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***Malaysian Women  
Creating  
Their  
Political  
Awareness***

Edited by

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## FOREWORD

Traditionally, most cultures world wide have treated politics as more or less a male domain. The rare historical occurrences of a woman (or women) taking over the reins of political power are recorded and renowned but this is largely due to their novelty value. Even in the so-called modern developed world there is no country where the women are, on an average, as politically active as the men. Malaysia is no exception to the rule.

Though there may in some cases be a high percentage of women in a party, the figures do not reveal much about how active these women are or are allowed to be within the party system. In the seminar that served as a basis for this book, some women members of political parties reported their disappointment at being reduced to technical-support roles or figureheads. However it is true that the aspirations of many other women do not go any further than that.

The seminar was organised with the intention of obtaining an overview of the present situation, it's causes and the future direction of the situation in Malaysia. An article about the situation of women in German politics is included to juxtapose a point of comparison and a different viewpoint in the cultural sense.

As Malaysian women gain more exposure to quality education and engage in increasingly qualified professions, more of the traditional role models for women will crumble, bringing the dawn of political empowerment. In this situation there will be many women who will be dissatisfied with the *status quo* - the role which circumscribes them and keeps them out of political power. On the other hand, there may yet be a large number of women who are not interested or willing to participate in the political process.

Women must be made aware of how politics influences their own lives which necessitates them to take an active interest in it. This persuasion can be painstaking but is the essential path to awaken the latent political consciousness of women. Whether the female perception of the process of political activity is similar to the political consciousness of men will be revealed in the fullness of time. The mere act of discussing these topics openly is a political act on its own.

Talking about women's political consciousness in Malaysia was considered to be daring. So when we decided among ourselves to have a seminar on this topic, we were warned that this was a bit courageous. In spite of this we persisted and it was a success. The Hon. Minister of

National Unity and Social Development, Dato' Napsiah Omar, opened the seminar in her official capacity and it was not hard to find speakers and participants from various groupings and parties. In fact, it seemed as if the women had impatiently waited to discuss this topic, as we had to turn down quite a number of applications for participation. Sadly enough, no males attended, apart from the organiser and the sponsor. Remarkable was the interest the seminar evoked in the media. Weeks after the event the press continued to be an arena for clashes between various factions on how to interpret various elements of the seminar.

The contributions in this book are based on the papers that were presented in the seminar. However, in several cases they are completely revised for the purpose of printing.

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