

A beautiful encounter with a local taxi driver

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I had my first political debate with a taxi driver who claimed to be an Umno member, in Malay, on the day the dissolution of parliament was finally announced (April 3, 2013).

He stopped by the roadside (which is supposed to be illegal) when he saw me walking in the car lane at the warmest time of the day. He asked what my job was, and I said in the publishing line. What kind of publication? Books and The Rocket. Ohhhh, DAP yea? And the rest of the conversation started to revolve around PKR vs BN.

He told me parliament akan bubar today, I said that's why I was walking all the way from my home to take a taxi and rush to the office! We laughed, and he told me that he's an Umno member, but all the while he was very keen to ask me questions about DAP and PKR, as if his curiosity has been aroused for some time but he had never been able to get any answers from his current sources of information.

At first he said he would still vote for Khalid Ibrahim in Bandar Tun Razak, but I told him a green leaf that fell (if only he still believed that Khalid is that pure green leaf) can never save a whole tree that has been rotten and corrupted to the core.

Then he claimed that DAP is just another MCA that is pro-Chinese (I noted that he ended many of his statements with a "kan?", implying tones of uncertainty). I replied that MCA is a retiring party that has been playing racial politics over the years, just like Umno, and that people nowadays don't buy any of their monkey shows any more; whereas DAP is actually non-racist. They have an ideology and they put Malaysians first and before the Chinese.

There are a lot of Malays in DAP and many of my colleagues in the office are Malays.

He also asked about the Lahad Datu case and whether Tian Chua was right. I told him that if Tian Chua was guilty, he would have been arrested and put into prison for defamation. But now he had been released. That was enough to prove that he was innocent.

He was quiet for a while and started to admit that many of the ministers "memang tak berguna", "dulu Mahathir sebenarnya juga makan banyak".

I took the opportunity to ask whether he believed that Anwar Ibrahim was innocent. He took a few seconds to think, and said he believed that Mohd Saiful Bukhari Azlan was telling the truth because he swore on the Al-Quran. "For Muslims when you swear on the Al-Quran you can never tell a lie". But I told him that Saiful's father had just told the media that his son had been used and that was it was a political conspiracy. "Betul ke?" He didn't know about the news.

"You tau Altantuya?" I said of course, what do you think about that? He said "I tak tau

lah,tapi Najib semua juga makan besar. Rosmah itu cincin... hahahaha!" I said yea, if the government does not makan that much, the money that we rugi would now lie in our banks and pockets and we wouldn't have to work so hard now and still not be earning enough to pay debts and live well. ("Ya! insurans kereta naik lagi tahun ini tau!")

And I told him that private investigator P Balasubramaniam, who was instrumental in the Altantuya Shaariibuu case had died last month of causes people could not believe. Then one of the lawyers in the Scorpene case was found dead in France, he had allegedly committed suicide. People who are closely linked to Najib Abdul Razak's scandals have disappeared one by one. His eyebrows raised higher and higher.

'Kalau Najib kalah...?'

"Kalau Najib kalah, apa akan berlaku kepada dia?" "Mana tau, tapi saya rasa dia susah nak tangkap loh", I said. And we both laughed..

I asked whether he used the Internet at home, he said no. Then I said no wonder la, because the mainstream media you have been consuming all these years are all controlled by BN and cronies. He said memanglah.

I told him that The Rocket Malay version is distributed for free, I'd like to give him one if I have it with me. I asked him to go for ceramah if he had the interest to know more about the information that he could never get in the mainstream media, and give the opposition a chance to express their ideologies in making our country a better place to live, to study, to love and to die with. He didn't answer, but he asked whether I'm married. "You pandai cakap lah." Laugh Out Loud (LOL).

The whole conversation might not be considered as a debate after all, but this is surely the longest and deepest Malay conversation that I have ever had with a Malay stranger.

What moved me the most was that when we had almost arrived at the destination, he saw a lady holding a lot of bags in her hands walking out from the market. He waved to her vigorously even though I was still in the back seat, and opened the door for her. The lady didn't know any Malay (from her Cantonese accent she's probably not even a local), and apparently they couldn't communicate.

The lady was hesitant, but he was so passionate that he called up his friends to ask the location of the place the lady wanted to go to, with the assistance of my translation.

I'm so glad to have met an open-minded Umno member who was willing to admit that the country is indeed in need of reformation, transformation, revolution and be corruption-free for a better living. I don't think I was persuasive enough to convince him to change his vote, but at least I think he would now like to know more about the chances and possibilities of change.

As an ordinary citizen working in an urban area (although I forgot to ask where he lived)

who doesn't read Facebook and online news, what he doesn't know is exactly what many other citizens with similar background are innocent of, and those are the news and information the government would like to hide, twist and distort as much and as hard as they could.

I have been ranting to my friends that I'm so gonna migrate if we can't change this government in the coming election. But I know deep down in my heart I love this country more than I could imagine. We all are. The blaze of success and prosperity in every country has always been a struggle demanded and fought for generation over generation, with the price that no one could have estimated. And the struggle for Malaysia is now.

We say we want peace, we want prosperity, we want a high quality of life. But how can we gain peace when we risk being terrified, risk losing our belongings and even lives for only walking on the road? How can we get prosperity and a high quality of life if the public transport system is so hopeless that everyone has to waste his or her life that could have been spent productively elsewhere than in a traffic jam?

How can we Malaysians achieve mutual understanding if we continue to hear only one-sided stories from the controlled media (and textbooks in schools) without having absolute freedom to speak, to question, to see each other, and to stand together for what is right?

For friends who always say they are not into politics, I assure you neither do we love politics. Because it's not even about politics, but the life that would affect us in every single way, and the fundamental social responsibilities that we are bound to that made us care and take action to spark the change.

Five years from now Malaysia will be the same country as today except for two things: the decision you make, and the future you vote for. Take a stand and vote for change. Be on the right side of history.

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