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Coming elections in Malaysia: PSM Socialists standing for the 99%

Saturday 24 March 2018, by [ARUMUGAM Sivarajan](#), [SALMON Alex](#) (Date first published: 24 March 2018).



The Socialist Party of Malaysia at a protest against the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement in Kuala Lumpur last year.

With general elections likely to be held in May, the left and democratic forces in Malaysia are discussing how to respond. Some are calling for a boycott around the #UndiRosak hashtag.

This reflects a growing belief that neither the authoritarian ruling National Front (Barisan Nasional) nor the opposition Pact for the Future (Pakatan Harapan) offer real change. Despite expressing sympathy for this view, the Malaysian Socialist Party (PSM) has decided to take part and campaign on its platform for pro-people change.

Green Left Weekly's Alex Salmon spoke to PSM general secretary Sivarajan Arumugam on the PSM's approach.

Alex Salmon - How many candidates is the PSM running and what issues will you be campaigning around?

Sivarajan Arumugam - We are putting forward 17 candidates for the federal parliament and state assemblies.

The PSM has been intensively involved in working with other comrades of the Malaysian Left Coalition for the past two years to draft out the first ever left manifesto — the “Manifesto for the 99%”.

The six main ideas that we are putting forward are: A fair distribution of wealth; free university education for all; a decent living wage for all workers; high quality and affordable housing; pension fund for the old; and towards a green, high-tech economy.

What is your attitude towards the Pakatan Harapan opposition coalition?

The Pakatan Harapan betrayed people's hopes when it accepted past dictator Mahartir Mohamad as its supreme leader and prime minister if it wins the elections. It thus proved itself very shallow in

political ideology and direction. Previously, it claimed to represent all racial groups, but that claim has expired with the entry of Mahathir's Malay-only Malaysian United Indigenous Party into the Pakatan coalition.

The fact is that the Pakatan Harapan is not confident and brave enough to build a new Malaysia with a fresh vision. Their rationale is the same as the ruling conservative Barisan Nasional government — that it needs an exclusive Malay party in the coalition to give assurance to the masses that the special privileges of Malays will be safeguarded.

Thus policies based on race and not class are reinforced. Mahathir has always been the icon of Malay supremacy. During his 1981-2003 tenure as PM, he built a rich Malay elite class through government handouts that left behind poor Malays, who today comprise the majority of urban poor.

Could you comment on the #UndiRosak phenomenon?

The PSM views the #UndiRosak wave as a manifestation of real frustrations of the masses (especially the young) towards the Pakatan Harapan. Before #UndiRosak was announced, there were many voices of dissent criticising the opposition coalition on their reluctance to solve core governance issues. But anyone who criticised the opposition was labelled as the ruling government lapdog.

This really got those who had supported the Pakatan Harapan infuriated. They voted for change, but saw no real change.

Thus the #UndiRosak campaign exploded. Still the Pakatan Harapan leaders refused to listen and continue to criticise the #UndiRosak proponents.

The PSM does not attack the #UndiRosak campaigners, as they are a healthy evolution in political thinking. People have moved on to find better alternatives when they find no real change with both the ruling and the bourgeoisie opposition coalitions.

The #UndiRosak proponents are keen on the left, but are still looking from afar before accepting the socialist platform.

What do you think will determine the timing of the calling of the election?

The general election will probably be held in May. It is the prime minister's call and basically it will be whenever the ruling party feels it can win comfortably.

P.S.

* Green Left Weekly. March 23, 2018, Issue 1174:
<https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/malaysia-socialists-standing-99>