

KEPAYANG: DAP THREAT MAY HAVE SWUNG THE VOTES

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IPOH, Sun. — The DAP's threat that it would "close shop" in the Kinta Valley if it lost the Kepayang by-election was one of the major factors that swung the votes its way in the by-election yesterday.

Another major factor was the attitude of the voters who felt that since the MCA had won nine State seats under the Barisan Nasional in the April general election, voting in a DAP candidate in Kepayang would not really matter.

The DAP's Lau Dak Kee defeated the Barisan's Ng Yok Kooi by 9,764 votes to win the seat vacated by former DAP State chief Lim Cho Hock because of an internal party squabble.

A number of other developments were also fully exploited by the DAP.

Among these was the speech by Datuk Musa Hitam in opening the MCA general assembly on Oct. 3 in which he said that most of the former Malaysian citizens who had emigrated were Chinese.

Datuk Musa also said that these people continued to smear and tarnish the Malaysian Government from their adopted homelands and this had caused suspicion on the loyalty of Malaysian Chinese here.

The DAP went to town with this, saying that Datuk Musa had questioned the loyalty of Malaysian Chinese and that the speech was aimed at those living in the country rather than those who had migrated.

The DAP also claimed that the MCA had supported Datuk Musa rather than championing the cause of Malaysian Chinese.

It blamed the MCA for not hitting out at Datuk Musa and also claimed that the MCA was not protecting the rights of Malaysian Chinese.

Another issue which the DAP used to get the votes of the Chinese-educated was the restricting of lion dances to only the Chinese New Year by the police.

Federal Territory police had refused permits for associations to hold lion dances on joyous functions and said that the lion dance could only be permitted during the Chinese New Year and in welcoming VIPs.

The issue was played up in the Chinese newspapers.

Four days ago, the MCA said party president Datuk Lee San Choon had met Datuk Musa.

Datuk Musa had reportedly told Datuk Lee that this was not govern-



The Barisan's Mr Ng Yok Kooi (left) congratulating the winner, Mr Lau Dak Kee of the DAP

ment policy and reassured him that permits would be issued for lion dances for other occasions beside Chinese New Year or in welcoming VIPs.

But apparently, this assurance came a little too late to affect the outcome of the by-election.

While these issues went down well with the Chinese educated, the DAP went on a sympathy line to get the votes of the English educated and middle-class voters living in Ipoh Garden and Canning Garden.

DAP secretary-general Lim Kit Siang repeatedly stressed that the DAP would have to "close shop" in the Kinta Valley if it lost in Kepayang and that the opposition candidate must be voted in if the DAP was to be an effective watchdog on the Government.

He also spoke at length on the challenges facing the country and warned of "extremism rearing its ugly head."

The tactic worked and most of the voters, while appreciating the fact that the Opposition would not be able to deliver the goods, still felt that opposition was needed for its watchdog role.

They felt that an additional seat for the MCA would not make that much a difference since the party already has nine representatives in the State Assembly.

Many felt that this was unlike a general election where a defeat for the MCA may have serious repercussions and might affect their livelihood.

Observers said that on the MCA's side, one factor

for the defeat could be that the party treated the by-election as a local affair while the DAP went all out with national leaders being fully involved.

Most of the Barisan candidate's workers were from the Ipoh division with a few from other divisions in Perak.

MCA national leaders were not involved in the campaign until the last two days when national leaders like Youth chief Datuk Lee Kim Sai and Wanita MCA chief Datin Paduka Rosemary Chong went to campaign for the Barisan candidate.

One feature in the by-election surprised many people was the number of posters, pamphlets and other documents the DAP put up or distributed.

Even in the April general election, the opposition party had never gone to this extent of churning out pamphlets and posters.

In contrast, the Barisan's poster campaign got off to a late start. It was only in the last week of the campaign that the coalition began putting up its posters.

The Kepayang by-election victory has given a new lease of life to the DAP, which was reeling from its debacle in the April general election.

Observers said it was ironic that another by-election should provide a boost to

the party's morale which had been sinking since it lost a by-election in Penang to the Barisan in 1979.

Since Penang MCA chief Lim Kean Siew won the opposition stronghold of Pengkalan Kota in Penang, the DAP had been affected by internal problems which was one of the major reasons for its poor showing in the April general election. (Mr Lim Kean Siew was, however, beaten by the DAP's Teoh Teik Huat in Pengkalan Kota in April).

It is understood that Mr Lim Kit Siang himself had told party leaders that the party was facing its most testing time and that if it lost Kepayang, the DAP would find it almost impossible to recover.

It is understood that he also told them that if Kepayang was lost, then he would accept the responsibility and even consider resigning his party post.

One party leader said: "I have never seen Kit Siang more depressed. The election debacle was already terrible but Lim Cho Hock's resignation and the internal strife in the party added on to his already depressed mood."

But with Kepayang now back in its hands, the DAP is all set for a house-cleaning and a new start as the win has strengthened Mr Lim Kit Siang's hand.