

Right To Freedom Of Expression Does Not Mean Throwing Punches

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By Dr Mah Hang Soon

While I respect the right of the audience who had gathered at New Era College on 25 March 2012 or better known by its acronym "325 assembly" organised by the United Chinese School Committees Association (Dong Zong) to rally against shortage of Chinese-educated teachers for Chinese schools, I wish to point out that restraint must be practised at all times, no matter how emotional speeches maybe, or the atmosphere leading up to and during the event.

Newspaper headlines and online news portals have reported that one protestor had even thrown a punch against the Deputy Minister of Education cum MCA Youth chairman Dr Wee Ka Siong.

The supporters may voice their grievances. They have every right to a differing opinion from that of the federal government or the Education Ministry or Barisan Nasional. But they should never resort to harassment and getting physical against any individual. To do so, is to completely abuse freedom of expression, and disrespecting the rights of individuals to personal safety.

Situation could have spiraled out of control

Dr Wee and the police and bodyguards should be commended for not reacting against the assailant but remaining composed at all times. The situation could have grown out of hand with more damage incurred if there were any on-the-spot retaliation.

Pakatan's hypocrisy

More than a dozen Pakatan Rakyat leaders like PKR Secretary General Saifudin Nasution and lawmakers and excos like Tian Chua and Teresa Kok present at the protest should be condemned for not appealing to the crowd to exercise physical control and restraint. Indirectly, they have contributed to the heckling and attempted physical assault against Dr Wee.

To date, why is there still no criticism by Pakatan legislators against the action of physical intimidation by the protestor? If they do not accept heckling from the audience, why did Pakatan leaders in attendance not address the crowds advising them to be rational and behave calmly?

Sheer hypocrisy radiates from Pakatan leaders who on one hand preach the right to freedom of expression, right to assembly, but do nothing to ensure the right to personal security or to respect a differing opinion.

Pakatan Rakyat pattern to condone heckling against BN leaders

It appears to be a trend for Pakatan leaders to condone public jeering, verbal abuse where physical safety of any BN leader is put at stake. Only about 10 days ago where a discourse on women's issues was held in Penang to which Wanita MCA Penang chief Tan Cheng Liang was subject to loud taunts from the audience thereby interrupting her presentation, Wanita DAP's Chong Eng did not rebuke nor appeal to the audience not to be disruptive or rude.

Commendable of MCA Youth leaders to be present

Recognition must be given to Dr Wee as well as MCA Youth Education Bureau chief Chong Sin Woon for attending the rally despite the partisan fervour of the audience. If they were absent from the rally, Pakatan

leaders would have had a field day deriding MCA as snubbing the event. Their presence despite the highly-charged atmosphere indicates that MCA Youth listens to grouses from the ground irrespective of political affiliation. MCA Youth is with the masses.

Instead of merely jeering Dr Wee, the audience should allow time and opportunity for the 8-point formula prepared by the Education Ministry's committee on addressing teacher shortage in Chinese schools headed by Dr Wee to work. To be dismissive of the measures undertaken by the Education Ministry without even giving time to see the results means one is already clouded with biasedness and will fault-find no matter how much effort is initiated.

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