

Teachers in politics: Umno desperate for change?

Malaysiakini.com

July 28, 2010

Pakatan politicians believe that the recently announced move to once again allow graduate teachers to participate in politics, is a desperate attempt by Umno to 'rejuvenate' the 'weakened' party before the upcoming general elections.

They were commenting on yesterday's announcement by the Chief Secretary to the Government Mohd Sidek Hassan that beginning next month, graduate teachers on grades DG41 to DG48 will be permitted to engage in politics.

sibu by election lim kit siang "If you look at the groups affected, they are those who were once active in Umno. This move seems like it is to serve Umno's agenda," said DAP supremo Lim Kit Siang (left) when contacted by Malaysiakini.

Agreeing with Lim, PAS secretary general Salahuddin Ayub told Malaysiakini that the move is an attempt to win the hearts of the teachers concerned.

"It's a short term strategy by Umno to face the election. As we know they have lost a lot of support from amongst these groups," he added.

PKR secretary general Saifuddin Nasution said this move is meant to be a shot in the arm for a weakened Umno.

"Why now? I believe this is to rejuvenate the party. Umno in its heyday was filled with teachers. Teachers came into the party without vested interests and they were sincere in their fight.

"But now Umno is full of businessmen for whom profit is the only yardstick and the sincere struggle (of the teachers) were abandoned. Umno is now weak," he opined.

Possible abuse

However, the Pakatan politicians also called upon the government to be sincere in allowing graduate teachers to be involved in politics and not revert to the previous practice of victimising those who supported the opposition.

barisan alternatif ba johari baharum pm memo 060307 salahuddin ayub "They should allow the teachers to engage in politics regardless of party affiliation, be it the BN or the opposition. Unless the new rule is implemented impartially, it will be another tool of oppression," warned Lim.

Salahuddin (right) contended that the rule must be implemented fairly with a guarantee that there will be no discrimination.

"We don't want teachers who support the opposition to find that action is taken against them silently, be it blocked from promotion or transferred for 'administrative' reasons," added the Kubang Kerian parliamentarian.

Both Salahuddin and Saifuddin agreed that there is however no foreseeable impact of the move on Pakatan itself.

Saifuddin however added that Pakatan practises inclusive politics and has support from across the board. Teachers are a group in the community, and Pakatan have long engaged with them directly or indirectly.

'Move half-hearted'

Both Pakatan leaders also believe that the decision to allow graduate teachers to participate in politics will not jeopardise the quality of teaching in schools.

selambau pkr pc 040409 saifuddin nasution
Salahudin said that this is because teachers' involvement in politics is not new, and historically there has been minimal disruption to schools.

Saifuddin (left) believed that the teachers are professionals and they should be trusted to distinguish between their duties as educator and their involvement in political parties and act accordingly.

Meanwhile, PAS vice-president Mahfuz Omar said that the government decision is somewhat half-hearted, because they are still restricting other teachers and civil servants from participating in politics.

"For years the BN government has politicised the civil servants to their own ends, why not let the civil servants engage in politics?" he asked.

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