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Teach, don't proselytise

TEACHING was once a calling just as the inwardly felt summons to take up healing and preaching. All three were deemed avocations that demanded complete dedication to the chosen calling. Teaching, for one, required the master to broaden the minds of his pupils. Encapsulated in the Greek philosopher, Socrates' credo, the task of the teacher was to stimulate the student to "know thyself".

Today, teaching is not so much an avocation as it is a vocation. For most, it is a job, a job that pays fairly well. But it is still an honourable profession. Teachers are not just required to nurture the skills in the 3Rs in their students. More is required of them.

Among the requirements is that they should be solid role models. For in addressing the impressionable minds of the young in their formative years, they potentially wield an enormous power.

The power to shape the minds, the thought process and the moral values of the young in the moulds the teachers desire. That mould should be one that the society cherishes, not that of the deviant kind instilled by teachers who have their own axes to grind.

Teachers who had their own credo were always there in any education system. But in the past pedagogues, few in number, had only ideologies that differed from the society they served.

But lately, in our schools, the number who abuse the privileged position of teachers by inculcating negative values, is on the increase. The negativitisms include hating the Government and casting unfounded aspersions on the leaders of the country.

Such a growth in the trend to poison the minds of the young in schools not only is worrisome to the Government but also should be the concern of parents.

The Governmental worry was manifest in the Prime Minister's strong words on such a state of affairs in schools. On Thursday, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad branded as cowards and traitors teachers who hide behind their students while instigating them to hate the Government. He has ample reasons to come down heavily on these highly politicised teachers who misguide students, from the pre-school kindergartens to tertiary institutions.

One is the fact that teachers, all of them, are public servants. Most of them are trained at the expense of enormous funds from the public coffers. And they are paid from Government funds to do a job, not to impart their own political ideologies.

What is required of them is simple as it is clear. Just execute tasks spelled out clearly spelt in teacher training curriculums. No more and no less. If in the process of teaching they uphold themselves as good models of upright citizens, well and good.

The Government does not deny any one the fundamental right to espouse his own beliefs or political ideology. That inalienable right is enshrined in the Constitution. But personal preferences should not encroach upon public performance. The two should be clearly separated. In the classroom the teacher is a teacher, first and last. He is not there standing on the teacher's podium in the classrom as an individual to pontificate his own views on the rights and wrongs of the Government. If he desires such a platform he should quit as a teacher to take up arms of the ideology propagated by the political party of his choice. That is the honourable

way out of a honourable profession which teaching surely is to honour
one's beliefs.

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