cost of reproducing the labour force and, while representing a resilient group who find rational strategies to deal with poverty (Portes, 1972), are subject to tight control and manipulation by political and economic decision makers. Indeed, as I have suggested elsewhere (Johnstone, 1983) housing policy toward urban squatter settlements and their inhabitants has largely been concerned with the control of an actual or potential urban workforce and with the needs of an expanding corporate sector.

The following empirical discussion is divided into four parts. First, a brief outline of the pattern of urbanisation and urban squatting in Malaysia is undertaken, providing a context for the more detailed discussion that follows. The data presented were largely obtained from detailed questionnaire based surveys conducted in nine squatter settlements located in three different cities. These cities were Kuala Lumpur, the national capital, Alor Setar and Kuantan, respectively the state capitals of Kedah and Pahang. Fieldwork was conducted

between October 1976 and March 1977. The second section describes the occupational structure of the surveyed squatter settlements, highlighting both common patterns and regional differences, with the latter, to some extent, reflecting uneven impact of capitalism within the Malaysia social formation. Third, data on the income and earnings of squatters are examined as part of the discussion of socio-economic stratification and marginalisation. Finally, the relationship between income, occupation and social relations of production is examined focusing on the way in which wage earners and self employed while located in a different part of the productive system, display, some similar characteristics. In this discussion, therefore, the essential issue is not just whether there is a proletariat or not, because where capitalism exists, there is a proletariat, but rather how contemporary social groupings, such as squatters, increasingly become proletarianised. We can also clarify in some way the conceptual validity of the notion of 'proletarian' in analysing social class relations in the Third World city and, in doing so, provide a heuristic device to promote discussion on the part played by different forms of production in peripheral formations, on inter and intra class conflicts and on the organisational capacities of the marginalised mass under the conditions of contemporary Southeast Asian urbanisation.

PATTERNS OF URBANISATION AND SQUATTING IN MALAYSIA

By Southeast Asian standards Malaysia is a relatively urbanised nation, with some 35 per cent of the population living in cities with over 10,000 inhabitants in 1980. Irrespective of the urban definition used the level of urbanisation has risen steadily since 1920, with the largest aggregate increases generally being experienced in the larger cities (Hirschman, 1976). The spatial and structural patterns of Malaysia's urban system are tied to the diversified nature of the economy. Conditions of employment in, and the occupational structure of most cities reflect broad economic patterns. In its simplest terms capital intensive agriculture and modern industry are largely concentrated in the West coast and subsistence agriculture in the North and Northeast. Regional and urban economic disparities are still increasing despite absolute increases in per capita GNP (Malaysia, 1981) so that Selangor, focussed on the Kuala Lumpur-Kelang Valley axis, has a disproportionate concentration of economic activity compared with its share of population and total GDP.

The main features of urban growth in the last two decades can be summarised as: (1) High rates of growth in Kuala Lumpur, the national capital, and in regional capitals such as Kuantan, Johor

Bahru and Ipoh. (2) The varying importance of migration to city growth with rural to urban movement being proportionately less important than other flows including urban to urban movement (Young, 1978). (3) The changing ethnic character of cities, with Malays constituting almost 60 per cent of total migration to cities (Lee, 1977).

One of the major consequences of rapid urban growth has been the increasing shortage of housing and the associated development of squatter settlements in most Malaysian cities. However, as I point out elsewhere (Johnstone, 1981) squatting is not a totally recent phenomena, with unauthorised occupation of land and construction of dwellings being recorded in the earliest days of the colony. By 1945 the combined effects of the Japanese occupation, the Depression, war induced food shortages, structural changes in the economy and the general weaknesses in reinforcing and administering land laws, together with minimal construction of cheap housing, had resulted in rapid expansion of squatter settlements in Kuala Lumpur and many other cities. During the post war period squatting increased rapidly. For example, from 1950 to 1957 the number of squatters in Kuala Lumpur rose almost five fold from some 22,000 to between 75,000 to 107,000. By 1969 there were an estimated 26,000 squatter households or 37 per cent of the total. Since this date, though records vary, squatters have constituted between 25 and 30 per cent of the total population in Kuala Lumpur, with the figure considerably less in other cities ranging from 8 per cent in Johor Bahru to 12 and 20 per cent in Kuantan and Alor Setar respectively. However, the proportion of housing that is in some way illegal or unauthorised, what I have called unconventional dwellings (Johnstone, 1979b), is generally much higher reaching 50 per cent in Kuantan and over 70 per cent in several smaller centres.

From the brief discussion above it can be seen that squatting and unconventional housing vary considerably in each of the three cities studied. As will be shown the character of squatters and their work-force participation is to a large extent a product of broader spatial and structural patterns. Kuala Lumpur is a rapidly growing city (approximately 5 per cent per annum) located in the wealthiest and second most urbanised state in the country, in which agriculture contributes a relatively low proportion to the state economy compared with manufacturing, commerce and financial services. Levels of consumption, income and employment in industry and government services are among the highest in the country and contrast with Kuantan and Alor Setar, which have functioned as administrative and service centres for their rural hinterlands.

In the last decade, however, Kuantan, which is among the fastest

growing cities in the country (estimated at 8 per cent per annum) has become an important commercial and supply centre for the nearby, new industrial port of Gebeng, oil exploration activities off the Trengganu coast, and the industrialised agriculture programmes of the Pahang hinterland. In contrast, Alor Setar, a traditional city which antedates the colonial period, is growing at a rate below the national urban average (2.2 per cent), has low per capita incomes and is experiencing population loss due to selective out-migration. The former ethnic similarity of the two cities (40 per cent Malays, 49 per cent Chinese in 1970) is changing because of the high growth of the Malay population in Kuantan and to a large extent the different rates of migration to and from these cities have contributed to the character of squatting.

Overall each of the three cities examined reflect the social and economic base of their respective hinterland. The two regional cities, contrast with Kuala Lumpur, and with each other. Kuantan is a rapidly growing centre with considerable 'modern' economic expansion while Alor Setar is a more traditional city with a relatively low level of 'modern' sector activity. Thus centres with varied colonial histories, administrations and economic structure were chosen since these are likely to affect the character of squatter settlements—and the extent of proletarianisation.

OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE

It can be seen from Table 1 that although squatter household heads were employed in a wide variety of activities the majority can be grouped into two main occupational categories. The first comprises regular wage earning employment in the modern sector, particularly in factories and government services. The second encompasses a wide range of jobs, often irregular and intermittent, in the small-scale distributive services, transport, primary and traditional pursuits, as well as casual work in both the modern and 'informal' sectors. Following Taylor (1979) these groups could be categorised respectively as 'artisan' and 'semi-proletarian', or, to use McGee's (1976) term, the 'protoproletariat'. Those in the first group usually had more formal education, were often skilled or semi-skilled and, although wages were generally low, they had a higher social status than other workers. Within the 'modern' category', factory production and process workers and those who provided services and support for capitalist activity, such as *jagas*[2], drivers and messengers, predominated. The main difference between these occupational groupings is that in the former labour is directly involved in capitalist production and accumulation and in the latter it is not. Employment

Table 1. Occupational categories of squatters

Occupational category	Kuantan			Kuala Lumpur			Alor Setar		
	Tanah Puteh (n=59)	Alor Akar (n=54)	Tan-jong Api (n=54)	Max-well (n=51)	Chen-dana (n=52)	Sela-mat (n=53)	Tong-kong Yard (n=56)	Klub (n=53)	Ber-jaya (n=51)
'MODERN' SECTOR									
High status (professiona)	0	1.9	0	0	1.9	0	1.8	0	0
Middle status									
Teacher	1.7	0	0	3.8	1.9	0	0	1.9	0
Clerk	0	1.9	1.9	2.0	15.4	3.8	3.6	7.5	3.9
Army-police	0	5.6	0	2.0	0	20.8	1.8	0	0
Other	0	0	0	2.0	3.8	0	0	1.9	0
Sub-total	1.7	7.4	1.9	9.8	21.2	24.6	5.4	11.3	3.9
Low status									
Driver	11.0	11.1	16.7	13.7	17.3	7.5	8.9	1.9	7.8
Jaga (watchman, guard)	1.7	1.9	5.6	15.7	5.8	3.8	0	0	0
Railway worker	3.4	0	0	0	5.8	0	0	0	0
Cook-waiter	0	0	3.6	0	3.6	15.0	0	0	0
Messenger	3.4	0	0	0	1.9	0	0	0	0
Tradesman	5.1	1.8	1.9	3.8	1.9	5.7	5.4	5.7	3.9
Sawmill worker	6.8	5.6	0	0	0	0	5.4	1.9	2.0
Construction worker	1.7	0	0	3.8	0	0	1.8	7.5	5.9
Factory worker	5.1	0	5.6	2.0	0	7.6	1.8	0	4.0
Others[a]	3.4	0	1.9	8.0	3.8	0	5.4	3.8	0
Sub-total	41.6	20.4	35.3	47.0	40.1	39.6	28.7	20.8	23.6
PROTOPROLETARIAT									
Labourer	25.4	44.4	18.6	29.5	11.9	32.0	14.3	20.8	33.3
Hawker	6.8	11.0	1.9	3.8	0	0	12.5	9.4	2.0
Beca-driver	12.7	1.9	0	2.0	0	0	16.1	18.9	15.7
Gardener	0	3.6	1.9	0	0	0	3.6	3.6	2.0
Fisherman	0	1.9	37.0	0	0	0	10.7	0	2.0
Farm worker	0	1.9	0	2.0	0	0	0	3.8	5.9
Traditional craftsman[b]	3.4	0	0	0	1.9	1.9	0	0	3.9
Others	3.3	3.7	0	0	3.8	0	0	1.9	0
Sub-total	51.6	68.4	59.4	37.3	17.6	33.9	57.2	58.4	64.8
Self-employed (small business)	3.4	1.9	1.9	3.9	7.7	1.9	3.7	9.5	3.9
Others (pensioners, housewife, unemployed)	1.7	0	1.5	2.0	11.5	0	3.2	0	3.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

a Includes shop assistants, hospital attendants, storemen and foremen.
b *Attap* making, basket weaving, *batik* printing, weaving and medicine.

Source: Johnstone (1979a)

in the productive group was, however, small, amounting to about 15 per cent of the total in most settlements (Table 1).

Because some of the data collected was imprecise[3] it was not possible to be completely accurate in the classification of labourers and although this group is categorised as protoproletariat, many worked in the capitalist sector. However, of these many were paid on a daily rate and so existed in a condition of 'precarious employment' associated with a marginalised proletariat (Quijano, 1974). The proto-proletariat also includes self-employed workers. Some earned low incomes through the use of their labour power but were not involved in production, for example *beca*[4] drivers, some hawkers, gardeners

and casual workers. This sub-group has minimal contact with the organised capitalist sector and while its economic activity is conducted 'within a co-existing mode of production subordinated to the capitalist mode' (Gerry, 1977b, 12), it is not subjected to a dependent form of labour relations. Others within the proto-proletariat are petty-producers and artisans, who produce and sell specific goods or services. This category covers activities found in traditional commercial areas, markets and squatter settlements, as well as the artisans who build and repair dwellings or are involved in traditional occupations such as *attap*[5] making, carving or basket weaving.

Within the general occupational structure there was, however, considerable specialisation within some communities (Table 1). For example, in one area 37 per cent of all household heads were fishermen while in another some 42 per cent, including those listed as drivers and cooks, were employed by the Army. To some extent this reflected a general association between occupation and ethnic group (see McGee, 1971; Jackson, 1974; Lee, 1976) and has contributed to the character of several of the surveyed settlements.

A second feature was the contrast in occupational structure of squatters in Kuala Lumpur, the national capital, and Kuantan and Alor Setar, the two smaller sized regional cities examined. In Kuala Lumpur 'modern' sector employment, whether public or private, predominated, while in Kuantan and Alor Setar the protoproletarian occupations were more numerous. The number employed in middle-status occupations was also much higher in the national capital because of its pre-eminant role as an administrative and government centre, although this tended to be in the lower echelons of the public service where educational requirements were lower. In contrast, there were fewer respondents active in protoproletarian occupations in the Kuala Lumpur settlements compared with those in Kuantan and Alor Setar where the proportion was over 50 per cent of respondents. In Alor Setar, the relatively high occurrence of hawkers, *beca* drivers, farm labourers and craftworkers reflected the subsistence base of the economy in the region and the low absorptive capacity of the capital intensive sector. These occupations were largely absent among the Kuala Lumpur squatters, while in the middle-cities such self-employed persons accounted for between 25 and 40 per cent of all respondents.

Data indicate that self-employed squatters generally had proto-proletarian jobs except for those in labouring occupations who, together with those in most other vocational groups listed, were paid wages. The marked difference in the occupational structure of squatters is also seen in Figure 1 which indicates that the majority of

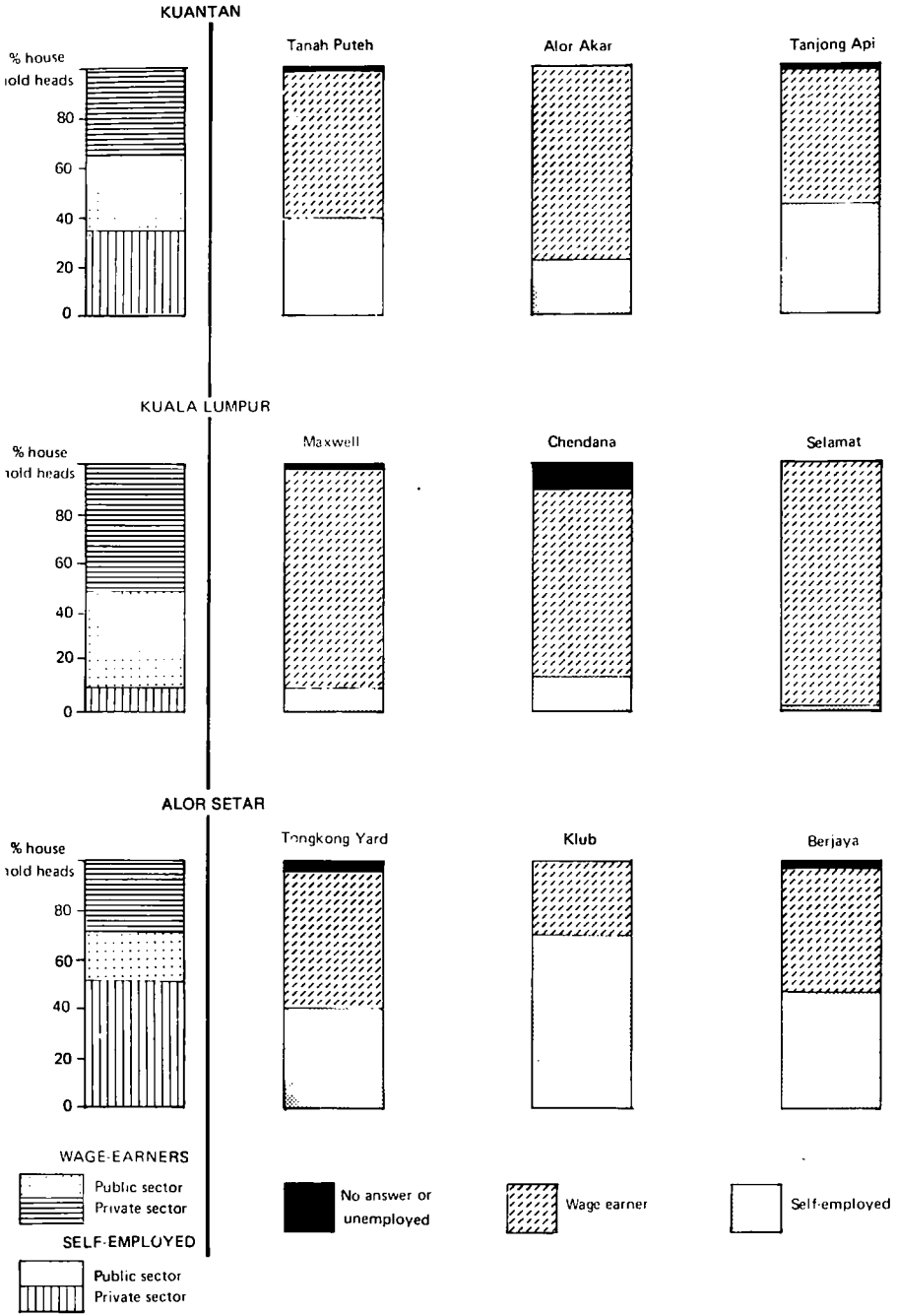

Figure 1: Type and sector of employment of squatter household heads. (Source: Johnstone 1979a).

respondents in most settlements were wage earners. This high proportion reflects both the process of proletarianisation and the role of the public sector in Malaysia as an employer, particularly for Malays. Government employment for squatters was more important in the national capital than elsewhere, although private sector occupations were the majority in each city. The relative balance between public and private sector employment reveals one of the main differences in the occupational structure of the two middle cities examined, a difference which reflects the character of their regional economies. Kuantan, with its more developed capital intensive and commercial sectors, offered a greater range of unskilled wage-earning employment than did Alor Setar which, because of its relatively large commercial sector, and particularly its traditional marketing and distributive systems, had a high proportion of self-employed workers. Occupational structures among squatter populations are dependent on the character and dynamics of regional economic systems and the national (and international) forces that mould them.

The income of some household heads, particularly those engaged in fishing, hawking and *beca* driving, was not only low but also often irregular. This occurred because their work was susceptible to fluctuations in the general economy or was affected by local seasonal or climatic variations. Moreover, significant proportions of squatters did not have full-time employment but depended on part-time work for family income, which further reduced their earning potential.

Several points arise from this discussion of occupation structures. In terms of their functional relationship with the total economy, wage earning vocations for squatters are almost wholly, directly or indirectly, associated with expansion of the modern sector and its supportive structures. An estimated 40 per cent of all squatter household heads enumerated[6] can be seen as working in a direct and dependent wage labour relationship with the capitalist sector. Half of these were engaged in productive activity i.e. production line workers, operators and factory labourers', with the other half working in the spheres of distribution, exchange or services i.e. drivers, messengers, clerical workers, office boys, which are functionally part of the total productive system. If we add to these, workers who although manifestly self-employed are in some sense paid a wage since they provide goods and/or services to the factory or its workers and depend on (one) industry for their livelihood, then the extent of proletarianisation becomes clear. This instance would include tradesmen who subcontract specific tasks, hawkers who provide food for factory workers (thereby reducing costs to owners) or gardeners and odd jobbers who are casually employed. In this sense the proletarian is one who is functionally dependent on capitalist

enterprise and structurally subordinate through the income earning relationship, whether a wage is directly paid or not.

Wage earners, in this way can be considered a labour elite in so far as they have obtained a regularly paid position in the modern sector. Their dependence on this sector for income is heightened by the competition for such positions from the mass of the underemployed and unemployed urban poor. While the growth of industry is relatively slow in most cities, existing development does attract the unskilled labour of squatters and this is seen in the proliferation of new squatter areas close to industrial zones in the Federal Territory and several other cities. Surveys conducted in other squatter areas confirm this. It appears that in the predominantly Malay populated areas surveyed by this writer, participation in the industrial workforce was lower than among Chinese squatters. For example Ng (1976), in a study of Chan Sow Lin, a Chinese settlement in Kuala Lumpur, found 32 per cent of all workers employed in large scale industry (of whom 40 per cent were women), 12 per cent in construction and another 12 per cent in support occupations (drivers, tradesmen etc), giving a total of 56 per cent of the total workforce involved in capitalist production. If we add to these the wage earners employed by local petty-producers, the extent of the proletarianised labour force can be gauged. Given that the proportion of total workforce in Kuala Lumpur employed in industry in 1976 was only 26 per cent, it is clear that squatters make a disproportionate contribution.

In the past ethnicity appears to have influenced the extent of industrial employment, but this has changed in recent years, particularly with increased Malay migration to the major cities. Malay squatter areas are growing faster than Chinese settlements (Johnstone, 1981) and recent reports indicate that over 50 per cent of unskilled workers in manufacturing firms are Malays, of whom over half are women. Thus, though the evidence of increasing proletarianisation among Malay urban squatters is sketchy and conclusions, therefore, are difficult to draw, two changes are apparent. First, more Malays are entering the wage labour force and second a new sexual division of labour appears to be emerging among squatters with women forming a major component of the increasingly large industrial workforce[7]. The effect this has on domestic social and economic relationships and on class formation will be important and offers a fruitful area for further research.

INCOME AND EARNINGS

The income data[8] presented here, while including errors and inconsistencies, do offer a reliable indication of the wide variation in

squatter income both within and between settlements and cities. While income levels in the settlements surveyed in Kuala Lumpur were somewhat higher than those reported in other squatter surveys, they were lower than the national urban average of $569 per month in 1976. The data are, therefore, sufficiently comprehensive to allow an accurate picture of squatters' earnings and occupational patterns to be drawn. The discussion below draws primarily from two sets of data—principal income (that earned by household head) and total income (that earned by whole household)—because these appear to be the most reliable.

One feature of median principal income[9] was the marked variation between cities, ranging from $160 per month to $250 (Table 2). (Variations between individual settlements were even greater, see Appendix 1). In all locations over 50 per cent of respondents earned $300 or less but there was a clear difference both in absolute incomes and in the range of incomes between Kuala Lumpur settlements and those in the other two cities, which reflected regional income patterns.

Table 2. Monthly income distribution of surveyed households
(Principal income and total income[a]: average for all respondent in each city[b]: percentage of households)

Income range	Kuantan		Kuala Lumpur		Alor Setar	
	n = 167		n = 165		n = 160	
$ per month	PI	TI	PI	TI	PI	TI
No income	1	0	4	0	1	0
Below 100	5	4	0	0	13	4
100-199	**47**	33	25	12	50	42
200-299	**25**	28	32	19	21	26
300-399	**17**	22	31	35	9	13
400-499	1	3	15	3	3	7
500+	4	8	5	10	3	8
Percentage of households earning under						
300	**78**	65	61	31	**84**	72
200	**53**	37	29	12	63	46
Mean income	212	270	275	370	187	241
Median income	189	218	250	330	160	199
Principal income a proportion of total income						
Mean	**78.5**		71.4		77.6	
Median	**86.7**		75.7		80.4	

a Principal income = PI and total income = TI
b For full details of all settlements surveyed see Appendix I.
Source: Adapted from Johnstone (1979a)

Median principal incomes in the national capital were, on average, 25 and 36 per cent higher than in Kuantan and Alor Setar settlements respectively, with variations between some individual settlements being even higher. Compared with other locations fewer households in Kuala Lumpur had total incomes below both the $200 and $300 per month thresholds (Table 2). The more recent settlements, and those with younger populations, had lower total incomes and higher proportions of households with earnings below $300. The dependence of younger families on principal income contrasted with the ability of larger families to increase earnings with additional or secondary income.

Income differences are generated by the earning capacity of each household unit which in turn is associated with its demographic structure, the relative productivity of the labour force in each location and the occupational structure of the city. However, the main factor influencing the different income levels in each settlement was its occupational structure. Thus higher incomes in Kuala Lumpur were associated with more wage employment in the modern sector and easier access to a wider variety of principal and secondary job opportunities.

Many squatter households augmented principal income so that this accounted for between 70 and 95 per cent of total earnings. In almost all settlements at least one-fifth of all households had more than one income earner. Secondary income came from two main sources: from part-time or casual employment almost wholly in the 'informal' and rural sectors and from the receipt of money such as pensions, welfare, or remittances from family members. Most households earning secondary incomes were those in which the 'bread winner' had a poorly paid low status or protoproletarian occupation. In Alor Setar, where household incomes were lower than elsewhere, more families earned secondary income although the average amounts were considerably smaller. This highlights, again, the income differentials between 'core' and 'peripheral' regions, where squatters in Kuala Lumpur not only have access to a greater variety of secondary earnings activities but also have higher incomes than in other cities. In fact, the mean secondary income of the households with such earnings in Kuala Lumpur was higher than total income in two of the Alor Setar settlements.

Secondary earnings were clearly an important supplement to family resources. The dependence of many squatters on such extra income for continued existence and the realisation of household socio-economic goals is characteristic of their overall marginalised economic position in Malaysian cities. It also highlights the hetereogeneity of economic interests wherein a proletarian worker can not only earn

extra income through such activities as petty production or trading, but family members may be situated in a distinctly separate economic category. Such differentiation blurs boundaries.

INCOME AND OCCUPATION

Data collected indicate that there was a wide variation in the income earned by squatters in different occupations (Table 3) in addition to differences between those received by wage earners and the self-employed (Tables 4 and 5). The range of incomes earned within each occupation broadly followed the regional income patterns. In Kuala Lumpur not only were mean incomes for most jobs higher than elsewhere but the income maxima for each category were higher (Table 3). In this sense the process of marginalisation which disadvantages all squatters compared with the rest of society also has a regional-spatial character, with squatters in the middle cities being relatively more disadvantaged than their counterparts in the metropolitan core.

Table 3. Principal income by occupational categories

Occupational category	Kuantan			Kuala Lumpur			Alor Setar		
	Lowest	Mean	Highest	Lowest	Mean	Highest	Lowest	Mean	Highest
High status	0	1,000	1,000	0	700	760	0	760	760
Middle status									
Teacher	0	0	0	150	390	650	0	310	310
Clerk	200	365	600	200	395	700	150	293	449
Army-police	300	325	350	250	327	499	0	530	530
Sub-total	200	367	500	150	366	700	150	305	700
Low status									
Driver	100	244	500	150	272	399	100	193	349
Jaga	100	183	300	100	230	349	0	0	0
Railway worker	200	250	350	200	256	349	0	0	0
Cook-waiter	100	147	160	150	204	399	0	0	0
Messenger	150	215	300	350	360	399	0	0	0
Tradesman	50	198	350	150	303	399	100	267	449
Sawmill worker	150	228	349	0	0	0	100	155	250
Construction worker	230	250	270	300	350	350	100	175	350
Factory worker	50	160	349	100	170	250	100	180	249
Sub-total	100	228	500	100-150	265	500	100	220	500
Protoproletariat									
Labourer	50	185	350	100	201	349	100	155	349
Hawker	100	225	449	350	350	399	50	218	450
Beca-driver	150	208	230	300	300	300	50	135	349
Gardener	50	173	199	0	0	0	50	105	149
Fisherman	30	160	349	0	0	0	100	234	299
Farm worker	40	80	100	100	100	100	70	142	299
Traditional craftsman	100	120	150	100	295	399	50	140	199
Sub-total	50-99	183	475	100-149	220	350-400	50-99	164	500
Self-employed (small business)	150	416	800	150	290	550	120	214	350-399

Source: Johnstone (1979a).

These features were most apparent among low status workers and the protoproletariat. For example, the average monthly earnings of $350 for construction workers in Kuala Lumpur were 44 and 95 per cent higher than those earned in similar jobs in Kuantan and Alor Setar respectively; while the incomes of *beca* drivers and hawkers were almost always larger in the national capital than elsewhere. The very low minimum incomes earned by many workers in the two middle cities highlight the generally irregular nature of earnings and the susceptibility of squatters to changes in prices of basic commodities. In contrast, the average earnings of middle status occupations and self-employed businessmen were higher than those from other jobs in all cities. Significantly average wages for factory workers, those directly engaged in production, were lower than most other occupations, including many within the protoproletariat.

This situation is heightened by the often relatively higher costs of living in many regional cities. For example the cost of housing in Kuantan is estimated to be at least 40 per cent higher than in Kuala Lumpur (Johnstone, 1979a, 144) and the prices of staples (food, clothing and fuel) which account for between 80 and 100 per cent of squatters' expenditure (Johnstone, 1979a, 343) can be up to twenty per cent higher because of transport costs. At a material level squatters in Kuala Lumpur are generally better off then elsewhere: more dwellings were built of permanent materials, more had electricity and television sets and household savings were higher. At a more subjective level squatters in the national capital had access to a greater variety of cheaper goods and services, including public facilities, and therefore their limited incomes went further than in the regional centres.

WAGE EARNERS

The data suggest that among wage earners the lowest income accrued to those in certain parts of the service sector and to casual workers (Tables 4 and 5). The single largest group was drivers, over 67 per cent of whom earned below $200. Together with labourers and factory workers, they accounted for over 50 per cent of all workers in the lowest income category. Wage earning employees are a dependent group in so far as they rely on the sale of their labour for income. Unlike wage earners in the public sector, who generally have higher incomes, these employees receive few fringe benefits, usually are not covered by workers' compensation or superannuation, and, as a result, are often exploited by employers. From personal interviews it was found that wage earners in smaller, less regulated enterprises often experienced non-payment, or under-payment, for work done, as well as poor working conditions.

Table 4. Principal income, occupation and employment status (Averages for settlements in each city)

Occupational category[a]	Kuantan		Kuala Lumpur		Alor Setar	
	Wage earners $	Self-employed $	Wage earners $	Self-employed $	Wage earners $	Self-employed $
High status	1000	0	700	0	760	0
Middle status	341	0	370	260	305	0
Low status	229	227	262	295	205	270
Protoproletariat	195	168	218	267	168	162
Self-employed business	0	437	0	328	0	186

a For breakdown of occupation categories see Table 1.
(Source: Johnstone (1979a).)

This situation exemplifies the marginalised state of many wage earning workers in the private sector and although many wage earners (particularly Malays) were public sector employees the dependent, and sometimes exploitative, nature of such employment remains. Increases in wages are generally related to an extension of working hours because the employee is 'selling' his/her labour. However, additions to income due to greater productivity are unlikely to occur because a large number of wage earners surveyed worked in the public sector where wages are fixed and do not change with output. The ability of self-employed workers to augment their earnings through increased effort and time is one of the main benefits accruing to such occupations, as was demonstrated in the higher average incomes of certain groups compared with wage earners. Furthermore, despite the existence of a trade union system in Malaysia many wage earners in the private sector are not effectively subject to wage and social security legislation and it is difficult, therefore, to obtain any improvement in earnings. These employees, and the many part-time and casual workers, are generally in no position to make demands for increased wages and, therefore, provide a 'pool' of cheap reserve labour for both public and private sectors.

Compared with the self-employed, wage earners had relatively higher income levels (Table 5). Employees with wages above $300 accounted for less than 17 per cent of all respondents in Alor Setar, but over 40 per cent in Kuala Lumpur. Despite the low incomes of wage earners compared with national income levels, it was clear that regular wage earning jobs were preferred to more precarious and irregular work in the informal sector.

Table 5. Income in relation to employment status in surveyed cities (Percentage of respondents in income[a] and employment[b] groups)

Montly income group	Kuantan				Kuala Lumpur				Alor Setar			
	Self-employed		Wage earners		Self-employed		Wage earners		Self-employed		Wage earners	
Below 200	37.9	55.9	62.1	50.9	5.3	15.4	94.7	26.5	57.1	66.7	42.9	58.3
200-299	40.5	28.8	59.5	23.6	8.2	30.8	91.8	33.1	47.1	19.0	52.9	25.0
300-399	17.9	8.5	82.1	21.7	12.2	46.2	87.8	31.6	50.0	8.3	50.0	9.7
400-499	50.0	1.7	50.0	1.0	0	0	100	3.7	60.0	3.6	40.0	2.8
500+	50.0	5.1	50.0	2.8	12.5	7.6	87.5	5.1	40.0	2.4	60.0	4.2
All groups	—	100	—	100	—	100	—	100	—	100	—	100
Total number of respondents	59		106		13		136		84		72	
Percentage	35.8		64.2		8.7		91.3		53.8		46.2	

a. read across row
b. read down column
(Source: Johnstone (1979a)

SELF-EMPLOYED

Self-employed squatters were most prevalent in Alor Setar and Kuantan and a significant proportion earned incomes below $200 per month (Table 5), particularly the protoproletariat. The self-employed were not, however, a homogeneous group. They included both those who eked out meagre subsistence incomes and the small-scale producers or distributors who were accumulating small quantities of capital. For many squatters self-employment offers the potential for economic improvement and mobility and because of these features the sector attracts a great deal of part-time employment. While levels of earnings and capital accumulation were low among the self-employed, compared with other private enterprises, this group cannot be considered marginal because not only do the members display the same motivation and initiative that is associated with capitalist enterprise but they also contribute services and income which benefit the total urban system. However, as has also been shown elsewhere (Le Brun and Gerry, 1975; Bienefeld, 1975) most of these petty-producers are subordinated to capital through the market and through the price system which transfers value from the petty-capitalist enterprise to the capitalist sector. In addition many self-employed depend significantly on the modern sector for equipment, materials and skills and are often discriminated against through legislation, thereby reinforcing their dependent state. This marginalised situation, Gerry (1977a) suggests, can be seen as a specific aspect of the generalised subordination of Third World economies to the international capitalist system.

Although the participation of squatters in petty-production was common, notably in the middle cities where wage earning opportunities were more restricted, their ability to develop this production was limited by a dependence on the activities of the modern sector. The self-employed who were involved in such activity were, therefore, often only able to reproduce conditions of subsistence and, given the expansion of the informal sector, the continued impoverishment of this low income group appears inevitable. The position of such an impoverished group, which Quijano (1974) has called 'the marginalised pole' of the urban economy, is a result of diminishing need in the capitalist sector for labour in relation to the growing urban populations.

CONCLUSIONS

Squatting comprises far more than the illegal occupation of houses or land. It is a complex process associated with the overall structure of development, class formation and poverty in Third World cities.

The working population in squatter areas is involved mainly in low skilled and often physically arduous occupations. Levels of unemployment are often high and many households are amongst the most economically disadvantaged groups. However data have shown that squatters provide part of the labour for a variety of modern sector activities—in both secondary and tertiary sectors—and in both public and private sectors. Significant numbers are employed in factories, sawmills, transport and construction, as well as by government; activities which are central to the capitalist modern sector. The data show that most respondents had found work and many more would do so if jobs were available.

Furthermore, the nature of squatter employment, like that of other low income groups, is determined by their differential access to the means of production and, as Quijano (1974) suggests, this is conditioned, in turn, by the types of relations which are established in regard to resources. The fragmentation and sectoral stratification that is evident in the occupational structures of squatters is a consequence of their restricted access to national resources for the Malaysian economy is characterised by a structural, ethnic, spatial and social differentiation of the means of production.

Squatter employment in general is poorly paid, thereby playing a subordinate role in the accumulation process, but its functions are important to, and largely determined by, the operation of the modern sector. Squatters are engaged in the array of productive and distributive services associated with the 'informal' sector which offer cheap goods and services to the whole city population—a factor which acts to keep wages in all sectors low. In addition, squatters carry out some labour intensive activities and contribute to a 'reserve army' of labour upon which capitalist enterprise draws personnel as required (Mkandawire, 1977; Gerry, 1977a). The existence of a large number of unemployed and underemployed workers

> is not only a mechanism for maintaining a sector of the labour force . . . in reserve, and therefore is a condition of existence of the system of production, but it is also a mechanism for maintaining the level of wages as low as possible and obtaining a greater proportion of surplus value (Quijano, 1974, 417).

There is evidence, some of which is provided here, that squatters not only provide labour directly to capitalist activity but also help support and sustain such enterprise in a number of ways—including the expropriation of surplus from petty producers, the provision for social infrastructure (housing) and providing personnel for state apparatus. Because of the fragmented labour markets in Third World cities many workers are affected by social relations of production

which embody similar features to the 'classical proletarian'—a loss of autonomy and control over their means of subsistence, a structural dependency on capitalist production for the livelihood (whether directly or indirectly) and the creation of more value than they receive. In this sense squatters cannot be conceived of as a marginal workforce but rather as a Third World proletariat. We cannot fully resolve the difficulties involved in analysing proletarianisation, because the economic distinctions differentiating, for example, a production line worker (the trained permanent proletarian) from the labourer or artisan employed casually by the same factory (the 'semi-proletarian'), are not always replicated in social groupings. Thus not only are both groups likely to live in the similar social and cultural milieux of a squatter settlement but it is feasible to find individuals who are wage workers by day and petty traders by night. Some workers may use their wages as a means to save, in order to invest in a small business[10] and thus enter the ranks of the petty bourgeoise. The social homogeneity of the squatter population hides a diversity of economic categories and aspirations and heterogenous links with the dominant economic sector. The types of occupations and employment situations of squatters are a condition resulting from the changing pattern of economic and social relations in Third World social formations.

NOTES

1. This paper was originally presented at 1982 SAANZ Conference held at the University of New South Wales, 25-28 August.
2. *Jaga*: guard, watchman.
3. Many respondents did not give a specific occupation or place of employment and because the occupational classification was undertaken after the surveys were completed it was not possible to obtain more precise information. Thus, for example, an occupation given as 'labourer' did not allow discrimination between type of firm, ownership, or extent of work. Even though most labourers were wage earners they were classified as 'protoproletariat' because a significant number were casually employed or worked on a contract basis. To group such workers in the modern sector would imply regular wage earning employment, which clearly was not always the case. Despite the acknowledged shortcomings, the classification presented appeared the most appropriate given the data available.
4. *Beca*: pedal powered tri-shaw.
5. *Attap*: Matting or weaving made from woven palm fronds.
6. Like most studies in the social sciences this research unwittingly has a male bias whereby less attention was paid to workforce participation and the general role of women in squatter settlements. This bias is soon to be rectified (at least in part) in a paper examining the sexual division of labour among squatters. See Johnstone (in preparation).
7. See Jamilah Ariffin (1980) for a full discussion of women and industrial growth in Malaysia.

8. All income data refers to Malaysian dollars (*ringgit*) notated with the symbol $. When fieldwork was undertaken (October 1976) $3.1 was equal to $A1.
9. The median income of each settlement is used instead of mean income because the latter is distorted by the extreme high and low levels.
10. See Johnstone (1980) for a discussion of squatters savings.

APPENDIX 1
MONTHLY INCOME DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEYED HOUSEHOLDS
(Principal income and total income[a]: percentage of households)

me range	Tanah Puteh		Alor Akar		Tanjong Api		Kuantan		Maxwell		Chendana		Selamat		Kuala Lumpur		Tongkong Yard		Klub		Berjaya		Alor Setar	
r month	n = 59		n = 54		n = 54		n = 167		n = 51		n = 52		n = 53		n = 156		n = 56		n = 53		n = 51		n = 160	
	PI	*TI*	PI	*TI*	PI	*TI*	PI	*TI*	PI	*TI*	PI	*TI*	PI	*TI*	PI	*TI*	PI	*TI*	PI	*TI*	PI	*TI*	PI	*TI*
ncome	0	*0*	0	*0*	2	*0*	1	*0*	2	*0*	12	*0*	0	*0*	4	*0*	3	*0*	0	*0*	0	*0*	1	*0*
w 100	2	*0*	7	*6*	7	*7*	5	*4*	0	*0*	0	*0*	0	*0*	0	*0*	7	*2*	17	*8*	14	*4*	13	*4*
149	15	*5*	9	*9*	9	*6*	11	*7*	4	*0*	0	*0*	4	*0*	3	*0*	9	*6*	19	*13*	20	*14*	16	*11*
199	25	*17*	33	*24*	50	*39*	36	*26*	22	*14*	6	*0*	38	*23*	22	*12*	38	*30*	32	*30*	32	*33*	34	*31*
249	14	*15*	15	*22*	15	*13*	14	*17*	14	*6*	19	*4*	17	*13*	17	*8*	16	*14*	19	*21*	16	*20*	17	*18*
299	19	*19*	7	*7*	6	*6*	11	*11*	12	*8*	19	*12*	13	*15*	15	*11*	5	*9*	2	*6*	6	*8*	4	*8*
349	22	*27*	19	*19*	7	*13*	16	*20*	20	*28*	18	*14*	15	*21*	18	*21*	11	*5*	8	*8*	6	*8*	8	*7*
399	0	*3*	2	*2*	0	*2*	1	*2*	20	*14*	12	*15*	7	*11*	13	*14*	2	*5*	0	*6*	0	*7*	1	*6*
449	0	*5*	2	*2*	0	*2*	0.5	*3*	0	*10*	4	*11*	4	*6*	2	*9*	2	*11*	4	*4*	2	*2*	2	*6*
499	0	*0*	0	*0*	2	*6*	0.5	*2*	0	*4*	0	*11*	2	*2*	1	*6*	2	*2*	0	*0*	0	*0*	1	*1*
+	3	*9*	6	*9*	2	*7*	4	*8*	6	*16*	10	*33*	0	*9*	5	*19*	5	*16*	0	*4*	4	*4*	3	*8*
entage of eholds earning r																								
00	75	*56*	71	*68*	89	*71*	78	*65*	54	*28*	56	*16*	72	*51*	61	*31*	79	*61*	89	*78*	88	*79*	84	*72*
00	42	*22*	49	*39*	68	*52*	53	*37*	28	*14*	18	*0*	42	*23*	29	*12*	58	*38*	68	*51*	66	*51*	63	*46*
n income ($)	224	*282*	227	*258*	180	*271*	212	*270*	270	*360*	280	*446*	239	*304*	275	*370*	208	*289*	167	*214*	178	*215*	187	*241*
ian income ($)	201	*251*	192	*202*	159	*193*	189	*218*	250	*330*	272	*412*	210	*290*	250	*330*	180	*212*	153	*190*	150	*192*	160	*195*
cipal income as a ortion of total in- e																								
ean	79.4		88.0		67.5		78.5		76.7		64.2		78.6		71.4		74.7		78.0		82.8		77.6	
edian	80.1		95.0		82.4		86.7		75.7		70.9		72.4		75.7		85.4		80.5		78.1		80.4	

[a] Principal income = PI and total income = *TI*.

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