

Peter Symonds replies to two letters on the trial of Anwar Ibrahim in Malaysia

18 December 1998

To the editor,

I will grant that Anwar went along with the policies of Mahathir and the ruling elite, otherwise, he would scarcely have got to the position he did. But I believe that Anwar as PM would have moved in the direction of change, bearing in mind that you cannot change Rome in a day. That would have included freeing up the press and cleaning up the judiciary and he had expressed such views before he was sacked, not after. He would have reduced corruption, cronyism and nepotism. He himself must be one of the cleanest persons holding high office in Malaysia if you consider just how little dirt Mahathir could dig up to charge him with. Apart from the ridiculous and unbelievable sodomy charges, those cases of technical corruption are a little unconvincing.

J

Dear J,

Thank you for your e-mail to the *World Socialist Web Site*.

What you say about the charges against Malaysia's former deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim is probably true. Whatever the basis of the allegations, they have clearly been dragged up now to suit the political needs of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and the ruling United Malays National Organisation (UMNO). Such crude methods have been used in the past in factional brawls within UMNO and by UMNO against its political opponents.

I do not agree, however, that Anwar as leader would make any change for the better for the vast mass of working people in Malaysia. Calls for 'democracy' and reforms are being made increasing frequently in countries in Asia. But it is necessary to distinguish between the genuine aspirations of workers, students, intellectuals and sections of the middle class for

democratic reforms and a decent standard of living, and those like Anwar, US Vice President Al Gore and others who act as spokesmen for international finance capital.

In the middle of the APEC meeting, Anwar wrote an editorial in the *Asian Wall Street Journal* calling for an end to corruption and nepotism, for financial and trade deregulation, and for 'a gale of creative destruction' to sweep away all the old ties between government, the state and business. His proposals are completely in line with the demands of international investors for the abolition of all barriers to the free flow of profits and capital, and for legal guarantees for their investments.

The 'gale of creative destruction' advocated by Anwar would have disastrous consequences for the working class as whole sections of industry would be wiped out. The outcome of the IMF's policies are all too evident in South Korea and Indonesia where poverty and unemployment have risen dramatically. Neither Anwar nor Mahathir has any solution to the deepening economic crisis produced by the profit system itself.

Genuine democratic reforms are completely bound up with the struggle for social justice and social equality. That is why in the four decades since formal independence from the British, the Malaysian ruling class as a whole has proven completely incapable of providing for the basic rights and social needs of the majority of working people. Since 1957, UMNO and its allies have used the most ruthless methods to defend the economic power and privileges of the wealthy few.

The only social force capable of carrying out a consistent struggle for democratic rights and social equality is the working class as part of the broader objective of remaking society completely along socialist lines. To do so, it needs to organise independently of all sections of the capitalist class and in that way to win to its side students, intellectuals and

sections of the middle class also stifled by capitalism.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Symonds,

World Socialist Web Site

The dispute between Anwar and Mahathir

To the editor,

The truth is that Dr. Mahathir and Anwar have different opinions in solving the current economic crisis. Since almost 100% of the Malays are Moslems, the most effective tools to attack the former Deputy Minister is through sexual allegations. The Moslems are very sensitive especially with sexual misconduct issues. Mahathir is of the opinion that one has to lead to solve the current economic turmoil and he unfortunately chose himself. His cronies make the matter worse. Since Malaysia face the economic problem, many of his cronies are in great debt crisis. Billions of dollars. Surely, if Anwar becomes Prime Minister, the possibility that he will save Mahathir cronies is less, so Mahathir has no choice but to sack Anwar using sexual misconduct as the substance to confuse the people. Well, he's gone too far and everyone knows it. It is time for him to go.

AS

Dear AS,

Thank you for your e-mail to the *World Socialist Web Site* concerning the political crisis in Malaysia.

Much of what you write is true. The dispute between Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and his former deputy Anwar Ibrahim is about sharp differences within the ruling elite over the direction of economic policy. Mahathir has taken action against Anwar and imposed tight new monetary and financial controls in order to prop up sections of big business hard hit by the country's recessions. He is certainly using the allegations of sexual misconduct to obscure the underlying political issues.

It is time for him to go, as you say. But then the crucial question for working people in Malaysia is: who will replace him and what policies are required to meet their needs and aspirations?

One of the reasons why Mahathir has been able to retain some support, is that many people are understandably sceptical about the 'market reforms' pushed by the IMF and the US, and championed by Anwar. After all the 'creative destruction' of the market,

which Anwar advocates in his recent editorial in the Asian Wall Street Journal, has produced a social disaster in countries like Indonesia, South Korea and elsewhere, throwing millions out of work and into poverty virtually overnight.

The fundamental cause of the economic crisis in Asia and elsewhere is not 'crony capitalism' and 'corruption' but the workings of the capitalist system itself. Even the more astute bourgeois commentators have pointed to the dangers of the world economy being engulfed by a 1930s-style depression. Economic rivalries are sharpening particularly in the Asian region. Gore's support for Anwar and 'reformasi' is completely bound up with the US demand for the opening up of the Asian economies to provide economic opportunities for US banks and corporations.

Workers cannot place their faith in Anwar, Mahathir or any other political representative of the capitalist class to carry out democratic reforms or to meet their social needs. They have to begin to fight for their own class interests which lie in the complete reorganisation of society along socialist lines so that the great wealth created by the working class is used to benefit the majority, not a tiny wealthy elite. In doing so, the working class would win the support of layers of students, intellectuals, small farmers and other sections of the middle class who have also been hard hit by the economic crisis.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Symonds,

World Socialist Web Site

See Also:

'A legal farce: Malaysian judge orders Anwar's lawyer jailed'

[2 December 1998]

'A gale of creative destruction': What Anwar Ibrahim means by 'reformasi' in Malaysia'

[26 November 1998]



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