

'I looked at the police and feared for my life'

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This is the first time I am writing to you because I feel that it is very important for me to give my first hand experience of the police insanity.

I am in my early 50s and have always been a model citizen. I had not even taken part in any previous rally or demonstration. However this year I decided that I needed to support Bersih by being there where it counts.

My friend Lean Bee and I drove from Petaling Jaya into the city but were blocked off at Syed Putra so we decided to drive back to Asia Jaya, parked the car there and took the LRT there.

The train when it arrived was packed to the brim. That was a good sign that a lot of people were coming. Had expected to be stopped by police at the stations but there were no signs of them there. As such we got into the city without any challenges.

My first question for the PDRM is:

Why block up most of the roads if you are still going to let us into the city any way.

Have you ever thought about the tourists who needed to get in and out for the arrival and their departures.

On reaching the city we met up with four other friends all who were first timers to rally. The oldest in our group was Dorothy who is 72 years old.

The streets were full of people in yellow and green. We ourselves did not dare wear any of those T-shirts for fear of being picked up by the police. The whole atmosphere had a carnival feel to it. There were singing of songs including the 'Negara Ku'. Lots of picture taking. Everyone seemed to be in such a happy mood.

What surprised me was that there were so very many Chinese there. For a long time we Chinese have been in a comfort zone and therefore have always seemed to take a back seat when it came to things like this. As such it was a pleasant surprise to see so many youngsters and many had their parents with them.

At 12 noon along the way to Dataran we stopped many times to look at the different posters (some were very creative and some funny).

At one point we even stopped under a palm tree to talk to a number of policemen who were taking shelter from the sun. One of them named Nawawi even encouraged us to walk further down to Dataran as in his own words "where the action is"

We asked him if they were going to attack us using water cannons and tear gas. He smiled and said that they were not given any instructions to do so. After a bit more conversation with him, we happily took his suggestion to move closer to the 'action'

By now it was 2pm and we made it to the spot where they had barricaded the road with razor wire. What caught my attention was that the PDRM had positioned elderly looking police men standing in a row behind the barricade.

The FRU , trucks and men in sky blue T-shirts were positioned further inside. I thought that this was good

as having older policemen there meant that they were not expecting trouble.

After taking the pictures we decided it was too jammed up there and decided to walk back to Masjid Jamek area.

Second Question : What were you thinking of when you barricaded the place like you did. It made me feel very sad as it seemed like we Malaysians were terrorists who were a danger to the police force when in fact nobody there seemed to be carrying any weapons other than the FRUs and police.

Meanwhile all mobile phone lines seemed to be blocked as none of us could call out. However we could still receive and send out text messages.

But everyone was still in a jovial mood. There were Malays pak cik who told us they came all the way from Terengganu using their own money. Some said they were from Kelantan.

There was a Chinese family of four from Kuantan who had driven in the night before and they had to put up a night at Swiss Garden Hotel.

There was supposed to be 20 buses that they had chartered but at the last minute the bus operators told them that they could not do so as they were threatened by the Transport and Tourism Ministries that their licences would be revoked if they were found to be ferrying people in for this cause.

Third Question : Why threaten those who were just trying to do their business which is to provide transportation. After all the people who wanted to attend the rally would still come.

By 3pm I was answering many text messages that were sent by friends around the world and I was telling them how good the situation is whereby it felt like a carnival and different races had come together for the same cause.

Inside of me I was secretly feeling a bit sorry for myself for not having attended the previous Bersih 2.0 which was more exciting. But 10 minutes later everything changed.

There were people on the road shouting "Turn back, turn back tear gas". I quickly put on my goggles and I also had an industrial mask. The goggles were great over my spectacles but the mask did not work.

My face had burning sensations and that was when I took out salt to rub my skin and ate some of it.

I wasn't sure what to do as my friends and I were separated by now. So I decided to go into a Malay restaurant opposite OCBC bank.

There were already many people taking refuge there. Everyone was great. We were all helping each other with salt and water. Someone got me a chair to sit down while another was passing out sweets.

Meanwhile outside was like a war zone scene from a movie. There were so many tear gas canisters being fired even though the street in front of the restaurant appeared to be empty of people.

Meanwhile inside the restaurant the Selangor Wanita chief did a short speech to thank the restaurant owner for allowing us to rest inside there.

All of us clapped and cheered her for her sense to do the right thing for her fellow countrymen.

More tear gas was still being fired and then someone from inside called for the restaurant to pull down the shutters. At 3.30pm there was loud banging on the shutters from outside.

Someone inside shouted "Jangan Buka" I was wondering if it was people on the street trying to get in.

Turned out that it was the police. They had forced opened the shutter. The first policeman who came inside was screaming obscenities at all of us. He proceeded to push at the tables and kicked the chairs that were around.

That was the time when I felt really really terrified. He was walking towards me and he looked like he wanted to harm me. Then he kept shouting "keluar! keluar!" I did not know what to do. Did he want us to go outside so that he could beat us up or to put us in the trucks?

More questions:

a) Why did you have to pull open the shutters. Those of us inside there were not the type who wanted to create trouble otherwise we would have stayed outside.

b) Why did you behave like a hooligan. Is that your nature or were you under instructions to do so.

c) As a policeman isn't it your job to protect us citizens but instead I was fearing for my life when I looked at you coming towards me.

d) What is your purpose for forcing us back into the street. Did you not want us to be off it.

Fortunately there was a YB Gan around together with her assistants inside the restaurant.

They told me to sit tight and wait. Miraculously the policeman must have recognised the YB because he instantly calmed down and just stood quietly while the YB told all of us to leave by the back entrance and once there people were helping us to climb through a gap that led to the Masjid Jamek where we stayed there for a while.

I think the older ones like us who stayed downstairs got off easily but the younger ones who were resting upstairs did not get a chance to escape and I was told that they were beaten up by the police.

I did not see it with my own eyes. Perhaps those who witnessed it may wish to affirm this.

At 4.20pm there were a few people in the Masjid Jamek to asked all of us to go out. I was still terrified because the FRUs were standing in a row blocking the path back to Dataran.

I was worried that they would charge at us when we went out but they did not. I quickly went to the Masjid Jamek LRT station but the shutters were down. I couldn't get in to take the train. Why did they do that if they seriously wanted us to go away from there?

I then proceeded to walk towards Pudu to regroup with my friends who had their own stories to share.

Kudos to the young boys and girls of the St John Ambulance Malaysia who were handing out free mineral water to us.

This whole incident has made me really hate and distrust the police. Instead of frightening me away from demonstrating it has instead made me more determined to exercise my rights as a citizen of Malaysia.

I love my country but not the way it is being managed. If there is another demonstration I will definitely be there.

