

## **Opposition politics: Our brand is ignorance**

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**By S Thayaparan**

The problem isn't that Johnny can't read. The problem isn't even that Johnny can't think. The problem is that Johnny doesn't know what thinking is; he confuses it with feeling. - Thomas Sowell

COMMENT It's catchy this term "ignocracy" that Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah bandies about but one must remember that Ku Li represents albeit coyly a political party that specialises in catchy slogans in lieu of any long-term constructive inclusive nation-building.

Some would argue that the same can be said of Pakatan Rakyat and sometimes I would agree with this sentiment. Ku Li's broadside against the current regime and its "education policies" displays a profound misunderstanding of the social reality that has been coalescing around opposition politics for some time now.

It's not that people are unable to make wise decisions (whatever 'wise' in this context means) because of their 'racial worldview' but because 'change' (again a nebulous emotive term used to rile up the rakyat) is hamstrung by the regime's gerrymandering, constitutionally-created Malays, money politics, a denial of access to the mainstream media, intimidation, a prejudiced judicial system, and the list goes on.

penang 1 muted mlayasia flash mob 310810 05Supporters of Pakatan are voting across racial lines and the main principle here is to kick Umno out.

What the regime has done extremely well is generate such loathing amongst a certain section of the voting public that they are willing to vote across racial lines not because of any 'colour blindness' on their part but because of their loathing of the regime's policies.

As has been well-documented in the alternative media, matters of principle that Pakatan supposedly represents is secondary to vanquishing the ruling coalition. The priority here is kicking BN out first and then maybe attempting to address real questions of policy later.

In other words, in spite of our captive minds - like prisoners who have learnt to adapt to their confinement - we have subverted the racial game that Umno has forced us to play for so long using the language of multiracialism, all the while remaining true to our racial pedigree and only paying lip service to principles which are supposed to be the basis of this alternative front.

Purveyor of ignorance

And really, politicians should refrain from these paternalistic analogies of doctors attending ails of the nation. Malaysian society is not some deceased body begging for a cure and public figures should be disabused of the ludicrous notion that they 'prescribing antidotes' when the reality is that public policy is shaped by numerous agendas.

If anything, Umno has been a mad scientist obsessively seeking the means to remain in power forever with BN component parties its willing Igors and the Malaysian public, lab rats in its crazed social engineering experiments.

So Ku Li is right, or rather Syed Hussein Alatas is, when describing the regime as an "ignocracy" in its role as a purveyor of ignorance but is wrong when he (Ku Li) attempts to describe Umno's failure to enquire into the failings of the NEP (as an income equaliser) as some sort of intellectual failure of imagination.

The "failings" of the NEP is a deliberate attempt at social engineering and a case of long-term corruption which has led the country down this ruinous economic path.

NONEKu Li (left) gravely intones, "To break free from the 'ignocracy', would require the people to educate their fellow comrades as the present education system cannot be trusted to do this. Today we can no longer trust them (the government) to act as purveyors of truth. It has become our responsibility to hold the future in our own hands."

Firstly, starting off with the premise of 'the government' as 'purveyors of truth' is what got us into this all this trouble in the first place. It's not the role of the government to be purveyors of truth and especially not in the 'educational' sense of political consciousness that Ku Li refers to.

And Ku Li use of the word 'today' implies that there was a time when the government was a credible purveyor of 'truth'. When was this exactly? That brief post-57 period which ended in the tragedy of 1969? Or maybe it was the glorious 70s or 80s - the boom days of Umno's mafeasances? When exactly did the BN morph from truth peddlers to ignorance purveyors?

Anything but Umno

Governments comprise of political parties each with their own agendas and ideologies, so the last thing we should expect from them is the truth of any kind.

You can have an education system based on meritocracy, you can expect accountability from the groups that govern us and as a society we can adhere to certain principles and the best we can hope for is to vote for candidates that best exemplify these principles but the great lesson Umno has taught us is that we should never think that the government is there to provide us with the 'truth'.

Of course, this is a lesson we have not learnt very well and in breaking free from this ignocracy we may be very well embracing another of our own making.

bersih 2 rally guy fawkes mask 090711I don't think Ku Li understands the reality of exactly how people have been "educating their fellow comrades" or maybe he does, he is a smart man after all. For hardcore Pakatan supporters, the only thing that matters is that Umno is banished from the political scene.

Matters of principle like I said is really secondary. The main focus here is Umno's corruption and the decade's long reign of fear that needs to be ended.

For me at least, it's reminiscent of my time spent with hardcore PAS supporters (is there any other kind?) in the late 80s that saw Umno's corruption and unIslamic activities as an affront to principles they held near and dear but were totally ambivalent to the failings of their own preferred party.

Their main goal was to oust Umno at all cost and they never really had a plan beyond subscribing to their Islamic preoccupations if they ever came into power.

Truly in those days, their passion was almost kamikaze-like when they talked about their desire to oust Umno and I have been surprised at the way how PAS has been playing well with their Pakatan allies.

The moderating influence of their political partners is an example of how diverse interest can co-exist amicably rather than the slavish relationships of the BN component parties.

The race to Putrajaya

The best thing about Pakatan is that there is a possibility that these diverse voices could deliver on the inclusiveness that Pakatan promises but so far the focus has been the corruption of Umno and the race to Putrajaya.

The faithful have been supplied with a steady diet of governmental malfeasances but precious little has been articulated on the way how Pakatan intends to rectify these systemic imbalances nor have they chosen to educate the public on the complications a Pakatan administration would face if ever they captured the throne in Putrajaya.

Whether it's the horrendous state of the police force, the racial preoccupations of the majority of Malaysian or the upcoming GST (goods and services tax) debacle (which is being used as a political weapon and why not?). Pakatan, like the Barack Obama administration, has been scant with details but almost messianic in its 'change' rhetoric.

NONEOf course, the propaganda organs of the state has been relentless in its attacks but the fact is most people in the 'urban heartland', to use a Nurul Izzah (right) phrase, are already skeptical of these propaganda organs and the people in the rural heartland are torn between the handout dogma that has had a deleterious effect on their culture and a yearning for change even though they have no idea what that entails.

Pakatan keeps telling them they are being 'robbed' and 'swindled', the implication being that whatever that was 'stolen' from them would be returned. Money politics can be subtle.

And because BN has poisoned the well as far a government institutions are concerned, ignorance is disseminated further by an almost instinctual reaction to take what the government says in any situation as further evidence of Umno duplicity.

And since every issue is turned into an election issue, credible voices that are seen as supportive of the regime's stand are shouted down or accused of being simpatico with the ruling regime. Us vs Them is a breeding ground for ignorance.

Of course, to break free from the ignocracy we need to 'educate' people of the corruption of the current regime but more importantly to break free from any ignocracy or to ensure that another one is never created in its place we need to be critical and skeptical of our preferred political parties.

And so far the post-tsunami critical discourse amongst supporters of Pakatan, and from within the alliance itself, has been abysmal.



