

## **Why black & white politics when world is not?**

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**By Ong Kar Jin**

The world is not black and white. Even for the colour blind, there are shades of grey (indeed, as many as ahem, Fifty Shades of Grey!).

One of the first things we learn as we grow up is that things are often not simple - nuances permeate our world.

Somehow, however, this awareness that the world is not binary is suspended in our perception of Malaysian politics.

Depending on whether you follow the mainstream or alternative media, every forthright political participant is pigeon-holed as either an anti-government/pro-opposition troublemaker, or a government-paid lapdog cyber trooper.

Following on from this artificial labelling is the "all-or-nothing" expectation of the personalities involved.

Nothing good must be said of the other side, and 100% adherence to your side is demanded.

A recent example is the comment by PAS Member of Parliament for Hulu Langat Che Mat Che Rosli that radiation levels from the much-loathed Lynas plant were low.

He was swiftly bombarded with criticisms including charges that he was paid by the government to lie and he had turned traitor.

Che Mat, a nuclear scientist by training, was blasted for stating a fact as he saw it.

Or consider the issue of low wages in Malaysia: Those who opposed minimum wage were swiftly branded as selfish rich capitalists while those who supported it were labelled socialists.

This binary view turned Twitterjaya into a class warfare background. Lost in the hostilities was a deeper consideration of the issue at stake, and the reasoning behind the different positions.

Tunnel view block to democracy

Refsa or Research for Social Advancement considers this narrow view of politics a serious impediment to the development of a mature democracy in Malaysia.

It reduces politics to a two-size fits all dichotomy: you are either ALL Pakatan or ALL BN: "[My side] is always good. [My side] is always right. [The other side] is always wrong."

This all-or-nothing approach is presumptuous and undesirable. It is presumptuous as the stifling of dissent suggests that only the views of the party leaders are correct and important.

It is undesirable as it fails to recognise different opinions on particular issues and prevents constructive discourse.

The fact is there can be many potential approaches to address the social problems of our day.

Rational, intelligent thinking people would be expected to evaluate proposed policies on a case-by-case basis, and cannot be expected to always support everything a particular party is doing.

Constructive criticism must be welcomed. Dissenters must not be labelled as traitors.

All mature democracies accept constructive criticism as necessary for improvement.

Barack Obama consider this: Back in 2008, then Democratic US presidential candidates Barack Obama and Hilary Clinton had differing opinions on how to run the economy and conduct foreign policy.

They intensely criticised each other's proposals, and the debates allowed a consensus on the 'best' policies to evolve.

So much so that Mrs Clinton subsequently agreed to serve as President Obama's Secretary of State!

No one was called a traitor or chucked into some stereotypical category, because the American public recognised the goal of the discourse.

Recognising the colourful views that people have can be bitter, but is ultimately beneficial!

Blind support equals automatons

For our democracy to mature, we Malaysians must expand our horizons and realise that people have a right to express different stands on different issues.

We may have our political leanings but it does not mean we have to support our particular party blindly ALL the time, for we are not mindless automatons!

In fact, like any parent who has scolded their child will know, it is those who give fair criticism that truly have their beloved's best interests at heart.

Sadly, our mainstream media is not facilitating this maturation process.

Part of the Internet vitriol directed at Che Mat following his comments on the Lynas plant were probably because he was misrepresented in the mainstream media.

He said that radiation levels were low but the most critical issue of waste disposal had yet to be addressed; the mainstream media quoted him as saying Lynas was safe!

His clarifications were not carried. In this environment, Pakatan leaders and supporters cannot be blamed for being hesitant to express contrary views for fear that they will be taken out of context.

As citizens of Malaysia, we have to be discerning in our views and keep our minds open. The mainstream media, sadly, is unlikely to help as it has plummeted to the depths of lying about Australian senators and censoring BBC news feeds.

Refsa hopes our alternative media can step up. Do not pigeon-hole Pakatan personalities. Do not label them as 'traitors' merely for expressing contrary opinions.

And when we read mainstream media headlines of "quarrels and disunity" within Pakatan, do not immediately condemn Pakatan or the personalities but ask yourself "What are the relative merits of the different views/arguments? Will this help the nation?"

With questions like this in our minds, Malaysia will truly be on its way to a colourful and bright democratic future, and not a drab black and white world!

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