

The Bear in Tartan

Too many politicians are still not listening



It seemed almost surreal. The helicopters clattered around us, circling and filming. A crowd rushed along the street opposite, chased by riot police into the park behind. Strangest of all, the sound of sirens and the call to prayer in the distance, the chanting of the Koran, the sound of morality, swirling in the smoke.

Kuala Lumpur, Saturday July 9, 2011.

It is unnerving to be in a city when people get angry. On this occasion, the crowd was demanding political change. They wanted electoral reform. They sought to challenge those in charge, to end what they saw as so much injustice. In a country characterised by unfairness for years, which has allowed a minority to fill their pockets with so many undeserved gains, they were demanding reform.

Feeling the tension on the streets today, I heard another message. Malaysia is also a warning-beacon to much of the rest of the world.

The problems in Malaysia exist in many other countries too. The gap between the rich and poor is just as wide in America. The sense that politicians are serving their own needs and not those of the voters is growing. The belief that a minority has gained unfairly over the last 30 years is widespread. The feeling that the man in the street is suffering from the greed of a few. The sense that the state is suppressing people's voices rather than making the changes that are necessary.

Wherever social and political injustices occur, wherever governments become self-serving, wherever a minority has grabbed an unfair share of wealth and power, and wherever a judiciary has lost its moral compass, the same story risks unfolding – in America, Europe and much of Asia too.

Victims of injustice need to be heard. They need to be listened to properly – in Kuala Lumpur, London, Cairo, Athens and many other cities. When people are willing to risk their lives for what they believe in, it is growing rather too late for easy change. Crushing them will not crush their ideas. It will not right the wrongs they have suffered.

So take note, politicians around the world, wherever you are. Too many of your societies have allowed a minority to gain too much in the last 30 years. Too many elected representatives have failed to respond as social divisions have widened. Too many have simply shrugged as the injustices have grown.

Tainted ideas of democracy, warped methods of maintaining law and order and social inequality are problems facing too many countries.

Politicians need to address them or make way for those who can.



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