

Malaysia: Najib's in prison, yet the rot remains

Tuesday 30 August 2022, by [KATHIRTCHELVAN Arveent](#) (Date first published: 28 August 2022).

With Najib finally going to jail, liberals are having a field day claiming it was only through voting for them that this great achievement was won. Perhaps it is undeniable that they did play a role in this victory, although a pyrrhic one. Yes, Najib has been found guilty today and is now in jail, but were the circumstances in which he was born altered meaningfully? Are we sure that another Najib will never exist again, or does not already exist — perhaps one with even more sophistication with regard to avoiding getting caught?

PH's (Pakatan Harapan) victory may have led to his imprisonment, but it also led to the consolidation of the fascist forces in the coalition between UMNO (United Malays National Organisation) and PAS (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia). Bolstering these was the rogue division of Bersatu that split itself from PH, alongside a sizeable chunk of PKR (Parti Keadilan Rakyat) leadership to undemocratically overthrow PH's government within a span of just 22 months. What can we learn from this? Liberals will complain that they were betrayed by those they trusted. But it is they that trusted those who are most untrustworthy. We remember how they raised Mahathir and his ilk into the highest seats of power. We remember how they assimilated those from BN (Barisan Nasional) into their ranks to bolster political power. What is the use in complaining now when the fault remains within the shortcut taken?

Corruption as a symptom, not the disease

Where does that leave us with post-Najib's incarceration? The recent uproar of the LCS scandal is an example of liberals of today advocating for more focus on battling corruption. While these remain important issues, to the discerning leftist they are anything but manifestations of a decaying superstructure enabled and concerns itself with only protecting a rotting base, proverbial leafless branches arising from a rotten core. Are we to satisfy ourselves by merely pruning branches, leaving the core to decay?

What is this core exactly? Why, as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels explained, it is none other than the mode of production, comprising of the means of production (machinery, land, factories etc) and the relations of production (employer-employee relations, conditions of work, division of labour etc.). The current mode of production alienates the worker from that which they produce. Within the relationship of employer-employee, most of what the worker produces is taken by the employer with a small concession made to the worker in the form of a salary.

This extra surplus value — in the form of profit — is held by the capitalist as the owner of the means of production, who has complete control on how to spend it. This is the alienation of the worker from what they have produced, having no way of determining how to use it, solely on the basis of not having enough capital to own the means of production themselves. The capitalist is free to use this money to benefit themselves, pushing forward legislation to benefit themselves, give bribes and engage in further oppression of the underclass.

Without this basic understanding at the base, at the level of the workplace, the superstructure built from it echoes the same arrangement, that of opacity of how funds are used. Hence, without common Malaysians being privy to the tax monies paid, they go into the pockets of whoever is in power. Legislation is either unable to prevent this, instead largely protects this on the basis of official secrets or those that protect private property.

How to cleanse the core

We need to realise that combating the branch of the superstructure — which is corruption — needs a cleansing of the core base, and that takes place through the rearrangement of the relations of production and the ownership of the means of production. This should be achieved by organising workers and into functional units such as unions, to push for better work conditions and then eventually take over the means of production. These units must have a say in the direction of a company's profits, wages and benefits, giving some oversight into how what they have produced is used. It is important that these structures are democratic and collective in nature, as, after all, profits are achieved collectively.

Apart from growing these into organisations managed and owned by workers, parallel structures to organise common people into councils from the level of the residential area must be established to build solidarity between individuals within a community. The individualisation of the masses, a kind of alienation from each other, allows those with capital to rule unopposed. The common individual compared to an individual with immense capital is insignificantly powerless. The common individual needs to sell their labour to survive, thus depends on the capitalist and has to play to the tune of the capitalist's ideation. If they do not, another powerless individual takes their place. But the capitalist needs the worker too as only through their labour can surplus value be achieved. Hence, by banding together, workers can demand concessions from capitalists by threatening the withdrawal of their labour. Similarly, they can band together and threaten any organisation, including the capitalist state, through the withdrawal of their labour and votes, where ever relevant.

Over time, with the growth of these organisations, common people can ask about where their tax monies went. As they see the cracked pavement, the run down clinics and Malaysia's decaying infrastructure, they can ask of their local government why these have not been fixed. As now they are great in numbers, their voice carries much larger power. Building on these, the masses can push for inclusion in auditing and deciding what the money allocated for their needs be spent on directly. As these organisations are collectively arranged, there is an understanding that no one group or person that can make decisions to benefit themselves. Hence, funds that are used are more likely to be holistically distributed. With enough of this kind of organising, eventually even federal funding can be questioned effectively.

The base informing reaction

Admittedly, everything addressed is easier said than done, but they have to be done. If we are to rely on bourgeois democratic shortcuts to win power, the events that we would witness might be similar to PH's rule. A government that is unable, unwilling or both, in addressing the core rot of capitalism results in the strengthening of further reactionary elements. If the culling of corruption is focused as the only problem to be solved with a bourgeois democratic coalition taking on the role of saviour against another bourgeois democratic coalition, it is a reactionary stance that will be fought against with other reactionary stances. Such a stance is the race-religion supremacy upheld by UMNO and PAS.

If PH had built the proper organisations of the masses, those organisations would have banded together the second they lost the seat of power and delivered it back to them through a show of

force against the conspirators of the Sheraton Move. However, PH, being servants of capitalism themselves, did not see the value in building this solidarity, focusing only on attaining power through whatever means necessary. Hence, the rehabilitation of Mahathir.

We must break with these halfway measures. The next election is near and the expected rhetoric will be laid thick on saviours and villains, yet mainstream politicians do not build the kind of resilience the marhaen need. For this, we have no choice but to organise, organise and then organise even more — only then would the decay of capitalism be overthrown, and a new dawn for the common people to be realised.

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