

# INTRODUCTION

## THE DAP IN PARLIAMENT

This collection of my parliamentary speeches offers a glimpse of history and politics in the make in Malaysia in the last decade. Space has necessitated speeches on other important issues to be omitted.

The exclusive confinement in this collection to parliamentary speeches reflects the importance the DAP places on the parliamentary democratic process in which Parliament occupies the apex of power.

Unfortunately, the DAP's experience with parliamentary democracy had not been a pleasant one. We found, especially in the 1969-1974 Parliamentary session, that the ruling party was wroth to use its parliamentary majority to abuse and pervert parliamentary procedures and conventions for petty political advantage.

For instance, at the very first meeting of the Dewan Rakyat in February/March 1971, following the lifting of the 21-month suspension of Parliament, the 13 DAP Members of Parliament were forced on the 10th day of the 16-day meeting to protest in the strongest possible manner against the partiality and unfairness of the Speaker by staging a walk-out from the Chamber and boycotting the rest of the Parliamentary sittings. This happened when the Speaker carried out the government instructions to 'punish' the DAP Members of Parliament during the debate on the Royal Address by denying even a single DAP MP a chance to speak or reply to vicious personal attacks on the DAP leaders by government members, although the DAP with 13 MPs was the largest Parliamentary group. The 'punishment' was for the DAP's 'misdemeanour' in daring to speak out and vote against the earlier 1971 Constitution Amendment Bill, which removed the traditional privilege of parliamentary immunity and made it an offence for anyone to question four 'sensitive' subjects.

On April 18, and 19, 1973, in two DAP attempts to move an amendment to the Motion of Thanks on the Royal Address so as to register public anxiety over the mass failures in the MCF examination solely because of failure in Bahasa Malaysia – over 14,000 candidates failed because of this – the Speaker ruled that no amendments were permitted to a Motion of Thanks on the Royal Address. This ran counter to all accepted parliamentary practice and betrayed the Speaker's meagre understanding of parliamentary traditions and conventions, namely an amendment to a Motion of Thanks on the Royal Address was a censure against the ruling party and meant no disrespect or discourtesy to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

In the first Parliamentary meeting in February/March 1971, DAP MPs did their homework and submitted an avalanche of questions both for oral and written answers by Ministers covering a wide range of subjects in-

timately connected with the people's livelihood. I myself submitted 152 questions. As a result, the Standing Orders of the Dewan Rakyat was subsequently amended to limit each member to a maximum of 20 oral questions and five written questions for each Parliamentary meeting !

As conscientious political workers, DAP MPs made full use of the parliamentary device of Adjournment Motions, the half-hour debate before the adjournment of the House in each sitting where MPs could raise specific issues or problems for Ministerial attention and reply. Amendments were again made to the Dewan Rakyat Standing Orders to ban Adjournment Motions in the two long Parliamentary meetings in each session, namely the Royal Debate meeting and the Budget meeting.

Undeterred, DAP MPs continued to avail themselves of the Adjournment Motions during the two short parliamentary meetings. The Government then resorted to the unheard of action of sabotaging the Adjournment Motions by emptying the House of its Members, leaving behind one Member or Minister, who would draw the Speaker's attention to the lack of a quorum, forcing an adjournment of the House – as Government MPs outside the Chamber would laugh like naughty boys playing a clever trick ignoring the bell calling for the quorum to be filled. In the House of Commons, in the United Kingdom, Adjournment Motions are invariably made to an almost empty House, but nobody stands up to sabotage them by engineering and shouting 'no quorum'!

On 19th July 1974, I was suspended from the House by the Speaker because I termed the National Front a 'National Fraud.'

Private motions by Opposition MPs were killed by not giving time. After the 1974 general elections, I wrote to the Prime Minister, the late Tun Razak, protesting against such abuses of parliamentary procedures. This produced positive results for time was given for private motions by Opposition MPs. But lately, there appeared to be a relapse to such unparliamentary tactics, for in April this year, my motion on Merdeka University was killed by the government denying parliamentary time.

In February 1975, the Government resorted to the unprecedented step of declaring the Menglembu Parliamentary seat vacant and a writ of by-election was issued, when the Member of Parliament for Menglembu, Fan Yew Teng, convicted of sedition by the Kuala Lumpur High Court, was still appealing to the Federal Court against conviction.

I immediately despatched a letter to the Prime Minister protesting against this 'usurpation of the parliamentary powers by unconstitutional and unparliamentary acts' and urged him as Prime Minister 'to uphold the rules of natural justice, accepted form of parliamentary practice and the sanctity of the Constitution by staying the holding of a by-election of the parliamentary constituency of Menglembu'. (See Tun Razak's reply, page xxi)

Three days before the by-election polling on March 15, 1975, the High Court gave a declaration that there was no vacancy in the Menglembu constituency and stopped the by-election.

It is clear that there is an urgent need for the mobilisation of public opinion in defence of parliamentary ideas, traditions and institutions from the encroachments of those whose democratic credentials are dubious. As Acton has aptly said: "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely". For such a mobilisation to succeed, there must be a greater public awareness and consciousness of the threats to parliamentary ideas, traditions and institutions - and it is with this object in mind that this book is born.

May 25, 1978.

Lim Kit Siang

#### **Acknowledgement**

In the publication of this book, special mention must be made of Sdr. N. Madhavan Nair for his tireless energy in getting this collection out of the press.

#### **Post-script**

(When this book was in the press, news came that Fan Yew Teng had announced his resignation from the party accompanied by a long tract giving the reasons for his resignation. Reproduced in the next page is the press statement which I made on May 28, 1978 on Fan's resignation: LKS)

I have not yet received Fan Yew Teng's letter of resignation from the Party, apart from press reports.

Fan Yew Teng was one of the DAP leaders victimised and persecuted for leadership in Opposition politics, spending five years from 1971-75 in a seditious trial which went up twice to the Privy Council, and which ended in conviction with its concomitant consequences of disqualification as a Member of Parliament and State Assemblyman.

Fan Yew Teng has been away from Malaysia for the last two-and-a-half years since November 1975. When I met him in London and Cambridge in July 1977, I asked him to return to Malaysia and to help organise the Party. He expressed disillusionment with the democratic process in Malaysia, and spoke of the futility of the constitutional political struggle. He said party work was not like selling ice cream, and needed conviction before it could be undertaken.

Fan Yew Teng is a good example of a Malaysian nationalist who, because of the repressive actions he had personally suffered, has been driven into disenchantment with the constitutional and democratic process. More and more Malaysians are in fact joining the ranks of those who see the democratic and constitutional process as a fraud and futility, because of the absence of credible outlets for peaceful, democratic changes in our society or for meaningful expression of dissent and criticism. This is also the major reason for the exodus of professionals abroad.

Fan Yew Teng's resignation from the Party has not come, therefore, as a complete surprise to me or other Party leaders except for the timing and the mode of resignation.

I feel sad at this political parting of ways. I feel sadder that Fan Yew Teng, to find an honourable political exit from Menglembu and the political arena in Malaysia, has chosen the DAP as a whipping boy.

It shocks me deeply that Fan Yew Teng's resignation letter is so personal, reeking with dishonourable insinuations and even venom, which I leave to him to reflect at other times as to whether there is validity or justification.

I reject his contention that at the Tokyo Socialist International Party Leaders' Conference last December, I had taken the stand that (1) repression in Malaysia is to be condemned but not in Singapore; (2) that the Internal Security Act in Malaysia and Singapore is 'a necessary evil'. Like other arguments of his in his resignation letter, these are things which Fan Yew Teng has chosen to read into my speech and to provide the basis for his attack on me and the DAP. As many of his attacks are based on these self-drawn and unfounded conclusions, there is no need to refer to the arguments for the simple reason that they are based on false assumptions.

The DAP has not differentiated between Malaysia and Singapore in our condemnation of the Internal Security Act. The DAP's stand against the ISA was adopted at the 1971 Party Congress on my initiative. I had personally and publicly called for the release of detainees like Said Zahari, Dr. Lim Hock Siew, Dr. Poh Soo Kai and Ho Piao, who were arrested in 'Operation Cold Store' in Singapore in 1963. In March this year, in Parliament, during the debate on the Royal Address, I spoke of the need for an ASEAN Commission on Human Rights to protect and advance human rights in the ASEAN countries, and to bring to an end the detention without trial laws like the Internal Security Act in Malaysia, Singapore and other ASEAN countries.

Fan Yew Teng has chosen to misrepresent what I said in Tokyo, alleging that I had advocated PAP's re-admission into the Socialist International. For the record, in Tokyo, the Japanese Democratic Socialist Party had proposed a review of the case of the PAP membership in the Socialist International. In my comments, I said that this question merited deeper study. I had expressed the view that in 1976 "it might have been more apt and beneficial if the Socialist International, before taking the extreme measure of considering the expulsion of the Singapore PAP, to have made a deeper study of the problems confronting democratic socialists in non-communist South East Asia. If influence is to be applied on Singapore PAP in the area of detention without trial, greater effect might be expected from its membership inside the Socialist International, rather than outside."

If Fan Yew Teng is not happy with any political question in the DAP, the right and proper thing for him to do is to present his views at the Party Congress. In fact, when I met him in Cambridge last year, I suggested that he return to Malaysia and I offered to convene a Special Congress for him to present his views about the futility of the democratic constitutional struggle.

Fan Yew Teng has not availed himself of this party avenue, but chosen instead to mount an attack on the DAP which in many instances were unfounded and based on inaccurate reports to him, regardless of the harmful effect on the DAP electorally, in view of the nearness of the general elections. His action has made the enemies of the DAP, the National Front on the one hand, and the mosquito opposition parties whose sole aim is to 'subvert and destroy' the DAP, very happy.

It is Fan Yew Teng's prerogative to act as he had decided, and I wish him the best in whatever new endeavours he has embarked upon.

(Lim Kit Siang)