

PKR economic policies need review
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Anwar Ibrahim had recently intimated that PKR' economic policy would reflect the ideology of a centre-left government. As one of the pioneer members of PKR, I am very much amazed as to how its current leaders could have thought of such an economic goal for the party.
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Firstly, the party evolved out of the desperate need to circumvent some crucial events arising out of the dismissal of Anwar as the deputy prime minister. The reformasi movement did not very much align itself to economic goals except that it had wanted to become a substantive force to check the then government of Dr Mahathir Mohamad. There was more anger upon that individual than on the governing coalition. However, it eventually turned into a political force that brought into the party a number of left-leaning politicians from the politically ineffective Parti Rakyat. However, the influence of the former Parti Rakyat leaders has been immense and has also led to many former leaders like Ezam Mohd Nor leaving the party. It is a fact. Let us not shun the truth. I am not a fan of Ezam. The party is more important for me.

Most PKR members would not understand the distinction between leftist or rightist economic goals. It will be very difficult for PKR leaders to explain the difference between the monetary- based economics policy of a state's corporatist cum privatised economic goals to that of social- centered egalitarian economic goals. This to a people who are already muddled in a consumerist society using credit cards prevalently.

Malaysians generally view themselves as growth-oriented citizens and consumers. This has been supported by the fact that there are already 5,000 foreign companies choosing Malaysia as the 19th best investment centre in the world.

Socialist-thinking leaders in PKR will be meeting students and career-oriented youths who are looking forward to confronting a globalised economy. The challenges ahead for these newcomers in the job market is not one of handouts and dole but one that which is based on sound forward- looking corporatist thinking. While the majority have sympathy for poverty, they do not consider poverty-eradication a priority issue anymore. Most of them are angry about continued inflationary trends, over-taxation, toll problems, expensive public transport systems and the lack of good and effective tertiary education that can provide sound positive economic base for their children. Saving has become impossible for many and utility rates have risen and have diffused the possibility of a comfortable life.

Global economic issues like the continued increase in prices of oil, raw materials and basic commodities like rice and sugar have further aggravated the problems of most lower-income and middle-income families. Should we divide 25,000,000 people by five we will get an average of 5,000,000 families and if we further deduct for centre-left policies, there will only be less than 1,000,000 families or 5,000,000 people who may want to listen to this kind of a view.

Then there is the issue of growth-oriented economic policies, banking goals and fiscal and monetary goals along with currency evaluation against the euro, pound sterling or the dollar.

If we are thinking of generating an average income of RM5,000 per month per family than we will have to equate ourselves with countries like the Philippines or even Indonesia in terms of the standard of living. $RM5,000 \times 5,000,000 \times 12 = ?$ Find for yourselves if you would like this to be your GNP.

Our property prices and market are indeed vibrant and growing. Condominiums of world-class stature stand next to the Twin Towers. Building good and decent houses for 5,000,000 families even at a cost of RM200,000 per unit current raw materials cost is not a mammoth problem for the government of Abdullah Ahmad Badawi or for Anwar Ibrahim's government-in-waiting. You do not need a centre-left policy to fulfil these basic needs.

I do not wish to expand further for now but I would certainly believe that PKR's economic goals must be reviewed with more effectiveness in procedural safeguards and enforcement plus provisions for an active health care and public transportation system, a senior citizens pensions system, a free education policy and towards creating a career-based tertiary education system.

More than that, a transparent social and political system is necessary. The provision of welfare must be based on necessity and not on political contention. Realism and not abstraction is what Malaysians would expect from PKR. Anwar must make less ideological promises and create more space for effective economic goals for all and including for the rich Malaysians as well.

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