

**Anwar muses need for Malaysian Zola**  
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**Terence Netto**

"Where can we find a Malaysian Zola for these times?" mused PKR MCPX

de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim during an interval in a hectic flurry of meetings with his retinue of advisers and aides, closeted with him to mull ways to overcome what is shaping up to be another round in a government campaign to smother the reformasi icon.

anwar ibrahim freed from police ipk detention pc 170708 wavingSpeaking to Malaysiakini in the library of his home in Bukit Segambut, now converted into a situation room, the PKR leader was leafing through 'J'accuse', Emile Zola's open letter to the French president, the single most important weapon that helped win Alfred Dreyfus exoneration from trumped up charges of treason in fin de siecle France.

Captain Alfred Dreyfus, an artillery officer in the French army accused in 1894 of secreting secrets to Germany, was found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment in the penal colony of Devil's Island in French Guiana.

The case became a cause celebre, not only in France but also in Europe where anti-semitism, that disfiguring blight of western civilisation, came to an apogee of sorts in the trial of the Jewish Dreyfus.

The case had a convulsive effect in a country considered the home of the European Enlightenment nearly three centuries after Rene Descartes' cogito ergo sum ("I think therefore I am") set off the modern epoch of intellectual emancipation from what the poet William Blake called "mind-forged manacles".

j accuse jaccuse emile zola article letter 210708The Dreyfus Affair polarised French, even European, society between the upper crust establishment of the military and church and the bourgeoisie. The looming sodomy case against Anwar Ibrahim is threatening to similarly cleave Malaysian society into those against and for him, those for encrusted privilege as against the egalitarians.

Zola's 'J'accuse', a withering tract accusing the French establishment of conspiracy to convict Dreyfus, ran on the front pages of a popular French daily in 1898 and detonated the movement to free Dreyfus. The article's seismic effect was comparable to Harriet Beecher Stowe's 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' some 50 years earlier on the emancipation movement for Black Americans in the United States.

Anwar, seen as the Asian leader capable of blending western rationalism with eastern modes of thought - with a strong Muslim orientation to his particular variant - is regarded as the foretaste of a statesmanship a conflicted world needs.

**Shannon's 'Pukimah PM'**

To the plutocratic upper crust in Malaysia, Anwar's leadership of a snowballing movement for political change, driven by populist sentiment, is a threat to their encrusted privilege and class interests.

1489 the dreyfuss affairThe coalition of ethnic groups within Anwar's PKR, now extending to the DAP and PAS, offers a plausible and increasingly popular alternative to the existing order. Anwar sees the sodomy charge - character assassination Malaysian style - as the establishment's last cudgel to beat him and this movement into submission.

"This is the hour for a Malaysian Zola to shame this conspiracy into defeat," he said, snatching a moment of relaxation in his amply-stocked library.

"Words are the most puissant of weapons, so this is the time for a polemic in ink that will submerge this lot in shame," he added, with perhaps too touching faith in the power of the pen against adversaries not particularly known for affinity for the printed word.

The closest a local writer came to a Malaysian version of 'J'accuse' was in 1999 when novelist Shahnun Ahmad penned 'Pukimah PM', a thinly-veiled polemic against then prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in the immediate aftermath of the first court cases of corruption and sodomy against Anwar in late 1998.

That book was seen as little more than a vent for the author's bile, swirling and loosely corked, than as an expression of his artistic imagination. But it did register the literary community's revulsion for the case against Anwar.

It's almost *déjà vu* in the community at this second edition of the supposed perversions of Anwar Ibrahim, but who knows a local Zola - with a finer feel for allegorical refutation - may yet rise to the occasion.

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