

**Little Napoleon meets his Waterloo**  
**Malaysiakini.com**  
**July 26, 2010**

Umno's most potent political weapon is finally publicly unveiled. It is called the civil servant: it does little work, it cannot be fired.

Admission into Malaysia's civil service is highly desired by the unambitious, the incapable and the indolent. With 1.2 million civil servants (over 4 percent of the population), Umno is assured of political commitment. Thus, civil servants represent the fifth column.

For decades, elected leaders promised to remove incompetent and insolent civil servants. These bureaucrats, our paid servants, make our lives miserable. How many leaders kept their promises? Did good governance arise from these meaningless pledges? Leaders deserve to be treated with scepticism and scorn for failing to deliver.

But the tide may be turning.

In the recent spat between Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng and the state development officer Nik Ali Mat Yunus it appears that Nik Ali is about to meet his Waterloo.

Nik Ali (left) is responsible to his chief minister for his actions and conduct, although he is a federal appointee. As a civil servant, he serves the government of the day, of whatever complexion.

Nik Ali's disregard for the strict code of conduct, his failure to demonstrate the core values of integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality, does not inspire confidence. He caused the breakdown in communication.

When we became independent, we inherited several British institutions: a good judiciary, civil service, family planning unit, police force and parliament. Years of mis-rule eroded their high standards and abolished the system of checks and balances.

Nik Ali should reread the history of the British civil service and in particular, William Harcourt's comments over two centuries ago: "The minister exists to tell the civil servant what the public will not stand".

Reclaiming our rights

Nik Ali took umbrage and criticised Lim for his 'interference' in addressing corruption and waste of public funds. When Lim chided his civil servant, he also bore on his shoulders all our frustrations. He became our 'symbol' for clawing back our rights.

We, too, have been at the mercy of errant civil servants. We stood patiently in long queues, held our tongues, ignored the delays while they had 'extended breakfasts'. We waited to be served while they discussed the 'bursa saham'. We were made to feel small because of their lack of tact.

We suffered when they said, "masih tak ada keputusan" (no decision yet) because we refused their offers of "senang 'aje nak expedite". Dare we complain? At the risk of our papers being 'lost'? These civil servants thought nothing of abusing our intellect, our time and our goodwill.

Chief secretary to the government Mohd Sidek Hassan (right), Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak, Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin and Penang Umno head Azhar Ibrahim have rallied round Nik Ali. Their support for a rude civil servant, for the wrong reasons, exposes their hypocrisy, malice and sanctimony. They make good political theatre.

Didn't Najib and Sidek both condemn 'Little Napoleons' in the past? Can't they recall the 'People First' policy?

In 2006, then-PM Abdullah Ahmad Badawi announced, "There is no need to show how powerful you are by delaying things. There are people who held back files and there are people who held back decisions. We don't want to have 'Little Napoleons' in the civil service showing power by delaying things, for example, just to teach that person a lesson."

When DPM Muhyiddin said, "Nik Ali is an exemplary officer and there is no case of insubordination here," he makes a laughingstock of himself. His failure to reproach encourages the type of gutter politics beloved of Bung Mokhtar Radin and Tajuddin Rahman.

No doubt Azhar's admonishment of Lim's style of governance as "immature and inexperienced" reveals that Umno prefers puppets on strings. Moreover, Umno is sore it cannot add corruptibility and stubbornness to Lim's list of alleged failings.

NONEAs for Ibrahim Ali (left), wading into this fracas, he acts the class bully spoiling for a fight. He should be less of a 'kay poh chee' (busybody) but instead busy himself and resolve the issues of the latest study by the Universiti Putra Malaysia's Social Sciences Institute.

The survey found that pornographic websites were accessed mostly by young urban Malays who were also inclined to lepak (idle) (15 percent), smoke (13.7 percent) as well as swear at people and play truant (11.5 percent).

Lim is right to be cross at being called biadap (rude), "That's why I cannot tolerate people who waste (public) money like Nik. No chief minister dares to upbraid a civil servant. I have been told that I was a 'terror' for doing so."

Lim deserves an apology but would be naïve to expect Nik Ali or his political masters - the federal government - to admit the error of their ways.

Will they alter the civil service to reflect the country's racial composition? Will they accept that each race, with its own particular strength, can make a useful contribution? Will they adopt a more lean institution? Will they stop spending our money frivolously?

Saboteurs not uncommon

What happened in Penang is not uncommon. During Pakatan Rakyat's brief tenure in Perak, similar saboteurs were at work to undermine Pakatan. Civil servants complained of oppression by constant interference from the federal government.

civil servants government workers This government has repeatedly ignored the electorate. It intimidates those who expose wrongdoings and corruption in our civil service, judiciary and other institutions. It silences those who write about what is right and just.

Unlike the BN stooges, decent Malaysians do not judge by the artificial criterion of popular appeal.

In 1994, Lim defended an underaged Malay girl who was allegedly raped by then Malacca Chief Minister Rahim Thamby Chik. Both Lim and the girl were imprisoned; the alleged rapist escaped all charges. Did any senior civil servant or BN politician protest at this outrage? No. They closed ranks.

Today, Lim is spearheading a charge towards a cleaner, more transparent and open style of governance. He is not 'all talk and no action'.

What happened in Penang is not about a chief minister reprimanding his civil servant. It is about fear. Our inefficient, bloated and arrogant civil service is afraid of losing its privileged existence.

The writer wishes to acknowledge the thousands of dedicated, loyal and hardworking civil servants to

whom this article does not apply to.

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/138313>