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Interviews with three anarchists in Indonesia vs Anti-Sistema

Palang Hitam International, Anti-Sistema

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8. Last August’s uprising revealed many things that had remained hidden under “normal” circumstances. It exposed the contradiction between the system’s claims and reality, demonstrated the limits of collective patience that had been exceeded, exposed the true face of power and its mechanisms of domination, whilst also uncovering the latent potential for collective action within society; at the same time, the uprising also proved that the seemingly stable order is actually fragile and dependent on compliance, and that the meaning of the event itself is always contested through various competing narratives. But more importantly, it reveals the fact that the left-wing movement and the majority of anarchists are a pseudo-opposition.

9. What is needed is the translation of relevant texts. Not just past anarchist theory and practice, but also bringing local experiences into the global discourse—whether it’s ways of organizing, ways of confronting state repression, or ways of responding to apathy or fragmentation in each locality. I think many anarchists here have been doing this since the early 2000s. But now it’s relatively rare. I’m not exactly sure why that is. Furthermore, direct relationships also need to be cultivated. Many connections today are one-way: reading, watching, and following. We need correspondence, or perhaps even visits. The point is to build an internationalism that is not merely mediated by social media and algorithms. I think it’s important to be able to understand each other’s specific conditions, to avoid shallow universalism, and to avoid an overly romanticized ethic of solidarity regarding struggles in other places.

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Palang Hitam International

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was the humanism of the activists and the anarchists, who lacked analytical insight. They failed to see those “wild” and violent rioters as potential allies. Consequently, they failed to affirm and expand the August uprising into a “celebration of life” amidst a lifeless spectacle of society.

As soon as the anger began to subside, the police began making arrests, spreading disinformation, and carrying out surveillance. Many anarchists actually helped spread that disinformation as well. The result was predictable: the individualists/egoists became the scapegoats. Some of them were accused of being snitches by social anarchists who didn’t even know each other. So, of course, the police exploited the anarchists’ own stupidity.

6. Not much has changed. Everything has more or less returned to the way it was. Most anarchists are plagued by persistent paranoia. Even as late as January 2026, people were still debating the snitch status of the ‘chaos-star’ prisoners, rather than reflecting on last August’s riots. So not much has changed, except that anarchism has become more popular. Now the A symbol and the ‘chaos-star’ are printed on T-shirts and displayed everywhere.

7. I think that’s the logical consequence. Anarchists reject the legitimacy of the state, and the state will obviously respond to that. The first thing they do is construct an image of anarchism as a threat to “public order” while simultaneously making it a useful “ideological enemy” to justify control, security, and the perpetuation of authoritarianism. The second step is mass arrests based on absurd charges that are expanded and obscured. This is usually accompanied by infiltration and the production of public narratives to delegitimize anarchism. The purpose of this kind of repressive imagination is to shut down the social possibilities opened up by every uprising—such as spaces of solidarity, alternative ways of life, and collective courage. In other words, post-uprising repression works to restore a sense of fear while closing off the horizon of political imagination, so that what has happened is no longer conceivable as something possible.

activists I know have started to open up to the idea of exploring anarchism. That's all I know.

5. The movement's overall inaction in response to the demonstrations and riots contributed to the suppression of the August uprising. It should be noted that these riots began with demonstrations on 25 August by ordinary people, such as the unemployed, the online motorcycle taxi community, high school students, and the people who were not affiliated with any particular movement organisation. Generally, these groups were underestimated and considered "politically clueless". Most of their protest posters were poorly designed. And for that very reason, the illiterate middle-class activists mocked and labelled the demonstrations of 25–26 August as an "intelligence operation". Thus, from the very beginning, these activists constructed a narrative that fragmented the movement into factions, making them prone to fighting amongst themselves and fostering mutual distrust.

As tensions escalated, particularly following Affan's death, the anger of ordinary people was then quelled by middle-class activists shouting "Don't vandalize public property," "Don't be anarchists", "Don't be provoked". Meanwhile, social anarchists, rather than openly advocating civil war, were instead busy clarifying on social media that "anarchism isn't always about violence" in an attempt to market anarchism and win public sympathy. Such propaganda might be appropriate, but only in the right circumstances. When riots break out, such propaganda actually creates public confusion about anarchists and fuels a situation where rioters become easier to identify and are subsequently judged for posting on their social media about how wonderful the riots are. And that is exactly what happens.

It is precisely situations like these that explain why there was no significant resistance when wealthy activists suddenly arrived on 1 September with a series of nonsensical demands known as '17+8'. And from that moment on, the fire was completely extinguished. So it is clear that the first thing to extinguish this uprising

Comrade A

1. Last August, a widespread social uprising erupted in Indonesia. It began with demonstrations protesting tax hikes and pay raises for politicians. When the police killed the first person, the uprising escalated on August 28, and police stations and parliament buildings were set on fire, while politicians' homes were looted. Can you say something about the conditions that led to the revolt at the end of last year?

Comrade A: Like any uprising, the one last August came from a ton of frustration that had been building up for ages. It started because during Jokowi's second term, a lot of corruption finally got exposed. Then when Prabowo became president, the politicians got even ballsier — they were basically mocking everyone like, "If we wanna do this, what are you gonna do about it?" Add to that the deep hatred toward the police, who are corrupt as hell institutionally, plus tons of unfinished cases like the Kanjuruhan stadium disaster where over a hundred football fans died a few years ago.

In the last couple of years, especially on TikTok (which is huge among regular and lower-middle class folks), there were way more posts full of hate toward the police than before. The final spark? The government decided to raise DPR (the Indonesian parliamentary) members' salaries right in the middle of all that anger. Then during the protests, an online driver got run over and killed by a police tactical vehicle. Boom — perfect recipe for chaos.

2. How did the revolt unfold and how did it develop? How did people organize themselves? How did you personally experience it?

I already covered some of this in the first answer. I wasn't on the streets myself, but I heard from folks who were right in the middle of it. People didn't really organize in any structured way — it was still too early and the whole thing happened too fast. Most folks just coordinated the next place to burn, with a bunch of adventurous types hopping from one burning spot to another. TikTok

helped a lot too, with people live-streaming short clips of the riots in real time.

3. Our impression was that anarchists threw themselves headlong into the revolt from the very beginning and were very active. What role did anarchists play in the revolt? What were the anarchist initiatives and focal points?

Some anarchists were busy with propaganda on social media, but they didn't directly provoke the riots. So honestly, anarchists didn't start this — they just got caught up in the flow. This was a real spontaneous mass uprising.

Anarchism itself is still pretty new in Indonesia. There are some anarcho-syndicalist groups that have been around for a while, but I don't really know how involved they were. The more insurrectionary anarchists did join the street actions though. It's still too early to talk about any specific anarchist focus points in the August uprising.

4. To what extent was the revolt connected to the Gen Z uprisings in Nepal, Morocco, Madagascar, and other countries? Were people aware of the other uprisings, and did that provide them with additional motivation?

We gotta thank social media for this one. A lot of Gen Z in Nepal straight up said they were inspired by Indonesia's August uprising. But in my opinion, they actually took it further than we did here. In Indonesia, the uprising fizzled out pretty quick because the government played it smart — they pushed a narrative against the rioters by targeting middle-class influencers who are scared of chaos. That worked really well and convinced most protesters to calm down and switch to more moderate stuff, like student demands (which I think were kinda silly and went nowhere). That basically killed the momentum.

5. How was the state able to suppress the revolt? Why did the uprising end?

Already answered in number 4.

mosphere. Affan's death served as a key catalyst, but what stands out is the widespread mass response that occurred without centralized coordination.

The police then highlighted six Instagram accounts accused of being involved in funding the riots. I am the administrator of one of those accounts. These accounts had previously been active in voicing radical criticism of social alienation, and in calling for total rebellion against authority. I myself am not an individualist or an egoist, but I support insurrectionary political tactics. They are sensible tactics. I believe all anarchists, regardless of their ideological variations, should adopt insurrectionary tactics. It is an effective way to make the leap out of the psychological prison or prison of fear created by the humanist morality of the citizenry. It is a way to feed the imagination and desire. And because most anarchists tend to stigmatize such tactics, they could do little more than be passive spectators when the August riots took place. To be honest, most anarchists here are cowards.

I don't mean to suggest that the August riots were the result of control by a specific group, because the dynamics on the ground indicate that the outbreak of violence was more an accumulation of public anger that found its momentum.

3. I take issue with the assumption underlying your question that many anarchists are active in uprisings. In fact, most of them are actually the ones putting out the fires. It is true that many anarchists have been actively raising people's political awareness. They initiate discussions, set up study groups, built unions, collectives and subcultural communities, take part in demonstrations, and so on. But political awareness alone is not enough to spark an uprising. All the activities I've mentioned are often merely a repetition of what anarchists have done before.

4. Many of the uprisings known as the Gen Z uprisings in various countries took place after the August riots in Indonesia. So there wasn't much additional motivation for Indonesians. But thanks to news about those Gen Z uprisings, some democracy

future. The challenge, of course, is the double-edged sword: technology.

Comrade C:

1. The main triggers of the protests in late August were poverty and the increasingly evident process of impoverishment. The outrage stemmed from plans to increase the salaries and allowances of members of the House of Representatives (DPR) amid widespread public outcry over tax hikes. Initially, the protests were confined to social media, but a video of lawmakers dancing during a session, along with a statement by one Member of Parliament describing the protesting public as “the most stupid people in the world” sparked mass demonstrations on August 25, 2025.

On the night of August 28, Affan Kurniawan, an online ride-hailing driver was killed after being run over by a Police vehicle. This became the boiling point of the public’s anger. Long before this, dissatisfaction with the government and the police had actually been building up for a long time due to the government’s foolish policies and statements that easily went viral on social media. Affan’s death triggered an outburst of public emotion and sparked the imagination that power could be destroyed. Riots then broke out from 29 August to 1 September, as an outpouring of anger through acts of violence and looting.

2. The uprising has spread rapidly since August 29, reaching various cities outside Jakarta—including areas previously unknown for having a strong tradition of resistance. Its scale and intensity have created a ripple effect across many other regions.

The ability to make Molotov cocktails is no longer limited to certain groups. At the same time, anarchist discourse—particularly the individualist/egoist variant—has also been growing in a number of cities and has contributed to shaping the insurrectionary at-

6. How do anarchists discuss and reflect on their experiences and participation in the uprising? Do you see mistakes or missed opportunities? How have anarchist discussions changed since the revolt?

Since quite a few insurrectionary anarchists got arrested and are still dealing with legal stuff, there hasn’t really been much reflection — or at least I haven’t seen it. I’m actually trying to piece one together myself, but the info is still pretty raw and messy.

7. How did anarchists come to be labeled the state’s number one enemy, and how can we imagine the repression that followed the revolt?

This has been building up gradually for a while. From what I’ve seen, the “anarchists are the enemy” narrative got really loud after May Day 2018 in Yogyakarta. Some anarchist protesters painted “Kill the Sultan” graffiti and it caused a huge backlash — there was a serious hunt for the people who did it. Then came a big May Day 2019 demonstration in Bandung where lots of young people wore all black, waved black and red flags with the circled-A, and around 600 of them got arrested. There wasn’t any real riot, just some vandalism, but that’s when the head of the Indonesian police first publicly said there’s a new enemy called “anarcho-syndicalists.” After that, the state started pushing the idea that anarchists (not just the old communist scare) are now public enemy number one.

8. What is the current situation like? What challenges are you facing? How has the situation changed since the revolt?

One thing is clear: the police made a special long-term program (part of their 10-year plan) to go after groups they see as threats to security and order. They didn’t name names, but it’s obvious anarchists are on that list.

Not much has really changed since the uprising. Life went back to normal, the government is doing the same old shit. The only difference is a lot of people — especially middle class and above — are way more pessimistic about trusting the government. You can see it all over social media.

9. Although there are many anarchists in Indonesia and many texts about the revolt have been translated, we sometimes feel that we still feel distanced from the struggles and experiences here. What do you think anarchist internationalism needs today to make solidarity, discussions, and connection alive and strong?

I think the real work has to start here in Indonesia — how anarchists deal with this situation, learn from the August uprising, and figure out what to do next. Without that, whatever people outside Indonesia do (no matter how good the solidarity is) won't make a big difference. It's not on you guys abroad. We have to sort out our own problems first before expecting help from outside.

10. Do you have anything else to add?

In short, we gotta admit that social media played a huge role in this August Uprising. From spreading hatred toward the police, showing off all the corruption by officials, sharing info about the next riot spots, targets for burning and looting, inspiring people in other countries like Nepal, to how the uprising was eventually calmed down and life went back to normal — everything revolved around social media.

Thanks for all the attention and solidarity from Europe so far. In case you need to know more detailed on some issues I've raised in my answers above, just let me know.

Comrade B:

1. Last August, a widespread social uprising erupted in Indonesia. It began with demonstrations protesting tax hikes and pay raises for politicians. When the police killed the first person, the uprising escalated on August 28, and police stations and parliament buildings were set on fire, while politicians' homes were looted. Can you say something about the conditions that led to the revolt at the end of last year?

disappear. So insurrections don't stop just because power is too strong. A lot of the time, they stop because people are afraid of losing their comfort at the expense of millions of people who barely have any roof and something to fill their stomach.

6. How do anarchists discuss and reflect on their experiences and participation in the uprising? Do you see mistakes or missed opportunities? How have anarchist discussions changed since the revolt?

I'm not part of the so-called anarchist movement here and I don't want to be one. From what I know, there isn't much to it. It's mostly just a small number of people who engaged in this discussion—some calling themselves anarchists, egoists, or nihilists. At the same time, others in the so-called movement seem more focused on building their image for international organizations, just so they can become members, rather than doing actual local organizing. I'm not saying everyone is like that. There are also people who are active on the ground and involved in real organizing, but they aren't obsessed with labeling themselves as anarchists. In short, as far as I know, there hasn't really been any serious discussion about August.

7. How did anarchists come to be labeled the state's number one enemy, and how can we imagine the repression that followed the revolt?

I think that since Leninism and its variants have already died—like Lenin's preserved body—anarchism has become the only real opposition to the social relations of the state and capitalism. After the insurrection, of course, many of us are already on the radar of the authorities.

8. What is the current situation like? What challenges are you facing? How has the situation changed since the revolt?

Not much has changed, except that the widespread anger toward the police and the government is still very much present across society. Other outbursts are likely to happen in the near

looting of malls and for the casualties. But in reality, some of those who died were journalists and protesters who were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. My condolences to them.

4. To what extent was the revolt connected to the Gen Z uprisings in Nepal, Morocco, Madagascar, and other countries? Were people aware of the other uprisings, and did that provide them with additional motivation?

I think I already answer this on question 1 and two. They were quite similar even though it is clear we are different in terms of geographical and historical point of view.

5. How was the state able to suppress the revolt? Why did the uprising end?

I've already talked about this, but I'll add something—because the irony is hard to ignore. Some social media figures—and even some people who call themselves anarchists—were quick to blame those involved in the looting. Not just blame them, but even help the police by pointing out certain individuals, based on unclear issues, and sharing their photos online like they were doing police work.

So you start to wonder—what's the difference between them and the system they claim to oppose? It's strange how some "anarchists" suddenly become very supportive of police and prisons the moment things get uncomfortable. There's also this need to look morally right all the time. Some people seem more interested in gaining attention than actually understanding what's happening. Snitching becomes a way to look good. And this kind of social control is very real. You can see it especially with people whose comfort is disturbed. Middle-class people who get upset because they can't go to malls. "Radical" artists who suddenly struggle when their funding disappears, so no more exhibitions or trips to Europe. It shows what really matters to them.

In the end, it's not really about ideology. People from any class, if they have a bourgeois mindset, will panic when their daily comfort is threatened—when the lifestyle and image they rely on might

Demonstrations like this are not something unique here, especially when they end in loss of life. In fact, such outcomes often reinforce the misleading narrative that protests which turn violent are pointless and counterproductive—a view frequently echoed by social media influencers. Ironically, although many of them initially express support, once the uprising begins to disturb their comfort and bourgeois sensibilities, most are quick to condemn it. What stood out yesterday was the spontaneity across different groups, transcending divisions of race, culture, and religion. The issue became vertical in nature—something that does not usually happen. Regardless of whatever conspiracy theories are being pushed by the uninformed, it is clear that the moment laid bare the state's political infrastructure and exposed just how fragile the structures of power really are. Poverty remains the central, undeniable issue, particularly for the younger generation, whose outlook is increasingly cosmopolitan, yet marked by deep frustration and a future that appears increasingly bleak. Moreover, with the advancement of information technology, these realities can spread rapidly and can no longer be concealed. Old ideologies have, in essence, lost their relevance—not only Leninism, but also classical anarchism, which is deeply Eurocentric.

2. How did the revolt unfold and how did it develop? How did people organize themselves? How did you personally experience it?

Honestly, no one really knows exactly how all of this began. But what had been building up for a long time was a deep exhaustion with politics as usual. There's a widespread feeling across all levels of society that politicians have become servants of the wealthy, and that corruption has reached an almost absurd level. When you see things like extreme tax hikes alongside government officials openly flaunting their enormous salaries, it creates a kind of boiling point. And all of this spreads very quickly through social media.

In terms of organization, it's hard to pinpoint exactly how it happened. What's clear is that social media played a huge role. The

movement didn't follow the usual pattern—it was spontaneous, horizontal, informal. It didn't look like the typical “organized protest,” which is often just political theater staged by opposition parties. This time, people were tired of that. You had students, online drivers, and many other parts of society organizing themselves in ways that were completely unpredictable to the authorities. The state was genuinely overwhelmed. What we saw was more like anarchy in action—not in the traditional ideological sense, which often feels rigid or outdated, but something much more alive and dynamic.

I'm not glorifying technology, of course. It's a double-edged sword. But there's something important to learn from it. If you look at history, major upheavals have always been tied to the dominant technologies of their time. Without the printing press, something like Paris 1871 wouldn't have happened. The same goes for Paris 1968 and the global student movements of the 1960s—those were made possible by the concentration of young people in universities, which itself was driven by capitalism's need to produce skilled workers. But that's also where the contradiction lies. Universities bring young people together and expose them to real issues affecting their lives. At the same time, they train people to think in fragmented ways—separating issues, specializing, and ultimately internalizing the false promises of prestige, career success, and bourgeois values. That tension has been there for a long time.

Even events like August 2025 were quickly contained using technology, which shows both its power and its limits.

Personally, I was surprised by everything that happened. I felt a mix of emotions—part of me felt like maybe something was finally shifting. Coordinating with friends from high school and people in different regions was actually exciting. There was a real sense of shared energy. In a country as complex as this archipelago, what happened felt like a kind of catharsis. And honestly, even when I was interrogated by the anti-terror unit—with their almost “CIA-style” approach—I couldn't help but laugh to myself. It was clear

they didn't really understand what had actually happened in August. This is blatant proof that we can really destroy this social relationship of techno-industrial civilisation.

3. Our impression was that anarchists threw themselves headlong into the revolt from the very beginning and were very active. What role did anarchists play in the revolt? What were the anarchist initiatives and focal points?

Well, on a smaller scale, there are definitely insurrectionary anarchist elements—people who try to sharpen contradictions through direct confrontation. That's not to dismiss other tendencies, but many of them tend to romanticize Spain in 1936 and keep insisting they're “pro-violence,” as long as it's properly organized. A lot of that ends up sounding like empty talk. I mean, if they actually followed through, I'd respect that. But in reality, those circles often get stuck in interpersonal issues. They claim to stand with workers, yet act more like church missionaries, and they're deeply absorbed in cancel culture.

Honestly, many of these so-called anarchists today resemble 19th-century Christian puritans. They go out of their way to distance themselves from spontaneous acts against authority, as if they're worried it might damage the image of anarchism. I find it frustrating and laughable. Ideology, to me, isn't particularly useful. But what's ironic is that when anarchist prisoners begin to receive broader public sympathy, these same groups suddenly insert themselves into the moment. Certainly laughable. The truth is, those who present themselves as “organized anarchists” often struggle to connect with people who are actually out on the streets. And yet, anarchism today is widely adopted precisely because of its flexibility, its informality, and its rejection of conventional politics.

At some point, we need to move beyond these outdated ideologies—and beyond the armchair theorists who do little more than repeat their so-called libertarian socialist texts. And I just remembered—one day before I was arrested, those same anarchist circles were busy blaming the insurrectionary elements for the