

# Whither Democracy?

An Analysis of the Malaysian Experience



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3. Loh Kim Heng  
Jumlah mengundi 37,604  
Peratus mengundi 79.29  
Undi rosak 1,501  
Majoriti 15,199

KUALA LUMPUR  
Prosecutor  
1. Mohd. Saleh  
2. Hussain b. Drani  
3. Mohideem Abdul  
4. Kader sjo Mohd Yusoff  
Rawther

Jumlah mengundi: 32,086  
Peratus mengundi: 76.07  
Undi rosak: 914  
Majoriti: 9,318  
NIBONG TEBAL (30,467)

1. Dr. Goh Cheng Teik  
2. Desa bin Saat  
3. N. Shanmugam  
4. Khoo Soo Kheng

PUCUK PIMPINAN  
KUBANG PASU (7,022)  
berpendapat bahawa orang-orang  
Uttrak  
ak-in.

1. Datuk Seri (Dr) Mahathir  
Mohamad  
2. Halim Arshat

Jumlah mengundi  
Peratus mengundi  
Undi rosak  
Majoriti

KULIM-BANDAR  
1. En. Abdul Kadir  
Fadzir  
2. Abdul Aziz  
Hj. Kassim

1. Datuk Seri (Dr) Mahathir  
Mohamad  
2. Halim Arshat

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fruits! Nor should those  
in charge of preparing  
examination papers in  
The Ministry of  
Education consult our  
students on the type of  
questions which should  
be set!

government with a more  
accurate picture in the  
actual situation of the  
country. It is possible and  
sometimes the nature and  
extent of certain communi-  
cated to those with the  
power and authority to  
provide redress.

This happens especially  
when the men at the apex  
are heavily dependent on  
those at the middle-level  
for information and analy-  
sis. It is likely that the men  
in the middle will try to  
present an attractive but  
false version of the situa-  
tion in order to gain the  
esteem of the men at the top.  
-And men at the top will not  
realise the truth as long as  
there are more than one  
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kompang-beating pemuda.

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# Whither Democracy?

*An Analysis of the Malaysian Experience*

edited by

Khoo Yoke Kuan, Coordinator of Publications, Aliran



PUSTAKA PERDANA



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*Differences of opinion in my community is a Divine blessing.*

Hadith

*Meng-tse said (to King Hsuan), "...when all your immediate ministers say that a man is worthy, it is not sufficient. When all your great officers say so, it is not sufficient. When all your people say so, look into the case, and if you find him to be worthy, then employ him. When all your immediate ministers say that a man is no good, do not listen to them. When all your great officers say so, do not listen to them. When all your people say so, look into the case, and if you find him to be no good, then dismiss him."*

Meng-tse  
3rd century B.C.

*"In the so-called free countries the majority of the people are not free, they are driven by the minority to a goal which is not even known to them. This becomes possible only because people do not acknowledge moral and spiritual freedom as their object. They create huge eddies with their passions..... But the doom which is waiting to overtake them is as certain as death – for man's truth – is moral truth, and his emancipation is in the spiritual life."*

Tagore

*"Freedom is a human not a western ideal. The whole earth is the temple of freedom. Its spirit moves wherever men are learning to do justice to each other."*

Lionel Curtis – quoted in  
Muhammad Natsir *Capita Selecta*  
(Bulan Bintang, Djakarta, 1973, p. 305).

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## PREFACE

This book is composed of the whole series of speeches and discussion sessions that transpired at the Forum Rakyat on "Democracy in Malaysia" organised by Aliran on December 10-11, 1977 in Penang. After twenty years of independence and for a multi-ethnic country like Malaysia, this book on democracy is but a small step towards the true understanding of a system of government that Malaysians would very much like to see strengthened. It is a modest contribution to the existing literature on democracy. It also serves as an important platform upon which all of us could reflect and ponder on how much we have achieved in terms of democratic values. Idealism is not the essence of this book; rather it is the reality of a developing nation struggling to achieve higher economic standards and national unity.

Three themes were selected for discussion at the forum: Democracy and the Man-in-the-Street, Democracy for Development and the Future of Democracy in Malaysia. The participants were from different walks of life — academics, trade unionists, politicians, parliamentarians, lawyers, journalists and leaders of interest groups. They gave their frank opinions and expressed deep concern for the need to preserve democratic values and ideals in our country. We all know that in a multiethnic society where problems of national unity are more complex than in other societies, there are greater challenges confronting the creation of a just and equitable society. These challenges were most interestingly elucidated in a talk by Aliran's President.

It is Aliran's fervent hope that readers would find this book useful and beneficial. It is not our aim to provoke or to agitate or even criticize for its own sake. Our aim is merely to bring about a greater level of consciousness among the Malaysian public on issues and problems that have direct relevance to their lives so that a more enlightened citizenry will emerge. This objective is in consonance with the aspirations of the Rukunegara.

It must be noted here that each individual speaker presented his viewpoints from his own experience, knowledge and analysis of the existing situation. While the opinions of Aliran members reflect those of the society, it must be emphasised that we are not responsible for the views expressed by the other speakers who spoke for themselves or on behalf of their organizations.

Whether the reader subscribes to all the viewpoints is left to his good judgement. The book should be read with an open mind and whatever conclusions arrived at, one cannot but believe that in a democratic system the rakyat and those in power must work together effectively to safeguard democracy so that the aspirations of the people from various communities can be fulfilled.

Aliran wishes to express its gratitude to all the speakers who participated and who consented to having their speeches published in this book. Also I would like to thank all those who in one way or another helped to make this book possible.

May, 1978.

Y.K. Khoo.



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## Welcoming Address by Encik Eusof Izzudin, Co-ordinator, Talks and Seminars Bureau, Aliran

Yang Berhormat, Encik Mohd. Khir Johari, saudara Dr. Chandra Muzaffar, Yang di Pertua Aliran, wartawan-wartawan, tuan-tuan dan puan-puan.

Yang Berhormat, we are aware you are having a tight schedule and had set aside this morning, in fact, the whole day, to be with us and we are very grateful to you for that. This is the first of a series of forums. We intend to organize forums and seminars on issues which we feel are vital to developing nations, like Malaysia. Aliran being a non-partisan organization can play a vital role in educating the rakyat to study and ponder over issues without a prejudiced mind. We are committed to serving the basic democratic principles which are enshrined in our constitution. It is now two decades since our nation achieved independence. It is important that after twenty years, we should reflect and think about how much we have attained by way of democracy. It is also important that we should study how we can strengthen and preserve democracy. Democracy has just come to mean elections, Parliament, and Senate. Democracy does not mean: "You elect us, you let us run the government." It also does not mean: "Yours not to question why, yours to just close your eye."

Democracy means full participation of the people in the policies of the government. The word, democracy, itself originates from the word, "Demos," a Greek word meaning "people." Democracy is the right of the people to participate in the government, the independence of the Judiciary, planning of development through the Parliamentary process. involvement of unions, social groups and political parties in public policy formulation and implementation.

We invited representatives of the ruling party, especially the major component party of the Barisan Nasional to participate in this forum. We also invited representatives of the opposition party, trade unions, the Press and other social groups. It is unfortunate that not many members of the Barisan Nasional could participate in this forum. We hope that we will be able to have them at Aliran's future forums.

On behalf of Aliran, I have to thank Yang Teramat Mulia, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj for his message to the forum. The Tunku had agreed to declare this forum open but as he has to be away in Hongkong, we are sorry that he cannot be with us this morning. I would also like to thank members of the panels, especially those who had come from outside Penang, the Press, advertisers in our souvenir programme, Fraser and Neave for supplying drinks for all those attending this forum, all those who had given donations and in one way or another helped to make this forum a success.

I would not be doing justice if I do not thank the Penang Police, especially the OCPD, and his fellow officers for trying their best to get the permit for this forum approved. Once again I would like to thank all of you for your kind presence this morning. Thank you.

It is now my pleasure to invite Yang Berhormat, Encik Mohd. Khir Johari, to read the Tunku's message to the forum.

## Message to the Forum from Y.T.M. Tunku Abdul Rahman (read by Y.B. Encik Khir Johari)

It is now my great pleasure to read to you the message from Y.T.M. Tunku Abdul Rahman to mark the inauguration of this forum on Democracy in Malaysia under the auspices of Aliran. This is the message.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I regret very much that I am not able to deliver this speech myself due to an Emergency Meeting of the Asian Football Confederation in Hong Kong which I have to attend. This is rather unfortunate because the forum deals with an important issue in our society, and which I have always expressed my keen interest and support for, that is, democracy in Malaysia.

I am very pleased to note that Aliran is organising this forum on democracy. Democracy is a form of government in Malaysia that has been practised for twenty years since Merdeka and it is important for the people to know what Democracy is, and how to strengthen Democracy in order to be able to contribute effectively to the development of the country.

Democracy is understood by different people in different spheres of the world in different ways. The real meaning given to it by the Greeks, who introduced it, is "A government of the people, for the people and by the people." Though we have a King and all acts of Government are done in his name, he in fact is only a figurehead. The real government rests with the people who choose their representatives to handle their affairs and do all such acts as approved by Parliament.

Other countries, such as the communist states, also refer to their government as a democratic government, but is run by a politburo, which is the chief political and executive committee of the communist party. They dictate all the affairs of state and at the head of it is a man called a dictator, and he wields vast and supreme power and is in fact and in reality the supreme ruler of the State and not a figurehead as is understood by western democracy.

Then we have a Republic, like the American Republic, whose President is elected but during his term of office he also exercises strong administrative power as President. But his power is limited in that he must act with the approval of the House of Representatives.

I am glad to know that Aliran's activities embody an interest in Democracy, solidarity and multi-racial issues in our society. It is not connected with any political party; thus in this respect, it is able to provide a fair and unbiased analysis of these issues. Moreover, it is a body that tries to educate people on Democracy.

Malaysia is a country with a mixed population so it was agreed that our policy must be based on democratic system of government. During my term of office as Prime Minister of the country I have allowed fair and just participation of the people in the country's development, freedom to speak and criticise, the basic rights to dissent, for therein lies the strength of democracy. It is part of democracy to allow opposition as long as the rules of the game are observed.

In a multi-racial society like Malaysia, where there are different cultural values and community interests, democracy as we understand it, is best suited for us. It is only natural that different views and opinions arise and should be tolerated as long as they do not go against national unity. If we do not allow lawful dissent, then frustration and unhappiness among the people will result.

There is the totalitarian dictatorship of the communist nations which I mentioned earlier and there is another type, the dictatorship by a group of people in power who are out to amass power and wealth for themselves, as for example, Indonesia under Sukarno. This type of dictatorship has not been able to meet the needs of the people. Basic socio-economic problems have not been solved. On the one hand, unemployment, inflation and increasing disparities of wealth become more serious; on the other hand, the people are gradually but surely deprived of their bread and butter, their freedom and their right to speak and criticise.

A vast majority of the people do not want any kind of dictatorship. Those who cherish democracy must fight this form of dictatorship.

There is another type of dictatorship which is known as military dictatorship. This is the government of the Armed Forces in order to maintain peace and good order in the country where according to them democracy could not work. It is only natural in order to preserve peace and good order in the country for this government to suspend the democratic constitution and run the country under military dictatorship until such time when peace and good order is restored.

As true citizens of the country, the people must be ready and responsible to defend a democratic way of life. At the same time all those who have been elected to power must genuinely practise democracy. Those who are genuine democratic dissidents should be given the right to speak and criticise. If we deny them this right, democracy will be weakened and the Communists will gain through such dissatisfaction.

In my time, I gave sufficient freedom to trade unionists, leaders of various social and political groups and academics too. If there are any subversive activities within these groups the laws of the land would adequately deal with them. I am made to understand that there will be new rules to transform the universities into Civil Service and academic staff will be required to abide by the rules that normally come under general orders. They will be required to take Civil Service examinations. Universities should never be equated with the Civil Service. The functions of universities in society are entirely different from those of the Civil Service. They are to develop the corpus of knowledge, to create critical thinking and to develop the values of civilization. If there is too much control over the universities, they cannot perform this important role. This is why when I was Prime Minister and Chancellor of the University of Malaya I made no attempt at all to destroy the autonomy of the university.

I wish to make an appeal to the government to mobilise the support of all those who genuinely believe in democracy irrespective of whether they are members of the government or not. In this way they can contribute to the defence of democracy against



subversive elements. By the same token I would like the university academicians to play their role as academic leaders of the nation. By that I mean they must try to impart such knowledge to the students as would help to make them good and loyal citizens, veering neither to the right nor left but to give the education to the students in their charge that would best equip them to play their roles as the future leaders of the country. It has come to my knowledge that there are some professors and lecturers who are inclined to be biased in their understanding of religion and social ethics. This is dangerous and this is not teaching the students to be leaders but activists in the ideologies believed by the professors and lecturers concerned.

I wish your forum a great success and if I am able, perhaps in the not too distant future, I may be fortunate enough to join you in your discussion.

With all my good wishes for happy exchanges of views and ideas for the good Democracy.

Sat., 10th Dec. 1977

**Keynote Speech :**  
**Democracy and its Challenges**

by Dr. Chandra Muzaffar, President of Aliran

Chairperson: Encik Yusof Sharif  
Rapporteur: Cik Khoo Yoke Kuan  
Time: 11-00 a.m. — 1-00 p.m.

**Panel Discussion 1 :**  
**Democracy and the Man-in-the-Street**

Panelists: Y.B. Datuk Michael Chen  
Y.B. Encik Mohd Khir Johari  
Encik Yeap Ghim Guan  
Encik Gan Teik Chee  
Chairperson: Encik Latif Kamaludin  
Rapporteur: Tunku Zaiton Mahadi  
Time: 2-00 — 4-30 p.m.





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## Democracy And Its Challenges

by Dr. Chandra Muzaffar, President, Aliran

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen. First, let me thank you for your attendance. For a Saturday morning function, I think this is fairly well attended. The topic that we have chosen as an introductory topic to our forum is one which covers all the other themes that we will be discussing for the rest of the day and tomorrow. I hope to touch all the major points that are involved in the various topics we are going to discuss. It is customary for academics to discuss the various characteristics in democracy and then to analyse these characteristics, after that to talk about these characteristics in relation to the challenges. I am going to depart from this usual pattern because one of the purposes of Aliran is to break down the ivory tower image of academics and of Universities.

So let me begin by talking about the challenges confronting democracy. In the course of discussing these challenges, we will be able to form some idea of what the characteristics of democracy are.

The most obvious challenge before a democracy as far as Malaysians are concerned is of course the challenge posed by communist totalitarianism. Malaysians have been exposed to this in its organised terrorist form since 1948. There is no doubt at all that communism as a social system has some very dictatorial elements in it, whether Communists admit this or not is a secondary matter. But the Communists, we know, believe in a dictatorship on behalf of the poor, on behalf of the oppressed, on behalf of the suffering; a dictatorship which they call a dictatorship of the proletariat. But the important thing is whatever name they give to it, it is still a dictatorship and, as such, it performs as a dictatorship. It exercises complete control over different areas of life. There is no concept of individuality, of a private area of society or life; there is no concept of diversity in the political sphere or sometimes in the cultural and intellectual spheres. All these things are denied. So it is this that makes the Communist system a dictatorship — its denial of diversity, its denial of differences.

Now Aliran does not and will not support this idea of a social system. It is not because the government is against Communism. It is not because the Communist Party is an illegal organization. It is because Aliran itself does not believe that this is right. In other words, even if Communism was legal, Aliran would have a different position on this. Now that is the type of dictatorship which we reject and which we see as a challenge to a democratic way of life.

But there are also other challenges to democracy which are not so obvious. One of the challenges, and this has become increasingly true to people in Third World countries, is the challenge posed by those people who argue that democracy is a Western idea, democracy is not suitable for Asian and African countries, it is alien to our way of life. There is nothing in our history, in our tradition that will make us good democrats. Then they go on to say a democracy cannot work where there are a lot of poor people; democracy can only work when people are all very well educated. They say that democracy can only succeed if you have got a strong middle class, with a lot of happy, satisfied,

well-to-do people, only then can democracy work. They even say that for developing countries, it is irrelevant to talk about democracy because what is important is development and economic change.

These are the three related arguments that they make very often – that it is alien to our culture and tradition, that it is unsuitable where there are a lot of poor, illiterate people and that the main challenge is economic development, therefore we should not talk so much about democracy. There are many people, well-intentioned people as well as those who are not so well-intentioned, who hold on to this argument. This argument has been made in Malaysia and there are people who still continue to make this argument in Malaysia. What is our response to this?

First, we believe, as a group dedicated to the education of society, that these myths about democracy must be demolished. Aliran places a lot of emphasis on this because the whole idea of educating society will have no meaning if we cannot come to grips with myths like these and if we cannot destroy such myths. It is wrong to say, for instance, that democracy has nothing to do with our tradition, that it is completely alien. There are values and ideals in a democracy which are universal – the desire for freedom, the love for justice that goes with freedom, the desire for some degree of diversity in society, the desire to preserve one's individuality, the desire to retain what is private to oneself. These things are universal desires and goals. They have nothing to do with the West or the East. They belong to mankind as a whole.

This is the one important thing we must always bear in mind. It may be true that the Parliamentary system as an institution, the independence of the Judiciary in its present form, the idea of political parties, of functioning social groups, of trade unions, of consumer organizations and so on developed in relation to the growth of Western civilization. But it is wrong to say that if certain institutions are Western, the values that support these institutions are also exclusively Western. This is untrue. They belong to the whole of human history and the whole of mankind. That is why in our souvenir programme that some of you have, you will notice there is a quotation at the bottom that is our reply to all these arguments. It is from an European thinker but quoted in a book, written by a leading Southeast Asian who was Prime Minister of Indonesia at one time, Muhammad Natsir. The quotation reads:

*Freedom is a human and not a Western ideal. The whole earth is the temple of freedom, its spirit moves wherever men are learning to do justice to each other.*

Now that is our idea of what democracy and freedom is. It does not belong to any particular culture. In fact, if we look at our own cultures and traditions, you will discover that these values have been expressed a few hundred and sometimes even a thousand or two thousand years ago. You will notice in the souvenir programme, a quotation from the great Chinese thinker of the 3rd century B.C., Meng-tze. He told the rulers of his day, the Emperors and the Kings of his day that it is only when the people feel that certain things are right and certain things are wrong, that the leaders should respond. They should not pay attention to the elite, the Ministers, the officials at the helm. That shows that even within Chinese culture, at least some aspects of Chinese culture, there are some values of this sort.



Similarly if you look at Hindu civilization you will find that the idea of people sitting together and talking about their problems and achieving decisions on the basis of majority vote or consensus was something that was practised for thousands of years in what was known as the "panchayat" system. The people discussed, shared opinions, argued, debated. In fact, even the Buddha in one of his sermons, laid emphasis on the ideal of discussion, of debate, of freedom of the individual. The idea of freedom which had been upheld in the Hindu tradition is not restricted to political or economic freedom but has a larger meaning which is linked to moral and spiritual freedom. So we must try to appreciate this, that even in our own traditions we have such values.

If you look at Islamic civilization, you will find numerous quotations, passages that show Islam's commitment to man's freedom. As an example, there is a quotation in the souvenir programme, one of the sayings of Prophet Muhamad, "differences of opinion in my community is a sign of divine blessing," and there is another of his famous quotations where he had said that, "A word of justice uttered before an unjust ruler is the greatest jihad." Now these are some of the examples from the Islamic tradition. As Abu Bakar, the First caliph in Islam, had said:

*To observe silence in the face of wrongdoings is treason; to criticize when things are wrong is loyalty.*

This is quite different from what our leaders would like to see in Malaysia. For them to observe silence in the face of wrongdoings is loyalty; to criticize when things are wrong is treason! Now we must correct ideas of this sort.

The other myth that we must demolish is that in countries where there are a lot of poor illiterate people (in Malaysia, almost 50% of the people live below the poverty line) democracy cannot work. Is that true? If only these sceptics study the growth of democracy in Western Europe, they will discover that when democracy was developing in the latter half of the 19th century there were a lot of poor uneducated people. In fact, there was a great deal of factory exploitation during this period. Democratic values were developed by people who were conscious — who believed that civil rights and individual liberties were important. These thinkers, reformers and humanists managed to influence government and create a liberal atmosphere. The illiteracy and poverty of the European masses did not prevent the emergence of democratic values and ideals. Of course later on social and economic conditions helped sustain these values. A somewhat different example from Asia would be India. India in many ways is one of the most democratic societies in the Third World but it is also one of the societies with a lot of poor people and a lot of illiterates. On the other hand, there are other societies where a lot of people are neither poor nor illiterate with a strong middle class, and yet democracy is nothing compared to what exists in countries like India. One good example would be Singapore. Singapore has one of the strongest middle classes anywhere in the Third World and yet in terms of democracy, you find there are far more restrictions in Singapore than in India or many other countries. So it is not a question of education nor a question of poverty!

The other myth is that democracy is an impediment, a hindrance to development. It is said that when you have lots of discussion and debate you will not be able to achieve development. One of the men who argued this way with considerable eloquence was

Sukarno of Indonesia. He described democracy as a system of government which believes in 50 per cent plus 1. Democracy only means talk, talk, talk, talk!!! It may be true. But then, democracy can be harnessed for development, if you allow the right form of discussion and debate in society. What happens is that very often the rights accorded by democracy – the right to talk and to criticize – is usurped, is hijacked (to use a term that you all understand) by certain groups at the top – the rich, the corrupt, the powerful. They control Parliament and the legislative and bureaucratic process. Of course, when it is hijacked, democracy crashes! This is the problem; we must make sure that democracy is not hijacked by a few people at the top and we must make sure that they do not hold the rest of us who are passengers on this plane to ransom. We must make sure that they do not crash the plane. This is important.

The only way in which we can ensure this is by allowing the genuine interests of the masses to emerge through the democratic process, which means, the interests of the poor, of the fishermen, the farmers, the hawkers and the slum dwellers. Their interests and aspirations must be articulated; they must become part of the legislative process. The bureaucracy must become responsive to these interests and then, you will find that democracy will work and it will be worthwhile to talk and to debate and to discuss. This is not happening in many developing nations. Because it is not happening in many developing countries, democracy is seen as an impediment to development. It is not because of democracy; it is because of the way it is being practised.

Now having said these things the question that comes to our mind is, if democracy is not a problem, why is it that many of the leaders in many developing countries decide to discard democracy after a while? There is a reason for this – a very paradoxical reason. They decide to get rid of democracy for the simple reason that people have become democratic. What does this mean? When there is unhappiness, disagreement, dissent in society people begin to wake up; they question things, challenge things; they find that the leaders are not able to look after the real interests of the people, that they have failed to fulfil the aspirations of the people. When the people begin to challenge and to question, the leaders begin to argue that democracy is not suitable because democracy is being “abused,” “misused” by “unscrupulous” people. The fact of the matter is that the masses have discovered their rights, their voice, their strength. Bankrupt leaders cannot face this.

This is the irony. This has happened in many parts of the Third World. This is what Mrs. Gandhi did in India. If you had observed the development of Mrs. Gandhi’s politics just before she declared emergency, there were a series of by-elections in different parts of India in which her party lost. The people were demonstrating in large numbers, there were rallies that drew something like a million people in Delhi and other places, Mrs. Gandhi became afraid and decided that democracy was not suitable. She began to say: look what is more important is development; what we need is discipline, we don’t need democracy anymore. But democracy was okay when it returned her to power with the biggest majority in Indian history in 1971!

It is the same in many countries. It may well happen in some other places in future. It is better that we be prepared for such an eventuality. Let us understand that if democracy is destroyed it is not because democracy is an impediment to the people’s needs,

desires, aspirations or expectations. It is simply because those in power are not able to remain in power in the face of the people's challenge and therefore they decide to destroy the channels that could remove them.

Having said that, we are, I suppose, in a position to discuss the essential condition, the fundamental prerequisite for the survival of democracy. The important factor that ensures the survival of democracy is the type of leadership. If you have a political leadership that is tolerant of dissent, that understands what dissent and disagreement is, that is prepared to allow people to speak up and to accommodate other people's views, that believes in diversity and differences and respects them, then I think democracy is safe. I am not saying that they will lead to the success of democracy. All that I am saying is if you have a leadership that is tolerant and understands criticism because it knows it has got some worth, then at least democracy will survive. To ensure its success you must have a leadership that has these values and at the same time is able to plan, able to look after the interests of the masses, is clean, honest, incorruptible and dedicated to truth and justice. Then I think democracy will work. So, it is leadership which is the vital, crucial factor in the survival and success of democracy.

The greatest task before Aliran is, therefore, to make people conscious of the need to create good leadership and to practise democracy on the basis of good leadership. But, before we can do that we must understand why democracy is superior to every other social system. It is because it is only a democracy that is really concerned about the dignity of man. To me, this is the most important reason. The dignity of man is a value that is very precious to us, precious to us as people who believe in God whatever our religious or cultural tradition. Why is it the only social system that is concerned with the dignity of man? Because it is a social system that makes man important; it gives him the right to decide his own affairs, gives him control over his own society, makes him master, in a sense, of his own destiny. He can criticize and speak; he is equal to anyone else in his own society — that is if democracy is genuinely practised. He is able to say he disagrees with certain things; he is able to question and challenge his leaders. He can choose his own job, live his own life in his own way as long as it does not hurt the interests of the community. It is this that gives him dignity. More than that he is able to work with his fellow-men towards the good of society on the basis of goals he has chosen on his own free will.

Democracy is important because it recognises differences and diversity and that brings it very close to human nature. We cannot get rid of diversity in society. There will be political diversities, cultural diversities, economic diversities in society. These are realities and democracy recognises this very important human factor. Diversity is not something that should be replaced by uniformity; it is something that should be harnessed for the good of mankind. Democracy recognises this and that is its strength.

Democracy allows everyone the degree of equality which is inherent in his very soul because democracy states very clearly that in its social system, everyone should be equal before the law and in terms of economic opportunities. This is also a democratic ideal. In this connection it is only democracy that sees the independence of the Judiciary as a vital element in its organization. No other social system gives as much importance to that.

For this reason I believe in democracy. And for this and other reasons, Aliran will try to propagate democratic ideals.

Let us now look at the Malaysian situation. How can we make Malaysia more democratic? Because we agree, we accept that Malaysia is not sufficiently democratic. Anyone who thinks that Malaysia has enough democracy is like the proverbial ostrich who has buried his head in the sand. Now, there are three groups, to my mind, which have to play their role in making Malaysia more democratic. First and most important, there is the group in power. It is their responsibility more than the responsibility of any other group in this country, to make sure that Malaysia becomes more democratic. How can they do this?

As a starting point, they have to get rid of many of the laws in this country which I think stultify or tend to curb the growth of democracy. You can take very simple laws, laws against students, the Universities and University Colleges Act (UUCA) which does not allow students to fulfil their rights as citizens of this country as an example. They cannot say things connected with politics or even social affairs; they cannot take part in the larger deliberations of society; they cannot associate with groups outside; they cannot even take part in political forums or organize forums in their own campus without permission from the authorities. For violating some of these rules, students can be expelled from the campus. They are in fact presumed guilty even before they are tried.

Similarly, trade unionists also labour under great difficulties. If you are a trade union leader, you cannot hold office in a political party and vice versa. In certain trades, the organisation of workers has been made extremely difficult by existing labour laws. There are other laws which tend to divide workers in the same industry in such a way that effective unions cannot emerge. More important, there are even laws which deny the right to industrial action among workers who may not be part of any crucial public service institution. All these things are impediments to the labour movement in this country. Now even politicians suffer great handicaps in the exercise of their duties. If you are an opposition member of Parliament or perhaps a critical backbencher and you want to make a speech about certain aspects of development, something which may be quite harmless – you want to discuss, perhaps, why there are many mosquitoes in certain parts of Penang – if some people do not like this, they will not allow it. It is very easy. All you have to do is to leave Parliament. So there is no quorum, the meeting is adjourned. Therefore you cannot make your speech. This is done from time to time. It is a tactic used to prevent debate and discussion.

Soon academics may also join the procession of those who cannot exercise their civil liberties in a manner consistent with democratic norms. If certain rules which have been formulated come into force, it would mean that in future, some of my colleagues and I cannot take part in forums of this sort because it would be a violation of those rules. We cannot discuss anything controversial, we cannot support a political party, campaign, offer ourselves as candidates, be appointed to the Senate or any other political institution. We cannot discuss a political party or the affairs of a political party in a publication or even in forums or seminars. If you want to do these things, you must get permission from your Vice-chancellor; in other words, if one is appearing in a forum and one

is coming to something very controversial in one's talk, one must ring up the Vice-chancellor and say: "Look, I am about to say these things, can I have your permission to say them?" This is what it means. In other words, one should say in the midst of Endau-Rompin campaign: Now this issue is going to get controversial, everyone concerned must stop for a while; get clearance from the Vice-chancellor, can we go on talking about the rhinoceros because it is getting controversial? This is how the freedom of the academics would be effected.

Perhaps, at the root of all this is a law meant to protect democracy which unfortunately has become the greatest threat to our democracy – the Internal Security Act. Since it provides for detention without trial it has become a serious psychological obstacle to the development of freedom of speech and action. Communist subversion has to be fought, we concede. We may even need special laws for this, but, detention without trial is not one of them since it can be abused so easily and, in the end, only serves to weaken democratic values.

Apart from getting rid of bad laws the leadership must also increase the flow of information in society, communicate more often with the masses, allow discussion and more debate in society. Communication is a very important factor in a democracy. A good democracy depends to a great extent on the flow of information. There must be a flow of information from the leaders to the led and from the led to the leaders. There must be consultation. If you find that existing rules on consultation in our Constitution are insufficient, create new rules, have referendums or opinion polls. In Kelantan, for instance, there was this recent crisis. One way of resolving the crisis would have been to hold an opinion poll to find out whether the people really wanted so and so to remain Menteri Besar. But this was not done because we don't trust the people, we don't trust the democratic process. This I think is the danger; we must operate in such a way that we make democracy meaningful to the common man. One way in which this can be done is to increase the flow of information and to increase the channels of communication. At the same time, we must ensure that the institutions that are important to a democracy remain democratic all the while. What would be these institutions? We want the Judiciary, for instance, to continue its independent role. The Judiciary in Malaysia has been independent to a great extent. The judges themselves would want to enhance this independence in the years to come. We hope that brave judges would be promoted and brave judges would become Chief Justices and Lord Presidents so that the Judiciary can become a brave Judiciary. This is what we look forward to.

We want the Press to be free. We are not asking for licence. We are not saying that we open up the newspapers, Radio and Television to such an extent that certain campaigns on chauvinism or subversion would be allowed free play. We are cognizant of the difficulties of developing democracy in a country like ours. We know that chauvinism is a problem, whether it is Malay chauvinism, or Chinese chauvinism or Indian chauvinism or Eurasian chauvinism or "others" chauvinism. We know that within the democratic system we have in Malaysia, it may be difficult to control subversion. We are aware of all this. But we are still saying that in spite of all this we can make the Press free. This we can do by removing the law that says that newspapers must apply for annual licences. I think



that is a bad law. I am sure that every reporter who is present here would agree with me. Because this is a law that curbs their freedom, it affects their dignity. Because someone, like saudara Dadameah, may write a good report on what happened in Aliran's forum; there will be nothing subversive, nothing chauvinistic, nothing that can create trouble in the country; he sends it up to his news editor, to the man at the top, the man at the top may agree with all these things but because there are all types of censorship that operate, you find that what comes out is quite different. That will be unfortunate. People can speak for five minutes, they get two miles in the newspapers, others can speak for ten hours and they get half an inch. Now this is what we have to change. We have to 'open up' our newspapers. One way of doing this is by removing that particular law because it acts as a sort of sword of Democles, something that is always there hanging over one's head. Anytime, newspapers editors can be clobbered and they are afraid because they are human beings; they have got wives, children and families to look after. Is there an alternative to this? I believe that you must allow for some form of regulation in the newspaper world. That is why I would like to support the suggestion made by some newspapermen themselves for the establishment of a Press Council, a Press Council that formulates its own ethics, that is not controlled by anyone, that operates with the full knowledge that it is also dependent on democracy, with the full knowledge that it is also opposed to subversion of the democratic system and opposed to chauvinism. I am sure we can trust our newspapermen that much. Surely being sensible, responsible people, they can also help to foster democracy in the country. I am sure they do not want to publish news that encourages chauvinism, or Communist subversion or other types of subversion.

Similarly we would like to see Radio and Television operate in a freer atmosphere. Should Radio and Television be under the complete control of the government? I don't think this is necessary. We can have an effective Radio and Television service that is run by a public Corporation where the government will also have representation. In this way other types of news — apart from government news — will also emerge. Different viewpoints will be put across. In this way when the presentation of a bill in Parliament is telecast, we will also be able to view other aspects of the debate and not just the government leader's performance. This is important because of a recent telecast of this sort. All that we saw on the screen was the Prime Minister standing up, reading his speech and then everything was over. Surely that is not how a bill is presented in Parliament. There must be a seconder; there must be someone who opposes it, then there must be a debate. Now if we give this impression to our young people who are watching television, they will get a wrong idea of what democracy in Parliament means. They may think that all that it really means is a man standing up and reading a speech after which the bill is passed and Parliament is over. Now if you are going to create that sort of impression then I think our young people will subvert the Rukunegara in the long run, because one of the ideals of the Rukunegara is preserving the democratic system. So, in the interests of the Rukunegara and the Constitution, please show debates in full so that we can know what happens in Parliament, so that our young people will respect Parliament and our leaders. They would like to see how our leaders discuss, how they present an argument, defend an argument, take part in the cut and thrust of debate. Let them learn these things. Let them have greater respect for their leaders. This is one of the ways of enhancing the popularity of our leaders. They would not have to campaign in the end; they will win elections

hands down if they “open up” Parliament a little. This is one way in which they can promote the democratic system. These are some of the things that the government can do.

There are two other groups which are also important. The first is the opposition and this is a very important point. Aliran does not want to be seen as a critic of one side because we have emphasised it is completely non-partisan. Therefore we feel that the opposition in Malaysia or the opposition in any democracy for that matter, has also got a role towards the preservation of democracy. This role does not mean merely criticising, attacking, challenging the government whenever there is an issue. That is only one aspect of the role of the opposition. A responsible, mature opposition is one that will criticize when criticism is necessary, that will challenge when challenge is necessary, disagree when disagreement is necessary and discuss when discussion is necessary. But it must also be an opposition which realises that when things are good and there are things that have been done which are useful and helpful to the masses, they must also compliment the government, say good things about the government, give praise where praise is due. Only then will there be a responsible opposition and only then will we be able to develop democracy as a mature social system in our country. Unfortunately the political opposition in Malaysia has not been that charitable when there are good things. They don't acknowledge the good things; when there are bad things – they highlight these. I think they should also change their mentality; let us recognize some of the good things that have been done.

If you find a new man in charge of the railways and he is trying to clean up the place, trying to make sure that the trains run on time, I think you must compliment the man. Tell him he has done a good job and express the hope that there will be more people like him. If you find that you have a judge who is honest, dedicated, impartial, you have to compliment him. If you have a general who says: look democracy is important, we must support the civilian government at all costs and we must protect democracy then you must say: well, it is good we have a judge or an army general with that sort of sentiment. That would be the correct attitude.

Thirdly, the public has a responsibility to democracy. This is where you and I come in because we are not part of the government or the opposition. What is our responsibility? This is where I think we have failed. The Malaysian public, in spite of the fact that a large segment is educated, is unfortunately docile. It is a public which does not stand up, a public which does not feel a sense of revulsion, a sense of righteous anger when unjust things happen around them. I used to remark to a friend that I am always amazed at the spontaniety, at the gusto with which the Malaysian public stands up and point a finger at the referee on the football field when he does something that is wrong. If a chap were to “curi ayam” in a football match, you can be sure that the Malaysian public would rise in anger, hurling abuses, pointing their fingers at the referee and the players. I think this is a very good sentiment. Why don't they carry it to other areas as well? I would like to see that in our politics, in our economic development. When you have a corrupt man and the corrupt man is trying to mobilize support, we hope that the people would stand up and say: “Look, you are corrupt, you have no business trying to get support from the people.” That will be a genuine democratic sentiment. Now the way in which we exercise our

rights on the football field should also be carried to other fields of life including politics, culture, education and so on.

Recently a great tragedy occurred in our skies, a plane crashed with a hundred people on board. If we know that the hijacking which led to the crash was the result of poor security arrangements at the Bayan Lepas airport we should feel angry enough, outraged enough to say: "Look, this is wrong and the Minister responsible for this should resign because in all civilized countries, the person who is in charge of a particular Ministry would, in all fairness, in all decency, lay down his office." I'll give you examples. If you look at Taiwan, about two months ago, there was a railway crash in which about ten people, if I am not mistaken, died. The Minister concerned resigned. He was not the train driver, mind you, not the signalman, not the guard nor the ticket collector, but he was in charge of the railways. He realized that he was ultimately responsible to the people for the efficient functioning of the railways. Recently in India, there was also a transport calamity of the same sort, a railway accident, and two State Ministers resigned. Even when there was a cyclone in India, you find that a Minister laid down his office. In Malaysia, we love our offices more than we love truth, justice or the rakyat. Now, why didn't the Malaysian public demand the resignation of the Minister? There were one or two who made this demand in the newspapers. Because we are lethargic, docile, we don't understand that it is perfectly within our rights as defined in the Constitution to stand up and say: "Look, this is wrong, whatever you may say, security at Bayan Lepas was lax, this was why it happened." Remember the statement made by the President of the International Association of Pilots, Mr. Pierce, that appeared in the *Star* where he had said quite clearly that the major portion of the blame for the mishap must be laid at the door of the Malaysian authorities.

The plane tragedy merely goes to show that anything can happen but the people in power will go on wielding power. Surely there are certain values that are over and beyond power. There are certain values which are more important than position and glory. Surely the commitment to truth, justice and human welfare is more important than position and power. Surely in a society that proclaims belief in God as the first principle of the Rukunegara, there must be some commitment to the values associated with that concept, values like truth and justice. If people in power do not want to give meaning to the belief in God, do not want to respect the Rukunegara, it is important that we who do not have power stand up and say: "Look, we are not prepared to put up with this. We want a better deal."

Indeed this was one of the reasons why Aliran was brought into being. It was not created to contest for power. We are not part of the electoral process, we are not a political party, we are not interested in becoming Ministers, members of Parliament, State Assemblymen. Aliran is merely an organization that wants to promote consciousness so that people will be conscious of what democracy means, what their rights are, what justice means and what their role is in promoting justice in society; so that people would be conscious of what good leadership really means; so that people would be conscious of moral values of the right sort, not morality that is concerned solely with the length of the nurse's skirt. We are more concerned with moral values that are connected with human welfare. That is more important for us because we know for a fact that there has not been a patient in Malaysia who had died because his nurse's skirt was a little above her knees.

On the contrary, we know that if we do not have sufficient commitment to public morality and good values, then poor patients will suffer through neglect arising from inefficiency. This is the sort of morality we want, morality based upon permanent values, values which have always built up human civilization. This then is Aliran's purpose, to build up consciousness. And how would we do it?

We hope to do it through every avenue accorded by the Constitution and we pledge that we will not veer from constitutional avenues as long as there is some semblance of democracy. If the authorities does not give us a licence to hold a forum, we will not demonstrate and hurl bricks at the police or the Federal Reserve Unit (FRU), because we know the police is neutral; in fact, we know that they are just doing their job. We will use democratic channels, we will use forums, talks, seminars and the pen. We will use the pen because we know the pen is a powerful weapon. We shall use our pen in such a way that the ideas we preach will reach the people. There will be articles, publications, pamphlets and so on. This is how Aliran will work.

In this connection it must be stressed that Aliran is not committed to any particular "ism." We do not call ourselves socialists, capitalists, communists, anarchists or fascists. We are none of these. Other people may want to give us names. They are welcome to. As far as we are concerned, we are committed to certain basic, perennial values in society because we feel that in our country, it is not so important whether we define a particular ideology in great detail or not – that is to say, how our society will be organized, what the means of production would be, how capital and labour would be organized and so on. What is fundamental in this country is first to try to get people to think and to reflect and eventually to act. This is the starting point. This is what we mean by consciousness.

Unfortunately, there has not been a multi-ethnic organization committed completely to this goal of developing consciousness among all communities based on values acceptable to all communities. There has never been such a group in the entire history of this country. This is unfortunate because others before us should have taken on this task. If they had, we would have been in a better position today. It is a shame, an indictment upon our history that we should be the first group to do this. And we have nothing at our command – we don't have power, we don't have money, we don't have channels of influence at our disposal. All that we have is our idealism. There is nothing else we can offer you. We can't offer you positions, or economic opportunities, we are not based on the sort of sentiments that move people in our society; we are not based upon narrow chauvinism of any form or upon any particular religion. What then will move Aliran?

What will move Aliran would be its idealism, the dreams of its members, its capacity to transform these dreams into reality. It is this that will move Aliran. Aliran needs support from the people. Your support does not mean support in terms of registering as members because for a movement, the size of its membership is not important, what important is the spread of its ideals. How would Aliran's ideals spread in this society – Aliran's concern for justice, for a better economic order, for a more genuine democracy? How will people accept these ideals? That is what is more important. It does not matter who utters these ideals or how they are uttered. It may well be articulated by different

people who have nothing to do with Aliran. They can use their own channels or their own avenues. What is important to us is a simple thing. All that we want is for these ideas to spread. Because we believe if there is consciousness in our society, there are two great things that we can achieve which no political party contesting in the elections will be able to achieve – two things that make us superior to any political party and the electoral system. One, if you have a conscious public, you will be able to check the wrongdoings of those in power. Two, if you have a conscious public, you will be able to create the sort of atmosphere that will automatically produce leaders who are capable of meeting the aspirations of the masses. This means that if the social atmosphere is different and people are more conscious, you can be sure that in the long run, the leadership that emerges from this society will also be a leadership of quality and calibre. This is why we have to build up social consciousness. It is a starting point in history but we have to do this. We know – and this is what gives us strength – we know that in the whole history of Man, all the great events and great deeds, all the great changes have been preceded by consciousness, by what develops in the mind and in the heart. This is always the starting point. It is this confidence that propels us on because if you look at Asia, you will realise, for instance, that the Philippine revolution began because there were men like Rizal, Mabini, Jacinto, Aguinaldo, Bonafacio, people who preached ideas, who wrote about them, who created consciousness, who built up reform movements like the Liga Filipina. This is what created the atmosphere and the mood that brought about great changes in Philippine society. We know that from that point of view, we are not alone. Our contribution may be nothing but we want to make the start. We want to make the start because we know that this is a continuation of a great historical process, a process which in Southeast Asia at least was initiated by a person who was, without any doubt, the first conscious thinker on the problems of colonial Southeast Asia and that was Rizal. That is why I want to end this talk, my friends, with a quotation from Rizal. Jose Rizal had said:

*I do not mean to say that our liberty would be secured at the sword's point but that we must secure it by making ourselves worthy of it by exalting the intelligence and the dignity of the individual by loving justice, right and greatness even to the extent of dying for them. And when a people reaches that height, God will provide a weapon, the idols will be shattered, the tyranny will crumble like a house of cards and liberty will shine out like the first dawn.*

## Question and Answer Session

### Question

Dr., one takes the risk of being branded a racist when he engages in lamenting the position of his own community in a multiracial nation. You are aware that the plight or the problem of poverty-stricken, ill-fed, ill-fated human beings is universal. Now in a multi-racial society like Malaysia, how do you intend to get this togetherness for the benefit of all irrespective of race, religion or social position?

### Answer

There will always be Malaysians who believe that the problem of poverty and injustice should be approached outside communal considerations. We have these Malaysians in all communities, among the Malays, among the Chinese and among the Indians. This has always existed except that their thinking and their feelings have not been highlighted. This is because people who wield power have a different outlook. They believe that problems of justice and injustice should be resolved on the basis of communities. Now the task before us is to convert more and more people of all communities into the type of thinking that has been upheld by these groups which have never been able to achieve power. How do we do that?

First, we have to demolish the thinking that the way towards national unity is through communal solidarity. Many people who once opposed communalism are succumbing to this appeal. They are saying: "Well, everyone else is doing it, we must join the crowd. Everyone believes that this is the only one way to national unity, we must also operate that way. We must first have communal groups, look after our own community because others are doing the same." Now, if everyone believes that, you will find in the long run, the cause is lost. So, we must demolish this; just as there are myths about democracy, there are myths about national unity that we have to demolish. The way to national unity is not through communalism just as the way to truth is not through untruthfulness, as Gandhi once said. Similarly, if you want to achieve what is pure it is not through impurity. If we can convince a lot of Malaysians, Malays, Chinese and Indians that they must start thinking of the interests of all those who are poor, oppressed and exploited then I think we will be able to do something.

Our method is through writing, forums and seminars. Many people would question the usefulness of this method because they say it will take a long while, how can you change things in this way. But they forget that even the first communal ideas that are dominant today began that way. It was through the written word, in the 1920's and 1930's that communal thinking emerged. So, I suppose there is a chance for those who believe in another approach. I have every confidence that this can be done because even now, you can find some change. At least, since the second Malaysian Plan, the government has begun to talk about poverty as something that affects all communities irrespective of ethnic background. That is a change. The question is whether this can be transformed into action. Now that needs a little persuasion, a little more of democratic action



on our part. I hope you and others are prepared to help us in this. You are in a privileged position as a member of a newspaper. If all of us can contribute in our own little way, we can build up this consciousness.

### Question

My question is more direct in terms of what is practical for Aliran for the future. So far we have been talking about ideals and the need to reform society. There must be some practical ways to transform these ideals into action. The pen, I think may be a very useful avenue for certain people but where the masses are concerned you may not be able to reach them through the pen. Are there any other concrete methods which are more practical?

### Answer

I suppose my friend will agree that organizing a forum is also a practical thing. It requires very practical arrangements to get a forum or a seminar going. Perhaps you would like to know what sort of forums or seminars we intend to have in the next few months. We have begun with democracy; if all goes well, we may have a forum on Islam and Chinese Culture, a topic which ironically has not been discussed in this country. These are two very important cultural groups in our society and we would like to show that in certain areas there are common values and this would, we hope, help to bring certain sentiments together. This is one of the programmes we have in mind.

We will be publishing our *Basic Beliefs* very soon, a pamphlet for distribution to the public. Later on, we hope to come up with other publications connected with the *Basic Beliefs*. Similarly, we hope to hold public campaigns from time to time. The protest against logging in Endau-Rompin was an example of a public campaign. We hope to have public campaigns on crucial socio-economic issues. What they are, I cannot possibly disclose because I think the whole purpose would be lost or perhaps the campaign would be proscribed if I told you what the campaign would be. These are some of the things we would like to do in the months ahead.

Now, your point about whether the pen can reach the masses or not. I think a social movement must see itself in terms of different levels of operations. There are certain ideas which cannot be articulated easily for mass consumption. But there are also other ideas which may disseminate more easily within the masses. One of these would be ideas connected with corruption and social injustice. Such ideas the rakyat would understand very easily especially injustice in relation to individuals. If there is going to be a detailed analysis of the economic system or of the history of ideologies, I am sure the masses will not understand. Yet such analysis is also necessary for a social movement for it is this that equips it with its intellectual ballast. However, since only well-educated groups will be able to assimilate this, one has to first direct such analysis to them and later train them to simplify the ideas for mass consumption. This is what I meant when I said a social movement must operate at different levels.

In terms of direct mass involvement, a public campaign would require direct mass involvement. But how massive this involvement would be depends on whether the issue



at hand is perceived as important by the masses and whether one has the material resources and the freedom to mount a large scale campaign. Even forums or discussions of this sort help us reach out to ordinary people. We are not preaching to an elite group anymore because if you look at the people who are here and if you look at the people who have joined Aliran in the last three months since it came into being, you will discover that many of them come from other levels of society, outside the academics and the professionals and people with high salaries. We have waiters, radio mechanics and others who we believe are as important as academics, perhaps more important, to the development of Aliran. Why do these people join?

The reason is very simple. If one looks at the development of all social movements, you find that apart from a few who articulate the ideas, there are a lot of people who join a social movement because they feel and may not comprehend certain injustices in society and they want to rectify these injustices. They may not have any faith in political parties or other groups. This is one way in which a social movement develops. If we have a waiter or a radio mechanic or a person from a kampong as a member of Aliran, who is conscious of certain things, who understands what his rights are, he may be able to influence a lot of people in his environment, many more than you and I can, through our classrooms.

### Question

Why was the organization called Aliran?

### Answer

I think that is a very good question and something that has to be explained. One of the meanings of Aliran is “gerakan” in Malay, meaning “movement.” So since this is seen as a movement we decided that the term “Aliran” would be appropriate because there is already a Gerakan in the Malaysian political process; we don’t want to be confused with that Gerakan and all the other Gerakans that are taking place – Gerakan Pembaharuan, Gerakan Bunuh Nyamuk Aedes and so on. So, we want to distinguish ourselves from all the other Gerakans. That is one reason why we have chosen another word in the Malay language.

Two, “aliran” is very often used to denote a movement of ideas. The word is used in relation to ideas, thoughts. For instance, one would say this is “aliran pemikiran” such and such. So since it denotes ideas, we decided on the word, Aliran. And perhaps, if I may add, Aliran is a word used for current or electric supply. We hope to electrify the country.

### Question

Given the shortcomings of our leadership, a time will come, I believe, when their sins of immediate commission and irresponsible omission will come home to roost and we will find that the nation will be on the brink of a disaster. How can building up consciousness prevent this?

## Answer

I suppose the bit about “disaster” is an opinion. The question is whether I agree or disagree with your opinion. As an optimist, I would like to disagree. As a pessimist, I will agree with you. And there are times when one is an optimist and there are times when one is a pessimist. When I see this Saturday morning gathering I feel quite optimistic; and when I listen to these questions, I am optimistic but when I go back and read the newspapers I get very pessimistic. Now, the more important question is whether we can avert a future disaster.

If you’ll forgive me, I would like to go back to the whole question of consciousness. Suppose in the newspaper world — since you are a journalist — we have a few individuals who are conscious of how we could approach the problem of inter-ethnic harmony and are prepared to write about this without touching upon political controversies, don’t you think it would make a big difference? For instance, I have often wondered why in the English newspapers of this country, there are very few articles about different cultures and some of the values upheld by different cultures. Why isn’t there any article about some of the things that Meng-tze, the Chinese philosopher, said about people’s dignity, proper values, responsibility of the rulers to the led or about Islamic or Hindu notions of justice and human welfare. Why aren’t there articles on these values in the newspapers? To my mind, if these articles appear consistently over a period of time, they would make some impact on people’s thinking. Why aren’t there articles about the great men in the Asean region who worked for social change and reform? We hear so much about Asean, Asean film producers, Asean directors, Asean artistes getting together. But we have never thought of highlighting some of the contributions from Asean men, men who are part of Asean history, like Rizal. Why is it we do not do this? After all, writing about Rizal would not be politically controversial and yet in a larger sense it will help develop our political consciousness.

Now, if there was an analysis of Rizal’s contributions, his idea of justice, truth, morality, if over a period of time, articles of that sort appear about King Chulalongkorn, Mongkut, about Agus Salim, Abu Hannifa, about Diponegoro and some of the other great leaders I think this will help build up people’s consciousness. Now, similarly we don’t have any articles in the newspapers or in our magazines that discuss some of the contemporary issues in our country in depth and with a larger understanding of historical forces. I’ll give you one example. Why isn’t there any in-depth analysis in our papers of why Dato Onn wanted to open up UMNO to all communities in 1950? There has been no analysis. His son is our Prime Minister today. Surely it is not wrong to talk about the father. Why is it that some newspapermen who may have some training in political science don’t pick up these themes and discuss them? Why is this not done? I can think of two reasons.

Firstly, the educated group, the elites, those who are in a position to exercise influence, whether in the newspapers or the universities are basically opportunistic. They are fundamentally self-seekers protecting and advancing their own interests while they try to cloak their cowardice and opportunism with all sorts of pious platitudes. They won’t go to jail for discussing Dato Onn. They won’t go to jail if they wrote a mild criticism of the New Economic Policy. They won’t go to jail if they discussed urban slums

and uneconomic holdings and pointed out the shortcomings of the government. No Vice-chancellor would go to jail for protesting against the University and University Colleges Act. No newspaper editor would be jailed for criticising the essential regulations. But then, the men at the top would be displeased, would be unhappy. They may not smile at the editor the next time they meet him at a Government cocktail. They may not invite him to their homes. He may not get a title, a medal.

This then is the problem. Many of us want to please the men at the top. We want to remain on the right side. Consequently, we become flatterers, sometimes unconsciously. This is why I have always said that one of the important courses that should be introduced at universities is on flattery – because this is what the vast majority of graduates are expected to do once they hold important positions. This then is the first reason why educative articles do not appear in our newspapers.

The second reason is because we lack an intellectual tradition. For a Filipino, it is the most natural thing in the world to connect his fight for civil rights today even if he is a Roman Catholic priest, with his tradition, with what happened in 1897 and 1898 in Filipino history. But for us we don't have this tradition: We have no memory. There is nothing to fall back upon. This is one of the problems. This is why I think the real task is to build up an intellectual tradition. Writing, thinking, analysing, evaluating come easily when there is such a tradition. Otherwise your prediction, my friend, could well come true.

### Question

Sir, Aliran has good ideals but have you got any practical plans to reach out to specific groups, for example, students in the University?

### Answer

That is a good question, something we have thought and talked about. We are not going to waste our time, unlike other groups in the past, talking to comfortable, well entrenched, well looked after, cosy middle-class types. We know from the experience of many developing countries, that they will be the last to move because their positions are secure in relation to the rest of the society. At the most we hope to produce some individuals from the middle and upper classes who will be able to communicate effectively with the masses and then build up real consciousness at other levels.

This means that the campuses, students, are not part of our analysis of the social situation. It is one of the infantile notions of left-wing groups in Malaysia and in other places that students are very important for social change. They have read this from the books. They don't know that in reality students by themselves are unimportant. Look at the real situation – they come to campus, spend three years in the campus, imbibe certain things, and then leave to join the privileged stratum. Some of them treat demonstrations like going to the nightclubs. This was what happened in December 1974. There were many of those active nightclub-goers who took part in the demonstrations. It was all fun and games. And then came the University and University Colleges Act, 1975. I agree that

the Act is wrong, it curbs the freedom of students but I do not agree that because there is the Act, students cannot do anything. The fact is that they have done nothing, they have not been able to develop a new role in the midst of these restrictions. Because I think that is what maturity means. You must be able to devise fresh approaches in spite of all the obstacles and barricades. Do you think the Russian Czars were kind to their critics? Do you think they gave them a lot of freedom? Do you think they said, please write and criticize us; students come out, please demonstrate against us?

Let me be more specific. There is nothing in the University and University Colleges Act that stops the student from producing pamphlets on social conditions in the slums of Penang. He can do that. He can organize study clubs on his own, have a club of five or six people and discuss these things. They can even talk about the courses in the University, about shortcomings in the University curriculum, about the need for an autonomous social science tradition. If they feel that the semester system is oppressive they can protest against it. It is allowed. Write a paper, make a case, petition. These things can be done.

This is why as far as students are concerned our attitude will be if they come and listen and support our ideas well and good. If one or two of them are prepared in the long run to stand by their commitment and develop their idealism, it will be very good. But if some of them after a while become implementors of the Internal Security Act, we won't be disappointed because we know this is to be expected! They are after all trained for elite society! One thing I am certain I won't do is what Aristotle did. Aristotle committed suicide because he was disappointed with his students!

Are there other groups then which are our target groups? As I had said, there cannot be a specific group for a social movement. If people from the intelligentsia are prepared to think, develop ideas and join us and are willing to work with clerks, typists, waiters and bell-boys, it will be a healthy development. In my view, the educational development of Malaysia favours Aliran because as time goes on, people are getting better and better educated in the formal sense. In other words, many more can now read and write. Look at the way in which newspapers and magazines sell today. The reading public has increased tremendously. You have parking attendants who are Form VI certificate holders. This is a change.

In that sense, we are not too unhappy because we know the groups we have to reach out would be groups whose mobility is blocked. They have the education, the qualifications, but are frustrated. They will be responsive to ideas and ideals.

### Question

Is Aliran a sort of training ground for future leaders?

### Answer

If leaders emerge from Aliran in the next thirty, forty or fifty years and they are good people, we will be very happy. But Aliran has no programme to train leaders. You can build up people's consciousness by exposing them to various ideas like socialism, capitalism, democracy. One thing we cannot do is to train them to be clean and incorrupt.

tible. They may have all the knowledge but when they get into power, they may still choose to line their pockets. No training programme can protect us completely from that danger.

### **Question**

There is a noticeable trend in Malaysian society. Institutions are set up and in the process towards power, they become corrupt. I hope this will not happen to Aliran.

### **Answer**

This is also our hope. There is no guarantee. This can happen to any group. I hope this will not happen to Aliran. One way to ensure this is to have individuals inside and outside Aliran who will not hesitate to criticize whenever things go wrong. We are always open to criticism and comment. Disagree, challenge and criticize. As long as there are people like you who are concerned enough to speak up, I will be happy.

## Datuk Michael Chen

Mr. Chairman, Yang Berhormat Encik Khir Johari, Mr. Yeap Ghim Guan, Mr. Gan Teik Chee, ladies and gentlemen.

First of all, I am very honoured to be invited to participate in this forum. At the same time I must confess that I am also facing a dilemma, being an active politician. I had always harboured the fear before I joined politics that being a member of the honourable legal profession, people think you are intelligent. When you are in politics, you become less intelligent. When you are actively in politics other people think you have no more intelligence, unless one is lucky enough like Tunku Abdul Rahman who after retirement still finds time to write monthly articles which appear in the *Star*, not just stories but advice to politicians and non-politicians. Unfortunately I am not retired yet, so I do not enjoy that status. So I am facing this dilemma and with that impression I would like to start on this topic today.

Malaysia has slowly built up during the last two decades a unique form of government in this region of South East Asia — a government of the people and by the people. Our Parliament which stands majestically in the Lake Gardens in Kuala Lumpur, the Federal Capital, and our State Assembly in each of the state capitals are institutions of democracy to protect the rights of each and every Malaysian citizen; they are guardians of our liberties. Parliament House and the State Assemblies are not just ordinary buildings. They are buildings of the people, the supreme power which is exercised by the representatives elected by the people and by some of you. We can do anything under the sun except to make a woman a man and a man a woman. Their efficiency as instruments of governance depends on the quality of the members and this again, directly or indirectly, depends on the serious judgement and political honesty with which citizens discharge their electoral responsibilities.

A democratic government enables the citizens to enjoy their rights but every right also carries with it a corresponding duty. It is therefore you as citizens of Malaysia who determine the well-being of Parliament and the State Assembly. The man-in-the-street must know not only his rights but also the corresponding duty for such rights. And yet, how many of us apart from listening to speeches made by various candidates from various parties during election campaigns, reading statements by politicians which appear from time to time, reading the *Watan* or the country's other newspapers, really take the trouble to know or care for, our Parliament and our State Assemblies and how exactly they affect our lives? This is a phenomenon not confined to Malaysia alone. It can also exist in countries like Britain and America where the practice of democracy had been many, many years ahead of us. It is probably due to the fact that many of us are too busy, too far away or too uninterested to enquire about it. Whatever the reason, genuine or otherwise, it does not help the cause of democracy if it is carried out without the full understanding and co-operation from the people. In spite of the fact that members of Parliament and members of State Assemblies are elected through a process of majority, they do not command the respect from the people — with the exception of a few. I do not know whether I would have done the same if I were not a member of Parliament as well as a Minister.

If so, I would certainly like to find out the cause of it. I often come across some people who are made to believe that politicians are a group of nest-feathering scoundrels; such belief would definitely discourage those genuine, honest politicians who had suffered so much and sometimes risked their lives for the good and well-being of the nation. There are others though I may not be able to defend.

Our Parliament or State Assembly is not a congress of ambassadors from different and hostile regions, whose interests must be maintained as an agent and advocate against other agents and advocates. But Parliament or State Assembly is a derivative Assembly of our nation with one interest and that is, to weld up local interests, not local prejudices, and to guide the general vote resulting from general reason. The member whom you have chosen is not a member of that particular constituency or of a particular race or of a particular mode of life but is a member of Parliament or the State Assembly. The local constituents should not have interests evidently opposed to the good of the rest of the community.

Some of our citizens have gone to the poll four times since Merdeka and soon it will be the fifth. Those who will make their maiden trip whether to vote or to be voted should know who are the best men for Parliament or State Assembly. Today Parliament and the State Assemblies need men from all walks of life who will pool their knowledge and experience together in the national interest — scientists, doctors, teachers, businessmen, trade unionists, miners, farmers, last but not least of all, lawyers — all have a vital part to play at those institutions of democracy. The real champions of Parliament and State Assemblies are those members who, with or without exceptional ability, fight for freedom and the general good with courage and who have been, above all, men without any personal motive.

From elected members and the appointed members of the Senate, a cabinet is formed. In practice the leader of the party which has the majority in numbers, will be invited by the King, Sultan or governor to form the government. The Prime Minister, Menteri Besar or the Chief Minister is the keystone of the arch; although in the Cabinet, both Federal and State, all its members stand on equal footing and speak with equal voice, he is the Head of the Cabinet, the first among equals and occupies a position of exceptional authority. But in the ultimate analysis, ladies and gentlemen, even a person as the Prime Minister, Menteri Besar or the Chief Minister is not indispensable. The supreme control resides with the people's representatives in Parliament or the State Assembly as the case may be, and behind all these institutions, with the people themselves. In a formal democracy, the King may be a noble man but you, the man-in-the-street may not be a nobleman but can be a gentleman, a gentleman in Parliament and a gentleman in the State Assembly. The man-in-the-street can, through the process of democracy, exercise his right to choose the member to serve in Parliament and State Assemblies in each and every one of our states, which in return, safeguards the liberties and democracy which all of us cherish. Thank you.



Mr. Chairman, members of the panel, ladies and gentlemen.

I would first of all like to say I am very happy to see my good friend, Datuk Michael Chen, present here at this time, because his presence here as a Member of Parliament not only adds greatly to this discussion but as a member of the government we are sure we will benefit a lot from what he had said and what he has to say after this.

Well, he talked about the Tunku in retirement. I am only in semi-retirement, so I am perhaps in a better position to say more than the Tunku because as long as I am in this state of semi-retirement, I will never retire as long as I live.

What I am going to say here concerns something which I feel very strongly about because I find there is one very unhealthy trend that is developing in our country. This trend is what I describe as the "politics of fear." I will tell you more about this subsequently by way of example. One leader of a communal political party tells a man-in-the-street, or for that matter, a man-in-the-kampong, that unless he votes for his party he will stand to lose his special rights and perhaps his religion too and so on. Another party leader tells another man-in-the-street that he must support his party otherwise he will be bullied by other communities and he will stand to lose some of the things he holds dear in life and there will be no one to champion his cause and his rights. Yet another leader of a political party, a minority party, goes on to tell another man-in-the-street that unless he supports that party, he will be driven to the wall perhaps to a point of no return. You will note from what I said that in none of these cases would you find any leader making his appeal to his voters and supporters on ideological grounds. In other words their common bait is "fear." That is why I say "politics of fear."

Even in family planning, fear has been introduced and is being introduced in order to discourage the man-in-the-street or in the kampong from practising family planning. There is a leader who tells his people that if they practise family planning, very soon they will be outvoted and swamped in future elections; then what will happen? All your rights will go. But ironically, this particular leader practises family planning himself but he expects his followers to do otherwise. In other words, what he is actually saying is: let them all go to hell so long as I go to heaven and so long as I survive and retain my hold. I know all this not from hearsay but from my own personal experiences as the founder and the first President of the National Family Planning Board. I was accused of being a traitor to my own community for preaching family planning. As a result I very nearly lost my seat in the elections in 1969, very nearly. But even if I had lost my seat in 1969 elections, I would still have maintained my conviction in regard to family planning because I do not care too much about being defeated since my conscience is more important than anything else. And even if I were to be defeated, I would still continue to preach family planning because I believe it is for the good of the people, especially for the people in the kampong, who just cannot afford to have the number of children they are having.

What I have tried to do is to outline to you how democracy is practised in this country. It is based on “fear.” It is most unfortunate that from the start of democracy in this country over twenty years ago, we have had political parties based on communal lines. We first have UMNO, followed by MCA, then MIC (which is interpreted by some as “May I come in”). However, after the formation of the Alliance, the element of narrow communalism had been reduced and at that time it created a basis for national unity in the national interest, above all communal interests. The late Datuk Onn Jaafar, founder of UMNO, tried to open the doors of UMNO to the non-Malays in Peninsular Malaysia at that time. It was a very noble act on his part but at that time, his followers were not yet prepared for such a radical move, again out of fear. The late Datuk Onn then left UMNO, went on to form the IMP, the Independence of Malaya Party, which was supposed to be a non-communal political party, but when IMP failed to gain support of the electorate and the people of this country, he left IMP and subsequently formed Party Negara which later developed to be a more communal party than UMNO itself, with himself as the leader.

We must admit that at this stage of our political development, to form a non-communal political party based purely on ideological lines will be, from the beginning, an uphill task. To gain the support from the man-in-the-street is difficult. The mirage of fear, implanted over the years, still remains in the minds of the man-in-the-street, whether you like it or not.

Be that as it may, I feel that in the interest of genuine democracy in this country and in the interest of the future of our own country, those of us who prefer to think of the future rather than the immediate things, must choose and must persist in our efforts to eradicate this fear, convince the man-in-the-street or the man-in-the-kampong that his fear is really unfounded. I would readily admit that this would be a gigantic task but given the time and the correct approach, I believe we will succeed. I say so from my own experience, from what I see and what I observe and learn from my friends and various colleagues, that there is a great fountain of goodwill amongst the people, amongst the man-in-the-street, amongst the man-in-the-kampong. This goodwill, this understanding, this love must be developed and must be tapped in order to make this objective possible in the future.

Thank you.

## Encik Yeap Ghim Guan

Mr. Chairman, honourable Minister, fellow panelists.

The definition of democracy as a system of government is as wide and as varied as there are professed proponents. Suffice to say there is not a single self-confessed dictatorship in the world. Even President Idi Amin will be the first to claim that Uganda is a true democracy. Today the concept has come a long way from the original Greek term and to it has been added the modern western concept of the "government of the people, by the people and for the people."

Most Asian countries like Malaysia began their independence by subscribing to a democratic system moulded along the lines of their former colonial masters — theoretically, a highly desirable goal but often unattainable in implementation. We have constitutions patterned on the sacred concept of liberty, equality and fraternity, evolved in the West through centuries of historical development. Most of these constitutional guarantees remain dead letters in the statute books, eroded by the usual legal qualifications — the "subject to," "notwithstanding," "save as herein provided" — legal jargon to water down those very basic human rights these Constitutions profess to guarantee.

The topic of today's forum, "Democracy and the Man-in-the-Street," is perhaps mooted on the valid premise that it is increasingly remote from the man-in-the-street. At the onset, I would like to place my cards on the table that notwithstanding its attendant shortcomings, defects, democracy based on a system of "one man, one vote" and universal suffrage, is yet to be challenged by any other credible alternative which will not lend itself to the same human abuse. The right of the masses to decide their own destiny through the ballot box and the other accepted forms of expression of free will, be it called "democracy" or something else, is no more Western than the invention of the wheel or the law of gravity. Democracy in non-Western societies with perhaps the exception of Japan, had floundered and failed to a large extent mainly because these non-Western nations have had to telescope the revolutions of modern times to a span of a few years or a few decades in the twentieth century to catch up with the Western World. Where democracy had failed in non-Western nations, it had failed because of the corrupt ruling elite's intolerance of the restrictions of its freedom of action and of questioning of the permanency of its power. But like the proverbial tail linking man to the ape, democracy as a concept refuses to go away even from misuse or abuse. Failures and setbacks notwithstanding, one has as much chance to stem this surging wave of self-determination as one has to turn the clock backwards in this age of technology, industrialization and fast communication.

In South East Asia as well as in Malaysia, the experiment is still very much alive. In Malaysia, there are many who would play the role of "big brother"; soon after Ma 13 many prominent politicians, (the present crowd excepted) cried for the total abolition of democracy and in particular, parliamentary democracy. Even lately, Datuk Asri of the PAS was heard to decry democracy as a system of government suitable for Malaysia. Perhaps recent events in Kelantan had been in answer to his fervent prayers.

In Malaysia, we cannot say that we have achieved democracy from the view point of the man-in-the-street. His only participation in the process is that once-every-5-year journey to the ballot box, or if he is lucky or on the other hand unlucky for the candidate, a by-election once in less than five years but even so hardly a system of "one man, one vote." Elections in Malaysia hardly live up to democratic traditions. The real democratic experiment is avoided and lost in the scramble for seats and ruling parties with the might of government apparatus believing in the policy of overkill. Elections are fought, I do agree with my colleague, Encik Khir Johari, not on the basis of real issues but on personalities, gimmicks, bribes, and threats of retaliation, if all else failed! These methods most certainly would keep the ruling party in power; until the inevitable day of reckoning.

Today, when we face the twin extremes of the right and the left, the bulwark of our democratic foundations should be reinforced, not eroded. The ruling party especially is reluctant to involve the people in the democratic process, fearful perhaps of awakening the sleeping giant. Freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, free press, academic freedom, an effective opposition are virtually non-existent in this country. Freedom of expression is the first casualty in the suppression of other freedoms. Public rallies are banned in this country, except government rallies! The free Press is "free" only not to print! Institutions of higher learning, short of appointing Special Branch Officers as lecturers, are controlled and regulated by the ruling party jealously guarding its monopoly of power. Even professional bodies expressing legitimate dissent and concern on purely professional matters are being pulled up. We are exhorted to concentrate our energies on "development" as if these are separate entities.

There is a great need to involve the people in the democratic experiment and to take it out of the ivory tower of politicians, academicians and the brokers of power and I quite agree with the objectives of this society that is having its first forum. Because one of the aims, objectives and purposes, as I understand, reading from this brochure (the souvenir programme) is to get our rakyat to think and to reflect on the major challenges confronting our nation. It says here:

*Aliran will seek to nurture and nourish this consciousness so that our people will realise what social justice means in reality, why civil rights and liberties are so vitally important, what the sane, sensible approaches to national unity are and how honest, able leadership can inspire the masses to harness their energies in the quest for excellence.*

These are noble objectives and these are the objectives that I subscribe to. The people should be given a stake in democracy not merely through a mouth-piece but through the whole paraphernalia of democracy. There is no room for guided democracy and the process of involvement and education must start now. Parliamentary democracy seems remote to the man-in-the-street and this remoteness is a creature very much created by parliamentarians themselves. Parliamentarians jealously guard their proceedings and play the role of priestly middlemen to the "gods" or the powers that be. From the speech of the honourable Minister, I detect, this sense of remoteness is quite mutual.

Even today, in Western democracy, televising Westminster or Congress is a matter of heated debate. One senses the reluctance to admit the omnipotent eye of the TV camera. In Malaysia, admission to the State Assemblies and its meetings are only on invitation. In Malaysia, we have half-heartedly experimented with bringing facets of democracy to the people. Its failure had been due more to fear of those in power in sharing the media and involving the people. At least one investigative TV programme was taken off the air for succeeding too well! In the recent televising of the speech of the Prime Minister in Parliament on the Kelantan crisis, the opportunity of raising the whole affair from the gutter level of party propaganda was lost when only the Prime Minister's speech was televised. Why was Datuk Asri's reply and the other side of the coin denied a fair hearing and equal time? Are people incapable of deciding on the basis of two opposing views? That denial is not simply a denial of the right of Datuk Asri, who I had said earlier on, is not a self-professed democrat, but the denial of the basic right of the rakyat – the man-in-the-street – to be equally informed. There are enough laws for libel and sedition that we are all aware of, to keep debate within reasonable bounds.

I would suggest the time has come (and the launching of this society which calls itself a reform movement is quite appropriate because there is a need) for immediate reform in the concept and practice of democracy in Malaysia. There is an immediate need to bring democracy to the people. There are and will be differences in opinions as to the steps to be taken and the priorities but I would suggest at least seven simple steps of reform be taken in this long journey towards realization of true democracy in this country.

First of all, restoration of all constitutional freedoms and guarantees without any conditional clauses.

Secondly, Parliament should not be a mere rubber-stamp and the forum itself should be a forum that is representative of the people. We are well aware that in Parliament today, the power of the Speaker is overwhelming, that the voice of the opposition is hardly heard and if it is heard in Parliament, it is hardly printed in the newspapers.

Thirdly, restoration of grassroot democracy – the democracy that involves the people in their daily needs, that is, restoration of free elections to local government. This is the vehicle by which people can be drawn towards the practice of democracy.

Fourthly, greater consultation on issues before legislation is brought to Parliament. The process of guillotine and rushing through legislation is something that should not be allowed and we should have greater reliance on the system of commission of enquiry or even the American system of sub-committee hearings and public debates and more associations and societies such as Aliran.

Fifthly, abolition of the annual licensing of the Press which, I am sure, will make my fellow friends over there only too happy for I believe whether in government or out of government, there is really a need for a totally free press subject to the laws of libel and sedition. There is no justification for this annual licensing process.



Sixthly, there should be in fact an introduction of televised parliamentary proceedings to bring Parliament to the people. I had said that in the State Assemblies, attendance at meetings is only on invitation. I am well aware that in Parliament anybody can get in but we know Parliament is in Kuala Lumpur and it is impossible for everybody to try and attend Parliament under those circumstances. If debates on the budget, Kelantan crisis and even a routine report by the Minister of Communications over the air disaster can be televised I see no reason why Parliamentary proceedings cannot be televised to a certain extent. This practice I understand is being put into implementation in America and in Britain and I believe it could be usefully implemented in this country. I see no grounds for valid objections.

Finally, positive and overt demonstrations on the part of the ruling party of its commitment to the concept of democracy and its accountability to the people. That is very important. If we do not make these reforms now, then I say we have learnt nothing from the lessons of Indochina.

Thank you.

## Encik Gan Teik Chee

Mr. Chairman, members of the panel, ladies and gentlemen.

We have had three very interesting speakers and I must say that they are well above expectations although I do not want to sound presumptuous. We have had points raised which are highly relevant without punches being pulled but I think we will agree that there is really nothing new in what has been said. Each of us in our own serious moments have thought or expressed such sentiments but we have not seen any earthshaking changes as a result. I wonder why. This brings us back to the subject of democracy and the man-in-the-street.

The man-in-the-street cannot be that bodoh. The man-in-the-street cannot be that insensitive. Why is it then that he has not taken sufficient measures to exercise his rights? I think the reason is that one gets bored with the idea, as has been mentioned, of making the trip once in five years to the ballot box to be led round by the nose. One gets bored with the whole unreality of participation in debates in Parliament which is so difficult to attend and which in any case is tied down by so many rules that nothing important really gets across therein. Important decisions are of course not made in Parliament. They are made in the backrooms. One gets bored with the repetitious "politics of fear" as has been well put by Yang Berhormat, Encik Khir and yet it is not the answer to say, "To hell with them, they are all crooks." As has been well said by Yang Berhormat, Datuk Michael Chen, if the honest men do not get together then the crooks will continue to run the show. In fact it is extremely irresponsible to think, "Let them do their worst, I'll take care of myself." Individual rights are affected by community politics so that to establish a democratic government is a collective endeavour. One cannot do much just moaning in the coffeshop.

Now, it has been said that rugby is a game for ruffians played by gentlemen but in developing countries, politics is often the reverse, that is, a game for gentlemen played by ruffians. Our politicians do not observe the conventions as expected of gentlemen for they have no intention of losing power gracefully. Consequently, a cynical disregard for the rights of the people, for the whole democratic process, reduces democratic government into horsetrading and backroom gossip. In the end, the most important decisions are made in a terribly irrational and undemocratic atmosphere.

Of course, the man-in-the-street thinks, "I am only interested in the practical aspects of government. I know, not everything is right, many things are wrong but what has that got to do with me as long as I get up every morning, go to work and get enough to eat? After all they are too powerful and we are so few." But what he does not realise is that democracy as a way of life is highly relevant to his day-to-day concerns. I think, slowly, the younger generation, except for those crippled by the low level of education that we are now having, will begin to realise that politics does affect immediate day-to-day concerns. A few obvious examples are prices of consumer goods, environmental protection, law and order, public health, whether your letters get delivered on time – these are the things which have become more and more difficult to take for granted.



Firstly, of course, Aliran is concerned with the curtailment of fundamental rights which unfortunately appears irrelevant to the ordinary citizen. And then when the system reaches an intermediate state of decay, even little things like telephone services, water, electricity, the post, slowly begin to break down. I am sorry to say that although we are expected to progress year by year, but in many ways we have in fact gone backwards over the years and I speak as one who has come of age since Merdeka. I can distinctly remember the difference in the whole atmosphere of the country between 1957 and 1977. When I was in school we believed, rightly or wrongly, in national unity and equality of opportunity but now it is just a cynical throw-away.

One very important criterion of a civilized society is what we call the presumption of continuity. For example, if you own a house today, you can reasonably expect to own it tomorrow without unjustified interference or if your telephone works today it will work tomorrow without you having to pay anything extra for it. But nowadays, this continuity which we expect as a psychological necessity can no longer be taken for granted; this is the crucial dividing line between stability in a democracy versus arbitrary dictatorship. In this respect, the present state of affairs is far from satisfactory. The basic features of democracy are in danger of gradual suffocation and the very people who pretend to practise it, bureaucrats and executives in the government, are showing increasing disrespect for democratic norms and conventions. The powers that be are complying with democratic conventions only when compelled to. This is like the fear of a thief of being caught rather than the shame of being found out. As a result even the security of one's daily life is slowly being eroded.

This is a critical period for our democratic country. Make no mistake about that; the man-in-the-street must wake up now to this imminent danger. For the very character of his daily life is at stake. Of course, they will say, "But there are laws, there are codes." I think we have to forget about legal accountability for the time being because we have passed that stage. Let us think of de facto accountability instead. It is unfortunate but it is true that the honest majority do not always prevail over the dishonest handful of thieves and rogues, because life is not that simple. So we come back to the very basic question of what can be done – what is the remedy?

Well, firstly, there can be no action without consciousness of one's rights. There can be no action without thought and the great problem in this country is the lack of clear thinking and competent judgement. To some people, of course, it is a blessing – let them remain blind. It follows, therefore, that the basic remedy is the awakening of consciousness and, to begin with, let us resume the simple habit of calling a spade a spade. Confucius taught that one major evil in the society of his time was the discrepancy between the name and the actuality. And he taught that one of the great duties of a citizen was to bring the two into correspondence with each other. In Chinese philosophy this is known as "the rectification of names." And Confucius said that if a name is not rectified, then ultimately the people will be confused; they would be at a loss what to do and what to avoid doing.

Similarly, that courageous opponent of tyranny, Solzhenitsyn in his novel "The First Circle" stressed the importance of historical judgement. He described a man in the

prison camps of Stalinist Russia who was a theoretical scientist and who suddenly became very interested in history. When asked by his fellow prisoners, he answered, "You historians have been at fault. We cannot avoid evil but we can place it." So this scientist began to write history for he believed that Man must at least know what was happening even if he can't do anything about it. And I think he was very right. Without historical judgement, during a time of darkness and oppression, the light will go out altogether. But with serious thinking and judgement even as something happening in the mind, there is a reasonable chance that we will not have forgotten how to fly when the cage is opened.

Coming back to the rectification of names, Meng-tze was once asked by one of those petty tyrants who used to litter the Continent of China, "May a subject then put his sovereign to death?" The questioner was trying to trick him, you see, for he was speaking of the last ruler, Chou, in the state of Shan who had been overthrown by a subject. Meng-tze replied that when a ruler outrages virtue and transgresses against righteousness, then he is a bandit and a ruffian and is thus considered a mere fellow. And he concluded: "I have heard that a fellow called Chou was put to death but I have not heard that this was killing a sovereign."

So, we come down to some very basic things. Let us call a bandit a bandit and then decide what to do next. If nothing can be done, still we have the satisfaction of distinguishing between right and wrong. In a multi-racial society, of course, in this rectification of names, we must observe certain ground rules and the Rukunegara is a good guide in this respect. We should take care not to tread on the sensitivity of other races otherwise we would be playing into the hands of the troublemakers or as Encik Khir has put it – those who practise the politics of fear; their policy is: "Divide and rule – keep them apart and mutually suspicious; the politics of fear has proved to be successful and must continue to be used." Such practices, whenever they appear, must be exposed and defused as the very first requirement in arousing consciousness among the people.

I would say that the greatest obstacle to national unity today is institutionalised communalism. Racial antagonisms are ever present in our existing communal party set-up. It is very difficult to build a Malaysian scheme of values when the ruling parties themselves do not have a rounded Malaysian character. Each community is supposed to unite and then get together and further unite with each other, after a lot of inter-communal contention has gone on, no doubt. This is especially dangerous in a situation where unscrupulous groups commonly exploit racial differences in order to attain and maintain political power. It is therefore the duty of every individual citizen to encourage and support multi-racial groups – I am not just speaking of Aliran – and to resist the divisive tendencies of gangster-politicians.

One often hears of common misconceptions like, "Well, so long as there is efficient government, the form of government does not matter." Of course, the character of the ruler in any society is important but one should not be in a position where one is dependent on the goodwill of certain individuals. The strength of democratic government is that it provides an institutionalised safeguard against abuse of power and thus the responsiveness of the people is better assured. One should simply regard good government as a right, not a favour. The days of begging for justice are over. We expect honest and

good government as of right. This whole system of patronage and flattery (with Tan Sris and Datuks galore), which is becoming more and more widespread, must be rejected as sheer nonsense! The long-term interests of the nation in a “patronage-value-system” are often sacrificed to the personal weakness of the leader. The ruler can do no wrong because the ruler may not be told that he has done wrong. Furthermore Asian feudal history is full of examples of the susceptibility of benevolent despots to the influence of evil advisors. So even if we have good rulers we cannot guarantee good government. It is such an easy thing for someone to whisper in somebody’s ear that someone else is thinking of overthrowing him. And then this benevolent despot suddenly goes crazy.

Even in our own country, this kind of histrionics is relevant – it does not appear in the films only. Followers of Chinese wayang will be quite familiar with the stories where the Emperor has so often, so strenuously, to be dissuaded from executing his honest Minister. If he is such a good Emperor, why does he need to be protected from his own weaknesses? I think those days are long over. So let us ensure that if we must have an Emperor, at least let him be aware that he is just a human being and when he is told he is wrong, he will not get insanely destructive.

Finally, how does one approach the question of succession in this Emperor-worship system with its deeprooted psychological feudalism, if I may so put it? It is very difficult: the smoothest flatterer will surely get the highest vote.

The other misconception is that food is incompatible with freedom: “You must choose between them. Stop all this politicking: let us carry on with our work, we want to develop the country. You people are talking too much, you are distracting us from the really important tasks in the nation.” The answer is very simple: “It is because you do not want us to talk, you do not want to hear what we are saying, that you are trying to bamboozle us by saying food is more important.” Food has never been a problem in this country. I have never heard of anybody starving because he talked too much! Even as a matter of historical fact, the most productive and wealthy societies have also been the most liberal. For example, Athenian democracy, the North Italian City-States in the early urbanization of Europe, the early Islamic Empire. Tyranny in all ages has in fact proved to be an uneconomic social system and this is not surprising – nobody likes to work under coercion. Even the Soviet Union today is not as productive as it could be if it were better organized, if it did not use the system of the carrot and the stick.

The attitude of food versus freedom, when taken to its logical conclusion, will lead to the battery-farm police state as the ideal way of life.

Thank you.



## Question and Answer Session

### Question

Mr. Chairman, as I understood it, usually it is the small groups that lead the masses. It is not the masses that lead the small groups. If the government in power has tried to educate the people along the correct lines, has tried to eliminate this fear rather than let this fear continue, then perhaps the issue would not have cropped up. I for one believe one should not deceive the people but allow the people to decide. The government should educate the people and it can be done.

### Answer

Y.B. DATUK MICHAEL CHEN: I think the discrepancy here is that political leaders always like to lead the masses. But on the other hand the people should also try to lead the leader. If in a democracy we have the leaders who teach you what to do and what not to do, then the very essence or spirit of democracy would be gone. When you talk about democracy in the real sense, it is the power from the people who decide or determine what type of government should be formed. I don't think any good politician would teach the people how not to vote for him. I think that is the job of the lecturers, professors or teachers to teach them. I don't think any good politician would do that. If he does, I am afraid he is no longer a politician.

MR. GAN TEIK CHEE: I am afraid I have to disagree with such a view. I do not think one should have such a narrow concept of ruling or the government, that the business of the government is to stay in power. If that is so, then we should say that the business of doctors is to make patients more ill and make more money. Once you start off with this assumption, although I admire the frankness behind it, then you are more or less saying you are not fit to stand for elections because you are telling the people that whatever I tell you, let me just make it clear it is not true, it is only meant to win votes. If they come up with such an introduction at least we can admire such honesty in their dishonesty. Without getting too philosophical, I think we can all agree that it is not the business of the government to stay in power, that this is an extremely functional and cynical conception of rule. If it is merely the business of government to stay in power then we can throw them out immediately even from the outset. Let them say so publicly, openly, honestly, then we know what to do. The reforms, of course, must come from both sides. It is a two-way traffic. Whether the egg comes before the chicken is not important but both chicken and egg cannot exist without each other. Obviously, the people who at the same time should resist communal fools, have the right to expect guidance from the government because they have all the paraphernalia and apparatus of the State at their command. They can do a lot of good if they want to. It is not true to say that if they do good then they would certainly not come back to power. That is absolutely untrue. That is to say all human beings are by nature evil and in order to remain on top of them, we have to be more evil than them except not let them know what we are doing. I do not agree with that because if we agree with that, then it is also a justification for having a police state. Right from the start, everybody is waiting for a chance to get the better of everybody else, everything is justified in order to get to power. I personally do not agree with that and I think there are a lot of people in the country who may think that we are on the way to fascism.

MR. YEAP GHIM GUAN: Basically I agree with the panelist who spoke just now. I think the political leadership cannot evade their responsibility. Here I think the speaker from the floor really meant what solutions the ruling party has in mind. On this issue of national unity in this country, I think there is one solution which the ruling elite can take and that is, if they wish to bring about national unity in this country, I think it is high time after twenty years of independence to dissolve the communal lines of the Barisan components and form one political party. That would go a long way to eradicate communal politics in this country. That is the challenge that Barisan faces. Are they prepared to dissolve or do they have sufficient confidence in their role as leaders to dissolve their component parties and form one non-communal party? Are they prepared to? If they are not, then I say they are forfeiting their right to leadership because it is the very existence of communalism that is causing the stress and strain in this country. After twenty years, is it impossible for the Alliance, now the Barisan, to form such a party? As regards the question of the rakyat's involvement in politics, I think it is a dual problem. One is the lack of assertiveness on the part of the people. The people have not asserted their rights sufficiently in this country. The people have taken for granted that "big brother" knows what to do but unfortunately we have seen that in the last twenty years of independence, "big brother" does not know what he is doing. He is doing a lot of things that are wrong. This "big brother" attitude should now cease and the people should assert their rights and challenge the erosion of all their fundamental rights. On the other hand, it is also the responsibility of the ruling elite in this country to inform the people. The right to information is a basic right. Unfortunately it is not written in our Constitution. In America, I understand you can sue even for information. In this country, the Minister in Parliament tells you it is privileged and if you can't get an answer in Parliament you cannot get any answer outside Parliament. If we have the right information channelled to the people, I am sure the people can make proper and right judgement not only on election day but on any day. So this is a double-edged problem. It is the duty of both the ruling elite and rakyat.

Y.B. ENCIK KHIR JOHARI: I would just like to say that fear is always there and as long as the people can gain their objectives by capitalising on this fear, they will go on capitalising. Mr. Yeap suggested that Barisan should dissolve their communal components, I don't think they will do it as long as they can achieve their objective of staying in power. It is up to the people to think what is best for the country and we have to work harder than just attending forums or seminars to convince more people to think and be broad-minded. As I said just now, there is a way, however difficult it is, of allaying the fear of the people, that is by uniting the people not on the platform of fear but on a more objective platform. Asking the Barisan to dissolve itself is an easier way. Why not we form into another Barisan? I am not saying we should form one right away. But why not? I am sure Datuk Michael Chen would welcome it because he would then have a good opportunity to survive up to the 1990's. This is for us to ponder and to reflect. We have enough people who can think and guide the people of this country.

## Question

Kenapa politik jadi satu alat dan selalu diperalatkan?

## Answer

Y.B. ENCIK KHIR JOHARI: Apa yang saya sebutkan tadi ikut aliran yang ada sekarang. Jadi, lihatlah gaya yang menjadi daya penarik untuk parti-parti politik mendapat sokongan, misalnya, katalah PAS dia bertanding dulu, dia kata kalau tak undi kepada dia, awak kafir, awak bukan Islam, jadi awak murtadlah dan macam-macam dan begitulah juga parti lain. Kalau tak sokong parti ini habislah, luputlah orang Melayu! Ini menjadi daya penarik untuk parti itu mendapat sokongan. Jadi, pasal apa keadaan electorate atau penggundi-penggundi kita dalam peringkat itu mereka boleh menelan perkara-perkara seperti ini? Tetapi tak begitu misalnya dalam sepuluh tahun lagi, lima-belas tahun lagi, katalah itu semua tak jadi umpan untuk menarik. Tetapi ini terpulang kepada siapa untuk mengubah sikap fikiran itu? Ini terpulang kepada kita yang ada sekarang, kepada generasi yang ada lebih-lebih lagi macam saudara yang muda. Macam dalam Islam ada dikatakan Tuhan tidak boleh mengubah nasib satu kaum melainkan kaum itu sendiri mengubah nasib sendiri. Ini dari Quran, tak boleh lari. That is, "Nobody can change the fate of any community unless the community itself changes its fate." It is very true. So we have come to a certain point where we have to do something and as far as I am concerned, I will support any party whether DAP or PAP or whatever "P" which I believe is for the good of the country. That is why I support Aliran because I think it is a good thing to have this kind of forum where we can discuss openly. Where else can we discuss? Jadi, inilah pendapat saya. Saya harap generasi muda yang boleh menunjuk sikap yang lebih progresif, yang lebih tegak untuk negara. Kita tidak boleh salahkan, saya tak salahkan apa yang parti ini buat, apa yang lain-lain parti buat. Kita salahkan kepada kita. Basically it is our duty to reform and change the attitude and thinking of the people. It is a very difficult task but what we should do is to get together and think together and plan what is the best thing to be done.

## Question

Yang Berhormat kata dia tak sokong siapa-siapa pun; Yang Berhormat ada pendapat persendirian. Tetapi saya ingin tahu bagaimana Yang Berhormat sebagai ahli Parlimen Barisan Nasional atau ahli UMNO dan ahli Barisan Nasional, tidak beri sokongan kepada sesiapa pun. Sebagai ahli Parlimen UMNO atau Barisan Nasional, Yang Berhormat terpaksa menyokong parti kerajaan. Kalau tidak, saya tak tahu bagaimana kerajaan atau parti yang mana Yang Berhormat menyokong, dapat bertindak?

## Answer

Y.B. ENCIK KHIR JOHARI: Saya kata saya sekarang ahli Barisan Nasional. Kalau tidak ditangkap, tak apa-apalah, nasib baik. Walaupun untuk pengetahuan saudara, bila saya ada di Washington memang sudah niat saya. I was prepared to stand against anybody. Whether I win or lose is a different matter. But then at the last moment I was given the ticket to stand for Barisan Nasional. So in fact, I have to support Barisan Nasional because it is only fair. Although I have certain reservations with regards to so many things. But thank God, I have my newspaper wherein I can voice what I feel should be



done in certain fields. The latest news today is that PAS has announced that it has been expelled on the 13th from the Barisan Nasional and if you had read my newspaper what we wrote is not just on the expulsion of PAS. Anytime we can be expelled, anytime we can get out of the Barisan but what we regret is that communal politics will rear its head again in this country and this is something which we really regret. We had come to a certain stage where we could avoid such a thing in the interests of national unity. But now we go back to where we were in 1969, 1968 when we had to fight these elements. This is the only thing. As far as I am concerned, for better or for worse, I have always stuck to my principle and if I find that I can no longer be a useful member of Barisan without sacrificing my principle, I will leave the Barisan at any time. Yes, this is my stand, today, tomorrow and forever. I hope that I have answered your question.

### Question

Mr. Chairman, much has been said on whether we do select right representatives or wrong ones or the choice happens to be a wise one but basically how does one actually choose the right one because many of the representatives who stand in certain constituencies are not from that constituency but from elsewhere. So in this context how do the people in that constituency get to know the candidates from elsewhere. Do you think a certain ruling must be made that people who stand in that constituency must come from that area so that the people concerned can vote for the right people? This is important because usually what happens is when the people wish to seek advice from the representative he is never there and the purpose of electing that person is defeated.

The other thing is as it has been stated certain games are played by gentlemen and crooks and there are some very good elected representatives and some who are not so good. There are some honest ones and some are on the other side of the fence. I would like to say that while all government servants who enter the service have to declare their assets, elected representatives up till now have not come forward to champion the cause of declaring their assets.

### Answer

Y.B. DATUK MICHAEL CHEN: In answer to your first question, according to the Election Ordinance, there is no hard and fast rule that the candidate must be from that locality but in fact, as far as I know, there again, the type and quality of candidates have to be decided by the people themselves. Where UMNO is concerned, most of the candidates must be from the division. Every party has a party division and most candidates are local people. In the case of MCA, most of them are from the local division except in those cases where it does not have the type of candidate it wants then it might invite others to come into that constituency. In the case of MIC, probably they have candidates from other areas. But generally people do request for candidates from the local division. As for the second part of the question, that there are gentlemen and crooks, you will discover with time. You have to depend on your choice, on your judgement and the information you have. As for declaring assets, I do not know whether you are referring to cabinet ministers right down to the Parliamentary Secretary or members of Parliament; as far as Ministers are concerned, they have to submit their assets once they come into the government.



## Question

Mr. Chairman, today we see very little importance attached to the Dewan Rakyat and we the masses are very interested to know what is going on. If the masses are able to get more news on the Dewan Rakyat, the masses will be better informed. Would the panel or the Press care to comment on this? It was also stated that elected representatives should not be the ones to lead the people, that the masses should lead the people. I do not know how this can be done because the masses are not properly and fully informed and also because of certain sensitive issues. I do not know whether the man-in-the-street is able to say something which is correct and not against the Sedition Act.

## Answer

Y.B. ENCIK KHIR JOHARI: I am speaking for my newspaper; the space is limited for government news but whatever we can put in, we try to put in. If you want to get the full record of the proceedings you have to buy the Hansards which only cost one dollar but the thing is the Hansards come out probably a year or two years later. As for my newspaper we try to cover as much as possible. Your second question about leadership, you have to accept the fact that the people get the type of government they deserve. It is we who choose the government. If we choose the leaders, we make leaders; we can also unmake them. The way to do this is through the democratic process. I know there are handicaps but there is no other way; so it is up to us to think what is best and to choose carefully.

MR. YEAP GIM GUAN: On the question of Parliamentary news, I am not a journalist so I find it difficult to answer from that point of view. But I think not all the news that comes out of Parliament is very newsworthy. But certainly I don't expect every word to be printed. However I believe both sides of the view should be presented but I notice certain national newspapers report news the other way round. If a member of opposition asks a question and the Minister replies, what happens is the Minister's reply comes first then the question raised comes later. The point in issue was the recent debate over the Education Ministry. This is the way the *Straits Times* had done things but I think there is a case for better coverage of Parliament. I think as far as Chinese newspapers are concerned, they give good coverage. The English and perhaps the Malay newspapers don't give adequate coverage but as I suggested earlier, perhaps the question of televising the proceedings, as Encik Khir has said, should be welcomed. At the moment, televising of those proceedings by TV Malaysia is highly inadequate. On the question of leadership, the choice ultimately lies with the people. The question is how to decide. If they are to be deprived the basic right of democratic dissent, then the people will decide by revolution. That we have seen in Indochina. The political leaders have a responsibility. Before that kind of decision is taken, they should see that true democracy is practised. On this question of declaring assets, I believe the answer has not been fully given. It is not enough to declare assets to the Prime Minister. This question was the main undertaking of the Perak platform in 1969. Dr. Alatas was very vehement about this point and Dr. Lim when challenged, said, "Oh, they declared it to me." What good is that? I say fair enough, there must be some degree of privacy and I support this question of declaring assets but one should not just declare to the Prime Minister. It should be gazetted in the government gazette. If people want to read this gazette, they can buy it. It is not publicly sold like the *Watan*. At least some privacy is there.

**Y.B. ENCIK KHIR JOHARI:** On the question of coverage, I support this fully. In Japan, for example, the Budget Committee debate (which we don't have in this country) was fully televised. In America, the proceedings of the Congress and especially on certain matters of national importance are all televised. From my own observations, this is a good thing we should adopt in this country in order to bring the people together and to promote democracy. On the question of assets, in many countries each member of Parliament, including the Prime Minister, declares his assets and this declaration is available in Parliament or the Assembly for anybody to inspect anytime. This is a good practice which we should adopt in Malaysia.

**MR. GAN TEIK CHEE:** On reporting of Dewan Rakyat, if it takes one year for the Hansards to be printed, I don't think the people are prepared to wait that long. I think it is a disgrace and rightly or wrongly, we get the impression that the government is not interested in letting the people know what is going on. The point on whether the masses should lead, I think we will go round in circles. It is important to remember that primarily it is the duty of the leaders to educate the masses. If we come to the conclusion that they have no intention to carry it out, then it is the duty of the people to do something. In such a state of affairs, as Encik Khir had said, they should be unmade. But they cannot be unmade in the same way they are made. Unfortunately if you have elected a man, you cannot dissect him. I think the process of unmaking is rather a more serious affair.

### **Question**

What do members of the panel think if speeches of the opposition are televised?

### **Answer**

**MR. GAN TEIK CHEE:** There has been a lot of frustration arising from this bitterness at not being able to say what you want to say. If that is the case, then perhaps we should look at the matter again. There is nothing that we have said today that will be subject to any Sedition Law. And if you express satisfaction that speakers have been bringing up matters which you think are relevant, there is nothing to prevent you from talking these things openly either. A lot of people have the wrong impression that if we oppose, that itself is seditious. The first obstacle that we have to overcome is this kind of psychological block. There is nothing wrong in saying a thing. You just have to be careful how you say it. There is no need to feel frustrated. Say things frankly, bravely, openly and fairly. The truth is they are all paper tigers! They don't put you in jail because you said something relevant and extremely true. If I say something like, "Spiritual revolution must precede material revolution," they can't put me in jail. It is absolutely true you must learn how to think before you learn how to act. It is also absolutely true in this context that if we are slaves, we have nobody to blame but ourselves for our slavery.



## Question

Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask what would happen if all these speeches today were televised.

## Answer

MR. YEAP GHIM GUAN: I think the issue here is fear itself. If fear can be overcome then the rest of the problems are solved. It is in the psychology of certain political parties to play on this fear so that they can force the public to do what they will not be prepared to do. But on this question of Parliamentary proceedings, I think the best example is the Kelantan crisis debate when after the whole summary of the government's speeches had been made by Lapuran Parlimen it ended with only one sentence which said the leader of the opposition opposed the motion. That is all. This is the kind of misinformation. But the speaker asked what will happen if the speeches of the opposition are televised, are allowed full publication. I think this is good indication that *Watan* should start a Parliamentary page. I think nothing will happen because to the extent that what the members of the opposition would say in Parliament would be very much what the party would say in public. What would happen is the air would be cleared, there will be greater sense of democracy, that people's views are allowed to be aired. That is very important. I don't foresee that with the publication of opposition speeches and Parliamentary debates, the government would be overthrown automatically. That will be most unlikely. But it is this attitude of the government that is stifling democracy. This desire to overkill is itself the mechanism that will ultimately bring down the government. This is something which the government does not seem to appreciate. They should allow the public and the opposition as a medium for the public, to voice their dissent. If they succeed to do so, there will be less dissent because in a Parliamentary democracy there must be checks. If you do away with these things, you can see what goes on. In Penang, there is no opposition. Not only will the government in power have the confidence to do what it wants to do, it will be arrogant enough to push its way through on all issues, irrespective of public opinion.

Y.B. ENCIK KHIR JOHARI: Just to tell Mr. Yeap, we already have a Parliamentary page in *Watan*. To comment on the last few questions, if I may sum up, what we need is a more open society. I believe the best Parliament that we ever had was during the fifties where we had all those stalwarts in politics. We had very able politicians then. At that time I was a member of Parliament; I looked forward each time to the next meeting of Parliament because of the amount of interest that it generated in me to be able to face the people, to be able to answer the people, to be able to be reported by the newspapers the next day. It is something I miss today and I share your feelings that this is what we need in our society. I have always advocated that our own RTM, our own TV, should allow a second channel. In England they have the BBC which is independent and which reports freely. Why don't we do as these countries do? In addition to a government TV, we should have a commercial TV. I suggested that myself. In Thailand, there are four — two government-owned and two privately owned. So long as they toe the government policies in national issues like Bahasa Malaysia, let them be free to do what the people want rather than forcing on the people what the government wants them to do. This is what we should aim for — to think what is best for the country and to create a more open society. Thank you.

## **Panel Discussion 3 :**

### **Democracy for Development**

Panelists:            Encik Anwar Ibrahim  
                          Encik A. R. Kamaludin  
                          Encik Mohideen Abdul Kadir  
                          Encik K. Thillainathan

Chairperson:        Encik S. Subramaniam

Rapporteur:         Encik Hum Kim Choy

Time:                10-00 a.m. — 1-00 p.m.

## **Panel Discussion 4 :**

### **Future of Democracy in Malaysia**

Panelists:            Dr. Kamal Salih  
                          Y.B. Encik Lee Lam Thye  
                          Y.B. Encik R. Rajasingam  
                          Encik Ariffin Omar

Chairperson:        Encik Hum Kim Choy

Rapporteur:         Encik P. Ramakrishnan

Time:                2-00 — 4-30 p.m.



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PERDANA

## Encik Anwar Ibrahim

Demokrasi yang dimaksudkan bukanlah semata-mata dalam pengertian kebebasan politik secara terbatas sepertimana yang umumnya diterima menurut garis-garis kasarnya. Demokrasi mestilah dilihat sebagai satu pembebasan, pembebasan hidup diri insan (diri manusia) dari segala bentuk belenggu, samada belenggu kejahilan dari segi ilmu, belenggu penindasan dari segi ekonomi, belenggu penafian hak dari segi politik. Ini sesuai dengan apa yang difahamkan oleh Islam, kerana sesungguhnya manusia dalam Islam itu satu gubahan (ciptaan) Allah dalam sifat semula jadinya yang murni yang kita sebut sifat “fitrah insaniah.” Justeru itu pengertian kebebasan di sini ialah pengertian yang dihubungkan secara langsung dengan nilai hidup insan itu. Insan (manusia) tidak akan dapat mengecap pengertian dan nilai hidup yang mulia dan murni sekiranya dinafikan hak dan direndahkan darjat mereka dan diletakkan mereka sebagai mangsa kehidupan ekonomi atau mangsa pemerasan politik atau tanpa nilai-nilai akhlak dan ruhani yang murni.

Pembangunan pun begitu juga. Pembangunan yang bererti ialah pembangunan manusia seluruhnya dan tidak kita hadkan pengertian pembangunan itu dari segi kebendaan semata-mata. Manusia hari ini yang materialistik samada yang diilhamkan dari “ISM” dari kiri atau kanan akan megah untuk menyembah sistem-sistem rekaan manusia, terutama yang dari Barat. Mereka merasakan manusia itu tidak lebih dari satu perkakas dan pembangunan manusia itu diukur, samada oleh sistem kapitalis atau komunis, hanya dari segi taraf atau kedudukan ekonomi dalam pengertian “basic structure” mereka. Pembangunan seperti ini sudah semestinya membawa kepada penipisan nilai murni insan sendiri (dehumanising).

Dari itu bila kita bincangkan pembangunan, seperti juga soal kebebasan tadi, mestilah dihubungkan pengertian pembangunan itu dengan pengertian kemanusiaan seluruhnya. Tidak bererti pembangunan yang ditilik dari segi peningkatan pendapatan atau taraf ekonomi, tetapi menjadikan manusia itu manusia yang rendah akhlaknya. Kerana kiranya diterima ukuran pembangunan dengan banyaknya industri atau banyaknya kilang-kilang, banyaknya motokar, maka ianya tidaklah berbeza dari pengertian pembangunan di zaman Firaun. Kezaliman berleluasa dalam sistem zaman Firaun itu, tetapi pembangunan fiziknya hebat dan antara pencapaian pembangunan yang dimegahkan ialah pembinaan gedung-gedung piramid yang terkenal yang sukar ditandingi oleh manusia hingga sekarang. Dan, agama dan sejarah telah menjatuhkan hukuman berat terhadap manusia “biadab” Firaun itu.

Justeru kerana itu manakala kita bincangkan soal demokrasi dan pembangunan, kita tidak dapat lari daripada pengertian hak, kebenaran dan pengertian keadilan yang semurni-murni mungkin. Sebab itu dalam konteks negara kita, atas nama pembangunan, apatah lagi pembangunan itu dalam pengertian kebendaan, ianya dinafikan hak atas kepentingan pembangunan atau perpaduan dan akhlak serta prinsip keadilan dikorbankan maka sukarlah kita menerima. Umpamanya, tak munasabah untuk dibina hotel besar dan dirampas tanah orang-orang kampung semata-mata untuk memuaskan kehendak segelongan kecil dan menyatakan, tidak ada casino, tidak akan ada pelancung dan kita



tidak “up-to-date.” – Kalau inilah yang berlaku pembangunan yang ada sekarang ini boleh disifatkan sebagai “membangun sambil merobohkan.” Membangunkan bangunan, membangunkan benda, membangunkan lambang-lambang kemegahan sambil menindas pekerja, merobohkan darjat dan fitrah dan nilai-nilai murni manusia:

Sebab itu pembangunan bagi kita tidak sah (batal); pembangunan kita sekarang sebenarnya membawa pengertian perobohan, sekiranya tidak didasarkan atas pengertian keadilan, tidak dihormati asas-asas akhlak manusia, dan tidak dibina masyarakat itu atas prinsip kebendaan dan keadilan. Dan sebab itulah dasar pembangunan hari ini tidak dapat kita terima sebagai dasar yang sihat. Malangnya beberapa parti-parti pembangkang jua menjadi mangsa fahaman yang sedemikian juga. Umpamanya sebuah parti pembangkang, bila ia mengkeritik perjudian umpamanya, ia tidak mengkeritik perjudian dari segi menafikan sesuatu punca pendapatan wang yang menggalakkan maksiat, ia tidak melihat perjudian dari segi punca untuk mendapatkan wang dengan menjadikan orang-orang miskin sebagai mangsa, tetapi ia kata bahawa oleh kerana Empat Nombor Ekor itu memberi keuntungan kepada negara berjuta-juta ringgit setahun maka ENE mesti dimiliki-negarakan.

Kezaliman samada yang dilakukan oleh “private enterprise” atau dilakukan oleh negara sama zalimnya. Penindasan oleh seorang atau ramai, oleh taukeh lombong atau oleh menteri – penindasan juga namanya.

Sebab itulah pembangunan mesti dimulai dari pembinaan peribadi, dan peraturan ekonomi ini kalau dalam Islam adalah penjelmaan atau manifestasi dari peribadi yang baik ini. Sekarang ini orang tidak bincangkan soal moraliti, soal peribadi. Orang hanya bincangkan sistem-sistem saja. Sebab itu pembinaan itu tidak muncul dari peribadi yang suci, yang bersih, dengan akhlak yang murni. Ia jadi kata-kata dan slogan politik yang boleh menarik minat dan mencungkil sedikit sebanyak isi hati dan emosi manusia tetapi tidak dapat memberi dan menggariskan penyelesaian yang baik.

Selain daripada itu dari segi pembangunan yang ada di negara kita kini, selagi pembangunan tertakluk pada kehendak segolongan yang berkuasa, segolongan kecil manusia, untuk kepentingan sempit mereka dan selagi ianya lebih memusatkan perhatian dan memberikan keuntungan pada kepentingan kapitalis, maka tidak mungkin pembangunan itu memberi nikmat yang meluas kepada masyarakat ramai.

Sebab itulah kumpulan ini tidak akan bersedia untuk melakukan apa bentuk “reform.” Jangankanlah reformasi tanah, untuk mengkaji masalah tanahpun sudah tidak sanggup, kerana nanti akan diketahui Tanjung siapa punya, Kota Baru siapa punya, Alor Star siapa punya, tanah sawah di MADA siapa yang punya! Sebab itulah tidak ada kesediaan hatta untuk mengkaji masalah itu, – jauh daripada hendak melaksanakan reformasi agraria atau reformasi tanah dan lain-lain seumpama itu.

Jadi kalau hendak diperkatakan pendapat Gunnar Myrdal, walaupun dalam beberapa hal terutama dari sudut nilai saya tidak persetujuan dengannya. Ini disebutkannya sebagai “traditional conservatism” – yakni sikap enggan meroboh sistem termasuk dikalangan pegawai-pegawai yang berpendidikan tinggi. Jadi orang-orang ini yang kononnya pro-

gresif, orang-orang ini yang kononnya mementingkan pembangunan, golongan “intelligentsia” yang berpendidikan barat tidak sanggup langsung melihat masalah ini dengan cara lebih luas lagi, selain daripada apa yang ditunjukkan oleh sarjana-sarjana, guru-guru mereka, dan tidak sanggup umpamanya melihat peri-pentingnya reformasi kerana bagi mereka itu terlalu radikal dan mungkin mengancam kedudukan mereka. Soal merobah institusi, soal menggantikan infra-struktur baru selain daripada yang kecil-kecil itu tidak dapat mereka terima. Jadi soal reformasi tanah, soal merobah sistem pemasaran, soal mengharam penindasan dalam bentuk “riba” (bunga) yang menyentuh persoalan ekonomi desa sukarlah dilaksanakan tanpa kesediaan membuat perubahan.

Selain dari itu demokrasi yang dilau-laungkan itu tidak dapat memberikan kesempatan yang cukup untuk masyarakat menyuarakan, tidak ada “participatory democracy” di mana orang diberi kesempatan memikir dan memberi pandangan terhadap program-program pembangunan ini. Mereka merasakan orang-orang kampung ini perlu “revolusi mental” kerana sikap kolot, sikap jumud, konservatif. Tambah-tambah lagi orang yang bercakap fasal Islam dianggap extremists dan fanatik dan mendakwa mereka saja yang progresif. Jadi revolusi mental yang mewakili pendapat yang sedemikian itu, yang menyalahkan orang-orang kampung sahaja dan oleh itu tidak perlu dirundingkan dengan mereka. Sikap mereka ialah “kita memutuskan dan mereka jalankan.” Dari segi ini samalah dengan dasar-dasar golongan marxist yang tidak memberi kesempatan yang baik selain dari menentukan dari satu dua kitab mereka dan barisan para-para ketua agung mereka dan memaksa ke atas orang ramai sistem ini tetapi tidak memberi kelonggaran (flexibility) dalam mempertahankan keadilan.

Kegagalan program-program pembangunan kita ialah kerana ianya tidak dijalankan tanpa merobah beberapa dasar pokok. “Reform” adalah perlu sebelum apa yang dikatakan, pembangunan yang adil dan bermakna itu dapat dilakukan. Ini termasuklah soal nelayan Pantai Timur, petani yang menderita di Kedah, buruh kasar, pekerja-pekerja estet atau penghuni-penghuni setingan di bandar-bandar. Selagi kita tidak dapat melihat masalah-masalah ini dengan lebih kemas, dan tidak terikat dengan kepentingan-kepentingan perkauman yang sempit dan dorongan-dorongan chauvinisma yang tebal, maka selama itulah apapun yang kita lihat hanya kepentingan kaum yang sempit, bukan saja kaum, malahan kepentingan golongan yang kecil dalam kaum itu agar dapat dipertahankan. Maka sebab itulah berlaku kalau orang dari parti pembangkang daripada kaum yang lain — dia serang, dari segi the “so-called bumiputra policy,” tetapi ia tidak sanggup melihat masalah sebenar yang dihadapi oleh golongan itu kalau di Pulau Pinang. Pada hal ini program nasional, bukan soal satu kaum saja, tapi satu program nasional dengan menerima bahawa sebilangan besar daripada orang-orang miskin itu ialah orang-orang Melayu tanpa meniadakan hak orang-orang China dan lain-lain yang miskin yang juga perlukan pembelaan.

Tetapi kalau sudah dilihat golongan itu dengan menganggap bahawa orang-orang Melayu sudah terjamin kerana ada dasar ekonomi negara ini adalah satu pendustaan yang maha besar, dan ini tidak dapat diterima. Orang-orang yang progresif kononnya yang

menjiwai semangat baru untuk memperjuangkan untuk membela satu-satu golongan lain, tetapi bila berhadapan dengan soal Pulau Pinang dia tidak akan melihat umpamanya kegelisahan masyarakat Melayu yang merasakan bahawa kedudukan mereka itu terancam. Sebab itu masalah ini tidak boleh kita lihat dari kepentingan kaum yang sempit dan dorongan chauvinisma yang tebal.

Jadi saya merumuskan bahawa sebenarnya kita mesti melihat masalah demokrasi dalam pengertian kebebasan yang lebih luas, dan jangan melihat soal pembangunan dalam pengertian yang sempit, berdasarkan keadaan dan status quo yang sekarang. Generasi muda terutamanya hari ini "irrespective of race," mesti cuba melihat soal ini dengan lebih luas, yang selalu kita menyarankan sekurang-kurangnya supaya terkeluar daripada prasangka (prejudice) yang ditanam oleh pihak penjajah Barat terhadap agama. Mari kita lihat umpamanya, apa saranan Islam terhadap kebebasan dan pembangunan. Ini selarasilah dengan apa yang cuba diterangkan dalam pengertian Islam. Kalau tidak ada pembangunan, tidak ada kebebasan, kalau tidak dipertahankan nilai-nilai murni akhlak dan keadilan. Dan kalau kita nak cakap tentang "conscientisation," kesedaran rakyat jelata maka dia mesti berdasar satu "risalah" yang dapat melihat soal-soal ini secara yang lebih luas.

Kita harus membebaskan diri kita dari menjadi khadam, dari "slavish mentality" terhadap apa saja saranan oleh orang Barat dan menafikan saranan lain. Dari segi ini barulah saya rasa kita dapat mencapai satu penyelesaian yang baik. Orang-orang yang ada kepentingan-kepentingan sempit akan mengatakan ini idealistik dan ini khayalan, anak muda dalam gelombang "asmara." Kenyataannya ialah bahawa kita tidak punyai pilihan dan diharapkan agar kesedaran masa dan "conscientisation," boleh dibina. Percayalah, sebenarnya, yang kita appeal ini ialah kepada "fitrah" manusia, sifat semula jadi manusia; bukan kepada sesuatu yang lebih ideal darinya. Hanya supaya manusia itu kembali menjadi baik kerana mereka ini diperanakkan, dilahirkan supaya menjadi baik, bukan jadi penyamun (dalam apa pengertian sekalipun). Jadi, oleh kerana kita dilahirkan bersih maka kita mesti kembali kepada keadaan fitrah insan, dan inilah sebenarnya apa yang kita sarankan dalam "democracy for development" ini.

Terima kasih. Wassalam.

## Encik A. R. Kamaludin

Assalamualaikum. Saudara Pengerusi, kawan-kawan, ahli-ahli panel dan semua saudara-saudara yang saya muliakan.

Saya terlampau tertarik dengan ucapan dan faktor-faktor dari hujjah oleh saudara Anwar Ibrahim, salah seorang dari dunia belia yang popular. Saudara Anwar ada mengatakan tadi bahawa beliau bukanlah hendak memerintah tetapi kalau diberi peluang, boleh juga. Saya cuma mengingatkan bahawa pertengahan tahun 1974 atau akhir tahun 1973, Allahyarham Tun Abdul Razak kononnya pernah bercita-cita hendak menjadikan saudara Anwar seorang senator untuk membolehkan dia dilantik sebagai menteri. Ini konon cerita dan konon cerita juga saudara Anwar telah menolak. Barangkali waktu itu ABIM belum hidup dan sebenarnya ABIM bukan sebuah parti politik. Tetapi saya percaya ABIM telah berlayar ke arah itu.

Saya bersetuju dengan saudara Anwar Ibrahim tadi bahawa melalui sistem pemerintahan demokrasi yang ada kita bukan saja membangunkan harta benda tetapi dalam masa yang sama kita turut merobohkan akhlak dan nilai-nilai kemanusiaan. Saya akui. Saudara-saudara, sebelum kita pergi lebih jauh saya ingin bertanya, "Apakah pembangunan hanya boleh dicapai melalui sistem pemerintahan demokrasi? Apakah pembangunan tidak boleh dicapai melalui sistem pemerintah sosialis? Apakah pembangunan dalam sesuatu negara itu tidak boleh dicapai dan tidak boleh diwujudkan melalui sistem Islam, seperti yang banyak telah dikatakan oleh saudara Anwar tadi? Apakah pembangunan dalam sesuatu negara itu tidak boleh dicapai melalui sistem komunis?" Saya tidak mahu menjawab tetapi Perdana Menteri kita telahpun memberi satu jawapan. Saudara-saudara mesti ingat bahawa kita sekarang dalam sebuah negara di mana dua belas daripada tiga belas negeri adalah dibawah sistem demokrasi. Kerana Datuk Hussein Onn sendiri kelmarin dalam perhimpunan agong khas UMNO di Kuala Lumpur mengatakan, saya quote: "Memanglah saya mengakui bahawa demokrasi di Kelantan sudah mati." Ertinya tinggallah 12 negeri sahaja di Malaysia yang mengamalkan sistem demokrasi. Demokrasi di Kelantan dimatikan untuk meneruskan usaha-usaha pembangunan negeri itu. Untuk melanjutkan usaha-usaha yang gagal dan digagalkan di negeri itu sepanjang PAS memerintah Kelantan dulu, yang akhirnya membawa kepada purak peranda, yang akhirnya membawa suatu rekod hitam dalam sejarah demokrasi kita hingga suatu pemerintahan mageran terpaksa diwujudkan di Kelantan. Ini menjelaskan bahawa pembangunan tidak mestinya boleh dilahirkan, dibesarkan dalam sistem demokrasi sahaja.

Saudara-saudara, ramai teman-teman saya dari luar Pulau Pinang kelmarin sengaja saya bawa ke Padang Kota Baru. Di hujung sana saya tunjukkan sebuah restoran. Saya kata pada kawan-kawan saya, "Tenguklah alangkah cantik restoran ini. Tapi untuk pengetahuan saudara-saudara itu ialah restoran haram dibina dengan perpuluh-puluh ribu ringgit. Pembinaan rumahnya saja saya ingat hampir seratus ribu ringgit. Tetapi dia restoran haram, tidak ada lesen. Saya boleh bawa saudara-saudara untuk melawati sekurangnya lapan belas buah kedai arak yang tidak mempunyai lesen di Pulau Pinang sekarang." Demikian juga restoran-restoran haram tapi inilah caranya pemerintahan demokrasi kita. Saya tidak tahu apakah bentuk demokrasi yang kita ada tapi demikianlah adanya.

Kalau saudara mahu bandingkan kesah tujuh bulan dulu apabila lima enam orang peniaga kecil bumiputra membina gerai dekat Sungai Pinang, didatangi oleh Polis, ditepek belakang, disuruh “Roboh rumah, kalau tidak kami akan merobohkannya.” Pihak polis ditemani oleh pihak Majlis Bandaraya. Ia, itulah sistem pemerintahan demokrasi yang ada sekarang hingga susah didefinisikan. Kemudian satu kejadian yang paling baik ialah pada tahun 1975 bila sebahagian besar daripada ahli-ahli Dewan Undangan negeri Selangor terdiri daripada UMNO telah bersumpah untuk mempertahankan Datuk Harun Idris, Ketua mereka, yang waktu itu masih Menteri Besar, turut menandatangani satu surat di dalamnya ditulis nak mati dan tenggelam sama-sama, kalau boleh suatu kelamin. Tetapi dengan tidak disangka oleh sesiapa pun mereka itu dua hari kemudian telah diterbangkan ke Fraser Hill dan empat lima hari kemudian, di dalam Dewan Undangan Negeri Selangor, pada 25hb., merekalah orang yang mencatatkan sejarah kejatuhan Datuk Harun kerana merekalah yang mula-mula sekali bangun untuk membentangkan usul undi tak percaya kepada Datuk Harun. Jadi inilah orang-orang yang mendukung sistem pemerintahan demokrasi. Kita melihat hari Isnin mereka bercakap lain; hari Khamis mereka bercakap lain dan malam Isnin depan mereka buat cara lain.

Yang paling akhir, saudara-saudara, ialah kecelakaan yang berlaku di Tanjung Kupang, Johor, di mana seratus nyawa telah terkorban, yang pada fikiran saya, lebih dari seratus kalau kita boleh percaya kepada cakapan seorang juruterbangnya yang mengatakan ada rampasan berlaku. Kita pun sedih, orang-orang surat khabar, termasuk saya, pun ikut sibuk juga sampai tiga pagi nak membekalkan berita-berita yang terakhir tentang kejadian itu kepada saudara. Semua orang sibuk, menteri pun terpaksa pergi ke sana, pegawai-pegawai tinggi pun terpaksa pergi ke Johor, tentulah hujung bulan ini mereka akan buat claim mileage. Kemudian selesai upacara pengembumian kelmarin. Maka tamatlah cerita ini, tetapi cerita bulan dulu kalau saudara-saudara mengikuti berita-berita dalam akhbar, terdapat suatu rampasan kapal terbang kepunyaan JAL di Jerman di mana perampas-perampas terdiri daripada pengganas J.R.A. menuntut supaya enam orang teman-teman mereka di penjara-penjara Jepun dibebaskan sebagai ganti kepada 87 penumpang. Kerana menteri berkenaan di Jepun telah membebaskan keenam-enam pengganas itu, maka selamatlah 87 penumpang tadi. Ekoran daripada kejadian itu ialah menteri berkenaan meletakkan jawatannya. Ekoran daripada kejadian itu, seorang pegawai tinggi dalam kerajaan Jepun telah meletakkan jawatannya kerana mereka merasa bertanggungjawab. Bertanggungjawab kerana terpaksa membebaskan 6 orang pengganas yang banyak mencatatkan sejarah hitam bagi negeri Jepun di luar negeri. Tetapi di Malaysia anihnya, seratus orang jadi debu, seratus orang terkorban, tak ada apa-apa. Manikavasagam senyum-senyum, semua orang senyum-senyum tak ada hura-hura meletakkan jawatan walaupun ada saya mengakui bahawa *Bintang Timor* dan pengarangnya telah menuntut supaya perletakkan jawatan menteri itu dilakukan. Itulah baharu demokrasinya. Tetapi ini tidak berlaku di negara kita dan juga sebab ini, saya mengatakan saya masih sangsi apakah jenis demokrasi yang kita amalkan sekarang. Apakah jenis demokrasi kita — jenis daripada London, jenis daripada Amerika ataupun jenis demokrasi ala Manila? Bagaimanapun, saudara-saudara, saya timbulkan soal ini kerana saya hendak menarik perhatian saudara-saudara. Jangan fikirkan bahawa kerajaan sekarang buat benda-benda tak elok sahaja; itu sebenarnya ialah pelaksanaan-perlaksanaan dalam sistem demokrasi yang ada pada hari ini. Kita ber-setuju misalnya demokrasi mesti diwujudkan terus menerus tetapi tahukah saudara-sau-



dara demokrasi yang ada pada hari ini menggalakkan politik yang terlalu banyak bukan sahaja di antara parti dengan parti dalam satu gabungan, malah di antara pemimpin-pemimpin dalam sesebuah parti politik. Sistem demokrasi yang banyak diamalkan oleh parti-parti politik kita, kecuali barangkali parti politik yang dipegang kuat oleh saudara Mohideen Abdul Kadir, ialah sistem demokrasi yang menggalakkan seseorang boleh mendapat kuasa politik di samping ia mengejar kebendaan.

Kita lihat saja UMNO di Pulau Pinang, umpamanya, orang selalu kata UMNO Pulau Pinang lemah dan sebagainya, tak ada pemimpin. Saya kata tidak. UMNO di Pulau Pinang ramai pemimpin, yang menjadi puncanya ialah tokoh-tokoh parti tersebut di Pulau Pinang ini berkehendakkan kedua-dua perkara tadi – kuasa politik pun dia mahu, harta kekayaan pun dia mahu, kalau ada mana-mana kontrek dia nak tangkap juga, kalau nak jadi calon ketua bahagian dia mahu juga, nak jadi calon Timbalan Ketua Perhubungan Negeri dia mahu juga. Kalau ada tokoh-tokoh UMNO di Pulau Pinang ini mahu mencontohi misalnya saudara Boon Siew. Boon Siew orang main saham. Saudara-saudara, dia tak mahu kuasa politik, dia buat harta saja sehinggakan kerajaan kita terlalu baik hati, terlalu baik hati hingga bagi menepoli motosikal Honda kepada beliau. Tetapi dia tidak mahu kuasa politik, tetapi MCA digemukkannya. Tetapi orang-orang UMNO di Pulau Pinang tidak. Kuasa politik pun dia mahu, kekayaan pun dia mahu. Saya kata inilah satu daripada akibat-akibat dalam sistem demokrasi, demokrasi yang saya tak tahu demokrasi untuk apa sekarang?

Tetapi saya yakin bahawa sistem demokrasi yang kita amalkan sekarang ialah se-baik-baik sistem untuk memerintah negara. Apa yang berlaku tadi ialah silapan-silapan yang boleh diperbetulkan, yang boleh dipinjam dan disadurkan dari mana-mana sistem yang lain.

Saudara, dalam konteks pembangunan dan demokrasi, saya setuju dengan saudara Anwar tapi ada point yang saya ini tidak setuju, kalau kita mahu pembangunan dicapai dengan cepat. Saya fikir kita tidak boleh menggunakan demokrasi terlalu liberal, demokrasi yang terlalu liberal menyebabkan kita lambat mencapai pembangunan. Saya tidak kata ini satu halangan. Saya beri contoh. Saya menerima surat sebagai pengarang akhbar, saya menerima surat dari seorang pembaca – marah, sudah dua puluh tahun lebih kita merdeka, di kampungnya tidak masuk apa dan air. Saya pergi ke kampungnya itu di Perak, juga dekat tempat saya dan saya dapati sebab-sebabnya ialah kerajaan memang bersedia untuk masukkan api dan air ke kampung itu; yang menghalangkannya ialah tuan-tuan tanah – tak boleh masuk, tak boleh terbang sinilah, tak boleh terbang sana, korek sini pun tak boleh, sana pun tak boleh. Jadi kerana kita menggunakan sistem demokrasi yang terlalu liberal dalam soal ini, maka sukarlah kerajaan, sukar bagi L.L.N., sukar bagi Jabatan Air nak memasukkan kedua-dua perkhidmatan yang penting bagi masyarakat modern sekarang ini ke kampung itu.

Jadi saya tak tahu bagaimana harus dilakukan untuk mengatasi masalah ini. Tetapi inilah kenyataannya saya bagi contoh. Kemudian, dalam segi ekonomi pula saudara Anwar tadi telah menyentuh tentang Raja dan sebagainya yang beri peluang kepada hulubalang-hulubalangnya. Tetapi sebenarnya saudara Anwar memberi garis-garis kasar dan sekarang saya memberikan contoh-contohnya pula. Barangkali PERNAS memang



baik sebagai satu agensi untuk menolong kerajaan mengatasi masalah ekonomi bumiputra. Tetapi sistem demokrasi kita yang ada pada hari ini membolehkan para pegawai tinggi agensi-agensi kerajaan sekarang mengambil lebih dulu peluang-peluang yang harus dan sepatutnya disalurkan kepada orang ramai, kepada bumiputra lain. Kalau um-pamanya Pernas.....

*(At this point our tape-recorder went silent; our sincere apologies to Saudara A.R. Kama-huddin. The Speaker however was also not able to supply the small remaining portion of the speech – Ed.)*

## Encik Mohideen Abdul Kader

*A system which lives by profit must make profit. If its power to do so is challenged, the owners of the system will seek to destroy the men and the movements which challenge that power.*

Harold J. Laski

I must congratulate Aliran for organising this important seminar to discuss the question of democracy. With the rapid erosion of democratic rights in this country and the emergence of openly dictatorial regimes in some Asean countries, such discussion has become a matter of grave urgency. Our people must be informed and made conscious of the ideals of democracy and on the basis of this consciousness they must be mobilised into a force to work for the setting up of a truly democratic society in our country and to fight the small privileged group which is pushing our nation towards authoritarian rule.

In the last few years, the ruling groups in Asean countries have been putting forward the strange theory that developing nations cannot afford the luxury of democracy as practised in the developed nations. They argue that the fight to provide rice and be-lacan to every citizen is more important than the fight for freedom of speech and other basic democratic rights. They seem to imply that there is a conflict between political freedom such as freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention, freedom of speech and assembly on the one hand, and economic freedom such as freedom from hunger and want on the other. To them, the existence of political freedom is a hindrance and an obstacle to economic development, and to the efforts to wipe out poverty and improve the economic well-being of our people. Recently, at the opening of the Asian Development Bank meeting in Manila, Tengku Razaleigh and President Marcos chided the Carter government for linking economic aid with the question of human rights.

The emergence of the National Front comprising 9 political parties is a product of this trend in our politics. When the National Front was launched, the late Tun Razak stated that the object in forming the National Front was to reduce politicking and to concentrate on economic development. If by politicking was meant the curbing of those forces in our society which try to prevent the emergence of a Malayan Nation, identity and national unity by playing on communal sentiments in order to get votes then such a move would have been welcomed by all right thinking people. Unfortunately these evil forces have been given full freedom to propagate their policies of communal hatred and division and it is those groups who have been working for a united, progressive Malayan nation based on the ideals of freedom, democracy and social justice that have been ruthlessly suppressed. Thus "no politicking" only applies to those who question this unjust social system and want to replace it with a just one.

### What is democracy?

The word "democracy" has been so abused that it can mean anything, from a liberal democracy to ruthless dictatorship. Marcos who rigs elections and jails his opponents, Lee Kuan Yew who emasculates all effective democratic opposition through systematic

arrest and detention of his important political opponents, and through a tight control of the mass media and the workers and other mass organisations, and Suharto who fills his puppet parliament with members nominated from the armed forces — all these gentlemen claim to be working for democracy. They justify their acts of ruthless repression and the violation of basic human rights as being necessary in the defence of democracy against the so-called subversion by communists and anti-national elements. Further, in this country, most people equate democracy with holding elections once every five years to elect representatives to Parliament and State Assemblies. Since this word has been so distorted, misrepresented and misunderstood, it is important to clarify what it means before we proceed further.

The basic conditions for the existence of a functioning democracy is that the economic power in any society must be under the control of the people. Thus, the means of production such as estates, tin mines, banks, factories, and big business must be socially controlled and not be the private property of certain individuals. Political power is nothing but the political expression of economic power. Whoever controls economic power controls the state, that is the Parliament, Government, Bureaucracy, Police and the Armed Forces. Therefore the rights and liberties that are written into our constitution, as well as into the constitutions of most capitalist countries, are nothing more than a mirage to the poor since they do not have the economic power to give expression to these rights and liberties.

Private ownership of the means of production is inimical to the realisation of democratic ideals. It divides society into two important classes.— one which owns the means of production, that is, the capitalists, and the other which lives by selling its labour power to these owners, that is, the workers. These two groups are unequal in terms of wealth, power and influence. The capitalists, although they constitute only a tiny minority, possess great economic wealth, through which they obtain power and influence. By means of their wealth, they control the government and influence the national policies. On the other hand, the workers have no wealth and therefore are unable to influence the government and its policies and actions. This is clearly illustrated by a recent example. The workers have been asking the government to amend certain oppressive provisions in the labour laws but the government has flatly refused to meet these just and reasonable demands. But, when a handful of foreign oil companies demanded that the Petroleum Act, which was supposed to control the exploitation of petroleum in the interest of our nation be amended, the government readily conceded to their demands. The foreign capitalists obtained this concession not through persuasion but by threatening to withhold investment unless their demands were met. Thus, the might of the dollar was able to force a so-called sovereign government to change its policies and amend its law against its own wishes and interest.

In a capitalist society, liberty and freedom are hollow and without any substance to the oppressed majority. When a capitalist shuts down his factory and retrenches hundreds of his workers he does not consult anyone. He is at liberty, under the law, to hire and fire his workers and thus deprive them of their source of livelihood. He is a dictator who is answerable to no one but himself. What liberty have the workers? They have the liberty to starve and die, or to revolt and face the repressive arm of the state.

Freedom of speech and freedom of the press are valuable freedoms in a democracy. In a society based on private ownership of wealth and inequality what do these freedoms mean to the majority who lack the economic resources? They mean absolutely nothing. To publish a daily newspaper with mass circulation one requires hundreds of thousands of dollars and advertisement support from the capitalists. Therefore only those who have money can enjoy this freedom. The capitalists thus have a monopoly of the mass media which they use effectively to brainwash the masses with their values and ideas. In this way they manipulate public opinion in their own interest.

In a capitalist democracy the people are assumed to be sovereign and their sovereignty is to be exercised through elections held periodically. The popular myth propagated by the hired intellectuals of the capitalist class is that any person is free to contest the elections and that the electors are free to elect the candidate of their choice. Participating in elections requires the expenditure of a substantial sum of money. Therefore a candidate must either be rich or be financed by a party that is supported by the rich. It is naive to believe that anyone can successfully contest elections.

The claim that the people are free to choose their representatives to Parliament and other legislative bodies is nothing but a fraud. There are various constraints and obstacles built into the system which prevent a person from exercising his right of choice freely and rationally. Through the control of mass media the capitalists suppress the propagation of their opponents' views. They publish lies, slanders and villifications about their opponents who are in no position to rebut them effectively in the eyes of the people. In this way they mould the views, opinions and prejudices of the people in such a way as to ensure that there will be no challenge to their dominant position in society.

In this country there is even a bigger obstacle in the way of our people exercising their right of free choice, that is the Internal Security Act. Under this obnoxious law, which was first introduced into this country about 30 years ago by the British under the name of Emergency Regulations, a person can be detained without trial for an indefinite period on the order made by the Minister of Home Affairs. This dictatorial power is used to repress and weaken progressive opposition parties through the systematic arrest and detention of their able and effective leaders and cadres. In this way these parties are prevented from disseminating their policies and programme of action among the people. Therefore the public do not know what these parties really stand for, except for the distortions and lies that are published in the capitalist press. Thus the people are denied the opportunity to know, understand and decide on an alternative to the policies of the government. This certainly is contrary to the ideals of democracy which require the free contention and struggle of different ideas, beliefs, policies, and programmes so that the correct one will triumph in the end. It is therefore clear that elections are held not in order to enable the people to elect the government of their choice but merely to legitimise the power which is already in the hands of the ruling group.

From the above we come to the conclusion that two conditions are necessary for the existence and flowering of democracy in any society. Firstly, the means of production, that is the source of our economic wealth, must be owned and controlled by the people in the interest of society. Secondly, people must actually enjoy basic human rights such as freedom of speech, assembly, freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention and other freedoms. Only where these two conditions exist can there be genuine democracy.

## Development

To a socialist, the object of development should be the development of the economy of our country so as to free our people from the bonds of hunger and want, to improve their economic position, as well as to create the conditions necessary for the cultural, moral and spiritual development of the individual. In contrast, the object of capitalist economic development is to develop the economy for the benefit of the capitalist class as well as to create the cultural, moral and spiritual values and conditions necessary to make the people accept private ownership of our wealth, capitalist exploitation, profit seeking and individualism.

For developing countries capitalist economic development means dependence on foreign capital which results in the draining away of our wealth in the form of profits and other repatriation. It also leads to the enrichment of a few at the cost of the impoverishment of the many. Workers are paid low wages. Unemployment and under-employment grow to staggering proportions. Prices of essential goods keep sky-rocketing affecting the consumption levels of the poor. Houses are expensive and therefore the low income group build their ponds on government land or on other peoples' land. Increasing economic hardship leads to heightened social tension. Workers go on strike to demand for higher wages and the government bans strikes to look after the interest of the investors, particularly the foreign ones. Squatters whose houses are demolished demonstrate and they are forcefully dispersed by the FRU bullies. The peoples' dissatisfaction grows to such a degree that many desert the camp of the ruling party and vote for the opposition. The ruling party loses its dominant position in parliament and therefore it declares emergency. The government then rules by decree. This is no fictitious account. This has happened in many developing countries that have taken the capitalist path of development. The shining example is of course Marcos's Philippines. We are also proceeding in that direction. It is inevitable that, in developing countries that have chosen the capitalist path democracy will ultimately come into conflict with economic development that is geared towards maximising the profits of the capitalists.

Under socialism, economic development is based on the principles of self reliance, planned development of our resources, and the supplying of the basic needs to all our people. This policy requires maximum participation by the people in all the important decisions affecting them. For example, the workers in a factory will discuss and democratically decide what to produce, how to produce, the wages to be paid to them and the prices at which their goods are to be sold. They will also discuss and take measures to reduce waste, increase the efficiency and productivity in their factory. The prime consideration behind all their decisions will be, not individual enrichment, but how best to serve society. The liberation of the worker from his bondage to his employer and the practice of democracy in the factory management and operation will help free the creative energies that have been lying dormant in the workers for so many years and thereby increase production and economic growth. The elimination of competition, greed, individualism, and egoism and the encouragement of co-operative work, selflessness, and concern for human beings, society and nature will help the moral and spiritual development of the individual. Thus, under socialism, democracy will aid and reinforce development rather than hinder it.

## Encik K. Thillainathan

Development particularly in Third World countries needs to be multifaceted. National development does not and should not merely mean the construction of huge multi-storey, glass windowed, carpeted, and air conditioned buildings, miles and miles of highways, new and better bridges but much more than this. Development needs to encompass the socio-political and economic spheres. It needs to include institutional or organisational development as well as the moral and spiritual development of the people. Development has as its main aim and perhaps the only aim — a better quality of life for the rakyat. This aim cannot be fulfilled in the absence of effective organisation and dedicated men and women who have during the period of either their education or their initial working life inculcated in themselves certain essential moral and spiritual values.

Without men and women of integrity, honesty and dedication we have seen corruption and misuse of public funds becoming a way of life with those who have been entrusted with the task of development in many countries. National development with its aim of a better life for the rakyat cannot be sustained for long with the corrupt, the inefficient and the self seeking in control. With this type of people in control the effectiveness of every dollar that is budgeted for development is reduced to 25 cents or so, the balance being pocketed by those entrusted with the task of implementing the development plans. We have seen this happening in many developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In many developing countries, development plans considered the best at the time of their conception have been brought to a standstill not because the plans were bad but because the men and the institutions entrusted with their implementation have failed. And nearly always the failure of national development plans has been the harbinger of attempts by various groups to pave the way for the erosion of the democratic form of government and install in its place some form of totalitarian government. Of course, such change has seldom, if ever, benefitted the people or the development of a country. This is to be expected as a change in the style of government does not necessarily result in improved government. More often than not the corruption, the misuse of public funds, the inefficiency, the dishonesty and the lack of integrity still prevails. Only the practitioners have changed, not the practice.

### Who decides on what is good for the people?

Having acknowledged that development plans are to provide for a better quality of life for the people, the question then arises as to who should decide?

In totalitarian societies, the party will decide, in dictatorships — the dictator will decide; in feudal societies, the feudal overlords will decide but in a democratic country, the people will have to decide. This right to decide on what is best for us is, to my mind, the most important aspect of democracy. More often than not, in Third World countries, the rakyat appears to be contented with merely exercising their right to vote. We are, it seems, happy and contented to elect or select a group and leave them alone to do what they think best and go our ways. We seem to do very little or, perhaps, do not have the opportunity to exercise our right and also our responsibility to ensure that whatever our leaders decide and implement does in fact provide for a better quality of life for all of us



and not for a few selected favourites. In certain instances development plans, their priorities and their implementation have been reduced to vote-getting gimmicks.

We lack confidence to such an extent that even our sports and social organisations have to be headed by MP's, Ministers and party leaders. An ordinary man in the street who gets elected to public office seems in our mind to be an embodiment of wisdom, truth and knowledge the day after his election. As in the days gone by when the peasant could not question his feudal lord, we too seem reluctant and unwilling to question our elected representatives.

Throughout the course of human history, with the exception of a very few individuals some of whom have either been recognised as saints or Prophets, most men with power have made decisions that have benefitted themselves or those close to them most. Sustaining themselves in power and the life-style they so easily become used to, conditions and colours their decisions – if we, as citizens, give these decision-makers a free reign. This is the reason why the people must take an active interest in not only the implementation of the development plans of our country but all other aspects of development. For successful and beneficial development of the nation, therefore, Parliamentary Democracy includes participation by the people – participatory Democracy.

#### **Prerequisites for the Rakyat's Participation in the Development Process.**

Among the prerequisites for the rakyat's participation in the development process I would list the following two as essential prerequisites.

- (i) The existence of some form of machinery for the rakyat to express their views with an undertaking that these views will be given serious consideration at all levels.
- (ii) The recognition and acceptance by those in power i.e. the people whom we have authorised through the electoral process to serve us for a period of 5 years, that they are in fact serving us – the people – and not themselves and that the basic freedoms including the freedom of expression and assembly are an integral part of democracy.

In this connection what is perhaps most saddening in Third World countries is the attempt, by those elected to serve the people through the democratic process to try to deny the rakyat full participation in this process. This they attempt through either covert or overt means. In many instances they seem to have succeeded. Once entrenched in power they argue that 'bread' i.e. development is more important than basic human rights or that development is incompatible with democracy or Asians are not sophisticated to practise democracy and so on.

In India, Indira Gandhi spoke along these lines and invoked emergency rule. She ended up by not even being elected to Parliament. But before this could happen to her she had forcibly sterilised thousands of Indians, built a prototype car for her son, Sanjay, at a cost of a few millions. From what one can understand through the mass media, her sins and the sins of her psychopants are yet to be tabulated. The journalists and the writers are kept busy. It is of course heartening, particularly from a trade union viewpoint, that

at this time of rising unemployment, people can still find work writing about the crimes of those who want to deny the people their rights. In addition to this, being the daughter of a great man, out of all the mess she was instrumental for, she has taught us, in fact the whole world, a most valuable lesson and that is — Indians steeped in superstition, prisoners of poverty and illiteracy would, if given a choice, still opt for, and can practise, the democratic form of government.

This, to my mind, is the true Asian heritage — the indomitable spirit of man struggling for self-respect, dignity and enlightenment.

In spite of what some erstwhile leaders have been saying about the need to curtail democratic and human rights for the sake of development and the need to re-examine the democratic form of government because Asians are not sophisticated enough or it is not in keeping with our heritage, I would strongly argue that successful and beneficial development hinges on the willing participation of the rakyat and that the essentials of democracy such as the basic freedoms are an integral part of our heritage.

Those who speak about the incompatibility of our heritage with democracy speak thus because they understand neither our heritage nor democracy. To them, our heritage is the cringing subservience our forefathers had for the feudal overlords at certain eras of our history and the colonial period. Those leaders of the Third World who speak this language are perhaps those already entrenched in power and see a threat if democracy is given full reign and also because they are unable to deliver the goods. They dream of feudal times when no one dared to question the overlords. In short, I would say that our heritage speaks volumes for the practice and preservation of the democratic form of government while the forces of oppression, totalitarianism and feudalism militate against the democratic form of government.

### **Rakyat's involvement in the development process.**

The need for the rakyat's involvement in the development process can be illustrated from our daily experience. No mandore or foreman can get his gang to produce, except in slave gangs, unless he is able to get the willing co-operation of his workers. This he cannot do if he uses a whip or keeps on scolding them; of course more often than not, if a worker is angry enough he may punch the mandore or foreman and chuck his job and go home and fend for himself. Apart from involvement there is also the question of feedback from those for whom the development is intended. For successful development those who would implement should also relate and understand the hopes and aspirations of the people.

All these cannot be achieved by talking down to the people or using the whip or instructing them. Ask any successful businessman or entrepreneur and he will tell us of the need for willing co-operation and involvement of those working with him if his enterprise is to be a going concern.

The principles that go to make development plans successful are not far different from those of a successful business concern. Since the funds for development are public funds belonging to nobody and yet everybody, unlike the funds of a business concern in

which the owner's well-being is intimately tied up with the well-being of the business, the public or the rakyat have a right and also responsibility to ensure that their funds are properly utilised. Hence a knowledgeable, aware and conscious rakyat functioning within a democratic framework should be assured the right to use the existing organs – if none exists, new ones must be created – of this framework to provide the checks and balances:

- (i) against abuse of power, favouritism and nepotism;
- (ii) ensure the correct implementation of policies and projects;
- (iii) prevent mismanagement of funds and corruption;
- (iv) prevent the subversion of development projects by vested interests and well-oiled lobbying by powerful groups of individuals.

All this and the attendant avenues – for the rakyat to seek redress against any grievances, it must be remembered – will be absent in a totalitarian or feudal situation. Why then do leaders through various means, attempt to deny the rakyat these avenues that ought to exist in a Democracy?

Is it because they are inadequate and are unable to fulfill the rising expectations of the rakyat?

Isn't it very much like a father who, unable to answer his child's questions, tells him that he shouldn't be asking these questions now, or that of an inadequate teacher telling the pupils to shut up and carry on with their work every time these pupils ask an intelligent question, or is it because leaders assume that once they are elected to office, they are the embodiment of wisdom, truth and justice and are no more answerable to the ignorant masses?

Just like the much popularised 7-year-itch for married couples, I am beginning to believe that the Third World or developing countries, particularly the newly independent ones, undergo a 25-year-itch – somewhere between the 20th and 30th year. This is the time when the rakyat after the first flush of independence and initial enthusiasm for replacing the white faces with local hues, begin to reason, analyse, and question. The leaders, if they are unable to answer the questions separately, it seems, find it easier to give one answer to all questions. It is, "the system is wrong" they say and "of course since the democratic system gives you all the chance to question us we will change the system itself so that you cannot question us." This answer from the majority of the Third World leaders at various levels is perhaps understandable, particularly when to them our heritage means the heritage of feudal overlordism – a cardinal principle of which is "The lord and master is never wrong."

It is not the democratic system which has failed. It is the people who practise the system who have failed.

The contribution of the rakyat in decision making and the role they could eventually play in the acceptance and implementation of government policies in our country could perhaps be best illustrated by a recent action of the present Minister of Finance.

At the time of drawing up the present budget, Tengku Razaleigh, the Finance Minister, invited various groups for dialogue sessions and discussions. Representatives of the various Chambers of Commerce, Banks, Universities, Labour and many others had an opportunity to freely express their views. The budget that was then presented in Parliament was well received. If my memory is correct this was the first time any Minister of Finance in our 20 year history had given such diverse groups of people a chance to express their opinion on this matter before it was proposed in Parliament. A most welcome step and definitely in keeping with democracy.

Unfortunately we do not see the same thing happening when the various development plans are drawn up. In the Third Malaysia Plan there is no mention of the role to be played by labour – the producer of wealth.

Government's own statistics define 49.3% of our people as living in poverty. Over the years the gap between the rich and the poor has been widening. 5% at the apex or top accounts for 30% of the national income while 49% at the bottom accounts for just 15 – 18% of the national income. What really are the hopes and aspirations of these people? Are there channels for them – the rural poor and urban slum dwellers – to really express their hopes and aspirations, to ask for what they want?

The democratic form of government with its essential and integral parts fully intact, can provide the rakyat with a sense of involvement in national building and the successful implementation of the development plans.



## Question and Answer Session

### Question

Why are the people listless and apathetic to change? It seems extremely difficult to influence and change the way of thinking of the people.

### Answer

MR. THILLAINATHAN: I think it is not so much docility that we are concerned with but that those who can think, those who can speak, are contented; they are happy with what they are getting because if you look at the great differential between a degree holder, a professional administrator and a sub-professional and then at a labourer's wages you will find that it is about 10 or 20 times more. The people who can think, the people who can speak are contented, happy, they can do whatever they like. If you are a member of a party in power, then nothing can stop you; you can take a contract, for example a contract to supply food to the hospital in Taiping as reported in the newspaper, if you have the political connections you can under-supply food, you can supply bad food and still the contract will be renewed when it comes up — no problem. There is nothing to speak about; why do you want freedom of speech? There is all the freedom to make money. But I believe the people, the majority of Malaysians are not that type, they are discontented but I think they are inhibited by a feudalistic atmosphere. It is this paraphernalia of office, the big cars and the motor bikes which precede these cars, the distance between the leader and the led and of course if they are not very well educated they cannot communicate. They can think, they read the newspapers, they listen to the radios — they want to say something but at the same time it is the traditions that make them say, "I will not tell these things to the leaders, I shouldn't do it this way, I shall do it that way." But from my own experience, the workers, the uneducated labourers, if properly talked to, can tell the leaders, whoever they may be, many more things much more effectively than I or many of the school leavers can. Perhaps one way of bringing about democracy is through organisations like Aliran, ABIM and many others, and also the mass media. Talking of the mass media there was a time when the unions wanted to boycott newspapers because they were not getting a fair hearing. Now, of course newspapers have their constraints — financial constraints, profit motive, and so on. Nevertheless, I think a certain amount of pressure can be put on the newspapers. We can't do a thing with T.V., radio and so on. But with the newspapers it is for organizations and individuals to decide what they should do and how to go about doing it. This is in fact very important because in a democratic country the mass media play a very important role with regards to labour laws. For instance, there was a time when there was talk of political parties supported by labour but looking at our country and its multiracial composition and the attempt to identify all issues on communal lines, even if they are not communal issues, it may not be wise. Those in power, because they have come to power, want to keep everything on communal lines. The formation of a party that has labour support is a vital thing and must be seriously considered because, whether we like it or not, the labour movement in this country is perhaps the only multiracial organization and because of its very nature, it has definite limitations as to what it can do and what it can discuss and how to go about achieving its aims. But I think a number of avenues should be explored. Let us not

forget that political parties have shown, time and again, that they have their own weaknesses. I will give you an example: in Parliament where they have opportunities to help labour they don't promulgate laws, progressive laws. However, come May Day, every political party wants to organize a May Day rally for the workers. May Day rallies here and there, free drinks and speeches, but I think that labour as a whole is becoming sophisticated enough to realise that these political parties, instead of holding May Day rallies for us, should do something for us in Parliament that is worthwhile. So that when the time comes, I think labour will be mature to react within reasonable terms.

ENCIK ANWAR IBRAHIM: Tuan Pengerusi, saya telah jelaskan tadi bahawa sebenarnya soal kebebasan suara bukan untuk hal yang tidak disiplin, tidak ada ethics. Ianya secara langsung ada kaitan dengan nilai murni insan. Oleh itu, walaupun saya setuju ada kebenaran menyebut tentang soal tanggungjawab, tetapi siapa yang nak menentukan? Mengapa tidak melalui undang-undang dan kita nak persoalkan pasal pelaksanaan itu ada kepentingan keadilan atau pelaksanaan itu mempertahankan kerusi mereka? Ini masalahnya. Memang betul kalau nak banding dengan repressive order yang lain lebih banyak memang betul. Tapi takkan kita senang hati nak bandingkan dengan rejim Lee Kuan Yew, atau dengan the great Bolshevik revolution dengan pemimpin-pemimpinnya ataupun pemimpin-pemimpin besar negara Cina dengan oppression mereka. Bagi orang-orang sosialis soal lainlah, dia tak kan nak kritik kelemahan-kelemahan demokrasi tadi, bagi mereka negara-negara itu demokratik. Tapi kita tidak mewakili pendapat demikian. Dalam menyerang kelemahan-kelemahan yang seperti itu tadi, dalam menyerang ketidakadilan dan penekanan-penekanan begini, tidak sedikit pun terlintas di pemikiran kita untuk mendewakan sistem-sistem kekejaman yang lain. Tapi kita nak pertahankan demokrasi dan bagaimana kita nak pertahankan? Saya rasa kita pertahankannya melalui undang-undang, kita memperketatkan undang-undang tapi boleh dicabar dalam mahkamah, biar mahkamah yang adil dan independent memutuskannya. Kalaulah suatu rencana, katalah dalam *Suara Merdeka* atau *Suara Rakyat*, tidak baik; bukan kementerian dalam negeri yang memutuskan. Kalau tidak, ramailah kita diberi cuti selalu. Saya, kalau boleh, hari itu saya nak tulis ke surat khabar. Kalau takpun, puas hati juga — tetapi tiada peluang. Tapi sebab ini bahayanya. Kemudian oleh kerana kita lihat ini sebagai prinsip asas, kalau kita katakan sekarang pembangunan, untuk apa pembangunan, untuk mempertahankan siapa? Kalau kita katakan pembangunan untuk rakyat, pembangunan untuk mencapai keadilan untuk masyarakat seluruh, siapa yang nak menentukan? Oleh sebab itu dalam melihat soal negeri Kelantan pun, begitu juga. Tapi mereka usik, dia kata kita sokong parti itu, soal sokong tak timbul, tapi prinsip keadilan itu terlalu penting untuk dicemarkan, untuk dipertahankan satu dua interest-group. Kalau tidak, untuk apa kita berjuang lagi? Untuk apa perpaduan? Kalau tidak mempertahankan nilai-nilai indah, nilai suci dalam kehidupan kita. Untuk apa demokrasi kita laungkan kalau kita tak boleh mempertahankan keadilan dan kebaikan untuk semua? Siapa yang nak kata samada ini orang Melayu, atau Cina atau India, yang nak sungguh-sungguh nak pertahankan, nak perjuangan, nak pertahankan negara ini kalau yang nak dipertahankan itu hanya suatu clique yang opportunistic upamanya. Prinsip asas ini saya katanya saya melihat dari kacamata Islam — soal freedom of speech, soal hak dan kebebasan. Ada suatu peristiwa yang dikatakan oleh Rasul Allah di Masjid Madinah. Seorang berkata, “Ya, Rasul Allah, my neighbour was arrested and I don't know why.” The prophen was silent. Dia, terus mengajar. Dia bangun berkata,



“My neighbour was arrested, saya nak tahu sebab apa.” Tak jawab lagi, dia perhati kiri, dia mengajar lagi. Kemudian bangun sekali lagi orang itu, “Ya, Rasul Allah, kawan saya telahpun kena tangkap, apa pasal?” Rasul Allah immediately ordered, “Release that man.” Dan alasannya, kalau orang itu ditahan dan tidak diberi alasan dan tidak diberi kesempatan untuk orang itu membela diri, kalau tidak ada alasan untuk mempertahankan orang itu, ia mesti dibebaskan.

### Question

Bolehlah saudara Kamaludin menentukan apakah bentuk demokrasi yang berjalan di Malaysia hari ini? Kalau sekiranya dalam negeri kita, kalau saudara tidak mengingat apa bentuknya, bagaimana saudara boleh mengatakan demokrasi atau sistem yang berjalan hari ini adalah sistem yang terbaik? Jadi sekiranya saudara tak dapat memberi contoh yang jelas, jadi rakyat bertambah keliru tentang sistem yang saudara mengatakan tadi. Tidakkah adanya dalam politik satu golongan yang dapat mencegah penyelewengan-penyelewengan yang berlaku? Untuk saudara Anwar, iaitu beliau mengatakan Islam menolong untuk menyelesaikan masalah umat manusia, kalau saudara kata kita nak membangun, jadi kita perlukan pemimpin dan pengikut. Apa bentuk pemimpin dan pengikut yang diperlu atau sah dalam Islam dan apakah pengertian disiplin dalam Islam ini sekiranya saudara Anwar mendapat kuasa dan menjadi Kalifah dan, sekiranya kamu menyeleweng, tiadakah ada cara untuk memperbaiki keadaan ini?

### Answer

ENCIK A. R. KAMALUDIN: Saudara Pengerusi, saya tidak pernah menamakan tadi apakah bentuk sistem demokrasi yang kita pakai sekarang, sebenarnya saya sendiri tak tahu apa bentuknya. Sebab kadang-kadang kita melihat samalah sistem demokrasi yang kita pakai hari ini sistem demokrasi a'la Malaysia, kadang-kadang sistem demokrasi a'la Tun Razak, kadang-kadang sistem demokrasi a'la Hussein Onn. Jadi ini yang saya kritik, ini yang saya tidak puas hati, saya bersama-sama dengan saudara bahawa sistem ini tidak ada asas yang kukuh untuk kita berpegang, tetapi kalau kita bandingkan dengan soal pakaian, misalnya baju, songkok – kita tak tahu tentang mana satu cap songkok yang baik, maka kita pakailah songkok mana yang ada dulu. Di samping itu kita prepare untuk memperolehi songkok yang baik. Tetapi saya suka menjelaskan bahawa sistem ini memang kalau diteruskan akan lebih banyak membawa keadaan-keadaan yang tidak baik daripada yang baik. Kalau pembangunan yang dicapai maka ia akan bagi konsep proses yang amat menyakit-yakit itu. Tapi yang telah diterangkan oleh teman-teman panel tadi, ia memang melalui proses di mana kekuasaan politik, orang-orang yang berhampiran dengan kuasa politik boleh mengambil sebesar-besar peluang untuk membesarkan diri mereka, keluarga mereka, keturunan mereka dan sebagainya. Pembangunan memang dicapai. Pulau Pinang sajalah contohnya. Bandingkan dengan 12 negeri lain di Malaysia, tidak hairan Pulau Pinang merupakan sebuah negeri yang paling developed. Ekonominya first class. Tetapi orang Melayu di Pulau Pinang boleh bertanya untuk apakah pembangunan di Pulau Pinang ujud sekarang? Apakah orang Melayu mendapat peluang dari pembangunan yang ada di Pulau Pinang sekarang? Ini soalnya. Soal pembangunan di Pulau Pinang ujud melalui proses demokrasi yang ada sekarang tetapi pembahagian dari hasil pembangunan demokrasi itu untuk siapa? Kawan-kawan? Kita melihat berbagai kilang, berbagai gudang,

dipunyai oleh komparti-komparti dan saudara-saudara boleh trace siapa director-director, siapa chairman lembaga, pengarahnya. Maka saudara akan dapati bahawa orang yang sama juga, kalau tidak orang yang sama juga, barangkali ia datang dari satu clique yang jadi anggota lembaga pengarah dan sebagainya. Sebab itulah saya katakan tadi bahawa saya tidak tahu apakah jenis demokrasi yang diamalkan sekarang. Politik kita dalam keadaan yang amat menyakit-yakit kita. Bagi mengambil tindakan terhadap orang yang menyeleweng, saya fikir ini terlalu umum – menyeleweng dalam soal apa? Jadi saya tidak akan menjawab kerana soalan ini terlalu umum. Saya rasa saudara Anwar boleh menjawab tentang perkara-perkara yang lain.

**ENCIK ANWAR IBRAHIM:** Bukan kerana demokrasi maka tidak ada keadilan dan di Pulau Pinang memang pemimpinnya patut diberi amaran, kerana kalau dibiarkan begini, orang-orang Melayu umpamanya di Pulau Pinang merasakan tidak ada security lagi di negeri ini. Hal ini boleh ditimbangan, diperluaskan akan juga mewakili beberapa pandangan di kalangan orang-orang miskin di kalangan masyarakat bukan Melayu. Ini juga mesti diberi penjelasan, jadi bukan salah demokrasi tapi programme atau dasar-dasar untuk mempertahankan clique yang tertentu dalam partinya yang berkuasa. Gabungan parti-parti yang berkuasa, itu pun ahli-ahlinya. Clique tertentu dalam gabungan parti-parti yang berkuasa. Towkay-towkay, datuk, yang berhormat, yang tak berhormat, jadi golongan ini. Jadi, kita telah jelas, umpamanya, bukan kerana demokrasi; jadi kita dah jelas bukan kerana demokrasi tetapi dasar falsafah negara. Tetapi, atas nama kebebasan kita terkongkong kepentingan sempit. Saya nak bagi suatu cerita, cerita lama orang-orang tua mengenai suatu kumpulan anak-anak yang sedang belajar tentang soal pembersihan jiwa, pembersihan diri. Kemudian mereka pergi ke suatu tempat ternampak bangkai. Dia nampak seekor anjing menjumpai bangkai itu. Kemudian anjing ini pergi panggil gangnya – dua puluh, tiga puluh ekor, makan bangkai, tapi anjing ini pun duduk di hujung memerhati-hatikan sahaja. Entahlah untuk apapun tak tahu. Bangkai itu anjing-anjing yang lain makan. Semua dah kenyang, anjing-anjing itu pun balik. Anjing yang tadi seekor ini barulah pergi dan cuba jilat-jilat apa yang ada, saki-baki yang lebih daripada apa yang dimakan. Tok guru pun berkata, “Ha, ingatlah anak-anak, murid ku, kalau kamu tamak haloba nak rebut bagi kenyang perut, taraf kamu lebih rendah dari anjing tadi.” Rupanya anjing itu pun dia bagi kawan dia makan dulu. Dia bagi chance pada orang lain. Dia tahu juga sifat peri-keanjingan. Dan peri-keanjingan dia itu nampaknya jauh lebih baik dari sifat manusia yang ada di kalangan kita ini. Sebab itu dalam Islam, kemungkinan kalau manusia itu jahat, tamak, nak rebut kekayaan, dia lebih teruk daripada binatang yang terhina. Lebih teruk dari ular sawa; kalau dia makan kenyang empat hari dia rest. Dia orang ini, dia rebut tanah orang, apa pun dia mahu, halal atau haram belakang kira. Yang kira perutnya, keluarganya dan kepentingannya. Ini yang jatuhkan, merosakkan, the perversion of our democracy. Bukan saya nak marah, saya nak tegur, mereka mesti diberi tahu. Pemimpin, asasnya, mestilah ada akhlak. Kalau dia nak pin mesti ada ilmu. Tapi akhlak ini terlalu penting. Mesti disiplinkan diri sendiri. Yang pemimpin mesti mendisiplinkan diri sendiri. Mereka yang perintah, dia fikir nak disiplinkan orang saja. Jangan hisap ganja, rambut jangan panjang sangat. Semua dia nak disiplin. Disiplin dalam Islam start dengan diri kita. Disiplin ketua dulu dan lepas itu masyarakat.

## Question

Saya nampak saudara Anwar cuba nak mengemukakan tentang ideoloji Islam. Bolehkah ideoloji Islam dapat diimplementasikan di Malaysia? Soalnya samada rakyat Malaysia dapat menerima ideoloji Islam? Kalau kita cuba mengimplementasikan ideoloji Islam mungkin kita boleh menarik perhatian orang-orang Melayu dengan mengeluarkan hadith, ayat-ayat Quran, tetapi adakah menarik orang-orang lain? Kerana masyarakat Malaysia terdiri dari berbilang bangsa. Kalaulah saudara Anwar berkuasa apakah bentuk kerajaan yang adil yang dicita-citakan didirikan olehnya?

## Answer

ENCIK ANWAR IBRAHIM: Tentang soal orang bukan Islam nak menerima ideoloji Islam, saya optimistik. Soal dia nak memeluk agama Islam atau tidak bukan soal penting kerana dalam Islam tidak ada paksaan. Tetapi kita nak cakap tentang ini alternative kami, mari kita discuss bersama dulu. Kita cakap tentang keadilan, yang mana tak setuju? Saya tidak menolak dialogue dengan kaum lain. Sekarang ini tidak ada perbincangan, yang ada hanya prejudice. Jikalau suasananya baik tentulah persetujuan boleh dicapai dengan kaum lain.

## Dr. Kamal Salih

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen. I am not a political scientist nor am I a qualified practitioner in the democratic field in the sense of actively participating in politics like a politician but as an academic, I have some views on the future of democracy in this country which might be of interest to you and which all of us could talk about and exchange ideas on.

Now, as for the future of democracy in this country, I for one would not want to say that democracy is dead in our country. Neither is it appropriate for me to shout the slogan that "We are independent, democracy is not dead, long live democracy!" In considering the future of democracy there are signs of considerable ailment in its practice in our country.

But the analogy that I would suggest is this. Democracy in Malaysia is like the case of the Sumatran rhinoceros in Endau-Rompin in that it is one of the endangered species; that, if you don't assume a greater rationality and responsibility towards it and involve as many interests as possible in the defence of democracy, the practice of democracy in this country would be threatened with extinction. I say this because there are many trends that are obvious, based upon reading newspapers and some reflections. Such trends, I think, affect the practice of democracy and place its future viability in danger.

To start with, knowledge of the democratic process — what democracy implies, what its conditions are, its parameters and possibilities and so on — is important. However, we are not going to engage ourselves in a democratic discussion on democracy. But there are at least two trends which appear to me to lead to the possibility of the abolition of democracy. One is bureaucratic centralisation in almost all aspects of life — penetration of bureaucratic governmental processes in many other sectors as well.

Let me tell you that the democratic process involves participation of various groups, various bodies and various people, of different interests, that the process of bureaucratic centralisation in the government would mean that there would not be opportunities for various kinds of opinions, beliefs as well as various interests which, in a democratic process, should have a free play in order that the majority opinion is obtained, on the one hand, and the interests of the minority are not put aside simply because of the majority, on the other.

In this context, the government penetrates and so far as it does not allow any other opinions other than its own to have free play in decisions which will affect the social and economic development of the country, we can say that democracy will be weakened. The usual explanation for this is that developing economies or societies, because of special conditions, need government control. According to government leaders, many of the so-called forces that would tend to undermine the decision making process must be centralised. The penetration of the government or the executive branch in certain processes of the law is one example. Another example is the penetration of the government into the functioning of certain bodies which should be left independent like the university. Another example is the penetration of the government into the "jawatankuasa" in the rural areas as part of the process of consciousness but in effect they prevent the consciousness of the rural population from developing in terms of making known their preferences in development. These are some examples, there are many other examples which have to be scrutinized more carefully.

The second trend which prevents the operation of democracy in this country and which is increasing is chauvinism that seems to permeate all levels of discussions. When chauvinism in inter-party politics in particular, transgresses what are recognised as realistic limits, it would be contradictory to democracy in the true sense. From another angle, I imagine that one can argue that the pursuit of ethnic interest is consistent or part and parcel of democracy. My own point, however, is that in the context of building a true Malaysian society (which is also Aliran's aim) this interest can easily be exploited by certain groups in an undemocratic manner.

In these two processes, that is, ethnicity and the bureaucratic penetration in our daily life, it appears that there is an unwillingness on the part of the ruling party to recognise that there is a great deal of rationality outside the ruling group itself. There is, for instance, I think a fear that the masses, the peasants in the kampung, the workers in the urban areas, might not be able to decide for themselves and to decide for others or the country as a whole, for within a democratic process, one should not usurp decisions from others with the aim of establishing preferences in certain directions. There should be full participation, equal opportunity for participation. There are instruments, apparatus for ensuring full participation. In the face of differing preferences by different groups and different individuals in society, there should be equal weightage of different opinions except in relation to majority rule.

But even then, even when the majority is in power and the majority may decide in a democratic sense, there still must be – for democracy to function, and in a country like Malaysia, for a democracy to exist – some compassion and some tolerance for dissent, for different opinions and different views. I think that this tolerance plus rationality and compassion for the needs and requirements of those that are at the moment in need of assistance should be taken into consideration in the formulation of policies.

But given the structure of our society, rationality, the inculcation of democratic values, compassion in judgement, equality in opportunity, voluntary participation – these are increasingly set aside in the name of national interests because it could lead, it is said, to ethnic conflict. In other words, in discussing democracy, ethnicity has often been used as the legitimising factor by those in the ruling group and even those in the opposition and those outside the political process.

So I think, given these two tendencies and the fear of incorporating elements useful to the democratic experiment into the decision making process, it appears that only the present ruling group has the monopoly over democracy. In the long run, the future of democracy in Malaysia, I suggest, would have to depend on the educational function. This means education in the home, in the schools, in universities, among the general public. We must inculcate those values that are pro-democracy. These must be inculcated in the whole society in every aspect. So long as these values are sustained by certain guarantees in the sense that they do not become anti-democratic, then I say, the future of democracy will be good.

Let me conclude by suggesting that perhaps the one thing which we must always guard against is mediocrity in the ruling group itself. That is why democracy must always seek areas of excellence in trying to project and promote those values important to democracy – justice, truth, equality. Only under these conditions would democracy be viable. Without these, democracy in this country would have an adverse future.

Thank you.

## Encik Lee Lam Thye

Tuan Pengerusi, ahli-ahli panel, saudara-saudara, saudari-saudari, kawan-kawan, sahabat-sahabat. Pada petang ini saya rasa amat gembira kerana dapatlah menerima satu jemputan untuk datang ke Pulau Pinang untuk mengambil bahagian dalam satu forum – forum rakyat yang diaturkan oleh Aliran, satu pergerakan reformasi untuk keadilan, kebebasan dan perpaduan. Saya rasa forum ini adalah satu forum yang amat sesuai, sesuai oleh sebab forum ini diadakan di dalam satu masa sangat genting, satu masa genting dalam negara kita apabila bukan sahaja kerajaan, bukan sahaja parti pembangkang tetapi seluruh rakyat, seluruh negara, seluruh masyarakat sedang menghadapi cabaran-cabaran mengenai proses pembangunan demokrasi negara ini.

Mr. Chairman, members of the panel, my dear friends, ladies and gentlemen.

I wish first of all to congratulate Aliran for having organised today's forum, "forum rakyat," forum of the people, by the people and for the people on the subject of vital importance to all of us – Democracy in Malaysia. As I said earlier in the National Language I feel that this is a very suitable time for such a forum to be organised in view of the many changes and challenges that we are facing and the whole nation is facing with regard to the development and survival of democracy in this country. I am sure the organiser of this forum would like panelists who are present here to-day to speak their minds freely and frankly about what they think about the future of democracy in this country. In this regard I think it is my duty to speak freely and frankly in view of the fact that I am first of all a people's elected representative, a member of Parliament and I deem it my duty to the people, to the country, to the nation that I must speak my mind freely and frankly to-day. And if you want to be free and frank in the discussion you have no choice but to say certain things which are unpalatable and unpleasant to the government and even if that is so, let it be so. Anyway, in view of the time factor, I wish to refer to the text off and on so that I hope I will be able to cover all the points I wish to speak upon.

Has democracy a future in Malaysia? This question is gaining more relevance day by day in the wake of fast changing political developments which are now taking place in our country. This question is being asked in public places, in coffee shops, in markets, in business circles and in the university compounds. Now the proper and the correct answer to the question is not hard to find if one really takes the trouble to get down to the ground and speak to those who are in a position to express frankly and freely their opinion about the future of democracy in this country.

The answer that we can expect is undoubtedly clear; that democracy in Malaysia has never been at its lowest ebb as it is now. From 1957 to 1969 Malaysian leaders boasted to the whole world that Malaysia is a model democracy for newly emerging nations and regarded herself as a bastion of what was euphemistically called the free world. But when the May 13 incident took place which had been described by a certain book as a politically motivated act, democracy in Malaysia was officially pronounced dead. Democracy unfortunately had to be sacrificed for rule by the National Operation Council or what is popularly known as the N.O.C. As to why democracy has to be sacrificed, the answer is always there, that is, so long as democracy could not continue to



preserve and sustain the vested interest of the ruling Alliance, then it had to be sacrificed for some other form of government.

As I said earlier I have to speak very freely and frankly to-day and I am sure much of what I say to-day will never go to the print but let it be so. As I said, I have a duty to perform to the people and to the nation.

In February 1971 limited democracy was reinstated with further encroachments on the democratic liberties and the rights of the people. Foremost among these encroachments was the amendment of the Constitution, curbing freedom of speech which classified certain issues as sensitive and thereby had to be removed from the pale of public discussion and debate and even to abolish the traditional privilege of parliamentary immunity, thus preventing even people's elected representatives from raising such so-called sensitive issues. It is argued that these constitutional amendments were necessary in order to prevent the recurrence of another May 13. I would have thought that with the passing of the 1971 Constitutional Amendment Bill entrenching the various unquestionable sensitive issues, the spectre of May 13 would have been exorcised for good. But we still find ruling party leaders and their workers raising the May 13 spectre and intimidating voters at by-elections saying that racial riots would recur should the ruling party candidates be defeated.

Mr. Chairman, the flame of democracy is a weak and a flickering one. It has suffered serious setbacks and blows since 1957, but never in greater intensity than since 1969. Following actions taken after 1969 have dealt severe blows on political democracy in Malaysia. Let me just tell you what these are:

- (1) 1971 Constitutional Amendment Act which curbed freedom of speech of the people, and muzzled elected representatives of the people by abolishing parliamentary immunity.
- (2) 1973 Constitutional Amendment which abolished 9 Selangor State Assembly seats in the Kuala Lumpur area and disenfranchised a million people from state representation.
- (3) 1973 Constitutional Amendments which permitted grave imbalances in the weightage of voters between urban and rural constituencies.
- (4) 1975 passage of the Essential Security cases regulations which is a blow to the rule of law, a blow to human rights and above all, a serious undermining of the entire parliamentary democratic process in this country.
- (5) 1976 Constitutional Amendment which sought to amend Part 2 of the Constitution, which enshrined the fundamental rights to be enjoyed by Malaysians.
- (6) Continued, prolonged and indefinite suspension of City Councils, Municipal, Town and Local Council elections.
- (7) Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 forbidding University students from taking an active interest and part in the political and national affairs of the country.

- (8) Tighter controls of the press freedom and full use of the mass media, that is, the television, radio and the press as the tools of government propaganda.

My dear friends, these are not the only examples which have contributed to a severe blow to parliamentary democracy in our country. Examples that I've given will not be complete without mentioning the Internal Security Act which was passed in 1960. Although this Act is primarily aimed at safeguarding the security of the nation, it has on numerous occasions been abused and specifically used to hunt down, I emphasise the word, to hunt down politicians and trade unionists whose opinions and beliefs are directly opposed to those held by the ruling party. My party, the DAP, has strongly opposed the ISA because we are convinced that it has been constantly used to actually safeguard the political powers of those who belong to the power elites. The Act gives supreme power to the Minister in charge of Home Affairs to sign orders for the detention without trial for a period of 2 years of persons who are suspected or believed to have threatened the security of this country or this nation. When the 2 years detention period expires, the Minister can reissue a new order for the continued detention of such persons again for another 2 years. This can be repeated every 2 years when one's detention order expires with the excuse that such detained person still poses a threat to the security of this nation. The DAP is today a victim of this Act. Right now, 2 of my colleagues are still in detention in Taiping – and one of them is a people's elected representative – not because they have acted in a manner prejudicial to the internal security of this country, but because they have the guts to speak out freely and frankly on the problems of this country. Is it true that the nation's security is threatened by politicians and trade unionists or are the ruling parties' vested interests and security being threatened by the challenges of politicians and trade unionists? Provisions in the ISA are completely contrary to Articles 9 and 10 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 9 states: No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention. Article 10 states that everyone is entitled to full equality through a fair and proper hearing by an independent impartial tribunal in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

Mr. Chairman, looking at the number of Constitutional Amendments that I had just mentioned, it cannot be denied that the Malaysian Constitution has earned for itself the distinction of being the most amended Constitution in the World. From a rough count, the Federal Constitution must have been amended close to a thousand places since Independence in 1957. In fact, Mr. Chairman, it is not an exaggeration to say that the history of the Constitutional Amendments in Malaysia is the history of a progressive erosion of Democracy in our country. Thus in 1967, the Constitution was amended in an Emergency session of Parliament to bring about an Alliance overthrow of Datuk Stephen Kalong Ningkan, the Sarawak Chief Minister, although the Privy Council upheld his constitutionality and defended him as a Sarawak Chief Minister. The motive here was political interest of the Alliance and not the national interest of the country. The same political motivation explains the whole gamut of other constitutional amendments in this country. Mr. Chairman, advocates of these encroachments against democratic principles, against the democratic process have argued that democracy a'la Westminster is not suitable for Malaysia and that democracy a'la Malaysia adapted to meet local conditions and realities should be adopted. Of course, there is a school of thought that says that the

very fact that I am able to stand before you today, to speak out so vociferously against the government, clearly shows that there is still democracy in this country; the very fact that I am allowed to say these things, right here, still shows that the government is prepared to accept dissent. Mr. Chairman, to my mind, this entire argument must be rejected outright as it is a dangerous fallacy to justify the undemocratic actions of the government. The fact cannot be denied, that in Malaysia today, democracy is more observed in its external trappings than in substance. Whenever the Alliance, or now, the Barisan Nasional, tinkers and messes about the Constitution they will plead that we cannot have democracy a'la Westminster but that we need democracy a'la Malaysia. Why? We are no uncritical adherents of democracy a'la Westminster. We cannot fail to notice that every constitutional amendment and change leads to further diminution of the democratic rights and liberties of the people and not to its greater enlargement. There are many areas where democracy in Malaysia, can be improved, so as to make it a more efficient system to fulfill the needs and aspirations of the people. For instance, we should remove all clauses which undermine the people's confidence in the democratic process and one such instance is the opportunism of members of Parliament and State Assemblymen who defect for personal gains – whether it is for money, material inducements or other temptations. A law to ban an Elected M.P. or State Assemblyman from selling his seat to the highest bidder would definitely be a step to raise the standing of democracy in public esteem. But no, the Barisan Nasional will not do this, for it does not mind seeing opportunists debasing the name of democracy so long as it benefits and remains in power.

Mr. Chairman, what do I think about the future of this country? I believe that in a multiracial society, a democratic system is the most suitable and effective system to weld the diverse races into one and move them ahead towards a common destiny. I am convinced by this. Any rule by force, or coercion without the consent of the governed would merely set in motion a chain of divisive forces. It is out of my concern for the present state of democracy in our country and the constant erosion of the democratic process that I wish to suggest here, that the time has come for a Commission on Democracy to be set up in Malaysia. This commission should be charged with the task of reviewing the laws and constitutional amendments in our country, to find out which are those that are against the spirit and substance of democracy in our country and should be removed from the statute books. If the government will not set up such a commission, then I say the students, the Universities and other circles of opinion, like the Aliran for example, should themselves set up such a commission or conduct their own studies, as regards what we feel are some of the challenges facing us in the development of democracy. Such bodies or groups should forge for themselves a common purpose and a common destiny. The democratic spirit and the democratic way of life must be actively and consciously fostered and nurtured, if it is not to wither away and die. This is the responsibility of both the government and the people. Mr. Chairman, it is highly unfortunate, that in Malaysia, in view of the examples that I have cited in the early part of my speech, the Barisan Nasional government has systematically eroded the basis of the democratic way of life, all done in the name of so-called “national interest.”

While I am on the subject of democracy and human rights, allow me to quote a poem written by one of the world's greatest poets, Rabindranath Tagore, which reads as follows:

*Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high.....where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way in the dreary desert sands of dead habit. Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.*

Mr. Chairman, it is most unfortunate that we in this country have never seen or felt that heaven of freedom. On the contrary, what we are seeing and experiencing in our country today, is a situation in which democracy is diminishing day by day, and whatever human rights we are left with, are swiftly and continuously being eroded by the actions of the few, not because of the safety and security of the majority of the Malaysians but more because they want to consolidate and perpetuate their hold on the masses in the name of national interest.

In the wake of all these unfortunate developments, let me plead to the government to make a thorough reappraisal of itself and find out whether the measures they have taken so far to curb and curtail parliamentary democracy in our country are in the interest of the people and the nation. Are they laying the proper foundation for nation building? If the government is prepared to pause and take a deep look at itself and reappraise its policies then we still have a chance to correct our past mistakes and set ourselves on the right path or the proper path to achieve a truly multi-racial and democratic Malaysian Malaysia. Mr. Chairman, if the government is determined, and above all, what is important, if the government has the political will to do so, then I would like to propose that it should for a start embark on the following democratising plan to enlarge the areas of democratic freedom in Malaysia: They are:

- (1) Democratise the mass media of communication because people like you know that a democracy can only succeed if the majority of people can exercise good judgement and make wise decisions, which in turn, are dependent on the availability of adequate information and of the truth.
- (2) Democratise the government's control of political party activities. Regulations requiring parties to get prior police permit for a public rally not only give rise to bureaucratic red tape but also infringe on the basic rights of free speech and free assembly.
- (3) Democratise the conduct of elections where the government makes use of government personnel, money and resources for its party campaign. In my mind one solution will be to set up an all-party commission to draw up a code of ethics for general elections concerning electioneering conduct and finance which is binding on all competing parties.
- (4) Democratise local government by immediately holding local council elections. The continued suspension of local government elections stifles grass-root democracy which is the fountain of democratic education for all villagers' and towns' people on the meaning and working of the democratic process.
- (5) Democratise the university campus by allowing student political activities, to allow the leaders of tomorrow an opportunity to develop into balanced and mature citizens of the Malaysia of tomorrow.

These are, of course, some of the aspects that I feel need looking into. There are, of course, other aspects which have to be democratised. But suffice for me to mention a few important ones here. Mr. Chairman, I wish to stress here that in the final analysis whether a democracy succeeds or fails will depend on whether there are enough democrats in our country. In Malaysia, I observe, there are large numbers of people who are not politically committed or even politically involved not because they do not want to do so but because of the inborn fear of arrest, because of the fear of intimidation by police Special Branch officers, if they have the guts, if they have the courage to speak out freely and frankly, if they hold political views contrary to those of the government. This, to my mind, is most unhealthy because it shows that the government is intolerant of political dissent, even though it may be lawful. Mr. Chairman, one of the hallmarks of democracy is that governments can be changed without hatred and violence through the ballot box but is the Barisan Nasional Government prepared to accept this hard political fact? I do not wish to answer this question and I hope that my colleague, Y.B. Mr. Rajasingam who is a member of the National Front, will give me an answer later on. Finally, and in conclusion let me say that the future of democracy will depend on whether, before our fragile democratic system is put to the supreme test, we can throw up more democrats and allow democracy to strike deeper roots in Malaysian soil. If we can, democracy will be a successful experiment. If we cannot, democracy will be a casualty and together with it the multi-racial Malaysian experiment. Let the Barisan Nasional remember this: The government should spend more time and more money on promoting democracy in Malaysia instead of spending a lot of money on defence. For I am sure of one thing, and that is, if democracy is snuffed out, I do not think that any amount of money or expenditure on defence can save Malaysia. On this note may I thank you once again, Mr. Chairman and may I also thank Aliran for having given me this opportunity to take part in this forum to air my views as regards the future of democracy in this country.

Atas sebab-sebab dan hujah-hujah yang telah diberikan oleh saya, ingin saya mengucapkan ribuan terima kasih kepada pengelola Forum Rakyat ini, yang telah memberi saya satu peluang yang amat baik dan satu peluang yang sesuai bagi saya ucap dari hati ke hati mengenai apa yang saya anggap adalah masalah-masalah pokok yang dihadapi oleh negara, yang dihadapi oleh rakyat berkaitan dengan pembangunan demokrasi di negara kita.

Sekian. Ribuan terima kasih.

## Encik R. Rajasingam

Mr. Chairman, members of the panel, ladies and gentlemen.

Firstly, I must congratulate Aliran for having such panels where we can come up with our frank opinions as my colleague, Mr. Lee Lam Thye, had stated. I endorse most of his views with certain exceptions; possibly since he belongs to an opposition party, for gaining votes he could have said certain things.

Now, my topic today, I have been asked to speak on the topic of "The Future of Democracy in Malaysia." Going backwards, ladies and gentlemen, in 1957 we modelled a Constitution which looked very democratic but by 1977 we have had 27 amendments to the Constitution of which 5 amendments involve more directly the fundamental liberties of the subjects.

Now, the Constitution of the United States of America was promulgated in 1776, if I am not mistaken, and over a period of 200 years they have had only 21 amendments! We beat them! I am trying to find out what democracy is, trying to look into dictionaries but I feel the closest and the best view that we could come to, is democracy as in the Doctrine defined by Carter, President of the United States, when he said firstly, "The right to be free from government violation of the integrity of a person; such violations includes torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment." That we must accept; as a lawyer, I know. Many of my clients have undergone this. Secondly, the right of fulfilment of such vital needs as food, shelter, health, care and education. Now, on this score I don't think the government (no doubt I am a government back-bencher, but I must tell you frankly) has adhered to it. Unfortunately I was unable to bring a document circulated by the Party Rakyat condemning the Menteri Besar of Johore for nepotism in land distribution. That is a clear-cut case of corruption, if you ask me. Thirdly, the right to enjoy civil and political liberties, freedom of thought, of religion, of assembly, of speech, of the press, freedom of movement both within and outside one's own country, freedom to take part in the government. Now, all these things, as I define it, exist in a democracy. Now looking at it at present, I feel that we are no more a democratic government — other than having elections once in every 4 or 5 years! Because the sad part is this: The Constitution is supreme — that is what we say — but unfortunately in terms of numerical majority in Parliament at present or even in the next elections there is bound to be one party which will have a numerical majority, a two-third-majority, to amend the Constitution. And by having a Party Whip, we, the so-called representatives of the people, have our hands tied and what happens is, the Executive takes control over the legislature. They can decide to change the law just like the Kelantan Bill which because of some trouble there resulted in Federal Rule; possibly on the 17th, you may have Federal Rule in Kedah. You won't know — I expect that! So, because of this numerical majority and this party discipline, as you know, Barisan Nasional amended the Constitution. The survival of democracy is at stake.

My colleague, Mr. Lee Lam Thye, had said that we started amending the Constitution since 1971 but we started amending our Constitution way back in 1963; and in 1969 we brought a piece of Emergency Legislation known as the Emergency Ordinance of



1969 which was never brought to Parliament, which was not even passed! By virtue of those regulations, the Minister had been delegated powers like those found in Emergency Security Cases. And, what could we do? The best we could do as lawyers was to boycott all security cases. But we have got in our profession some black sheep who are still prepared to carry on. I know the government was not very happy. Being a member of their side, being a seconder to the motion, it had cost me a lot of money because I had collected the fees and spent the fees but now I have to refund the fees! As a matter of principle, this is very important. If we are going to have democracy, we must have elected representatives with a certain amount of principles at least on a minimum basis – the individual's right to say "yes" or "no." There must be a dividing line. I am against this question of Party Whip.

Now, coming back again to this topic of Democracy in Malaysia, personally I feel that we are no more democratic. We may have Parliament you can organise a seminar like this, you can talk. But when it comes to a little bit of touchy issues..... there are CID officers behind us breathing down our backs. The Internal Security Act has been totally abused. And if you ask me, at the moment, our democratic process has gone down the line. And mind you, my guess is that possibly in this country there may be one more election. May, I say! I didn't say we will. We may have one and after that we may have NOC rule as what had happened in 1969. As Sdr. Lee Lam Thye will agree with me in Parliament, when it came to voting I had to walk out! That is the only way a back-bencher of the government side can get off. It's true – you speak and then when it comes to voting you don't feel like voting because your conscience doesn't allow you. So I just take a walk – have a cup of tea. That's the only way I can do it.

So gentlemen, there is a very good article written by Associate Professor Nik Abdul Rashid of the University of Malaya on the erosion of fundamental liberties, which I was quoting from and which I have a little bit to comment on. The democratic process in this country will now basically come to this: we can't have ethnic political parties, ethnic groups in political parties, that's my view. It will not work if we had UMNO for the Malays, MCA for the Chinese, MIC for the Indians. It will never work, and it just cannot work. But unfortunately, we are sort of tied down to that fact. Possibly within the next one week or so, if I am not wrong, the other component parties in the Barisan may be walking out of the Barisan Nasional leaving behind the same old Alliance to take over. And if this happens it would be very difficult to practise democracy in our country.

The other important thing is to compare Malaysia with, say, two other countries, India and United States. In the States and in India they have Constitutions, and Parliament can make any law except a law that changes a man into a woman, and a woman into a man. But in the States and in India, the Constitution and parliamentary legislations are still supervised by the courts but not in our country. In our country, the judges will tell you straight, "Look, Constitution is supreme, you all make the law, follow the law." As you know security cases carry mandatory death sentence. So this is what we lack. One of the biggest bottlenecks in our democratic process is that the Judiciary in this country is unable to supervise the legislative powers of parliamentary rule. Because out of the 144 parliamentarians you may have about 95 yes-men. So when the vote is taken they just say "yes" or "nay." And this is where we do not have this safeguard where our courts can

say, "Look, now this is against the Constitution, it is not proper," as in the United States. Or in India, for example, Indira Gandhi and her emergency legislation. Now, there the judges were very frank; when Raj Narain took an election petition against Mrs. Gandhi, the judge, without fear or favour, gave his decision. Unfortunately, he lost his job. Possibly here you may have the same situation. The judges are appointed by the Crown. They may also have to look after their daily bread. And the only way you can protest against this is to leave certain cases which you feel are against your conscience. Now, this is where we can do our part — people like you should voice your opinion, openly, candidly. I know that there is the Internal Security Act of 1960 where the Minister has signed all the papers which are kept ready — you can get them from the police headquarters. The Minister has got about 60 of these forms signed; all they need to do is to type out your name: R. Rajasingam. This sort of abuse must stop. We can't be talking of democracy way ahead — we have got so many things, minor things, abuses by the elites which are not checked. When we talk, well, some bloke will say, "watch out." Next thing you may go to Taiping! That happens to be my hometown also.

So, I feel at present we are not practising democracy in the real sense of the word, talking about the future is of no use! I think, we have a very bleak future for democracy.

The leader of the Opposition, Mr. Lim Kit Siang, asked something about education and the kind of reply the Minister of Education and the Deputy Prime Minister gave! I mean, can you expect such a man to continue in his portfolio? The MAS crash, if this is a democratic government, the Minister should have tendered in his resignation that very day. In any other civilised country, that would have happened. So what kind of future for democracy do we have when we don't even have democracy? — with the 1960 Internal Security Act, and I think, under Articles 5, 6, 8 to 10 five amendments which have brought in 62 pieces of parliamentary acts. Preservation of Public Order, Essential Security cases, and I think about 62 amendments passed by virtue of subsidiary legislation, that means the Minister passes it himself, without even bringing it to Parliament! Where is our freedom? I can't go up there and say, "Look, I am a parliamentarian, I like to talk to my constituents in a rally." Today, you can't do that. You have got to get a police permit and not satisfied with that, they want to go through your speech — what you are going to say, good or bad. What is the choice? Where do you have a choice?

Now, the biggest block I thought was the Universities and University Colleges Act. The University lecturers are now supposed to comply with Chapter D, Disciplinary Ordinance of the government servants. How does a University Lecturer or Professor do his research openly and frankly? How are you going to brighten up our University and live up to its status as a University? As such I don't see how democracy exists other than having elections once in every 5 years. As Dr. Mahathir says, we are a democratic nation because since 1957 we have been holding elections every 5 years. As though it is a sort of a time-table in a school. That doesn't spell democracy and that is not democratic! I view of this if you ask my personal views, we are presently not living in a democratic society as spelt out in Jimmy Carter's doctrine. The poor are becoming poorer, the rich are becoming richer. That is the reality now. At least under Soekarno's regime he had the word "Guided Democracy." It was one shade better than our democracy. Say what you like. He was a mad man, he did a lot of things. But he openly said, "I am having Guided Demo-

cracy” and he patted himself. Let’s not speak of democracy when there is no democracy in the country today. And in this sense I would like to make this recommendation:

*The appointment of a Commissioner, not foreign constitutionalists, to examine our system, to look into our constitution and constitutional amendments.*

Gentlemen, don’t be taken by the idea that people can go to Privy Council because the Privy Council is also a very biased body. You must understand that. In certain cases, they will hear you out but I went up there once under this emergency and there is one case coming up on the 19th of this month – Jellani, the security case – and I can bet my last dollar that it will be dismissed. When it comes to the government side, the Privy Council is only a sort of a magic word to give a man the right to go to England, English judges are fair. But the Privy Council, the Judicial Committee have got their bias towards governments, they will not want to disturb – that is the feeling I get – the stability of a government. They think that our legislators are competent enough when it comes to national security.

We don’t have an emergency in existence but we have declared 6 emergencies. In the case of Datuk Kalong Ningkan, we declared one emergency. Then we declared another emergency – May 13th. Then we declared another emergency in Kelantan. On the 17th or 18th we may be declaring another emergency – Kedah or the whole country – we don’t know!

So, our weakness in parliamentary democracy is because of the numerical majority, and I think this is what we lack – and Party Whips. We are a cosmopolitan country, we should go on that basis – not on the basis of “I am a Malay, I am going to vote UMNO, I am an Indian, I am going to vote MIC, I am a Chinese, I am going to vote MCA.” As long as this exists, I don’t think that we can have a fruitful Parliament. We can’t. I go there so obedient..... but I am virtually stopped by the Whip from speaking. So there are other ways for us to express our views, like this organisation here or in the Bar Council when we hold an Annual General Meeting and say what we like, what we feel like saying. Anyway, the result is, this is how I feel, if we are more civic-conscious as our 200 odd lawyers in our country were when we met in Kuala Lumpur and expressed our views not to take ISA cases, the net result was that all the ISA cases were taken off the list and they have commuted death sentences on 9 persons out of that.

So the government is encouraging us into subversion. On the one hand they say, “Look, we are trying to stop subversion.” On the other hand they are encouraging subversion. They are forcing it down our throats. So what do we do? Under these circumstances, my view is that democracy in this country does not exist in the true sense of the word. And the future of democracy in this country is, to my mind, very, very bleak. Possibly we may not even have the next elections.

Thank you.



## Encik Ariffin Omar

Mr. Chairman, fellow panelists and friends. I sometimes wonder whether as a last speaker I have much to say after knowing that my fellow panelists had expressed their points of view on the Future of Democracy in Malaysia so eloquently. But at least I feel I can elaborate on certain points which they had not touched upon.

What we share in common with Yang Berhormat Lee Lam Thye is the belief that between the the years 1957 to perhaps 1969 the democracy that we practised in Malaysia was a functional democracy. For all its shortcomings, it was fairly viable. As much as we pride ourselves that we model our democracy on the Westminister type of democracy, it did its functions. But since 1971 it is obvious there are shortcomings in this democracy of ours. Now what exactly are these shortcomings?

First and foremost, what is the Malaysian concept of democracy? To most Malaysians, democracy is just casting a ballot, putting a vote in the box, election campaigns and that is the end. To most of us, that is how democracy functions and no further. And this is how, if I am not mistaken, most Malaysians conceive of democracy and to them, democracy is only apparent during elections when they delude themselves into believing that by casting the ballot they are making a choice with regards to whom they elect. Very few realize that choice is predetermined by factors beyond their control. And that choice which we think we have exercised is really no choice at all. To me, at least to some of us, democracy is not just casting a ballot. It is the ability to articulate views, ideas with regards to social, political and economic issues, the freedom to say "no" (for if democracy means "yes" then what sort of democracy are we practising?), the freedom to dissent, to have a different point of view, to have the right to know what is going on (can you honestly admit that you know what is going on in this country?) and what is most important in democracy is the right to ensure accountability with regards to any wrongdoing on the part of those whom we elect to power. Are these apparent in the democracy that we now know? To my mind, I can safely say "no."

It is clear that if we look back on the last twenty years of democracy in this country, many of the things mentioned above do not exist. There seems to be a curbing of legitimate dissent especially after 1971 when all sorts of laws curbing basic human rights were passed by Parliament. It would not be wrong for me to say that between the years 1957 and 1969, the democracy that existed in Malaysia was reasonably healthy whatever its short-comings. For that was a period in Malaysian history when moderate and broad-minded leaders were at the forefront of the political arena. There was an element of give and take and there was the realization of the value and function of an opposition in Parliament. The mass media, I am sure many reporters would agree with me, were much freer those days and more critical. In this respect they fulfilled a much needed social role. The institutions of Government were respected. These were considered sacred so as not to be subverted to serve the interests of rapacious and power hungry politicians. Parliament, the Senate and even the Judiciary were respected and honoured in this country. Can we hold these institutions in high esteem now?

Even the educational system contributed to the growth of a democratic mind and spirit. It was freer, there was no curbing in the search for knowledge and, I would say academics were freer to do their research. Even the quality of education was better and there was no glorification of personalities or the popularization of divisive doctrines that tend to set off one ethnic group against the other. The leaders of the period, 1957-1969, saw no reason to muzzle academicians nor did they desire to threaten the Judiciary, nor was there anyone to hurl abuse and threats at the Bar Councils.

But the democracy that we have enjoyed so far until 1970 has undergone some changes which may lead to its death in the not too distant future. At least in this respect I share the opinion of Yang Berhormat, Encik Rajasingam. Ever since 1971, there has been a curbing of legitimate dissent, the leaders who came to the fore after 1971 appear to behave like feudal barons and they would brook no criticism. Their interpretation of democracy is that once they have been elected to power, they consider that as a blank cheque whereby they can do anything they want and they are not accountable to anyone. Once you have elected them it is not their business to account to you on what they do or what they intend to do. From this, I can conclude that they will only adhere to democracy or the sham of democracy so long as they are returned to power. If there is any general elections where they sense that they will get a thrashing they are likely to suspend elections and declare a state of emergency so as to ensure that they remain in power. Lord Acton has stated that, "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." We are realising how true this is.

Now why has there been this transition from a healthy democracy in the past to the tragic road towards a one party political system in Malaysia? There are several factors to explain this.

Firstly, the group in power realises that after 20 years of Merdeka they have failed to deliver the goods. Their "rancangan pembangunan" had been aground, there is increasing dissent within and without the Barisan and in order to control this dissent they have become more and more authoritarian.

The second and deadlier challenge to a healthy democracy is the psychological feudalism that exists in the powers that govern us. The leaders who are elected to power are at heart psychological feudalists. They do not understand democracy and to them getting people to vote on election day is like the forced labour system of the past, what is called the "kerah" system. In the past, the great Sultans used to mobilize men to hunt women and elephants. Now this is how they conceive of elections, like the "kerah" system – "Orang dikerah untuk mengundi, selepas itu, habis."

There is a third reason. For a democracy to work the group in power must be able to distinguish between government and nation. This is a serious problem in many Third World societies. They fail to realise that loyalty to the country begins when loyalty to the party ends. Yang Berhormat Encik Rajasingam had stated clearly that he could not speak against the government in Parliament. The only thing he could do is to walk out and pretend to go to the toilet when they are taking a vote! Therefore any criticism of the government is interpreted as treason to the country and the legitimate dissenter is often

packed off to a holiday in Taiping after being labelled as either a communist or an anti-national element, whatever that may mean! In such a situation, dissent, so vital for a democracy, cannot develop.

The last and most obvious threat to democracy is the politics of racialism. In this the ruling elite is as guilty as other elements. It is partially responsible for creating and fostering racial animosity and suspicion between the various ethnic groups to the point that democracy is being threatened. Its policies and the implementation of some of its economic programmes have contributed to this. Consequently, it uses "fear" to keep itself in power as evinced in its election campaigns. Opposition groups have also adopted the same tactic to win support.

Now with all these threats to democracy, what is its future in Malaysia? By nature I am optimistic and I believe that despite all that is being done to subvert democracy by those who claim to be upholding and guarding it, it will survive. There is a saying which I share with my colleagues and that is the government is so busy guarding democracy that they would share it with nobody!

I say this because no authoritarian regime has survived for long. Ultimately the will of the people will prevail. Also the younger generation has no respect for the psychological feudalists in power nor do they stand in fear of them. The up and coming generation being more critical is not inclined to swallow sweet phrases and empty promises doled out by the group in power. The group in power realises this and is fighting a last ditch battle before they reach historical oblivion. A new development which is a welcome one is a new perception of the monolithic entity called the Barisan Nasional. The usefulness of the Barisan is now being questioned with all the disagreements among and within its component parties. Its viability is being challenged. This could lead eventually to greater democratic dissent and a freer society.

Let us hope however that after the coming elections opposition groups will not be tricked into another unholy matrimony with the Barisan. They have been elected to represent the voice of the people and it is their duty to do so and not to sell out and join those who hold on to power for the sake of power.

It is also heartening to note that those politicians who called for a review of democracy 6 months ago because they felt nothing would happen to them, that they would remain in power indefinitely, are now realising that the democracy that they asked to be kept in the museum has some function in their political survival. It is very heartening to note that Datuk Asri is fighting desperately hard to make sure democracy would survive because he realizes that when the obituary on democracy appears in the *Star*, his picture may well be beside it!

So, let me say that there are still a few glimmerings of light. No matter how deplorable the situation may be, there will still come a time when we will have a viable and functional democracy. This being a "Forum Rakyat," I wish there will be a healthy exchange of questions and answers. With this, I would like to thank all of you.



## Question and Answer Session

### Question

We have heard several members of the panel saying the divine right of democracy is with the people. Very often people who shout the loudest that they are democratic are at heart the worst of dictators. So it surprises me that Mr. Rajasingam, a member of the Barisan Nasional, hasn't much choice on voting and all he has to do is to leave the House when the vote is being taken by going to the toilet. I believe people who can preach democracy should be committed to their cause and if they are committed enough they shall take the obvious course, the obvious course need not be elaborated by me.

### Answer

MR. RAJASINGAM: I uphold democracy to the maximum and I know that your suggestion is that I should resign. That was exactly what the speaker wanted. The reason why I do not want to resign is because I feel that by staying within the Barisan Nasional I can do more good than bad. I mean this is one of the evils that one has to live with. In fact, there is a meeting today, I just got a note that the Gerakan Central Executive Committee is having a meeting at Minden Heights to decide on my expulsion at 3.00 p.m. They have decided. I am going to remain there until such time when I know I can't fight. When you can't fight them you join them and we can do more damage within than outside.

### Remark from the floor

His reply reminds me very clearly of a politician who said, "Well, I am still very committed to socialist principles." His party is the greatest party of capitalism!

### Question

When we talk of democracy or the future of democracy in a country you have to talk about democracy in a multi-racial society. First, we have to recall the past, look at the present and of course focus upon the future. Now for democracy to succeed in this country, for democracy to succeed in any country, particularly in a multi-racial country, issues pertaining to language, education and culture, economy and all the rest of it which affect human life will be brought into play. Now it is on record issues of such nature are allowed to become explosive political issues both by the members of the opposition and the members of the ruling government. Now I want to pose this question to the MP for K. Lumpur Bandar, Yang Berhormat Encik Lee Lam Thye: How do you overcome this problem so as to eventually have a truly multi-racial, democratic nation?

### Answer

MR. LEE LAM THYE: Just before I reply to your question, I like to have your permission to say how happy I was just now listening to Yang Berhormat Encik Rajasingam for having spoken out so freely and frankly as the circumstances are well understood because his Party Whip is not here. But certainly, I would have been much happier about the future of the democracy in this country if he had first and foremost convinced Y.B. Dr. Lim Chong Eu on why the Gerakan should pull out from the Barisan Nasional and

if he can succeed in doing that I can offer him my deepest congratulations. Anyway, with regards to the question by the member of the floor, I agree with him. When we talk about democracy in this country, rather than talk about the future of democracy in Malaysia, we have to take into cognizance the fact that Malaysia is by its very nature, by its very set-up a multi-racial, multi-lingual, multi-cultural country. The question was that in view of this, we are bound to have a situation whereby certain sensitive issues would be raised here. Is it sensitive to talk about language, to talk about freedom? Now he has asked me and I take it to mean that he has asked the DAP as well, as to what we propose to do to overcome this problem. Now, in answer to your question, I would like to refer to a document which we published and circulated way back in 1968. This document is entitled, "The case for a multi-racial society." Now, of course, at that time, the document was allowed to be circulated freely but I'm afraid that I have to tell you now it is supposed to be a banned document, that anyone caught in possession of that document can be charged for having in his possession a document that is not supposed to be in his possession. Now in that book, we did highlight that Malaysia is a multi-racial, multi-cultural society and how we should go about tackling this problem. The whole book can be summarised into one paragraph, that is, we in the DAP have advocated and still advocate and will continue to advocate that the principles of multi-racialism must not only be put into practice but it must be seen to be put into practice. As for the principles of multi-racialism, we believe that in a multi-racial country, multi-racial society like Malaysia the values of cultural democracy must be put into practice. But we cannot run away from the fact, as a number of speakers, in fact, 2 speakers, have pointed out, the reason why Malaysia suffers severe setbacks in Parliamentary Democracy is because of the problems of communalism, the problems of multi-racialism. Now, this problem is further aggravated by the fact that with each passing day the problem of polarization is getting more serious – Malays getting more Malay, the Chinese getting more Chinese, the Indians getting more Indian, others getting more others and where do we go from here? My reply is that we are convinced that the only answer is multi-racialism. Now, of course, if you argue with me that multi-racialism is easier to talk about than to have it implemented, I agree. I agree with anyone who says that because the forces of racialism, forces of communalism are on the offensive. But as Encik Ariffin has pointed out, I am as equally optimistic as he is, that if you look back to the history of political struggles, how nations secured independence, people have undoubtedly gone through many periods of trials and tribulations, particularly, in our country. I feel that although multi-racialism, the principles and practice of multi-racialism, is fighting an uphill battle against the forces of racialism, against the forces of chauvinism, against the forces of communalism, but so long as there are people in this country who are prepared to think, to see in terms of Malaysians, then I feel, and I am confident that we will be able to achieve success in the long run in the struggle for a multi-racial society.

### Question

Mr. Chairman, I would like to make it very clear to Mr. Lee Lam Thye that I have definitely read the document he is referring to. Your document was a small leaflet of 50 cents.

MR. LEE LAM THYE (interjection): No, it is not a document. What I am referring to is a book which sounds like this, "Who lives if Malaysia dies: The case for a multi-racial society."

## Question

I have read the book completely, totally because the book came out at the time I started my journalistic career in K.L. Now, Mr. Lee Lam Thye, having gone through the book, I have come to one conclusion – the book is one long essay by good writers, full of false hopes, meaningless platitudes without any positive, downright thinking on the present situation. Granted that the book was the solution at that time, almost a decade ago, by no stretch of imagination can I accept that it will work today, because in 1968 the situation in Malaysia was different from 1977 almost a decade later. The political, the social, economic and cultural society of ours is undergoing a completely different change. Now the question is if you are talking about that book I still maintain that what is advocated in that book cannot be practised today.

## Answer

MR. LEE LAM THYE: That is only an opinion. I would not go into party politics in such a forum. As a people's elected representative, my task is to represent the people's interests. Therefore I go down to the ground and talk to the people to find out in what way they need help, irrespective of whether they are Malays, Chinese and Indians. Still I come to the conclusion that for every decision and every implementation, it is charged with political overtones and I think this is a big setback for the country, for the people as a whole. With this note, let me repeat that Aliran, I hope, will be able to play a very useful role in carrying out a campaign, a campaign for the masses to educate them fully with regards to the values and principles of democracy.

## Question

How can poverty be overcome through democracy?

## Answer

DR. KAMAL SALIH: I really don't have much to say with regards to this question. I understand the question was how we can eradicate poverty in a democratic system. Certainly I can say that the politics of poverty is much more complicated than what politicians talk about. There are two aspects. One is democracy is not the opium of the people to the extent that, as I had said, it is not so much what you do in response to democracy but what you get in the end, that is, a bowl of rice and so on. Certainly I think poverty has become the opium of the politician in the sense that poverty is used perhaps in a number of cases in different contexts including most of the time as a means of legitimizing the non-public programmes, that is, programmes that are geared towards other things rather than solving poverty and that is the problem. Secondly, as I understand it, either poverty cannot be solved within a democratic process, that means poverty can be solved under other kinds of conditions or perhaps you must solve poverty first before you can inculcate democratic values. I think this is as far as I can say at this point but surely economics and politics are complex. In this context democracy must be disentangled from these two aspects in order that these two problems of poverty can be faced. There's another element with regards to this and that is the ethnic issue which has always been involved. The ethnic issue in fact interferes with the problem of eradicating poverty as well as in really promoting democracy.

## Question

Mr. Chairman, may I direct this question to Mr. Lee Lam Thye. There is a move being made to form an opposition front, tentatively called the Barisan Rakyat. The consensus here is democracy is being eroded because there is only a one party system; that is why democracy is being eroded. So I would like to know whether with the formation of the opposition front it will remedy the situation and in the long run benefit the people. (The question was subsequently opened to all the speakers).

## Answer

DR. KAMAL SALIH: Well, Mr. Chairman, Just a short comment. To the extent that a viable opposition is necessary for the proper functioning of a democracy, I think, such a viable organisation ought to be promoted.

MR. LEE LAM THYE: To the question as to whether an opposition front is beneficial to democracy in this country, my advice will of course be a positive one. But the point I wish to make here is that and I hope as a result of this, it will not provoke an exchange because frankly I don't want to turn this into a political forum. This forum is a forum for the people, by the people and of the people. But as I said, the question of an opposition front is a question that should be deliberated by the opposition parties involved but in my view it is only worthwhile to have an opposition front if that opposition front is able to provide a credible political alternative to the ruling party. This is the reason why as far as the Democratic Action Party is concerned, we have advocated that before we are ambitious enough to form an opposition front in this country, first of all we should proceed at the level of bilateral talks, the purpose of which is to achieve an electoral understanding for the coming elections. That is the basis we have advocated and that is the basis we work on.

MR. RAJASINGAM: I am very much in favour of an opposition front of all parties being formed. The Democratic Action Party is the biggest opposition party in this country. Other opposition parties will have to produce, as Mr. Lee Lam Thye said, credible candidates. There is no point in having Pekemas and everybody joining the bandwagon with good-for-nothing people. It defeats its purpose. So you get down basically to an electoral understanding but to have a united opposition front I strongly feel that we need more than an electoral understanding. You can't bring an opposition party with three groups in it and ask them to join up with an opposition party with credible candidates. These are the factors, I think, presently preventing the formation of an opposition front.

MR. ARIFFIN OMAR: Well, I quite agree with the comments of Yang Berhormat Mr. Lee Lam Thye and Mr. Rajasingam but my belief is that it will be extremely difficult to form an opposition front though that in itself will contribute very strongly to the maintenance of democracy in this country. The problem we face is that in Parliament as Encik Rajasingam has pointed out, since Barisan Nasional has a two-third majority, any form of legislation is passed across the board without discussion. You can even legislate a cow into a horse and probably in the not too distant future you can legislate a man into a woman. Now the terms of forming an electoral pact among the political parties have to

be worked out. Here difficulties will arise because not one of them has any clear ideology. If I am not mistaken, there are very few compromises on either side. The next problem, as Mr. Rajasingam has pointed out, is that there are also crooks among them, not only in the government but on the other side too. The problem is to have credible persons to stand for election. But I tend to think that this will not work out because in any constituency there will always be more than three candidates. Everybody wants to put his finger into the pie and it is this that will contribute to a Barisan Nasional victory when there are three opposition parties contesting against one Barisan Nasional, you can bet your bottom dollar that the Barisan Nasional member will win because the opposition will go all out to kill each other. If and when they are able to solve this problem of not standing against each other in order to defeat the Barisan Nasional, only then will a viable opposition front evolve.

### Question

Mr. Chairman, when talking about democracy, I cannot divorce myself from the topic of the freedom of the Press, because professionally, I am a journalist. At least three members of the panel here have told us that there is no freedom of the Press. I would not like to comment on that but I would like to pass this message. As one who has spent almost ten years in journalism, that is, five years in investigative writing and seventeen months in Penang investigating certain things for certain newspapers, I have been a victim of threats. One member of Barisan Nasional has even sent thugs to me and there were people who threatened me in the hotel on what I was going to write with regards to some dirt. Unfortunately over the past two days, that particular party's representative was not on any of the panels. Now you see democracy has even reached the stage where they threaten journalists on what one ought to write or what one ought not to write. Now I believe more than anyone else that no one is big enough not to create harm and no one is small enough not to make news. If people dig up the bitter facts and are prepared to speak and if we impress on people that the truth is good for the people, they should be allowed to speak freely and criticize the government where necessary, constructively for the good of humanity. I would like the members of the panel to find out whether there are any means to stop this kind of unscrupulous method of preventing well-intentioned journalists from investigating rackets.

### Answer

MR. LEE LAM THYE: I think there is one person we should thank for keeping the freedom of the Press in this country. I must qualify freedom of the Press here – that is, freedom to publish what the ruling party says! He is the Minister of Home Affairs, who, under the Printing Press Ordinance, requires newspapers in this country to take annual licences. This question of licences is one of the biggest obstacles to Press freedom in this country because it is a sword of Democles hanging over the head of newspapers' publishers where at the end of each year (this is my personal experience) all the newspapers, including the vernacular newspapers, pretend not to publish anything of what goes on in Parliament because this is the time, they know, they have to go to the Ministry and apply for new licences. I think this is one of the biggest setbacks we face in this country. Besides this, there is another aspect which to my mind has become more serious and that is,

the fact that, lately, you find certain component members of Barisan Nasional have taken interest in buying over newspapers to make sure they will be given more publicity than what they are entitled to at the moment. A very good example is the *Star* publication. Everybody knows that the MCA is a major shareholder of the *Star*. You find Datuk Lee San Choon and his MCA clique, for instance, have not only been played up but overplayed up! There was a speech made by Datuk Lee San Choon where he supported Datuk Hussein Onn in his motion on the Emergency Bill in Kelantan. His Speech was not only reported in full on the front page of the *Star* but at the same time, a summary of his speech was given both on the front page and the back page. As you know very well, the *Star* is nothing more than a MCA mouthpiece. So that is the serious state of affairs. Of course, I have always believed that Malaysia is a country of the capitalists, that when one talks about control of the Press, whoever offers most will have his share of his cake. With regard to Press freedom, first and foremost, what is of primary importance for us is to get rid of this requirement for annual licences because this is the most obnoxious part of the Printing Press Ordinance. If it is allowed to exist, then the question of Press freedom in this country will always be a myth, never a reality.

MR. RAJASINGAM: As regards this particular complaint, there are a few things I agree with: that the *Straits Times* is controlled by the government, the *Star* is run by MCA and *Echo* is very soon to be run by another political party or there are plans to take over *Echo*. The only other way you can overcome this sort of thing is firstly, if you say somebody is threatening you, you go to the police. Two, come to organizations like Aliran and lodge your complaint. They will give you publicity. If you can't do that, come to me. I agree with my colleague, Mr. Lee Lam Thye, that the Licensing law of the Printing Press Ordinance should be taken off. Because people fear and dread to publish certain things which are true but against the government. That law must be taken off.

MR. ARIFFIN OMAR: Mr. Chairman, with regard to the freedom of the Press, I think there are a few aspects that should be taken into consideration. None of us would deny that the annual licensing of the Press is a hindrance to the Press but I am also of the opinion that quite a lot of pressmen are prepared to play ball with the government rather than take some risks and print some investigative reports. Look, the government is not really that oppressive as they would like to make themselves to be. It would really be awkward for them to, say, deny publication of the *Straits Times* or even the *Watan*. Think of the international repercussions. When the Singapore government closed down one of its papers, it had to face the wrath of the International Press Institute and they were thoroughly embarrassed. Do you think that the Malaysian Government would dare take the risk and ban a newspaper just because there are certain investigative reports? Why didn't they do this to *Watan* which had been writing criticisms of the government lately? Some pressmen are not prepared to take the risk.

#### Remark from the floor:

Mr. Chairman, regarding the final gentlemen's remark, may I just add. You must realise that the Press is now under commercial control rather than editorial control. The pressman or the reporter does his duty and hands a copy to the editor who normally goes through the copy and finds out whether it toes the line or not, then it will get the permission of the commercial people who control the Press; only then does it go to print. If it doesn't, however much a reporter is committed to a specific cause, then whatever he writes does not get out into print unless Aliran is rich enough to sponsor such a paper.



## The Panelists

DATUK MICHAEL CHEN is at present the Minister of Housing and Local Government and the Deputy President of MCA.

ENCIK KHIR JOHARI is the Barisan Nasional Member of Parliament for Kuala Muda, Kedah and chairman of WATAN National Daily.

ENCIK YEAP GHIM GUAN is the Secretary-General of the Socialist Democratic Party (SDP) and former Vice-Chairman of the Democratic Action Party (DAP).

ENCIK GAN TEIK CHEE is a member of the Executive Committee, Aliran and a lawyer by profession.

ENCIK ANWAR IBRAHIM is the President of ABIM, Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia.

ENCIK A. R. KAMALUDIN is the former editor-in-chief of Bintang Timur and presently with the editorial staff of Utusan Melayu.

ENCIK MOHIDEEN BIN ABDUL KADER is a member of the Central Executive Committee, Partai Sosialis Rakyat Malaysia and a lawyer by profession.

ENCIK K. THILLAINATHAN is the Coordinator of Aliran Study Club 1 and Chairman of MTUC, Penang Division.

ENCIK LEE LAM THYE is the DAP Member of Parliament for Kuala Lumpur Bandar and the director of the political bureau of DAP.

ENCIK R. RAJASINGAM is the former Gerakan Member of Parliament for Jelutong, Penang and a lawyer by profession.

DR. KAMAL SALIH is the present Dean of the School of Comparative Social Sciences in Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang.

ENCIK ARIFFIN OMAR is the Secretary of Aliran and a history lecturer in the School of Humanities in Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang.



## The aims and purposes of ALIRAN

ALIRAN is the first non-partisan, multi-ethnic reform movement to have emerged in our country. There have been reform movements in the past confined to particular communities or to particular issues. Our movement on the other hand not only draws its strength from various religious and linguistic groups but is also concerned with the total reform of Malaysian Society as an endeavour which will span a few decades.

ALIRAN'S reforms will be directed towards the creation of a society where the spiritual and material development of Man and his community would be based upon certain fundamental moral values acceptable to the Malaysian nation as a whole. These values, highly cherished in Islam are in fact universal ideals which would be in complete harmony with the interests and aspirations of the non-Muslim communities. Freedom and equality, unity and solidarity within diversity, love for honesty and integrity, respect for industry and excellence and most of all a commitment to truth and justice — these would be among the supreme values of ALIRAN's ideal society. In such a society, the political system, the economic order, social institutions, cultural patterns and ethnic relations will reflect those moral values which are at the core of the nation. Our commitment to them will be all the more precious because it emerges from an abiding belief in God as the Source of these values.

To achieve this goal the first and perhaps most important task of our movement will be to get our *rakyat* to think and to reflect on the major challenges confronting our nation. Sound analysis and proper understanding of Malaysian problems is only possible if there has been serious thinking and reflection. Out of this reflection, it is conceivable that a new consciousness of the type of reforms we need in various spheres of national life will emerge. ALIRAN will seek to nurture and nourish this consciousness so that our people will realize what social justice means in reality, why civil rights and liberties are so vitally important, what the sane, sensible approaches to national unity are, and how honest, able leadership can inspire the masses to harness their energies in the quest for excellence.

More than cultivating social consciousness, ALIRAN will also attempt to disseminate values and principles common to all our communities in its desire to build a strong, solid foundation for national unity and solidarity. This emphasis upon common social and cultural values will be buttressed by a comprehensive examination of both historical realities and the contemporary situation especially those policies which have a profound impact upon inter-ethnic relations. It is a fact that an understanding of the relationship between communities based upon these premises has yet to manifest itself in our country.

Finally, as a reform movement, ALIRAN must be concerned not only with the long-term task of educating society but also with its immediate position in an environment fraught with urgent issues. It must therefore articulate public grievances — from wages and incomes and housing problems to efficiency in our public services and corruption — on behalf of the common man. Our reform movement will thus become yet another channel for the representation of our peoples' woes and worries.

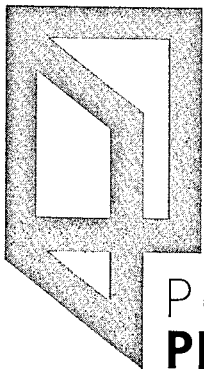
In espousing the interests of the *rakyat*, ALIRAN, it must be emphasised, will utilise all the constitutional avenues of action available. It will be guided in this by the aspirations of the Rukunegara. We believe that such an approach will help strengthen the democratic process itself since it will result in a more active, alert and participatory public. Apart from publishing books and pamphlets which will be its main activity and organising talks, forums and seminars, ALIRAN will also conduct research into various social problems and plan public campaigns from time to time on particular issues. In the years to come new modes of democratic action will be developed as the reform movement itself discovers new challenges in what is after all a constantly changing situation.

It is our hope that our people will help ALIRAN achieve its ideals — ideals which are fundamental in Man's eternal quest for justice and freedom.



### Books published by ALIRAN

1. Basic Beliefs, 1st ed., Dec. 1977
2. Basic Beliefs, 2nd ed., March 1978
3. Dasar-Dasar Asas, edisi pertama, March 1978
4. Dasar-Dasar Asas, edisi kedua, August 1978
5. Whither Democracy, August 1978



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