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Interview with Malaysian anarchists

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What can the international anarchist movement do to assist anarchists in Malaysia?

Until today we have been receiving literature material from the international anarchist movement. Also helping to build up anarchist organization such as hosting a conference or workshop in Asia to gain awareness and education. Coordination of direct action also can very helpful if we have a local issue that we could relate to your country.

Could you explain for our readers the current political and social situation in Malaysia?

The political situation in Malay remains the same since achieving independence from Britain 50 years ago, when the political struggle evolved into racism and religion. The same party is in power today. There are several states that are governed by several opposition parties.

The ruling political party uses racial issues, especially “Malay Power” to ensure power is maintained to this day, although the country is multi-ethnic. In 2010, there were several sectarian incidents including property sabotage on mosques and a church.

After 2008 the opposition parties did well in the elections because of the economic situation. They believe Malaysia can only be changed through reforms to overcome corruption but they are mistaken.

Today the social situation in Malaysia is critical with so many economic pressures coupled with corruption, race and religion. Government is too dependent on investors from outside where the capitalists will take advantage to manipulate the workers.

Is there much of a workers’ movement and wider left in the country?

Currently, there is not much of a workers’ movement. There are some independent organizations or committees which focus on struggles for civil rights liberation but normally these organizations participate from activist society and bourgeois class. Last year there were some people trying to build local Marxist organizations (CWI – Committee for a Workers’ International), we had a few session debating with them about ideology and class struggle.

There is one socialist party in our country (PSM – Socialist Party of Malaysia), but they have no direction or strategy to build a workers' movement. There is a single anarchist group, which focuses on youth activism and doing Food Not Bombs program stuff.

What is your own political background and how did you become interested in anarchism?

I began my political journey at university (1998), involved in organizing a reform group to remove one prime minister due to corruption. After 2 years the reform group turned into a political party and I realized the issue was not about people's struggle anymore. In 2003, one of my friends asked me to look into anarchism since he always saw me talk about radical ideas of changing society but did not believe in the state and never voted or supported any party. Through some reading, discussion and debating, I became interested in anarchism even though I do understand the difficulty of struggle in our country by using the anarchist method or idea. Now I believe in building up an anarchist group among friends to introduce and empower a workers' liberation movement.

There is a notable history of anarchism in other parts of south-east Asia, such as in Korea and the Philippines. Is there a history of anarchism in Malaysia and what state is the movement in today?

There was some anarchist history before we got independence (1957)... radical ideas coming from immigrant Chinese workers at the time. One our friends in CNT Paris, just informed us they

found some historical document that had been sent by anarchists in Malaysia to the Spanish CNT a while ago. The communist party was banned by the government in 1988 and there is no real anarchist movement which exists.

How does the repressive security situation and religion affect the anarchist movement there?

Repressive security comes from authority and law. We don't have the right to meet or gather in public unless we get a permit from the police. We also have a publishing act where all literature is monitored by the government, printing company. We do not want to risk publishing radical literature. The government also monitors radical websites and social networking sites such as Facebook. In these weeks one anonymous hackers' group declared it had attacked a government website after the Malaysia government announced it would block some file-sharing websites. We also have the Internal Security Act (ISA), where the government can detain anyone without trial. Our communications such as mobile phone and internet connections are controlled by a government agency, and there are requirements such as required identification registration for every mobile number. Religion is always an issue with Muslim populations because their historical perspective on communism as well as understanding of ideology caused by government education policy. So, people are scared to get involved in the workers' movement because they believe they will force them to abandon from their religious beliefs.