

# What is wrong with political satire?

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*“Political satire to be most effective.*

*Is caustic, unfair and never objective.*

*With all this in mind, you may ask why I’m for it.*

*The answer is simple: Tyrants abhor it.”*

*– Leonard Freedman, *The Offensive Art* (2009).*

Whatever the intention of the 11-minute satirical clip of Seputeh Member of Parliament Teresa Kok entitled, “Onederful Malaysia CNY 2014”, was, I find it puzzling that this clip was alleged to contain elements that could trigger fear among the public and was deemed an insult to Malay leadership and Islam.

I could not comprehend why there is a need to suspend sitcom “88 Kopitiam” just because one of the actors in the sitcom might be involved with the clip.

Where is our sense of humour? Although I do not find the clip particularly funny, what is wrong with political satire?

I personally do not find the clip to be insulting to Malay leadership and Islam. Moreover, we have had so many examples of political satire from both coalitions, be it Barisan Nasional (BN) or Pakatan Rakyat (PR) in the past.

While everyone is free to criticise such political satire and to demonstrate, it is simply outrageous and ridiculous that members of the Muslim NGOs went to the extent of slaughtering two chickens and offered a RM1,200 reward to anyone who dared slap the Seputeh MP as a sign of protest.

Why is there a need to slaughter the chickens?

I also think it is unconvincing for the Council of Islamic NGOs, which consists of five Muslim NGOs, to link the clip to the May 13, 1969 racial riot.

It is sad to see the growing trend of making every matter into a racial and religious one.

In the past, we have had many forms of political satire including political cartoons. It is common to see political cartoons in the daily print media.

So why is the video of the Seputeh MP exceptionally “insulting”? Is it just because it is now a trend to turn everything into a racial one? Such forms of reaction indirectly reflect the weakness of the government.

The negative reactions on political satire however are not uncommon in Malaysia.

Malaysia has in the past banned the works of political cartoons that criticise the government, and deemed that such gestures posed a security threat.

Publications and videos that assumed to have potential to influence people to revolt against the leaders and government policies were not permitted.

In short, critical views on the government are not allowed in the country.

For decades, scholarship on the effectiveness and impact of political satire and jokes has been carried out.

Political satire is a humorous, exaggerated or sarcastic form of reflection of the political arena with the intention to expose the wrongdoing or hypocrisy. In fact, it is also an effective form of channelling information to the public because it is easy for the community to understand political issues.

Political satire and jokes can be a way to see politics in a lighter light and it could also be a very useful education method for young generation.

Passionate with the art of political satire, Leonard Freedman, the professor emeritus of Political Science at the University of California, Los Angeles, has an exclusive blog, [strictlysature.com](http://strictlysature.com), dedicated just for this purpose.

I quote:

*“Political satire is therapeutic. Every day we watch breaking news about the carnage of war, the blundering of leaders, the never-ending greed and corruption – all extremely depressing. Satire transmutes these continuing tales of human depredation and folly into ridicule to bring us solace in laughter.”*

In Malaysia, seeing the lighter side of politics is something that many politicians have yet to learn to accept.

One of the best examples of seeing the lighter side of politics and to bring it close to our hearts is the Android-based game called “Conquest of Putrajaya” introduced by Game Pro International, a Penang-based game developer.

The players have the option of either to help the BN or PR to win power by spawning cartoon caricatures of politicians to fight each other.

We need a politician who is mature and able to comprehend the rationale behind every political satire or jokes. Being able to laugh at oneself is a skill; it is another skill to be a good leader.

A good leader should be able to act positively towards the jokes and respond to the criticism.

Recently in Victoria Park Hong Kong, the Lunar New Year was also a time for political satire. A pro-democracy group were selling rolls of toilet paper printed with the face of Hong Kong Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying. The pro-democracy couplets also became a growing trend in the festive season.

The situation in Malaysia and Hong Kong can be quite aptly summarised as how Coluche, the French comedian and activist, said, “humour has always been anti-authority”.

Satire is an effective way of revealing the falsity of positions by politicians. It would be wonderful if we could have our own news satire program, similar to “The Daily Show with Jon Stewart”. One day, I hope. – February 10, 2014.

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