

# Malaysia at the Crossroads



**A Socialist  
Perspective**

Jeyakumar Devaraj

4.2  
EY



# Malaysia at the Crossroads: A Socialist Perspective

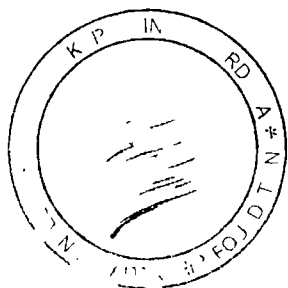
Jeyakumar Devaraj

PUSTAKA PERDANA



1008293

Parsosma Enterprise



**Malaysia at the Crossroads: A Socialist Perspective**

Published in 2009 by  
Parsosma Enterprise  
2A, Jalan Sitiawan  
Lim Gardens  
30100 Ipoh, Perak  
Malaysia.

Printed by Jutaprint  
2 Solok Sungei Pinang 3, Sg. Pinang  
11600 Penang, Malaysia.

ISBN: 978-983-44547-0-8

324.2  
JE 1

# Table of Contents

---

## Foreword

<b>Introduction</b>	1
<b>A: Ethnicity and Class</b>	3
Ethnic Politics and National Unity	5
The Hindraf Campaign: A Critique	16
Culture or Economy – Wherein Lies the Primary Contradiction?	21
<b>B: Malaysia in a Unipolar World</b>	31
Fault Lines in the World Capitalist System	33
The Global Justice Movement and Imperialism Today	41
The US-Malaysia Free Trade Agreement	49
<b>C: Privatization</b>	57
Fighting Privatization	59
Health Financing Reform: A Critique of the Consultant’s Interim Report	63
Raising the Fees for Foreign Workers: Not Merely Inhumane, but Stupid!	73
Private Clinics in Government Hospitals: Do Not Stab the Rakyat in the Back!	75
<i>Pagar Makan Padi?</i> : Turbulence in Perak Water	78
<b>D: Building Socialism</b>	83
The Status of the Socialist Project in Malaysia	85
Building Socialism in the 21st Century: The Case of Brazil and Venezuela	95
The Left in Coalition Politics	105
Socialism and Religion	117
Building the New Anti-Capitalist Global Movement	121



## Foreword

WHEN the first money-making “private” hospital started operations in Penang, doctors deserted the General Hospital to sign up. The promised riches lured them as the Wild West once drew Groucho Marx to its hidden gold. But one remained behind, spurning the offer of a directorship of a money-making corporation. That physician, Dr Devaraj – said to be the best in the country – remained at his post, loathe to desert the man in the street. Genuine concern for the underprivileged revealed something of a family tradition when his son, also a doctor, led the fight against the introduction of Thatcherism in the health services. The ministry made things difficult for Dr Jeyakumar and he left the government job.

It was inevitable that the young doctor’s sympathies led him to socialism. He formed the Parti Sosialis Malaysia (PSM) and created a sensation when he knocked out Samy Vellu, a government minister and head of the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), to become the new MP for Sungai Siput, destroying the dominance of the MIC which had held sway since 1957. This startling achievement opened the door to many possibilities and to fresh speculation about the future of this unfortunate country.

At a time when the Internal Security Act had crushed underfoot the trade union and labour movements, when memory had deserted socialists and American imperialist propaganda had transformed the word “socialist” into a dirty word, it took an independent mind to reject the propaganda and to recall the meaning and importance of socialism, still kept alive in faraway Cuba. That country’s survival despite American sabotage, attempted assassinations, invasion and enforced starvation rebutted the right’s repeated song that socialism had been discredited. Cuba was not only surviving, but increasing its influence in Latin America where startling changes have become the order of the day. Two of the countries in the region – Brazil and Venezuela – are examined in an article in this book.

This collection reflects the anguished search for the answer to achieving socialism in this UMNO-dominated police state. Shouting slogans and

quoting from Lenin is of no help. Gramsci has warned that “for the proletarian ideology – Marxist theory – to triumph, it must win the battle for hegemony and become ‘common sense’”, which, the writer Diana Raby explains, means that the abstractions of Marxist theory must gel with the popular democratic traditions of a specific country before they can become hegemonic. Not dogmas but an autochthonous programme (as the Cuban writer Ricardo Alarcon de Quesada puts it), demonstrated by the Castro solution, is called for. Every country has its own uniqueness which demands an indigenous solution, which in turn, in Malaysia, cries out for an intimate study and understanding of political movements since the Japanese surrender in 1945, such as the building of a united front against colonialism in the post-Japanese-surrender years. The memoirs of Rashid Mydin and Abdullah CD; Shan Ru Hong’s memoirs of the guerrilla battle against the Japanese invader, *War in the South*, as well as the story of his life and the beginnings of trade unionism and communism entitled *Gold in the South*, are available for study, but they await editions in all the major languages before they can be fully effective.

The main task facing socialists today is the removal of the clique of multi-millionaires calling themselves UMNO from political power. This group, elected by a restricted group in the UMNO party, forbids its members from challenging decisions in court, and runs a police state that has not relaxed its iron grip on the country for 50 years. In the words of Professor Ozay Mehmet, this clique has “emerged as a cartel. In the process, they have effectively cornered economic planning and decision-making, to enrich themselves while paying lip-service to poverty eradication”. If we bear in mind this overriding problem, the discussion of the subject of “main contradiction” in this collection would appear rather confused; the term “ethnic oppression” betrays a viewing of class relations in racial terms, an ingrained habit of UMNO and its race allies. However, the PSM’s participation in the united action that won on March 8 shows that they are on the right track.

Much has to be done. The states of Sabah and Sarawak, co-signatories to the Malaysia agreement but since reduced to colonies of Kuala Lumpur, must regain their sovereignty. The orang asli have to be freed from their status as “protected animals”. The downtrodden tappers who, emboldened by experience in the Indian National Army, refused to continue “the new kind of slavery” – as Hugh Tinker the British historian names it – on the estates and remained loyal to the memory of the executed Ganapathy can be

effectively mobilised, as Sungai Siput showed. But the movement will not become a mass movement until the Malay working class, already a large group in manufacturing, is brought in. That is why a study of the lives of Abdullah CD and Rashid Mydin is so important. And much work remains in the rural areas, still feudal and under the iron control of UMNO (Hasnul Hadi's libel action against *Utusan Melayu* revealed that ex-police sergeants had become UMNO chiefs cum headmen in the Johor villages). Scott's *The Weapons of the Weak* is a detailed survey. In this area of work a study of Shamsiah Fakeh's story, now available in print, would be valuable.

Jeyakumar and his fellow socialists will find their task easier now that capitalism has exposed itself as a catastrophic disaster. The belief that markets are self-correcting is in tatters, and honesty among the money-makers, even now diverting money to themselves, has been revealed to be non-existent. These are favourable times for those fighting globalisation and the obstacles to the growth of the developing world struggling against the pressure of American subsidies and guarantees.

But they must guard against the "Marxists" parroting Marx and Lenin, the "Maoists" waving little red books and sneering at the "rightist" Malayan Labour Party. Mao proved them wrong. So have the guerrillas in Nepal. Today these voices are still mouthing quotations about the equality of languages in a country in no way resembling a Tsarist colony, where Malay is the lingua franca and was accepted by the People's Constitution of the AMCJA-PUTERA coalition as the language of legislatures. Where once Winstedt held sway and interpreted "vernacular" to mean only "Malay", there are now schools, albeit limping woefully, teaching in Chinese and Tamil. There is a Constitution of equal rights but the leftists prefer the sterile weapon of the quote.

The socialists must also rid their minds of colonial baggage, avoiding the slavish style of writing coloured with the clichés of colonial tradition. Phrases such as "front organisations of the CPM", "armed insurrection" of 1948, "left was outmanoeuvred" and "skilful use of stratagems" still abound.

It is encouraging that this collection also reveals an awareness of the "YB" (*Yang Berhormat*) problem, the fear that success in elections will lead to the "dilution of one's anti-capitalist position", warning that "They should not become too comfortable with their new position, prestige and access to government executive power and financial privileges". This prescience calls to mind Mao Tse Tung's conversation with Andre Malraux when the chairman

told him that since coming into power some comrades were drifting away from the original ideas, or words to that effect. It was soon after that Mao launched the Cultural Revolution against the bureaucrats of the party.

In 1945-1947 it was a small group of the English-educated who provided ideas for the post-war anti-colonial programme that formed the broad coalition known as the AMCJA-PUTERA, and it was Tan Cheng Lock, the very English Baba, who taught us the weapon of the Hartal. This is not surprising for we now know that the dominant political party that led the trade unions and the women and youth movements was moribund, its activities frozen by Lai Te, its secretary general and triple agent. The Malayan Democratic Union (MDU) grew to become a powerful movement embracing all groups, so powerful that the British had to launch a fierce colonial war, called the "Emergency", to crush it. The Socialist Party is also a small handful of people committed to socialism. The present courageous and dedicated leadership promises that the PSM will grow into a broadly based movement.

**Lim Kean Chye**