

**An insider's guide to party hopping**  
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The BN, with their superior financial resources, can easily induce political defection from the opposition forces by offering huge financial rewards to the turncoats.

From time to time throughout history, elected reps have been induced to switch sides to the BN in the middle of their terms, in order to change the balance of power in state assemblies and as well as in Parliament.

The most recent furore involves the change of the state government in Perak in 2008.

Because of the defection of three state assemblypersons to the BN, Pakatan Rakyat lost their hold on state power, causing a change of the state government in the middle of their term of office.

Generally, such changing of sides can be effected by the offer of money and political positions to the defectors.

As an MP, I personally experienced an attempt to induce me to switch from the opposition DAP to the BN side, through a clandestine deal.

When I was elected to be a member of Parliament, representing my home constituency of Bandar Kuching, I was the sole opposition member in the house.

One day, I was approached by a personal friend from the SUPP, a component of the ruling BN. I had known him personally for some years. So, when he requested a confidential meeting, I consented.

He had a proposition for me.

Money for hopping

"You are well respected by electorates from both sides of the fence," he said.

Even SUPP members expressed their admiration for my performance, he confided. Would I not therefore consider jumping ship in order to offer better service to my rakyat?

This is the deal that he proposed to me in great secrecy: I did not even have to resign from my party, all I had to do was to take a long leave of absence from Sarawak and to allow events to take their subsequent course.

A prominent member of the state BN would arrange for a large sum of money, precisely RM3 million, to be transferred to my name, plus a few million mining shares.

My part of the bargain was to disappear from the active political scene in Sarawak, and move to England, for an academic course.

I had of course heard of political 'under-the-table' deals like that, but it was still quite a shock to me when the offer was made to me personally.

Wishing to find out more about how that deal could be closed, I asked my friend how the payment of the

bribe was going to be performed.

All expenses paid

The transaction was to be sealed in Singapore, I was told, where the money was going to change hands. In return, I was to sign an undertaking, promising never to be involved in politics again for the rest of my life.

In Singapore, I would be given VIP treatment, where everything would be paid for by my friend's political masters.

I pondered over this conversation, and let my party chief know about the Faustian bargain. I immediately told him that I would not accept that offer, principally because I was not in politics for the money.

To my great surprise, my friend from the SUPP approved of my refusal to cut a deal, when I told him of my decision. It would be a great pity, he said, if I had sold out my principles.

He supported my rejection, even though that decision meant he had lost his cut; that he had missed out on RM300,000 in commission. We parted as friends.

Every time I hear a defection from the opposition to the BN, I know some agent would get rich in the process.

In some countries like India, they have anti-hopping laws to forbid switching of elected representatives from one side to another.

I am sympathetic to that kind of legislation, especially when party-hopping can be rampant on occasion.

Reject party hoppers

Just last week, we heard of an attempt, in Johor, of the BN trying to induce such hopping in the state assembly.

Unfortunately, I believe in the adage that morality cannot be legislated in politics.

Still, in the long run, we need our politicians to respect the wishes of the electorates, after they had been elected into office. Party-hopping from the opposition to the government is hugely unpalatable and should be banned.

Malaysia is a young democracy and we have to build up our political institutions over the passage of time. The best way to stamp out unprincipled defections is to reject opportunists who practise party-hopping, through the ballot box, if they stand again for election.

In the state of Perak, we have to depend on the voters to do the right thing in the next round of general elections, by voting out party hoppers. It would take a long time but eventually, we hope to build up a healthy political culture in Malaysia, in which only people with integrity will be elected as the people's YBs.

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