

YALE SOUTHEAST ASIA STUDIES, 3

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Political Ideology in Malaysia

Reality and the Beliefs of an Elite

by James C. Scott



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PERPUSTAKAAN
ARKIB NEGARA MALAYSIA

25 MAY 1971

To the Memory of my Parents

Parry M. Scott, M.D.

Augusta B. Scott

Preface

This is a study of political beliefs in a new nation. It is not, however, a case study in the customary meaning of that term. What I have done is to suppress the unique and particular character of the Malaysian experience in the interest of accentuating those political beliefs and experiences that are common to many relatively poor new nations. Those concerned primarily with comparative political studies will find this perspective a valuable one inasmuch as it explicitly suggests temporal and spatial comparisons that merit research. Those interested primarily in Malaysia will hopefully be compensated for the lack of much mention of that nation's quite special circumstances by a greater appreciation of what Malaysia shares, at a fundamental level, with other developing nations.

When I had spoken at length to a number of civil servants, I became aware that their views of human nature and of human conflict—both of which were crucial for their political attitudes—were not markedly different from the views of people from poverty-stricken portions of the Western world. That is, their views seemed to flow less from something in their culture *per se* than from something in their environment. Throughout my treatment of their political beliefs, I have stressed that these beliefs are reflective of certain assumed environmental restraints—e.g. material scarcity. I have thus tried to place their beliefs against the background in which they arise and which gives them meaning. This kind of contextual analysis not only leads to an appreciation of how ideology might change but also avoids the danger of evaluating such beliefs from the observer's context in which they may appear unrealistic or even pathological—but solely because of the imposition of an alien context.

Because of my concern with democracy and the conditions under which democratic values are likely to thrive, this study devotes considerable attention not only to the nature and extent of democratic beliefs among Malaysians, but to their sources as well. Here again I have endeavored to see these beliefs in a context that in-