

60 or 66: 318 or 169 revisited

By Dunstan Chan First published in Borneo Post 30 August 2023

Okay, it is that time of the year again when we ponder on such question as “318 or 169?” I have written about this a few times and thought I would give it a rest this year. However, someone has just opened the can of worms again. If you are non-plussed about what I am talking about, it is about Malaysia Day, the day our nation was formed – was it on 31 August (318) or 16 September (169)? Today is 30 August and the fact that our city is not festooned with flags means that the question is finally settled. I think it was settled by our beloved Chief Minister, the late Adenan Satem.

Let me recap, 31 August 1957 was the day when Malaya (sic) gained its independence, the day when Tunku Abdul Rahman shouted triumphantly “Merdeka!” seven times. When the new nation Malaysia was proposed all the parties concerned thought it would be neat if we could choose 31 August as the significant date so that we could celebrate the two momentous events together. However, Indonesia and Philippines threw a spanner in the works. They protested at the United Nations that the people of Sarawak and Sabah were not fully consulted on this important matter. Hence a UN fact-finding mission was formed to assess the view of our people. They did not finish their job until it after 31 August 1963. So, Malaysia was formed on 16 September 1963.

One might say, 31 August or 16 September, what is difference? Really, there should be none ... except that those who insist on 31 August being the day of the formation of Malaysia harbour the thought (consciously or unconsciously) that Sarawak and Sabah JOINED not FORMED Malaysia. For decades Sarawak followed the narrative that Sarawak and Sabah joined the enlarged Federation of Malaya that is Malaysia. We were the little brothers being co-opted into that nation. Malaysia is merely an expansion of the then independent nation, Malaya. It acquired two extra states from the island of Borneo. Therefore, it follows that all our wealth and rights are subsumed under the Federation. In fact, for years if Putrajaya were to ask us to jump, we would just reply, “how high?”

It was the author, the late Zainnal Ajamain who through 15 years of research that culminated into a book called “The Queen’s Obligation” that brought to the fore the provisions of Malaysia Agreement 1963 and the Report of the Inter-Governmental Committee (IGC) that set the conditions for the Sarawak, Sabah (and the then Singapore) and Malaya for the formation a new nation called Malaysia.

What really triggered me to dash to my computer was a posting on social media of a message by a prominent personality, Tan Sri Rafidah Aziz. She wrote “Good morning on this New Day we are so Fortunate to be able to welcome . . . On 31 August, all Malaysians in our various diversities, will be celebrating the 66th Anniversary of our NATION'S Independence from the colonial masters.”

Wait a minute, did she say 66th anniversary? I did a quick calculation: 2023 minus 1963 is 60, right? So, where does the 66 years come from? Of course, it is the counting from 1957. So, she is alluding to the idea that Malaysia came into being in 1957 and thus Sarawak and Sabah were mere additions in 1963. By the way Singapore also joined in 1963 but they were smart enough to get out in 1965. Look at them now! Bully for them! We in the meantime surrendered to the national coffer the bulk of our natural wealth and in return, together with Sabah, are considered the least developed states in the Federation.

In the last few years, Sarawak are awakening from its slumber and are slowly trying to claw back what we have lost, but many are feeling that it is “all too slowly”. However, there is a new phenomenon that is emerging in West Malaysia that might force us to quicken our pace. This is the so-called Green Wave that is sweeping down from the north of Malaya. In the last state elections of six states, they made a clean sweep of the three states of Kelantan, Terengganu and Kedah, riding on the battle cry of the supremacy of their 2Rs (Race and Religion). Flushed with the victory they are now emboldened to proposed to have their own logo for the celebration of Malaysia Day and even more brazenly want to work for the formation of a Malay-Muslim only government for the country.

Someone once said, “You can believe in stones, but don't throw them at me”. Indeed, all of us would agree that we should not use our religion (or race for that matter) to beat others. However sadly as the last state elections in Malaya showed, race and religion can be mighty tools for battle. Even more sad is that it seemed that even the apparently more progressive PH

government is succumbing to this populist political tool, the siren call of race and religion. We can observe that lots of favours and enticement were thrown at the “Green Wave” states. Alas, to no avail. One can never outbid the offers of those who promise heaven in this world and the next.

Let me end with an ancient story. It is about a king called Canute. King Canute was a pious and humble king. He was fed up with his courtiers who were obsequious and flattered him excessively, saying that the King was so powerful that he could do anything. So, he asked them to place his throne on the beach just pass the line where the tide came in. He sat on his throne and gestured to order the tide not to come in. Of course, it was to no avail. In time, his throne was inundated, and he had to evacuate.

How does story of King Canute relate to us here in Sarawak? Well, perhaps this: Sarawak is separated from Malaya not just physically by geography, but historically and socially. Here we want to live up to the slogan of “Unity in diversity”. So, let us place our “throne” beyond the tideline of the Green Wave, so the wave cannot reach us. Perhaps it is time to cut the umbilical cord which Malaya made us believe that ties us to them.

Source: <https://www.theborneopost.com/2023/08/27/60-or-66-318-or-169-revisited/>