

Follow PKR's party line? Or vote conscience?

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COMMENT The Selangor power struggle develops at such breakneck speed that an article written in the morning may well be irrelevant by evening.

Thus, I shall reserve for now comments on some of the controversial main developments, and in this article only look at some political trends and observations that will hopefully still be relevant by sundown.

The big news of course is the defection of two PAS assemblymen, raising very interesting questions about the idea of party discipline.

PKR sacked Khalid Ibrahim (left) because they argued that he had breached party discipline. Now, PKR is happily encouraging two members of PAS to do the exact same thing: breach party discipline.

There seems to be quite an element of hypocrisy here, as well as the glaring inconsistency that has coloured almost every position PKR has taken since the term 'Kajang Move' was first coined.

When I wrote an article about how PAS' internal discipline was perhaps the party's greatest strength, analyst Wan Saiful Wan Jan asked me on Twitter: How can you praise PAS discipline, and yet be ok with Khalid's insubordination?

It was a point well taken, and one of the more astute criticisms of my writing.

Now, the matter has come full circle. It is clear that PKR does not practice what it preaches, and that 'party discipline' is something to be invoked only when it suits their purposes.

When it comes to Khalid doing whatever Anwar Ibrahim wants him to do, the talk is all about 'party discipline'. When it comes to recruiting two PAS state assemblypersons to PKR's cause, 'party discipline' is thrown out the window, to be replaced with 'following conscience'.

This smacks of repugnant opportunism, and the dearth of principle that has come to characterise PKR.

The need for consistency

As members of the public, we ,too, need to be consistent in our views.

I have often heard people bemoan the system where elected representatives are mere rubber stamps who always toe the party line.

Such individuals take the view that representatives should vote and follow their conscience, rather than blindly follow what their party says.

This line of thinking causes many of us to idolise such individuals as Saifuddin Abdullah (right), who some love to think of as a brilliant maverick who bravely goes against the grain of his party.

Khalid could be argued to be doing the same, but I guess it really comes down to what we feel (or what we have been influenced to feel) about the man in question - instead of being all about consistent application of principle.

Clearly both always toeing the party line and always acting independent of the party have shortcomings.

The only point I believe is fair to make here at this point is that one must be consistent about which one feels is the correct approach - not switch from one to another according to political convenience.

What really started the Perak crisis?

Selangor state assemblymen have certainly hit the big time. There is no better time to be an elected representative than when in a hung assembly.

Many forget what actually precipitated the entire Perak 2009 crisis. It did not begin with the crossover of three Pakatan Rakyat assemblymen. It began when Anwar announced that Umno state assemblyperson Nasarudin Hashim had crossed over to PKR.

Not long after, Nasarudin not only crossed back, but brought over 3 more Pakatan assemblypersons with him, causing the collapse of the Pakatan government in Perak.

Surely one can see the parallels here. Anwar has now enticed Saari Sungib and Hasnul Baharuddin to his side. Is anyone foolish enough to think that this is really the end of the saga?

Just like in Terengganu recently, all this really means is that now the price has gone up.

What would BN do?

Barisan Nasional's end goal is to stay in federal power indefinitely, and eliminate any opposition to its rule. So, how do they best serve their interests here?

I think the answer is simple - create instability in Selangor for as long as possible.

I wish I could say with confidence that the 2013 batch of Pakatan elected representatives nationwide were head and shoulders above the 2008 batch in terms of integrity, but somehow, that is not a bet I would yet be willing to take.

Today two people cross over to Anwar, (right) tomorrow, how many people are going to cross over to BN?

Whatever Anwar offered those two (in whatever form), BN can obviously triple (also in whatever form).

BN would not do so to support Khalid because they believe in Khalid; they would do so because such a move would perpetuate the instability that BN will use as proof in GE14 that any alternative to themselves is bound to end in nothing but trouble.

Anwar is gambling the same way he gambled in Perak, and he does not appear to be holding any better cards than he did in 2009, or in the Sept 16 fiasco of 2008.

It is worth noting that Khalid resigning at this point may eliminate some of the brickbats against him, but may not necessarily provide an end to the crisis.

A new menteri besar must command the majority of the house - something Wan Azizah Wan Ismail can claim right now, but for how long?

Let us also not forget the dark figure in the wings - Azmin Ali and his supporters in the state assembly. As the crisis deepens and every vote counts, the options available to this faction grow with almost every passing hour.

Engineering the Erdogan split

Lastly, it is worth noting the blatant obviousness with which Anwar, Rafizi Ramli and gang are working to tear PAS apart.

The ulama faction has long been a thorn in Anwar's side, and the Anwar-aligned Erdogans know that they will never be fully rid of them in PAS.

In fact, for PAS, the Selangor crisis is not about the Selangor crisis at all; it might perhaps be likened to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in the prelude to World War I - merely the spark that ignited great underlying tensions. Now, both Erdogans and ulamas are using this issue to try and finish one another off.

Thus, Anwar's moves clearly point towards the creation of a splinter group or party. The signs suggest that there will be a mass exodus of Erdogans from PAS - either to a new party, or (if they truly are so short sighted) to PKR.

The Erdogans are probably now waiting only for an exit opportunity in which they would be most likely to come out smelling like roses - probably by exploiting what few people in

PAS that still want some sort of alliance with Umno.

The thought that this split in PAS will help rather than impede PKR and DAP's quest to penetrate rural areas - the main stumbling block in the road to Putrajaya - is so delusional that it suggests that this is not Anwar's main goal at all.

Ironically, the efficiency with which Anwar's actions are leading to the disintegration of the Pakatan dream would almost make him the perfect Trojan Horse. If he did in fact control Selangor, who knows what deals he would be in a position to make.

As the saga continues to unfold, the one question that appears again and again in my head seems to be: how many wrongs does it take to make a right?

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