

LAND REFORM IN THAILAND

—The Concept and Background of the Agricultural Land Reform Act of 1975—

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INTRODUCTION

THE Thai Agricultural Land Reform Act was promulgated on March 5, 1975. There had been several important previous attempts to limit private landownership, for example, the famous "National Economic Plan," which was submitted to the Parliament by Pridi Phanomyong in March 1933, and which proposed the comprehensive nationalization of all Thailand.¹ Subsequently the 34th Article of the Land Code of 1954, promulgated during the tenure of Field Marshall Pibun Songkhram, set the limits of landownership at fifty rai (1 rai=0.16 hectare).

However, the National Economic Plan was rejected as being too radical for its time, and Pridi himself, suspected of being a communist, was exiled for some time. Since the Land Code of 1954 stipulated that landownership was limited to the individual rather than the family and it failed to set age limits for the landownership, the landlords inclined to distribute their holdings among all their family members. Consequently, the code was not actually able to limit landholdings.

Subsequently, on January 13, 1959, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, who seized power in a military coup d'état in 1957–58, abolished the limits set up by the Land Code of 1954 with the Revolutionary Council's Proclamation No. 49, and in effect cancelled out all previous efforts at restricting landownership.

The Agricultural Land Reform Act of 1975 discussed in this paper is thus the first Thai law to limit private ownership, to give authority over distribution and redistribution of land to the state, and to succeed, at least partially, in the enforcement of these provisions.

The enactment of this legislation of 1975 was of epoch-making significance for Thailand; it was preceded by identification of the existing problems regarding landownership, and a major impetus behind its enactment was the development of the first organized peasant movement in Thai history.

This paper will confine its analysis to the Agricultural Land Reform Act of 1975 and investigate it definitely, concentrating on the following three points:

¹ See, Thak Chaloemtiarana, ed., *Thai Politics, 1932–1957* (Bangkok: Social Science Association of Thailand, 1978), pp. 108–237.

(1) Gaining an understanding of the aims and content of the Agricultural Land Reform Act of 1975, in relation to the land problems that faced in Thailand at the time.

(2) Clarifying the government's policies toward the land reform by carefully tracing the peasant movement that developed during the period surrounding the promulgation of the act.

(3) Outlining this act of 1975 and its enforcement to date.

Actually, in terms of enforcement, the land reform has not yet achieved particularly noteworthy results. Or rather, the reform is very much behind schedule, as indicated by a statement from the Agricultural Land Reform Office itself. This paper will, therefore, attempt to investigate and evaluate what lies behind the retardation of the Thai land reform or why the plan is running far behind the original schedule.

Lastly, it does not claim to be more than a tentative analysis of the Agricultural Land Reform Act of 1975, as it is very difficult at present to obtain an overall understanding of them mainly due to the fact that a great deal of data was lost after the coup d'etat in October 1976, as well as the fact that the reform is still in the process of being implemented.

I. LAND PROBLEMS AND THE LAND REFORM

A. *Definition of the Land Reform*

The details of the land reform in Thailand are outlined below in Section III, so let us start first with its definition. A formal definition can be found in Article 4 of the Agricultural Land Reform Act of 1975 as follows:

Improvements made in connection with rights and holdings in agricultural land, including housing arrangements by allocating state land or, land purchased or expropriated from the landowners who do not themselves cultivate or who own land in excess of their rights in accordance with the Agricultural Land Reform Act of 1975 to farmers who are landless or do not have sufficient land for cultivation, and to farmers' institutions on the bases of hire-purchases, renting or rent-free utilization. In so doing, the State will provide assistance in farming activities, improvements in resources and productive inputs as well as marketing facilities.

This is a very long and involved statement but put simply, it contains three points.

(1) The land reform can be defined in the narrow sense as actions to improve the system of rights to, and holdings of, agricultural land.

(2) In order to implement these improvements, the government is to take the following two steps. (a) Allocation of state land through a system of reclamation and leasing. Because the transfer of the titles to individual farmers is forbidden, the government leases this land through farmer's institutions (*sataban kasetrakon*). Although the act does not state this explicitly, this method could also be applied to farmers illegally squatting on state land. (b) The second method is the purchase or expropriation of private land by the government, which then

allots it to farmers and farmers' institutions on a long-term installment payment basis. In this instance, the landownership is naturally transferred to the farmer.

There are, as a consequence, two types of the land reform. One is the distribution of state land, which does not include the transfer of ownership, the second is the redistribution of private land.

(3) The land reform is not confined to these two methods alone. They have a much wider scope, including reforms of the economic conditions in rural areas, such as production and marketing of agricultural products.

As can be readily understood, the basic concept of the reform is very different from that of "creating independent landowners-farmers through the redistribution of landholdings," which is the common Japanese understanding of the concept of the land reform.

Specifically, this reform differs from the postwar Japanese experienced reform as follows:

(1) One of their principal supports is the distribution of state land among farmers.

(2) They are not limited to tenant farmers.

(3) They are not limited to individual farmers, but extend to farmers' institutions as well.

(4) They are not restricted to landownership, but extend to improving production and marketing systems of agricultural products.

What causes these differences? The special characteristics of land problems in any one country will have a major effect on the character and direction of that country's land reform. To gain an understanding of the reasons behind these differences will necessitate an investigation into the objectives of the land reform and into how, in setting up these objectives, policymakers came to grips with the problems and contradictions in agriculture and landownership.

The following pages are devoted to an investigation of the various land problems that Thailand faced at the time, and the effect they had on the format of the land reform. An aid to these investigations is a series of papers written by the first director of the Agricultural Land Reform Office, the late Dr. Chaiyong Chuchart, who is affectionately known as the father of the land reform [7]. The writer will also use documents and data from the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives and the Agricultural Land Reform Office in the following discussion.

B. *Land Problems in Thailand*

The principal land problems in Thailand pointed out by Dr. Chaiyong around the time of the enactment of the land reform can be summarized as follows:

(1) The emergence of land shortages due to population pressures.

(2) The high ratio of tenant farming in the central delta and parts of northern Thailand.

(3) The illegal cultivation in state land.

(4) The increase of indebted farmers and land forfeitures.

Dr. Chaiyong laid his greatest emphasis on the shortage of agricultural land.

According to his estimate, the shortage of land in Thailand would reach 20 million rai by 1985 [7, p. 108].

This estimate was based on the fact that there were approximately 5,060,000 agricultural households in Thailand in 1975, a number which, by FAO estimates, would increase to 6,780,000 households by 1985. In 1975, a total of 750,000 households were either tenant farmers (450,000), farmers who cultivate state land illegally (50,000), or marginal cultivators who were either landless or did not possess enough land to support themselves (250,000).

If the anticipated increase of 1,720,000 in agricultural households by 1985 is added to the total of 750,000 households who do not possess enough land to support themselves, it comes to a total of 2,470,000 households. When this number is multiplied by 25 rai, the minimum amount of agricultural land required to support a household (assuming that the number of tenant households does not increase after 1975), then, at the very least, 61.75 million rai of additional agricultural land will be needed by 1985.

In 1975, the amount of state land which was potentially distributable did not exceed 40 million rai, of which 12 million rai was uncleared waste land. Another 7 million rai was arable land owned by the Land Department, the Department of Social Welfare, and the Department of Cooperatives Promotion, and the remaining 21 million rai was being cultivated illegally. According to Dr. Chaiyong's calculations, even if all of this state land was distributed among the farmers, there would still be a shortage of 20 million rai of agricultural land by 1985. These observations were shared by others as well and, for example, the Economic Basic Report of 1978 warned that "expansion of agricultural land will come to an end by the beginning of the 1980s."²

However, the absolute land shortage and the disappearance of frontier land does not necessarily mean a crisis in agriculture is imminent. If land productivity is increasing, due to mechanization, land improvements, and installation of irrigation facilities, and the increase of agricultural income can sustain the increase in rural households, the land shortage will be greatly alleviated. However, should land productivity stagnate, and agricultural households continue to increase, then the natural outcome will be an increase in the poor or landless tenant farmers due to land subdivision. This situation has already developed in some areas of Thailand. The distribution and redistribution of land—and particularly in cases where state land is limited, the redistribution of private land—has become the only way that it can be dealt with.

The logical conclusion drawn by Dr. Chaiyong and others was that the land reform was inevitable in the near future in Thailand.

The second land problem that Dr. Chaiyong delineated was the high rate of tenant farming in the central delta and parts of northern Thailand, and he advanced this as an additional reason for the necessity of redistribution of land owned by landlords. The statistics for each area put together by the Agricultural

² See International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *A Basic Economic Report: Thailand* (Washington, D.C., 1979).

TABLE I
PERCENTAGE OF TENANT HOUSEHOLDS BY REGION

	Total Farm Households	No. of Tenant Households	Percentage of Tenant Households
Central Thailand	853,654	352,632	41.31
Northern Thailand	1,127,888	301,255	26.71
Northeastern Thailand	1,820,252	157,967	8.68
Southern Thailand	577,749	101,004	17.48
National	4,379,543	912,858	20.84

Source: [1].

Note: The source does not state this clearly, but tenant farmers are presumed to include landowner farmers who also cultivate some tenant land.

TABLE II
INCREASE IN TENANT FARMING IN
PROVINCES OF CENTRAL THAILAND

Province	1968/69	1973/74 (%)
Pathum Thani	82.62	83.92
Ayutthaya	62.05	76.49
Samut Prakarn	68.22	71.54
Nakorn Nayok	46.96	67.70
Chachoengsao	42.70	63.64
Sara Buri	42.00	53.60
Ang Thong	39.73	49.92

Sources: For 1968/69 figure, [6]; for 1973/74 figure, [16].

Note: These figures apply to the seven provinces with the highest tenancy ratios.

Land Reform Office (see Table I) give the average ratio of tenant households in central Thailand as 41 per cent, and 27 per cent in northern Thailand. This ratio climbs even higher in seven of the central provinces, the rice growing areas around Bangkok, resulting in a 50 per cent tenancy ratio among agricultural households. The tenancy ratio in these provinces has been increasing unabated for the past five to six years, and this trend toward a landlord-tenant system is clearly shown in Table II.

Let us now look at the situation in Lat Bua Luang District, Ayutthaya Province, where are typical example of patterns of landownership in the Chao Phraya Delta area, and were the first areas designated for the land reform.

The Agricultural Land Reform Office surveyed land tenure system in a pilot project area of 3,610 rai which is being developed with Japanese cooperation in Ayutthaya Province. This survey revealed that 2,814 rai, or 78 per cent of this land, was under tenancy (see Table III) and almost 70 per cent, or, 1,962 rai of this 2,814 rai, belonged to nine groups of large-scale landowners who

TABLE III
LANDOWNERSHIP IN THE AGRICULTURAL LAND REFORM AREA OF
LAT BUA LUANG DISTRICT, AYUTTHAYA PROVINCE

	No. of Land Titles	Area of Cultivated Land (Rai)	No. of Tenant Contracts	Area of Tenant Land (Rai)	Ratio of Tenant Land (%)
Susa Lot Mu 4	24	1,105	81	904	81.8
Phraya Bang Su Mu 3	28	1,287	76	1,133	88.0
Phraya Bang Su Mu 4	10	742	30	563	75.9
Phraya Bang Su Mu 6	29	476	56	214	45.0
Total	91	3,610	243	2,814	78.0

Source: Survey (1979).

TABLE IV
LAND OF OVER 100 RAI (16 HECTARES) OWNED BY MAJOR LANDLORDS
IN THE AGRICULTURAL LAND REFORM AREA OF
LAT BUA LUANG DISTRICT, AYUTTHAYA PROVINCE

Landlord	No. of Land Titles	Holding Land Area (Rai)	No. of Tenants (Parcel)	Tenant Land Area (Rai)	Ratio of Tenant Land to Total Land Area (%)
K family	7	669	40	669	23.8
Temple land*	3	261	9	211	7.5
Mosque land	3	251	11	251	8.9
T family	1	223	3	223	7.9
H family	3	150	14	150	5.3
L ₁ family	2	127	10	127	4.5
A family	1	119	12	119	4.2
P family	1	106	7	106	3.8
L ₂ family	1	106	6	106	3.8
Totals for nine landlords	22	2,012	112	1,962	69.7
Total tenant land			243	2,814	100.0

Source: Survey (1979).

* Total for two temples.

owned over 100 rai (16 hectares) each (see Table IV). Another feature of the pattern of ownership in this area was the fact that these large-scale landowners, for example, the K family who owned 669 rai which was all leased out, or the H family which owned 150 rai, again all leased out, also owned land in other districts of Ayutthaya Province which came to a total of 1,052 rai and 2,173 rai respectively. Both these families resided in Bangkok, and entrusted the management of their land to an agent.

Large-scale landholdings by absentee landlords are not confined to Ayutthaya Province. They can be also observed in the rice-growing areas around Bangkok as well. Table V gives the results of a survey made in 1969 of large-scale landholdings (over 1,000 rai [160 hectares]) in the four provinces of Pathum Thani,

TABLE
LANDHOLDING SITUATION OF LANDLORDS WITH OVER 1,000 RAI

Province	(1) No. of Landlords	(2) Area of Holdings (Rai)	(3) Total Cultivated Land* (Rai)	(4) (2)/(3) (%)
Pathum Thani	18	78,839	745,358	10.6
Ayutthaya	29	84,369	1,217,277	6.9
Chachoengsao	39	102,084	903,384	11.3
Nakorn Nayok	41	97,835	629,607	15.5

Sources: For (1) (2) (5) (6) (7) figures, [13, pp.20-23]; for (3) figure, [15].

Nakorn Nayok, Ayutthaya, and Chachoengsao around Bangkok. These figures are a little dated, but they clearly show the extent of large-scale landownership by absentee landlords residing in Bangkok. The ratio of large-scale agricultural landownership of over 1,000 rai is approximately 10 per cent of all cultivated land in each province (see item 4, Table V). Absentee landlords residing in Bangkok make up 50 to 70 per cent of the number of the large-scale landlords who possess over 1,000 rai, and these landlords in turn own an overwhelming 60 to 80 per cent of the area that is owned by all large-scale landlords (see items 8 and 9, Table V).

Thus the existence of absentee landlords is a remarkable characteristic of the provinces of the Chao Phraya Delta region, at the head of those surrounding Bangkok. A group of promoting the land reform conceived of it as a method of dissolving, even if not completely, the large estates owned by absentee landlords, and dealing with the shortage of agricultural land mentioned above.

The pattern of control of the land by landlords in northern Thailand differs from that of central Thailand even though both regions have a high ratio of tenant farming. For example, although the results of a survey conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives in 1973 and 1974 showed that eleven provinces in northern Thailand had a tenant farming ratio of over 20 per cent (see Table VI), the landlords were, for the most part, not absentee, but rather lived in the same province and the same village as their tenants. Also the core of these tenant farmers were originally landowners who had slid into tenancy due to the infiltration of the commercial economy.

Another major characteristic was that the scale of landholdings in northern Thailand was the smallest in the country. According to information issued by the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives in 1963, the average area of land owned per agricultural household in northern Thailand was 16.1 rai, much smaller than the 21.7 rai which constituted the national average. By 1972 and 1973 this amount had dropped even further to 8.8 rai, a decline of over 50 per cent in ten years.

V

(160 HECTARES) IN THE FOUR PROVINCES AROUND BANGKOK

(5) No. of Landlords Residing Locally	(6) No. of Landlords Residing in Bangkok	(7) Holdings of the Landlords Residing in Bangkok (Rai)	(8) (6)/(1) (%)	(9) (7)/(2) (%)
6	10	56,937	55.6	72.2
5	22	69,823	75.9	82.8
11	20	60,127	51.3	58.9
9	26	62,027	63.4	63.4

* Although figures refer primarily to rice cultivation, they also include some land used for other crops as well.

TABLE VI
PERCENTAGE OF TENANT HOUSEHOLDS IN NORTH THAILAND

Province	Percentage of Tenant Households
Nakorn Sawan	40.44
Chiang Mai	39.42
Phichit	38.27
Phisanuloke	35.33
Lam Poon	30.80
Tak	25.96
Kam Phaeng Phet	24.95
Mae Hong Son	24.76
Uthai Thani	23.88
Phrae	22.88
Sukho Thai	22.53

Source: [16].

Note: Figures are for 1973-74, provinces with a ratio of over 20 per cent.

As a result, the competition between tenant farmers in northern Thailand for rented land became very severe, and in 1973 and 1974 the land rent in northern Thailand was 164 baht per rai, which was greatly in excess of the rent in north-east Thailand at 81 baht per rai and that in central Thailand at 111 baht per rai.³ However, the unit productivity of land in northern Thailand is the highest of any area, and this needs to be taken into account when evaluating land rent for this area. Even so, this figure is one indication of the hardships of tenant farming.

In addition to these problems of the landlord-tenant system on private land, a severe problem had also developed on state land as well: that of illegal squatting by agricultural households on state land (*kan bamruk thamlai pa sa-ngwan*).

³ Data from National Statistical Office.

There are no data that accurately reflect the extent of this squatting. Dr. Chaiyong gave the level at 50,000 households cultivating 21 million rai, but a statement issued by the Agricultural Land Reform Office in 1977 set the amount of state land being cultivated illegally at 5 million rai. The actual figure varies according to one's definition of illegal cultivation [5, p. 3]. At all events, however, the fact that the Agricultural Land Reform Office emphasized the confrontation between the government and the farmers illegally cultivating state land as being one of the major forms of land dispute in Thailand, as well as the conflict between tenants and landlords, clearly indicates that squatting on state land had become a serious problem in Thailand [8, Vol. 3, p. 2].

Two major, and closely related, reasons for the continuing increases of squatting on state land are the shortage of frontier area and the subdivision of agricultural land into increasingly smaller plots as a result of population pressures. The 1960s saw a rapid spread in the cultivation of cash crops such as maize, which can also be considered to have acted as a spur to this squatting trend. An additional important factor which cannot be ignored in this context is the fact that government determination of landownership rights in Thailand has still only been partially implemented.

The principal documents issued in Thailand in connection with occupation and landownership are:

- (1) *So kho nung*—a certificate received upon application for occupation of land.
- (2) *No so sarm*—a certificate of land utilization.
- (3) *Chanot*—land title deed, a certificate giving the government's legal acknowledgement of landownership rights.

Of these documents, (2) and (3) have a legal basis, which includes mortgage rights, and can be used as collateral. However, according to available sources, *no so sarm* documents have only been issued for 16.0 per cent, and *chanot* documents have only been issued for 21.5 per cent of all cultivated land in Thailand, for a total of only 37.5 per cent. The legal implication of these figures is that over 60 per cent of all cultivated land in Thailand is presently being cultivated illegally [14, p. 14].

However, the great majority of farmers do not consider squatting as an illegal act. This is because Thailand has a long-standing custom called the *jab jong* system whereby if a farmer clears and occupies wild land for a certain length of time, then the right of cultivation accrues to that farmer. In addition, the government did not make efforts to tightly restrict this *jab jong* system practically, although it proclaimed that all ownerless land was state property. Instead the government was in effect following a policy of tacit approval of illegal cultivation on the part of the farmers. This resulted in the establishment of a dual system of rights to state land, with the government continuing to retain legal rights of ownership while the squatters possessed practical rights with respect to occupancy and cultivation. (This problem did not arise in the central delta region, particularly in areas where new land was developed to cultivation following the excavation of canals, because titles to this land were issued from the beginning.)

However, the latent contradictions in this system began to surface from the 1960s on with the increase in the number of squatters and government promotion of land development on a national scale. For example, when plans were made to build a dam or road on state land, conflicts arose between the government, which issued eviction orders, and the farmers, who insisted on their vested rights. In some cases, these confrontations even led to violence. An even more acute problem was the conflict between the government and farmers over forest reserves (*pa sa-ngwan*). Farmers were legally forbidden to encroach on the state forests for reasons of national land conservation, and the customary rights conferred by the *jab jong* system were completely denied in this area. The result was a head-on confrontation between the government, armed with the law, and the farmers, who were endeavoring to continue their clearing and occupancy in accordance with customary practices. These conflicts developed into a major impetus for the peasant movements from the end of 1974 to 1975.

The government adopted two policies to deal with these conflicts over state land. The first was a ten year plan commenced in 1973 to increase the tempo of government determination of land rights which used satellite photography to gauge the extent of squatting on state land [19]. The other policy was a settlement plan (*nikhom*) which aimed to prevent squatting on state land by limiting the freedom of farmers to clear and cultivate the land themselves. Instead the government took it upon itself to clear and consolidate state land and then settle farmers on it, after organizing them into agricultural cooperatives.

This *nikhom* projects commenced as early as 1935 (the relevant legislation was prepared in 1938) and the concept was broadened in 1942 with the enactment of the Land Distribution Act. However, the *nikhom* projects of clearing and settlement of state land were not developed on a scale large enough to completely solve the shortage of agricultural land emerging at that time. To deal with the land shortage and with the increasing squatting on forest reserve land, the government was forced to proceed with land clearing on an even larger scale. This resulted in fresh clearing and settlement of state land, in other words, the land reform. Thus it can be argued that the distribution of state land, which is one of the primary elements in the present land reform, is simply an extension of the *nikhom* system which had been in operation since before the war.

The fourth land problem facing in Thailand pointed out by Dr. Chaiyong and his colleagues is that of the increase in indebted farmers and their forfeiture of the ownership of their land. For example, according to a survey conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives in 1971 and 1972, 27 per cent of all agricultural households were burdened with debt, the national average for debt per household being 3,830 baht (1 dollar = 20 baht). As seen in Table VII, the central Thailand having the highest ratio with 48 per cent of all agricultural households in debt, the average sum being 8,457 baht. The next highest debt ratio for agricultural households was to be found in northeast Thailand, where 29 per cent of all agricultural households were indebted to the extent of an average sum of 5,838 baht per household [11].

Table VIII shows the level of land mortgages and mortgage transfers from

TABLE VII
INDEBTEDNESS OF FARM HOUSEHOLDS BY REGION

	Ratio of Indebted Households (%)		Average Indebtedness per Household (Baht)	
	1970-71	1971-72	1970-71	1971-72
Northern Thailand	33.8	12.9	4,230	3,962
Northeastern Thailand	31.0	27.3	1,850	1,785
Central Thailand	55.8	47.9	7,483	8,457
Eastern Thailand	47.1	29.2	8,268	5,638
Southern Thailand	26.7	13.3	3,299	3,901
National average	35.9	27.4	4,308	3,830

Source: [11, p. 439].

TABLE VIII
TRANSFER OF LANDOWNERSHIP RIGHTS (1966-77)

	Mortgage			Transfer		
	No. of Titles	Area (Rai)	Value (Million Baht)	No. of Titles	Area (Rai)	Value (Million Baht)
1966	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	14,789	21
1967	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	11,047	60
1968	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	14,965	64
1969	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	7,886	14
1970	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	5,710	22
1971	40,124	507,842	6,533	1,200	24,969	30
1972	45,470	485,402	12,789	1,033	19,363	35
1973	56,440	535,271	7,739	445	9,136	45
1974	56,102	546,075	12,874	130	3,333	6
1975	73,832	813,580	14,893	100	1,185	49
1976	45,932	596,870	2,893	207	4,299	11
1977	34,311	541,976	3,293	52	1,489	5

Sources: For 1966-70 figures, [6]; for 1971-77 figures, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, *Statistics of Title Deeds Using as Warrantee for Loan and Lost of Agricultural Land Right A.D. 1977* (Bangkok, 1978).

1966 to 1977. Care should be taken when reading this table as it applies only to land held under title deeds and does not include lands that are held under the *no so sarm* (land utilization certificate) document, which are also allowed to be mortgaged. The figures in this table would be even higher if they include *no so sarm* land, as a fact that is freely acknowledged by the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives itself. Secondly, this table does not include cases in which the farmer sells his land himself and uses the cash thus acquired to pay off his debts. Thus, in looking at the problem of land forfeitures, one must first realize that Table VIII shows a part of the actual situation.

This table is useful, however, as it indicates the trends in land transference over the past ten years. Although it may not give the absolute figures, it does at least clearly indicate the relatively high frequency of land transfers in the

years from 1966 to 1968 and 1971 to 1973, as well as the emergence of the land forfeiture problem in the years just before the enactment of the Agricultural Land Reform Act.

These circumstances formed an important backdrop to the peasant movement which commenced in 1974.

C. *Objectives of the Land Reform*

The points outlined above comprise the four major land problems in Thailand. At the same time, Thailand has many additional agricultural problems such as a shortage of irrigation facilities and the income disparity between urban and rural areas. However, the agricultural problems that Dr. Chaiyong and his colleagues conceived as the major problems connected with landownership when they were drafting the Agricultural Land Reform Act can be summarized in the four points discussed above.

These points clearly show that land problems in Thailand were not necessarily limited to the problems of the existing landlord-tenant system. Certainly, the landlord-tenant system had developed into a very serious problem in the provinces of the central delta region around Bangkok and in parts of northern Thailand. However, in parts of northern and northeast Thailand adjacent to the central delta, illegal squatting on forest reserves and the conflict between the government and farmers over state land were much more serious problems than the possession of the land by landlords. Even the landlord system itself took different forms in different areas. The problem in the provinces around Bangkok was the existence of large estates owned by absentee landlords, while in parts of northern Thailand the hard exploitation of tenant farmers by landlords, predicated on the prevalence of farmers with small holdings, emerged as a more serious problem. Thus the land problems are by no means uniform and display great regional diversity. The regional diversity of these problems, or to put it another way, the uneven development of agricultural problems is reflected naturally in the objectives and the content of the land reform in Thailand.

In an essay entitled "Land Reform," Dr. Chaiyong cites the fundamental objective of the land reform as being "the parceling out of land accumulated by people who own large tracts of land but are not themselves engaged in agriculture, allocating it to poor farmers who are directly engaged in agricultural production"—in effect the dissolution of large estates owned by single landlords. At the same time, Dr. Chaiyong emphasized "the allocation of land to tenant farmers, to farmers squatting on forest reserve areas, and to farmers who have been dispossessed of their land by moneylenders as a means of providing them with a stable livelihood and preventing them from squatting on state land," as being two important objectives of the land reform.

Accordingly, drawing an analogy from Japan's experience, the land reform in Thailand was not simply aimed at the dissolution of the landlord system and the evolution of the tenant into an independent landowner-farmer. Their largest and most fundamental objective was the development of agriculture through the transformation of the entire population of poor farmers into self-sufficient

independent cultivators. This was to be achieved by allocating enough land to sustain their livelihood to all poor farmers including tenant farmers.

II. THE PEASANT MOVEMENT AND THE LAND REFORM

A. *The Development of the Peasant Movement*

The land problems in Thailand and the need for the land reform discussed in Section I were recognized earlier on by certain members of the intelligentsia. After the coup d'etat by Field Marshal Thanom and Field Marshal Praphas in November 1971, the military government began to investigate plans for the land reform in Thailand and their feasibility. Thanom's son, Naron Kithikhachon, was one of the leading figures in this process. However, these plans for the reform never saw the light of day under the military rule of Thanom and Praphas and were inherited by the Sanya civilian government which took office in October 1973. Actually, one should say that under the impetus of two new factors on the political scene, the Sanya government could not avoid serious engagement in the planning and finally the enactment of the land reform. These new factors were:

- (1) The dramatic changes in the political scene following the collapse of the military government triggered by the "Student Revolution" of October 1973.
- (2) The emergence of the land problem as a result of the upsurge of the peasant movement.

We have focused primarily on the second and we would like to touch briefly here on the influence that both of these factors exerted on the enactment of the land reform.

First of all, the collapse of the military government and the advent of a civilian administration served as an important impetus that strengthened the influence on the voice of Dr. Chaoyong and other reformist government officials who emphasized the need of the land reform. In particular, the provisional Sanya cabinet, which was appointed immediately after the fall of the military government and which held power until the general elections of January 1975, was pressed by the urgent need to exhibit a policy of "democratization" in response to the demand by farmers, workers, and students. In the process, wide-ranging authority was conferred on Dr. Chaoyong and others who had, very earlier on, displayed a deep understanding of the land problems in Thailand, and who had developed concrete plans to deal with them. This can be easily inferred from the fact that Dr. Chaoyong, who was then deputy director of the Land Development Department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, also occupied a position of leadership in the committee, formed in March 1974, which was charged with drafting the Agricultural Land Reform Act.

Also, after 1974 the peasant movement and the student and labor movement which had preceded it, instilled a sense of political crisis into the Sanya government and became an immediate stimulus for the enactment of the land reform. In other words, the Sanya government, fearing that the demands for democrati-

zation from all levels of society would develop into more radical demands for systemic reforms or even revolution, hit upon the land reform as a preemptive measure. This crisis consciousness can be clearly seen in an interview with Dr. Chaiyong published on April 17, 1974, in which he warned that: "unless the land reform is implemented immediately, some group or other will impose them through violence [implying a communist inspired land revolution]."⁴

Lastly, the peasant movement of 1974-77 was central in bringing the Thai land problems which lay behind it to the surface, and demanded that the government should find an immediate solution to them.

For the above reasons, as early as February 1974, the Sanya government announced its intention to implement land reform.⁵ In March it established the Agricultural Land Reform Act Drafting Committee, with the vice-minister of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives as its chairman. In May of the same year, it published a draft bill, the essence of which was the limitation of agricultural landownership to fifty rai.⁶ The final draft of the act was presented to the Parliament on December 10, 1974, and after deliberation it was passed by a vote of sixty-five to forty-five on January 17, 1975 (see Appendix).

From 1974 to the beginning of 1975, coinciding with the drafting and promulgation of the Agricultural Land Reform Act, the peasant movement spread throughout Thailand at an accelerated tempo [18]. Large-scale meetings were held in Bangkok in June and November 1974, at which the farmers presented the government with a list of seven demands (see Appendix). These two protests, one in the first and the other in the second half of 1974, differ significantly in terms of the leading groups from which they drew their support and in terms of the content of their demands, and therefore need to be examined separately.

The first protest began in January 1974 with demands for land restitution in Raj Buri Province. Beginning in March, farmers from Nakorn Sawan and Chon Buri provinces marched on Bangkok and on June 27 they presented their seven demands. This peasant movement in the first half of 1974 was characterized by:

(1) Major support drawn principally from bankrupt landowner-farmers or indebted ones from the delta region who had forfeited their land or were close to doing so as a result of debts incurred due to the poor harvests of 1972-73.

(2) Demands which reflected the character of this support, emphasizing: (a) The provisional granting of lands to such farmers. (b) Assistance from government financial institutions in redeeming their land. (c) Control of corrupt practices by landlords and moneylenders (merchants).

At the outset, the Sanya government displayed a willingness to implement the land reform at an early date,⁷ but with the rice planting season close at hand, the farmers could not be expected to be satisfied with these measures, and the government was pressed into taking more prompt action. As a result, on June

⁴ *Voice of the Nation*, April 18, 1974.

⁵ *Voice of the Nation*, February 19, 1974.

⁶ *Voice of the Nation*, May 13, 1974.

⁷ *Voice of the Nation*, May 27, 1974.

4, the Sanya government set up the Committee for Enquiry of Farmers' Debts (*khana kamakan sopsuan panha nishin khong chawna chawrai*) to investigate and arbitrate land disputes. Parallel to the activities of this committee the government directed the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives to increase its loans to farmers and on June 29, it promised the following six categories of assistance to the farmers of the Nakorn Sawan Province [9].

- (1) The allocation of land to poor farmers before the next planting season.
- (2) The conducting of a survey of farmers who had forfeited their land to moneylenders.
- (3) Based on the survey findings, the restoration of land or else the repayment of the amount overcharged to farmers who had been charged a higher interest rate than the legal 12 per cent.
- (4) Prevention of the resale of land by landlords during the survey period.
- (5) Permanent allocation of land to farmers in the form of agricultural cooperatives.
- (6) The cessation of the arrest and prosecution of farmers who were squatting on state land illegally.

With these government promises, the farmers ceased their meetings in Bangkok, and beginning in July, the movement entered a period of relative quiet. However, this calm was not long lived, especially as the Committee for the Enquiry of Farmers' Debts was not able to deal promptly with the crush of appeals from farmers, and this further aggravated peasant discontent in Nakorn Sawan Province. A statement issued by the Committee for Enquiry of Farmers' Debts on October 11, 1974, illustrated this when it stated that the committee had received approximately 40,000 appeals in the four-month period starting in June and they had only been able to solve 334 of these.

The farmers saw this as a betrayal of their hopes, and in late October, the farmers from Nakorn Sawan Province issued a statement of no confidence in the government. This triggered the assembly in Bangkok of farmers from not just Nakorn Sawan Province but from provinces all over northeast, north, and central Thailand, at which the representatives from sixteen provinces once again presented seven demands to the government. This movement led up to a mass meeting of over 10,000 people at Tammasat University on November 29, at which the Peasants Federation of Thailand (*sahaphan chawna chawrai haeng prathet thai*) was formed, the first organized peasant group in Thailand dedicated to the rights of farmers.

This peasant movement of late 1974, which peaked in November, displayed a number of new features in comparison to the movement of early 1974.

First of all, the farmers who came to Bangkok in November included not only farmers from the region surrounding the delta who had forfeited their lands, but also many tenant farmers from northern and central Thailand and squatters from central and northeast Thailand.

Second, farmers' demands were not limited to prompt relief for indebted farmers but included wide-ranging demands for controls on landownership, the relaxation of tenancy conditions, and so forth.

In more specific terms, the content of their seven demands was:

- (1) The prompt legislation of the six promises that the government had made in June.
- (2) Limitation of landownership to 100 rai in northeast Thailand, and 50 rai in all other areas.
- (3) Enforcement of the Act Controlling the Rent of Paddy Land of 1950 and extension of the shortest tenancy period at six years.
- (4) Government support for the redemption of land by farmers.
- (5) Granting of a title deed to farmers who had occupied state land for over ten years.
- (6) Prompt suspension of public works projects which conflicted with the interests of farmers such as the dam project in Udon Province.
- (7) Introducing the guarantee system of the producers' rice price at 3,000 baht per ton.

As can be seen from the above, the farmers' demands had now widened to include all of the land problems discussed in Section I. In other words, all of the land problems which had been steadily developing in Thailand came to a head simultaneously at the end of 1974.

The three major policies the government advanced as solutions to these problems were:

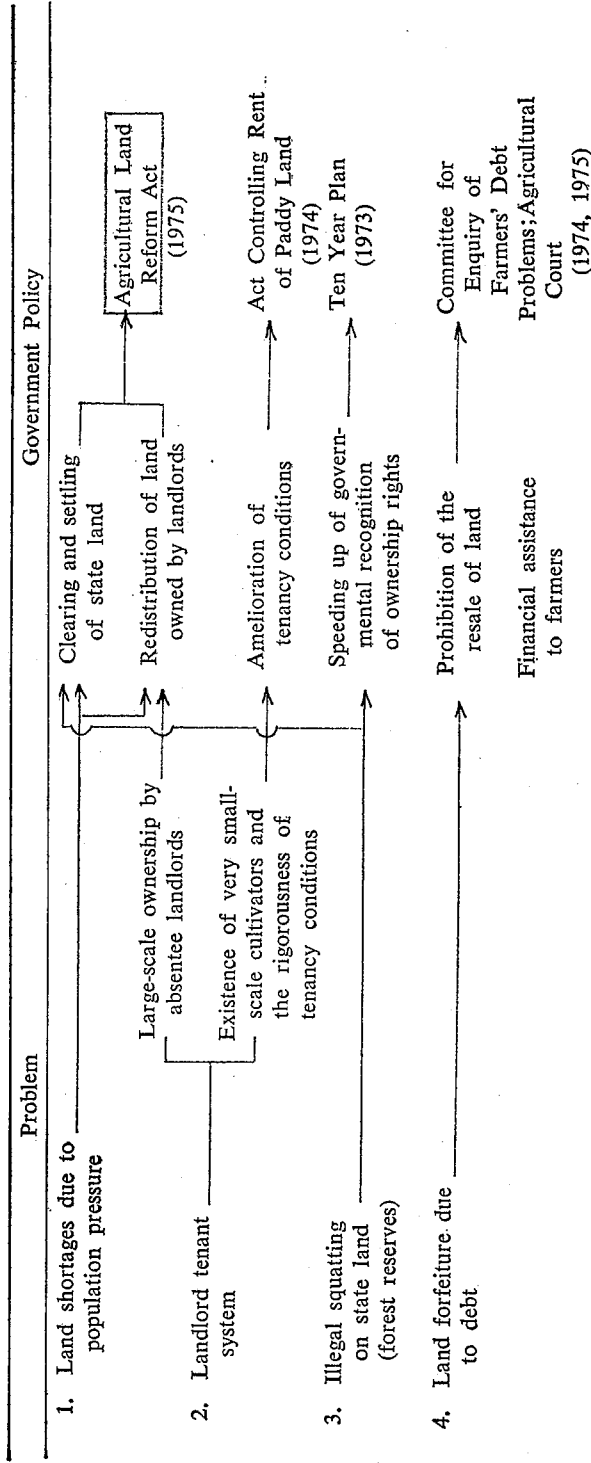
- (1) The extension of aid to debt-laden farmers through the Committee for Enquiry of Farmers' Debts which had been established in June, and through the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives.
- (2) The amelioration of tenancy conditions by means of the amendment of existing Act Controlling the Rent of Paddy Land.
- (3) The limiting of private landownership and the distribution and redistribution of land through the Agricultural Land Reform Act.

The Act Controlling the Rent of Paddy Land was a revamping of the act of 1950, which had become a dead letter under the military government. By modifying in part the sections on the period of tenancy (guaranteeing a minimum of six years) and rents, it satisfied to a certain extent the demands of the tenant farmers, especially in northern and central Thailand. The Act Controlling the Rent of Paddy Land was promulgated on December 17, 1974, and was implemented slightly in advance of the Agricultural Land Reform Act. Thus, by the beginning of 1975 the government's policies with regard to the land problems had, on the whole, taken shape, and the legal and administrative preparations involved were almost complete. (However, the government's handling of the land problem and its policies towards the peasantry changed dramatically under the Khukrit government, which was formed after the general election of January 1975. This change is discussed again in Section IV.)

B. The Significance of the Land Reform

The development of the 1974 peasant movement and the government's response to it have been discussed above, but what was the significance within the framework of the government's overall policy of the land reform that was enacted

TABLE IX
LAND PROBLEMS AND GOVERNMENT POLICIES (1974-75)



as a part of this response? Table IX sets out the connection between the government's policies and the agricultural problems delineated above.

As discussed in Section I, Dr. Chaoyong and his colleagues saw the objectives of the land reform as the resolution of the contemporary land problems in Thailand through the allotment of land to all classes of poor farmers, not just to the tenant farmers under the domination of the landlords. In addition, with the increased vigor of the peasant movement after 1974, the government was not concerned simply with resolving the land problems. At a more political level, it was anxious to ensure the political stability of the rural areas by preventing the peasant movement from being co-opted into a broader anti-government movement.

However, apart from any ideological effect this may have had, these political objectives did not yield any immediate practical results, since although the government's declaration of its intention to implement the land reform gave the farmers a measure of hope, the then peasant movement pressed the government for more immediate and specific relief measures. As a result, for example, the government set up the Committee for the Enquiry of Farmers' Debts and expanded the lending activities of government financial institutions in response to the problem of land forfeitures as a result of debts—a problem which had been central to peasant demands from a very early stage. Similarly, it implemented the Act Controlling the Rent of Paddy Land as a specific response to the worsening of tenancy conditions in north Thailand. In the process, the objectives of the land reform and their target people were more limited than those envisaged by Dr. Chaoyong and his colleagues. Actually, it appears that the concept prevailed that the target of the land reform should be contemporary land problems other than those of assistance to indebted farmers and the amelioration of tenancy conditions. As Table IX reveals in concrete terms, the two direct targets of the land reform became:

- (1) The partial dismantling of the large-scale absentee landlord system in the delta region and the redistribution of the land held by landlords as a method of dealing with the land shortage that were becoming more acute throughout the nation, and particularly of dealing with the high ratio of tenancy in the Chao Phraya Delta region.

- (2) The clearing and settling of state land—a large-scale version of the traditional *nikhom* system—aimed at preventing illegal squatting on forest reserves in the regions surrounding the central delta, which had become prevalent due to the shortage of agricultural land.

Thus, it was natural that the distribution of state land and the redistribution of private land became the two mainstays of the Thai land reform. However, this also meant that the character of the land reform became extremely vague. On the one hand, they aimed at impressive *structural changes* in landownership, especially with regard to private land, while on the other, they tried to implement *nonstructural changes* which could be used as a substitute for structural change in dealing with the shortage of agricultural land—the clearing and settlement of state land.

Structural change was emphasized the legislative process surrounding the land reform of 1974–75. At least during the Sanya government the land reform had political significance as “a countermeasure for expected revolutionary movements,” and were intended to resolve the current land problems. However, following the Sanya government Thai politics was rocked by the military coup d’etats and other events and with changes in the government’s policy towards the farmers, the emphasis on structural changes rapidly fell away, while in its place *nonstructural changes* aimed at eliminating the shortage of agricultural land came to the forefront. In other words, landownership limitations were behind schedule, and the emphasis of the land reform shifted from the redistribution of landlord-owned land to the distribution of state land.

III. THE AGRICULTURAL LAND REFORM ACT OF 1975

A. *Outline of the 1975 Act*

The major provisions of the Agricultural Land Reform Act of 1975 can be summarized as follows:

1. *Organization*

An Agricultural Land Reform Office was set up within the Ministry of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives and invested with the power to execute these reforms (Articles 6 and 7). In addition, local offices were set up in areas designated for the land reform (Article 11).

The Agricultural Land Reform Central Executive Committee and the Agricultural Land Reform Provincial Executive Committees were set up as legislative bodies to draft policies related to the land reform and determine the various regulations involved (Articles 12 and 13). These committees were to be separated from the Land Reform Office.

2. *Areas*

Land Reform Areas (*khet patirup thidin*) were to be designated at the district level. Priority was to be given to districts where landless farmers were numerous, where there were many farmers with small holdings, or where yield per unit of land was low (Article 25).

3. *Limitations on landownership*

The Agricultural Land Reform Office was empowered to buy up or confiscate any private land over 20 rai which the owner was not using for agricultural purposes. In addition, if a family or an individual owned more than 100 rai of pasture land or more than 50 rai of cultivated land, then the Land Reform Office was also empowered to buy or confiscate the excess land (Article 29).

However, it should be noted that these landownership limits were not restrict ones. For example, under the Agricultural Land Reform Act of 1975 it was possible with the permission of the Agricultural Land Reform Committee to hold

up to 1,000 rai of cultivated or pasture land. It was also possible to hold over 1,000 rai of land if the land met certain conditions, for example if it was receiving government-assisted agricultural investment, or if it was being used to produce exports or meet large-scale domestic demand. In other words, the limits or landownership imposed by the Agricultural Land Reform Act were not absolutely binding but were rather flexible in nature, and could, to a certain degree, be changed at the discretion of the Agricultural Land Reform Committee.

The land reform as applied to state land made it mandatory for the committees to extend long-term leases to farmers or farmers' institutions on any state land exceeding 10,000 rai. It also stipulated that the government could also lease out state land under 10,000 rai (Article 30).

4. *Compensation of private land*

Government compensation for land bought up from individuals was to take the form of a 25 per cent cash payment, with the remainder being made up in government bonds, redeemable after ten years and with an annual interest rate of 8 per cent.

In order to procure the necessary funds to buy up private land, Dr. Chaiyong, director of the Agricultural Land Reform Office, proposed that a new Land Bank be set up. However, it appears that this plan was shelved after 1975.⁸

The Agricultural Land Reform Act of 1975 was structured around the four main points outlined above, and the stages in which they were to be executed were as follows [5, pp. 9-10]:

- (1) Drawing up of plans.
- (2) Designation and announcement of agricultural land reform areas.
- (3) Setting up of provincial agricultural land reform committees and provincial agricultural land reform offices.
- (4) Investigation of landownership and the economic situation of farmers in the designated areas.
- (5) Buying up of private land and the provisional settlement of farmers (farmers settled on state land were given a long-term lease).
- (6) Improvement of the land in the designated areas (realignment of boundaries, installation of irrigation facilities, etc.).
- (7) Permanent settlement of farmers.

This schedule called for the completion of the first four stages within three years of the enactment of the Agricultural Land Reform Act in March 1975 (Article 25).

B. *Plans for the Land Reform in Private Land*

On the basis of this plan, the government set up the Agricultural Land Reform Office in March 1975, with its headquarters in the former residence of Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, on Patiwat Road. In FY1976 (October 1975-September 1976) it designated twelve districts in four provinces as land reform areas for

⁸ *Bangkok Post*, November 1, 1978.

TABLE X
AGRICULTURAL LAND REFORM AREAS DESIGNATED IN FY1977

Private Land*			State Land	
Province	No. of Districts	Land Area	Province	Land Area
Chachoengsao	4	63,000	Chachoengsao	150,000
Nakorn Nayok	4	38,000	Lop Buri	180,000
Ayutthaya	7	76,000	Udon Thani	6,000
Pathum Thani	3	50,000	Nakorn Panom	3,400
Nakorn Pathom	2	31,000	Surin	31,593
Prachin Buri	2	14,000	Loi Et	70,000
Lop Buri	2	16,000	Chiang Mai	6,000
Nakorn Sawan	2	12,000	Uthai Thani	50,000
			Kanchana Buri	100,000
			Nakorn Rajsima	130,000
			Sara Buri	150,000
			Kam Phaeng Phet	6,000
Total	26	300,000	Total	882,993

Source: [3, pp.19, 21].

* Includes 41,035 rai of crown land.

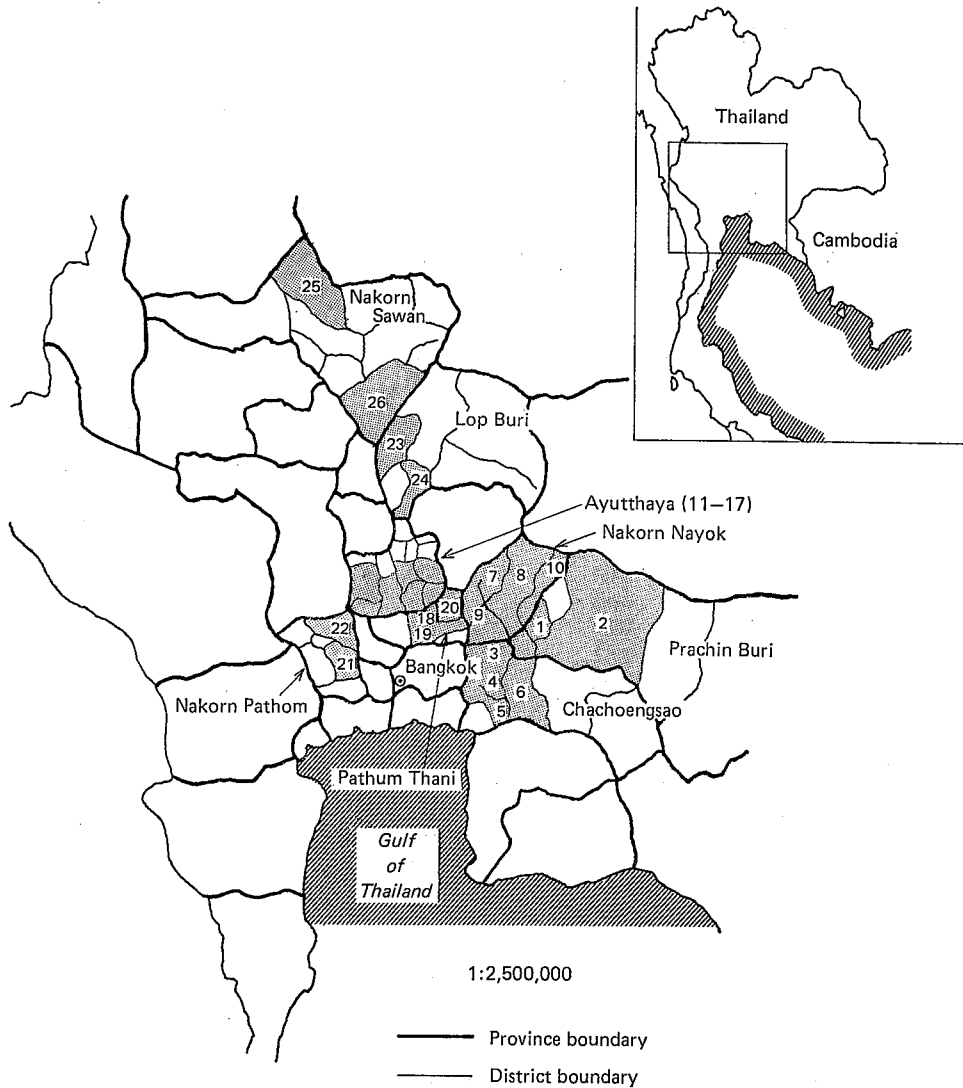
private land, and began a survey of patterns of landownership in certain of these areas. The twelve districts that were designated as land reform areas were the town of Ayutthaya and the districts of Lat Bua Luang, Bang Sai, and Wang Noi in Ayutthaya Province; the districts of Ban Na and Ongkharak in Nakorn Nayok Province; Ban Sang, Kabin Buri, and Nadi in Prachin Buri Province; and Khlong Luang, Nong Sua, and Thanya Buri in Pathum Thani Province. All of these areas were close to Bangkok, and all had high tenancy ratios.

It should be noted that pilot projects called "comprehensive production units" were set up in some of the land reform areas in Ayutthaya, Pathum Thani, and Nakorn Nayok provinces. These pilot project areas were units of approximately 10,000 rai for which wide-ranging agricultural improvements were planned. These improvements were not limited simply to the buying up and redistribution of land held by landlords. They ranged from the land consolidation, the improvement of irrigation facilities, and the diffusion of agricultural technology to the extension of credit and the promotion of sales of agricultural products through the agricultural cooperatives. In other words, comprehensive land reform, including land redistribution, was planned for the pilot project areas.

In FY1977, the land reform areas for private land were increased from twelve districts to twenty-six districts in eight provinces (see Table X). In addition, state lands in twelve provinces were newly designated as land reform areas. The total of these areas came to 300,000 rai of private land and 880,000 rai of state land. This land was scheduled to be allocated to 30,000 farming households. The private land areas included 41,035 rai of land owned by the Royal Crown Bureau in fifteen districts of six provinces made available by the king of Thailand.

Figure 1 and Table XI show the ratio and the distribution of tenant land in

Fig. 1. Agricultural Land Reform Areas (Private Land in Eight Provinces)



Note: The specification of districts is given in Table XI.

the twenty-six districts in eight provinces which were designated as land reform areas in 1977. A single glance at these will reveal that, except for one area, all of the districts were in the Chao Phraya Delta region, and all were areas where the tenant land and farming ratio was relatively high. This was a natural development, considering that Article 25 of the Agricultural Land Reform Act stipulated that districts with a high tenancy ratio were to be given priority in the selection of target areas. In addition, the following administrative considerations probably also played a part in the decision of the government to concentrate the land reform areas for private land into the delta region.

TABLE XI
LANDOWNERSHIP IN AGRICULTURAL LAND REFORM AREAS (%)

Province, District	Landowner Farmer*	Tenant Farmer*	Landless Farmer*	Tenancy Ratio†
Prachin Buri:				
① Ban Sang	45.9	34.7	19.4	31.8
② Kabin Buri	75.2	11.6	13.2	9.8
Average	75.6	12.4	12.0	15.3
Chachoengsao:				
③ Bang Nam Prieo	56.6	22.3	21.1	67.9
④ Muang	34.9	46.5	18.6	62.4
⑤ Ban Po	36.4	45.9	17.7	57.9
⑥ Bang Kla	65.7	26.0	8.3	33.5
Average	50.1	35.3	14.6	52.0
Nakorn Nayok:				
⑦ Ban Na	43.7	34.6	21.7	40.9
⑧ Muang	29.3	42.5	28.2	44.6
⑨ Ongkharak	11.7	63.5	24.8	46.2
⑩ Pak Phli	49.0	32.8	18.2	26.0
Average	32.9	43.2	23.9	41.4
Ayutthaya:				
⑪ Bang Sai	21.4	47.0	31.6	44.3
⑫ Sena	22.4	41.9	35.7	41.9
⑬ Uthai	10.9	50.4	38.7	65.6
⑭ Bang Pa-in	19.2	45.3	35.5	54.1
⑮ Muang	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
⑯ Lat Bua Luang	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
⑰ Wang Noi	10.0	59.8	30.2	75.5
Average	18.2	44.4	36.9	52.4
Pathum Thani:				
⑱ Khlung Luang	5.7	67.7	26.6	70.9
⑲ Nong Sua	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	76.4
⑳ Thanya Buri	n.a.	30.7	n.a.	77.9
Average	18.7	59.6	21.7	65.2
Nakorn Pathom:				
㉑ Nakhon Chaisi	47.0	34.3	18.7	40.8
㉒ Bang Len	38.6	42.6	18.8	41.5
Average	60.9	24.9	14.2	32.9
Lop Buri:				
㉓ Ban Mi	20.3	47.0	32.7	44.5
㉔ Muang	43.4	33.2	23.4	36.5
Average	57.4	24.5	18.1	n.a.
Nakorn Sawan:				
㉕ Banphot Phisai	87.3	4.6	8.1	3.2
㉖ Takli	59.9	27.8	12.3	23.5
Average	78.7	13.2	8.1	n.a.

Source: Compiled from Nos. 42, 47, 49, 52, 57, 59, 60, and 61 issues of [17].

Note: Average figure for the entire province.

* Ratio of households. Tenant farmers include landowners who partially rent the land. Most of landless farmers are daily wage workers on farm.

† Ratio of total rented land cultivated both by fully tenant farmers and landowner-tenant farmers to total cultivated area.

TABLE XII
GOVERNMENT LAND PURCHASES FROM LANDLORDS
(AS OF SEPTEMBER 1979)

Province	Area Already Purchased (Rai)	Buying Price	
		Cash (1,000 Baht)	Government Bonds (1,000 Baht)
Nakorn Nayok	18,019	12,843	7,798
Nakorn Pathom	1,544	1,867	1,092
Ayutthaya	6,355	7,008	1,637
Pathum Thani	21,268	20,877	36,109
Uthai Thani	2,612	1,872	682
Prachin Buri	1,840	1,853	487
Total	51,638	46,320	47,805

Source: [4].

TABLE XIII
GOVERNMENT LAND PURCHASES FROM THE CROWN
(AS OF SEPTEMBER 1979)

Province	Area Already Purchased (Rai)	Buying Price	
		Cash (1,000 Baht)	Government Bonds (1,000 Baht)
Nakorn Nayok	3,541	4,180	543
Nakorn Pathom	1,016	760	1,980
Ayutthaya	5,286	2,483	7,449
Chachoengsao	14,810	6,243	18,730
Pathum Thani	12,577	5,207	15,622
Total	37,230	18,873	44,324

Source: [4].

Firstly, land titles had been issued for over 90 per cent of landholdings in Ayutthaya, Pathum Thani, and other provinces around Bangkok that were the first areas designated for the land reform. This meant that it was much easier to survey the pattern of landholdings in these areas than in areas such as north Thailand or the regions surrounding the delta, where the percentage of land titles issued was considerably low.

Secondly, absentee landlords were numerous in the provinces around Bangkok, and it was felt that it would be easier to negotiate the buying up of lands in these areas, and to obtain large consolidated tracts of land, than in other areas dominated by small-scale resident landlords. These two aspects of administrative efficiency played a large role in the choice of land reform areas.

At the end of September 1979, the Agricultural Land Reform Office issued a report entitled *A Summary of the Achievements of the Thai Agricultural Land Reform (December 1975–September 1979)* which outlined the extent to which the land reform in private land had been implemented, primarily in central Thailand, since their inauguration in 1976 [4]. The contents of this report are summarized in Tables XII and XIII, which show that by 1979, land had been

bought up from landlords in six of the nine provinces (Uthai Thani had been added to the FY1977 list [See Table X]) designated as land reform areas and the total area of this land came to 51,638 rai. In addition, a total of 37,230 rai of crown land had been purchased in five provinces in the central delta region. However, the area of private land designated by the government as land reform areas since 1975 came, by September 1979, to a total of 2,216,340 rai [4, p. 2]. Thus in that four year period, the government was only able to purchase a total of 88,868 rai of both private and crown land—a mere 4.0 per cent of the private land that the government had designated for the land reform. Also the fact that over 40 per cent of all the private land purchased was made available by the crown should not be overlooked. Thus, at least in the case of landlord owned land, it would be difficult to claim that the land reform was proceeding smoothly. In fact, viewed in terms of the original plan, they displayed signs of retrogression on a large scale. Furthermore, as early as the end of 1978, the Agricultural Land Reform Office itself declared that the land reform in private land had ended in failure [8, Vol. 3, p. 5]. It stated:

The land [necessary for the land reform] would be acquired by purchasing of privately owned land, on the one hand, and by reclassification of public land (usually forest reserves), on the other. The emphasis was first laid on the acquisition of private land with just compensation when the Agricultural Land Reform Act was promulgated. But the failure to secure private land (apart from the Crown Land) for redistribution among the peasant farmers led to a shift in the emphasis to public land.

As in the past, Thailand had most of her experience in settling farmers in public land (nikhom scheme), usually in encroached forest reserves, *land reform apparently was not different from land settlement schemes already in existence.* [italics added]

There were several reasons for the failure of the land reform in private land, two of which are discussed below.

The first was that the budget the government appropriated to execute the land reform was insufficient. For example in FY1977 the entire budget for the land reform was 540 million baht (U.S.\$27 million, see Table XIV) and of this 250 million baht were budgeted for buying up land. However, the amount of private land scheduled for purchase was 260,000 rai (300,000 rai minus 40,000 rai made available by the crown) and if the unit price per rai is put tentatively at 3,000 baht then 780 million baht would be needed to purchase all the private land scheduled.⁹ Thus, given the size of the 1977 budget, it was impossible from the start to achieve the planned goals. Then in FY1978, the total budget was reduced by over half to 300 million baht, making it even more difficult to implement the reforms in private land. This problem was made more severe in the FY1980 when the entire budget was reduced to 80,750,000 baht, of which only 10,050,000 baht were earmarked for land purchases. However, the amount of private land scheduled to be purchased by the Agricultural Land Reform Office in FY1980 was 50,000 rai and a simple calculation will give the unit price that the govern-

⁹ Calculated from the case of land reform areas in Ayutthaya Province in 1978.

TABLE XIV
BUDGET FOR THE AGRICULTURAL LAND REFORM

Fiscal Year	1976	1977	1978
Annual budget	45,839	542,413	297,237

(1,000 baht)

Source: [12, p. 270].

ment planned to pay as 200 baht per rai. This price was completely unrealistic, and these figures show that the financial backing for the land reform in private land was rapidly and steadily deteriorating.

The second reason for the failure of the land reform in private land was that the landlords were strongly opposed to them. This opposition was anticipated from the beginning and so did not take anyone by surprise. The problem was not so much that the Agricultural Land Reform Office was unable to devise any countermeasures to deal with the anticipated opposition, but rather, that it was not given the authority strong enough to do so. The government as well did not have the strength of will to forcibly impose the land reform in the face of opposition from the landlords. It is also difficult to claim, too, that the government made exhaustive preparations prior to tackling the problem of buying up private land. For example, the Agricultural Land Reform Act provided for three quarters of the price of the purchased land to be paid for in government bonds with interest rate of 8 per cent per annum. However, the real value of these bonds was falling due to inflation, and the government was somewhat unable to indicate countermeasures to deal with this problem. This was a major reason behind the landlords' hesitation to sell their lands.

Thus the land reform in private land was quite inadequate both in terms of budget and in terms of their policy vis-à-vis the landlords. At all events, there are many aspects of the land reform in private land—as well as state land—that remain to be clarified. Therefore, we should point out that more concrete investigations are called for in the future, including efforts to describe a detailed picture of the situation in the land reform areas.

C. *Plans for the Land Reform in State Land*

The above discussion revealed that the redistribution of landlord owned land was greatly retarded, but what was the reform in state land, on which the Agricultural Land Reform Office had laid its greatest emphasis? As shown in Table X, in FY1977 the government planned to distribute 880,000 rai of state land in twelve provinces, and following that, another 6,060,000 rai in the four year period from 1977 to 1980 as a part of the Four-Year Agricultural Land Reform Plan set up in conjunction with the Five-Year Economic and Social Development Plan [2, p. 13].

According to the report summarizing the progress of the enforcement of the land reform published in September 1979 [4], surveys to determine patterns of landholding had been completed in 3,050,000 rai of the state land which had been designated as land reform areas by 1979 (see Table XV). This total comes

TABLE XV
 AGRICULTURAL LAND REFORM IN STATE LAND (AS OF SEPTEMBER 1979)

	No. of Designated Agricultural Land Reform Areas	Completed	Under Way	Planned	Total
Land reform planned or in preparation	39	1,466	3,143	655	5,265
Socioeconomic survey	39	2,220	1,398	732	4,350
Landholding survey	39	3,045	—	1,305	4,350

Source: [4].

to 4,530,000 rai when the areas which had not yet been processed are included—quite a presentable record when compared to the original schedule (in the Four-Year Plan). However, by September 1979, only 2,220,000 rai of the total had been surveyed to discover the socioeconomic conditions of the agricultural households in addition to the patterns of landholding. Furthermore, only about 147,000 rai of all the land surveyed had been processed through the planning and preparation stages. This was less than one quarter of the target of the Four-Year Plan. These figures represent a much higher success rate than that for the private land and may give the impression, to some extent, that the land reform was making progress on state land.

However, by 1979, areas in which the drafting of the land reform had been completed, and where permanent settlement of farmers on the land was being carried out, amounted to a total of only 34,425 rai in four provinces, and involved only 1,778 households. It would be difficult then to claim that the land reform was being pushed ahead vigorously. For example, 1,760,000 of the 3,050,000 rai of state land surveyed for patterns of landholding were being cultivated illegally, and even if the settlement schemes mentioned above had been concentrated solely on these squatting farmers, they would have only been able to cover 2 per cent of the land area in question. Judged from results, rather than planning, there was very little difference between the land reform on state land and that on private land.

A major reason for the delay in the land reform schedule on state land was the absolutely insufficient budget, a problem shared by the reform on private land. However, there was yet another factor at work in slowing the reform on state land. As shown in Table XVI, a number of government offices in addition to the Agricultural Land Reform Office participated in planning related to state land. For example, in 1977 the Agricultural Land Reform Office was only directly responsible for 10 per cent of the state land scheduled for reform. This resulted in a quite noticeable lack of uniformity in the enforcement of reform on state land, and differences in approach and conflicts of interest between government offices impeded the progress of land reform planning as a whole [5, p. 13].

Therefore, it is difficult to anticipate that land reform plans on state land will

TABLE XVI
DISTRIBUTION OF LAND REFORM BY GOVERNMENT BUREAU (FY1977)

	(1,000 .rai)	
	Private Land	State Land
Royal Irrigation Department	46	100
Applied Science Promotion Agency	—	150
Department of Cooperatives Promotion	—	50
Department of Land Development	—	50
Royal Highways Department	—	30
Construction Consultant	78	400
Agricultural Land Reform Office	176	86
Total	300	866

Source: [2, pp. 12-13].

proceed smoothly or on a large scale in future. Instead, it seems that clearing and settlement of state land will be carried out as a curtailed version of the *nikhom* projects.

IV. THE RETARDATION OF THE LAND REFORM

The land reform, which were legislated under the direct impetus of the "Student Revolution" of October 1973 and the peasant movement which followed it, began to show signs of rapid retardation within three years of their promulgation. By 1979, although the government was still allocating a budget for the reform and the Agricultural Land Reform Office was enthusiastically continuing its activities, in reality the reform had fallen far behind as compared with the original intentions. Why did the land reform fall into such a rapid decline? The writer would like to conclude this paper with a final consideration of this question.

The most important factor leading to the behind schedule of the reform was the change in the political situation in Thailand, especially the military coup d'état carried out on October 6, 1976. The coup toppled the civilian government which was attempting to implement the reform. At the same time, the new government, Thanin government, issued the martial law and the series of directives including the abolishment of the existing constitution in order to recover the sociopolitical unrest in the end of 1976 to the normal situations rapidly. In particular, the government tried to establish the social stability in rural areas by introducing a new political system backed by the strong powers of the army and driving away the leaders of peasant movement according to the "Proclamation for the Control of Persons Dangerous to Society" (Proclamation No. 22 of the National Administrative Reform Council).

These systems were basically inherited by the Kriangsak government which drove Prime Minister Thanin from power in the coup d'état of October 20, 1977, and by subsequent regimes. And the danger of land problems developing into a political crisis through the medium of a peasant movement was temporarily suppressed under the military rule. As a result, the necessity of meeting farmers'

demands for promotion of the land reform receded for the time being. In accordance with such change in the situations, the Kriangsak government and subsequent administrations attempted to develop own policies to deal with land problems, which emphasized more direct assistance to the farmers, such as increasing the financing available to indebted farmers and working to raise farmers' incomes.

Policy directed at the problem of farmers' indebtedness developed around a survey of farmers' indebtedness and the acceleration of assistance to farmers in redeeming their land by funds made available to them through the Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives. Policy for increasing farmers' incomes took concrete form in the Program for Economic Recovery Plan of Villages Suffered by Natural Disasters (*khrongkan funfu setakit chonnabot thi prasoppai thammachart*). This recovery program was directly concerned with relief for farmers who were the victims of the 1977 drought, and at the same time it aimed at creating employment opportunities for farmers during the leisure season and increasing their nonagricultural incomes through projects for the construction and repair of irrigation facilities. In other words, the Kriangsak government in fact gave the priority to the redistribution of income.

However, it should be noted here that in reality such policies, which aimed at improving the income disparity between urban and rural areas, were already being put into effect under the Khukrit government a full year before the coup d'état of 1976. The Khukrit government which took over from the Sanya provisional cabinet after general election on March 1975 was ostensibly committed to pursuing the three programs which had been the mainstays of the Sanya government's policies with regard to the farmers: land reform, control of tenancy, and resolution of the problem of farmers' indebtedness. However, when the "Pan-ngern [capital transfer] Project" was announced in April 1975, this project, which was one of the income redistribution policy, in reality formed the nucleus of the Khukrit government's policies toward the farmers [10]. Like the Kriangsak government's recovery program for areas affected by natural disaster mentioned above, the Pan-ngern Project poured government funds on a large scale into the villages (*tam bon* level), using them to mobilize the farmers for the construction of roads, bridges, and other public works. In this fashion, it aimed at the rectification of the income disparity between poor farmers and the rest of the population by increasing their nonagricultural income. The amount the Khukrit government budgeted for this program reached 2.4 billion baht, more than fifty times the budget of 45 million baht allocated at the time (1976) to the land reform.

In addition, the Khukrit government took a quite different approach to the peasant movement from that of the preceding Sanya government. First of all, on May 6, 1975, it categorically denied farmers' demands pressing for the fulfillment of the promises made by the Sanya government in response to the seven demands in November 1974. Then beginning in August, it initiated repressive policies against the Peasants Federation of Thailand and other movements among the farmers. The breakdown in negotiations with the government in May 1975

marked a turning point for the peasant movement in Thailand as a whole, and from June through August there was a continuing series of assassinations of peasant leaders.¹⁰ Then, with the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975, the Village Scouts and other right-wing organizations were formed in rural areas, and the activities of the Peasants Federation of Thailand were curtailed. All of these factors contributed to the gradual decline of the peasant movement.

Thus, by the end of 1975, when the land reform actually began to be put into effect, the government had already largely lost interest in promptly promoting the reform, while the peasant movement which had been pressing for a solution to the land problem was in the process of dissolution. As a result, the plans for implementation of the reform published by the Agricultural Land Reform Office from 1975 on did not have adequate financial backing, and the majority of them never came into existence. In other words, from the time the land reform was promulgated and entered the initial stages of implementation, they were already showing signs of retardation. This tendency was only spurred on by the advent of authoritarian government with the coup d'état of October 1976.

As a result of the changes in the political situation in Thailand and the changes in policy with regard to the peasant problems which have been discussed above, the land reform fell far short of their planned goals from the beginning. However, the land problems in Thailand which were instrumental in bringing the Agricultural Land Reform Act of 1975 into existence have not been alleviated. On the contrary, they in fact seem to be growing in intensity. Nor can the authoritarian political system and the income redistribution policies adopted since the middle of 1975 be expected to eliminate Thailand's land problems at their source. Instead, it is likely that the intensification of the land problems will pressure the government into attempting structural changes in landholdings. When that time comes, a debate will inevitably develop around the significance and enforcement of the Agricultural Land Reform Act of 1975.

¹⁰ See, *Sayam Rat sapda wicharn* [Weekly magazine Sayam Rat], August 5, 1979, pp. 18–21.

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APPENDIX
CALENDAR OF THE PEASANT MOVEMENT AND THE GOVERNMENT RESPONSE (1974-75)

1973	Political Situation	Peasant Movement	Agricultural Land Reform and Related Policies	Other Policies toward the Farmers
1974	<p>Oct. 13-15 "Student Revolution"</p> <p>Oct. 14 First Sanya Provisional Cabinet</p>	<p>Jan. Raj Buri peasants resist confiscation of land by landlord</p> <p>Mar. 25 Demonstration and presentation of petitions in Bangkok by peasants from Chon Buri</p> <p>May 7 Presentation of petitions in Bangkok by peasants from Nakorn Sawan, Phet Buri, Phisanuloke, and Phichit provinces</p> <p>May 27 Three demands for aid to peasants made by the Thai National Students Center and other organizations</p> <p>June 24 Seven demands by farmers from Nakorn Sawan, Chainat, Phichit, Petchaboon, and Kan Phaeng Phet provinces</p> <p>June 25 Joined by peasants from Ayutthaya, Tak, Phrae, Prachin Buri, and Uthai Thani provinces bringing the number of</p>	<p>Feb. 18 Government announces its intention to implement agricultural land reform</p> <p>Mar. ? Agricultural Land Reform Act Drafting Committee set up</p> <p>Apr. 17 Chaiyong, Deputy Director of the Land Development Department, calls for early implementation of the Agricultural Land Reform</p> <p>June 12 Draft of the Agricultural Land Reform Act published</p>	<p>June 4 Committees for Resolution of Farmers' Debt Problems set up at eight centers in six provinces</p> <p>July (late) Central Committee for Enquiry of Farmers' Debt Problems established</p>
	<p>May 31 Second Sanya Provisional Cabinet</p>			

APPENDIX (Continued)

	Political Situation	Peasant Movement	Agricultural Land Reform and Related Policies	Other Policies toward the Farmers
	Oct. 7 Promulgation of the 1974 Constitution	<p>peasants assembled in Bangkok to over 2,000</p> <p>June 29 Government agrees on six categories of assistance to peasants</p> <p>Nov. 20 Farmers from Phisanuloke and sixteen other provinces present seven demands</p> <p>Nov. 24 Formation of the Peasants Federation of Thailand</p> <p>Nov. 26 Government rejects the seven demands</p> <p>Nov. 29 The number of peasants assembled in Bangkok passes 10,000. The seven demands are presented again during a demonstration at the Prime Minister's residence. Government agrees to the demands</p>	<p>Aug. (late) Agricultural Land Reform Act presented to the Cabinet</p> <p>Dec. 10 Agricultural Land Reform Act presented to Parliament</p> <p>Dec. 20 Agricultural Land Reform Act passed the first hearing in the House</p>	<p>Dec. 17 Promulgation of the Act Controlling the Rent of Paddy Land</p>
1975	<p>Jan. 26 General Election</p> <p>Mar. 17 Khukrit coalition government</p>	<p>Mar. 22 Demands for assistance to peasants, especially in northern Thailand</p> <p>Mar. 25 Twelve demands submitted to the government</p> <p>Apr. 30-May 6 Eleven demands presented to the</p>	<p>Jan. 17 Agricultural Land Reform Act passes Parliament</p> <p>Mar. 5 Promulgation and implementation of the Agricultural Land Reform Act</p>	<p>Apr. 1 Pan-ngern Project (Tambon Program) announced</p>

APPENDIX (Continued)

Political Situation	Peasant Movement	Agricultural Land Reform and Related Policies	Other Policies toward the Farmers
	<p>government in Bangkok by peasants from 26 provinces</p> <p>May 1 Formation of the Three Groups Association (Workers, Farmers, and Students)</p> <p>May 6 Rejection by the government of all demands. Following this, the Peasants Federation of Thailand organized movements in each province, and particularly in northern Thailand, pressing for the enforcement of the Act Controlling the Rent of Paddy Land. This sparked off a series of assassinations of the leaders of the Peasants Federation of Thailand (by August 1975 twenty-two leaders were killed)</p> <p>July 30 Assassination of Intha Sribunluang, Vice-President of the Peasants Federation of Thailand</p> <p>The peasant movement weakened gradually after this</p>	<p>July 28 Government announces plans for agricultural land reform in the three provinces of Ayuthaya, Nakorn Nayok, and Prachin Buri</p>	<p>May 3 Implemented</p> <p>May 20 Decision made to establish an Agricultural Court (later suspended)</p>

Sources: *Nation Review* and *Prachatipatai*.