

**Election Commission still in "government service" fearing reprisals, says activist
Malaysian Insider
Sept 18 , 2013
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Former civil servants who make up the Election Commission (EC) are the main stumbling block to the body's independence and credibility, the Bersih People's Tribunal heard today.

Wong Piang Yow (pic, right), founder of socio-political forum Tindak Malaysia said this, coupled with the EC being placed under the Prime Minister's Department, has hampered the election authority's job.

"Sometimes these senior EC officials let slip statements such as 'we are public servants'. It's their mentality that they answer to the government," he said.

"Although they are supposed to be an independent body, in reality they are civil servants."

At the hearing today, prominent academic Professor Gurdial Singh Nijar, who is heading the tribunal's legal team, read out a list of high-ranking officials within the EC and their former positions in government service.

The tribunal, which started this morning at the Empire Hotel in Subang Jaya, is hearing allegations of fraud and irregularities in the 13th general election. It is organised by electoral reforms coalition Bersih 2.0, without Putrajaya's recognition.

This morning, the tribunal heard from DAP's Klang Member of Parliament, Charles Santiago that his complaint to the EC about dubious electoral roll was ignored. He cited the example of a house which had 60 voters registered to its address.

"They admitted there were 60 names registered at the house but told me they could not do anything about it," said Santiago.

Speaking to the tribunal, Wong spoke of the EC staff's "fear" of losing their pension, which he said led them to toe the ruling government's line.

Wong, who was a polling agent in Kelana Jaya during the May 5 polls, also spoke about fraud opportunities in advance and postal voting.

This includes the fact that the indelible ink applied on voters did not apply to advance voters.

Wong questioned the "privilege" given to media workers to take part in advance voting.

"Journalists are private sector employees, so why are they given the privilege to vote early? This means that anyone can do advance voting," he said, and contrasted with polling agents and candidates who were not allowed to vote early.

"They are on duty too. I would imagine that they should be given priority," he rejoined.

He pointed out that there were many ways an advance or postal vote could be manipulated, such as when the ballot box is kept in the police station for six days before the counting process.

"No one is allowed to guard the boxes except the police.

"Plus the seal on the box has no serial number, so if it is removed and replaced with another, no one will know," added Wong. - September 18, 2013.

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