

Don't let PKR be Umno-in-waiting
Malaysiakini.com
Apr 15, 2008
Neil Khor

I refer to the Malaysiakini report Azmin: BN MPs ready to cross.

Azmin Ali, the MP for Gombak, was reported to have said that one reason why BN MPs are keen to leave Umno was because these individuals wanted to safeguard Malay hegemony. More importantly, he stressed that Umno was no longer relevant because it no longer had the trust of the Malays. This statement reveals a subtle danger that PKR members must think carefully about.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Gerakan, a non-sectarian party, began accepting ex-MCA members. Among the ex-MCA leaders who joined Gerakan were Dr Lim Keng Yaik and Michael Chen. This made Gerakan into a mass party but also a Chinese one.

Soon, the party began losing its non-sectarian characteristics. Its non-Chinese leaders played only ceremonial roles. Even meetings have been conducted in Chinese. Within the BN, it is hard to tell apart Gerakan from the MCA. In time, Gerakan was reduced to the bluster that was Lim.

Today, PKR is a combination of ex-Umno members and a small but dedicated coterie from the Parti Rakyat Malaysia. The balance is a very fine one and to date, PKR's party ideology, whilst clear to its own members, is rather ill-defined in the public mind.

By merging with Parti Rakyat, PKR has now a much more flexible and dynamic platform. In other words, Anwar Ibrahim has something to fight for besides getting justice for himself. Now, PKR wants justice for the rakyat. That was, to a certain degree, the Parti Rakyat platform which could never be accepted by a Malaysian electorate so brainwashed against socialism and anything on the left of politics.

But, by luck, our bad education system meant that the younger generation know little of their national history. They were never told that former premier Abdul Razak's policies were very socialist in orientation. By today's standards, Razak would be suspect in Umno eyes for drawing up an economic policy to eradicate poverty regardless of race.

Coming back to PKR, the party now has strong working objective and advocates mild socialist economic policies. At this point, all the opposition parties in Parliament have a common enemy - the BN. It would be naïve to think that political parties should not aspire to power. But there is always a price to pay if one gets power too quickly.

As I see it, Azmin has already identified that first danger - ex-Umno members whose sole reason for joining PKR is to protect 'Malay' hegemony. As we all know, protecting anyone's hegemony is usually accompanied by a higher goal - the lining of many pockets with money.

Will PKR become another Gerakan? It certainly has the potential if it begins to accept ex-Umno members whose minds are fixed on perpetuating race politics. Anwar said that they would have to accept PKR's goals but can they really change so thoroughly and so quickly?

Instead these new members see an opportunity to remain part of the ruling clique. PKR could do better if it gave itself time to settle and become more cohesive. It also needs to define its party ideology in clearer fashion. Some of its new MPs also need time to brush up on their command of the national language!

If the party has some definite track record in government and work on projecting its ideology clearly, then it has little to fear from new members whatever their motives. Then, even if opportunists enter into its folds, its party constitution and culture would be able to contain their activities, perhaps even change their way of thinking.

But for now, those PKR members who joined a non-sectarian party might want to ask whether these new members Azmin has identified accept the very idea of non-sectarian politics? Can any meaningful working relationship between PKR, DAP and PAS survive a "re-constructed" PKR?

The biggest threat to change in Malaysia is the quicksilver transformation of PKR. It is not so much that Anwar is the PM-in-waiting but that PKR might be an 'Umno-in-the-making'.

Copyright © 1999-2007 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd.
Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news//81397>