

Bribing students to support Umno unethical
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In his letter entitled Pelajar harus tumpu kepada pelajaran, bukan Anwar, Anak Kelantan Insaf points out that sponsored students joining the opposition would violate their conditions of service.

'Ceramah-ceramah Anwar hanya akan mempengaruhi mereka supaya menyertai pembangkang dan melanggar syarat perkhidmatan yang telah dijanjikan dengan para penaja.'

The ethical status of this condition is deeply questionable. Why is a political commitment required of scholars sponsored by the Malaysian government? Is not the Malaysian government a distinct entity from the current ruling political party?

Suppose, for the sake of argument, an opposition party eventually wins a national election and forms the government. As far as sponsored students are concerned, this will not change the status of their sponsor, which is, and would remain, the Malaysian government.

There seems to be a conflation between the notions of 'the government' and 'political parties'. Alternatively, one might suspect that this is no conflation at all; on the contrary, this is nothing less than a bribe.

This raises an important question about the cogency of the argument being put forward by Anak Kelantan Insaf. I have often heard it being argued that students, both at local universities and those sponsored abroad by the Malaysian government, are obliged (morally? legally?) to not get involved in opposition activity. I believe that civil servants are also thus obligated.

I take it that those making this argument point to the contractual condition just mentioned above for justification. But a valid argument is only as strong or as weak as its premises, and the contractual condition is a shaky premise to rest on (it is a bribe).

If it appears to be a strong premise, that is perhaps because some of us find it hard to separate the notion of 'government' from that of 'ruling party' – a consequence of the country being governed by the same coalition party since independence.

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