

Malaysia: Vote PSM for Semenyih

Monday 5 August 2019, by [THAYAPARAN S](#) (Date first published: 18 February 2019).

“Kalau menang PSM berkhidmat, kalau kalah PSM masih berkhidmat. Ini politik PSM. Tetap berkhidmat untuk rakyat. (If we win PSM will serve. If we lose, PSM will still serve. That is PSM’s politics. It will always serve the people.)”

- Nik Aziz Afiq Abdul

COMMENT | Nik Aziz Afiq Abdul’s story is a familiar one when it comes to why people join Parti Sosialis Malaysia. Working for an NGO when he first came across PSM, he was impressed by their dedication to the rakyat.

As the PSM candidate for the coming [Semenyih](#) by-election, he is doing everything you would expect from a candidate of a political party that has always demanded real change, but has been failing at the ballot box.

He has [declared his assets](#) and [agreed to a debate](#). The latter is a tiresome prospect because there are no real political debates – even in the West – where it is all about personality and not about policy.

But, hey, it would be interesting to see how a PSM candidate differs from the other mainstream candidates. As for how much he’s worth, that’s another story.

Unlike mainstream political hegemony, PSM does work the grassroots and work for the grassroots. Here’s the thing about PSM activist/political operatives – winning or losing is not the point of their struggle.

I hate it when mainstream political operatives talk about their ‘struggle,’ because it does not mean a struggle for the people they claim to represent, but rather their struggle for political relevancy in the rigged game they choose to play in.

But talk to any PSM member/supporter – be they Malay, Chinese, Indian or Orang Asli – and political relevancy, though desirable, is not the paramount concern.

Their concerns are the issues – local – facing the communities they operate in, and the larger socioeconomic context of political hegemony at odds with a sometimes apathetic, but most often voiceless strata of society.

Independence and service

People often talk about the ‘*tongkat*’ (crutch) mentality of the Malay community. On the one hand, they mock and are dismissive of the entitlements for the community. On the other, they choose the pragmatic approach of furthering these programmes because it is beneficial to the party of their choice.

Nik Aziz talks about being independent and continuing working as a masseur so he does not have to rely on outside funds.

He talks about using his allowance as an MP to fund a service centre to help the people, as former PSM Sungai Siput lawmaker Dr D Michael Jeyakumar did. He knows his work could provide him with an avenue to learn more about the people he serves.

What we are talking about here are ideas of independence and service which are far more important in changing minds than whatever the mainstream political alternatives are offering, in terms of promises of more entitlements, or using the federal machinery to entice voters to vote for them.

Nik Aziz may be inexperienced, but his inexperience is that of not knowing how to work the system to his political advantage. He understands there is something wrong with the system, and he wants to engage with it and change it.

This is why PSM candidates say that win or lose, they will continue working for the people. They understand there are no quick fixes.

This is echoed in the [interview](#) I did with PSM central committee member S Arutchelvan: "Though we have lost elections, we have won many local struggles in estates, squatters, and at work sites, and these victories keep us going.

"Our track record in the grassroots struggle cannot be challenged by any other parties. Today, some good policies are there because of our long struggle."

Breaking the system

Voters in Semenyih have a choice. They could opt for the mainstream political parties embroiled in a conflict about political power, or they could choose an independent party/individual, which could be the first small step in breaking the dominion of the two-party system, which offers little difference in terms of policy or modus operandi.

Suaram adviser Kua Sia Soong [articulates](#) the need for a third progressive force in Malaysian politics: "Thus, at the by-election in Semenyih, PSM can spearhead a long-overdue 'Third Progressive Force' to offer a non-racial, progressive and sustainable alternative to BN 1.0 and BN 2.0 for the future generations of Malaysians."

PSM has always had a low-key approach to political campaigns. This is because they are not flushed with funds like the other mainstream political parties.

Now that Pakatan Harapan is in power, no doubt the federal machinery would be mobilised to exert influence over the elections. We can see the kind of political games played instead of narrowing in on policy.

Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad is playing the psywar game, by claiming that PAS [will not support](#) BN in this by-election.

His latest meeting with PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang is typical 'Malay' politics, all smoke and mirrors, to cloud the issue and make partisans focus on anything but the lacklustre candidate Harapan has put up. Keep everyone guessing and nobody will concentrate on the issues.

Who knows if PAS will support Umno - although they have been voices of support - but that's the whole point of the game. Muddy the waters, and make it a spectacle.

Hadi, of course, is doing his part to 'keep 'em guessing'. If the Malays are spooked by the power plays of the political elite, they will cling to stability where they can find it.

Meanwhile, Bersatu Youth chief Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman is playing the victim card with his close encounter of the third kind with rowdy Umno supporters. The youth and sports minister said he would lodge a police report about his [near assault](#) by Umno supporters.

To get an alternative narrative, read PSM Youth chief Khalid Ismath's take on the situation, as [reported](#) in the *Malay Mail*: "Khalid, however, said all other Harapan leaders and ministers did not take the path that Syed Saddiq took, pointing out that the Election Commission has dictated far apart areas for the parties running in the Semenyih state race.

"'But this youth minister ignored police orders and intentionally entered BN's path. Provocation,' he tweeted."

PSM candidates have no need for this drama. Years of interacting with the establishment means they do not needlessly provoke a confrontation to get press.

When they protest and are hauled up the establishment, it is for a purpose. This purpose is not to draw attention to themselves, but to the cause they are advocating.

I hope PSM wins, or at least makes a good showing of it. However, for people like Nik Aziz, even if he loses, he will still carry on the work of speaking out for the marginalised.

S THAYAPARAN is commander (rtd) of the Royal Malaysian Navy. A retired barrister-at-law, he is one of the founding members of Persatuan Patriot Kebangsaan.

S Thayaparan

[Click here](#) to subscribe to our weekly newsletters in English and or French. You will receive one email every Monday containing links to all articles published in the last 7 days.

P.S.

Malaysiakini

<https://www.malaysiakini.com/columns/464450>