

Tan Koon Swan JP (President from Nov. 1985 – Sept. 1986)



Mr Tan was born to a poor family. Even as a young boy, he showed his entrepreneurship by helping his parents who were hawkers. He finished his form five in a missionary school, worked as a clerk with Lembaga Lektrik Negara and studied part-time to finish his High School Certificate. Later, he became a laboratory technician with LLN then moved on to be an investigator of Inland Revenue Department and a tax consultant with Esso.

He got his break in 1970 when he became the General Manager of Genting Highlands Berhad and helped to make the resort a success. His involvement in politics began in 1977 when he accepted an invitation by the then MCA president Tan Sri Lee San Choon to head the Koperatif Sebaguna Malaysia (KSM) and Multi-Purpose Holdings Berhad (MPHB). He was to spearhead Chinese participation in all spheres of economic development.

Mr Tan made his political debut in the general elections on July 8, 1978 when he won the Raub parliamentary seat in Pahang. He joined the MCA Central Committee in 1979 and became the chairman of MCA Wilayah Persekutuan State Liaison Committee. In the 1982 general elections, he again won a parliamentary seat in the DAP stronghold of Damansara.

In 1984, the MCA plunged into a crisis sparked off by phantom membership. It came to a head on March 17 when a group of Central Committee members held a seven-hour meeting and demanded a task force to investigate the existence of phantom membership. When the demand was rejected, 15 Central Committee members wanted an extraordinary meeting of the general assembly to be convened on April 22 in order to adopt a resolution to elect a committee to investigate the phantom membership allegation.

On March 19, Acting President, Datuk Dr. Neo Yee Pan dismissed Mr Tan as chairman of the Wilayah Persekutuan Liaison Committee and Datuk Lee Kim Sai as Selangor Liaison Committee Chairman. Datuk Mak Hon Kam, Chairman of the Disciplinary Board, further expelled 14 top party leaders. They included the previous President of the party Tun Dr. Ling

Liong Sik who was then a Central Committee member and Deputy Finance Minister, Mr. Tan, a Vice-President, Datuk Lee, MCA Youth chief and also a Vice-President.

On March 21, a group of central delegates inserted advertisements in the newspapers calling all central delegates to write in to demand for an extraordinary meeting to be held on April 29. Apart from demanding re-instatement of all those expelled, they also wanted a special committee to probe into the phantom membership allegation. Branch and divisional elections scheduled to be held from March to May were suspended to allow checking of the party's register and all party elections were to be held 30 days after the scrutiny. The call received overwhelming support. Within 48 hours, 1,499 signatures were collected representing 59 per cent of the total 2,517 central delegates.

Despite the support, the attempt to hold the extraordinary meeting was blocked. On May 17, the case was brought up to the Ipoh High Court. It was exposed then there were 21,693 fake members in 10 "controlled" divisions. The admission sparked off a call for reform by 45 MCA MPs and State Assemblymen with the support of 80 per cent of divisions and branches, including those of Wanita MCA and MCA Youth.

The crisis dragged on for 20 months and eventually Datuk Dr. Neo accepted a formula forwarded by Deputy Prime Minister Tun Ghafar Baba which paved the way for a fair and clean election. On November 24, 1985, a party election was held and Mr Tan became the new President.

Mr Tan honoured its pledge to make the MCA a more liberal and democratic party. On March 2, 1986 a special delegates conference was held to make major amendments to the party Constitution, one of which was to curb the presidential power in expelling members.

However, a very unfortunate episode followed. Mr Tan was charged in Singapore over his private business dealings. He made several attempts to resign but was repeatedly rejected by the Central Committee. When the Singapore High Court made its verdict against him, he tendered his resignation again. A Central Committee delegation went down to Singapore to urge him change his mind, he refused. On August 27, 1986, the Central Committee accepted Mr Tan's resignation with regret. The Central Committee put on record the tremendous contribution by Mr Tan towards party and the Chinese community.

With the resignation of Mr Tan, Tun Dr. Ling Liong Sik who was then the Deputy President took over the reign in accordance with the new party Constitution. He continued the task of pushing for a more democratic and liberal party under the concept of collective leadership.

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| 1940,
September 24 | Tan Koon Swan was born in Puchong New Village, Selangor. |
| 1970 | Appointed General Manager of Genting Highlands Berhad. |
| 1976 | Attended Senior Management Course in Harvard University in the United States. |
| 1977 | Appointed General Manager of Koperatif Sebaguna Malaysia (KSM) and Managing Director of Multi-Purpose Holdings Berhad. |

1978, July 8	Won the Raub Parliamentary seat and became an MP.
1979	Voted into the MCA Central Committee and became Chairman of MCA Wilayah Persekutuan State Liaison Committee.
1982, April 22	Won the Damansara Parliamentary seat by a landslide majority of 14,522 votes, defeating V. David of DAP and Ramli Yasin of Pas.
1982, September 26	Became Vice-President of the MCA.
1985, November 24	Elected President of the MCA.
1986, August 4	Won the Gopeng Parliamentary seat with a majority of 6,135 votes in the general elections.
1986, August 27	Resigned as President.

*In 2012, former Singaporean chief prosecutor Glenn Knight released a book revealing that Mr Tan had been wrongfully convicted and that the Singapore courts had erred in sending him to jail.