



Written by [John F. McManus](#) on March 1, 2016

## Trouble Arises in Malaysia

Malaysia is an Asian country situated south of Thailand in the Malay Peninsula. At the peninsula's extreme southern tip can be found the city-state of Singapore. While Singapore is known for enforcing a strict code of conduct for its people, Malaysia had, until recently, a more relaxed and freedom-prevailing atmosphere. That reputation has been dealt a rather severe blow. But let's consider some of Malaysia's history before turning to its current problem.



During the 18th century, various kingdoms located in the area became subject to the British Empire. A Malayan Union emerged during the post-World War II years and the Federation of Malaya won independence in 1957. That federation soon spread to include the northern portions of Borneo in 1963. In 1965, Singapore found itself expelled from the new nation and has functioned alone ever since. It was during the early 1960s that the former Malayan Union adopted the name Malaysia by which it is currently known.

Malaysia's head of state is its king, currently Yang di-Pertuan Agong. Surprisingly, his royal designation isn't hereditary; he's elected. A prime minister who must be serving in the House of Representatives holds most of the nation's political power. Since 2009, Najib Razak has held this post. But he is now suspected of stashing \$700 million in his personal bank account, a charge that has led to massive protests in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur.

Within the past year, as many as 100,000 have gathered in the capital demanding that government clean up such practices as accepting and hiding ill-gotten money. As a symbol of their dismay, the protesters have worn yellow t-shirts carrying the simple message "Bersih 4." Translated, the word means "clean" and the number "4" designates that a recent protest is the fourth in a series.

The government's response has been to declare wearing those t-shirts a threat to national security. The nation's Home Minister actually banned public display of the shirts but the people defied his mandate and defiantly wore them anyway. The Malaysian High Court has now upheld the ban and anyone caught wearing the forbidden garment faces arrest and a fine of approximately \$1,200. Tony Pua, a member of parliament who is an opponent of Prime Minister Najib says, "For the government to ban a t-shirt that means 'clean' is a farce."

But it's evidently more than a farce that can be ignored because a shirt wearer can now get arrested and fined. In reality, it's a marked step toward tyranny. Along with the ban on yellow t-shirts has come police investigation of a graphic artist who produced an online drawing of Prime Minister Najib looking like a clown. It seems that [George Orwell-style thought police](#) have emerged in Malaysia.

With all the troubles we have in America, no one would yet go so far as to ban a t-shirt no matter what message it carries. Nor have we reached the point where caricature drawings of political figures lead to government scrutiny. We still have the First Amendment and its guarantee of "freedom of speech."

In days gone by, newly formed nations have looked to the United States as a model to guide formation



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of their own constitutions and laws. But this practice is occurring far more infrequently as our own leaders skirt the U.S. Constitution while devising new ways to usurp power. We are forced to wonder whether the day will come when a t-shirt bearing the slogan “Get US out of the United Nations” is banned. Or when another proclaims “Abortion stops a beating heart,” or still another demands “Bring the troops home!”

Knowing what has happened in Malaysia should impel Americans to resist being silenced by political correctness or by a Malaysia-style exercise in overbearing government. It should also help many to realize that a determination to return to less government and more responsibility is the far better way. Less government can be found in the limitations appearing in the U.S. Constitution, and more responsibility found in the Ten Commandments. If Americans honor those guidelines, maybe even Malaysia will consider them.

*John F. McManus is president emeritus of [The John Birch Society](#). This column appeared originally at the [insideJBS](#) blog and is reprinted here with permission.*



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