

COMMENT | When propaganda is presented as education

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COMMENT | Growing up in the 1980s and 1990s, there are a few things I remember when going to school back then.

I remember being told by teachers how great the government was and as Malaysians, we were lucky to be born in this country.

“Kita bertuah lahir di Malaysia. Semua pun ada dan kita ada pemimpin yang berani tegur kuasa besar.” (We’re lucky to be born in Malaysia. We have everything needed and even have a leader who dares to question big powers) – these were among the things told to us.

And when we entered the upper secondary level, the school textbooks were filled with policies from the “great leader” back then, such as the Look East Policy and Vision 2020.

But even as a primary school pupil who knew nuts about politics and governance,

there was one particular minister I detested. Why? It's because that imbecile of an education minister decided to start the new school sessions in December of every year.

His argument was that November was a monsoon season, hence, it was best to provide holidays for everyone so as to prepare for the rainy season.

Even back then, my little mind argued: "But we cannot predict the Malaysian weather. It rains when it's supposed to shine and vice versa."

For those who do not know, the said education minister recently got appointed as the 10th prime minister of the country.

The point I'm trying to put across here is that for decades, our students have been fed with "political propaganda" instead of the real education needed for the future generation to excel in life.

Let me take it a step further, the power-that-be never had any intention of creating critical thinkers.

Rot started in the 1970s

Just to give readers a brief history lesson, our education system got politicised by nationalistic agenda back in the 1970s – when the then-Abdul Razak Hussein administration decided to do away with the English medium schools.

And that started the whole mess. Talk to anyone who grew up in that generation and they will tell you that English medium schools were the number one choice for most Malaysian parents due to their diversity and of course – quality education.

Fast forward to the 1980s, the education system got “heavily infused” with loads of political propaganda instead of teaching kids how to become future thinkers and leaders.

Don’t believe me? Just google all the issues pertaining to our History subject, which had been carried by our media over the years.

So despite knowing our education system is failing our young ones, why aren’t our leaders doing anything to stem the rot? In my view, there are two reasons for it.

One is, there are several quarters that are thriving monetarily by perpetuating this system. These include those who prepare the national textbooks and other

paraphernalia needed for students in their studies.

Any new revision to the “old order” will require them to think out of the box and hire new personnel to make the revisions – which may in turn- cut down their profits.

The second reason is actually more devious than the first one – which involves the perpetuation of the old British system of divide and rule.

During colonial times, the British did invest in and nurture (using our forefathers’ money, of course) an education system for our populace.

But here is the thing. They moulded the education system in such a way that the people would be competent enough to work for them but never intelligent enough to question their authority.

While the British had left Malaysia for more than six decades, the elites in the country had “incorporated the system” into our national school syllabus.

Elites perpetuate failing education system

That is why you hardly see the elites sending their own children and

grandchildren to public schools. They are usually sent to prestigious private or international schools to study.

And when anyone makes noise about the abysmal quality of our national education system, the elites are the first ones to speak out against any possible reforms to the education system.

They even go to the extent of using racial and religious arguments to perpetuate the rot.

Simply put, they do not want commoners' children to have access to quality education like their own offspring do. If that happens, they fear the gap between the elites and common folk will narrow and in turn, threaten their hegemony.

In my view, the second group is the vilest of them all, destroying generations of young minds to perpetuate "new age feudalism".

On that note, our business leaders are equally guilty of what's happening to our education system.

While they are making a lot of noise about how our graduates can't even speak simple English, our national leaders could not have done this without the

business groups' tacit approval.

Business leaders equally guilty

We must understand that this rot happened for decades and while this was going on, the business groups chose to close their eyes on it because the economy was good back in the 1990s and 2000s.

The employers' group are known for the "don't rock the boat" policy. In the past, they just allowed our leaders to ruin our education system to maintain a good relationship with the politicians.

And now when they are unable to find good employees to fill in crucial jobs, they complain about the poor quality of our graduates. It's basically their inaction coming back to bite them where it hurts most.

And they are now providing a "great solution" to the problem- hiring more foreigners to do the job.

So what can we do to stem the rot in our education system? It's actually easier said than done.

First up, we need leaders with the political will (read stepping on the toes of powerful figures) to overhaul the education system entirely.

We need to ensure the system is updated and would educate our children to become future leaders... those who are confident enough to craft their own destinies.

And for that to happen, we must hire good teachers for our schools. The entry level for any prospective teachers must be high and we must also remove deadwood from the system without haste.

Can Anwar, Fadhlina address the issue?

Now comes the big question. Can Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and our Education Minister Fadhlina Sidek take up this gargantuan task? I have serious doubts about this.

Not that I want to be a pessimist whatsoever, it's just that I believe most of us have realised that placing hopes on politicians to get things done is akin to waiting for a unicorn to appear at our doorsteps.

Looking at the cabinet line-up and their deputies, my pessimism only grows

stronger.

At the end of the day, it all depends on us to keep pushing for changes to happen to our education system.

In the meantime, we just have to fork out money from our own pockets to get our children the best education... something that should have been provided using our tax ringgit.

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