Rustam Sani - the last leftist
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I refer to the Malaysiaini
MCPX
report Author, blogger, activist Rustam Sani dies.

The unexpected death of Rustam Sani leaves a blank in the history of this modern and yet a very young nation. However prior to World War II, this nation made Great Britain rather wealthy through its contribution of money from both rubber and tin yet remaining poor and marginalised.

We may remember in history the First Far East Toilers Conference held in Bangkok in 1924 organised by a French communist. At this conference, quite a number of Malayans participated. As a result of this conference, we saw two historic developments.

One, the formation of the Malayan Communist Part and two, the Labour Code of 1927 (before the Rump Labour Code of 1933). The mood of the MCP was more into setting up a socialist state and ending the bourgeoisie regime of the British. Consequent to this, there was continued and manifest conflict between the MCP and the British.

To overcome the threats of the MCP, the British declared a 12-year period of emergency rule commencing in 1948 and ending in 1960 (three years after independence).

During this Emergency period, the Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions comprising 250,000 workers was banned and its General Secretary K Ganapathy publicly hanged by the British. My late father had told me that his younger brother Sinnaparayar was shot dead and publicly dragged by the British for being the deputy commander in Sungai Kaya, Negeri Sembilan. Ironically, our family lives in Bukit Kaya now, not very far from the river.

We had one important development during this time - API or Angkatan Pemuda Insaf, a different kind of voice from the Malay nationalists. Ahmad Boestamam led this movement in championing the cause of the people and thus was born Parti Rakyat. This was the bastion of the Malay Left and it was a very vibrant and ideological party with the kind of social objectives we could never have anticipated from the BN guys who have been in power for more than 50 years now.

As a youngster from Seremban, I had met Ahmad Boestaman when once he gave a speech at the Merlin Hotel a few years before his death. I may not have seen Lenin but to me he was the kind of person Vladimir Lenin would have been. He cut across race and religion and carried Malaya into the folders of humankind. He had such an ideological candour in his vision, which I could later on see in Hamid Tuah's daughter, who is now very much isolated.

The Malay Left was a living phenomenon and for the non-Malays who do not have much historical knowledge of this nation, it is good to read more about the contribution of the Parti Rakyat. Kassim Ahmad, who graduated from School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London and taught there for some time before taking on the leadership of Parti Rakyat had this to say:

Beri aku lidah

Aku mau berkata-kata
Seperti laut yang menghempas
Di pantai merdeka.

His Kemarau di Rantau was an intellectual exposition the Malay Left. While Umno sided with the British, the Malay Left craved for a cause of social upliftment through ideological means for all Malayans. They had a national agenda for all Malayans through their socialist means.

Once when I approached Dr Syed Husin Ali, while he was still in Universiti Malaya, to supervise my Ph.D. proposas entitled the 'The Historical Development of the Malayan Labour Party' he just smiled and told me 'Kamal, you know I am from Parti Rakyat'.

He had an ideological mantle that was quite distinct to the objectives of the Malayan Labour Party. After that I never pursued that area of academic excellence. It was not worth it.

The death of Rustam Sani may mark the end of an era.

The youths of today should spend time to find more about their leaders who have sacrificed much more than the many who have had enjoyed the arcades of power without providing good leadership. Rustam Sani follows his father as a champion of the Malay Left. His hopes were not in vain; the beginning of an epoch may match a new kind of continuity in PKR with Anwar Ibrahim in the forefront. The Malay Left has not died.

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