

Resounding defeat for Malaysian splitters

by Sophie Tanapura

The footsoldiers for “people’s war” against Malaysia suffered a smashing defeat in the Jan. 28 Ampang Jaya parliamentary by-election, when government-backed candidate Ong Tee Keat beat Datuk Harun Idris, a dissident in the dominant UMNO party, by 4,250 votes out of 43,848 cast. The race had been characterized as “David vs. Goliath,” since it pitted a young ethnic Chinese government official, Ong, against a well-known UMNO old-timer in a predominantly ethnic Malay district. Ong’s victory is not only a decisive show of support for the Barisan National, Malaysia’s multi-ethnic ruling coalition, but the campaign itself served to bring the Malays and Chinese closer together in a common effort to promote racial harmony.

The appeal by the Barisan to Malay voters to rise above communal interests was in sharp contrast to the unprincipled tactics used by the opposition, led by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and Tunku Abdul Rahman. As the campaign progressed, it became evident that the opposition was promoting racial strife as their ticket to power. From the start, they urged Malay voters to vote for one of their own, some even going so far as to say it was forbidden by Islam to vote for a non-Muslim. The PAS, Malaysia’s Islamic party and an opponent of the Barisan, was brought in to court the fundamentalist vote. The racialism turned even uglier as the opposition began agitating among the Malays that the MCA (Malay-Chinese Association) official and Labor Minister Lee Kim Sai was anti-Malay, and that a vote for Ong was a vote for Lee Kim Sai.

Thinking the Malay votes were sewn up, Razaleigh, Harun, and Co. struck a deal with the Democratic Action Party to woo the Chinese votes. The fact that the Chinese-based, communalist DAP is strongly opposed to Malay political dominance in the country did not stop the UMNO dissidents from not only aligning with them, but adopting their demands too. This alliance is especially evil, since the DAP is currently attempting to grab nationwide control over the labor movement through its puppet union, the MTUC. So far the labor ministry has jooed their plans by prohibiting the MTUC from organizing a nationwide union in the crucial electronics sector. Certainly, therefore, it is the DAP that has the most

to gain from the opposition’s smear campaign against Labor Minister Lee Kim Sai.

Nothing makes clearer the unscrupulous tactics of the opposition than their parading in public the ailing, 86-year-old “Father Malaysia,” Tunku Abdul Rahmam, causing one observer to label the Tunku their “mascot.” The Tunku’s deep, personal resentment against Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir, who helped to oust him in 1970, causes him to make ridiculous assertions. One such claim was the form of an open letter from the Tunku to Ampang Jaya voters, in which he stated that Malaysia was better off under the Japanese occupation than it is today! This unleashed unprecedented public criticism against the Tunku, since Malaysians, especially the Chinese, suffered terribly under Japanese brutality.

While some Malaysians may be confused as to whether the Tunku is just senile and being used, or is fully cognizant of what he is doing, nonetheless his influence has waned to the point where even opposition spokesmen have been forced to admit he has more credibility internationally than in his own country.

National unity at stake

The plans of the opposition prior to their unexpected defeat were aired by Datuk Mohamed Sopiee, a columnist in the opposition daily, *The Star*, who normally takes an “above politics” approach. Sopiee wrote a column which appeared the morning after the election, predicting Harun would win, and mapping out plans for a “grand coalition” of all opposition parties. The UMNO dissidents plan to link up with the three Islamic parties to form a proposed “Muslim People’s Movement,” which in turn would ally with the DAP to form a new “party.”

Sopiee’s allegedly sincere call for a “two-party system” can only be looked at as a ploy to destroy the national stability that the Barisan has provided since it came into existence in 1952. The opposition to the Barisan has never won widespread support but has always devolved into communalist, separate interest parties. Interestingly, Sopiee sits on the board of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), a Kissinger-linked think tank that plays a key role in Malaysian-East bloc relations. Moreover, Sopiee’s son, Noordin Sopiee, is ISIS director general.

The threat that this unholy alliance poses to Malaysia was best summed up by Deputy Prime Minister Encik Ghafar Baba, who personally led the Barisan campaign for Ong to ensure the voters understood what was at stake in the election. At one campaign event, as reported in the *New Straits Times*, Ghafar warned that disunity could lead to a permanent split, as history had shown in the case of pre-independence India being partitioned into India and Pakistan. Referring to the division of Korea into two nations with opposing ideologies, he said, “I cannot bear to see Malaysia being partitioned into North and South, and the Barisan National will not allow this to happen.”