

An undignified exit for Tunku Aziz

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The truth is, hardly any of us have ethical energy enough for more than one really inflexible point of honour. - George Bernard Shaw

COMMENT The sad fact is that Tunku Abdul Aziz Tunku Ibrahim's role in the DAP was merely window-dressing to project the image of this so-called 'chauvinistic Chinese party' as a multiracial forward-thinking party.

His dignified pose symbolically completed the racial holy trinity for a political party so long demonised as 'racist troublemakers' bent on destroying the fragile social contract of Malaysia.

He presented the image of the Malay as urbane and benign so unlike the confrontational fear-mongering ruffians who have no problem displaying their butts to make a point only they seem capable of understanding, which seems to be the norm these days. A Malay willing to work with other like-minded Malaysians towards a better tomorrow.

Exactly which Malay demographic Tunku Aziz was supposed to represent or attract into the DAP fold was never determined.

Even amongst urban Malays, he seemed out of touch with their reality. Rabble-rousing was never in the Tunku's repertoire, which is exactly what most Malays (urban or rural) who gravitate to Pakatan Rakyat seem to relate to.

Unlike say someone like former National Union of Journalists president Hata Wahari who experienced the regime's wrath in an up close and personal manner, the Tunku's appointment and presence seemed like uncomfortable reminder of a bygone political era, steeped in gentlemanly tradition (which was anything but) whose sole duty was to comfort the non-Malays in DAP that theirs was a party truly reflective of the diverse nature of Malaysia.

Josh Hong's adroit piece in Malaysiakini on the man is probably the best commentary so far, but for me at least, there's plenty of blame to go around and nobody comes out of this looking good.

Heaping scorn on Guan Eng

Much has been made of Tunku Aziz's old-school gentleman demeanour and he has cultivated an air of weary detachment. His was not the gutter-level skirmishes that the DAP and Pakatan were embroiled in but rather his own personal crusade against the establishment was characterised by the feint and parry engagements carried out mostly in the propaganda organs of the state.

The face of the adversary which Pakatan and their supporters stared at was not the face that Tunku Aziz beheld. Most often his utterances of his abhorrence of governmental malfeasances

come off sounding like an exasperated parent irritated at a wayward child.

Make no mistake, I think it was a provocative and honourable move on Tunku Aziz's part to become the very public Malay face of the DAP even if it was just a symbolic gesture, but the way how he chose to depart from the DAP makes a mockery of his protestations of honour and dignity.

DAP on the other hand is nicely building a track record of public relations ineptitude and perhaps more distressing (if you are a Pakatan supporter committed to the ideals DAP claims to represent), a record of being uncharitable towards dissent from within their own ranks.

I have no problem with Tunku Aziz's stand on the Bersih 3.0 rally. In fact I know many people who agree with him. I welcome a plurality of views within a political party or political alliance.

Although I think that the Tunku's reasoning for objecting to the rally on the grounds that the Bersih steering committee rejected the government's offer of holding it at Stadium Merdeka and his views towards street protests in general are faulty, I don't think (like some Pakatan representatives and supporters) this is anything that warrants any kind of censure. As you can tell, I am not a firm believer in toeing the party line all the time.

However, following the dictates of your conscience does not mean playing into the hands (willingly or unwillingly) of those who only harbour malice towards the political party you have pledged your loyalty to.

The honourable, nay dignified, avenue of expression of his dissent would be the party's own propaganda organs or failing which the "alternative media", all the while maintaining a dignified silence when it came to the mainstream media.

This way even though the mainstream media would have picked up the story, the Tunku's silence (in the manner in which he chooses to engage with the media) would have been a clear sign of where his loyalties lay.

Instead by waging his war in the mainstream press, by announcing his departure from the DAP on ntv7 for instance, what Tunku Aziz has done is to ensure that whatever dignified exit he claims to want is mired in the gutter politics and shadow-play drama which characterises the Malaysian political landscape.

dap 15th congress 240808 tunku abdul azizBy heaping scorn on DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng, the tone of which is reminiscent of that emanating from Utusan Malaysia and its ilk, one can only surmise that Tunku Aziz for whatever reason is engaging in mischief-making for reasons I'll leave to the conspiracy theorists to articulate.

DAP fails to play card right

Of course, all this could have been avoided if the DAP played their cards right. Why they seem so eager to supply their enemies with ammunition is something which has always amused me.

From the start, they should have just accepted and politely disagreed with Tunku Aziz's stand on Bersih 3.0. They should have made it clear, especially when it comes to highly-charged issues such as these, that there is room for party members to express their dissent.

Understand now, the avenues these dissenters choose to express their views in is extremely important and what separates an honourable individual and a suspect one, is how much thought they have put into how and when they choose to express their dissent. If the first thing you do is run to the propaganda organs of your party's rivals, then I question the motives of your dissent.

And even after having announced his resignation from the party in a rather uncouth manner, the DAP continued to douse the media bonfire with gasoline by making this rather ridiculous offer of a think-tank job to Tunku Aziz.

To me, the offer would only be insulting (in this context) if the person being offered the job had a principled leg to stand but as is, the offer comes of as politically naïve or downright repellent, even more so, when the political secretary to Lim, Zairil Mohd Khir protests that the offer had been "misconstrued". If the tables were turned and it was Umno doing the "offering", nobody would give them the benefit of the doubt.

Zairil Khir Johari (3) If as Zairil (left) seems to think that Tunku Aziz was a "public intellectual" with a valuable "global network", then perhaps he should have been handled in a different way. Perhaps the powers-that-be at the DAP should have made it clear they welcomed his input even though they sometimes disagreed with it and his position as senator would be renewed.

If his position within the party was untenable because of certain of his ideological stances, offering him a position in a so-called think-tank most probably aligned with the DAP reeks of the kind of political back-scratching that Umno is very famous for. In my experience, if a man is determined to fall on his sword, it is best to stay out of the way of the blood spatter.

The moral of the story here is that the DAP should apply a little more common sense when dealing with dissent from within their ranks and they should be thankful of the extreme partisan nature of this conflict because if voters were not as polarised as they are now and had a little objectivity to spare, some of the actions of the DAP would not stand up to scrutiny.

As for Tunku Abdul Aziz, he doesn't get to play the 'honourable exit' card. His actions in the past few days have effectively destroyed whatever bit of myth-making was due his way.

Henceforth, what will be disseminated by the bigots who despise DAP is the narrative of how another Malay intellectual was ejected from the party which does not tolerate dissent. On the other hand, supporters of DAP will always be wary of Trojan horses within the Malay ranks of the party. And the show goes on.