

Malaysia: GE15: No shortcuts, no accomplishing goals by hook or by crook

Wednesday 3 August 2022, by [ARUTCHELVAN S.](#) (Date first published: 1 August 2022).

PSM recently concluded its 24th National Congress and the first one since the start of the pandemic. The event was held in Klang, between 15th of July to 17th of July 2022. It was a refreshing congress with many young people participating — displaying a promising future for socialism and giving us hope that its ideology is not outdated, but without a doubt, brewing amongst the youth. The election for the party's Central Committee was participated by 49 candidates for 10 Central Committee seats, which for the first time saw woman candidates winning 8 of them. 11 out of the 16 members that were elected into the Central Committee by the delegates of the 24th PSM National Congress were women, which equals 68.75% of the group. This makes PSM the first and only political party in Malaysia whose top leadership consists of a 2/3 majority of women.

However, one issue that was very frustrating and odd for the party was the question of elections, coalition politics, and on how we would broach the topic of electoral victory. Since we lost the last election in all its seats, there has been a growing sentiment within the party that by hook or crook, PSM has to work with a coalition due to the reason that in Malaysian politics, no party is able to gain electoral victory by going solo. When the party conducted its own internal special election discussion in February this year, members gave the leadership conditional support to only negotiate with some parties within the opposition, followed by an announcement that the party would still continue to be guided by principles even in coalition politics.

There is no doubt that the left in Malaysia was once the biggest opposition in Parliament with people like Ahmad Boestamam from the Socialist Front becoming an important leader in the opposition. Although, many things were drastically changed after the 1969 Emergency and post-NEP (New Economic Policy). Today, forces of the left have been relegated to being a third force and occasionally ridiculed as the “spent force”. Politics has also changed from class based to communal politics.

Back in January 2020, PSM underwent a soul searching exercise to strategize our role in Malaysian politics and to set goals that would bring back the glory days of the left. Just as Dr. Jeyakumar stated in his opening address at the congress, he does not want PSM to solely appear as a window dressing in Malaysian politics — we want to be one of the main players in Malaysian politics, as well as being capable of winning seats in elections.

The party's own Deklarasi Trolak — made 2 years ago — is a 10 year long plan to create that reality, similar to the situation before the 1970s. The plan involves restructuring party machinery as well as creating effective mechanisms for building party capacity in the near-future. Climate emergency, local government elections, health care, housing and poverty eradication, are amongst the issues on key campaigns the party would like to participate in. PSM would preferably like to forge an understanding with the opposition parties on these issues. Unfortunately, it seems that these kinds of issues do not inspire the political parties. Most of these issues are therefore typically taken on by

CSOs (civil society organisations) and NGOs (non-governmental organisations). We have an excellent relationship with these CSOs and NGOs, and have been historically working with them surrounding these issues. In addition, the party has built many marhaen-based coalitions on sectoral issues on its own initiatives.

Many social society groups work closely with PSM, and a majority of them see us as the only hope in bringing better policies for Malaysia. On top of that, the party has a large pool of activists and they are known to actively work within various NGOs in a great number of sectors. We have become the beacon of hope in championing their causes, including climate emergency, food security, land disputes, LGBTQIA+, migrants rights and many more.

It is disappointing that a lot of those topics are generally the ones that mainstream political parties refuse to address and actively choose to shy away from. This is sadly because most mainstream political party strategies involve incorporating individuals from the social society movement. We have seen how activists such as Sivarasa, Charles Santiago, Samad Said and Maria Chin Abdullah have been incorporated.

In the past, PSM faced a similar problem. During the party's fight for its registration — which took a whopping 10 years to achieve — we were invited as individuals to join existing opposition political parties, with offers of seats and positions. Due to our principles, our loyalty to our party, and the undeniable ideological differences, most of us declined the offered positions. Instead, we had set a condition that we would remain PSM members with an agreement to borrow their political logo. This arrangement did not go well. In 2004, DAP (Democratic Action Party) declined to lend its logo to PSM and we eventually stood under PKR (People's Justice Party) under a similar arrangement. Whenever it comes to seat negotiation, the other parties would rather hijack our members into their fold than to bring our party into a coalition.

While there will always be a strong public sentiment in wanting PSM to join the opposition front — which we have supported conditionally in the past — we are unable to join a coalition without proper preparations with good reason, despite desiring to see agreements made on broad policies.

In the 2018 PH election manifesto, it was arguably good and progressive. But the shocker came after the election when then Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that the promises were made in hopes that they will not come to fruition. This was undoubtedly a serious betrayal to election promises and on how voters were being treated by the Coalition of Hope.

Historically speaking, political coalition is based on the concept of “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” which, evidently, has never gone smoothly. We have observed time and time again how political coalitions like Barisan Alternatif, Pakatan Rakyat and Pakatan Harapan all fail, simply because they did not build consensus on key issues. These parties differ strongly on topics such as the Islamic State and Hudud. It is — without a doubt — no use going into a coalition when consensus on critical main issues are non-existent.

Without prioritising a clear understanding and consensus, these coalitions clearly cannot survive. Therefore, PSM is only committed to joining coalitions where some of these key issues are allowed to be discussed and resolved. But considering the current situation, there is nothing regarding policies — instead, just talks on the number of seats and who the PM candidate is. The biggest unity question amongst the opposition — again — would be centred around who the next PM is. On this question alone, PH would not be able to forge an understanding with other bigger coalitions like Warisan and Perikatan Nasional. Thus, at the moment, a BN victory unfortunately feels inevitable.

How much longer does the rakyat have to endure as they watch all the petty political power play

unfold while they are being constantly subjected to the increases in the prices of goods, hardships and sufferings?

PSM will therefore have to work harder and seek partnership with parties like MUDA, Warisan — as well as PH, on the issues of common positions and minimum programs. Without question, joining a fake coalition at the moment will not benefit the party and is not sustainable. Like it or not, we are better off building a stable coalition with clearer policies if we wish to achieve a longer and permanent stay in power.

Today, we apprehensively wait for elections with a bleak outcome. In this depressing scenario, two things which may be different are the Undi 18 and the anti-hopping law recently passed in Dewan Rakyat. These two factors might be the only two good motivations in incentivising people to vote. More notably, the voters who experienced the betrayal of political parties should also be advocating for pre-election demands so that they can play an active role in elections rather than leaving the business of politics in the hands of the few and their lackeys.

Certainly, PSM will have to look out and build the change that we want to see. We need to empower people-centric politics as well as build class collaboration amongst the ethnic groups, as we strongly believe there is more in common with the 99% than the 1%. Even though this path will be a lengthy one, it is unquestionably a righteous one. It cannot be by hook or crook.

S. Arutchelvan

[Click here](#) to subscribe to ESSF newsletters in English and/or French.

P.S.

Think Left

<https://thinkleft.net/2022/08/01/ge15-no-shortcuts-no-accomplishing-goals-by-hook-or-by-crook/>